

Social networking from a social capital perspective: a cross-cultural analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – Using social capital theory (SCT), the purpose of this research is to determine the success of social networking in societies that may be lower in social capital, for example in Poland, versus those which are higher in social capital, such as the USA.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper uses a partial least squares approach with a cross-cultural sample. The complete sample consists of 556 participants for this study across the USA ($n = 258$) and Poland ($n = 298$).

Findings – Results indicate that social media success is lower in Poland and that this result is related to lower social networking capital in Polish society. However, the proposed model shows that social media functionality can overcome some of the barriers.

Research limitations/implications – Limitations include a very specific set of countries rather than a larger set of countries and sample, survey methodology which could be augmented with a mixed methods approach and convenience sampling which ensured homogeneity and matching.

Practical implications – Based on this research, media designers should attempt to keep information quality high but even more importantly, they should increase interactivity. For Poland in particular, well-designed interactivity can mitigate societal barriers to success of social media, as it can enhance trust in such platforms.

Social implications – Because of Poland's history of more than 40 years of communism, the newer generations may eventually become more adaptive to social networking tools and such acceptance could lead to greater social capital, which is important for Polish society from a business perspective as well.



Originality/value – The most important contribution of this research is that it theoretically and empirically establishes the importance of SCT in relation to social networking across two different countries.

Keywords Cross-cultural studies, Interactivity, Poland, Social Capital theory, Partial least squares, Social networking

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The rise of social media provides a global marketing opportunity for social media promotions, which can foster customer–brand relationships and information sharing through culturally rooted social attitudes. Within the promotional mix, the horizontal revolution surrounding social media networking and customer communication applications is expanding tremendously (Berezan *et al.*, 2017). Users around the globe are networking and connecting more than ever on a variety of platforms (Jin and Phua, 2014). The importance of social media’s promotional impact and its ability to foster consumer–brand relationships and their evolution at a global level is immense, particularly for the adolescent market (Krishen *et al.*, 2016). However, sharing information relates to deeply rooted social attitudes and behaviours and logically should be different between countries because of culturally unique events and path dependencies.

In this study, we contend that in the country context matters and that social capital theory (SCT) can help explain important differences in social media success and the foundations on which social media success is based. Jin and Phua (2014), for example, articulated the place of SCT as core in a new media promotional environment:

Social capital theory defines “social capital” as resources created through people’s social relationships that can be harnessed to achieve positive social outcomes (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1992). These social relationships engender a system of trust and reciprocity that facilitates productive activity (Coleman, 1988) and operates in the same way as financial capital benefiting individuals by connecting them to other people who are influential and important within their social sphere (Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000, p. 182).

Given the pressing need to understand this phenomenon on a truly world-wide basis, the aim of our study is to understand social capital contextually as it relates to social networking success via a controlled cross-cultural analysis. To accomplish this, we conduct a cross-cultural comparison of social networking usage factors as outlined in our hypothetical model. We then operationalize our proposed model with two methods of comparative structural relations’ analysis between a high social capital achievement (SCA) country (the USA) and a low SCA national context (Poland). Note that Bertelsmann Stiftung (2012) and Gradzewicz *et al.* (2018) both confirm that Poland has low social capital and is still working to build social trust and social cohesion.

SCA is reflected via a combination of three subsystems, i.e. social and cultural ideas, economic activity and political and legal institutions (Young and Lindstorm, 2009). As of 2009, Poland has an SCA rating of 0.69 (ranked 48th in the world), whereas the USA has a 0.95 rating (ranked 15th in the world). According to cross-cultural research by Kääriäinen and Lehtonen (2006), emerging market countries such as Poland, which are still in recovery mode, have the lowest social capital, even amongst the welfare state regimes. More than half of all Poles use social networking for a range of purposes such as gaming, contacting and keeping friends and business purposes, and this number continues to grow over time (Strzelczyk, 2012; StatCounter, 2017). Hence this provides a useful comparative baseline for construct explorations.

Therefore, couched in an ecologically valid cross-cultural context comparing a high versus low SCA nation, the research goal is to introduce, theoretically justify and test a model incorporating the social networking usage factors of platform quality, interactivity and social networking capital affecting social networking success. We define social networking capital as the social capital derived from social network relationships and social media usage. We provide a theoretically robust, timely and foundational view of a key promotional context associated with social media as it expands uniquely across countries and cultures.

The article is structured as follows. To frame the contexts of comparison, we first present a review of the literature regarding SCT and how it applies to the new media promotional context. Next, we build our hypotheses that delve into our proposed conceptual framework for the development of social networking success as related to the cross-cultural factors across the USA and Poland. We then describe an empirical study designed to test the conceptual framework suggested by our hypotheses for our cross-cultural samples via comparative within group models. After discussing our empirical findings and the role of SCT, we explore their implications for both integrated marketing communications (IMC) practitioners and researchers. Finally, we summarize our research and draw appropriate conclusions.

Social capital theory in the context of new media

In its original definition by [Marx \(1933/1949\)](#), capital refers to the surplus value derived from the sale of a commodity for a price higher than the production cost. Since then, neo-capitalist theories delineate human capital, cultural capital and social capital as three specific forms of capital ([Lin, 1999](#)). Human capital concerns investments made by humans such as higher educational degrees, with expected earnings increases, and is analysed at the individual level. Cultural capital is measured at both the individual and class levels and applies to social assets of a non-financial nature, such as intellect, speech style, appearance and dress code.

SCT argues that relational returns can be achieved through investment in social networks ([Lin, Cook and Burt, 2001](#)); these returns essentially rest on the notion that individuals can profit from their interactions with others through networked relations. One important outcome of SCT is that the creation and enhancement of social capital within cultures also embody economic benefits ([Ellis, 2011](#)). The first explanation for how SCT enhances network relations is that information flow is better in societies in which social capital is greater. The betterment of information flow in social networks leads to lowered transaction costs, much like it does according to transaction cost theory, and therefore enhances information sharing and leads to goal congruency. In this way, SCT is consistent with relational exchange theory, which is based on the premise that a socialization process takes place when firms develop relationships. These relationships over time lead to shared goals and reduce opportunism within and between firm relationships ([Brown *et al.*, 2014](#)).

Second, according to SCT, relationships between individuals are enhanced when they can influence one another within their networks. The ability to exert influence or be influenced by others creates relational advantages such as trust, reciprocity and commitment that are identified in social influence network theory ([Friedkin and Johnsen, 1999](#)). According to the social influence theory, social waves are created by networks of individuals, and such waves spread knowledge and learning. In relation to research regarding media choice in workplace settings, social influence theory applies to the acceptance, perceptions and use of new media as well as the ability for a supervisor to influence the software tool adoption decision of a subordinate ([Homburg *et al.*, 2010](#)).

The third premise of SCT, social credentials, contends that individuals develop social tie resources, which form the basis for higher value to the structures they support. In essence, these social credentials allow individuals to provide additional connections, in the form of resources to their network unit, which then lead to intensified social capital. The final premise of SCT is the reinforcement of social identity and therefore the augmented recognition that individuals experience in their network structures. This heightened respect within their social tie structures provides reinforcement in the form of emotional backing, communal acknowledgement and therefore increased well-being. Hence, the four tenets of SCT, information, influence, social credentials and reinforcement, lead to increased social resources and social status within social networks. Such heightened social resources should eventually lead to a greater likelihood to work profitably with other high social capital countries or across multi-national organizations (Silkose, 2013).

Given the importance of the information, influence, social credentials and reinforcement as the key components of SCT, newer research applies it to the behavioural realm. In particular, Yadav *et al.* (2013) provided a framework and operational definition of social commerce, arguing that it begins with individual social network relationships which are facilitated through computer-mediated social environments. In their conceptualization, the tie strength between the members of a social platform is combined with other antecedents to eventually determine transaction-related outcomes such as need recognition and ultimately a purchase decision. As social media exists in many countries and connects them through individual networks, our model explores the importance of social capital across various countries as a foundational element to facilitate cross-cultural promotional outcomes. In effect, with lower levels of social networking capital in a country, marketers are much less likely to move forward and realize the benefits of social media metrics or social commerce.

Finally, the role of country context as a driver for social media success can be inferred from previous social media studies as well. Peters *et al.* (2013) defined four components, namely, social value, network structure, social roles and interactions and content. Two of these four components (social value and network structure) depend on the characteristics of the country within which individuals partake in social media activities. Therefore, SCT provides a robust framework for our study of the cross-cultural implications of social networking success.

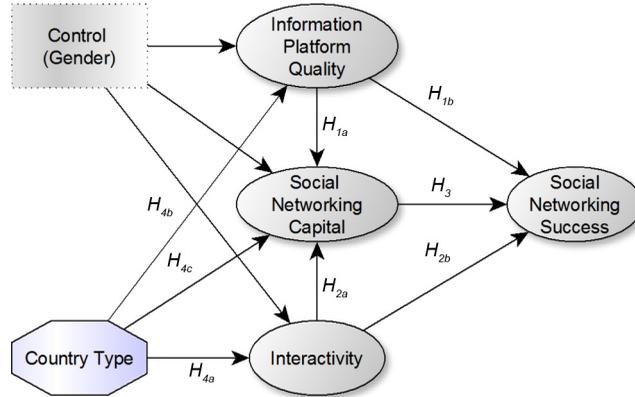
Conceptual framework for our model and path hypotheses

Using a broad review of literature on social media, relationship and community building and social capital, the following model was developed. As initial antecedents, we feature context of comparison (the USA versus Poland) as a treatment factor, as well as gender as a control variable. In the middle of the model, we specify two important design features of social media platforms that potentially facilitate the building of relationships, allowing them to increase loyalty and stickiness. Earlier research shows that two aspects are relevant for the success of social media:

- (1) quality of the information; and
- (2) interactivity; we postulate that both of these will positively drive social networking capital (Lin, 2008; Krishen *et al.*, 2015).

On the right-hand side (as to throughput), we specify the “success” regarding social media in terms of adoption and long-term use of social media platforms. These model components are further elucidated below (Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Conceptual diagram



Information platform quality in social media

Many marketing and communication researchers today are interested in the processes by which people create and transfer knowledge and build relationships (Campbell *et al.*, 2011). Social media information quality depends on many factors, technical as well as social. Technical factors include visibility, persistence, editability and association that create opportunities for and constrain the knowledge-sharing processes detailed below. Krishen *et al.* (2015) showed that information quality positively affects social networking community membership satisfaction, defining it in terms of accuracy, timeliness, relevancy and presentation. Information platform quality focuses on the utilitarian or functional aspects of social media, such as reliability as opposed to the hedonic or affective aspects such as imagery. In the context of websites, Holzwarth *et al.* (2006) defined information value as the usefulness, sufficiency and ease of understanding of a website. The actual operational sufficiency of a social media platform itself is the core element of information platform quality. The principles of Kent and Taylor (1998) on relationship building and information quality include:

- providing useful information on the site;
- frequently updating sites and generating new content to engage publics and encourage return visits;
- making the sites easy to use and navigate; and
- striving to keep publics on the site.

Social networking capital derives its definition from the four main tenets of SCT, namely, information, influence, social credentials and reinforcement (Lin, 1999). These tenets are related to platform quality and thereby should increase social networking capital and success. Quality information signals enhanced communication capability and thus we hypothesize:

- H1a.* Information/platform quality is positively associated with social networking capital.
- H1b.* Information/platform quality is positively associated with social networking success.

Interactivity of social media

Perceived interactivity in a social media context is defined as a subjective measure of how a consumer characterizes his/her interactions during social networking experiences (McMillan and Hwang, 2002). Vendemia (2017) indicated that due to their interpersonal nature, their high visibility and the reviewability or permanence of their content, social networking sites are generally considered to be highly interactive; in turn, this interactivity converts to a higher willingness to purchase and an enhanced positive attitude towards the concerned entity. Yang and Kang (2009) argued that interactive blogs create a personal connection with users, facilitate positive attitudes and encourage supportive word-of-mouth intentions. Individuals who use blogs to interact with organizations often perceive blogs as stimulating dialogue and building trust and satisfaction (Kelleher and Miller, 2006). As such, the perception of interactivity in a social network encompasses an enhanced mental state for users as they experience it (Ha *et al.*, 2010).

Extant research in multiple disciplines argues that relationships on the internet are best built with two-way dialogic communication channels, and as such, recent research calls for engagement as a central means of building social capital (Taylor and Kent, 2014). They noted that the internet provides an opportunity to create relationships through dialogic components allowing input by and communication to others; examples of dialogic components include comment forums and contact e-mail forms. Since the initial development of dialogic communication, additional channels have emerged such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and blogs. Another context in which interactivity has been examined is that of self-service technology, wherein it is seen as a measure of the ability a user has to modify the content of a mediated environment in real time (Zhu *et al.*, 2007). All forms of interactivity would ultimately increase individual social capital within a network, and in line with this, we suggest that:

H2a. Interactivity is positively associated with social networking capital.

H2b. Interactivity is positively associated with social networking success.

Social networking capital

A seminal qualitative study by Holt (1998) connects the idea of cultural capital and its structural influence on consumption. His findings demonstrate that high versus low cultural capital influences perceptions regarding several other dimensions, such as communal versus individualist forms of consumer subjectivity. In the present study, social networking capital is studied as the strength of community bonds within a virtual social media environment, i.e. a sense of belonging, enjoyment, pride and respect drawn from the interaction. Trust is difficult to achieve online and senders must be seen as believable, competent, reliable and consistent. In societies with low social capital, this seems to be a particular issue. Kent (2008, p. 37) advocated that social media is involved with “issue framing, relationship building, fostering trust, and identification”. Research on online relationship management shows that when practitioners understand the aspects of social networking sites, they use them to engage and develop relationships with key publics and build communities. In the context of social alliances, Berger *et al.* (2006) theorized that participation in networked organizations allows members to enhance and integrate their personal identities with those of the member organization. Given this, we propose that:

H3. Social networking capital is positively associated with social networking success.

Social capital in Poland and the USA. Poland is a part of the former “Eastern Bloc”, and that is why its social capital development differs from the Western countries. In 1989, Poland embarked on the process of systemic transformation, and in the initial years, the state’s economic policy was dominated by macroeconomic priorities designed to establish a new order after the centralized command system. Hence, regional policy was not perceived as an instrument for balancing out spatial differentiation; regional development was also not seen as a factor supporting the development of the country as a whole. Since 1989, Poland has succeeded in the transition to a modern market economy, implementing key market reforms including liberalization, deregulation, privatization and other institutional changes. These reforms brought about a remarkable upswing in economic performance and Poland’s international competitive position (Weresa, 2006). As a relatively new democracy, Poland still struggles with its changing political history, as such, Polish citizens continue to carry different mentalities than those of more democratically developed nations (Cwalina *et al.*, 2010). However, the international dimension of competitiveness requires an assessment of the region’s ability to compete and attract different types of capital indispensable for growth and development. The social capital level has undergone changes during the Polish systemic transformation; however, the country still has a lack of social capital and the need of building it. Specifically, in a meta-analytic study reviewing social capital in the European Union, of the 18 countries studied, Poland was ranked 14th (only higher than Lithuania, Romania, Latvia and Bulgaria) in terms of innovation, competitiveness and formal networks (Hvižďáková and Urbančíková, 2014). These authors combined networks (formal networks and informal networks), civicism (social norms and political engagement) and trust (general trust) to form the overall social capital measurement for the European Union countries. Social capital potentially benefits countries in various ways, including the fostering of innovation, knowledge flow, competitiveness and trust (Doh and Acs, 2010). Through an ongoing project entitled, “Social Diagnosis”, researchers used yearly surveys on Poles, which showed increases in subjective happiness and well-being over the past 14 years and slow increases in social media usage as well (Czapinski and Panek, 2015). However, Szopiński (2016) indicated that to engage in online banking and use the internet for sophisticated services, Poles must develop trust for corporations. Connecting cultural capital to social capital, research indicates that socially supportive cultures encourage risk taking and entrepreneurship because of higher levels of information sharing, less monitoring and lower transaction costs (Stephan and Uhlaner, 2010). We therefore hypothesize that:

- H4a.* Country (low vs high social capital) directly affects interactivity level (low vs high).
- H4b.* Country (low vs high social capital) directly affects information/platform quality level (low vs high).
- H4c.* Country (low vs high social capital) directly affects social networking capital level (low vs high).

H4c relates to the core contribution of this study. If supported, it means that certain societies have lower social media success because of less social networking capital. This is particularly important in our case because we tie social capital in Poland with social media behaviours and attitudes towards information sharing and being influenced by other people’s information and content, which is a foundational pillar for effective social media promotions. *H4a* and *H4b* are tested because interactivity level and information platform quality may affect social networking capital as well.

Main study

Sample frame and study context

The hypotheses were examined using data sets from two carefully selected countries varying in relation to their levels of social capital. We selected two markets with a Western culture but with a completely different history in terms of political systems: the US and Poland. To participate in the study, participants were required to meet the following criteria:

- be 18 years of age or over; and
- be a member of one or more social networking sites.

We purposefully chose to build our samples using a mix of undergraduate and graduate college students for several reasons. First, when conducting cross-cultural research, the establishment of sampling equivalence by using homogeneous samples both within and across cultures is of utmost importance (Smith and Reynolds, 2002); this is known as matched sampling. Student samples across both Poland and the USA allow for greater cross-cultural control by minimizing within-group socioeconomic and demographic variance, therefore enhancing sampling equivalence (Wang and Mattila, 2011). For primarily this reason, a similar sampling methodology has been followed by previous cross-cultural research as well (Orth *et al.*, 2007). Second, due to the exploratory nature of our study and the need for a digitally and socially active population, college students represent an ideal set of subjects for our inquiry, as social networking sites are mainly populated by a younger generation of technology-savvy and innovative consumers (Lee and Lin, 2005). Thus we followed previous exploratory studies on internet-based, innovative and emerging technologies and chose a mix of undergraduate and graduate university students as subjects for our study (Krishen *et al.*, 2013). Third, when the aim of research is to build theory and its application to new frameworks with refined predictions, student samples are appropriate and, especially when respondents are highly familiar with the domain of study, can provide generalizable results (Bello *et al.*, 2009). Finally, as our study is based on social networking success within two diverse cultures, Poland and the USA, broader socio-demographic factors are an important consideration for creating our sampling frames. In particular, with respect to social networking usage, education level is a significant factor for both the USA and Poland. More specifically, those with higher education in both countries are more likely to engage in social networking by large gaps; the USA shows a 16 per cent increase and Poland shows a 34 per cent increase based on college education (Strzelczyk, 2012). Therefore, the use of college students across both countries allows for a homogenous and appropriate sampling frame while limiting the need to include a broad range of controls.

The complete sample consisted of 556 participants for this study across the USA and Poland. For the US sample, a mix of undergraduate (206) and graduate students (92) in business courses participated in the study at a university in the Western region. The final US sample population consisted of 298 adults (117 males and 181 females), with the mean age of 25.7 years. For the Polish sample, university students in the city of Warsaw were recruited as sample respondents. The survey was conducted among students in economics and management fields of study. The final sample frame consisted of 178 upper level undergraduate students and 80 graduate (master's) students. The total Polish sample was 258 students (101 males and 157 females) with the mean age of 20.91. For both samples, approximately 80 per cent of the undergraduate students work for 30 h or more, and all of the graduate students have full-time jobs in addition to being students.

Measures

The four factors were measured using 16 questions (responses on five-point Likert scales) adapted from various published scales including those provided by [Lin \(2008\)](#), [DeLone and McLean \(2003\)](#), [Krishen et al. \(2015\)](#) and [McMillan and Chavis \(1986\)](#). We use a structured questionnaire for which we reviewed academic and practitioner literatures, paying close attention to the content validity of the measures and using existing measures where possible.

Information platform quality measures user perception of the quality of the online content presented within the social network. It is defined in terms of accuracy, relevance and timeliness of information. This interpretation is consistent with that of other researchers including [Lin \(2008\)](#). It has been argued by researchers such as [DeLone and McLean \(2003\)](#) that “platform” is well matched to capture technical issues that hinder use, such as systemic bugs and interface inconsistencies. Information platform quality is a subset of overall information quality, as it deals more with how the information is presented in the platform rather than the perception of the information plus the method of presentation. As such, it is defined in terms of reliability, ease of use, relevance and presentation.

Interactivity is a bidirectional concept driven by the need for consensual validation. The seminal work of [McMillan and Chavis \(1986\)](#) claims that individuals are more likely to participate in a group if they think that they have influence over the group members. They also maintain that group cohesion is dependent on the ability of the group to influence its members. The member thinks that his or her involvement makes a difference to the group and therefore group membership is important to the member. [McMillan and Chavis \(1986\)](#) posited that within tightly knit groups, members are important to the group and vice-versa.

Social networking capital measures user perception of the quality and strength of their bonds with other community members. Underpinning the construct is the notion of shared values, relationships and trust. [McMillan and Chavis \(1986\)](#) demonstrated that we all have personal values that inform our emotional and intellectual needs. They contended that the presence of members with shared values underpins cohesive communities.

Social networking success measures member participation and intended future participation as part of the social network. [Lin \(2008\)](#) showed that member value perceptions play a significant role in expanding the virtual social community. This construct builds on research from [Krishen et al. \(2015\)](#) regarding satisfaction and membership in social networks.

Control variable. To minimize spuriousness of results, we included a control variable that has been found to be important in consumer behaviour research ([Krishen and Homer, 2012](#)). Specifically, we included gender (0 = male and 1 = female).

Common method variance

Two different techniques were used to examine the potential for common method variance ([Chang et al., 2010](#)). First, we used the Harman’s one-factor test. We ran an exploratory factor analysis of all observed measures with varimax rotation ([Podsakoff and Organ, 1986](#)). In both the Polish and US groups, we found four clearly interpretable factors – one for social networking capital, one for interactivity, one for information platform quality and one for social media success – with no significant cross-loadings between the measures. Second, the partial correlation procedure of including a marker variable within the model was used. Testing common method variance by identifying a marker variable necessitates incorporating a variable that is not theoretically related to at least one other variable in the study ([Lindell and Whitney, 2001](#)). The marker variable was not statistically related to any

of the variables in the model in the Polish or US samples, indicating that common method variance is not a serious problem in this study.

Assessment of the measurement model

Prior to testing the statistical significance of the paths of the measurement and structural models, we examine their validity and reliability. All items are significant at $p = 0.05$ levels with high loadings and low cross-loadings, attesting convergent validity. There were also high levels of reliability for alpha values of each construct with levels ranging from as low as $\alpha = 0.70$ to as high as $\alpha = 0.84$. All AVEs are above 0.5 (AVE = 0.515 and higher), as provided in Table I.

Similar AVEs were obtained in the different countries separately, as shown in Table II, Panels A and B. A multi-group comparison was also used to assess configural, metric and factor invariance of the main constructs.

Apart from the rigid reliability and validity aspects provided, our comprehensive model shows good fit properties. The goodness-of-fit (*GoF*) of the model is calculated on the basis of the communalities and R^2 of our partial least squares (PLS) model. *GoF* is computed as the geometric mean of the average communality and average R^2 . As communalities is analogous to AVE in the PLS path modelling approach, we ascertain *GoF* by determining the geometric mean equation as suggested by Wetzels *et al.* (2009, p. 187) in the equation below:

$$GoF = \sqrt{AVE * R^2}$$

Table II, Panel C provides the basis for the computation of the above equation. For each construct of our model, the respective AVE values and the R^2 for the endogenous constructs are provided. The last row provides the average value for the AVE and R^2 , respectively. These values are substituted in the above equation. Finally, we ascertain the square root of the

Construct (AVE/CR)	Loadings	t-value
<i>Information/platform quality (AVE = 0.517; CR = 0.811)</i>		
The SN operates reliably	0.757	22.893
The SN is easy to use	0.672	8.955
The information provided in the SN is relevant to me	0.740	21.104
The content provided by the members is well presented by the SN	0.699	13.652
<i>Social networking success (AVE = 0.631; CR = 0.872)</i>		
Using the SN helps to satisfy my information needs	0.692	11.099
I believe it is worthwhile for me to continue to participate in the SN	0.797	20.651
I am willing to communicate with other members of the SN	0.795	18.318
I am likely to continue to participate in the SN in the future	0.874	48.801
<i>Social networking capital (AVE = 0.626; CR = 0.87)</i>		
Participation in the SN has helped me gain respect from other SN members	0.722	17.083
I am proud to be a member of the SN	0.879	54.454
I enjoy being a member of the SN	0.826	25.947
I feel a strong sense of belonging to the SN	0.724	12.274
<i>Interactivity (AVE = 0.680; CR = 0.895)</i>		
Members of the SN influence my thoughts and activities	0.826	25.947
I am able to influence the actions and feelings of other members in the SN	0.871	43.175
My opinions matter to other members in the SN	0.838	32.250
I care about what other members think of my actions in the SN	0.763	21.287

Table I.
Measurement model
statistics

Table II.
Measurement
invariance in the
Polish and US data
sets and model *GoF*

USA	Interactivity	Info/platform	SN capital	SN success
<i>Panel A: US measurement invariance</i>				
Interactivity	0.732	0	0	0
Information/Platform quality	0.287	0.794	0	0
Social networking capital	0.495	0.594	0.820	0
Social networking success	0.547	0.474	0.803	0.813
<i>Panel B: Poland measurement invariance</i>				
Poland				
Interactivity	0.729	0	0	0
Information/Platform quality	0.094	0.845	0	0
Social networking capital	0.409	0.507	0.752	0
Social networking success	0.316	0.546	0.731	0.781
<i>Panel C: Computation of GoF</i>				
Construct		<i>AVE</i>		<i>R²</i>
Interactivity		0.895		0.004
Information/Platform quality		0.811		0.027
Social networking capital		0.869		0.496
Social networking success		0.872		0.553
<i>Average</i>		0.908		0.27
Note: AVE values provided in italics				

product of the average AVE and R^2 to be 0.495, which is the *GoF* value for our model. [Wetzels et al. \(2009\)](#) suggested indicators as baseline for validating the overall model as *GoF* small ~ 0.1 , *GoF* medium ~ 0.25 and *GoF* large ~ 0.36 or higher. Our *GoF* value from the geometric mean of 0.495 exceeds the cut-off value of 0.36 for large effect sizes. From the various tests and fit computation of *GoF* provided, there is adequate evidence in the rigidity and certainty of conformance of our model for further extrapolation and discussion of the findings.

Results

The hypotheses are tested simultaneously by means of PLS, which is a distribution-free method that uses bootstrapping to determine confidence regions for the effects of antecedent constructs. Social media is a relatively new area of research and theory development is still in an early stage ([Yadav et al., 2013](#)). As a result, the conceptual model that is developed is largely exploratory. In addition, given that there are more than one billion social media users in the world, sample sizes are per definition small compared to the size and variation in the population. Even if the focus is only on two countries, there are millions of users with different motives, goals and behaviours. As a result, our relatively complex model is estimated with PLS because of its beneficial properties of PLS in such an exploratory research context ([Ringle et al., 2012](#)). Therefore, given the strong theoretical and empirical reasons, and adhering to best practice in terms of reporting both the measurement and structural models, PLS has beneficial properties compared to covariance based modelling approaches in the case of the current research. Before we conduct specific tests of our hypotheses, we provide descriptive statics and correlations in [Table III](#).

Manifest moderating categorical variable technique

In this technique of analysis, we consider gender (male = 1 and female = 2) and country (Poland = 1 and the USA=2) as categorical variables defining classes and including the

interaction term as the product of the indicators linked to the exogenous latent variable and the categories of the moderating variable (Chin and Dibbern, 2010). The PLS results show that social networking capital is significantly lower in Poland (see Table IV). This has negative implications for the success of social media in that country because there is a very significant and positive relationship between social networking capital and social media success ($\beta = 0.55, p < 0.001$). In other words, Poland is associated with lower social networking capital, which puts a penalty on social media success locally. In line with the notion that social media forms are valued and used by both genders, no significant differences appear depending on gender. In terms of culture, this may indicate that there are no significant differences between masculine and feminine countries but more research is needed across different societies to affirm this. Figure 2 shows the final loadings that confirm H3 and generally supports the other hypotheses except H4a.

Multi-group analysis via partial least squares

Henseler *et al.* (2009) highlighted the importance of the need of multi-group analysis specifically in international marketing for comparisons across groups such as countries or cultures. In accordance to their findings, we propose the use of PLS multi-group analysis (PLS-MGA) in comparing the main construct social networking capital with social networking success between Poland and the USA. As PLS-MGA does not require any distributional assumptions, we use the bootstrap outputs that are generated by SmartPLS. Bootstrap samples are created by randomly drawing cases with replacement from the original sample.

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1. Country	1					
2. Gender	-0.003	1				
3. Information/Platform quality	0.155	-0.016	0.718			
4. Interactivity	-0.048	0.040	0.146	0.825		
5. Social networking capital	0.366	0.062	0.505	0.440	0.790	
6. Social networking success	0.023	-0.021	0.528	0.369	0.711	0.792

Table III.
Construct correlations

Hypothesis	Beta	t-value
H1a: Information/platform quality → Social networking capital	0.399	4.966 ****
H1b: Information/platform quality → Social networking success	0.233	3.697 ****
H2a: Interactivity → Social networking capital	0.395	5.983 ****
H2b: Interactivity → Social networking success	0.093	2.079 *
H3: Social networking capital → Social networking success	0.555	12.560 ****
H4a: Country → Interactivity	-0.048	(1.096) NS
H4b: Country → Information/platform quality	0.155	2.419 **
H4c: Country → Social networking capital	0.093	2.079 *
Gender → Interactivity	0.041	(0.851) NS
Gender → Information/platform quality	-0.016	(0.357) NS
Gender → Social networking capital	0.053	(1.531) NS
Gender → Social networking success	-0.055	(1.939) *

Notes: * ≤ 0.05 , ** ≤ 0.01 , *** ≤ 0.001 , **** ≤ 0.0001

Table IV.
Model results

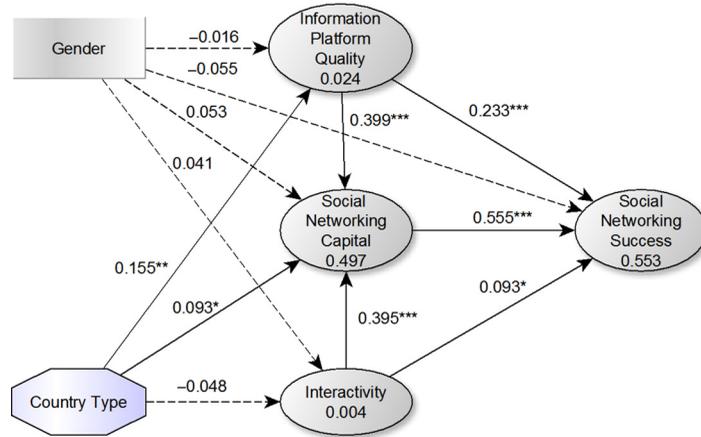


Figure 2.
Estimated model

Notes: *p-value < 0.05 (one-tailed *t*-statistics > 1.65); **p-value < 0.01 (one-tailed *t*-statistics > 2.343); ***p-value < 0.001 (one-tailed *t*-statistics > 3.126)

The data were divided in two subsamples and the PLS path model was estimated for each country (Poland and the USA). The path coefficients for the above constructs (SN capital to SN success) were 0.730 ($p < 0.01$) for the USA and 0.607 ($p < 0.01$) for Poland. Separate bootstrap (Davidson and Hinkley, 2003) analysis was carried for each of the subsamples to assess their robustness.

The bootstrap analysis proposed by Henseler (2007) was used for 5,000 samples, where each of the 5,000 cases' path coefficients for both Poland and the USA were placed in separate columns. A value of 1 was inserted in the cell if it (the US coefficient) was larger than the other, whereas a value of 0 was given in the cell if it was smaller. A value of 1 meant that USA had a higher path coefficient than Poland, whereas a value of 0 meant the opposite. There were 4,787 cells with a value of 1 and 213 cells with a value of 0. In the final analysis and as predicted by *H4c*, there was a 95.7 per cent chance of the USA having a significantly higher path coefficient than Poland in relation to social networking capital contribution to social networking success. Robustness of the results was further assessed running an ADANCO PLS model without bootstrapping and an AMOS model; all resulting in similar negative effects from the Polish context.

Design factors to overcome social capital deficits

Interestingly, the results show that Web 2.0 potentially has the ability to overcome lower social capital levels in a country by investing in specific functionalities. The simultaneous estimates indicate that information quality ($\beta = 0.399$, $t = 4.96$, $p < 0.001$) and interactivity ($\beta = 0.395$, $t = 6.06$, $p < 0.001$) both have a positive relationship with social networking capital. These design factors also have a direct effect on social media success. This shows that platform designers can play a substantial role in making social media successful by adding value to the platform by developing features and increasing information quality (for example by deleting offensive and incorrect information) and interactivity ($\beta = 0.233$, $t = 3.697$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.093$, $t = 2.079$, $p < 0.05$). This is also true in low social capital countries but they start from a lower base in terms of social capital.

Discussion and conclusions

While the global phenomenon of social media has been attracting increased attention among marketing practitioners and scholars, research examining the value-generating potential of social media at large within specific societies is limited. Research on social media also often uses a setting of US users or users from Western Europe, where social capital is relatively high. Very little is known about social media's potential barriers to success in other countries, especially those with lower social capital. This research gap persists despite social commerce gaining traction and becoming a trendy area of attention among practitioners and researchers (Yadav *et al.*, 2013) or its advertising implications within social networking communities (Taylor *et al.*, 2011). This study is among the first to offer an in-depth examination of the potential of social networking success in different societies and to study pathways of creating loyal users even when social capital in society affects trust and positive relational attitudes and behaviours. Therefore, the most important contribution of our research is that we theoretically and empirically establish the importance of SCT in relation to social networking across two different countries.

Social capital can be gathered both at the individual and the group levels. At the individual level, social capital essentially encompasses investing in social interactions and expecting returns from such networking (Lin, 1999). However, at the group level, researchers identify social capital as market driven information and resource flows, and they study three dimensions: structural (such as open communication), relational (such as trusting culture) and cognitive (such as a shared vision) (Merlo *et al.*, 2006). The important connection between interactivity, information platform quality and social networking success, which is stronger in the USA than in Poland, shows that social capital differences can account for lowered success.

Studied across global organizations, international researchers suggest that social capital allows multinational organizational members to integrate knowledge across borders and gain research and development economic benefits (Laursen *et al.*, 2012). Newer research based on SCT indicates that social networking also has important implications for e-tailers, and finds that such activity leads to their economic benefit (Qu *et al.*, 2013). As such, the adoption and use of social networking in Poland should lead to greater economic benefit for firms, as well as increase social capital for individuals.

Implications, limitations and future research

By presenting the cross-cultural differences in social networking across low versus high social capital societies, our findings have several important managerial implications. First of all, increasing information quality is not a straightforward endeavour in Poland. Second, the model shows that interactivity is not related to country, and it does have a significant effect on social networking capital and success. Design factors under control of companies such as Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest are important. Interactivity on social media platforms is a functionality that can have a positive effect on social media success in both low and high SCA societies. Social media platform designers may build more features that enable users to quickly respond to posted content, ask follow-up questions and interact more broadly to better enable information validation and feedback from users and organisations alike. Overall, we find that lower social capital in a society affects social networking success in the following two ways. It results in:

- (1) lower social networking capital on the social network; and
- (2) lower information and platform quality as perceived by users.

However, success in low social capital countries, such as Poland, is lower because of less social networking capital available in society. Our findings are especially relevant for companies such as Facebook and LinkedIn because the results show ways in which social media can be designed and marketed more successfully across the globe, including in low social capital countries. In addition, because of Poland's history of more than 40 years of communism, the newer generations may eventually become more adaptive to social networking tools and such acceptance could lead to greater social capital (Adams, 2007). Future research could explore generational differences across countries of high (low) social capital to determine the impact of such changes, as recent research regarding only US generations shows differences in social media networking motivations (Krishen *et al.*, 2016).

We also offer managerial and academic implications for the advertising and media industry. To date, most of the focus in the popular media as well as academic research has been on high social capital countries, such as the USA. Clearly, such research is bypassing a large arena of low social capital countries that if properly understood could facilitate IMC strategies that would adjust, customize as necessary, and overall, transcend world markets. In addition to the media and advertising implications of our research, we offer insights which extend and confirm the recent findings of Berezan *et al.* (2017). More specifically, our findings indicate that social media success can build greater trust for organizations for Polish consumers, and that trust can eventually translate to higher satisfaction and brand loyalty for firms engaged in e-commerce and social media promotions.

As societies have unique cultural practices and change over time and generations, these differences and associated constructs need to be included in research to really understand the success of promotional and brand building strategies.

Our research has certain limitations, many of which give ideas for future studies. First, we chose a very specific set of locations to examine the cross-cultural differences in social networking between low and high social capital countries. In doing so, we limited our sampling frame to Poland and the USA. Second, by using a survey methodology, we conducted quantitative research on larger numbers of respondents rather than qualitatively examining the two cultures through in-depth interviews, case studies or using a netnographic approach. Such qualitative research would be an excellent means of extending our findings and providing boundary conditions and specific factors contributing to as well as enhancing our model. Next, we limited our study to a relatively small number of foundational constructs, as our area of inquiry is novel and has not been studied in depth in extant research. We collected our samples through convenience sampling and would suggest that future research expand our findings through perhaps an online sampling method and a marketing research firm panel, to increase ecological validity. Another limitation of our study is that we did not directly measure social capital in the USA and Poland, although as Hviždáková and Urbančíková (2014, p. 124) indicated, "Social capital, like other aggregate and multidimensional concepts, is hard to measure". As social capital is a macromarketing measure, such as quality of life, and social networking success is a micro-level construct, a causal modelling approach would be very difficult in this case. Thus another limitation of this research is the potential correlation of lower social capital with other differences between the USA and Poland, which may be connected to social media networking success. To test such potential differences, future research should analyse secondary data between these two countries initially and then conduct a quantitative study measuring other potential contributing variables. Finally, we would suggest that future research examine other low social capital countries to investigate our findings in relation to those countries.

Finally, it should be noted that much of the projected growth of social media and social commerce assumes that consumers are willing to grant others access to their personal information, not only about themselves but also about others in their social networks. Sharing such information (and valuing other people's information), however, is less the norm in low social capital societies, which also points to the critical role of relationships, trust and privacy concerns in general, but this is particularly a concern in low social capital environments. Companies will have to provide compelling arguments about how consumers will benefit from sharing such information, otherwise they face the risk that consumers will refuse to offer such information – or, in the worst case, consumers may even completely remove themselves from social networking. This is true in high social capital societies, but in Poland, for example, this may be much more problematic and may call for specific functionality and informational tools on social media platforms. Trust is an essential precondition for information sharing to occur. However, much more research remains to be done in terms of understanding local cultures regarding the collection, management and use of personal data in commercial activities. In this study, the focus was geared towards discovering ways in which social media users become engaged and loyal to social networking. Future research can work towards identifying how social commerce grows in specific countries; our results seem to justify the notion that social commerce efforts need to overcome specific barriers in Poland. By facilitating the growth of social capital in various countries, advertisers and marketers can increase the use of social media and continue to target their selected consumer markets. Our research thus provides a key managerial implication as marketers are increasingly dependent on the power of social networks to adopt and diffuse messages and facilitate and generate sales.

Thus, as theory building and testing continue to advance in this arena, we are calling for sponsored global conferences appealing to both academics and practitioners, in particular, those with global social networking interests with strong cross-cultural orientations. In essence, all of this can mobilize the fundamental fabric of international commerce and open up opportunities that here-to-fore seemed out of reach. Indeed, truly globally focused social media scholarship is a brave new world.

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Further reading

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