

論文

# **Intercultural and Interpersonal Communication Through Social Media:**

## **A Facebook Incident Case Study**

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### **要 旨**

異文化間、個人間のコミュニケーションは、多くのレベルで障害や難題を突きつけられている。加えて、インターネットの登場、ソーシャルメディアの流行、マルチメディアのメッセージ発信サービス（MMS）の利用に伴い、ミスコミュニケーションが増大してさらなる対立が制御不能となる気運が生まれつつある。

以下の異文化間事例研究は、誤解、不和、対立が制御不能となりかねない一例として用いられるよう考案されている。本研究は、クラスルームで用いるための物語り形式で提示され、コミュニケーション不全に陥る際の、文化、時間、サイバー空間の諸側面にわたる特徴を追跡調査する。物語に続き、教師のための参考文献付コメントに加え、学習者のための学習・討論用の設問も提示される。

### **Abstract**

Intercultural and interpersonal communication is fraught with obstacles and challenges on many levels. Additionally, following the advent of the Internet, recent popularity of social media sites, and use of Multimedia Messaging Services (MMS) for daily communi-

cation, miscommunication has multiplied creating many more prospects for conflicts to spiral out of control.

The cross-cultural case study below is presented in story format for use in the classroom. The case study follows characters across dimensions of culture, time, and cyberspace, as communication breaks down and interpersonal conflict escalates. Following the story are suggested study and discussion questions for learners, as well as debriefing notes with references for instructors.

Keywords (キーワード): intercultural communication (異文化間コミュニケーション), interpersonal communication (個人間コミュニケーション), miscommunication (ミスコミュニケーション), face-saving (フェイス(面子)の保全), social media (ソーシャルメディア), conflict spirals (対立の悪循環), perspective shifting (視点移動), cross-cultural etiquette (異文化間エチケット), Multimedia Messaging Services (MMS) (マルチメディアのメッセージ発信サービス)

## INTRODUCTION

As technology advances and makes greater inroads in our daily lives, the ways and means in which we routinely communicate with one another shift and change as well. We now live in an era where we enjoy instant access into the lives of family, friends, coworkers, and strangers via various social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Line, LinkedIn, Mixi, etc.

According to Nielsen State of the Media: The Social Media Report 2012, the rapid growth and popularity of social media sites translates to consumers spending “more time on social networks than on any other category of sites—roughly 20 percent of their total time online via personal computer (PC), and 30 percent of total time online via mobile” (<http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/newswire/2012/social-media-report-2012-social-media-comes-of-age.html>). We often hear of the benefits of these new forms of online communication and socializing, there are however numerous pitfalls as well. For example, in a study of Israeli youth and Internet use, it was found that conflicts with individual’s family members increased the more time an individual spends online socializing (Mesch,

2006).

As the tools to communicate bring us more information and larger audiences, the unprecedented access to personal information through social media sites has also given rise to a type of voyeurism with allows us to gain intimate details about others without having to engage in face-to-face communication (Munar, 2010). As much as social media has opened up avenues of information and communication, it has created new barriers, increased misunderstandings, and created a lot more miscommunication as well. Misreading intentions, misinterpreting the situation or nuance of a post, spiralling conflicts, and new and unclear etiquette regarding social media are just some of the problems one regularly encounters in today's online world (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, Munar, 2010, Wilmot, 2009).

The case study presented below is set in Japan and designed to illustrate multiple dilemmas for those engaged in cross-cultural communication within a social media context. The incident outlined can be utilized for study alone, in combination with the guided questions for discussion, or as a resource tool for instructors. The case presented below can be photocopied, read in class or as a homework assignment for students. There are also useful study and discussion questions, and references provided for the instructor.

## **CASE—CHARACTER PROFILES**

- Jerry, Samantha (North American couple. 42, 35)
- Alyssa (Jerry and Samantha's daughter, celebrating her 3rd birthday)
- Tom (North American, 24. Friend of both Jerry and Frank)
- Frank (Fijian, 57. Restaurateur)
- Naomi (Japanese, 33. Friend of Samantha)

## **CHARACTER BACKGROUND**

**Frank's** restaurant, "Sunflower" has been in business for 7 years. Each year he holds a BBQ event on the anniversary of his restaurant's opening and to thank his friends and customers. He usually hires a band, has a wading pool and games for kids, and everything is all-you-can-eat. The event is open to the public, tickets are sold at the door or can be bought in advance. Frank is new to Facebook and uses it regularly, posting

information about his menu or food he eats. Frank admits to being from the “analog generation” and does not fully use or understand all the site functions.

**Jerry and Samantha** plan to celebrate their daughter **Alyssa**’s birthday by inviting a few friends with families out to a restaurant or park. They learn about the BBQ party at Frank’s restaurant and decide it would be convenient and fun to celebrate their daughter’s birthday there since it sounds like it will be a festive environment. Samantha has never eaten at the restaurant and Jerry had lunch there once many years ago. The owner is the same, but the place has changed and expanded since he last visited. Jerry uses Facebook infrequently, Samantha uses it regularly.

**Tom**, an avid Facebook user, submits multiple posts daily and stays abreast of “what is happening” mainly through social media. Tom reads all Frank’s timeline posts and Frank appears on Tom’s regular newsfeed. Tom purchased his ticket to Frank’s BBQ event well in advance. He attended last year and enjoyed meeting people from all walks of life, which is very unusual for him in Japan. Tom also received an invitation to join Jerry and Samantha to celebrate their daughter’s birthday at Frank’s restaurant via a Facebook event post. Tom is uncertain how to respond as he sees a clash between Jerry celebrating his daughter’s birthday at Frank’s restaurant and the anniversary BBQ.

**Naomi** is a good friend of Samantha and acquaintance to Tom and Jerry. She is not planning to attend Frank’s event but would like to celebrate Alyssa’s birthday with the family and has already prepared a gift. Naomi uses Facebook as well, often posting on Samantha’s wall.

## CASE

**Monday**—In the morning Jerry and Samantha make a decision about their daughter’s birthday celebration. After weeks of discussion, they finally decide to go out to Sunflower restaurant with friends and family. They heard from several friends about a BBQ party at the restaurant and since some of their friends had already bought tickets and are going anyway, their attitude is, why not kill two birds with one stone? They feel it would be a perfect place to go.

The two made plans in the morning to contact friends and family and let them know they will be going there on the weekend to celebrate Alyssa’s third birthday. Samantha was in charge of finding a cake and contacting the restaurant to make a reservation, and

Jerry would contact everyone to inform them of the plan.

Jerry, being busy, decides the best way to disseminate information is through the popular social media site, Facebook. Since an events page can provide exact details, maps, photos, and discussion all on one page, and for everyone to see, it seemed the perfect platform. Plus he can send out invitations through the page. He logs on just before breakfast and quickly creates an event page for Alyssa. Jerry follows the instructions for new features, uploads a photo of Alyssa and gives it the title “Princess Alyssa’s 3rd Birthday”. Once submitted, the site created a banner at the top of the event page. Not what he expected but “looks good” Jerry thought, so he left it “as is” and sent it off to all their friends. He then ate his breakfast, and proceeded with his day.

Samantha is busy this morning as well, so she calls the restaurant in the afternoon. However since Frank is out, she leaves a message and Frank returns the call later in the day.

Samantha asks Frank about a reservation for the birthday party and Frank tells her that the anniversary BBQ event on that day is very busy. The seating is on a first-come basis and all outdoor, under tents, so they cannot reserve a space for large parties. He goes on to say they are welcome to celebrate their daughter’s birthday at the event, but the discounted advanced tickets are sold out and they will have to purchase tickets at the door. Samantha asks him if it would be alright to bring a birthday cake, or if a cake could be purchased through the restaurant. Frank tells her his restaurant cannot provide one and goes on to say, “A lot of families with children come to this anniversary BBQ and I don’t want any children to feel left out. If just a few kids have cake and others don’t, it would not be good”.

Samantha agrees, stating, “We would be willing to ensure there is enough cake for all the kids” and the two discuss how much cake would be appropriate and logistics. Samantha thanks Frank, and lets him know she will look into cake options and get back to him in a few days.

Jerry arrives at his office early and goes straight to work. During his morning break he decides to check his Facebook account and see if there were any replies to his event invitations. Jerry is surprised to see a post by Tom. Tom checked the box marked “maybe attending” (even though Jerry knew Tom had tickets and was attending), Furthermore there was a comment that simply said, “Are you sure Frank is ok with this?”

Jerry is confused. “Why wouldn’t it be alright?” he thought. He tried contacting

Tom by telephone twice that day to clarify the comment, but Tom could not be reached.

That evening Jerry arrives home and tells Samantha of post. She too is surprised and logs into her account to see the page and read the post herself. She sees that her friend Naomi indicated that she will be attending, so she writes Naomi a text message asking her what she thought of Tom's post.

**Tuesday**—Samantha receive a reply from Naomi stating “I don't know why it wouldn't be okay either, it is a restaurant and business. Is it a closed anniversary party or is it open to the public? You did ask the restaurant if it was okay, right?”

To which Samantha replies “Yes. Frank and I spoke on the phone and he said it would be no problem. The event is open to the public.” She goes on to explain about the cake and reiterate that Frank said the birthday celebration would be ok.

“Then it should be fine. I don't know what Tom is talking about. Has Jerry talked to him?” replies Naomi.

Tom finally answers Jerry's messages and the two of them arrange to meet at a coffee shop near Tom's house after work. When they meet, Jerry asks Tom what he meant by the comment. Tom explains that he feels very awkward because Jerry and Samantha seem to be taking over Frank's party with a party of their own.

“It is like you are going to bring a lot of people and hijack the event for yourselves after Frank has put all this effort and money into it,” said Tom.

At this point Jerry interrupts ... “Whoa! What are you talking about!?! We are not bringing a lot of people and we are not taking over any party, we are just celebrating our daughter's birthday at a restaurant. It just so happens the restaurant is also having an event also so that makes the timing good, but it is still a business and people celebrate birthdays all the time in restaurants.”

“You made an events page, with a banner!” replies Tom.

“So?” says Jerry, “If you read the page you'd see it says come help us celebrate Alyssa's birthday at Sunflower Restaurant's anniversary BBQ. What is wrong with that?”

During the course of the discussion Tom reveals he had called Frank very shortly after the post went online to give Frank a “heads up” that Jerry created an event page and made plans to bring a large group of people to the BBQ event. Hearing this Frank became very upset and was not looking forward to talking with Samantha and Jerry.

Jerry feels that Tom has overstepped his boundaries and should not have become involved in the matter. “Who does Tom think he is, the Facebook police? Besides Samantha called and Frank said ok so what is Tom’s problem?” ponders Jerry. The more he thinks about it, the more he feels Tom is wrong.

Tom can not believe that Jerry would take advantage of a friend’s hospitality, “Who does he think he is? It is like crashing a wedding, you just don’t do that. What nerve” he thinks.

The two part ways and do not speak to each other all week.

## **STUDY QUESTIONS**

- Tom uses Facebook a lot and Jerry very little, does that explain some of the conflict? How?
- Was the “events page” of Facebook the best platform for Jerry to use to contact people about the birthday party? Explain.
- What is the big deal about a banner having been created on the invitation page. Does it look as if it was a professional event that was competing with the official event?
- Did Tom react too quickly to the post? Should he have contacted Frank or posted a comment?
- Why didn’t Frank seem more upset when he spoke with Samantha?
- Why didn’t Naomi feel the same way as Tom about the event page?
- Do you think the birthday party was held as planned? What happened?
- What role do you think each character’s culture played in the way each of them handled the situation?

## **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- Is there a basic etiquette for using social media sites?
- What are good manners for using; Facebook, Twitter, Line, or other social network sites?
- What happens when one misinterprets another’s actions or words online?
- What steps can we take to minimize miscommunication online?
- Do you use emoji pictographs (絵文字) often and do you limit yourself to the ones you

think are easy to understand?

- Have you ever received a message with an emoji pictograph and didn't understand it or thought it was inappropriate or didn't suit the context of the message?
- Is there too much access private or personal information on the internet?
- What does the term "digital voyeur" mean to you?

## DEBRIEFING NOTES

### *Social Media & Etiquette themes to explore*

analog vs. digital users                      universal vs. context/culturally-bound manners  
use of emoji pictographs, stickers                      privacy issues

### *Intercultural Communication themes to explore*

high context vs. low context communication (see, Bennett, Hall, Gudykunst)  
direct vs. indirect communication (see Gudykunst, Hall, Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner)  
DI(C)E or ODICE method (see Bennett, Ting-Toomey)  
Past, present, future orientation (see Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, Hall)  
"face saving" (see Ting-Toomey & Chung, Bennett)  
monochronic vs. polychronic (see Hall, Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner)  
"reading the air" (空気よめない)  
conflict spirals (see Wilmot)  
multicultural manners ( see Dresser)

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