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Social media and international advertising: theoretical challenges and future directions

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Abstract

Purpose – The primary aim of this article is to identify theoretical foundations that can be used in research on social media in the context of international advertising research. An additional objective is to identify future research directions for theory building in this research area.

Design/methodology/approach – The article draws on the extant literature to identify three key theoretical foundations that can be used in research on advertising in media from an advertising perspective: networking capability; image transferability; and personal extensibility. For each of these perspectives, the current state of knowledge, theoretical challenges, and future research directions are summarized.

Findings – The three key theoretical perspectives (networking capability, image transferability, and personal extensibility) provide strong potential for better understanding the advantages and disadvantages of social media use for advertisers. They are also useful for identifying important research gaps that need to be filled in the future.

Research limitations/implications – Research on social media advertising in an international context is still in its infancy, and needs further attention. As few cross-cultural studies have been conducted, the theories and their application will likely evolve in the future.

Originality/value – A review and conceptual framework pertaining to theoretical perspective used in social media research in an international advertising context has been practically non-existent. Thus, this article is designed to serve as a solid starting point for future research endeavors.

Keywords Social media, Advertising

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The use of social media among Fortune 500 companies surged in 2012. According to a study conducted by the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, as many as 73 percent of these companies now have an official corporate account in Twitter, while 66 percent have a corporate Facebook page. In addition, as of 2011, 28 percent of the companies had blogs at the corporate level, representing the largest increase since 2008 (Barnes *et al.*, 2012). This increase is indicative of a long-term trend toward social media use among corporations (as well as individual brands) becoming the norm.

Social media have been defined as a series of technological innovations in terms of both hardware and software that facilitate inexpensive content creation, interaction, and interoperability by online users (Berthon *et al.*, 2012). Social media differ from

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traditional computer-mediated communications in three primary ways: a shift in the locus of activity from the desktop to the web (meaning greater accessibility); a shift in locus of value production from the firm to the consumer (deriving from increased interaction/interactivity); and a shift in the locus of power away from the firm to the consumer (Berthon *et al.*, 2012). A typical classification of social media includes collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs, user-generated content communities (e.g. Flickr; YouTube; Youku/Tudou), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook; Cyworld), virtual game worlds (e.g. EverQuest), and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life) (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Furthermore, social media goes to mobile, breaking ground in traditional time-location restrictions.

This paper addresses the use of social media in international advertising and how research can be designed to better understand how social media can be done. Our objectives are threefold. First, we draw on the extant literature to identify major theoretical foundations that can be used to better understand the importance of social media in the context of international advertising research. Second, we provide an overview of prior research in social media advertising from a cross-cultural (or multinational corporation's) perspective. While this literature review is not designed to be comprehensive, it focusses on several key relevant studies, and, thus, serves as an important basis for our discussion. Third, we provide suggestions for future research directions that can advance knowledge on this topic.

This paper proposes a conceptual framework consisting of three highly relevant theoretical foundations that are commonly applicable for any type of social media-networking capability, image transferability, and personal extensibility. The rationale behind this framework is that social media can be an effective vehicle for international advertisers based on executing and making good use of the three capabilities in the international marketplace. It must be noted at the outset that we do not intend to suggest that the three theoretical foundations we identify are the only theory bases that should be used for advertising in social media; to the contrary, we offer several additional perspectives that are relevant in our discussion of future research directions. Rather, we propose that these three dimensions are the foundation from which social media can be used to derive additional value in advertising across markets. It should also be stressed that our primary focus is on international advertising research in social media, and not on how it works within an individual market.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, we justify our conceptual framework for understanding social media in the context of international advertising. Next, we discuss each one of the three capabilities along with theoretical challenges related to applying this perspective. We also provide an overview of current knowledge on each perspective and outline future research directions. In closing, overall conclusions are drawn.

Social media and international advertising

To date, social media has not been a heavily researched topic in international advertising and, as a result, there have been only a very limited number of cross-national or cross-cultural studies. This paucity of research on how social media is used by global advertisers is likely due to several reasons. First, researchers might see research on the internationalization of social media as being premature in light of the very recent evolution of social media as a significant advertising vehicle. It was only recently that papers on how advertisers were using vehicles such as Facebook and YouTube as advertising vehicles began to appear. Indeed, it really is only in the last

five years that a substantial number of studies on social media as an advertising/promotional vehicle have begun to appear even in the context of single country studies. Given the relatively slow and gradual pace of increases in advertising expenditures in these outlets, the lack of research attention is perhaps not surprising. However, it is now clear that these social media outlets have become significant promotional vehicles and that there is potential for many firms to use them cross-nationally.

A second reason for the limited research on social media in international advertising is that in addition to the usual difficulty in coordinating data collection across countries, the amount of information that needs to be analyzed in studying social media cross-nationally is enormous and may be seen as often having the potential to overwhelm our normal capacity of analysis. In other words, the sheer complexity of the needed design of the studies may have been a deterrent to researchers considering studying the topic. It is likely, however, that the growth of advertising in these media may give researchers more incentive to undertake such studies, even if data collection remains somewhat challenging.

A third factor limiting research is that the combination of global and social media may have been viewed as mismatched since social media is often considered as a very personalized, rather than global, medium. The interactivity of social media is often well suited to one-on-one interactions between companies and consumers along with highly personalized targeting. In this environment researchers have been more likely to focus on internal aspects within a medium such as network formation or information exchange, rather than external aspects (e.g. the similarities and differences in the medium across cultures). Going forward, however, it is clear that companies that operate globally need to have a broad understanding of how social media can be used across the various markets they operate in.

Finally, and perhaps the most important reason for this void, is a lack of clear theoretical perspectives from which research hypotheses can be formulated and tested by an empirical study. As theoretical development in a research area is often cumulative, it takes some time for useful theories to be articulated in the literature. This paper aims to offer some insights on this latter issue.

From the perspective of international advertising, social media can be positioned as a component of globally integrated marketing communications (GIMC). Prior research finds that firms that implement GIMC are more likely to employ global advertising across countries than those who do not (Okazaki *et al.*, 2006). After the appearance of the internet, more and more firms have attempted to employ online advertising across borders (Ko *et al.*, 2005). However, it was after the surge of Web 2.0 that truly “interactive” GIMC came into being. The reason for this is that Web 2.0 is a platform whereby “content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). In this way, we can reconcile the two most powerful but seemingly contradictory traits of the internet as an international advertising medium – global reach and personalization.

Social media has global reach because of the existence of de facto standard applications. At the same time it represents a powerful personalization tool as it enables individuals to both produce and distribute content by their own participation. The opportunity for interactivity is also an important component of the potential for any digital medium, including social media, to be effective from an advertising standpoint (Taylor, 2009). Because of its global reach and the opportunity for personalization, we argue that social media will play an increasingly important role in

global advertising strategy as it penetrates into not only our daily lives but also business practices.

This paper examines this unique nature of social media from the perspective of three principal theoretical foundations – networking capability, image transferability, and personal extensibility. These factors represent not only key benefits of social media but also the most relevant breakthroughs in terms of international advertising planning and execution. Figure 1 summarizes our conceptual framework. Here, the geographical and psychological context refers to an international marketplace consisting of diverse, geographically and emotionally distant locations. The primary question posed is how to connect or cover geographically and psychologically remote markets by these three factors. It is posited that the combination of networking capability, image transferability, and personal extensibility creates opportunity for advertisers by cutting across these boundaries in a way that is not culture bound. As will be discussed in more depth below, networking capability allows for communications across boundaries that are faster and more frequent than ever before and thereby has had a big impact on global marketers. Image transferability offers considerable brand building capability for marketers as advertising in social media can be used to build and reinforce brand image with consumers across the world. Meanwhile the personal extensibility component of social media allows marketers to capitalize on consumers’ desire for more interaction with others across cultures. Collectively, these three foundations of social media offer marketers tremendous opportunity to reach and appeal to cross-national audiences.

Network capability

Theoretical application

Networking capability is chosen as a key relevant theoretical foundation as it is the most capitalized upon benefit of Web 2.0 (second generation of internet-based applications) – because of this functionality, consumers are in control of how information is generated, created, organized, and shared (Bell and Loane, 2010). Social media exemplifies the consequences of Web 2.0, due to its capability of establishing and maintaining social networks among users. Network technology is at the heart of any open-innovation strategy, allowing large and small firms to reach the largest possible community for their offerings (Bell and Loane, 2010). Thus, networking capability can be applied to help explain how social media cuts across cultures and geographic

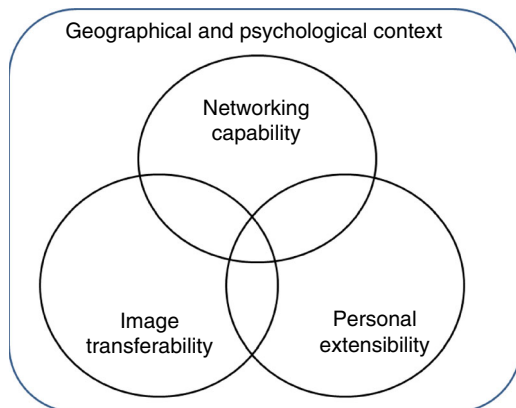


Figure 1.
Primary dimensions
of social media in an
international context

boundaries and allows groups of individuals who may have never otherwise been able to interact to have communication.

From an international business perspective, social networks have been defined as “a web of personal connections and relationships for the purpose of securing favors in personal and/or organizational action” (Zhou *et al.*, 2007, p. 674). The creation of such networks is important in international advertising and marketing for three reasons. First, because a social networking site is an efficient means to create and maintain networks in an easy and inexpensive way, the number of weak ties is likely to increase (Donath and Boyd, 2004). As suggested by network theory, weak ties are networks connected with less personal interaction among members, and act as “local bridges” to parts of the network which would otherwise be disconnected (Krackhardt, 1992). Thus, weak ties may enable a company to gain strategic advantage for resource availability, bridging emotionally distant, and geographically diverse actors (Sigfusson and Chetty, 2012).

Second, a key to understanding the effectiveness of social networking sites is the effectiveness of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). The main motives of eWOM are to facilitate information exchange, provide recreational pastime, and bring users together, thereby creating a group’s influence faction (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2003; Lee and Youn, 2009). Social media has already demonstrated the power of cross-border eWOM in global brands’ Facebook or Twitter accounts. Moreover, some studies (e.g. Lee *et al.*, 2011) have successfully applied network theory to help understand interactions within a web-based community, albeit generally in single country context.

Third, with networking capability, firms can develop routines within their networks that generate “new resource configurations and the firm’s capacity to integrate, reconfigure, gain and release resource combinations” (Mort and Weerawardena, 2006, p. 558). Such capability in a social media context can provide enormous opportunity for companies to better interact with customers via social media.

Current knowledge

While it is clear that companies such as Facebook have been able to successfully obtain wide reach across a variety of countries, one rather large gap in Facebook’s global domination is its lack of presence in China. The site is officially banned in China while local Chinese sites dominate in the market. Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Poland are additional countries where Facebook’s presence has been modest (Arno, 2012). To date, however, academic research on social media in an international context has been sparse and an understanding of exactly why firms face challenges in individual countries is largely absent.

Prior research on social media advertising has effectively focussed on several issues, including qualitative analysis of posts and comments and their relationship to effectiveness (e.g. Muntinga *et al.*, 2011; Smith *et al.*, 2012), causal relationships among psychological factors (e.g. Chu and Kim, 2011), drivers of eWOM or positive online consumer reviews (e.g. Chatterjee, 2011; Chen *et al.*, 2011), or extensions of existing consumer behavior models in the social media context (e.g. Steyn *et al.*, 2011). However, none of these studies has explicitly focussed on cross-cultural comparison or internationalization of social media across borders.

Our literature review found only one study that had applied network perspectives to international advertising/promotion. De Vries *et al.* (2012) examined 355 brand posts from 11 international brands across six product categories (cosmetics, alcoholic beverages, mobile phones, leisure wear, accessories, and food) on a social networking

site. Using a content analytic method, they found that vividness, interactivity, and the position of the post are the key drivers of a brand post's popularity.

Future research directions

Berthon *et al.* (2012) argue that the way in which most prominent social media types are used is dependent on technology (the infrastructure enabling social media), culture (shared values), and government (institutional rules and regulations). Thus, they claim that firms cannot standardize social media usage across borders. In other words, the social media content needs to be adapted to local markets so that cultural factors are taken into account. Berthon *et al.*'s (2012) primary thesis is based on the question of how culture affects consumers' motivation to create, exchange, and actively engage in their news feed or posts. While such propensity also depends on the general tendency of the country's novelty seeking behavior and government legislation, the importance of cultural differences cannot be dismissed as is the case with any other form of marketing communications. Yet, Berthon *et al.*'s (2012) thesis clearly needs to be tested empirically, as the trend in global advertising is to standardize strategy but adapt executions (Ford *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, it may well be that social media programs can be standardized in many respects across certain countries, product categories, and/or cross-national segments. With the emergence of cross-national segments in some product categories, such as the fashion industry (see Ko *et al.*, 2007) it is indeed likely that some marketers can even standardize aspects of executions geared at specific segments. For these reasons, it should not simply be assumed that all aspects of social media advertising and promotion need to be locally adapted.

Intuitively, the creation of social networks seems to be related to individualism-collectivism which is perhaps the most central dimension of cultural variability identified in cross-cultural research (e.g. Hofstede, 1984). Highly individualist cultures tend to develop a social pattern consisting of loosely linked individuals who tend to prefer a relationship independent of others and to subordinate in-group goals to their own personal goals. In contrast, highly collectivist cultures are likely to be composed of highly linked individuals, imposing interdependent relationships on their in-groups and subordinating their personal goals to their in-group goals. The individualism-collectivism dimension is synonymous with the interdependent-independent or connectedness-separateness self-schema theory (Wang and Chan, 2001), which has been widely applied in international advertising research (see Okazaki and Mueller, 2007). From this perspective, collectivist, highly connected cultures may use social media to create closely linked networks more effectively, compared with individualist, loosely connected cultures. As a result, social media use could be more extended and information exchange could be more active in an attempt to pursue greater connectedness. Research designed to verify this proposition along with other cultural dimensions and their impact would be timely.

It should be stressed that while the argument for greater opportunities to establish connectedness in social media in collectivistic cultures is conceptually compelling, it has been argued that the issue is actually much more complex. For example Zarbatany *et al.*'s (2004) agency-communion theory explains two types of friendship: communal and agentic. In the former, power is distributed equally for the most part, and the friendship itself is measured in terms of interpersonal closeness, which includes a large number of factors such companionship, intimacy, loyalty, security, emotional support, love and affection, nurturance, and mutual past experiences. Agentic friendship, on the other hand, emphasizes individual differentiation, with the goal of promoting an

individual's social standing through mastery or power. Friends may provide self-worth through acceptance, ego support, and validation, and may contribute to "the development of mastery by providing instruction, instrumental aid, and opportunities to rehearse skills and knowledge" (p. 300). This agency-communion theory could lead to agentic vs communal cultures having different preferences in terms of social media advertising. The logic would suggest that advertising strategy in social media may need to be differentiated for agentic cultures, where people might be more active in an effort to "show off" their opinions or privileged information, compared with communal cultures, where the tendency would be to keep such opinions and information to themselves or share them with only members of a small in-group. Thus, research on agentic vs communal cultures from a network perspective provides opportunities for better understanding how advertising in social media works, whether it can be standardized, and what makes it effective with different consumer groups.

Image transferability

Theoretical application

The second capability is image transferability. This capability facilitates a crucial aspect of branding-brand image construction. Brand image has been a central tenet for many international marketers and advertisers for some time since the image holds the key to attract similar consumer segments across borders. Thus, the creation of a uniform brand image is one of the most important objectives for many MNE's international advertising strategy (Okazaki *et al.*, 2006; Taylor, 2005). While this does not necessarily involve standardizing executional elements of an ad, it does require standardization of strategic aspects of the ad. Hence, building a uniform brand image may take considerable coordination across cultures, particularly if only traditional media are taken into account. In this regard, social media offers striking new opportunities.

The creation of differentiated, successful, and sustainable international brands is indeed a challenge and firms have been striving to evoke favorable emotions and perceptions with consumers in a way that builds a brand image that can be sustained across international borders (Pae *et al.*, 2002; Pittard *et al.*, 2007). An increasing number of MNEs intend to transfer a desired meaning by combining the brand and a conditioned stimulus via a wide range of conceptualizations in marketing, including brand extensions, event sponsorship, and product placement (Gwinner, 1997; Simonin and Ruth, 1998). With social media, marketers and advertisers may locate their brands in videos or games that fit well with their products. This notion of "fit" is synonymous to the conventional congruence theory in product or brand placement (Lee and Faber, 2007). Obtaining fit in advertising is a particularly critical issue in the ever-growing global community. For example, sponsors of sporting events with international television audiences, such as the Olympic Games or World Cup Football, may need to consider the image of the global event in relation to the image goals of various local markets. In many ways, social media are best suited to the creation of such brand image that is consistent with users' self or personal identity, due to their power of self-presentation or self-disclosure (Lee *et al.*, 2008; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). While there are significant constraints in tailoring executions in traditional media such as television due to the need to film additional ads, social media is much more nimble and well suited to reinforcing a strategy while tailoring an execution to the local market. The ability to combine visual and textual or even verbal components is a central element of this process.

Cultural and social norms may vary across national boundaries, such that a given brand's image would not be appropriate for all consumer groups (Okazaki, 2006).

In some instances it may be likely that culture will moderate the image transfer process. It could be posited that in cultures where an individual's self-concept is more closely tied to consumption activities (e.g. the type of fashion worn, the model of car driven), the transfer of image from videos or games to brands may proceed more effectively. In such cultures consumers are more active in looking for "meaning" in products that can be used to change or reinforce their concept of self. Social media could provide a realistic platform in this image transfer based on event, ad, or campaign.

Current knowledge

Southgate *et al.* (2010) examined creative determinants of viral video ads sampled from the USA and the UK and found that, besides the determinants of offline branded advertising efficiency such as enjoyment, involvement, and branding, the popularity of celebrities appearing in the ads positively affects online viral viewing. This seems especially relevant to international advertisers because a growing number of worldwide celebrities have the potential to play a central role in the success of cross-border video ads. Yet, Luna *et al.* (2002) suggest it may be good strategy to link testimonials on a main web site to pages where testimonials of culture-specific "heroes" related to the product category appear. However, while the effectiveness of tailor-made localization cannot be denied, internationalization of testimonials does appear to have advanced considerably during the last decade. In either case, the main idea of standardizing broad advertising strategy still applies.

Probably the most convincing example of image transferability in social media is advergames. Advergames are a powerful tool for image transfer because they often overcome the language barrier and they make use of one's sensory system. Advergames are usually custom-created by firms for the sole purpose of promoting their brands and are accessed via their corporate or brand web sites. By contrast, in-game advertising is often coordinated and sold by independent gaming organizations through dynamic ad-insertion networks (Winkler and Buckner, 2006). Prior research suggests that advergames likely differ from in-game advertising in terms of the necessary cognitive resources for game play, in that the latter requires higher levels of involvement and attention to play than the former (Lee and Faber, 2007). Researchers tend to regard in-game advertising as an extension of product placement, in which the desired meaning transfer occurs when consumers associate a conditioned stimulus (brand) with unconditioned (game) features (Winkler and Buckner, 2006). Here, the positive association and feeling from game play transfer to the sponsor's brand and result in a positive brand attitude.

Quite recently, firms have begun sponsoring social networking sites by offering free online games. Firms understandably are paying greater attention to social networking sites for their advertising and branding efforts, because in addition to the ability to build the brand via image transfer, games help firms to increase the sites' entertainment value and thereby enhance the "stickiness" factor. Such stickiness becomes a contagious buzz that can further help build the brand by stimulating eWOM about both the brand and the web site. Further, prior research indicates that online gamers spend time chatting and engaging in social exchanges that do not have a specific game-related benefit (Griffiths *et al.*, 2003). This is again indicative of the potential power image transfer through advergames can have. However, to our knowledge, a cross-cultural comparison in advergaming has been almost non-existent.

Future research directions

According to self-schema theory, consumers tend to talk to others about products when those products reflect their desired self-image, or the way they want others to see them

(Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Examples include the iPhone and BMW automobiles that are likely to be bought, used, and talked about by people who want to be seen as “cool” and “innovative” as a result of having the latest technology. In this regard, it would be insightful for researchers to examine how the success of advergames in particular product categories in international markets relates to the similarities and differences in consumers’ self-image. This could be an interesting extension of cross-cultural research on global product placement or international sport sponsorship and could make significant contributions to the international advertising literature. Again, any research aimed at uncovering whether cultural factors have an impact on the degree to which promotion via an advergame or the specific elements related to the effectiveness of an advergame would be useful. Such research need not be confined to advergames, however, as the impact of cultural factors on the effectiveness of image transfer based on advertising in social media is of general interest.

Second, one of the common elements among recent explorations on advergaming is their appeal to and use by children (e.g. van Reijmersdal *et al.*, 2012; Mallinckrodt and Mizerski, 2007). This perspective calls to mind the need to examine the notion of global youth culture which is rooted in global consumer culture theory (see Okazaki *et al.*, 2010).

The existence of the “global teen” segment is one of the most relevant topics that concern contemporary marketers and advertisers (Taylor, 2002). Some theorists would predict that children around the world would have more similarities than differences in terms of their reactions to advergames or advertising in other social media. However, there is a dearth of empirical effort in this area of research.

One study that did examine global youth, albeit not in the context of social media, was by Christensen (2002). Here, a large-scale qualitative survey in Europe was undertaken. It was found that innovation and communication are two of the four primary factors that commonly attract the younger generation to brands across the continent. Moses (2000) further points out that global teens indeed make up a homogeneous market that includes games, music, fashion, film, and technology. Social media sites deal with all of these issues and advergames would appear to be very well suited to combine all of these elements. Here, marketers may be able to target global youth in the same way as national youth via social media. Clearly, research is needed to provide evidence on the degree to which building brands via the image transfer made possible through social media advertising can be effective across cultures.

In comparison with earlier generations, today’s youth born between 1990 and 2000 or “Generation Z” are much less rebellious and politically engaged and are unlikely to desire ideological change in the world (Byfield, 2002). Although they appear to remain ambivalent on such issues, they catch and spread new trends via social media, especially in a form of “a game to create a shared experience between the company, the user, and possibly even the user’s own social network” (Kaplan, 2012, p. 136). Again, research on how to maximize the effectiveness of advertising through social media with this group is particularly important as it is a group that is more difficult to reach effectively via traditional media in comparison to older cohorts.

Personal extensibility

Theoretical application

The final theoretical foundation of our thesis is personal extensibility. This capability is chosen from the perspective of human mobility theory. Based on the design and capacity of Web 2.0, social media differs from traditional media because of its high mobility (Parameswaran and Whinston, 2007). In this light, the personal extensibility

concept attempts to measure the ability of a person (or group) to overcome the friction of distance through transportation or communication. Fundamentally, it pertains to “the scope of sensory access and knowledge acquisition and dispersion, and to people’s horizons as social actors.” Janelle (1973) claims that personal extensibility is “conceptually the reciprocal of time-space convergence” (p. 11), and argues that the rapid advances in communication and transportation technologies and their associated institutions imply a “shrinking world”, with expanding opportunities for extensibility. That is, the focal point of this theory lies in the expansion of opportunities for human interaction, rather than improved abilities for movement over greater distances.

Here, of special interest to us is that personal extensibility depends on developments in communications technology, because such innovation will reduce the time required to interact with persons in distant places. It has been argued that “as distant connections become easier to maintain, spatial patterns of social interaction change; work and home, resources and industries, management and labor assume varying spatial configurations” (pp. 267-8). This is precisely the result of the rapid advances in the internet in general, and the mobile device in particular.

The issue of extensibility is somewhat related to the impact of distance factors which researchers in international marketing have long examined (Malhotra *et al.*, 2009). Distance in international marketing has been conceptualized in terms of cultural, economic, and geographic distance in relation to firms’ selection of target markets, but with extensibility, we refer more to the capability to shorten such distance as well as to proactively expand the activity domain. For example, international marketing research traditionally addresses what psychic distance is and what consequences it may have, but not how to shorten such distance. In this light, mobile devices and their ability to foster social interaction extends an individual’s capability to reach where he or she wants to be, “becoming the only means of communication that allows true global reach of customers in different countries and demographic groups” (Kaplan, 2012, p. 137).

On the other hand, the personal extensibility concept covers not only the notion of distance (i.e. to what extent consumers want and need mobility), but also that of time (i.e. to what extent consumers want and need immediacy). In this regard, Edward T. Hall’s theory of polychronic and monochronic time seems relevant (Bluedorn *et al.*, 1992; Harvey *et al.*, 2008). While some events occur irregularly or sporadically, others take place regularly, following a predetermined, or at least predictable, sequence (monochronic). The “temporal mode of the actor” relates to how workers organize their time to deal with tasks and events. A polychronic worker would address tasks and events spontaneously as they arise, whereas a monochronic worker would only deal with tasks and events at specified times and address one thing at a time, designating slots of time for specific tasks. That is, while the temporal mode of work is concerned with the structure of work, the temporal mode of the actor is concerned with the process of working. When a mobile device is incorporated into our work processes, it could help us to disrupt monochronic temporal order by shifting the ways in which we structure our work patterns to be more polychronic. Using a mobile device, whether to e-mail, search, or download, enables us to involve ourselves in several tasks (which could otherwise have obliged us to relocate ourselves) simultaneously and seamlessly.

In general, the concept of personal extensibility needs to be applied to better understand how to effectively reach consumers with advertising across cultures by

examining the extent to which the reduction of temporal, geographic, and cultural boundaries affects consumers' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors.

Current knowledge

As the proliferation of standardized devices and OS such as iOS or Android ("de facto standard") advances, the success of mobile media in an international context has become more realistic. Nonetheless, cross-cultural research on mobile advertising has been extremely rare, with a few exceptions. Okazaki and Taylor (2008) examined multinational firms' mobile advertising adoption in a European context. They found that brand building potential, privacy/security concerns, and technological conditions are the primary determinants of such adoption. Liu *et al.* (2012) examined cross-cultural differences in mobile advertising adoption in Japan and Austria. Their findings suggest that infotainment and credibility are key factors predicting advertising acceptance through a mobile device. However, both studies focussed on short message services (SMS) advertising.

Greater focus on mobile advertising would seem warranted given that the younger generation worldwide is on average more comfortable with utilizing the capabilities of these devices. As will be discussed below, more research in general on how social media can capitalize on personal extensibility is warranted.

Future directions

Future research should move toward post-SMS advertising via mobile social media. A diverse range of applications may convert mobile advertising into a truly global medium. For example, popular online consumer review sites, such as TripAdvisor, Foursquare, Gowalla, tripwolf, VirtualTourist, and IgoUgo, may provide an interesting opportunity to explore mobile advertising in an international marketplace. These applications are location-based social media that help users connect with their friends on web or mobile applications and in so doing increase personal extensibility. The main attraction is the offering of incentives such as a race for points and/or badges among users who earn them upon "check in" at certain venues or locations. Additionally, users can also earn "super user" status if they frequently check in at new venues or locations and enter information about them. These applications include not only comprehensive location-specific information, but also the capability of quick circulation of their feedback or opinions through eWOM. They also have the ability to help foster brand loyalty and brand equity. Moreover, users are likely to access the applications in international settings (e.g. tourist destinations), which makes international advertising or promotion via a mobile device more desirable.

We know too little about how culture affects mobile social media adoption and usage, and how consumers' perceptions of and behavior toward these media vary across countries. Future research should explore to what extent the differences in how mobile social media advertising is used and accepted across countries are driven by economic, technological or social factors. Specific to personal extensibility is the degree to which the capabilities provided by social media capitalize on the greater ability to foster communications among consumers across the world in ways that simply were not possible before.

An area of particular interest for future researchers is the degree to which social media sites can capitalize on the personal extensibility component and make it possible for marketers to reduce psychic distance between cultures at least with respect to interactions with their own brand or brands. This type of research is also useful in

terms of testing the degree to which cultural convergence is really operating and how it is affecting global marketers.

Overall conclusions

This paper discusses three theoretical perspectives to explain how social media creates value in the context of international advertising. These three foundations, namely networking capability, image transferability, and personal extensibility provide marketers with new opportunities to be effective in reaching consumers across the globe. All three of these factors facilitate interaction across geographic and psychological boundaries. Our analysis suggests that these three factors are all “capabilities” that provide opportunities to engage in effective global marketing. The best way to approach advertising in global markets via social media is nonetheless subject to some debate and as a result research on social media in light of all three of these capabilities, both individually and taken as a whole, is badly needed.

A few key areas in need of future research stand out. First, for many years some researchers have posited that cultural convergence is leading to consumers becoming more similar in many respects. To the extent that this is the case, social media has the opportunity to capitalize on networking capability to bring people together, image transferability which enables marketers to build the brand with larger audiences than ever before, and personal extensibility which allows interactions and relationships to be built over much larger geographic boundaries than ever before. This phenomenon may be indicative of emerging global cultures with an emphasis on modernity, technology, freedom, and individual choice (Steenkamp, 2001). People belonging to a global consumer culture associate similar meanings with certain places, people, and things (Merz *et al.*, 2008). In such a global consumer culture, there are shared feelings toward sets of symbols, in particular, brands (Okazaki *et al.*, 2010). While the extant literature does, indeed, seem to support the notion that standardized advertising strategy is the best way to facilitate building a global brand image and associated brand equity, the degree to which execution needs to be adapted warrants much more study.

A second, and related, issue is the degree to which cultural factors affect consumer responsiveness to social media advertising and promotion. As mentioned above, cultural dimensions such as individualism vs collectivism, propensity for novelty seeking behavior, communal vs agentic tendencies in friendships, and monochronic vs polychronic time orientation, as well as others need to be explored to examine whether and how they affect consumer response to social media advertising in various cultures. Such research has implications for homing in on what needs to be adapted even if a standardized strategy is used.

A third area in need of research relates to how social media advertising provides a platform for examining the degree to which cross-market segmentation has become feasible and desirable. In light of a growing number of studies supporting the view that cross-market segments exist, it makes sense to examine whether groups such as young consumers and tech savvy consumers across cultures respond to social media advertising in similar ways. It is also worth examining whether there are some types of product categories for which cross-national segments tend to respond to the same type of advertising approach.

A final key area of research is on the brand building potential of social media across cultures in comparison to traditional media. Independent of the issue of whether standardized appeals and strategies can be used is the issue of whether on a global

level social media have stronger brand building potential than traditional media. Studies employing network theory to examine the creation and dissemination of eWOM have started to move in this direction, but cross-cultural studies are badly needed. Additionally, studies of the brand building capability of social media across markets are important in an environment in which building brand equity is a central focus of marketers.

While it is understandable that research on advertising in social media has only taken off over the last five years or so, the paucity of cross-national studies now represents a glaring hole. This paper is designed to serve as an aid to researchers in filling this gap and expanding knowledge about social media advertising in international markets.

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