Online Social Networks:
Student Perceptions and Behavior Across Four Countries

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that many college students in the United States post content to social networking sites that they know would be considered inappropriate by employers and other authority figures. However, the phenomenon has not been extensively studied in cross-cultural context. To address this knowledge gap, a survey of college students in Australia, Denmark, the United Kingdom, and the United States was conducted. The study found a universal tendency among the four groups: students knew the content they were posting would be considered inappropriate by employers and other authority figures, but they chose to post it anyway. The article also reports on differences in the way this tendency was manifested and on related aspects of social networking across cultures, including decisions about privacy and information disclosure.

Keywords: Careers, Culture, Global Business Communication, Information Systems, Privacy, Social Networking Sites (SNS)

INTRODUCTION

Today's college students are the first generation to form online habits while in adolescence (Tapscott, 2008; Subrahmanyam et al., 2008), and they will be the first to go on the job market en masse with an online history. As such, they will also set the future trends and expectations in the diverse spheres of finance marketing, education, technology, and government policy. Their behavior today provides a window into online social networking behavior of tomorrow (McCreary, 2008; Subrahmanyam et al.,

2008). At the same time, this history may have a proportionally larger effect on their career prospects than for older individuals (Gray & Christiansen, 2010). Older adults also use online social networks, but college-aged students are building their online history at a time in their lives when their online behavior may reflect a more experimental and less guarded lifestyle than would an older adult's (Gray & Christiansen, 2010; McAfee, 2010; Clark & Roberts, 2010; Livingstone, 2008). Also, college students entering the job market lack work experience and extensive employer references, so their online history may play a proportionally larger role in an employer's evaluation.

College students also have the opportunity to take an active role in using online social networks to influence their career prospects (Roberts & Roach, 2009). As the overlap between professional and personal life has increased through online social networking (Snyder, Carpenter, & Slauson, 2007), students must consciously shape the image that employers and others see or risk missing out on job opportunities (Bohnert & Ross, 2010). In a recent survey by Harris Interactive, nearly a quarter of hiring managers said they use online social networks to screen candidates, and 24% said what they found out about candidates through online social networks confirmed a hiring decision (Grasz, 2008). Social networking sites might also play a role in Career Preparation. Although Facebook use has been linked to lower student GPA and hours of study (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010), students might also choose to use online social networks to connect with other students for studying and build an academic network, potentially enabling them to achieve better academic results (The Science of Class Collaboration, 2009). Students can also use social networks outside of formal classes to pool their creative efforts and promote events or causes they care about (Shirky, 2008, 2010).

Yet, students often only belatedly see that online social networking is a form of career building and marketing (Roberts & Roach, 2009; Jue, Marr, & Kassotakis, 2010; Brogan, 2010). In a study exploring student use of online social networks, Miller, Parsons, and Lifer (2009) identified what they called a "posting paradox" in American college students' online behavior: the students believed the content they were posting would be considered inappropriate by authority figures such as parents or potential employers, but they chose to post it anyway. However, the closer these students were to college graduation and being on the job market, the more likely they were to self-censor the content of their online social networking accounts, suggesting an increasing concern over time about the negative effects of inappropriate content.

While such studies have deepened our knowledge of the online behavior and perceptions of college students in the United States, research that includes only college students in the United States is too narrow. About 70% of the over 500 million users of Facebook live outside the United States, and the site is used in more than 70 languages (Facebook, 2010). Other social networking sites such as Orkut in Brazil and India and Mixi in Japan claim millions of users (Naone, 2008). The global scale of markets—for jobs, products, and education— and of social networking sites themselves means that comparative studies of social networking behavior across cultures must also be performed. Behavior of populations has been shown to diverge markedly by national culture (Hofstede, 1996; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; Lewis, 2002), as have approaches to media use, technology, and rhetoric (Thatcher, 1999; 2006; Connor, 1996). Social networking is global in scope—and relevant research that is global in scope is likewise needed. Although studies on aspects of social networking have been done in specific countries such as Japan (Takahashi, 2010), South Korea (Lewis & George, 2008) Pakistan (Wan, Kumar, & Bukhari, 2008), and India (Agarwal & Mital, 2009; Wan, Kumar, & Bukhari, 2008), as well as the United States (Roblyer et al., 2010), comparative studies of college students' online social networking across multiple cultures have to date been scant. No cross-cultural studies of the "posting paradox" (Miller, Parsons, & Lifer, 2009) have been done.

A comparative, cross-cultural research framework would be ideal to study the social-networking-related perceptions and behaviors of college students in different countries. Such an approach, as used in this article, promises findings that can build on and extend current findings while also exploring where cultural differences are apparent. Key questions include the following:

- Does the posting paradox hold across cultures?
- To what extent is online social networking behavior universal, and to what extent is it influenced by culture?

- How do cultures differ in online social networking behavior and perception?

These questions are important because of their implications in the realms of business, law, and education, along with the decisions of individual online social network users themselves.

Since culture is an essential component of these questions, it is necessary to define what is meant by the term in this study. Hofstede (1996) proposes the well-known definition of culture: "Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another" (p. 51). This definition, based on the metaphor of computing, implies a distinction between biology (hardware) and culture, what Hofstede (1996) calls the "software of the mind." An important consequent question is as follows: at what level does this programming occur? Spencer-Oatey (2006) explains that in intercultural communication, culture is usually associated with social groups, which can be divided many different ways depending on the criteria used; e.g., sex (gender groups), ethnicity (ethnic groups), age (generation groups), religion (religious groups), nationality (national groups), occupation (professional groups), and language (linguistic groups).

In a similar fashion, Hofstede (1996) uses the metaphor of an onion to describe culture; each layer of culture that is peeled off (such as national, ethnic, professional, organizational) reveals another layer. Hofstede argues that culture should be defined at the level that is most appropriate for the situation, which allows culture to be explored anywhere along the continuum from the micro level to the macro level. By making the level of culture assumed explicit, researchers can discuss whether this level is appropriate for the purposes of their research and in light of corresponding ethical considerations.

In this article, culture is addressed at the level of nationality. There are several reasons for this decision. First, national boundaries are important and relevant concerns in business. Linguistic differences often follow national boundaries and are bound up with national identity in many countries, Japan being one example (Yamada, 1992, 2002). National laws must be followed, and financial markets are often delineated on national lines. Precedent also sanctions defining culture at the level of nationality in the intercultural communication literature (e.g., Byram, 1997; Hall, 1989; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2000; Hofstede, 1996; Hoft, 1995; Thatcher, 1999, 2000). Using these boundaries is also a natural fit for this particular case, as the universities from which the samples were drawn were located in different countries.

METHODS

In response to the research gaps identified, a preliminary, observational study of the "posting paradox" (Miller, Parsons, & Lifer, 2009) and related issues across cultures was conducted. An online survey, which promised the best prospects for obtaining detailed data and wide coverage across cultures, was created using Survey Monkey and distributed in English, with permission, via listservs at universities in Australia, Denmark, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data, the researchers did not attempt to assert what online behavior was appropriate; rather, the study was designed to investigate the posting paradox in the context of the participants' own evaluations of appropriate online behavior.

Demographic information can be found in Figure 1. While the samples from individual countries were small, they were sufficient to perform analyses of means using T-tests. Given the practical difficulties of obtaining access to international research sites and the lack of published research in this area, the samples used could be argued to be more than ample.

Of note in the demographic information, the gender ratio was in the 40 to 60% range for all groups except the Danish group, which came from a nursing school. While the Danish sample was heavily skewed (81% female), it

Figure 1. Demographics of the survey respondents in different countries were similar in most ways. Two notable differences were that the Danish sample contained many more females than the others, and more American survey respondents were on the job market.

Survey Information

	Australia n=50	Denmark n=43	United States n=46	United Kingdom n=170
Daily Access (daily / > daily)	86% (20% / 66%)	81% (32% / 49%)	93% (17% / 76%)	88% (22%/66%)
Gender Male / Female	56% / 44%	14% / 86%	54% / 46%	40% / 60%
On professional job market	22%	19%	46%	33%
Have you ever created a fake account?	22	5	7	9

was decided to leave the sample in the study, recognizing that the results for Denmark may not be as generalizable as the other results. Also notable demographically, American students were on the job market at the highest rate of 46%, followed by British, Australian and Danish students. Other information of interest is that 22% of Australian students admitted to having created a fake online social networking account—more than twice the rate of the next closest group, the UK, at 9%. American respondents had, on average, completed the most years of undergraduate study, followed by the Danish, UK, and Australian students, as shown in Figure 2.

Respondents in the different groups were similar in the kinds of online social networks they used, with over 90% in all groups using Facebook and a much lower percentage in all groups using Twitter, MySpace, and LinkedIn (Figure 3).

Given Facebook's position as the largest social network (New York Times, 2010) these results are not surprising. This means, however, that although the study was initially intended to investigate college students' use of online social networks more generally, it particularly reflects students' use of Facebook. Due to Facebook's dominance in the market, this is not a significant issue. It could be argued that Facebook's size and influence make it a more than appropriate proxy for social networking sites in general.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study yielded noteworthy findings about the posting paradox and related issues; in addition, the study produced related findings in the areas of privacy, information disclosure, and the use of online social networks. Along with enhancing knowledge in these areas, the study also revealed additional directions for future research.

Posting Paradox

The core finding of the study was that the posting paradox (Miller, Parsons, & Lifer, 2009) existed among all four cultural groups, although it was expressed differently for each group (Figure 4). Respondents were asked to rate their comfort level if categories of others—friends, parents, boy- or girlfriend's parents, professors, and employers—were able to view the contents of their online social networking accounts. Across all national cultures in the study, respondents' discomfort levels increased in the same order by category—from friends to parents to boy- or girlfriend's parents, to professors, to employers.

Figure 2. The United States sample had, on average, completed the most years of undergraduate study, with approximately two-thirds of respondents in their third or fourth year. The Australian sample was tilted towards the first and second years, with the UK and Denmark groups in between.

Year of Undergraduate Study
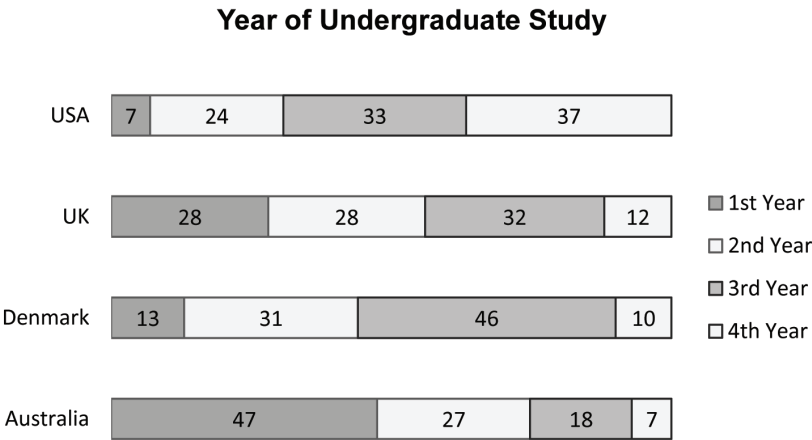
The decreasing level of comfort exhibited by all countries in the study appears to indicate that the "posting paradox" (Miller, Parsons, & Lifer, 2009) is not restricted to students in the United States. The responses show that students realize their content is often not appropriate for all audiences without being specifically told what "appropriate" means. Given the differences in culture expected from the nationalities studied herein, the similarity in response is very interesting.

Although the responses followed a similar pattern regardless of national culture, T-tests were performed to determine whether there were any significant differences between the cultures based on "comfort with different audiences". The T-tests identified the following significant differences (Figure 4).

A review of the T-test results shows a number of differences, especially between students in the United States and Australia, and between students in the United States and the United Kingdom. In all cases, students in the United States reported higher comfort levels when compared with their peers in Australia and the United Kingdom. Interestingly, Australian students always reported lower comfort levels

Figure 3. Students' use of online social networks was fairly consistent across national groups. One notable difference was the relatively high use of LinkedIn by American students.

Types of Online Social Networks Used

Social Networks Used	Australia n=50	Denmark n=43	United States n=46	United Kingdom n=170
Facebook	96%	92%	100%	98%
Twitter	7%	0%	2%	7%
LinkedIn	2%	3%	15%	6%
MySpace	20%	8%	35%	27%

Figure 4. T-tests revealed several significant differences, especially between the students in the United States and students in Australia and the United Kingdom

T-Tests

Friends		
Aus.	*U.S.*	*p-value*
6.40	6.80	0.048
Den.	*U.K.*	*p-value*
6.03	6.51	0.043
Den.	*U.S.*	*p-value*
6.03	6.80	0.000
U.K.	*U.S.*	*p-value*
6.51	6.80	0.003

Parents		
Aus.	*Den.*	*p-value*
4.40	5.24	0.034
Aus.	*U.S.*	*p-value*
4.40	5.76	0.000
U.K.	*U.S.*	*p-value*
4.85	5.76	0.001

Boy/Girlfriend's Parents		
Aus.	*U.S.*	*p-value*
4.36	5.52	0.003
U.K.	*U.S.*	*p-value*
4.61	5.52	0.001

Professors		
Aus.	*U.S.*	*p-value*
4.31	5.34	0.008
Den.	*U.S.*	*p-value*
4.49	5.34	0.048
U.K.	*U.S.*	*p-value*
4.34	5.34	0.001

Employers		
Aus.	*U.S.*	*p-value*
3.58	4.48	0.036
U.K.	*U.S.*	*p-value*
3.36	4.48	0.001

in any pairing where there was a significant difference.

In addition to the differences in means between national cultures, there was also a difference in the rate at which mean levels changed between categories (Figure 5). Australian students exhibited the sharpest drop-off in comfort levels between friends and parents viewing their accounts, followed by the UK students, with drops of 2.00 and 1.66, respectively, contrasted with smaller drops for Danish and American students at 0.79 and 1.04, respectively. Overall comfort with employers viewing one's online social networking account was lower for students in Australia (3.58) and the UK (3.36), compared with higher comfort levels in Denmark (4.03) and the United States (4.48). Thus, the overall change between categories was smaller for Danish and American students than it was for Australian and UK students. American students were relatively more comfortable with their professors viewing the contents of their accounts, at a rating of 5.34,

than were students in the other three groups, which converged around at 4.4.

Related to these issues was the question of access: to whom did students actually grant access to their accounts? As shown in Figure 6, the differences were somewhat paradoxical, with Australian students—who expressed the most discomfort with those besides their friends having access to their accounts—granting the most access, while the American students—who expressed the least discomfort with others viewing the contents of their accounts—granting the least access.

Beyond the question of whom students choose to grant access to, respondents were asked whether employers *should* be able to view the contents of their online social networking accounts (Figure 7). Not surprisingly, students in all four countries responded negatively, on average. What was surprising was the slim margin in the United States, with nearly half of the respondents—44% —saying that employers *should* be able to view their

Figure 5. Comfort levels decreased for students in all four countries, with the sharpest drop being between friends and parents, which was especially pronounced for Australian and UK students.
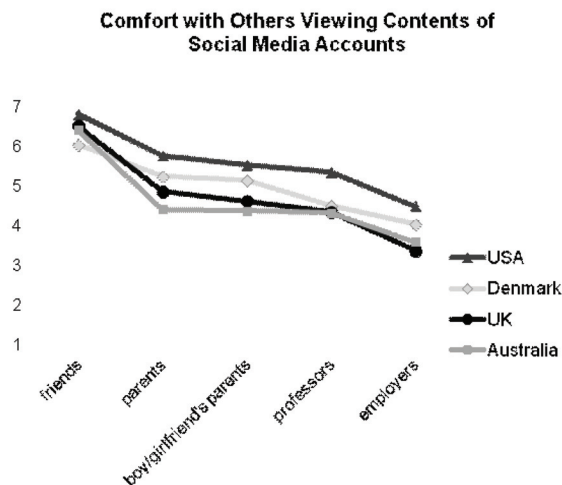
accounts. In contrast, less than half of this to-tal—only 21%—of students in the UK agreed, with slightly higher totals than this in Denmark and Australia. These results suggest divergent views of privacy that need to be further investigated in relation to online social networking across cultures.

Finally, in a related question, students were asked whether they would change the contents of their online social networking accounts if they knew an employer could view them (Figure 8). Here, the results diverged quite markedly by country. Danish respondents overwhelmingly responded, at a rate of 80%, that they would not change the contents of their accounts. A narrow margin of 52% of respondents in the United States also said they would not change the contents of their accounts if an employer could view them. Conversely, respondents in Australia and the United Kingdom said they *would* change the contents of their accounts at a rate of 51% and 61%, respectively, if an employer could view them. In light of the large difference between the Danish sample and the other three, it is worth noting that the Danish survey was taken at a nursing school, which

could have had a strong influence on a question related to a student's profession.

These responses are not unexpected in light of other answers that the respondents gave. The Danish and American respondents expressed more comfort with employers and other authority figures viewing the contents of their accounts, so it is not surprising that they would also not change the contents if these others could view them. On the other hand, Australian and UK students were less comfortable with people other than their friends viewing their accounts, so it not surprising that they would want to change the contents if others did have access.

Related to issues of privacy and access, the kinds of information survey respondents said they disclose was similar in many areas (Figure 9). High percentages of respondents in all groups said they list their birthdates, with much lower percentages saying they provide an address or phone number. Close to half of all respondents in Australia, Denmark, and the United States list their group memberships, while approximately one third of UK respondents do so.

In other areas of information disclosure, the national cultural groups diverged markedly

Figure 6. All groups were conservative in whom they granted access to. However, Australian students granted access to groups other than friends at a relatively higher rate.

Who Can View the Contents of Your Account?
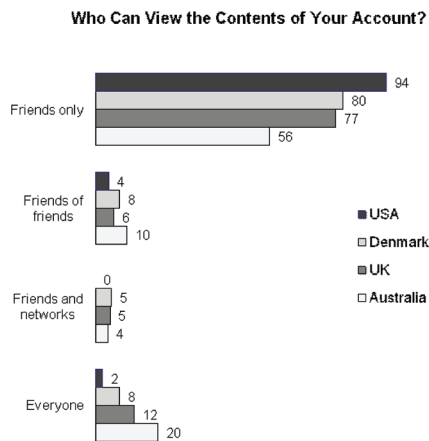
(Figure 10). By a wide margin, American students were more likely to post information about their sexual orientation, at 70%, than were the other groups. Less than a third of respondents in all groups said they disclose their political affiliation, with only 10% of Danish students disclosing this information.

More research is needed to understand the perceptions related to these choices, but it is interesting that sexual orientation—a potentially sensitive category of information—was, on average, much more likely to be disclosed by the American students. This is the same group who was most comfortable among the groups with the idea of authority figures, including parents, professors, and employers, being able to view their online social networking accounts. Strikingly, not only were American students more likely to disclose this piece of information than the other three groups; they were also *more* likely to disclose sexual orientation than they were more mundane types of information such as their group memberships, addresses, and phone numbers. All groups disclose political affiliation at a lower rate than sexual orientation, some by a wide margin, suggesting that sexual orientation is a less

controversial kind of online information disclosure than is political affiliation.

Uses of Online Social Networks

To fully answer the question of how college students actually use social media will require more detailed research than could be provided for in a survey. However, the survey did provide some initial findings that can lead to more research in several areas (Figure 11). All groups admitted, in fairly similar proportions, to using online social networks for gossip, with the exception of United States students, who claimed gossip at less than half the rate of other groups. It is possible that differences in word connotation or cultural values across the groups could be responsible for the difference, but more research is needed on this topic. Low percentages of respondents in all groups said they use online social networks to find dates and meet new people, contrasting with the nearly universal use of online social networks to keep up with old friends. Again, the Australian students seemed to be more forward—or more forthcoming—in admitting that they use online social networks to track the activities of old boy- or girlfriends.

Interesting contrasts can also be found in the recreational or instrumental uses of online

Figure 7. All groups rejected the idea of employers being able to view online social networking accounts. However, students in the United States were more likely than students in other countries to say employers should be able to view their accounts.

Do you believe employers should be able to view the contents of your account?

USA — 44 / 56
UK — 21 / 79
Denmark — 26 / 65
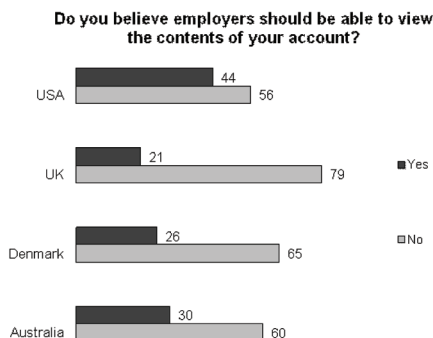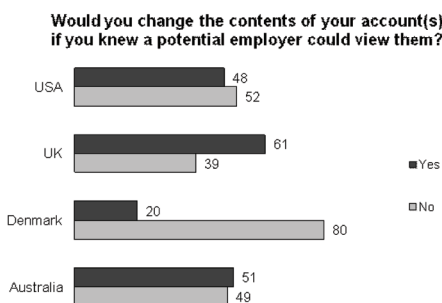Australia — 30 / 60

■Yes ▫No

Figure 8. Groups diverged over whether they would change the contents of their accounts if an employer could view them. As a group, Danish students were particularly opposed to this idea.

Would you change the contents of your account(s) if you knew a potential employer could view them?

USA — 48 / 52
UK — 61 / 39
Denmark — 20 / 80
Australia — 51 / 49

■Yes ▫No

social networks (Figure 12). All groups use online social networks to play games and check photos, but the Australian students did so at higher rates than the students in other groups. They were also less likely to use online social networks to connect with other students for studying. Using online social networks to promote events or causes was more likely among American students. Finally, the use of online social networks for job networking among all groups was quite low—well below 20% for all groups. This low percentage corresponds to the low use among all groups of LinkedIn, an online social networking service that facilitates professional networking (Figure 3).

The reasons for these differences are not entirely clear from the survey. More research is needed to discover the details of college students' perceptions and uses of online social networks across cultures. Qualitative methods hold promise for the kind of follow-up research that is needed.

The phenomenon of college students posting content they believe authorities—parents, professors, employers—would consider to be inappropriate was shown to be pervasive

Figure 9. In many areas, all four groups were similar in the kinds of information they said they disclose

Similar Kinds of Information Disclosure

Information Disclosed	Australia %	Denmark %	United States %	United Kingdom %
Date of birth	87	92	94	84
Address	20	8	4	4
Phone number	33	10	26	21
Email address	91	67	76	75
Group memberships	47	46	50	34

Figure 10. American students were more likely to disclose sexual orientation; Danish students were less likely to disclose political affiliation

Differences in Information Disclosure

Information Disclosed	Australia %	Denmark %	United States %	United Kingdom %
Political Affiliation	27	10	28	21
Sexual orientation	36	33	70	52

across cultural groups. Low use of online social networks for job networking was also common across all groups. Very few students use Facebook for career networking, which is perhaps appropriate, given the responses about discomfort with the employers viewing the on-line content that is posted. However, there was also a minimal use of LinkedIn, which would seem to be the perfect site for technologically mediated career networking (rates were 2% for Australians, 2% for Danes, 15% for Americans, and 6% for UK students).

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The study confirmed the universality of the "posting paradox" (Miller, Parsons, & Lifer, 2009) in the countries studied: students knew the content they were posting would be unacceptable to authority figures, but they chose to post it anyway. The study also uncovered several key areas of divergence in perception and use of online social networks. Students differed in their views of privacy, with US students seeming less concerned with the ideal of privacy; nearly

Figure 11. Uses of online social networks were similar in many ways across cultures. Using on-line social networks to find dates or meet new people was not common, while staying in contact with old friends was common. Divergences across cultures were seen in the areas of gossip and tracking old boyfriends or girlfriends.

Social Uses of Online Social Networks

Purposes for which online social networks are used	Australia %	Denmark %	UK %	USA %
Gossip	58	49	58	28
Find / screen dates	13	0	5	11
Meet new people	33	5	13	24
Stay in contact with old friends	89	97	93	98
Track old boy/girlfriends	22	3	14	11

Figure 12. Australian students were more likely to use online social networks for playing games and checking photos and less likely to connect for studying than were other groups. All groups used online social networks for job networking at similarly low rates.

Recreational and Professional Uses of Online Social Networks

Purposes for which online social networks are used	Australia %	Denmark %	UK %	USA %
Play games	36	21	14	17
Check photos	96	62	78	63
Manage / join groups	36	23	23	30
Connect for studying	47	77	71	76
Promote events, groups, causes	27	23	25	41
Job networking	13	10	12	17

a majority thought employers *should* be able to view their profiles, while only small minorities in other cultures agreed with this suggestion. Yet, in practice, these same respondents were less likely to let the general public or friends of friends view their account. Information dis-closure was another area of departure for the cultural groups, particularly in how free they said they are with their inappropriate content.

Australians were the most likely to share their profiles with anyone, and they also exhibited a steeper drop in comfort level between their friends and their parents, professors, and em-ployers viewing their online social networking accounts. This conclusion, while not statistically verified, is a natural extension of our results and presents an opportunity for further study. The purposes for which students used online

social networks was similar in some areas, such as staying in contact with old friends, but in other ways they differed, such as promoting events or causes (higher among US and Danish students) or connecting with friends for studying (lower among Australian students). One similar behavior across all four groups was the low use of online social networking sites such as LinkedIn or Facebook to enhance career networking.

Limitations and Implications

While the results of the study provide a comparative view of college students' use of online social networks in several countries, some limitations of the study must be recognized. First, demographic characteristics suggest the possibility of factors other than national culture in explaining the differing responses between groups. The gender ratio in the Danish sample, which was conducted at a nursing school, is heavily skewed towards female respondents. Also, American students were on the professional job market at a higher rate, at 46%, than were the other groups. In addition, the Australian students were somewhat newer in college, being concentrated in the first two years, while the other groups were more evenly distributed in years 2 through 4. Although the results indicate that the "posting paradox" was effectively universal in the study sample, these issues are worthy of further qualitative and quantitative study.

Despite these limitations, the implications of the study are important and widely applicable. Obviously, the study findings can inform students and their mentors within the specific cultural groups that are studied. This information may help students engage in meta-cognition about their own online behavior, helping them choose behaviors that will be most beneficial to them. Beyond the individual level, these findings can shape pedagogy and practice. For example, the comparative findings can help educators and curriculum planners understand whether certain online social networking behaviors such as the posting paradox are universal

and if they tend to be more pronounced in some cultural groups.

On a larger scale, this research can inform decision makers in business, government, and non-profit organizations. Clearly, the business potential of social networks has only begun to be realized, and accurate and current knowledge is needed for informed decisions (Shirky, 2010). National and international policymakers can use findings such as these as they craft a global legal and ethical response to the global online social networking phenomenon. Findings about social networking perception and use across cultures have implications for law enforcement, government services, and social advocacy. For example, Womer and Bunker (2010) studied the use of social networking sites by Mexican narcotics gangs, research that can be used by policy makers, legislators, and law enforcement officers. Information about social networking behavior has also informed the efforts of government agencies that provide services across cultures; mass transit is one such example (Mass Transit, 2010). Social advocacy is another area where comparative knowledge about social networking use in different countries and cultures can be valuable ("Socio-economic and internet visionary", 2010).

OUTLOOK FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study reveals new directions for future research related to the larger issues of online privacy and the use of social networking sites across cultures. In the area of online privacy, several questions arise: What privacy settings do individuals choose to have on their social networking accounts, and how do they decide what these privacy settings will be? What kinds of content do individuals post? How do individuals decide when something they have posted is inappropriate, and what do they do about it? In the area of use, how do individuals use and shape their social networks using online technologies? How do they decide to initiate or accept a friend request? How does

their network enable or inhibit the sharing of different kinds of content? How aware are individuals of their social networks, and who might be able to see content they post or that is posted about them? How aware are individuals of the online behavior of friends and friends of friends and its effects on them?

Answering these questions depends upon continued research in two phases. First, an inquiry must be undertaken to deepen our understanding of online social network users' behaviors and perceptions across cultures. Qualitative research provides an ideal method to answer the question of how national culture impacts social networking behavior. Such inquiry would use a systematic collection of information about the activities and characteristics of students' use of social networking and their behavior. The design process would be aimed at theory generation, which would continue to build knowledge about technologically-mediated social networking. As a second phase, theory can then be tested through additional survey research. Such efforts have important implications in a wide variety of settings, including academia, business, and government. Extending and refining our knowledge in these ways will make it possible to comprehend and navigate online social networks on a global scale.

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