



# Taking a global view on brand post popularity: Six social media brand post practices for global markets

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## KEYWORDS

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**Abstract** Brand post popularity positively relates to consumers' purchase intentions, actual sales, and stock prices. Research suggests that social media posts should be vivid, practical, interesting, personalized, and interactive. However, cross-cultural research also suggests that practices might not be equally effective across different regional markets. While vividness and practicality could be consistently important across cultures, characteristics of interest, personalization, and interactivity might need to be adapted to the cultural conditions of specific target markets. We consider how individualism/collectivism, long-term orientation, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and high-context/low-context cultures could influence brand post effectiveness. We provide suggestions for how to manage social media brand post popularity from a cross-cultural perspective to inform both domestic and global social media marketing campaigns. Suggested practices include: (1) making brand posts engaging; (2) targeting the 'I' in individualistic cultures and the 'we' in collectivist cultures; (3) focusing on consumers' identity in less long-term oriented cultures and on functional information in more long-term oriented cultures; (4) ensuring that posts help reduce uncertainty; (5) planning for one-way communication in higher power distance countries and two-way communication in lower power distance countries; and (6) making messages less direct in higher-context cultures and more direct in lower-context cultures.

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## 1. Taking a global view on brand post popularity

The use of social media for marketing has thoroughly been studied by academics, applied by practitioners, and adopted by organizations. It represents

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a stable new reality that decision makers in a wide range of businesses must accept, embrace, and master. By 2013, there was a near universal adoption of Facebook and Twitter among leading brands, with YouTube also gaining in brand reach (Statista, n.d.). Companies such as Coca-Cola, GoPro, McDonald's, Samsung, Nike, Oreo, KFC, PlayStation, Converse, Yo Amo Los Zapatos, and Red Bull all have thoroughly embraced the power of social media to help gain the attention, engagement, and market share of international audiences. For example, GoPro had 2.2 million interactions in 2014, during which time subscribers watched an estimated 10,200 years and 35 days of Red Bull video on YouTube (McCulloch, 2014). Nike capitalized on the 2014 World Cup by partnering with YouTube celebrities to increase its subscriber base. The company's "Winner Stays" video featuring superstar soccer players had 98 million views, 30,000 comments, and 795 years of total time viewed, making it the most viewed brand video of 2014 (McCulloch, 2014). For most managers, emphasis on the substantial value and importance of social media is not new information, as practical tips on managing a brand's social media presence have been around for a while (e.g., Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Yet, marketing managers will want to set the bar higher and find new areas of mastery to increase the effectiveness of their campaigns.

One set of ongoing critical marketing decisions for managers concerns how and what to post on social media. These decisions are important because certain characteristics of a brand's social media post will impact the brand post's popularity in the form of likes, shares, and fans. This popularity could make the posts more effective in communicating the company's message to engage and influence consumers. Academic research on word-of-mouth marketing suggests some characteristics that can make social media posts most popular and effective. However, managers' understanding of these effects likely fails to account for the substantial cultural differences that occur across global markets.

Social media use varies by culture and region (de Mooij, 2013). For example, compared to U.S. social media users, Koreans have fewer but stronger social connections, more anonymity, and more frequent use of graphical non-verbal communication (e.g., use of emoticons and emojis). French social media users tend to engage in discussions that are more impersonal to stay in touch with friends, while U.S. and U.K. users tend to use social media as a tool for researching products. Research comparing cultural differences between Korean and U.S. college students' social media use found that U.S. students tend to use social network sites to seek entertain-

ment whereas Korean students used social network sites to obtain social support from existing social relationships (Kim, Sohn, & Choi, 2011). Research also suggests that status updates and photographs are more important for U.S. users than for French users (Vasalou, Joinson, & Courvoisier, 2010). Overall, this evidence suggests that managers could benefit from understanding how to manage social media marketing campaigns across global markets. Thus, we make specific suggestions for designing and coordinating culturally relevant brand posts within global marketing campaigns.

In this article, we outline generalized practices to increase brand post popularity and suggest more specific practices that could appeal to distinct cultural preferences. We present a simple conceptual model that can guide readers through our discussion and suggestion of culture-specific brand post practices. This presentation will involve five components. First, we outline the value of brand post popularity and generally suggested practices. Here, we explain the value that brand post popularity holds for managers and other stakeholders. We then outline a set of generalized practices that have been shown to increase brand post popularity. In the next section, we present important cultural differences to consider when interfacing with global markets via social media and explain how general practices can be incorporated differently according to a range of cultural differences. The different cultural interpretations are then used to suggest a set of culturally-relevant global brand post practices for managers using social media to promote their products. We conclude by emphasizing the importance of taking a cross-cultural perspective to promote products using social media.

## 2. The value of social media use and brand post popularity

By 2015, around 96% of marketers were using social media as a marketing channel (Stelzner, 2015). Social media use has been related to increased purchase intentions, increased sales, and even increased stock prices. Specifically, company social media use and the popularity of brand posts can impact what consumers think about a product or brand. Research suggests that following a brand's Facebook updates positively relates to what consumers think about a product or brand, how loyal they are to the brand, and whether or not they intend to purchase a product or brand (Beukeboom, Kerkhof, & de Vries, 2015). Survey research by Chadwick Martin Bailey (2011a) suggests that 77% of respondents interact with brands on Facebook

through reading posts and updates from the brands, 56% of respondents were more likely to recommend a brand to a friend after becoming a fan of the brand on Facebook, and 51% of respondents were more likely to buy a product after becoming a fan. Similar findings were observed for Twitter (Chadwick Martin Bailey, 2011b). In a similar vein, research suggests that social media popularity relates to public opinion and election results (Lin, 2017).

A company's use of social media and the popularity of its brand posts can also impact consumers' actual purchase behaviors. Research suggests that social media activities like sharing, liking, and tweeting can positively influence purchase decisions. A recent study suggests that almost three-quarters of consumers rely on social networks to guide purchase decisions and that almost half of these consumers purchase a product after sharing it on social media (Saboo, Kumar, & Ramani, 2016). A 2013 industry report found that tweets were related positively to video game sales in the U.K. via word-of-mouth influence (Deloitte, 2013). This research estimated that a 30% increase in positive tweets is four times more effective in driving sales than a 30% increase in traditional advertising. Social media popularity metrics might also influence a company's stock prices, as research has showed that the number of Facebook fans a company has can positively relate to stock prices (O'Connor, 2013).

While there are many positive outcomes of a company's use of social media to promote its brands, managers should also pay attention to the social context. For example, in September 2014, frozen pizza company DiGiorno mistakenly used the Twitter hashtags #WhyIStayed and #WhyILeft to promote its product (Stampler, 2014). Unfortunately, the hashtags were being used by domestic abuse victims to share their heartbreaking stories. Oblivious to the context, DiGiorno sent a tweet that read: "#WhyIStayed You Had Pizza." Twitter users were outraged at the insensitive post, and the company immediately recalled the tweet and apologized for the mistake. DiGiorno's Twitter gaffe is a potent reminder that companies using social media should be cautious and conscientious of the social context and implications of their messages. Later in the article, we suggest how companies can avoid negligent posts of a cultural nature in order to help brand messages be received more positively across global markets.

## 2.1. Increasing brand post popularity on social media

Considerable research has looked into what makes brand posts popular and how social media can

impact consumers' purchase decisions. Results suggest that certain characteristics will make social media brand posts more popular, effective, and convincing. Specifically, posts should be vivid, practical, interesting, personalized, and interactive.

### 2.1.1. Vividness: Make it noticeable

Vividness refers to the way a brand post appeals to an individual's senses. Marketers can achieve vividness in posts by including dynamic animations, colors, or pictures. Research suggests that vivid brand posts can enhance the salience or prominence of the posts (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). More specifically, vivid brand posts on social network sites like Facebook in Singapore got more likes, shares, and comments than less vivid posts (Chua & Banerjee, 2015). The more vivid the post, the more consumers will recognize it. A video is more vivid than a picture, as it stimulates both visual and aural senses. Samsung, General Electric, Oreo, Red Bull, and HP are known to post short, creative videos presenting beautiful and vivid visuals on social network sites. Red Bull posts content on YouTube almost every day and its videos receive roughly 30,000 views within a few days after posting. These videos also have high rates of engagement as the content promotes viewer comments and reflects the general theme of extreme sports. Other research revealed that images and videos posted on Facebook received more consumer engagement than text-only posts and that these images were even more powerful sources of engagement than videos (Sabate, Berbegal-Mirabent, Cañabate, & Lebherz, 2014). Ferrero Rocher, a luxury chocolate brand, exemplified the effective use of simple yet vivid and compelling images when its page drew over 20 million fans in March 2016. Vividness is critical to the effectiveness of brand posts but it should not be confused with complexity, as vivid posts that are both simple and complex can be effective for different products.

### 2.1.2. Practicality: Make it accessible and easy to process

Brand posts must be practical and accessible for consumers to engage with the post, making time and efficiency critical characteristics of effective brand posts. Brand posts published during peak hours of consumer activity are crucial to effective posting, as some research has found that early morning and late night posts saw approximately 20% higher Facebook engagement rates than the average post (Sabate et al., 2014). Other research has found that posting on workdays can increase engagement while posting during consumers' peak hours of social media use can reduce engagement

(Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). Another study found that posting on Twitter earlier in the week (i.e., Monday through Thursday) offers a better chance of getting a high click count than posting on a Friday (Mishra & Monippally, 2014). However, it is likely that optimal post times will vary across brands, markets, and regions. Thus, companies should evaluate their own optimal posting times by reviewing their social media activity to understand when they get the most user engagement.

The message length of posts could also influence user engagement. Research by Sabate et al. (2014) showed that Facebook posts with 80 characters or less have a 27% higher engagement rate. However, these researchers also suggested that brands should focus on ensuring that consumers understand the content instead of targeting a specific character count within posts. In a similar vein, Twitter imposes a 140-character limit for tweets and a recent tweet by Samsung Mobile USA provides an example of how updates could be more effective if kept short. Using only 47 characters in its 'Clumsy Crops No More' post, Samsung received nearly 28,000 likes and about 2,000 shares and comments (Hemley, 2014). For YouTube, the suggested, optimal video length is between 3 and 3.5 minutes. Viewers are less likely to watch overly long videos all the way through, making them less prone to like and share the video. Together these findings suggest that brand posts must balance content and efficiency to optimize effectiveness.

### 2.1.3. Interest: Make it informative and entertaining

Social media brand post content needs to be entertaining and intrinsically interesting to consumers for them to engage further with the brand. Research suggests that posting entertaining, informative, or personally relevant content on social media increases consumer engagement (de Mooij, 2013; Kim et al., 2011; Lee & Ma, 2013). Many of the most popular social media sites offer important information, as is the case with content posted to Caterpillar's Cat Products Facebook page. On this page, the company shares a wide range of informative marketing content that addresses company initiatives related to the 2016 Olympic summer games in Rio de Janeiro and other product-related information. One particular post shares a story of how the Cat 424 B backhoe loader played a critical role in two entrepreneurs' earth moving business in rural India. Other brand posts are designed to be highly entertaining. Consider the previously mentioned promotional videos and content created by Red Bull, GoPro, and Nike. Each of these brands used highly entertaining sports content to capture

consumer attention, promote sharing, and further engage the consumer. While it is important for content to capture consumers' attention in an efficient way, the content must be interesting enough to hold this attention and translate it into further active engagement.

### 2.1.4. Personalization: Make it personally relevant and connect with the consumer

Personalization refers to targeted messages, offers, and recommendations by brands on social media, and it positively relates to consumers' brand engagement (Erdoğan & Tatar, 2015). Personalization can be achieved through delivering effective advertisements to the most interested users by analyzing the user behaviors pattern, a practice known as behavioral targeting. Research conducted on one music band's Facebook fan page suggested that the band should offer its new album free to its most loyal fans so these fans could provide reviews and comments on the fan page and their personal profiles (Khobzi & Teimourpour, 2015). It was also suggested that the band could send unengaged fans discount offers on concert tickets as an incentive for certain types of activity on the band's fan page. Campaigns that resonate with the brand's target audience also engage consumers on Twitter and YouTube. Maybelline New York India launched a campaign for its SuperStay lipstick on social media in February 2013 with a catchy phrase using the hashtag #doesntlastlongenough, getting 4,000 tweets from the brand's target population of young women in only 14 hours (Mishra & Monippally, 2014). Dove posted the message 'You're more beautiful than you think' on Facebook in 2013, which was liked nearly 230,000 times, shared more than 50,000 times, and received 4,500 comments. A link related to Dove's campaign then took viewers to a YouTube video that fans viewed nearly 45 million times by May 2013 (Mishra & Monippally, 2014).

### 2.1.5. Interactivity: Get the consumer behaviorally involved and engaged

Customers like to interact with brands, ask questions, and exchange their opinions via social network sites. Thus, the degree of interactivity of posts in social network sites is another important characteristic of effective brand posts. Post interactivity can be increased through the use of question-and-answer dialogue, promotions and contests, links to other websites, votes, or other characteristics that require some form of consumer action. Research suggests that interactivity is related to a brand's ability to attract likes, comments, and shares (Chua & Banerjee, 2015). More specifically, question-and-answer dialogue, promotions, contests, links to

websites, and online votes have also been found to relate positively to consumer engagement (Chua & Banerjee, 2015; de Vries et al., 2012; Erdoğan & Tatar, 2015).

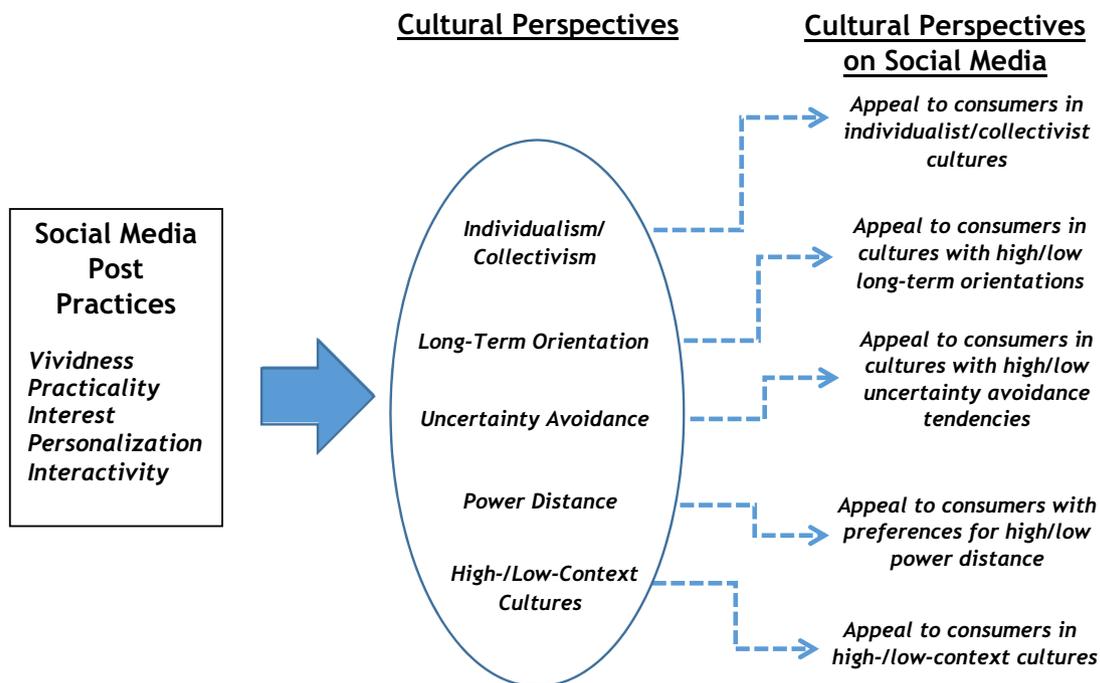
Starbucks and GoPro are prime examples of this engagement through interactivity. When Starbucks developed @MyStarbucksIdea, it engaged more than 30,000 followers to submit ideas for improving the customer experience. The list of ideas implemented by Starbucks then was posted on a separate blog, empowering consumers' further engagement by showing that consumers were being heard and their thoughts were being implemented. To maintain this engagement, Starbucks actively monitored and responded to tweets from followers. During a 2-week period, Starbucks sent 31 tweets, replied to followers 3,806 times, and retweeted messages 14 times (Hemley, 2014). GoPro also harnessed fan-generated content to increase its online channel subscriber base, obtaining 640 million views and a 72% increase in subscribers, which translates to about 1 million new fans (McCulloch, 2014). While some have suggested that links in posts may decrease comments (Sabate et al., 2014), the previously described research tends to suggest that fans of brand pages prefer interactivity as long as it is not overly time consuming. Thus, while managers face the challenge of finding the optimal level

of interactivity, it is generally considered to be an important characteristic for effective brand posts.

### 3. How do cultural differences relate to brand post popularity?

Geert Hofstede's cultural characteristics of individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and long-term orientation (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) are useful in understanding the impact and adoption of social media across cultures. Research by Edward Hall (1976) also suggested that cultures differ according to high- and low-context communications. We present Figure 1 to demonstrate how brand posts can be interpreted differently by consumers depending on their cultural perspective and present Table 1 to suggest possible ways certain brand post practices can be interpreted according to different cultural perspectives. We recommend that managers consider both general and specific practices depending on their unique circumstances. The more specific dimensions suggested are likely to increase the interest, personalization, and interactivity of posts that are specifically targeted at consumers from a distinct culture. Conversely, general dimensions might be more practical when creating a few generalized

Figure 1. A cross-cultural perspective on managing brand post popularity\*



\*Note: The model presented here in Figure 1 depicts how recommended social media practices can be tailored to specific cultural perspectives. This model shows how social media practices presented to people with various cultural perspectives (bold line) can be perceived according to these different cultural perspectives (dotted lines).

Table 1. Critical drivers of post popularity and relevant cultural perspectives\*

	Cultural Perspectives on Social Media				
Social Media Practices	Individualism/Collectivism	Long-Term Orientation	Uncertainty Avoidance	Power Distance	High-/Low-Context Cultures
Vividness	Relatively consistent across cultures				
Practicality					
Interest	<p><b>Individualist:</b> Useful information and appealing entertainment will benefit consumers by giving an individual distinct advantage, status, or enjoyment.</p> <p><b>Collectivist:</b> Useful information and appealing entertainment will benefit consumers' family or social groups.</p>	<p><b>High-Levels:</b> Consumers will focus on useful information that can provide functional value.</p> <p><b>Low-Levels:</b> Consumers will focus on information and entertainment that allows them to identify with the brand as a representation of who they are.</p>	<p><b>High-Levels:</b> Consumers will value functional information that reduces risk and uncertainty.</p> <p><b>Low-Levels:</b> Consumers will value a wider range of content that provides information and/or entertainment.</p>	<p><b>High-Levels:</b> Consumers will receive one-way communications regarding information and entertainment from the brand.</p> <p><b>Low-Levels:</b> Consumers will participate more in two-way interactions with the brand regarding information and entertainment.</p>	<p><b>High-Context:</b> Interesting messages would be more effective if conveyed subtly through indirect mannerisms and signs than through direct statement.</p> <p><b>Low-Context:</b> Interesting messages could effectively be conveyed through direct statements and other means.</p>
Personalization	<p><b>Individualist:</b> Focus on the consumer as a unique individual.</p> <p><b>Collectivist:</b> Focus on the consumer as a member of a group.</p>	<p><b>High-Levels:</b> Personalization will matter to the degree that useful information applies to the consumer's distinct functional needs.</p> <p><b>Low-Levels:</b> Personalization will represent the consumer's identity and history.</p>	<p><b>High-Levels:</b> Consumers will value functional information that reduces risk and uncertainty specific to the individual.</p> <p><b>Low-Levels:</b> Consumers will value a wider base of personal connections with the brand.</p>	<p><b>High-Levels:</b> Consumers will either accept or passively reject associations and personalization attempts by the brand.</p> <p><b>Low-Levels:</b> Consumers will engage in more two-way participative crafting of their personal connection with the brand.</p>	<p><b>High-Context:</b> Personalization attempts would be more effective if conveyed subtly through indirect mannerisms and signs than through direct statement.</p> <p><b>Low-Context:</b> Personalization attempts could be conveyed effectively through direct statements and other means.</p>

Table 1 (Continued)

	Cultural Perspectives on Social Media				
Social Media Practices	Individualism/Collectivism	Long-Term Orientation	Uncertainty Avoidance	Power Distance	High-/Low-Context Cultures
Interactivity	<p><b>Individualist:</b> Individuals interact with the brand and members of their network to gain distinct benefits or to present a distinct image of themselves.</p> <p><b>Collectivist:</b> Consumers interact more with members of their close friend or family group to gain shared benefits or be part of a social activity.</p>	<p><b>High-Levels:</b> Consumers will interact with the brand and others to extract valuable functional information about products.</p> <p><b>Low-Levels:</b> Consumers will interact with the brand more as part of a process of identification with others sharing a similar history.</p>	<p><b>High-Levels:</b> Consumers will interact with the brand to clarify ambiguities and reduce concerns over potential risks associated with the product.</p> <p><b>Low-Levels:</b> Consumers will interact with the brand for a wider range of reasons.</p>	<p><b>High-Levels:</b> Consumers will be less likely to interact directly with the brand on a voluntary basis.</p> <p><b>Low-Levels:</b> Consumers will be more likely to interact voluntarily directly with the brand.</p>	<p><b>High-Context:</b> Interaction could be more likely and effective if options for context rich interaction (e.g., video, voice, emoticons) was made possible.</p> <p><b>Low-Context:</b> Interaction is likely to occur and be effective through communication mediums of all types including simple text comments.</p>

\*Note: Some characteristics are likely to have more generalized effects on brand post popularity across cultures (e.g., vividness and practicality), while others will have noticeably different effects across different cultures (e.g., interest, personalization, and interactivity).

messages to send across a global network. We also present a checklist to help managers design cross-culturally relevant brand posts in the [Appendix](#).

### 3.1. Individualism/collectivism and social media

Individualism and collectivism capture the degree to which people prefer to identify with and be integrated into groups. Individualism is seen mostly in the cultures of Western Europe and North America, whereas collectivism is seen mostly in the cultures of Asia, Africa, parts of Europe, and Latin America ([Nelson & Fivush, 2004](#); [Triandis, 1993](#)). Around 70–80% of the global population can be considered collectivistic and only Anglo-Saxon cultures, Scandinavian countries, and North American countries of the U.S. and Canada are considered individualistic ([de Mooij, 2013](#)). Social media tends to be used in cultures higher on individualism as a means of meeting new people, while it is used more prominently in collectivist cultures to maintain stronger and closer relationships with a more select group of connections. Research comparing students in the U.S. (individualist) and China (collectivist) found that students in the U.S. tended to focus more on themselves and made more connections than students from China, who emphasized family and a few close friends ([Jackson & Wang, 2013](#)).

When it comes to relying on information on social media, however, consumers from collectivist cultures tend to rely on online word-of-mouth opinions more than consumers from individualist cultures. Word of mouth has demonstrated greater importance than other traditional forms of advertising in securing the consumer's decision to try a product ([Buttle, 1998](#)). Cross-cultural research comparing online word-of-mouth activity in the U.S. and China suggests that Chinese consumers engage in more online word-of-mouth activities on social media than U.S. consumers, such as opinion giving, opinion seeking, and information sharing ([Chu & Choi, 2011](#)). Other research examined the influence of culture on the use of online and offline purchase decisions across 50 countries and found that consumers from collectivist cultures are more likely to use social media for purchase decisions than those from individualist cultures ([Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014](#)). For example, consumers from individualist countries Australia and the U.K. were less likely to use social media for purchase decisions than consumers from collectivist countries like China or Thailand. Indeed, individualism and collectivism are important cultural considerations for marketing managers who could focus messages on the 'I' of

individuals in individualist cultures and the 'we' of groups in collectivist cultures.

### 3.2. Long-term orientation and social media

The cultural dimension of long-term orientation focuses on whether a culture is practical, thrifty, and primarily concerned with future-oriented development, or conversely, whether it values and prioritizes maintaining connections to historical traditions and norms. Cultures with less of a long-term orientation—like the U.S., Anglo-Saxon countries, Latin America, and Africa—place a larger emphasis on historical tradition. People from these cultures are more interactive on social media and present themselves in more self-enhancing ways. According to research by [Nielsen \(2011\)](#), people in less long-term oriented cultures spend more time on social media sites, while those in more long-term oriented cultures—like Japan, Korea, and China—prefer more anonymity and passive connection to the larger community ([Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014](#)). People from these more long-term oriented cultures also tend to be more modest by showing their competence indirectly and focusing more on self-criticism and improvement ([de Mooij, 2013](#)). This distinction suggests social media messages should target each type of culture differently by focusing on identification in less long-term oriented cultures and focusing on practicality and enhanced function in more long-term oriented cultures.

### 3.3. Uncertainty avoidance and social media

Uncertainty avoidance deals with peoples' tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. People belonging to cultures high in uncertainty avoidance are likely to be more interested in information from authoritative and knowledgeable sources on social media, while those from cultures with lower uncertainty avoidance might pay attention to broader sources of opinions and ideas. In the U.S., a country low on uncertainty avoidance, college students were more likely to post extreme information and improper content on their social media status updates than those in Germany, a country with relatively high uncertainty avoidance ([Acar, 2014](#)). In Germany, privacy concerns are extremely important, leading Facebook's 'like' button to be criticized for possibly allowing companies to track Facebook users' personal information ([Noack, 2011](#)). In fact, the privacy issue and its associated legalities have created a substantial rift between U.S. companies and those from European countries

such as Spain and Belgium (O'Brien & Kreijger, 2016). Managers should understand that issues of risk and uncertainty could be important concerns in countries with higher uncertainty avoidance.

### 3.4. Power distance and social media

Power distance captures the degree to which people within a culture tend to accept and expect an unequal distribution of power and decision-making authority. Anglo-Saxon and northwest European countries, as well as the U.S., score low on power distance. The rest of the world scores comparatively high on power distance. In countries with high power distance, family ties are strong and inequality in power distribution is legitimately accepted by the less powerful members of institutions and organizations. Research suggests that people from low power distance Western cultures do more online research into brands than people from higher power distance Eastern cultures (Goodrich & de Mooij, 2014). However, research also suggests that usage of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter is comparatively high in cultures with higher power distance (Agourram, 2013). Furthermore, people from low power distance countries do not prefer interacting with popular users on Twitter, while those from high power distance countries do (Garcia-Gavilanes, Quercia, & Jaimes, 2013). Other research compared 1 week of online activity from top 100 brands in Japan and the U.S. and found that U.S. brands interacted with their customers more than Japanese brands that were less active in asking questions, making posts, directly addressing fans, initiating conversations, revealing information on the brand, and allowing fan posts (Acar, 2014). The research also found that in Norway, a low power distance culture, 87% of brands responded to Facebook questions while responses were given by only 45% of brands in the U.K., a culture comparatively high on power distance (Acar, 2014). Together these results suggest that managers should recognize that although consumers in higher power distance cultures might use social media more often, they could be less comfortable and likely to interact directly with the brand. Conversely, consumers in lower power distance cultures might wish and even expect frequent and more equal interaction with brands.

### 3.5. Hall's high- and low-context cultures and social media

Hall's (1976) high- and low-context cultures capture the degree to which communication is based on facts and statements are taken at face value. In

low-context cultures, people are logical, linear, and action oriented; they value logic and decision making based on facts rather than intuition (Agourram, 2013); and interactions are expressive, direct, and formal (Meeuf, 2014). North America, Northern Europe, much of Western Europe, and other English-speaking countries tend to be low-context cultures. Research suggests that low-context cultures like the U.S. use social media more frequently than Singapore, a high-context culture. People from the U.S. tend to post more photos of themselves on Facebook, while people from India tend to post photos that capture public figures or religion (Sharrock, 2013).

The high-context cultures prominent in Asia, Africa, South America, the Mediterranean region, and the Middle East tend to communicate with more indirect and less formal statements (Meeuf, 2014). Explicit information is less important than contextual elements of communication like one's tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, and posture (Agourram, 2013). Research from high-context Arab countries found that people prefer face-to-face and highly interpersonal interactions (Agourram, 2013). Research comparing tweets from Japanese and U.S. students indicated that Japanese students asked fewer questions (Meeuf, 2014). Thus, managers should understand the importance of direct communication and context when marketing products to global consumers via social media, as they will likely respond to different communication strategies.

## 4. Six practices to drive brand post popularity across global markets

### 4.1. Make brand posts engaging

A general overview of best practices for brand posts to increase their popularity suggests that posts should be vivid, practical, interesting, personalized, and interactive. While not all posts need to have each of these characteristics, using them as a general checklist for brand post best practices is suggested. Managers could adopt the checklist presented in the Appendix and balance this checklist with their own in-depth knowledge of their firm's products and market/s. This first suggestion captures a generalized set of best practices that could differ somewhat depending on specific cultural considerations for particular markets. We will discuss these cross-cultural implications in the next five practices and present a checklist for managers. Managers should remember that any given regional market will have multiple cultural components, so

the more cultural characteristics addressed in the campaign the better.

#### **4.2. Target the ‘I’ in individualist cultures and the ‘we’ in collectivist cultures**

Managers should pay specific attention to cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism when promoting products to global markets via social media. Specifically, they should focus messages and activities toward the individual consumer in individualist cultures and toward the consumer as a member of a group, such as a family or social group, in more collectivist societies. We suggest that managers wanting to tailor their messages specifically to individualist or collectivist cultures should focus on customizing the elements of interest, personalization, and interactivity to the target customers’ individualist/collectivist preferences. For individualist cultures, managers might design the content, information, and entertainment to target the individual ‘I’ and have this content provide the customer with unique benefit. Personalization attempts should acknowledge the target consumer as a unique individual and the interaction opportunities should reflect and promote this uniqueness. For collectivist cultures, managers should consider how the content, information, and entertainment would benefit the consumer’s larger social group of family or close friends—that is, the ‘we.’ Personalization attempts for collectivist consumers should treat the target consumer as a member of this group and interactions should allow him or her to interact as part of this group.

#### **4.3. Focus on the consumer’s identity in less long-term oriented cultures and on functional information in more long-term oriented cultures**

Managers should adjust brand post content to appeal specifically to customers’ cultural differences in levels of long-term orientation. For less long-term oriented cultures, managers should make posts that cue consumers to identify with their history and roots. Personalization attempts should also seek to acknowledge the consumers’ history as uniquely important and connect with them on this basis. Interactions with the brand or other consumers should be those that help consumers identify with their history and interact with others sharing a similar history. For more long-term oriented cultures, managers should acknowledge that these consumers are concerned with functionality and practicality. Information provided through posts targeted at these customers should serve a practical

purpose and have functional value. Personalization attempts and interaction should also be derived from this more applied functional logic, as more long-term oriented customers are likely to find personalization most useful when it optimizes and customizes the information, service, and product provided. Interactions will be most helpful for these consumers when it allows them to gain more functional information.

#### **4.4. Posts should help reduce uncertainty**

Some cultures are much more averse to uncertainty and risk. Managers should embrace this difference for cultures with high uncertainty avoidance by using their social media posts to reduce the consumers’ perceived uncertainty and risk associated with the product and brand. In this regard, posts should help reduce the risk and uncertainty for the consumer. Personalization attempts should offer more targeted assurances and information to a more focused set of customers. Interactions allow consumers to gain supporting information on the product or brand from a wider variety of sources to help reduce anxiety and concerns over potential risks.

#### **4.5. Plan for one-way communication in higher power distance countries and two-way communication in lower power distance countries**

Managers should also be conscious of different levels of power distance across cultures, as these differences could lead consumers to act and respond to brand posts in very different ways. Managers targeting consumers in high power distance cultures should design social media posts with the expectation of a more one-way interaction between the brand and the consumer. In this regard, information should be transmitted in a manner designed to be effective as one-way communication, the connection with the consumer should be based on an expected one-way relationship, and posts should be effective without direct feedback from the customer. While consumers in high power distance cultures will be less likely to interact with the brand, they could still interact with their peers. In these situations, one-way communication could be transmitted to the consumer with the expectation that they will not respond to the company but could share the information with friends and family. Managers targeting customers in low power distance cultures will need to take a different approach, as they should expect and design their posts to facilitate two-way interaction. Consumers

from low power distance cultures will seek more two-way interaction, expect two-way relationships fostered through collaboration between the brand and the consumers, and expect two-way interaction with the brand.

**4.6. Messages should be less direct in higher-context cultures and more direct in lower-context cultures**

Finally, managers should design their posts according to target customers’ cultural preferences for high-/low-context communication. For high context consumers, managers should generally be less direct and provide more information through visual cues and contextual signs. This could include: conveying messages through subtle mannerisms, hints, and contextual cues; less direct personalization attempts; and the incorporation of context such as video, voice, or emoticons. Managers targeting consumers from low-context cultures should be much more direct in their statements and personalization attempts to allow for simple and direct interactions.

**5. Embracing a global perspective for managing brand posts**

Designing social media brand posts to be popular and effective is an important consideration for

marketing managers as it positively relates to consumers’ purchase intentions, actual sales, and even stock prices. Current research suggests that posts should be vivid, practical, interesting, personalized, and interactive. However, cross-cultural research suggests that there is value in adapting these generalized practices to the cultural characteristics of specific target markets. While characteristics of vividness and practicality are likely to be relatively consistent in importance across cultures, characteristics of interest, personalization, and interactivity likely need to be adapted to specific target markets according to a variety of cultural characteristics. Managers should also consider their own company-specific information on the product, its market/s, and their customers.

In conclusion, managers should adopt generalized practices and tailor these practices to specific target markets. A global perspective is necessary for companies with global markets, but it is also valuable within domestic markets as trends of immigration and cultural clustering increase. A global orientation to social media brand posts is a valuable perspective for companies with both global and domestic markets, for companies both large and small, and for both historical institutions and new startups. We urge managers to embrace a global perspective when it comes to social media brand posts in order to reach both global and domestic consumers more effectively.

**Appendix. Social media brand post checklist**

<b>GENERALIZED PRACTICES</b>	
___	<b>Vivid:</b> <i>Does the post capture consumers' visual attention?</i>
___	<b>Practical:</b> <i>Is the post available and easy to understand?</i>
___	<b>Interesting:</b> <i>Is the post informative and/or entertaining?</i>
___	<b>Personalized:</b> <i>Does the post speak to the target consumer or target consumer group?</i>
___	<b>Interactive:</b> <i>Does the post promote consumer activity?</i>
<b>CULTURE-SPECIFIC PRACTICES</b>	
<b>Individualist Culture-Specific Practices:</b>	
___	<i>Does the post provide advantage or status to individual?</i>
___	<i>Does the post focus on the target consumer as unique individual?</i>
___	<i>Does the post allow interaction with the consumer as an individual?</i>
<b>Collectivist Culture-Specific Practices:</b>	
___	<i>Does the post provide advantage or status to family/group?</i>
___	<i>Does the post focus on the target consumer as a group member?</i>
___	<i>Does the post allow interaction with the consumer as a group member?</i>
<b>Low Long-Term Orientation Culture-Specific Practices:</b>	
___	<i>Does the post provide information/entertainment that allows consumers to identify with brand?</i>
___	<i>Does the post represent the target consumer's identity and history?</i>
___	<i>Do interactions help the consumer identify with others sharing a similar history?</i>
<b>High Long-Term Orientation Culture-Specific Practices:</b>	
___	<i>Does the post provide information that gives functional value to consumers?</i>
___	<i>Does the useful information provided apply to the target consumer's distinct needs?</i>
___	<i>Do interactions help consumers gain functional information?</i>

**Uncertainty Avoidant Culture-Specific Practices:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Does the post provide information that reduces risk and uncertainty for the consumer?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does the post reduce the perceived risk and uncertainty for the specific target consumer?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do interactions help clarify ambiguity and reduce concerns over potential risks?

**High Power Distance Culture-Specific Practices:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Is the post effective when transmitted as part of a one-way communication?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is the connection with the target consumer effective as part of a one-way communication?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is the post effective without voluntary two-way interaction?

**Low Power Distance Culture-Specific Practices:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Does the post allow and encourage two-way communication?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does the connection with the target consumer allow two-way participation in the relationship?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Does the post allow voluntary two-way interaction?

**High-Context Culture-Specific Practices:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Are messages conveyed subtly through indirect mannerisms and signals?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are personalization attempts and connections with the target consumer indirect?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do interactions with consumers allow for rich communication (e.g., video, voice, or emoticons)?

**Low-Context Culture-Specific Practices:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Is information conveyed through direct statements and other means?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are personalization attempts and connections with the target consumer direct and to-the-point?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are there options for consumers to interact using simple and direct communication?

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