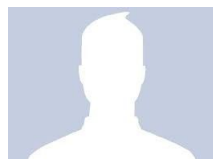


5 Things You Didn't Know About Japanese Social Media

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3 years ago I read an article in the newspaper that compared Japan to the Galapagos islands. **You would think that the Galapagos islands and Japan**



would have nothing in common, but the article said that Japan had developed unique culture the same way that Galapagos has their unique creatures. The Japanese coined the phrase “Galapagos Syndrome” to refer to an isolated development branch of globally available products, which first started with their cellphone market. Japan has so many trends on their own and when it comes to social media, it’s no different. **You would think that social media would be the same in Japan.** Those who have never been to Japan would never realize what is unique and different about Japanese social media. What follows are five of those main differences between Japan and America.

1. Japanese prefer invitation only social networks with people they already know.



In 2004, Mixi was launched as the first Japanese social networking site. It was initially intended as a job-search and recruiting site, but it grew into something much bigger. Ever since launch, Mixi had a monopoly on the Japanese social media field up all the way up to 2008. At its peak, 27 million people or one in five Japanese, owned a mixi account. What was so unique about Mixi and attracted people was its security. **According to Guido Ghedin** the author of “The Story Of Mixi In Japan: The Rise, The Fall And The Facebook Takeover,”: “Mixi is accessible only to Japanese citizens, or to those who have lived for a long time in the country, since a Japanese phone number is required to verify the account - until 2010 new users could sign-up by invitation only.” **In other word, Mixi emphasises security and privacy more than any other social networking site by limiting its members to those who have friends who already have mixi.** In 2006, I was in college in Japan. I got invitation for Mixi from one of my classmate. I had never even heard of Mixi up until that point, as it was advertised only via word of mouth through its existing members. I felt safer joining Mixi rather than Myspace, because I knew who my friends would be and didn’t need to worry about getting any messages in English.

2. Japanese don't want to publish their real name.

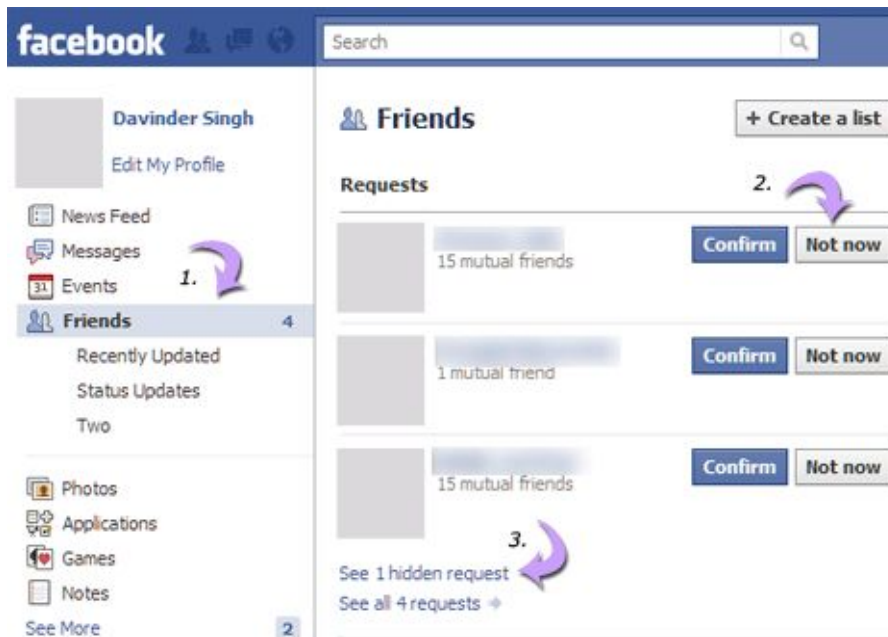
Sorry, your real name is not
Kitty Fluffypants

Please enter your real name or
we will blow your house up.



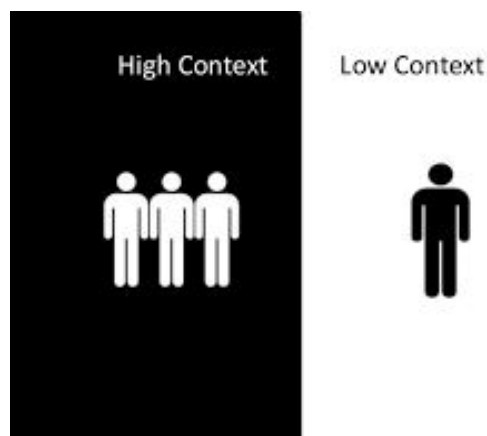
According to the article “Japan’s Sense of Privacy Squashes Social Networking” published in the *Associated Press* on October 20, 2008, the author says “The vast majority of Mixi’s roughly 15 million users don’t reveal anything about themselves. It’s not just Mixi. It’s Japan,” which means they don’t want to reveal their real names on the internet. **I agree that Japanese don’t like to publish their own identity because my experience on Mixi confirms it.** Nearly 95% of my friends used usernames without any personal information. This is the same reason the social network giant, Facebook, struggled to get new users in Japan because of its real name policy. **Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry wrote “Facebook Is Nowhere In Japan,” published in Business Insider on January 10, 2011, stated** “In a survey, 89 percent of Japanese internet users have said they are wary of using their internet names online.” **Gobry’s point is that** since facebook has a real name policy, that causes the Japanese to not be attracted to Facebook.

3. Japanese are too polite, even on social networking.



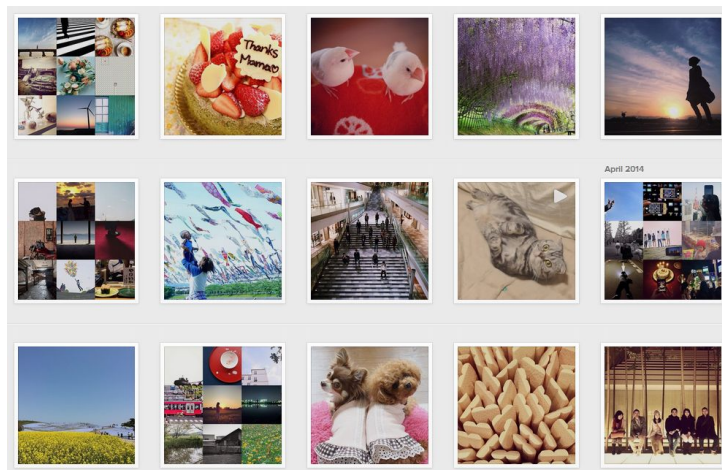
In Japanese culture, it is very rare to be told “no” outright, even if they are uncomfortable saying “yes”. When they want to say no, they avoid using the word no and keep going around and around the answer, expecting the other person to understand that your answer is no. Because of Facebook’s its real name policy, it’s easier for old friends, coworkers, and even a bosses to easily find you and ask to be friends. **Although non Japanese might think they would just ignore or reject the friend request, it is a fact that most Japanese are too worried about their reaction to ignore or reject it. In his article, “The Problem With Facebook In Japan”, author Adam Acar, maintains “Rejecting a friendship request or deleting a member who is not active anymore would be extremely rude in Japan.” I agree with his assessment, and it is a point that needs to emphasized since it is a foreign concept to non Japanese.**

4. Japan is a high context culture.



It is often said that Japan is a high-context culture country. **As the prominent anthropologist Edward T. Hall puts it,** “High-context cultures are relational, collectivist, intuitive, and contemplative. This means that people in these cultures emphasize interpersonal relationships. These cultures are collectivist, preferring group harmony and consensus to individual achievement. Words are not so important as context, which might include the speaker’s tone of voice, facial expression, gestures, posture - and even the person’s family history and status.” **Hall’s theory of Japan being high-context culture is extremely useful because it sheds light on the difficult problem of why facebook was struggling in Japan.** I started using facebook while I was a student in Texas mainly to keep in touch with friends from college until I went back to Japan. I have never replied to a friend request from a stranger. My mom opened her facebook account when I moved to the U.S. in order to watch her grandchildren’s growth and my life in the United States. Two weeks after she opened her account, she told me she is not comfortable using facebook because it kept suggesting people who she may know.

5. The Japanese use Instagram the same way Americans use Pinterest.



Unlike Facebook, the photo sharing site Instagram saw great success and rapid growth in Japan over the past two years. I have followed both American and Japanese friends on my instagram I realized something. The Japanese almost never post pictures of themselves on any social media, and Instagram is no exception. Instead of taking pictures of themselves, they post pictures of foods, pets, and landscapes. Although Youtube was successful in Japan, you'll rarely find a Japanese user making a video on Youtube that shows their face. All those means that once again, Japanese don't like to identify themselves in public even in their pictures.

In conclusion, Japanese adapted social media according to their culture, not the other way around. Social media in Japan is unique, as social media is usually used to bring people together, but Japanese use it to isolate themselves within their previously established groups. If you want to launch a new social networking site in Japan, you will need to think about those traits and customize it to suit the unique sensitivity of the Japanese population. [Word Count: 1112]