Using Social Media UGCs to Explain Culture Shock and Coping Strategies in a Cross-Cultural Communication Course

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Abstract. This assignment required Executive participants (Defence Officers) enrolled in the subject "Cross-Cultural Communication" in an AACSB and AMBA accredited business school in India, to examine user generated comments (UGCs) in social media (SM) from 2017-2020, on culture shock experienced by foreign tourists in demanding environments such as India, China, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The purpose of the assignment was to create a nuanced understanding of culture shock and cross-cultural adaptation. Divided into three teams, and each assigned a different Asian country, participants were required to conduct a content analysis using NVivo 12 and a sentiment analysis using the Twinword api. The assignment was found useful to understand the practical aspects related to the concept of culture shock. Apart from eight new strategies to deal with culture shock, participants reported finding sarcasm embedded in many user generated comments

Keywords: culture shock, asian countries, coping strategies, content analysis, sentiment analysis.

1. Introduction

Cross cultural communication is treated as a valuable skill for business, considering that much of the business is conducted online cutting across boundaries and time zones. These skills need to be cultivated to so as to ensure rapid integration with different cultures, especially when students join multinational and transnational firms. Studies show that international students, expatriates, international tourists, and even business executives, face psychological social and cultural pressures even when chatting online with international clients.

The distance between the host culture and home culture has often been cited as a primary reason for experiencing culture shock leading to psychological and physiological maladjustment (Winkelman 1994) and insecurities (Black & Gregersen 1991; Chapdelaine & Alexitch 2004; Searle & Ward 1990). This makes it doubly important to understand and adapt to intercultural differences.

Executive participants attending a cross cultural course therefore need to be made aware of culture shock and ways to work around it, so as to find it easier to adjust to alien environments.

The Assignment

For this end of term assignment, participants were divided into three teams, and each team was assigned an Asian country (India, China, and the UAE). The assignment required the participants to (a) search for culture shock experiences of foreign tourists using Google search engines (b) select as many comments as possible (c) run a sentiment analysis to determine their perception about the country using the Twin word api (d) qualitatively analyse how tourists negotiated culture shock in unfamiliar (and apparently hostile) environments to generate cluster analysis and identify coping strategies using NVivo 12 (e) identify culture shock experiences at the entry (arrival in the host country) and exit point (culture shock experiences at departure from the host country), and (f) prepare a PowerPoint presentation on their findings. The instructor helped the participants in identifying sites that they could visit, for example Lonely Planet.com and Quora.com, and also guided them to use the Twin word api for basic emotion and sentiment analysis of the USGs. Teams had about two months to complete the assignment as this was the end of term project. Two to three team representatives were required to present the findings to the class.

2. Background

Culture Shock

Oberg presented his theory on culture shock as a negative experience to explain the difficulties in intercultural adaptation. Believing culture shock as an inevitable result of intercultural relocation, he described it as it were a disease with specific symptoms (Oberg 1954; Oberg 1960). His more popular U-curve framework depicted expatriates' feelings as they transited from the stage of euphoria, disillusionment (culture shock phase), hostility, adaptation, and finally to assimilation. From 1984, however, evidence began emerging on the "inconclusive and partly non-valid" nature of the U-curve approach.

While "intuitively appealing" (Ward *et al.* 2001), the U-curve framework lacked empirical backing confined as it was to long-term transitions of expatriates. Later, Culture shock was assigned a new nomenclature – "acculturative stress" – to explain a difficult, unpredictable, and temporary stress reaction, where, when faced with social isolation, people become confused, taking time to 'develop a new set of cognitive constructs' to deal with the stressful situation (Furnham 1997; Berry 2006). Other terms suggested include one by

Chaney & Martin (2007) – culture wound – in place of culture shock, although it was not substantially different from Oberg's definition of culture shock.

In 2008, Hottola introduced the term culture confusion, claiming it to be different from the term culture shock; while culture shock related to difficulties in intercultural adaptation, cultural confusion pivoted around the desire to understand the emotional aspects of intercultural experiences. The stage of depression in the U-curve was a mistaken one, Hottola argued, because people rarely felt depressed while travelling; instead they felt confused and stressed out, trying to learn new things that they were not used to.

Strategies to Deal with Culture Shock

Rahim, in 1984, proposed the two-dimensional approach to deal with conflict namely "concern for self" and "concern for others". His work led him to suggest five key strategies to deal with *any* conflict: dominating, avoiding, obliging, compromising and integrating. Later on, Ting Toomey added the notion of "face" in dealing with cross cultural conflicts and concluded that collectivist cultures used more face-saving strategies than the individualistic cultures in face threatening situations (read culture shock-see Ting-Toomey *et al*. 1991; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998). In 2000, Oetsel and others added 13 conflict management strategies to the still evolving theory of face negotiation using a Q-sort technique: (1) aggression (2) apologize (3) avoid (4) compromise (5) consider the other (6) defend self (7) express feelings (8) give in (9) involve a third party (10) pretend (11) private discussion (12) remain calm and (13) talk about the problem. In terms of dealing with shock, Cupach and Metts (2008) showed that individualistic societies used more integrative strategies to deal with culture shock situations than the collectivist societies.

Requirements

UGCs on social media offer an easy and inexpensive way to collect authentic and unedited data about customer experiences. The tourism sector was selected as it appeared to provide an "open field for cultural conflicts" (see Joshi, Poudyal, & Larson 2017) where tourists stepped out of their comfort zones to enter into new and unfamiliar environments.

In this assignment, three student teams were created and each team was required to collect online reviews posted between 2017-2020, of the culture shock experiences of foreign tourists visiting India, China, and UAE respectively. The assignment specified *three* criteria to select the online reviews: first, the posts should have been written entirely in English; second, the posts should have been

written within the last three years (2017-2020), and third, posts should have the names and nationalities for the sake of authenticity.

Teams were to consider each UGC as a story (at a point in time), that had a plot (the culture shock), a strategy to deal with the conflict (resolution), and the resultant sentiments at a point in time (see Kim & Fesenmaier 2015; Hosany & Gilbert 2010; Nawijn, Mitas, Lin, & Kerstetter 2013). The approach adopted was therefore static unlike the meta narrative approach (see Tucker, Shelton, & Stanley 2008; Edelheim 2015) which required researchers to interpret connections between the stories and the post consumption experiences of the tourists. The software eased the laborious task of analysing text-based data to obtain an accurate interpretation of the sentiments expressed by the traveller (see Liu 2010; Ribeiro *et al.* 2016).

Teams were expected to code culture shock experienced at the entry point and at the exit point of the country along with the strategy to deal with the culture shock using an excel sheet. The list of the extracted statements was required to be carefully scrutinised for facts, context, and feelings implicit in the expressed statements before conducting the sentiment analysis. The Twinword api was recommended for the sentiment analysis.

The teams were required to assess the words, sentences, paragraphs and documents individually first and group-wise later, so as to determine:

- expressed feelings of the tourists on the culture shock experienced by them;

- polarity of the sentiments embedded in the narratives; and,

- strategies used by them to manage the culture shock.

Before conducting a full-fledged analysis, each team was required to share the pilot study of the initial codes generated from the first five narratives with the instructor so as to resolve coding problems and jointly agree upon a coding framework.

3. Results and Discussion

The participants had to interpret the phenomenon of culture shock from the point of view of the lived experiences of the tourists. In this sense, the project was grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. Each team was free to devise a conceptual model on the culture shock theory

Results of word count and average sentiment scores for the three countries (Tables 1-3) revealed that their authors narrated their experiences anywhere between two words (India) and 4535 words (UAE). Comments with negative sentiment scores in all the three countries were shorter than the mean length of the