

Master Thesis International Business Communication

‘Are you joining?’

Relationship-building strategies and cultural value appeals:
How companies in Brazil and in the Netherlands are creating
stakeholder dialogues using Facebook.



Annapaula Freire de Oliveira

s4424891

freireannap@gmail.com

+31 645356569

Radboud University Nijmegen



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Annapaula Freire de Oliveira

s4424891

Supervisor: **Dr. Elizabeth de Groot**

Second reader: **Dr. Pepi Burgos**

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Declaration of own work (Master thesis)

I, the undersigned,, Master student of the degree programme Communication and Information Studies at Radboud University Nijmegen, specialization International Business Communication, hereby declare that the thesis I have submitted with the title

‘.....’

was solely written by me, and that no help was provided from other sources than those allowed. I confirm that the work presented in this thesis has been generated by me as the result of my own original research. Furthermore, I declare that I have fully and appropriately acknowledged, cited and referenced in this thesis any information or ideas originating from other sources, including all and any literature used. Finally, I declare that the data for the study presented in this thesis were collected solely by me, the undersigned.

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Abstract

Users of the World Wide Web have increasingly relied on social media to exchange information and to obtain organizational information. Nowadays, Facebook is one of the most popular social networking sites among individuals. The collaborative and participatory nature of this online medium requires that companies interact constantly with their audiences. Engaging in dialogues with publics is a useful tactic that may lead to the establishment of organizational-public relationships. Because this communication channel is so recent, the creation of stakeholder dialogue by companies of culturally diverse countries remains an under-researched topic. In the present study, the corporate usage of Facebook by Brazilian and Dutch companies was compared. Specifically, it focused on the creation of dialogues by organizations: the attempt of global communicators to initiate conversations with their stakeholders through Facebook. To shed light on how organizations of these two countries vary in the creation of dialogues, a cross-cultural research based on two content analyses was carried out. The employment of relationship-building strategies was checked on the corporate Facebook pages of 18 companies. Additionally, the present study explored which cultural values are reflected in 80 corporate messages collected from the investigated pages. Unexpectedly, the results showed no significant differences between the two groups in the usage of relationship-building strategies, even though previous studies indicated that cultural values have an impact on the use of these strategies. Also, and above all, the Dutch corporate pages reflected more collectivistic values than the Brazilian pages. This last outcome was surprising due to the individualistic orientation of the Netherlands. The results of the present study would seem to support the theory of a “virtual culture” on the Internet, where traditional cultural values are not necessarily being followed by communicators.

Keywords: Internet; social media; Facebook; dialogue; relationships; cultural values; stakeholders.

Introduction

Recently, social media has been widely adopted all over the world as an information source and as a tool to connect users (Men & Tsai, 2012). As one of the most known online social environments, Facebook presents an impressive count of 936 million daily active users and approximately 82.8% of these are outside of the United States of America and Canada (Facebook.com, 2015). The interactive functions of Facebook were initially developed to solely serve individuals, but soon companies of all industries were attracted by the popularity of this new communication channel (Muralidharan, Rasmussen, Peterson & Shin, 2011). In 2006, Facebook offered the possibility for organizations to create free online business pages, which facilitated the interaction with stakeholders via social media (Waters, Burnett, Lamn & Lucas, 2009).

Through Facebook, firms create dialogues with users which results in an exchange of content (Thackeray, Neiger, Hanson & McKenzie, 2008). This “creative process” developed between organization and publics may probably contribute to greater word-of-mouth and customer loyalty (Thackeray et al., 2008, p. 340). Furthermore, due to its relationship-oriented nature, this kind of social medium may “humanize” what would otherwise be faceless organizations (Men & Tsai, 2012) providing companies with a channel to cultivate relationships with stakeholders.

Scholars have investigated how companies interact with audiences on the World Wide Web (e.g., Taylor, Kent & White, 2001). Earlier research on how communicators create reciprocal relationships with stakeholders through online communication tools focused mainly on websites (Capriotti & Kuklinski, 2012; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Ki & Ho, 2006). However, a new stream of research is now investigating the organizational practice of creating dialogues on social media (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Briones, Kuch, Liu & Jin, 2011; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007). Although scholars have started to explore this research field, there is still a gap regarding cross-cultural research concerning how corporate Facebook pages apply relationship-building strategies and how cultural values are reflected on communication materials practitioners utilize to interact with publics (Men & Tsai, 2012; Waters & Lo, 2012). It remains to be seen whether Western theories for the corporate usage of social media can be applied globally, because users may have different cultural values and behave differently on the Internet. This means that principles widely applied in the Western world to connect with stakeholders might not be the same in a different cultural setting (Men & Tsai, 2012). Research has yet to explore the impact of

cultural differences on global public relations (Men & Tsai, 2012) practiced in an online environment (e.g. social media). This medium allows two-way symmetrical communication, i.e. interactive and mutual communication between publics and organization (Kent & Taylor, 1998), and global connectivity (Waters & Lo, 2012). Additionally, most of the studies which investigated the impact of cultural orientations on the creation of corporate dialogues dealt with American and Chinese companies (e.g. Men & Tsai, 2012; Waters & Lo, 2012). Hence, there is a need to expand this literature field to other nations.

The aim of this study is to contribute to the literature of cross-cultural research and global public relations by investigating the creation of dialogues in terms of relationship-building strategies and cultural values reflected in corporate Facebook pages. Based on an integrated framework, the online communication of companies in two culturally diverse countries – Brazil and the Netherlands – were analyzed. The recent economic expansion of Brazil has attracted many multinational corporations searching for new markets to invest in. The Netherlands, for instance, is the fourth export destination for Brazilian products, whereas Brazil is the ninth import origin of the Netherlands (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2015). The trade relations between the two countries and their different stages of economic development are reason to establish a comparison regarding their communication practices. Also, the findings of this study may support corporate communicators in the development of global public relations campaigns for social networking sites.

Literature review

Social Media

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) described social media as a set of application programs that enable a constant update of user generated content through the Web 2.0. The authors further explored the concept of social media with a classification scheme based on media research and social processes. Social presence is one of the concepts of media research and is described as the capacity media have of allowing contact between communication partners (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social presence can be affected by intimacy and immediacy (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Intimacy concerns interpersonal (e.g., face-to-face conversation) and mediated communications (e.g., telephone conversation), whereas immediacy refers to asynchronous (e.g., email) and synchronous communications (e.g., live chat) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). A medium is considered to have high social presence when it allows for

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interpersonal and for synchronous communications. Media research also includes the media richness theory. This theory refers to the capability of a medium to reduce uncertainty and equivocality during the communication process (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). A high degree of media richness is related to “the use of responsive feedback, multiple cues, appropriate use of language and/or numbers, and a tailored frame of reference” (Cho, Philips, Hageman & Patten, 2009). This characteristics possibly resolve ambiguities and uncertainty that might exist between communication partners (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Among the categories of social media are the Social Networking Sites (SNSs). In these online applications, users can share personal information with other individuals as well as exchange instant messages (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Facebook is an example of a SNS. On its interactive platform, users can create personal as well as business profile pages allowing them to publish real-time updates to all their “friends” and “followers” in the form of a written message, photo and/or video. Furthermore, users and companies can also send private messages, therefore achieving a sense of privacy and closeness. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), SNSs have a medium level of social presence and media richness, because they allow the sharing of other media than simple text. Organizations can take advantage of the fast information sharing ability and the direct contact with stakeholders enabled by SNSs to create and foster dialogues (Men & Tsai, 2012; Tsai & Men, 2012).

Organizational-public relationships

In corporate communication, there are two perspectives that explore the reasons behind keeping relationships between organization and audiences: one within the public relations field and another associated to marketing. The public relations theoretical model has changed from “an emphasis on managing communication to an emphasis on communication as a tool for negotiating relationships” (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p.23). According to Grunig and Grunig (2008, p. 328), the Excellence Theory posits that in order to achieve excellence in the practice of public relations, communicators are required to build quality, long-term relationships with stakeholders. This public relations excellence is associated to organizational effectiveness, which occurs when “an organization achieves goals chosen in consultation with stakeholders – goals that serve the interests of both the organization and these strategic constituencies” (Grunig & Grunig, 2008, p.328). In order to be ethical, the public relations practice should seek for the maintenance of relationships through dialogues (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

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Whereas the relationship marketing approach proposes that “on top of the value of products and/or services that are exchanged, the existence of a relationship between two parties creates additional value for the customer and also for the supplier or service provider” and, if this relationship is long-lasting, it is likely to lead to customer security, and a sense of control and trust (Grönroos, 2004, p. 99).

Dialogic communication in online environments

Because of the possibility of immediate feedback from the public, the Internet offers great public relations potential for organizations. The relationships with stakeholders can be upgraded if communicators utilize the World Wide Web's interactive functions (Kent & Taylor, 1998). One-way communication is no longer the main way to interact with stakeholders and communicators' functions are beyond information dissemination (Kent & Taylor, 1998). The Web enables consumers and other audiences to express their views. In order to create dialogic opportunities that may turn into stakeholder relationships, public relations professionals need to learn how to use this new communication medium strategically. In cyberspace, a great challenge is put up to companies dealing with global audiences with varying communication needs and behaviors, caused by the fact that they can immediately show dissatisfaction and require further negotiation with the company (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Dialogic communication is thus one of the practices which professional communicators can apply in order to facilitate online relationships between organizations and publics (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Kent and Taylor (1998) defined dialogic communication as a mutual exchange of ideas. The authors created a framework that facilitates dialogic communication between firms and stakeholders through websites, which consists of making the navigation easy, providing useful information, maintaining visitors on the webpage, maintaining a dialogic loop with the public and generating the return of visitors. By applying this framework, companies would create meaningful online relationships. At the time of Kent and Taylor's study (1998), websites were the main web-based communication channel used by companies to interact with their audience and SNSs were not yet popular. Therefore, the framework created by Kent and Taylor (1998) is better suited for websites.

Recent research has demonstrated how social media is better suited for cultivating online relationships. Seltzer and Mitrook (2007) compared weblogs and traditional websites in terms of dialogic communication. Their findings conclude that weblogs may have a higher relationship-building potential than traditional online communication channels, because of a

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more frequent use of dialogic principals. Considering their ability to respond to users’ messages swiftly and effectively, weblogs are a more favorable tool for fostering relationships between company and users (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007).

Cultural impact on online communication

Another challenge global practitioners face when trying to create dialogues on the Internet is the depiction of their own cultural values on organizational communications. Although corporate online instruments are “born global” due to their ease of access all over the world, their information content may present the country-specific values of their managers and of the culture where the content is produced (Singh & Matsuo, 2004, p. 864). Singh and Matsuo (2004, p. 869) studied the websites of Japanese-language and English-language websites of multinationals and demonstrated country-specific websites features, indicating that “the Web is not a culturally neutral medium”. Waters and Lo (2012), on the other hand, suggested that the World Wide Web’s ability to enable direct communication between users globally has created a “virtual culture”, in which traditional cultural values are not necessarily followed by practitioners (Waters & Lo, 2012, p. 298). National borders are not relevant in this global community, where the central intent is the exchange of information (Waters & Lo, 2012). The ongoing advances in technology combined with the current rise in the use of social networking sites may allow for shifts in culture meaning an impact on firms’ behavior and communication styles, especially on their online presence (Waters & Lo, 2012).

The language used to communicate with international audiences may also impact the cultural values presented in corporate messages. According to the theory of cultural accommodation, individuals may “think and act differently depending on the language they are using” (Zander et al, 2010). This may also have an effect on the way communicators develop corporate content, considering that English is the main language used by companies to communicate with international publics on Facebook.

Research has yet to explore how cultural values are manifested in the online business content of multinationals. The present study aims to reveal whether culture-specific features are reflected in Facebook texts that use English as an international business language.

Online relationship-building strategies

Among the advantageous social media channels available to execute corporate-relationship efforts through dialogues are the SNSs. The direct and collaborative essence of these online platforms provides companies a tool to involve stakeholders in conversations in order to establish mutually beneficial relationships.

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Waters et al. (2009) developed a framework to better analyze whether companies are initiating and maintaining dialogues in SNSs. This framework consisted in the employment of three online relationship-cultivation strategies: disclosure, information dissemination, and interactivity and involvement. In the present study, this model is considered to be the first option that companies can utilize to create online dialogue. The strategy of disclosure indicates to what extent organizations are open and transparent in communicating information about their activities. Companies can achieve full disclosure by, for example, providing their history, vision statement and hyperlinks of their websites. The second relationship-building strategy involved information dissemination and refers to how useful messages are to users. This strategy is executed by, for example, publishing links to external news; photos or videos. Lastly, interactivity referred to what extent companies engage stakeholders in online relationships by, for instance, presenting an organizational phone number (Waters et al., 2009).

Waters et al. (2009) examined how nonprofit companies in the United States manage their Facebook presence in terms of the creation of dialogues through the use of aforementioned strategies. They found an insufficient use of all the interactive features of social networking sites. Companies should update their corporate profiles constantly in order to involve stakeholders into the company’s activities, because this would lead to dialogic communication and ultimately to meaningful relationships (Men & Tsai, 2012; Waters et al., 2009). Men and Tsai (2012) expanded this theoretical model in order to compare the social media usage of United States and China.

Taking into account that the theoretical model which analyzes the use of relationship-building strategies is based on the examination of technical features, the present study combined two methods in order to explore how companies create dialogues via Facebook. The analysis of online relationship-building strategies consists in verifying whether communicators are utilizing or not the features available on organizational pages. The use of these strategies is only one option that companies may utilize to create dialogues. Also, the layout of corporate Facebook pages is standard; therefore it is necessary to explore other tactics organizations employ to build relationships on this SNS. By combining the investigation of the strategies with another method that explores the content of organizational messages that are being sent to audiences (which will be further discussed in later sections), the current investigation aims to provide a complete picture of the corporate usage of Facebook, one that involves technical and creative details.

The present study adapted the framework of Waters et al. (2009) and of Men and Tsai (2012) in order to perform its first research step (see Table 1). This led to the investigation of how companies in Brazil and the Netherlands are using Facebook to interact with their stakeholders. Business Facebook pages of both Brazil and the Netherlands were examined on how they create dialogues through the application of the online relationship-building strategies.

Table 1: Online relationship-strategies on Facebook (Men & Tsai, 2012; Waters et al., 2009).

Strategies	Category
Disclosure	Description
	History
	Mission statement
	URL to website
Information dissemination	News links
	Photos posted
	Video and audio files
	Announcements and press releases
Involvement and interaction	Organizational contacts
	Sharing to one’s own page
	Response to user posts

Cross-cultural differences in the use of relationship-building strategies

Men and Tsai (2012) defended that global public relations practitioners should take the cultural values of local audiences into account when managing social media relationships. They found evidence that corporations in China and in the United States vary in the employment of relationship-building strategies on SNSs. Their findings showed that despite the fact that both countries make use of the three online relationship-building strategies, China and the United States vary in their approach. For instance, both used the cultivation strategy of interactivity, though the two groups applied the subcategories of

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this strategy differently (Men & Tsai, 2012). American companies shared news links more often (navigation) while Chinese are more likely to answer to public’s posts. Yet, none succeeded in using SNSs at their full potential to complete dialogues (Men & Tsai, 2012).

Waters and Lo (2012) investigated nonprofit organizations in China, Turkey and the United States. They analyzed the impact of culture on the strategies that companies use to interact with stakeholders through SNSs. Their results demonstrated that the application of corporate relationship-building strategies was according to cultural values only for Turkish and American organizations. Chinese companies performed differently than their cultural dimensions predicted. For instance, the Chinese engaged more often with their stakeholders (relationship-building strategy of interactivity) than the Americans. This finding was unexpected because according to Waters and Lo (2012), China is a culture with a collectivist orientation and it would therefore be less likely to employ this tactic than the Americans (individualist culture). Due to a collectivistic orientation, relationships are enduring and social structures in offline settings are prominent, so the individuals of this kind of culture have less need to network online in order to engage in new groups (Waters & Lo, 2012). Consequently, organizations would employ less often the online strategy of engaging with stakeholders (Waters & Lo, 2012). The authors justified the unexpected result with the theory that the Internet allows for a virtual culture, where cultural boundaries are blurred.

Cultural values reflected in corporate content

A classic theoretical framework that has been adopted by scholars in order to define cultural differences between nations is Hofstede and Hofstede’s (2001) six dimensions of national culture. Among these dimensions are individualism versus collectivism (IDC) and power distance (PD). In a collectivist culture, “people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups” (Hofstede, 1994, p. 2). Conversely, in individualistic cultures “ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family” (Hofstede, 1994, p.2). Power distance is “the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 1994, p.2). High power distance societies appreciate hierarchy and inequality is accepted, whereas cultures with low power distance appreciate equal rights and decentralized power (Hofstede, 1994). Another theoretical model used in cross-cultural research is Hall’s (1976) description of high and low context cultures. High context cultures are defined as societies in which “most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded,

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explicit, transmitted part of the message” (Hall, 1976, p.91). As for low context cultures, “the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code” (Hall, 1976, p.91).

Using the communication appeals corresponding to the cultural orientations of a certain audience (adaptation) is a way of captivating users into nurturing dialogues with organizations. Online content can help organizations to engage with stakeholders in a dialogue, which can eventually lead to meaningful relationships (Andersen, 2005; Grönroos, 1994). Scholars have emphasized that the content of Internet messages has also to be taken into account when companies interact with publics through online channels (e.g. Singh et al., 2005; Tsai & Men, 2012). The World Wide Web has few access barriers, which means that users are constantly exposed to a high volume of messages (Singh et al., 2005). This can result in having online audiences trying to avoid this overflow of information (e.g. by filtering out corporate efforts). It is therefore crucial as well as difficult to gain the attention of stakeholders. Companies may obtain advantages over competitors by applying culturally adapted messaging. Adapting the content of online corporate messages to the cultural values of target markets is a beneficial way of attracting stakeholders (Singh et al., 2005) into interacting with global organizations (Grönroos, 2004). However, the global nature of the Internet and the high frequency of information exchange between different cultures may have influenced how these companies use these appeals in social networking sites.

According to Albers-Miller and Gelb (1996), it is preferable that practitioners take into account the cultural orientations of audiences when developing communication campaigns. The authors associated communication appeals to specific cultural dimensions. For example, the appeal of independence (self-sufficiency and unattached) was matched to the cultural orientation of individualism, because individualistic societies appreciate autonomy. Their findings demonstrated that the content of print advertisements reflects their country-specific values.

Singh and Matsuo (2004) extended this stream of research and associated communication appeals used on websites to cultural values. According to the authors, cultural values may define what is more suitable for managers with regard to what communication strategy and appeals to apply for a certain audience. For instance, the category “pride of ownership appeal” portrays a high-power distance culture. The appeal of pride of ownership highlights social status or competitiveness (Albers-Millers & Gelb, 1996), which is appreciated in societies with high-power distance (Singh & Matsuo, 2004).

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Research has also provided evidence that corporate pages on SNSs employ different communication appeals across countries (Tsai & Men, 2012). Tsai and Men (2012) developed a framework that serves to examine the impact of cultural values and communication styles on corporate pages on SNSs. For example, the use of the communication appeal “popularity”, which emphasizes the adoption of known products and services, was associated to collectivist cultures, because individuals in this kind of society value harmony and seek to conform to social norms.

The present study analyzed whether Brazilian and Dutch companies initiate dialogues with their publics on Facebook using culturally-bound communication appeals. It did so by checking whether communication appeals that are related to Brazilian and Dutch cultural values are present on corporate Facebook pages or not. The values checked in the present investigation were selected based on the most contrasting cultural differences between Brazil and the Netherlands, according to the theoretical frameworks of Hall (1976) and of Hofstede and Hofstede (2001): high and low context, individualism versus collectivism, and power distance. The coding framework of communication appeals applied in SNSs by Tsai and Men (2012) was used to classify the messages based on the following cultural dimensions: collectivism, individualism, power distance, high-context culture and low-context culture. The communication appeals which were verified and their respective cultural values are described in table 2.

Table 2 Cultural values and their respective communication appeals (Tsai & Men, 2012).

Cultural values	Communication appeal
Individualism	Appeals about the individuality or independence of the audience Emphasis on uniqueness or originality Reflections of self-reliance or hedonism
Collectivism	Reflection of interdependent relationships with others Appeals to popularity or emphasis on conformity or harmony Appeals about the integrity of or belonging to a family or social group
High power distance	Appeals to high status

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	Appeals to vanity-expensiveness
Lower power distance	Appeals to humility
	Emphasis on inexpensiveness
Low context	Emphasis on product features and characteristics
	Mention of competitive products or use of comparative claims
	Addressing the consumers’ practical, functional, or utilitarian need
High context	Appeals to emotion or addressing the affective or intangible aspects of a product
	Use of metaphor or aesthetic expressions
	Association with a particular situation, type of person, or lifestyle

Cultural differences portrayed in corporate online pages

The impact of cultural values on online communication content has been researched in earlier studies. For example, Singh and Matsuo (2004) showed that American and Japanese companies differed concerning the display of cultural values in websites. Because Japan is a high-context culture, their websites presented, for example, more elements of humbleness appeals and gave emphasis on colors and aesthetics details (Singh & Matsuo, 2004). Due to its low-context orientation, American websites applied more often superlatives and published organizational achievements (Singh & Matsuo, 2004).

Tsai and Men (2012) explored whether cultural orientations of Chinese and American organizations were reflected in their marketing communication contents for SNSs through communication appeals. Their results demonstrated that the cultural dimensions of Chinese companies were indeed present and cultural values of collectivism, high-power distance and high-context communication style were more often observed in their corporate pages. The only country-specific cultural orientation that was more significantly depicted in the American corporate pages on a SNS was individualism. With regard to communication appeals that reflect an individualist orientation, for instance, corporate posts on American SNS pages used more often independence and uniqueness appeals (e.g., “what is your signature style?”). On the other hand, Chinese corporate messages, for example, employed more often the appeal

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of interdependence (e.g., “we”, “our” and “friends”) which demonstrates collectivism (Tsai & Men, 2012). By applying local communication appeals, global corporate communicators turn the content of communication materials “culturally relevant” for stakeholders (Tsai & Men, 2012). Finally, the authors stressed that future research should investigate the same topic in other countries.

Brazil and the Netherlands

As described in previous sections in this study, scholars have indicated that cross-cultural differences might impact the way organizations interact with stakeholders. Consequently, the differences between Brazil and the Netherlands might also influence the corporate usage of social networking sites regarding the creation of dialogues. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2001), the two cultures differ mainly in terms of power distance and individualism-collectivism. The Dutch society is considered to be individualistic and has a low power distance, whereas Brazil is a collectivistic and a high power distance culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001). Finally, the two countries also differ in the dimension of high and low-context communication, Brazil being a high-context culture, whereas the Netherlands is a low-context culture.

Because of their contrasting cultural orientations, Brazilian and Dutch global organizations might differ in terms of relationship-building strategies employed by corporate communicators. Dutch companies are more likely to apply the online relationship-building strategies of disclosure (associated with low context cultures) and involvement and interactivity (related to individualistic cultures) more frequently than Brazilian organizations (Water & Lo, 2012). The two groups might also vary in how cultural values are reflected in online content. Dutch companies are likely to present communication appeals corresponding to individualism, to low power distance and to low context societies, whereas Brazilian organizations are more likely to display communication appeals associated to collectivism, to high power distance and high context cultures (Tsai & Men, 2012).

Through the investigation of the social media usage of the two nations, it is possible to evaluate how culturally diverse countries practice the creation of stakeholder dialogues in an online environment. The outcomes of the current study may support companies that are interested in investing in these two markets. Approaches of the analyzed organizations, which already possess a good reputation and are established in the two markets, may be replicated by other communicators. Moreover, the results of the present study may contribute to the analyzed corporate pages and help them to improve their communication strategies on

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Facebook, therefore increasing the engagement of users into dialogues which as consequence will lead to relationships.

Research question

Scholars have stressed that there is a research gap concerning the usage of social media for global public relations (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Briones et al., 2011; Men & Tsai, 2012; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Seltzer & Miltrook, 2007; Waters et al., 2009). Research has yet to confirm whether organizations are utilizing all the features of social media to the full potential for the creation of dialogues (Briones et al., 2011). Bortree and Seltzer (2009) emphasized the need for investigating if organizations are failing on building collaborative relationships with stakeholders through SNSs.

Additionally, there is a gap in the area covering the impact of dissimilar cultural values on communication content of corporate pages on SNSs, considering that scholars have mainly focused on the analysis of corporate websites (Tsai & Men, 2012). Also, the field of relationship-building on SNSs is still in its early stage of development and there is a need for cross-cultural investigations.

In order to have a more in-depth analysis regarding the usage of Facebook by Dutch and Brazilian companies, the present study combined two different theoretical frameworks. As its first research step and based on the studies of Waters et al. (2009) and of Men and Tsai (2012), the current study investigated how corporate pages on Facebook apply the three online relationship-building strategies. This first method focused on the analysis of technical features of corporate Facebook pages, i.e. the exploitation by communicators of the page’s layout. Considering that the layout of business pages on Facebook is standard, another research step was added to this investigation. The second research step, thus, explored which cultural value appeals are being applied by the Brazilian and Dutch practitioners, it therefore explored the content of the pages. In fact, organizations have the option of utilizing either of the two approaches (relationship-building strategies and communication appeals) or integrate both in order to create dialogues with their publics. By combining these two methods, the present study aims to give a detailed portrait of the practices applied by practitioners of the two countries. Thus, the following research question was elaborated:

RQ: To what extent do Brazilian and Dutch companies differ regarding the creation of stakeholder dialogues (in terms of relationship-building strategies and cultural value appeals) on their corporate Facebook pages?

Method

Research material

As stated earlier, cultural values might affect the way companies interact with users on SNSs. In order to answer the research question, a content analysis based on an integrated framework was carried out. The corpus consisted on the official corporate profiles pages of Brazilian and Dutch global organizations on Facebook.

Sample selection

Two different sample selections were done in the present study. Firstly, corporate pages were selected in order to perform the first research step. Subsequently, corporate messages were selected in the chosen pages for the realization of the second research step.

The companies were selected through purposive sampling, which is a sampling technique based on strategic choices of the researcher. Corporate profiles on Facebook were picked out based on company size, authentic cultural origins (i.e. traditionally Brazilian or Dutch) and use of English language. The Amsterdam (Dutch) and São Paulo (Brazilian) stock exchange were assessed to check for the criterion of company size, which was based on the revenue of the companies. The cultural origins of the organizations were assessed by checking the history of the companies presented on their websites .

Because the present study focused on global communications, it was a sampling criterion to examine companies that are targeting an international audience on Facebook and therefore utilizing English to communicate with their stakeholders. Cross-cultural research has also shown evidence that cultural values pass through when individuals are using English as a second language in the workplace, e.g., Zander et al. (2011). The present study selected through purposive sampling nine corporate Facebook pages per country in order to perform the analysis of relationship-building strategies (for an overview of the investigated companies, see Appendix A).

After the first sample selection, the present study retrieved the five most recent status updates (messages) from the selected Dutch and Brazilian corporate pages on Facebook in order to perform the investigation of communication appeals. Taking into account that posts that combine both photo and text have higher rates of user engagement on Facebook (Buddy Media, 2012), the present study picked only messages that combine these two elements. Also, because one of the Brazilian companies did not possess any messages at all on its international corporate page (Tam Airlines), this company was eliminated from the analysis of communication appeals. In order for the two groups (Brazil and the Netherlands) to have an equal sample size, a respective Dutch company (KLM Airlines) was also excluded from the

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second research step (investigation of communication appeals). In line with Saxton and Waters (2009), 80 Facebook messages in total (40 per country) were selected through simple random sampling.

Coding procedure

The usage of corporate Facebook pages to create dialogues with stakeholders by Brazilian and Dutch communicators was checked through two research steps. The first step investigated the use of relationship-building strategies. The second one consisted in checking for the cultural value appeals used in corporate messages.

Relationship-building strategies

A company was considered to apply the strategies of disclosure, information dissemination as well as interactivity and involvement if the items described in Table 1 were present on its online page. The analysis checked whether the items for one or several relationship-building strategies are displayed on the Brazilian and Dutch Facebook pages. Based on Men and Tsai (2012) and Waters et al. (2012), the present study examined how companies in Brazil and in the Netherlands are applying the three cultivation strategies (disclosure, information dissemination, and interactivity and involvement) on Facebook. These strategies are used by companies to create and maintain relationships with their publics on their corporate Facebook profiles. The unit of analysis was visual elements (photos and videos) and texts. The complete scheme used during the coding procedure of the relationship-building strategies can be found in the Appendix B.

A company was considered to use the strategy of disclosure if their corporate page presented the following items: a description of the organization’s programs and services, an organizational history, the mission statement and the organization’s website. As for information dissemination, the present study checked whether the following items were present on the Facebook profiles: news items, photographs, video and audio files and posted announcements. Lastly, the coding for interactivity and involvement checked for the presence of organizational contact information, sharing to one’s own page and whether the companies respond to user comments.

An example of coding of these strategies is given below. Figure (1) shows the corporate Facebook page of the Dutch airline KLM. Looking at, for example, the category “disclosure”, the following two subcategories can be found: “history” and “URL to website”. The coding for the subcategory “history” includes information about the development of the

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company, e.g. KLM presents the information “Founded on October 7, 1919”. The coding of the subcategory “URL to website” checked for links to the official website of the company, in this example “<http://www.klm.com>”.

Figure 1: Corporate Facebook page of KLM using the relationship-building strategy of disclosure.



Cultural value appeals

The second research step identified how Brazilian and the Dutch companies vary regarding the cultural values presented in their corporate pages through the theoretical framework proposed by Tsai and Men (2012). It was measured whether or not cultural values are depicted in Dutch and Brazilian corporate messages that were shared on business Facebook pages. A message could present more than one communication appeal. The present study specifically checked for communication appeals relating to power distance, individualism/collectivism and high/low communication context (see Table 2). The units of analysis were in the form of texts (phrases and linguistic forms) and photos (images, scenes and portrayed activities). For a view into the complete coding scheme of the communication appeals used in the present study, see Appendix B. Two communication appeals (appeals to vanity and emphasis on inexpensiveness) were not presented by any companies; therefore the present study did not focus on them during the statistical treatments.

An example of a corporate message is displayed below (Figure 2). The message of the Brazilian corporation Embraer presents the appeal of comparative claims (“larger”, “more efficient”, “comfortable”, and “hugest”), that reflects the values of a low-context culture. The coding of comparative claims was performed by checking for the use of comparative and superlative linguistic forms. Also, this corporative message emphasized product features and

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characteristics by employing the phrase “new crop duster Ipanema 203” as well as by using photos of objects which are the main products commercialized by Embraer.

Figure 2: Corporate message on Facebook that reflects low-context culture values.



Inter-rater reliability

In order to make sure that the coding scheme adopted by the present study is reliable, two inter-rater reliability tests were carried out. These tests measured to what extent two coders agreed on which relationship-building strategies and cultural values were used by the Dutch and Brazilian companies on Facebook.

Each rater analyzed 10% of the total sample of corporate profiles (1 company per country) and checked whether the three relationship-building strategies were present or not. A very good agreement among coders was found for the investigation of relationship-building strategies: $\kappa = .90, p < .001$.

Moreover, each rater also examined 10% of the total sample of corporate messages (10 messages) and check which cultural value appeals are present. Subsequently, Cohen's Kappa was performed, which demonstrated a good agreement between coders: $\kappa = .70, p < .001$.

Statistical treatment

Relationship-building strategies

Independent t-tests were carried out to verify differences in the usage of relationship-building strategies between the two groups. Each strategy (disclosure, information dissemination, and

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interactivity and involvement) was analyzed individually. Also, chi-squares were performed to check if there was a relationship between the subcategories of each strategy and country.

Depiction of cultural values

In order to test for differences in the depiction of cultural values, t-tests were conducted. The communication appeals corresponding to each cultural value were grouped and tested for differences in their employment by the companies. Finally, chi-square tests were carried out to check for relationships between the frequencies of each appeal and country of origin.

Results

The aim of the present study was to investigate to what extent Brazilian and Dutch companies differ with regard to the creation of stakeholder dialogue through Facebook. In order to achieve this goal, the present study explored the use of relationship-building strategies and cultural value appeals on corporate Facebook pages.

Online relationship-building strategies

The first research step concerned the investigation of the use of relationship-building strategies by Brazilian and Dutch companies in their Facebook profiles. T-tests were carried out to check whether Brazilian and Dutch corporate pages vary concerning the use of the three strategies. An independent-samples t-test showed no significant differences between Brazil and the Netherlands regarding the use of disclosure ($t(16) = .29, p = .772$), information dissemination ($t(16) = 1.60, p = .138$), and interactivity and involvement ($t(16) = .46, p = .653$) (see Table 3). This finding reveals that Brazilian and Dutch companies apply the relationship-building strategies to an equal extent.

Table 3: Means and standard deviations of relationship-building strategies on Brazilian and Dutch Facebook corporate pages.

Relationship-building strategies	Brazil		The Netherlands	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Disclosure	.89	.25	.92	.12
Information dissemination	.80	.24	.94	.11
Interactivity and involvement	.85	.17	.89	.17

Furthermore, Chi-square tests were performed in order to demonstrate whether there was a relation between country and the use of each subcategory of the online relationship strategies. The chi-squares were non-significant for all subcategories: description of the company's programs and services ($\chi^2(1) = .06, p = .808$), organizational history ($\chi^2(1) = .06,$

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$p = .808$), mission statement ($\chi^2 (1) = .08, p = .782$), organization’s website ($\chi^2 (1) = .00, p = 1$), news items ($\chi^2 (1) = .82, p = .366$), photographs ($\chi^2 (1) = .00, p = 1$), videos and photos ($\chi^2 (1) = .06, p = .808$), announcements and press releases ($\chi^2 (1) = .06, p = .808$), organizational contact information ($\chi^2 (1) = .00, p = 1$), sharing to one’s page ($\chi^2 (1) = .00, p = 1$), company response to user comments ($\chi^2 (1) = .06, p = .808$). This outcome implies that Brazil and the Netherlands use Facebook equally, therefore applying the subcategories to an equal extent. The frequencies of the subcategories of the relationship strategies were also analyzed (see Table 4).

Table 4: Frequencies of relationship-building strategies used by Brazilian and Dutch corporate Facebook pages.

Strategies	Subcategory	Brazil	The Netherlands
		$n = 9$	$n = 9$
Disclosure	Description	8	9
	History	8	9
	Mission Statement	7	6
	URL to website	9	9
Information dissemination	News links	4	7
	Photos posted	9	9
	Video and audio files	8	9
	Announcements and press releases	8	9
Interactivity and involvement	Organizational contacts	6	6
	Sharing to one’s own pages	9	9
	Response to user posts	8	9

Reflection of cultural values on corporate messages

The second research step analyzed the differences regarding the use of cultural values appeals by companies of the two investigated countries. T-tests were carried out with the purpose to find to what extent Brazilian and Dutch companies vary with regard to communication appeals used in corporate messages shared on Facebook. These statistical treatments were performed by grouping the categories belonging to each cultural value. For instance, for the analysis of the application of collectivist appeals, the three appeals related to this value

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(reflection of interdependent relationship with others; appeals to popularity; and appeals about belonging to a social group) were tested as a combined group.

An independent-samples t-test showed a significant difference between Brazil and the Netherlands regarding the depiction of the communication appeals related to collectivism ($t(78) = 2.04, p = .044$). The Netherlands ($M = .53, SD = .32$) were shown to have a higher frequency of collectivist appeals than the Brazilian companies on Facebook ($M = .39, SD = .30$).

An example of collectivistic values reflected in a Dutch corporate message is displayed below (Figure 3). This Facebook post that appeals to popularity or emphasizes on conformity or harmony, it does so by stimulating (“Are you joining?”) online stakeholders to follow a popular trend (in this case, the event “Bike to work day”), who will consequently establish harmony between other individuals by following social norms. Furthermore, this message presents the appeal “reflection of interdependent relationships with others” due to the use of the collectivistic reference “our”, which demonstrates the relations between employees and company.

Figure 3: Corporate message on a Dutch Facebook page that applies the communication appeals “appeal to popularity or emphasizes on conformity or harmony” and “reflection of interdependent relationships with others”.



Another example of a Dutch corporate message that employs appeals related to collectivism is shown in figure 4. In this case, the message appeals about being part of a social

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group. The photo of a group of employees is directly linked to a sense of belonging and common ideals.

Figure 4: Corporate message on a Dutch Facebook page that uses the communication appeal “appeal about the integrity of or belonging to a family or social group”.

 **Gemalto** added 8 new photos.
May 19 at 4:59pm · 🌐

39 employees from Polanco and Iztapalapa represented Gemalto in the 2015 Corporate Run race in Mexico City. More than 3,000 runners enjoyed running in Chapultepec, one of the world's greatest urban parks. Team spirit, fun and sweat!

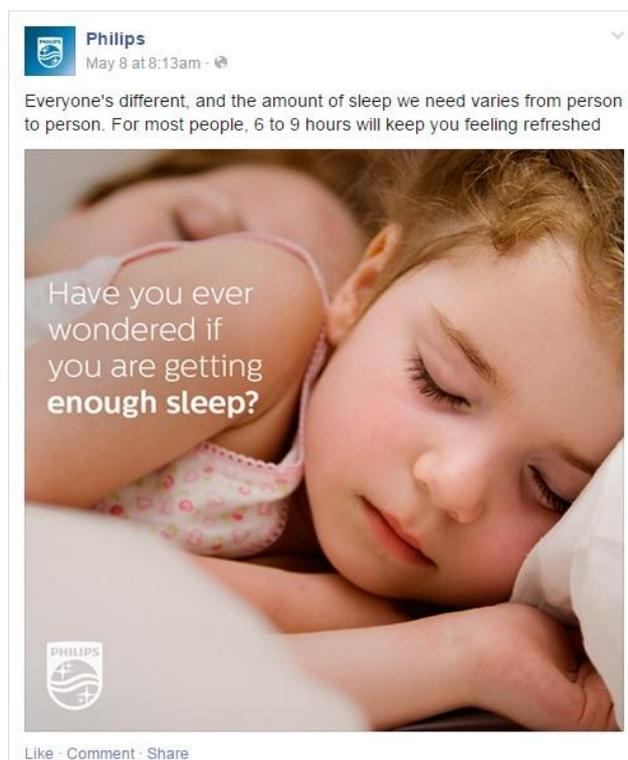


Another independent-sample t-test revealed a trend towards statistical significance when Brazil and the Netherlands were compared regarding the use of individualistic appeals ($t(68.59) = 1.96, p = .054$). Looking at the descriptive statistics, Dutch companies ($M = .12, SD = .18$) tended to present more often communication appeals associated to individualistic values on Facebook than the Brazilian organizations ($M = .05, SD = .12$).

See Figure 5 as an example of a Dutch company applying an individualistic value. In this Facebook message the appeal about the individuality or independence of the audience is employed. This post emphasizes the uniqueness of the audience by affirming that everyone is different and also outlines that every individual has different needs.

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Figure 5: Corporate message on a Dutch Facebook page applying the communication appeal “appeal about the individuality or independence of the audience”



Several independent-sample t-tests demonstrated that there were no significant differences between Brazil and the Netherlands regarding the use of communication appeals that are related to high power distance ($t(67.50) = 1.18, p = .241$), nor to the ones related to low power distance ($t(78) = .28, p = .778$), high context ($t(78) = .77, p = .446$), and low context ($t(78) = .58, p = .560$) (see Table 5).

Table 5: Means and standard deviations of Brazilian and Dutch corporate Facebook pages regarding the reflection of cultural values.

Cultural values	Brazil		The Netherlands	
	$n = 40$		$n = 40$	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Collectivism	.39	.30	.53	.32
Individualism	.05	.12	.12	.18
High power distance	.02	.11	.06	.17
Low power distance	.09	.19	.10	.20
High context	.27	.20	.31	.19
Low context	.30	.27	.33	.24

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Since there might be a relation between country and the use of each communication appeal, chi-square tests were also carried out. However, this time the investigation was done with each appeal individually, instead of grouping them according to cultural value.

A chi-square test found a significant relationship between country (Brazil and the Netherlands) and the use of associations with a particular situation, type of person or lifestyle ($\chi^2(1) = 6.40, p = .011$) in corporate messages on Facebook. This means that the frequency of associations with a lifestyle is different for Brazil and the Netherlands. Therefore, the higher the number of corporate messages, the higher is the frequency of this appeal in Dutch corporate messages. While this communication appeal was present nine times in Dutch corporate messages, the analyzed Brazilian corporate posts only presented this appeal one time.

A Dutch corporate page, for instance, applied the communication appeal “relation to a symbolic association with a celebrity or lifestyle” on a corporate message in the figure (6). In this Facebook post, the multinational Unilever announces a partnership with the worldwide famous chef Jamie Oliver and encourages users to actively participate in a charity campaign. Besides of the advantage of linking its name with a known sponsor and attracting a specific audience that appreciates high-end cooking, the organization is likely intending to receive from online followers a positive reaction to the generous work directed to education.

Figure 6: Corporate message on Facebook that uses the communication appeal “relation to a symbolic association with a celebrity or lifestyle”.



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Chi-squares tests demonstrated that there were no associations between country (Brazil and the Netherlands) and reflection of interdependent relationships with others ($\chi^2 (1) = 1.14, p = .286$) nor appeals to popularity or emphasis on conformity or harmony ($\chi^2 (1) = 2.91, p = .088$), or in the use of appeals about integrity of or belonging to a family or social group ($\chi^2 (1) = .09, p = .768$). Moreover, there were no significant relations between country and the following appeals: in the application of appeals about the individuality of the audience ($\chi^2 (1) = .82, p = .366$), emphasis on uniqueness ($\chi^2 (1) = 2.67, p = .102$), reflections of self-reliance ($\chi^2 (1) = .46, p = .649$), appeals to high social status ($\chi^2 (1) = 1.29, p = .257$), appeals to humility ($\chi^2 (1) = .07, p = .796$), appeals to emotion ($\chi^2 (1) = .08, p = .773$), use of metaphors ($\chi^2 (1) = 3.00, p = .083$), emphasis on products features ($\chi^2 (1) = .02, p = .879$), mentions of comparative claims ($\chi^2 (1) = .25, p = .617$), addressing the consumers’ practical needs ($\chi^2 (1) = 1.47, p = .225$).

An independent-samples t-test found a significant difference between Brazil and the Netherlands regarding the use of the appeals to popularity or emphasis on conformity or harmony ($t (73.83) = 2.02, p = .046$). The Netherlands ($M = .38, SD = .50$) were shown to have a higher frequency of popularity appeals than the Brazilian companies on Facebook ($M = .18, SD = .38$).

The present study also checked for the frequencies of the use of communication appeals, which are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6: Frequencies of the communication appeals used by Brazil and the Netherlands.

Cultural values	Appeals	Brazil	The Netherlands
Collectivism	Interdependence	18	25
	Popularity/conformity	7	15
	Belonging to a social Group	22	24
Individualism	Individuality/independence	2	7
	Uniqueness	1	5
	Self-fulfillment	3	2
High power distance	High social status	2	5
	Vanity, glamour luxury	0	0
Low power distance	Humility/down-to-earth	7	8
	Inexpensiveness	0	0
High context culture	Emotional appeals/ intangible	23	25

features			
	Symbols/metaphors	9	3
	Celebrity/lifestyle association	1	9
Low context culture	Product features	21	22
	Comparative claims	9	7
	Consumers’ practical needs	6	11

Conclusion and discussion

The present study attempted to investigate how organization-stakeholder dialogue is developed by Brazilian and Dutch organizations on Facebook, in terms of relationship-building strategies and of depiction of cultural values. Dialogue is an effective tactic for global corporations to practice ethical public relations, which, according to Person (1989), can be achieved by engaging and nurturing communication relationships with audiences that have stakes in the company. Furthermore, Grunig (1992, p. 20) defined public relations as the practice of “building relationships with publics that constrain or enhance the ability of the organization to meet its mission”.

Firstly, the goal of the present investigation was to shed light on the usage of online relationship-building strategies applied on Brazilian and Dutch corporate Facebook pages. The findings of the present study indicated no differences between the two countries regarding the use of the aforementioned dialogic approach, which is an unexpected outcome. Considering that the two countries examined in the present research differ greatly in terms of cultural orientations (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001), it was likely that Brazil – a collectivist society that has a high context style of communication – and the Netherlands – an individualistic society where people tend to have a low context communication style – would apply these strategies differently. The relationship strategy of disclosure is associated to corporate pages of low context cultures (in this case, the Netherlands) (Waters & Lo, 2012). Whereas the strategy of interactivity and involvement would be usually more present in SNSs pages of individualistic cultures, therefore Dutch pages were more likely to employ this strategy than Brazil (Waters & Lo, 2012).

The results are contradictory to the study of Men and Tsai (2012), which investigated social networking sites as well. In this earlier research, Chinese and American companies varied with regard to the application of the subcategories of the online cultivation strategies. The present study, on the other hand, revealed no differences between Brazil and the Netherlands in the use of these subcategories. The fact that Brazilian and Dutch companies

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did not differ in the use of the strategies concurs with Waters and Lo’s (2012) investigation. These authors stressed that the Internet, specifically Facebook, is an open online environment, which allows for individuals to either follow their preexisting cultural values or gives space for the formation of a virtual culture. This means that the Internet, due to its global exchange of content, offers the chance of cultural alterations and explorations by its participants (Waters & Lo, 2012).

Because the Brazilian and Dutch practitioners did not follow the expected cultural values when employing relationship-building strategies, it is possible that a virtual culture may be developing between the two nations. The trade relations between the two countries may be one of the reasons why this virtual culture is existing. As stated before, the Netherlands is the fourth export destination for Brazilian products (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2015). These relations may have an effect on the global communication of Dutch and Brazilian organizations. The commercial interactions between the two nations may influence the way both countries communicate with international audiences. Due to this constant exchange of products as well as the contact with people who trade them, Dutch and Brazilian companies are finding new ways of managing their social networking sites and may be incorporating the cultural values and practices of their trade partners into their organizational communication.

Another reason to explain this virtual culture between the two countries regarding the use of relationship-building strategies is the layout of Facebook pages. Considering that the relationship-building strategies are based on the use of technical features part of corporate Facebook pages, it might be possible that the standard layout for these pages explains the unexpected results of the present investigation. The fact that all the companies are given the same layout in their corporate pages might be the reason why the two countries did not present any significant differences in the application of the relationship-building strategies. If the features are the same for all business Facebook pages, it is likely that all the companies will use every resource available. This might also be an explanation for the high frequency of applying the online strategies throughout the sample.

Finally, the high frequency of relationship-building strategies applied by the practitioners of the two countries demonstrates that both are using this tactic of creating dialogue to its full potential. This contradicts previous studies (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009; Men & Tsai, 2012; Waters et al., 2009). An explanation for this outcome is that companies are investing on Facebook communication due to the broad reach this social networking site

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possesses nowadays – the number of daily active users on Facebook is of 936 million on average (Facebook.com, 2015).

The present study also concerned the depiction of cultural values on corporate content through Facebook as another option of creating dialogues with audiences. Classical theoretical frameworks described how relationships among individuals and therefore cultural values differ considerably across countries (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1991). An evident expansion of this thinking is that the cultural values present in offline settings would also be applied by individuals in an online context. Therefore, a recent stream of research is exploring the impact of culture on the Internet (Burgmann, Kitchen & Williams, 2006; Singh & Matsuo, 2004; Tsai & Men, 2012). Andersen (2005) mentioned that marketing dialogue contributes to brand involvement and loyalty, which eventually leads to fulfilling relationships with the audiences. Adaptation of organizational content to specific cultures may be an effective tactic for attracting users to interact with corporations (Singh et al., 2005).

To gain insight into how practitioners initiate dialogues on Facebook, the present study investigated whether communication appeals related to specific cultural values were reflected in the corporate content of organizational pages. Evidence showed that the two countries were significantly different only in the depiction of collectivism values. Strikingly, the Dutch companies (an individualist society) presented more communication appeals corresponding to collectivism than Brazil, which actually scores higher in that cultural dimension. Moreover, Brazil and the Netherlands did not vary in the depiction of high and low power distance, and of high and low context culture, which is also unexpected as the two nations differ with regard to these values.

These results seem inconsistent with what Tsai and Men (2012) revealed, in which corporations followed their country-bound cultural orientations while interacting with online publics on SNSs. In Tsai and Men’s (2012) study, the corporate efforts on social networking sites by companies from China and the United States were employed mainly according to cultural orientations. The Chinese were found to reflect in their corporate content a higher frequency of collectivist, high power distance and high context culture appeals than the corporate messages of the United States (Tsai & Men, 2012).

An explanation for the outcomes regarding the communication appeals may again be the possible development of a “virtual cultural region”, which is due to the interactive abilities of the Internet (Johnston & Johal, 1999). Previous scholarship has defended the theory that, because individuals constantly exchange information online, individuals (including global communicators) of different cultural backgrounds influence each other and this leads

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eventually to a sharing of the same global values, beliefs and behaviors (Johnston & Johal, 1999, Waters & Lo, 2012). Therefore, traditional cultural orientations may not guide the online behaviors of users and communicators when they participate in conversations on Facebook. Also, as outlined earlier, the close trade relations between Brazil and the Netherlands may also be a reason for a virtual culture and help explaining the results of the present study.

According to Johnston and Johal (1999) users emphasized a sense of collectivism and a strong willingness of sharing information in the early stages of the Internet expansion. Furthermore, an important aspect of social networking sites is the regular user-generated content creation. Because of this collaborative nature, social networking sites are by principle collectivistic. Consequently, it is plausible that this sense of community may have also influenced the results of the present study. Even though Dutch corporate communicators appealed to collectivistic values more than the Brazilian companies, both groups of companies showed a high employment of these value-bound appeals – The Netherlands ($M = .53$, $SD = .32$) and Brazil ($M = .39$, $SD = .30$).

Furthermore, there was a trend on the use of communication appeals associated to individualistic values: Dutch companies ($M = .12$, $SD = .18$) tended to present more often these communication appeals on Facebook than the Brazilian organizations ($M = .05$, $SD = .12$). This trend is expected and according to the individualistic values of the Netherlands. Also, this outcome is in line with what Tsai and Men (2012) revealed: organizations seem to follow their offline cultural values when interacting with publics on social networking sites.

Also, the companies of the present study had a high frequency of corporate messages which emphasized product features and characteristics, although no significant differences were found between the two groups. These results concur with those of Tsai and Men (2012), who justified that the similarities between two countries with different communication styles – the use of this kind of communication appeal is associated with low-context cultures – is caused by the fact that SNSs nowadays are used intensively to advertise product-related information.

Another result of the present study was the relationship between country and the use of associations with a particular situation or with a type of person or type of lifestyle. Dutch communicators applied this communication appeal more frequently on Facebook than Brazilian ones. This was also an unexpected result, because associations with a lifestyle are related to high power distance cultures, which is not the case for the Netherlands. This outcome could be explained by the fact that in SNSs, celebrities have their own personal

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profiles, which facilitates the contact and consequent association between users in the network.

Limitations and further research

There are certain limitations to the outcomes of the present study. The results discussed here only apply to the companies which were subject of the present analysis. Future research should have a greater sample size in order to be able to derive more general statements with regard to the online behavior of Brazilian and Dutch communicators.

Brazilian companies tend to focus on their local market; therefore they mostly adopt Portuguese as the corporate language on Facebook pages. This implies that there is only a small number of Brazilian multinationals using English on Facebook, which thus limited the analyses of the present study. Even in cases of Brazilian companies managing an international page, in many situations these corporate online spaces interacted with users in both Portuguese and English, which can be confusing to non-Brazilian audiences. Follow-up studies should focus on online channels that use the native language of Brazil and the Netherlands. It should be analyzed, if there are culture specific online communication patterns when companies interact in their native language.

Another limitation concerning the Brazilian sample was the fact that some of the organizations did not post messages often on their pages. According to Kent and Taylor (2002, p.24), dialogue is “a product of ongoing communication.” Consequently, if companies are failing at maintaining a constant interaction with their online stakeholders, dialogue cannot be properly achieved by global communicators. It is worthwhile for future investigations to check whether this lack of initiative affects the perceptions of users about the corporate pages.

There is the need of a follow-up study to verify which relationship-building strategies and communication appeals are more efficient in order to create successful dialogues with Facebook audiences of different cultural orientations. It is still to be shown whether the adaptation of communication strategies or the application of values related to a virtual culture are more successful when engaging publics in conversations. Future research should also look into the response of the public to corporate efforts that intend to create dialogue. Additionally, the subsequent and indirect outcomes of an effective stakeholder dialogue should be the subject of further investigations.

Another aspect that should be taken into account by a follow-up study is the frequency and effectiveness of companies replying to users. Although both countries scored high results in

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that category, it needs to be evaluated whether the dialogue loop has positive results with the audience and how often it is accomplished.

In order to attest if the theory of a “virtual culture” is applicable to Facebook, more research should be done in the field, including investigations focusing on other cultural settings (other nations) and on other social networking sites.

In conclusion, although country specific differences were expected in the employment of online-relationship strategies and in the reflection of cultural values in corporate content by Brazil and the Netherlands, the outcomes of the present study showed that organizations are using Facebook differently from their traditional cultural orientations. Because of the constant exchange of information between users from different cultures, the Internet became an interesting environment for companies to promote their products and most of all, to engage in relationships with important stakeholders through the creation of dialogues. The present study contributes to research in the field by providing a description of how Dutch and Brazilian companies are using Facebook and by revealing that there is a possible virtual culture where communicators do not necessarily follow their local values. Therefore, a practical implication of this could be, that multinationals of emerging markets (e.g. Brazil) may be following social media practices of more developed countries (e.g. the Netherlands), which implies that organizations planning on investing in emerging countries might not need to adapt their online communication to this audience.

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Appendix A

Table A1: List of all companies analyzed in the present study.

Brazilian companies	Dutch companies
Bematech	Aegon
Braskem	Akzo Nobel
Embraer	ASML
Gerdau	Gemalto
Natura	Philips
Odebrecht	Randstad
Stefanini	Unilever
Totvs	Wolters
Tam	KLM

Appendix B

Table B1: Coding scheme adapted from Men and Tsai (2009) and from Waters et al. (2009) and used in the present study for the analysis of online relationship-building strategies on Facebook.

Strategy	Category	Definition/ Example
Disclosure: refers to the willingness of the organization to engage in direct and open conversation with publics.	Description of the company's programs and services	Information about the company's activities in the "about" section. E.g., "We are a global financial institution offering banking services".
	Organizational history	Any information regarding past events of the company present on the "about" section. A date of foundation, for example, communicates the history of the organization. For example, "Started in 1991".
	Mission statement	Information about the purpose of the company presented in the "about" section. (e.g., "Our purpose therefore is: Empowering people to stay a step ahead in life and in business", "our commitment".)
	Organization's website	URLs to the organization's official website in the "about" section of the Facebook page. (e.g., www.ing.com)
Information Dissemination: addresses the needs, concerns, and interests of publics while promoting organizational information and accomplishments.	News items	URLs to external media coverage (e.g., "Did you go Dutch on Valentine's day? http://www.cnbc.com/id/102423802 ")
	Photographs	Images that are part of the communication material of the company and were shared on

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		Facebook.
	Videos and audios	Videos or audio files or links that are part of the communication material of the company and were shared on Facebook.
	Announcements and press releases	Links or messages regarding the company’s activities. (e.g., “We are celebrating 10-year partnership with UNICEF! See how the access to education for 1 million children improved through this partnership. http://bit.ly/ING_UNICEF_10years ”)
Interactivity and involvement: deals with the tactics to develop relationship by attempting to engage with online stakeholders.	Organizational contact information	For example, e-mail, phone number, physical address.
	Sharing to one’s own page	Sharing URL of the company’s website on the Facebook page timeline in the form of a post. (e.g. “We are excited to hear your ideas on the future of banking. Sign up before 29 April: https://www.ing.jobs/Neth.../Traineeships/ING-Inhouse-days.htm ”)
	Company response to user posts	Comments or likes made by the company in reply to users’ comments. (e.g., “Hi, user, on this link you can look up your country and find ING's official social media accounts for your country.”)

Note: The examples and explanations used to build this coding scheme were adapted from the studies of Men and Tsai (2012) and of Water et al. (2009), from real corporate pages and from examples of the sample used in the present research.

Table B2: Coding scheme adapted from Tsai and Men (2012) and used in the present study for the analysis of communication appeals on Facebook.

Cultural value	Definition	Approach/ Example
Collectivism	<p>Reflection of interdependent relationships with others. The relationship may be between company and consumers or company and employees. Also, partnership with other companies.</p> <p>Appeals to popularity of products or services among groups. Emphasis on conformity or harmony between individuals by following social rules.</p>	<p>E.g., “We”, “our”, “together”, “friends”, and “peers”.</p> <p>Claims of popularity, e.g., showing a social group consuming the product or focusing on using the product to fit a group norm. Also, “entertainment” posts on popular culture trends not directly related to the products (e.g. a cosmetic company posting “Tea is still the most popular drink in China today. What type of tea is your favorite?”)</p>

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	Appeals about the integrity of belonging to a family or social group. Collective benefits.	Photos of groups representing communities. Or, for example, “being busy business professionals” or “college freshmen, embark on new beginnings”.
Individualism	Appeals about the individuality or independence of the audience. Photos of individuals that emphasize their personal identity.	Evokes self-sufficiency, self-reliance, autonomy, unattached. E.g., “do it yourself”, “independent”.
	Emphasis on uniqueness or originality of the audience.	“What is your signature style?”; “What’s your favorite?”
	Reflections of self-reliance of the audience or hedonism.	Stresses personal goals instead of group norms. E.g., showcasing a solitary trekker hiking through mountains to accomplish his self-actualization goal.
High power distance	Appeals to high social status.	Featuring celebrities (pop culture or important people of a field of work) in high/end settings to accentuate power, wealth, and elitism.

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	Appeals to vanity/expensiveness.	Expensiveness, extravagance, luxury. E.g., “glamour”.
Low power distance	Appeals to humility.	Down-to-earth appeals and association with common folk, which imply humility and egalitarianism. E.g., “ordinary people”
	Emphasis on inexpensiveness.	Evoking affordability. E.g.: “cheap”.
High context	Appeals to emotion or addressing the affective or intangible aspects of a product.	Emphasizing the intangible aspects (e.g. image) and subjective features of the product, rather than its tangible aspects or practical benefits. E.g. a happy family using the product. Also, using emotions to connect with the audience.
	Use of metaphors or aesthetic expressions.	“But, what you really need is a home... IKEA gives you a real feeling of home.” Also includes photo.
	Association with a particular situation, type of person, or lifestyle.	E.g. a celebrity endorser.

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Low context	Emphasis on product features and functional value of the product or projects that the company is working on.	“Efficient”, “fast”.
	Mention of competitive products or use of comparative claims.	“Number one”, “leader”, “best”, “better”.
	Addressing the consumers’ practical, functional or utilitarian need.	“Discover how to write, publish and write your book. Click here to get your free ebook.”

Note: The examples and explanations used to build this coding scheme were adapted from the studies of Tsai and Men(2012), from real corporate pages and from examples of the sample used in the present research.