



The Differences between the Japanese and Americans: A qualitative Assessment of Facebook Usage

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Since we are getting ready to conduct a large scale cross-cultural survey about social media, as a first step, we qualitatively analyzed how Americans and the Japanese use Facebook. Although qualitative studies are sometimes overlooked because of the small sample size, they tend to provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon that is studied. To understand the underlying reasons behind why people from different cultures use Facebook differently, we sent an open ended survey to 25 Japanese and 28 American college students. The results were quite interesting and here are the most surprising differences:

#1 HUMOR! When we asked “what kind of messages and photos do you usually like?” The majority of the open ended answers in the American sample included “funny ones” and “humorous messages”. There was almost zero reference to humor in the Japanese sample.

#2 PROFILE PICTURE! When we asked what the respondents thought about Facebook accounts with no profile pictures, most of The American subjects stated that it was “creepy” and “strange.” On the contrary, most of the Japanese respondents thought this was normal and they would think the account owner has privacy concerns.

#3 PARENTS! Facebook hasn’t been used by the older generation in Japan but we asked how respondents would feel about friending their parents on Facebook. Almost all of the American subjects mentioned that they were already friends with their parents on Facebook. Strangely, most of the



Japanese respondents indicated that they would definitely not want to be friends with their parents on Facebook since it would be very embarrassing. Japanese subjects also did not mention family members when explaining what kind of pictures they upload or what kind of messages they post while most of the American subjects did.

#4 PROFESSORS! Two thirds of American students thought it was a bad idea to friend professors. On the other hand, two thirds of the Japanese students thought it was good.

#5 RESPONDING! Perhaps the most important difference was the attitude toward responding to every single message on one's Facebook wall. The question was "Do you usually respond to every single comment on your status or photos? (e.g. you post a photo and someone comments "you look nice in the picture" and you comment "thank you") Why or why not? Most of the Americans said they don't do this because "...they don't comment just for the sake of commenting." On the contrary almost all of the **Japanese participants thought it is impolite to not to respond to every comment. It also looks like ignoring the person who left a comment.**

#6 SMART PHONE! Similarly, both American and Japanese subjects thought PC was more convenient than a smart phone when it comes to using Facebook. While nobody in the American sample showed a preference for smartphones, about a quarter of the Japanese participants thought smartphones were more convenient than computers to log on to Facebook.

#7 UNTAG! Almost all of the American respondents reported untagging a picture of themselves whereas the majority of the Japanese respondents never untagged themselves. While some respondents in the US sample mentioned employment related concerns we suspect that Japanese users don't untag themselves because they're not tagged by others that often.