

How do cultures respond to online privacy?

Many marketers in South Africa use Facebook as a cheap marketing tool, but fail to realise that the social networking environment is merely a tool for enhancing existing meaningful offline relationships. Analysing how individuals in different cultures regard and respond to privacy issues provide a means for researchers to understand further complex online behaviours in the information age.

Compared to other SNSs in South Africa, Facebook has the most subscribers. This motivates many South African brands to use Facebook as a cheap advertising solution because it reaches a mass, yet much targeted, audience. Dumping information on Facebook, however, will not create instant appeal among young consumers. As the social networking environment is merely a tool for enhancing existing, meaningful offline relationships, reaching consumers online requires a much more customer-specific approach.

Culture is one of the largest determinants of how we communicate. It not only determines the way we say things, but also influences the tools we choose to get a message across. Therefore, technological tools such as Facebook which affects human behaviour may not be free of cultural influences. A large body of knowledge suggests that consumers' privacy concerns are affected by their respective cultural values.

Individuals from different cultures show varying degrees of concern about privacy. Individualistic individuals expect service providers to respect and care about them as well as give them confidence about the services they are receiving. Internet users from highly individualistic cultures are also found to exhibit significantly higher privacy concerns than individuals from collectivistic cultures.

A study was undertaken by a team of researchers, including [Dr Melanie Wiese and Professor Yolanda Jordaan](#) (staff members in the [Department of Marketing Management](#)) to investigate the differences between individualistic and collectivistic students in terms of online information privacy in a South African context.

The results of their study indicated that there was no significant difference between individualistic and collectivistic individuals in their usage intensity of Facebook. Additionally, no significant difference was found between individualistic and collectivistic individuals in terms of their online privacy concern. However, the results suggested that collectivistic individuals do take more protective action online than individualistic individuals.

Marketers and Social Networking Site operators should be aware of the high privacy concerns exhibited by both groups and ensure that they inform users about their privacy policies and settings. Marketers should also ensure the availability of 'opt-out' methods if consumers no longer wish to receive advertisements from a company.

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