

Social network use reflects East-West disparity

EurekaAlert!



EAST LANSING, Mich. — The stark contrast between America's "me-first" culture and the "collective-good" mentality in China is reflected in the two countries' use of social networking sites, according to a new study led by a Michigan State University scholar.

U.S. citizens spend more time on the networking sites, consider them to be more important and have more "friends" on the sites, the research found. The most popular social networking site in the United States is Facebook; in China it's Ozone.

Linda Jackson, MSU professor of psychology, said Chinese citizens tend to be more interested in real-world relationships than online friendships and less inclined toward the self-promotion that's popular on sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

"In the United States, it's all about promoting yourself and taking credit for positive outcomes and denying blame for negative outcomes," Jackson said. "In China, it's the opposite. If something bad happens, you take the blame and talk about how you can improve. If something good happens, the credit is shared for the good of the group."

Jackson and Jin-Liang Wang, a researcher at China's Southwest University, surveyed more than 400 college-aged residents from each country on their use of social network sites. The results are published in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*.

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The study found that U.S. participants spent nearly twice as long on social networking sites (nearly 52 minutes a day) compared with Chinese participants (about 28 minutes a day). Further, nearly a fifth (19 percent) of Chinese participants said they almost never use social networking sites, compared to just 4 percent in the United States.

Jackson said the Chinese parenting style likely plays a role in the disparity. Chinese parents emphasize effort as a means to achievement and success, she said, and using social networking sites is not consistent with this focus as it takes away from schoolwork. "Thus, Chinese parents may discourage or even forbid their children from using social networking sites," Jackson said.

Chinese children also are less likely than U.S. children to have multiple computers in the home. Because of the communal nature of Chinese culture, many homes have just one computer, located in a shared space.

But Jackson doesn't see it as an issue with access. "If Chinese students really wanted to go online more, they easily could, whether it's at home or at school. It's more of a motivation factor," she said.

"It becomes a question of what's important in life. In China, it's more important to sit down for a family dinner or concentrate on your homework or help your parents clean the house."

Ultimately, Jackson said she's concerned about the potential negative effects of spending an increasing amount of time online.

"Because we are essentially social creatures, I cannot see good coming out of social isolation and practices that encourage aloneness and solitary activities," she said. "And a lot of technology does this."

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