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Reasons for Facebook Usage: Data From 46 Countries

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INTRODUCTION

Seventy-nine percent of internet users use Facebook, and on average they access Facebook eight times a day (Greenwood et al., 2016). To put these numbers into perspective, according to Clement (2019), around 30% of the world’s population uses this Online Social Network (OSN) site. Despite the constantly growing body of academic research on Facebook (Chou et al., 2009; Back et al., 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; McAndrew and Jeong, 2012; Wilson et al., 2012; Krasnova et al., 2017), there remains limited research regarding the motivation behind Facebook use across different cultures. Our main goal was to collect data from a large cross-cultural sample of Facebook users to examine the roles of sex, age, and, most importantly, cultural differences underlying Facebook use.

Cultural Differences

According to Clement (2019), the current total number of active monthly Facebook users is ~2.45 billion, including 183 million from the USA and 307 million from Europe, together constituting only 2% of the total number of Facebook users. Nevertheless, most previous research has focused on these two populations (e.g., USA: Ellison et al., 2006, 2007; Lampe et al., 2006; Stern et al., 2007; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Sheldon, 2008; Ophus and Abbitt, 2009; Pempek et al., 2009; Valenzuela et al., 2009; Smock et al., 2011; Europe: Joinson, 2008; Brandtzæg and Heim, 2009; Madge et al., 2009; Selwyn, 2009). This leaves the remaining 98% of the world’s population of Facebook users almost unattended.

Among a few noteworthy exceptions, Abbas and Mesch (2015) investigated the role of cultural values in motivations for using Facebook among Palestinian youth in Israel. Blachnio et al. (2016) explored cultural and personality determinants of Facebook intrusion among eight countries from three continents. Jackson and Wang (2013) compared American and Chinese societies on the use of social networking sites. Finally, Ji et al. (2010) examined the use of social network services across American, Korean, and Chinese populations.

It is, thus, not surprising that many scholars stress the importance of cultural differences with regard to Facebook usage (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012; Wilson et al., 2012; Hsu et al., 2015), as cultural norms affect one’s behavior in the context of online communication (Gevorgyan and Manucharova, 2009). For instance, people from individualistic cultures more often seek out information on social media sites, while people from collectivistic cultures tend to use social media more with an aim to obtain emotional support (Kim et al., 2011; USA & South Korea). The results of a study by Hsu et al. (2015; Australia, Austria, Japan, Taiwan, and USA) provided similar results, highlighting a major role of socialization and self-presentation in Facebook use among users from collectivist cultures.

Not only do scientists acknowledge the likely existence of cross-cultural differences in general motivations to use Facebook among distant and distinctive cultures (Wilson et al., 2012), studies also report differences in Facebook behaviors between seemingly similar countries (e.g., Strayhorn, 2009; Tsoi and Chen, 2011; Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012). For example, people using Facebook in the UK value group-related content more than American users do, whereas Italian users rate groups and games as their most important online activities. It has also been reported that Greek Facebook users are less concerned with status updates in comparison with British, Italian, American, and French users (Vasalou et al., 2010). French users rate the motive of keeping in touch as more important than do Hong Kong users, while Hong Kong users display stronger preferences for communication, seeking and sharing information through Facebook (Tsoi and Chen, 2011). Finally, ethnic minorities appear to use Facebook more often than Caucasians do (for a review see: Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012); scholars of a non-Caucasian origin also use Online Social Networks more frequently than their Caucasian counterparts (Strayhorn, 2009).

Sex Differences

Are there sex differences in Facebook usage? According to Clement (2019), 54% of Facebook users declare to be a woman. Research conducted by Lin and Lu (2011; Taiwan) showed that the key factors for men’s Facebook usage are “usefulness” and “enjoyment.” Women, on the other hand, appear more susceptible to peer influence. This is concurrent with the findings of Muise et al. (2009; Canada), in which longer times spent on Facebook correlated with more frequent episodes of jealousy-related behaviors and feelings of envy among women, but not men. Similarly, in Denti et al. (2012), Swedish women who spent more time on Facebook reported feeling less happy and less content with their life; this relationship was not observed among men.

In general, women tend to have larger Facebook networks (Stefanone et al., 2010; USA), and engage in more Facebook activities than men do (McAndrew and Jeong, 2012; USA; but see Smock et al., 2011; USA, who reported that women use Facebook chat less frequently than men). Another study (Makashvili et al., 2013; Georgia) provided evidence that women exceed men in Facebook usage due to their stronger desire to maintain contact with friends and share photographs, while men more frequently use Facebook to pass time and build new relationships.

Age Differences

Early research showed that younger Facebook users tend to spend more time on Online Social Networks, and have a greater number of Facebook friends compared with older users (Joinson, 2008; UK). At the same time, young people are more likely to increase their profile’s privacy. This may be due to the fact that older users have a relatively limited number of friends on their online friends list, typically invited, or accepted more carefully, thus, their need to secure their privacy is lower than among young users, who have a wider variety of friends, some of whom they met online (Dhir et al., 2017). This course of explanation is in line with Quinn et al. (2011; UK), who provided evidence that younger users (aged 15–30) have on average 11 times more Facebook friends than do older users (aged 50+).

Despite the fact that not all Facebook users are adolescents or young adults, most studies to date have been conducted specifically among such populations, leaving more mature users unattended (Manzi et al., 2018; Italy, Chile). Among the few
exceptions are the studies of Oleszkiewicz et al. (2017), who examined emoticon usage on a large, diverse sample; Ançu (2012), who investigated motives for Facebook usage among American elders (50+); Newman et al. (2019), who attempted to develop a measurement of social network use in older adults (UK); and Rattanasimakul (2015), who compared motivations and gratifications of Facebook use among three age groups (Thailand). Thus, building on the aforementioned research, one of our goals was to examine Facebook activities among different age cohorts (including middle-aged and senior adults).

The Current Data
Conducting studies within only a limited number of countries or only within “Western” countries limits general conclusions about online social networking, as culture is an important predictor of various aspects of human behavior, including Facebook use (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012; Wilson et al., 2012; Hsu et al., 2015). To fill this gap, we aimed to investigate differences in reasons for Facebook usage (i.e., individual activities that draw people to use Facebook), using a large-scale cross-cultural sample (examining also sex and age of our participants).

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Participants
A total of 16,465 individuals from 46 countries (68 study sites) participated in this research. Of these, 11,765 participants reported using Facebook and thus were included in analyses (see Table 1), whereas 4,700 (28.5%) were excluded from further analysis as individuals who did not meet the study criteria (i.e., do not use Facebook), or did not complete the questionnaire.

In order to create a diverse and yet comparable samples from each country as possible, members of the research team were instructed to recruit half of their participants from samples of local students, and the other half from the local community at large. From study sites that kept records of the source of their samples (22 countries), 47.14% of participants came from community samples. We exercised great care to ensure similar recruitment methods in all study sites, which included poster adverts, emails, and word-of-mouth. Participants were not compensated for their participation in the study.

Procedure
Prior to data collection, the corresponding author discussed the questionnaire with all the collaborating research groups. In those countries where English was not a first or primary language, participants could complete the questionnaire in their native language. This procedure involved translating the measures from English into the native language, and then, by a different collaborator, back-translating the questionnaire items into English. Any differences in translated versions were then discussed until an agreement was made on the most appropriate translation (Brislin, 1970). If there was more than one study site from each country, all local groups were asked to participate in the translation process.

As internet surveys tend to be under-representative, especially in developing countries (Batres and Perrett, 2014), all data were collected in person by a network of research teams. The instructions for participants were as follows: “You are being asked to participate in an anonymous survey study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. This survey was designed to compare various variables and constructs around the world—it will be completed by participants in 40 countries. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers in this survey (what matters are your opinions). If you wish to participate, please continue with the questionnaire. If not, please do not complete the questionnaire” (English version). After providing informed, written consent to participate in the study, participants were given a set of questionnaires, including the current Facebook scale, and several unrelated questionnaires in the context of a broader cross-cultural research project (see e.g., Conroy-Beam et al., 2019a,b). (1) The instructions for completing the Facebook scale were as follows: “Do you use Facebook? Yes/No (if no, please continue to the next scale); (2) Please use the scale below (ranging from 1—very rarely, to 5—very often) to assess how often you use Facebook for the following purposes” (see Measures below). Participants completed questionnaires in ~30 min. Data were collected simultaneously across all locations, and then coded, standardized, and merged into one dataset.

Measures
We examined individual reasons for Facebook usage using a 13-item scale, constructed for the purpose of this study and based on previous research (Steinfeld et al., 2008; Vasalou et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2012; Krasnova et al., 2017). The scale listed the most common and recurring reasons for Facebook use: to keep in touch with friends, reconnect with people with whom one has lost contact, relieve boredom, organize or join events, join groups, to present one’s opinions and beliefs, see what friends are doing, inform others of what one is doing, post and share photos, write private messages, make new friends, date new people, and look at the profiles of people one does not know (see https://figshare.com/s/68f306f31958d9a5c0c0, for English version of the scale). Participants reported how often they use Facebook for each of the 13 aforementioned reasons (on a Likert scale, ranging from 1—very rarely, to 5—very often). The questionnaire also included basic socioeconomic measures (e.g., sex, age, material situation, see database under the link: https://figshare.com/s/68f306f31958d9a5c0c0).

Strengths and Limitations
The present dataset has several strengths, which distinguish it from other studies: (1) it was conducted on a large number of participants (N = 11,765); (2) we considered six different regions of the world (Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, Latin America, and North America), some of which have only been included in a handful of previous studies (e.g., Australia & Asia: Hsu et al., 2015; Asia: Kim et al., 2011; Makashvili et al., 2013); (3) all participants filled in the same questionnaires; (4) all persons took part in the study in the same years; (5) we measured additional variables, which may be useful in further analyses, replications and extensions of the current research (i.e., sex, age, education level, years of study, economic situation, and religious affiliation).
TABLE 1 | Country, study sites, number of participants from each country, mean age (with SD), and sex ratio.

| Country | Study sites | Participants | Mean age (SD) | Sex ratio (% males) |
|---------|-------------|--------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Africa  |             | 895          | 25.69 (SD = 6.56) | 462 (52%) |
| Algeria | Algiers; Setif | 431          | 26.33 (SD = 6.73) | 197 (45%) |
| Nigeria | nsukka       | 272          | 25.31 (SD = 5.82) | 143 (53%) |
| Uganda  | Gulu; Gamba   | 192          | 24.80 (SD = 7.01) | 122 (64%) |
| Asia    |             | 2,362        | 26.24 (SD = 8.26) | 1,015 (43%) |
| China   | Beijing      | 192          | 26.12 (SD = 9.02) | 93 (48%) |
| India   | Delhi        | 304          | 25.41 (SD = 8.88) | 162 (53%) |
| Indonesia | Jakarta; Yogyakarta | 68 | 20.05 (SD = 2.27) | 26 (38%) |
| Iran    | Shiraz       | 112          | 25.80 (SD = 6.71) | 52 (46%) |
| Jordan  | Ma’an        | 166          | 21.56 (SD = 4.28) | 92 (55%) |
| Malaysia | Sintok; Kuala Lumpur | 179 | 29.62 (SD = 10.36) | 80 (44%) |
| Pakistan | Iahore; Islamabad; Karachi | 606 | 26.75 (SD = 8.42) | 245 (40%) |
| Russia  | Moscow; Ussuriisk | 104 | 27.41 (SD = 8.91) | 39 (37%) |
| South Korea | Seoul | 141 | 26.35 (SD = 9.57) | 70 (56%) |
| Vietnam | Hanoi       | 489          | 27.20 (SD = 6.47) | 146 (29%) |
| Australia | Canberra | 425          | 27.58 (SD = 9.02) | 202 (48%) |
| Europe  |             | 6,281        | 27.02 (SD = 9.32) | 2,826 (45%) |
| Austria | Vienna      | 160          | 23.46 (SD = 6.15) | 37 (23%) |
| Belgium | Louvain la Neuve | 372 | 28.68 (SD = 8.80) | 167 (44%) |
| Bulgaria | Blagoevgrad; Sofia | 113 | 23.89 (SD = 7.87) | 41 (36%) |
| Croatia | Zagreb      | 299          | 24.63 (SD = 9.37) | 135 (45%) |
| Estonia | Tartu       | 182          | 26.04 (SD = 7.89) | 83 (45%) |
| Georgia | Tbilisi     | 189          | 27.66 (SD = 10.88) | 93 (49%) |
| Germany | Dresden     | 79           | 26.76 (SD = 6.99) | 26 (26%) |
| Greece  | Crete; Athens | 115 | 29.68 (SD = 11.25) | 43 (37%) |
| Hungary | Budapest; Pecs; Várpalota; Székesfehérvár; Zalaegerszeg | 779 | 28.66 (SD = 10.26) | 379 (48%) |
| Italy   | Milan       | 325          | 27.42 (SD = 10.55) | 104 (32%) |
| Lithuania | Vilnius | 259          | 26.53 (SD = 8.63) | 128 (49%) |
| Netherlands | Amsterdam | 177 | 28.92 (SD = 11.44) | 65 (36%) |
| Norway  | Trondheim   | 267          | 23.20 (SD = 2.82) | 143 (53%) |
| Poland  | Brzeg; Gdansk; Wroclaw | 448 | 25.68 (SD = 7.25) | 252 (56%) |
| Portugal | Lisbon | 246          | 26.52 (SD = 9.11) | 97 (39%) |
| Romania | Bucharest   | 170          | 25.99 (SD = 8.97) | 84 (49%) |
| Slovakia | Trnava; Nitra | 126 | 26.95 (SD = 7.54) | 51 (40%) |
| Slovenia | Ljubljana; Maribor | 490 | 27.00 (SD = 8.71) | 236 (48%) |
| Spain   | Granada     | 182          | 23.53 (SD = 4.24) | 58 (31%) |
| Sweden  | Stockholm   | 277          | 28.29 (SD = 10.37) | 133 (48%) |
| Turkey  | Istanbul; Izmir | 813 | 28.97 (SD = 10.71) | 369 (45%) |
| Ukraine | Lviv        | 214          | 26.14 (SD = 8.48) | 103 (48%) |
| Latin America |         | 1,602        | 27.55 (SD = 10.67) | 672 (43%) |
| Brazil  | Rio de Janeiro; São Paulo | 279 | 28.77 (SD = 11.57) | 126 (45%) |
| Chile   | Santiago    | 176          | 31.17 (SD = 13.14) | 72 (40%) |
| Colombia | Bogotá; Cucuta; Tunja | 170 | 27.82 (SD = 11.67) | 78 (45%) |
| Costa Rica | San José | 121          | 37.61 (SD = 8.01) | 61 (50%) |
| Cuba    | Havana; Vedera Nueva; Consolación del Sur | 123 | 24.59 (SD = 8.26) | 49 (39%) |
| El Salvador | San Salvador | 86 | 24.10 (SD = 7.46) | 31 (36%) |
| Mexico  | Mexico city | 163          | 25.50 (SD = 7.71) | 67 (32%) |
| Peru    | Lima        | 249          | 21.88 (SD = 6.40) | 92 (36%) |
| Uruguay | Montevideo  | 235          | 28.39 (SD = 10.10) | 96 (40%) |
| North America |           | 200          | 20.75 (SD = 4.35) | 74 (37%) |
| United States | Austin   | 200          | 20.75 (SD = 4.35) | 74 (37%) |
| In total |             | 11,765       | 26.75 (SD = 9.10) | 5,251 (45%) |

Bolded items represent sums for each continent and for the entire dataset.
Despite these contributions, the present dataset has several limitations that hinder drawing general conclusions. First, the study samples from each of the study sites are not representative for the whole of each country, as half of the participants were students, and the other half originated from the local community; some sub-populations or cultural groups may have been excluded. Second, our questionnaire did not include any items related to entertainment (for instance, games), which is a significant omission, as playing games on Facebook has been shown to be a popular activity (Wohn and Lee, 2013). Third, as our questionnaire consisted of one-item questions regarding various reasons for using Facebook, a reliability analysis could not be performed. Last, but not least, we have not collected data on participants’ frequency of Facebook use, Facebook membership duration, and their number of Facebook friends. These variables were previously linked to Facebook usage, so a lack of such data in the present dataset leaves open directions for future research.

Possible Research Paths
Based on the presented dataset, scholars can conduct numerous analyses concerning a broad range of research questions. They can explore reasons for Facebook usage in various cultures, with regard to, for instance, age, sex, country of origin, culture, and numerous other variables. Preliminary analyses (see: https://figshare.com/s/68f306f31958d9a5c0c0) presented statistically significant differences in the range of all identified, individual reasons for Facebook use across continents ($p < 0.001$), but the effect sizes for the given differences were rather small (ranging from 0.01 to 0.10). The highest effect size was observed in presenting opinions ($d = 0.102$). Furthermore, the analysis indicated that there are significant sex differences in all reported reasons for using Facebook, except for presenting opinions and writing private messages. However, the effect sizes for sex differences were small (from dating, $d = 0.211$, higher among men; to reducing the sense of boredom, $d = -0.147$; higher among women). Additionally, there were statistically significant but generally weak relationships between age and several of the reported reasons behind Facebook usage. Nevertheless, age explained <1% of the variation in any declared purpose for Facebook usage. In future analyses, the present dataset and aforementioned differences could also be investigated on a cross-cultural level.

In addition, scientists may apply these data to identify other country-level predictors of Facebook usage. For example, the degree of Facebook usage: degree of individualistic/collectivistic values preferred within a given culture, which can be easily obtained from other online sources (e.g., Hofstede’s culture dimensions: Hofstede, 2001); Schwartz’s value orientations (Schwartz, 2006); degree of Westernization (Gunewardene et al., 2001); or power distance (Hofstede, 2006). Also, as previous research has offered conflicting results regarding the differences (or lack thereof) between different cultures in Facebook usage (Karl et al., 2010; Manzi et al., 2018), the data presented herein (conducted on a large sample across the world) may serve as a reference point for further investigations regarding Online Social Media usage.

Dataset Description
The data in the present paper have been deposited in the Figshare repository and are freely accessible through the following link: https://figshare.com/s/68f306f31958d9a5c0c0 under the name: “Reasons for Facebook usage: data from 46 countries.” The deposit contains five files: Radmė_facebook, containing the basic information regarding the present data, Codebook_facebook, containing definitions of variables and values, along with a short summary of each variable, Database_facebook, containing the raw data, Facebook_questionnaire, containing the English version of the questionnaire, and Preliminary_analysis, containing the comparison regarding sex, age, and cultures (grouped within continents).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
All datasets generated for this study are included in the article/Figshare, under the link: https://figshare.com/s/68f306f31958d9a5c0c0.

ETHICS STATEMENT
This study was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of the Institutional Review Board of the University of Wrocław, and the Declaration of Helsinki. The Institutional Review Board of the Institute of Psychology at the University of Wrocław gave ethical approval for conducting the study. All participants provided written informed consent to participate in the study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS
All authors listed have made substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication. MK, PS, MD, KP, AO, CAI, JC-G, LK, MBu, and PP contributed to the preparation of the manuscript. PS and AS coordinated the project. Remaining authors collected the data.

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