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Abstract: Given the increased relevance of social networking sites (SNSs) for consumers around the globe, companies face the challenge of understanding motivations underlying consumers' interactions with online brand-related content. Cross-cultural research on consumer motivations for online brand-related activities on SNSs, however, is limited. The present study explored, via in-depth interviews, reasons why Facebook users from individualistic (the Netherlands, the United States) and collectivistic (South Korea, Thailand) cultures engage with brand-related content. The findings provide in-depth insights, in particular, with regards to collectivistic consumers, to the varied interpretations of the motivations for COBRAs identified in previous literature. We also identified a new motivation specifically for collectivistic cultures: the desire to share an intention to purchase or try a product. Moreover, while collectivistic motivations were driven by the wish to express a sense of belonging to the social group, individualistic cultures appear to engage with brands mainly for obtaining advantages for themselves.

Keywords: culture, individualism, collectivism, brand, motivation, Facebook, SNSs

Introduction

The emergence of social networking sites (SNSs) has put consumers in the driver's seat. They choose when, where, and how brands can communicate with them. Considering that SNSs enable consumers to create and interact with content, including *brand-related content* (content related to commercial brands that represents products, services, or places, Br-C), consumers have also recognized their

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power to influence Br-C (Arnhold, 2010). Given the increased relevance of SNSs for consumers, brand managers face the challenge of understanding why consumers across the globe create and interact with Br-C on SNSs.

Several scholars have studied consumers' motivations for engaging in consumers' online brand-related activities. Earlier research has explored why consumers view user-generated online advertising (Cheong and Morrison, 2008; Knoll and Proksch, 2015), 'like' or follow brand pages (Jung, Shim, Jin, and Khang, 2016; Lin and Lu, 2011; Tsai and Men, 2013), pass along brand messages (Araujo, Neijens, and Vliegenthart, 2015; Yuki, 2015) or video advertising (Hayes and King, 2014), discuss brand information (Tsai, 2013), and create Br-C (Berthon, Pitt, and Campbell, 2008; Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit, 2011; Poch and Martin, 2015).

This stream of research, however, has largely focused on single-country samples, and primarily on Western populations. This creates a critical gap in the literature because assumptions articulated about brand-related use of SNSs in one culture do not necessarily carry over to other cultures, given that motivations for SNS use generally reflect prevalent cultural values of that culture (Barker and Ota, 2011; Chu, Windels, and Kamal, 2016; Kim, Sohn, and Choi, 2011). To the best of our knowledge, there is only one cross-cultural study exploring this subject, confirming that culture does have an influence on brand-related SNS use (Tsai and Men, 2014, see below). While extremely important, the findings of the study call for further research given that (1) the SNSs involved in the study were different in each country (Facebook brand pages from the United States, Renren and Sina Weibo from China), and therefore different SNS features may confound the influence of culture, and (2) the study focused only on consumers' motivations for using brand pages, thus it needs further in-depth investigation into how culture affects motivations for other consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAs).

Given the limited knowledge on how motivations associated with COBRAs vary across different cultures, we adopted a qualitative research design and conduct in-depth interviews with consumers in the Netherlands, the United States, South Korea, and Thailand. These four countries were chosen to explore this phenomenon in a qualitative manner for four primary reasons. Firstly, their national cultures are generally considered collectivistic (South Korea and Thailand) or individualistic (the Netherlands, United States) according to cross-cultural research (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2001; Lewis, 2010). Secondly, a previous cross-cultural study suggests that social media usage in general, and, in particular, related to purchase decisions across these countries, is different owing to culture-related motives (Goodrich and De Mooij, 2014, see below). Thirdly, these four countries have high levels of SNS usage (We Are Social, 2016), thus allowing for an investigation of COBRAs within a somewhat mature setting when it comes to SNS usage. Finally, we have explicitly selected two collectivistic and two indi-

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vidualistic national cultures as a way of delving deeper into what may be country-specific consumer behavior, or what may be common within two countries sharing similar individualistic and/or collectivistic cultural values.

In this study, we explore why consumers across individualistic and collectivistic cultures consume, contribute to, or create Br-C and, more specifically, how consumers in these cultures position these activities in relation to their individual values and social orientation. From a practical point of view, the role of cultural differences in consumers' engagement with Br-C poses serious challenges for global and multinational companies (Okazaki and Taylor, 2013). The findings derived from the present study should provide an understanding of how to interact with consumers across cultures and assist practitioners in making cultural adjustments when promoting Br-C on SNSs.

Background

Cultural individualism and collectivism

The cultural individualism/collectivism distinction holds important knowledge about consumer behavior including how they function and communicate in a society (Roland, 1991). While individualistic persons, such as those from North and Western Europe, and North America, focus on the self as a unique entity, collectivistic individuals, such as those from Asia, focus on the self as a member of a group (Triandis, 2001). Individualistic individuals are motivated by their own preferences, needs, and rights and give priority to their personal goals. In contrast, the identity of collectivistic individuals is based on a collective social norm with family and friends being important factors. Along these lines, the independent and interdependent individuals' conceptualization (self-construal) and values have been found to mediate the influence of individualism/collectivism on communication styles (Gudykunst et al., 1997). These communication styles are related to Hall's notion (1977) that cultures can be distinguished with regard to the degree of context (high vs. low) in their communication systems. While low-context direct communication is used predominantly in individualistic cultures, high-context indirect and visually oriented communication is used predominantly in collectivistic cultures (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988; Hofstede and Hofstede, 2001). As a result of intimate relationships among high-context collectivistic people, they are deeply involved with each other and their inner feelings are kept under strong self-control (Hall, 1977). In contrast, low-context individualistic people are highly individualized and disintegrated, thus involve-

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ment with others is relatively little, and the communication between people is more explicit and non-personal (Hall, 1977; Kim, Pan, and Park, 1998).

The use of SNSs across individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Several cross-cultural researchers have pointed out that people have different motivations that reflect their prevailing cultural values for using SNSs. For example, Kim et al. (2011) indicated that Americans tend to use SNSs to entertain themselves primarily by finding new friends with similar interests, and make fewer efforts to maintain the relationships. South Koreans, however, seem to use SNSs to obtain information and social support from existing social relationships, requiring deeper involvement. Fong and Burton (2008) have explored in their study how Chinese consumers encourage information sharing and exhibit higher reliance on personal sources of information while requesting product recommendations and information. Goodrich and De Mooij (2014) have also indicated that people in collectivistic cultures tend to use social media more often than individualistic cultures to share ideas, form opinions, and guide purchase decisions. In contrast, Americans tend to use SNSs to develop and present online identity highlighting their uniqueness (Chu et al., 2016). Furthermore, cultural individualism and collectivism have also been found to influence the relationship between people's self-consciousness and self-presentation on SNSs. Individualistic low-context SNS users tend to engage more in self-enhancement activities than collectivistic high-context SNS users (Lee-Won, Shim, Joo, and Park, 2014). Likewise, American Facebook users were found to engage in managing unwanted photo tagging to a greater extent than Asian Facebook users (Rui and Stefanone, 2013).

When it comes to cross-cultural research focusing specifically on brand-related SNS use, Tsai and Men (2014) found that culture influenced consumers' motivations for using brand pages. As a result of intimate social ties stressed in collectivistic cultures, the connections between Chinese users and their preferred brands were closely bonded, thus these consumers were more likely to actively take part in a conversation about the brands on brand SNS pages. In contrast, the same study showed that the act of 'liking' brand pages by American consumers was mostly motivated by individualistic gains and self-expressive gestures to demonstrate their personal interests, thus relationships with brand communities were more likely to be weak in the American individualistic culture. However, further investigation is needed to confirm if these differences are also applicable for the wide range of COBRAs.

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Consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAs)

In this study, we adopt the COBRAs typology developed by Muntinga et al. (2011) to explore how consumers in different cultures engage with Br-C on Facebook. This typology classifies brand-related activities according to levels of engagement and proposes three dimensions. Firstly, *consuming* Br-C constitutes a relatively passive type of online participation and represents the lowest level of online brand-related engagement. People who consume Br-C, for example, read or watch Br-C posted by others. Secondly, *contributing* to Br-C involves a moderate level of engagement with online brand-related activities. People who contribute to Br-C 'like', share, or comment on, Br-C, which includes user-to-content and user-to-user brand-related interactions. Lastly, *creating* Br-C represents the highest level of engagement for online brand-related activities. People who create Br-C, for example, post their experiences about products or services in a brand-related message, picture, or video.

Motivations underlying consumers' engagement with brand-related content on SNSs. According to previous research on COBRAs (e. g., Knoll and Proksch, 2015; Poch and Martin, 2015), motivations for brand-related SNSs use can be summarized into six main categories: (1) *Information* refers to observing and staying updated about things, searching for advice or opinions, finding and collecting useful information when making a purchase decision; (2) *Entertainment* relates to relaxation, enjoyment, emotional release and relief; (3) *Empowerment* is associated with the intention to have an influence on others, and to change people's perception regarding a specific brand; (4) *Remuneration* is defined as a desire to obtain benefits or rewards such as economic incentives or work-related benefits; (5) *Personal identity* is concerned with finding reinforcement for personal values and involves self-expression, identity management, and self-fulfillment; and (6) *Social integration* involves motivations related to gaining a sense of belonging, seeking support, affiliating with like-minded people, and showing in-group identifications.

It is already known that the relevance of these six motivations varies according to the level of social media engagement. For example, people *consume* (e. g., view, watch) Br-C because of information, entertainment (Cheong and Morrison, 2008), and remuneration (Muntinga et al., 2011) motivations. And when it comes to higher levels of engagement with online Br-C, personal identity and social interaction motivations emerge for *contributing* to Br-C (e. g., Hayes and King, 2014; Yuki, 2015). Regarding the *creation* of brand-related videos and content on SNSs (Berthon et al., 2008; Poch and Martin, 2015), entertainment, empowerment, personal identity, and remuneration are the motivations that influence such behavior.

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While we have learned that motivations vary according to the level of engagement in the COBRAs, research exploring these activities and their motivations across cultures is scarce. Earlier findings for online brand-related activities in individualistic country samples still need to be validated for collectivistic cultures. The following research questions, therefore, are proposed: How do motivations for *consuming*, *contributing to*, and *creating* Br-C on Facebook differ between consumers from individualistic and collectivistic cultures?

Methodology

Participants and recruitment process

In this study, we interviewed consumers from individualistic (the Netherlands, the United States) and collectivistic (South Korea, Thailand) countries. A total of 10 interviews were completed per country, as this is considered sufficient to enable the development of a theme and for useful interpretation (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006), leading to a total of 40 participants.

A multiple snowball technique was employed by the interviewers to select participants. Firstly, each interviewer browsed her list for Facebook friends, and contacted one friend who met the criteria to participate in the study, namely whether: (s)he either contributed to ('liked', commented on, or shared) Br-C on their newsfeed, or created Br-C on their timeline in the two weeks before the interview was conducted. The intent of these criteria was to ensure that a participant would be able to remember why (s)he engaged with such Br-C. After completing the interview, each participant was asked to refer to another Facebook user who also met the criteria for this study. The process followed this procedure until reaching 10 participants in each country. A few times the participant could not refer to another respondent. In these situations, the interviewer needed to look at her friend list again and restarted the process. All participants were given remuneration of 22.50 euros for their participation.

The selection criteria for participation also ensured a wide range of ages (21–60 years). On average the participants were 33.03 years old (SD = 12.46), 50 % were female, and most (82.5 %) held a bachelor degree or above. Participants from the four countries were comparable in terms of age, gender, and education, and were born, were nationals of, and resided in the countries in the scope of this study.

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Interviewer training

The interviewers were female bilinguals (Dutch-English, Korean-English, Thai-English) and one American female who completed a master's degree in Communication. All of them had hands-on experience of conducting an in-depth interview. The first author was the Thai-English bilingual. The interviewers' ages ranged between 25 and 28. They were informed about the research questions and objectives of the project. The first author conducted in-depth interviews with the American, Dutch, and South Korean interviewers in order to familiarize them with the questionnaire and the interviewing process. After discussing and finalizing the interview materials, pilot interviews with Facebook users from the four countries were conducted. The pilot interviews conducted by the American, Dutch, and South Korean interviewers served as a training session guided by the first author. After the pilot interviews, the first author had one-to-one meetings with the three interviewers to discuss issues and to ensure that the participants clearly understood all the questions.

In-depth interviews

All face-to-face interviews were conducted in the native language of the participants, in the country where the participants lived, between June 1 and July 20, 2016. Each of the in-depth interviews took approximately one hour. The interviewers were provided with a semi-structured interview guide that included an explanation of all interview steps and examples of consumers' liking, commenting, sharing, and posting activities. The interview was divided into two sub-sections, including general questions regarding Facebook usage (e. g., Have you ever 'liked' Br-C on Facebook?) and the individual's motivations for engaging in brand-related activities (e. g., Why did you decide to 'like' this Br-C?). The first introductory section of the interview was designed to make participants familiar with the interview topic. The latter section allowed us to record and see various types of Br-C contributed and created by participants.

Before the start of the interviews, participants were informed about the aim of the study and their rights as a participant, and signed an informed consent form. During the interviews, participants were asked to access their Facebook account and go through their activity log, timeline, and newsfeed. We used ScreenFlow software to record the whole conversation as it helped us capture both a screen as well as participant's face and voice. We conducted initial interviews with Thai participants and found that saturation occurred within 8 to 9 interviews. As

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these findings were sufficient to answer our research questions, we applied this approach to the other three countries.

Data analysis

All 40 interviews were transcribed verbatim in the original language by the interviewers. The thirty interview transcriptions in Dutch, Korean, and Thai were translated into English by the interviewers and bilingual research assistants. The average length of the interview transcriptions was about 5,500–6,000 words.

The coding process was as follows. Firstly, open coding was conducted (Saldaña, 2013) using a software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative research (MAXQDA 2011). Before going through the interview scripts, the first author read summaries written by the interviewers in order to understand the main insights of each interview. Subsequently, the first author thoroughly read the transcripts line by line and identified labels (codes) that describe what motivations the respondents mentioned. For example, a phrase or sentence describing the influence of friends or family was attributed the specific code for the "personal relationship (sub)motivation" and was placed under the general code "social integration motivation". All the sub-motivations and the main motivations were labeled by the first author. Statements that represented more than one motivation were coded twice or more. In addition, all motivational statements were also coded corresponding to each level of COBRA (consumption, contribution, creation). When we were uncertain of the motivation(s) included in a statement (e. g., unfamiliar brands, slang words), we used the screen capture recorded by ScreenFlow or consulted the interviewers to clarify and understand the context of conversations during the coding process.

After the first cycle of coding was completed, the first author did the second and third cycles following the coding process mentioned in the previous paragraphs, as some of the first cycle codes might be later subsumed by other codes, relabeled, or dropped altogether (Saldaña, 2013).

Internal reliability and validity

In line with recommendations for qualitative research (e. g., Guba, 1981; Van der Goot, Beentjes, and Van Selm, 2015), we used three procedures to ensure internal reliability and validity. Firstly, after the interviews, the interviewers provided interview summaries including key insights and screenshots of Br-C mentioned during the interviews so that the first author was able to interpret conversations

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correctly. Secondly, the first author had peer debriefing sessions with the three interviewers by randomly choosing some interview transcripts to discuss and reach agreement on each code and category applied. Finally, the first author did 'member checks' with four Thai participants in which they were asked to indicate whether the coding was misinterpreted. The first author's interpretations were correct and confirmed. In this regard, and considering checks with the interviewers for the other countries, the accuracy of coding across the other three countries was also considered to be consistent.

Results

In total, there were 1,881 codes with motivations for consumption of, contribution to, and creation of Br-C. These codes (sub-motivations) were applied to seven main motivations: information seeking, intention to try or purchase, entertainment, personal identity and presentation, remuneration, social integration, and empowerment. In Table 1, we summarized all major findings including the motivations found for each level of COBRAs, the definition of motivations, and some examples of quotes for each motivation.

Table 1: Definition and examples of motivations demonstrated in COBRAs.

Motivations	Definition	COBRA type	Examples of quotes
• Entertainment	The entertainment motivation covers gratifications that are related to passing the time; being entertained by humorous content; or having good experiences and memories.	Consumption Contribution Creation	"I really enjoyed Schlitterbahn [a water park in Austin, Texas] and I just wanted to tell people where I was, this was where I had so much fun" (American female, 20). "Posting allows me to save my memories online. It almost feels like it is a photo book. I have access to it anytime I want" (South Korean male, 27).
• Empowerment	The empowerment motivation refers to people's desire to exert their influence or power on other people or brands by listing good/bad products/	Contribution Creation	"I took a picture to say that I ate it and it is costly. The price equals the cost of four meals. My intention was to blame but not to show-off" (Thai female, 28).

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Table 1: (continued)

Motivations	Definition	COBRA type	Examples of quotes
	services; giving opinions regarding product/services; spreading the word towards brands.		"It's a larger conversation about what are the rules for Pokémon Go [a location-based augmented reality game] when it comes to what augmented reality is, and when it comes to ownership of something and in what world is that something not publicly owned" (American male, 37).
• Information seeking	The information motivation covers gratifications that are related to staying updated on relevant events; seeking advice and opinions; collecting useful/interesting information.	Consumption Contribution Creation	"If it has something to do with like getting something out of it, or like if it's one of my favorite coffee places that I obviously like. They said like we'd got this new seasonal. Come try it" (American female, 23). "It's more about information, promotion, trending and new stuff, for example, what's new on Central [a Thai department store]. I would share" (Thai female, 34).
• Intention to try or purchase	The intention to try or purchase refers to gratification that is related to people's desire to try or purchase a product, or to visit a place. Subsequently, they want to express their desire to their friends or the public by creating or contributing to such Br-C.	Contribution Creation	"This post was about a coffee place. It is near my house. I think I would love to see and go there" (Thai male, 35). "So I actually thought I would like to buy them if I make some money in the future and that's why this post attracted me" (South Korean male, 35).
• Personal identity and presentation	The personal identity and presentation motivation covers gratifications that are related to the self that people try to present to the public. It covers motivations that are related to people's personal	Contribution Creation	"Thai people like to show what they want to be, such as a person buying high-quality brands, spending leisure time in high-end department stores, or having good and fancy foods by uploading pictures on Facebook" (Thai male, 26).

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Table 1: (continued)

Motivations	Definition	COBRA type	Examples of quotes
	interests and experiences; emotions and feelings; intention to present their (positive) image.		"I want to show-off. To show my friends that I went there, I ate the foods there, the place that everyone talked about" (Thai female, 25).
• Remuneration	The remuneration motivation covers gratifications that are related to people's expectation to gain some kind of future rewards such as economic incentives, work-related benefits, and reciprocity.	Contribution Creation	"You can win this if you 'like' this. I won an 80 USD gift card from this restaurant that just opened up in the Arboretum (Austin, Texas), and all I did was commenting on their post" (American female, 23). "Those 'likes' are because I wanted free Wi-Fi at terraces in Barcelona" (Dutch male, 23).
• Social integration	The social integration motivation covers gratifications that are related to other people. It covers gratifications that are related to gaining a sense of belonging; connecting with friends, family, and society; seeking opinion/support; having a conversation with others; giving support to others; being helpful to others; socializing with friends.	Contribution Creation	"I 'liked' this post because it is the post of the guy who I know. Yeah, it's a brand but this was more on a personal level" (Dutch male, 28). "Many times, I met friends from their checking-ins. When I saw a checking-in nearby, I commented on their post to check if there is a chance for meeting up or a quick chat" (Thai female, 34).

Note. The definition of each motivation is adapted based on previous literature (Araujo et al., 2015; Berthon et al., 2008; Cheong and Morrison, 2008; Hayes and King, 2014; Jung et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2011; Knoll and Proksch, 2015; Lin and Lu, 2011; Muntinga et al., 2011; Poch and Martin, 2015; Tsai, 2013; Tsai and Men, 2013; Yuki, 2015).

Below, we focus on the differences in motivations that influenced participants from the four countries to consume, contribute to, and create Br-C, respectively.

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Motivations for consuming brand-related content

Participants across the four countries provided motivations associated with *information seeking* and *entertainment* for consuming Br-C on Facebook in similar ways. For example, they view or read Br-Cs to stay updated on trends, to seek useful information, or to pass the time and entertain themselves. However, some important differences emerged from the interviews when participants explained the reasons why sometimes they did not make further contributions to a given Br-C.

The first key difference concerned perceptions of privacy, and one's own public image, which we labeled a *personal identity and presentation* motivation. Several Dutch and American participants indicated that they chose not to post anything about themselves on their Facebook timeline as they did not want to be known on the internet with all their private information included. Moreover, some Dutch and American participants tended to think consciously how they wanted to be seen on Facebook and they did not want to become a spammer for brands that they happened to be involved with. For example, one Dutch participant (male, 28) said, "I don't need to be associated with a brand by posting a comment and I just don't want everyone to see that I'm reacting to it". One American interviewee (male, 40) stated, "I don't post a lot of branded stuff because I don't like to wear a lot of clothes that have a brand name across them".

Unlike the Dutch and American participants, South Korean and Thai participants expressed focus on avoiding arguments with their social groups. They indicated feeling sometimes uncomfortable to contribute to or create Br-C, as it would show their perspectives on a certain direction, which might not be the same as others'. For example, one Thai participant (male, 26) indicated that "[If] I don't click 'like', the content is a controversial topic and I don't want to show my opinion and have an argument with friends who might have a different point of view". So, although both individualistic and collectivistic interviewees mentioned personal identity and presentation motivations, the underlying motives differed.

Motivations for contributing to brand-related content

Motivations for contributing to Br-C on Facebook could be summarized by the seven motivations mentioned in Table 1. While motivations were similar at a high level between participants across the four countries, interesting differences across cultures emerged for the different types of contribution ('liking', commenting, sharing).

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Information seeking and entertainment: Sharing for saving content. Several South Korean and Thai participants, not Dutch and American participants, indicated that they shared *informative* or *entertaining* Br-C on their timeline as a way to save the content for themselves, so that they could read or watch the content again later. One Thai participant (male, 22) indicated that "I like to share things on my wall so I can come back to read them later because I don't have time to read them now". Interestingly, some South Korean participants went a step further and shared the content only with themselves, by selecting the 'Only Me' option when posting to their timeline. For example, a South Korean participant (male, 23) indicated that "People would say that my timeline is messy if I share everything. Therefore, I sometimes share content with 'Only Me' for saving purpose".

Purchase intention as a social activity. South Korean and Thai Participants commonly indicated the motivation for signaling their *purchase intention* (to their friends) when they 'liked', commented on, and shared Br-C. For instance, a South Korean interviewee (female, 24) stated that she made a comment referring to her friend after she saw a post by OST (a South Korean fashion brand) advertising friendship rings because "I wish to have one with my friends". Some of these South Korean and Thai participants identified the Br-C they shared as their wish lists or shopping lists. For instance, one South Korean interviewee (male, 35) said that "I actually thought I would like to buy them if I make some money in the future".

Although Dutch and American participants did not indicate their intention to purchase (with a focus on friends) when deciding to 'like' and share Br-C, they did suggest they would contribute a comment to explicitly indicate their desire to visit a location.

Personal identity and presentation: Emotional expression and impression management. South Korean and Thai participants indicated that they intended to express their feelings about the Br-C that touched them emotionally by 'liking', commenting, and sharing. For instance, a South Korean interviewee (male, 35) stated that he 'liked' a post by Apple (an American technology company) because "It's more related to emotion. There's something that moves my heart. I think that there is more to it than just promoting products". However, Dutch and American participants did not give the same reasons for 'liking' Br-C, and only suggested that emotional expression (positive or negative) was a reason to comment or share. For instance, an American interviewee (female, 20) said that "I commented on this post because it really pissed me off, so it's an extreme reaction to something".

Social integration: Having a discussion and socializing with friends (versus others). While participants across the four countries indicated that they

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contributed to Br-C as a way to engage in conversations, their intended audience differed. Dutch and American participants tended to focus on the brand or on the content without clearly indicating a focus on friends. For instance, one Dutch interviewee (male, 22) stated that "I prefer to comment on others' posts to discover their perspectives, otherwise the conversation would remain within my social circle, and then the interaction would be much lower". However, South Korean and Thai participants indicated that they wanted to participate in conversations with friends. For example, one Thai participant (male, 22) commented on his friend's post because "I saw that my friends were at Bar-B-Q Plaza (a Thai restaurant), but I couldn't go on that day. I asked them why you guys didn't tell me".

Empowering friends by tagging their name. Participants, except for Americans, indicated that they posted comments by tagging friends as a way to suggest a product, a restaurant, or something associated with an *empowerment* motivation. For instance, one South Korean interviewee (female, 22) asserted that "The photos of their foods look great and delicious, so I tagged a friend of mine". Moreover, we found that participants across the four countries did not always introduce their favorite brands to friends, but they may tag a certain friend in a comment when they thought that the content was important for him or her. For example, one Dutch interviewee (male, 23) stated that "there is a discount at a particular store. Though it's less interesting to me, I tagged my sister in case she hasn't seen it yet". When it comes to sharing Br-C, participants across the four countries indicated reasons related to the empowerment motivation.

Remuneration: Obtaining promotional and work-related benefits. Finally, Participants from both individualistic and collectivistic cultures indicated reasons related to *remuneration* as their motivation to contribute to Br-C as consumers. Dutch and South Korean participants, but not American and Thai participants, indicated that they 'liked' and shared Br-C as a company's employee or a business owner. Some of them indicated that Facebook had become a marketing platform and they did not merely use it to keep in touch with their inner circle. For instance, a Dutch participant (male, 34) 'liked' a post because "I am an ambassador for it so then I like seeing it. It's actually indirectly a commercial thing".

Motivations for creating brand-related content

Participants across the four countries all provided reasons related to the six motivations, except information seeking, for their creation of Br-C. Regarding the *entertainment* motivation, South Korean and Thai interviewees perceived Facebook as their own diary or photo book in which they could record their daily life and which they could access anytime. They posted Br-C as a way to record what

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they had done each day as a part of their memories. For instance, a South Korean interviewee (female, 63) said that "I uploaded pictures of the gifts my professor gave me to save it on Facebook. This will last possibly forever so I use Facebook as my diary". However, Dutch and American participants did not provide similar reasons.

We further found differences when participants provided reasons related to a *social integration* motivation. South Korean and Thai participants created something related to brands because they expected to have a conversation with someone who had the same opinion. For example, a Thai interviewee (female, 52) created a post about Starbucks (an American coffee company) that said "I want to know if there is anyone who would think the same". However, American and Dutch participants did not give the same reasons for creating Br-C.

Discussion

The present study explores motivations underlying consumers' engagement with Br-C across individualistic (the Netherlands, the United States) and collectivistic (South Korea, Thailand) cultures. The results of the in-depth interviews provide several key findings that align with, and also extend, earlier research.

The first key finding of this study is that the six motivations for COBRAs found in countries with individualistic cultures (e. g., Knoll and Proksch, 2015; Muntinga et al., 2011) are also applicable in countries with collectivistic cultures. Notably, this study provides in-depth insights, in particular, with regards to collectivistic consumers, to the varied interpretations of the motivations for COBRAs identified in previous literature. More specifically, with respect to the *entertainment* motivation, collectivistic interviewees not only indicated the desire for relaxation and emotional release, but they also mentioned the need to record their life-time memories by posting good experiences and life events. Additionally, we found insights related to the *social integration* motivation, which reflects the prevalent collectivistic cultural values – the emphasis of social relationships and interdependence (Kim et al., 2011; Triandis, 2001). The findings show that collectivistic interviewees appeared to give their support to others by 'liking' or sharing a post of their friends or their favorite brands which extends the meaning of 'seeking support'. Moreover, Facebook has been used as a tool to meet friends offline or socialize with friends at a specific location.

The second key finding of this study is the new motivation that emerged more apparently among collectivistic cultures. More specifically, the *intention to try or purchase* motivation is found important for collectivistic countries as participants

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from South Korea and Thailand frequently indicate their purchase intention as a social activity. This finding is in line with earlier cross-cultural research on online consumer decision-making (Goodrich and De Mooij, 2014), asserting that friends' opinions are found to be important for collectivistic consumers, especially when they need confirmation for their purchase decision process. However, the desire to purchase or try a product with friends was less prominent in interviews with individualistic participants. This finding may suggest that American and Dutch participants tend to be more independent and prefer to base their own purchase decision on personal taste and interests reflecting the desire to fulfill their individualistic gains (Tsai and Men, 2014). To better understand the causal relationships between cultural-related motives and purchase decisions, future studies could employ an experimental approach.

A third key finding of this study is that collectivistic participants' motivations for engaging with Br-C were driven by the wish to express a sense of belonging to their social group, and to express this in-group identification via Br-C activities on SNSs. Participants in collectivistic cultures contribute and create Br-C as a way of having conversations with friends, gaining emotional support from friends, and indicating their intention to try a product with friends. This finding validates the study of Jung et al. (2016) who proposed that peer influence is the strongest determination of a favorable behavioral intention to engage with brands among collectivistic countries. Additionally, it extends the literature by demonstrating that peer influence prominently affects collectivistic consumers' motivations when engaging in all types of COBRAs. In contrast, individualistic participants often mention obtaining advantages for themselves when creating Br-C. When having discussions, they mention friends less often than collectivistic participants, and indicate more of a desire to have open discussions with others outside of their (close) social group. These findings support the previous cross-cultural social media motivations studies (Barker and Ota, 2011; Chu et al., 2016) which propose that while collectivistic users use SNSs for peer communication and show greater involvement with their existing contacts, individualistic users seek social compensation via SNSs and focus more on the extension of their networks with a large number of loose contacts.

A fourth key finding of this study is how participants perceive privacy and even the motivations for using SNSs differently across collectivistic and individualistic cultures. On the one hand, several collectivistic participants used their Facebook as their own private diary by storing Br-C visible for themselves only because they are sensitive to contextual and relational factors. This finding supports the study of Park and Kang (2013), who argued that collectivistic consumers, especially Koreans, are under a lot of social pressure and pay a lot of attention to how others perceive them. This seems to be in line with the more general

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observation that people in collectivistic high-context cultures are more likely to suppress their feelings and interests in interpersonal communication (Barker and Ota, 2011; Hall, 1977). On the other hand, individualistic participants only consuming Br-C suggested that they avoid presenting their personal interests on SNSs. This finding extends the results of cross-cultural research regarding online privacy concerns (Cho, Rivera-Sánchez, and Lim, 2009) by demonstrating that, when engaging with COBRAs, people in individualistic cultures tend to express a higher desire for privacy by avoiding associating themselves with brands on SNSs as they do not want to be seen on the internet.

Finally, the results show interesting patterns that might not be directly attributed to the collectivism-individualism dimension of culture. Firstly, impression management and the influence of celebrities are particularly important for South Korean participants. Our findings show the wish to express an ideal image and gain self-assurance, things which seem to be suppressed while in face-to-face communication in South Korean high-context society (Park and Kang, 2013). Secondly, sharing a location to meet friends offline seems to be very important to Thai participants. Since Facebook has provided 'check-in' and 'location tag' functions that allow people to use the GPS function on their mobile devices to let others know exactly where they are, several Thai participants liked to use the Facebook checking-in function as a channel to socialize with friends. Finally, several Dutch participants seem to associate Facebook with a marketing platform. They often mention using it to promote their own brand or work, instead of for keeping in touch with their close social circle or for meeting new friends. This motivation reflects profit orientation – the objective of making money – in Dutch society (Lewis, 2010). For the American participants, we did not find any specific insight that is distinctively different from the findings mentioned above.

Practical implications

The present study provides valuable managerial implications for global and multinational companies in three aspects. Firstly, we recommend that brand managers consider the consumers' sharing and posting Br-C activities as powerful engagement strategies because the Br-C that are shared and posted by one consumer are easily eye-catching and have a wide reach to other consumers. Based on the findings, the prominent factors that influence consumers across cultures to share and post Br-C are personal identity and presentation and social integration. Therefore, global marketers may need to prompt consumers to see (1) how their brands can bolster consumers' positive image and ideal identity construction, or (2) how brands can strengthen consumers' relationships with

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friends, or social groups, for example, by introducing online campaigns related to friendship (e. g., Share a Coke campaign) or social support (e. g., #LikeAGirl campaign by Always).

Secondly, we have learned that a sense of belonging and in-group identification seem to be very influential motivations in online Br-C engagement for collectivistic consumers, while obtaining advantages and achieving personal goals appear to influence individualistic consumers' engagement with Br-C. Based on these findings, SNS marketers could leverage these motivational patterns and employ a targeting Br-C strategy. For example, the Br-C advertised across individualistic consumers could stress rewarding outcomes (e. g., economic incentives, information usefulness), and the Br-C promoted across collectivistic consumers could emphasize benefits of social relations (e. g., values of friendship, social support).

Finally, we suggest that multinational managers consider brand-related location sharing as a tool for bridging the gap between online (COBRAs) and offline (consumers' purchasing behavior). According to the results, consumers across cultures have intentions to check-in at brand-related locations related to their desire to promote themselves and to provide detailed information regarding the specific locations. All of these consumer motivations are found to induce other consumers' intention to collect and discuss brand information or to purchase a product. Therefore, global brand managers should ensure that their company's important information is listed with location-based networking services (e. g., Google Places).

Limitations and suggestions for future research

While this study makes important contributions, some limitations must be considered and addressed in future research. Firstly, participants of the study were active Facebook users who had either contributed to, or created, Br-C at least once. While this allowed for a rich exploration of COBRA motivations, less active Facebook users who only consumed Br-C were not interviewed. Future research should extend the findings of this study by also including these less active consumers who only consume Br-C because they might provide additional reasons for (not) engaging with Br-C on SNSs.

Secondly, the operationalization of culture was based on the country in which the participants were born and resided. While this practice, related to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, is frequently used in cross-cultural research (Lee and Yoo, 2012), tendencies toward individualism and collectivism within a person can possibly coexist (Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier, 2002), and individuals in the

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same culture may define their own identity differently (Schwartz, 1990). Therefore, to extend and validate our findings, future research should investigate the relationship of individuals' cultural values with country-level cultural values and understand how it influences COBRA activities.

It is important to note that the objective of this qualitative study was to gain insights about the motivations for engaging with Br-C across cultures, and that our findings need, therefore, to be extended by future research adopting quantitative designs. Moreover, considering that our participants had a relatively high education level, future research should explore the role of education more closely. Especially highly educated users within South Korea and Thailand might become more cosmopolitan and less dependent on their traditional cultural values due to higher exposure to global media and marketing communication (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007).

Finally, our interpretation and discussion of the findings was mostly focused at the level of individualistic-collectivistic culture. This strategy might run the risk of underrepresenting country-specific interpretations. Our results already indicate some types of behavior or motivations that are country-specific, or do not happen fully across individualistic-collectivistic cultural lines. It cannot be excluded that other characteristics than 'culture' could account for other differences found between the countries. Future quantitative research that includes participants of different countries, and that includes measures of cultural values at the national and individual levels, is needed to disentangle the roles of culture and country-specific culture in consumers' engaging with Br-C in social networking sites.

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