A Cultural Research Comparing Chinese and English speakers in Mobile Internet Widget Content Preference

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Abstract: Unlike traditional products, mobile internet products are differentiated by user interface and content languages in stead of national sales networks. Identifying the language specific requirements has become more and more important. In this paper we explore the cultural differences in mobile internet content creation, selection and consumption between Chinese and English speakers through comparing the content publication and usage statistics of the English site and the Chinese site of a leading free mobile internet widget service run by a top mobile phone maker.

Key words: Paper Template, Guides, instructions, author's kit, conference publications

1. Introduction

Hofstede's five-dimension theory about national cultural differences provides a systematic analysis tool for understanding the different ways of thinking in different national cultures. [1] It has been widely applied as a reference in many cross-culture studies in mobile and Internet user experience. Some scholars have developed some practical guidelines for user interface design based on Hofsted's theory. [2]. However, in the age of Mobile 2.0, Widgets especially user-generated widgets play more and more important roles in mobile internet industry. Widgets are small, single-purpose, highly graphical and interactive Internet-enabled applications. [3]

Unlike physical products, mobile services are nowadays distributed internationally without national sales channels. The only differentiator is the communication language. Consequently, understanding not only cultural differences in interaction logic but also in content preference is critical to be successful. Therefore, for mobile Internet service, it is more meaningful to do research on cultural differences on different language speakers instead of different nations.

WidSets is a free mobile Internet service created in 2006. The slogan "Mobilizing your web" clearly describes the basic idea, which is to enable users to pick up their favorite web content straight to their mobile phones as widgets. In addition, users can create their own widgets for their preferred content and publish them on the web, or share with other users by sending them.

WidSets is developed using Java. Theoretically, it works on all mobile phones supporting Java MIDP 2.0. And it has been tested successfully on over 300 phone models from all manufacturers. [4]

Users can sign up and download content from the websites www.widsets.com (English site) or cn.widsets.com (Chinese site), and from the WAP sites wap.widsets.com (English site) or cn.widsets.com/wap (Chinese site). Widget creation and publication can be done through the websites only. Users just need to fill in a widget name, a

small image as the widget avatar and a RSS feed URL to make a widget. Figure 1 shows the look and feel of the website user interface.
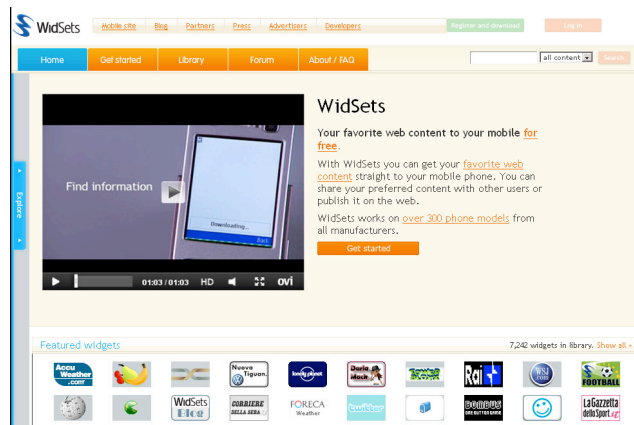

Figure 1. WidSets website for registering, widget downloading and publishing.

The actual content consumption is happening on the phone user interface. If the user clicks on one of the widgets shown on Figure 2, the widget will expand to full screen mode to show the contents, which can be interactive.

Figure 2. WidSets user interface and widget appearance on the phone.

There are four reasons why WidSets is selected to do such a comparison study. Firstly, even though WidSets has different servers and databases for the Chinese site and the English site, the two websites are exactly the same except for the content categorization and user interface languages. The website is not designed dedicated for English users and localized for Chinese users afterwards or vice versa. In stead, in the development phase, the requirements are collected from both English speakers and Chinese speakers. So their needs are equally considered when planning and constructing the website. Secondly, the Chinese site and the English site have similar user base and content size. Chinese site has 12.1 million registered users and 4801 widgets, and the English site has 12.2 million registered users and 7242 widgets. The two websites have been running for approximately the same amount of time when we do the data analysis. Thirdly, unlike other profit-driven mobile Internet services, WidSets is created by a phone manufacturer and is targeted to add value to users' phones. It is a completely free service, and the users cannot get any revenue through publishing and sharing content. So there is no any economical influence on users' behavior towards content. Finally, even though the WidSets registration top countries US, Russia, India, Indonesia UK, and S. Arabia are not all native English speaking countries, English is the word's largest language in term of the number of speakers, and Chinese is the world's largest language in term of the number of native speakers. Comparing the cultural differences between speakers of these two major languages is still very meaningful.

2. Research Findings

2.1 Preference differences in User Generated Contents

There are 2 different kinds of widgets in Widgets,. The 1st kind is official widgets, which are created by WidSets team and marked with WidSets logo. The proportion is about 3% in the English site and 1% in the Chinese site. The widgets created by end users are user-generated widgets. They are grouped into categories according to their topics for content navigation if only the category covers more than 1% of all the widgets. Slightly different wordings are used in the two sites to make the category names locally idiomatic. Table 1 shows different widget categories in the two sites and their percentage in their libraries.

The users who use WidSets more than once a week in average are defined as loyalty users, According to our statistic, 0.12% of the loyalty users in the Chinese site and 0.21% of the loyalty users in the English site have created widgets for sharing. The percentage is much higher in the English site. This means English speakers are much more active in creating widgets, while Chinese speakers consume mobile content in a more passive way. This may be able to partially explain why Web 2.0 services are less successful in China than in English speaking countries.

Rank	English site	%	Chinese site	%
1	Blogs and Forums	26.7%	Blog	24.7%
2	Fun and Games	16.3%	News	12.0%
3	News	14.3%	Technology and Internet	8.0%
4	Images	10.0%	Female Fashion	6.7%
5	Mail and Messaging	8.5%	AV and Entertainment	6.0%
6	Searching	6.3%	Fiction and Magazine	6.0%
7	Date and Time	5.1%	Career and Learning	5.3%
8	Sports	3.6%	Financial and Stocks	5.0%
9	Tools	2.2%	Search and tools	4.7%
10	Transportation	1.8%	Mobile and Digital device	4.3%
11	Travel	1.5%	Community and Match making	4.0%
12	Weather	1.0%	Game and Animation	3.0%
13			Image and Photography	2.0%
14			Sports	2.0%
15			Foreign language, EU and US	1.7%
16			Travel	1.7%
17			Car and F1	1.0%

Table 1. Table captions should be placed below the table.

Another phenomenon can be found from Table 1 is that Chinese speakers created less widgets but the topics are much more diverse. Blog is the top one topic in both sites but games are more preferred by English speakers. Technology, female fashion, career and learning are specific for Chinese speakers. The needs of technology and female fashion knowledge are driven by China's fast growing economy. Career and learning can be explained by the enterprising and hard working spirits rooted in Confucius culture. [5] Match making is a hot topic even in mobile internet, maybe because the sexual proportion balance of Chinese society is broken by rural worker immigration and baby control policy.

We can easily reach a conclusion that Chinese speakers have more diverse interests in mobile internet content creation but less motivated to create content comparing to English speakers.

2.2 Preference Differences in Content Selection

As shown on Figure 3, users can pick their favorite widgets from the widget library. There is only a short description and the widget's home view preview next to each widget. Therefore, users can only rely on their intuition and experiences to make decision on widget selection. Users can delete widgets from their phone but very few widgets are deleted. So the number of users of each widget can reflect the users' preference on the widget by first impression.

Rank	Widget names	Explainations	Users
1	Wikipedia	Web 2.0 cyclopaedia	5834301
2	Push email	Mobile email service	4390865
3	TowerBloxx	Tower building game	4325662
4	Wall Street Journal Articles	Financial articles	3969842
5	WidSets Horoscope	Horoscope service	3458726
6	Sudoku	Game with grid layout	3349845
7	Private Chat	P2P IM tool	3155874
8	Foreca Weather	Weather forecast	2925702
9	AccuWeather	Weather forecast	2865454

Table 2. Top 10 most popular widgets in WidSets English site.

If you compare the top 10 list in the English site shown on Table2 and the top 10 in the Chinese site, it can be easily found that news, chatting room, financial information and games are the common topics. Wikipedia is a user-generated widgets but it is till ranked top 1. This fact shows that it is the most desired widget of English speakers. Unfortunately, Wikipedia is blocked in China so there is nothing comparable. Sina news, A local news portal gets the top 1 in the Chinese site because there are many internet users who can only access internet through mobile phones. Dazhihui stock widget, the second popular one, witnesses the stock price surge and the crazy stock investment tide in China.

Rank	Widget names	Explainations	Users
1	新浪新闻（Sina news）	Sina news portal	2604953
2	大智慧高端版(Dazhihui)	Stock analysis tool	1164674
3	聊天室　　(Chatting room)	Public chating room	1025425
4	世纪佳缘（Love century）	Match making service	902649
5	天下书库（Tianxia library）	Mobile book	872338
6	宝石方块（Gem diamond）	Game with grid layout	783760
7	酷讯(Kuxun info)	Travel search engine	778518
8	校内网(Xiaonei)	SNS website	717504
9	挖地雷(Mine digging)	Game with grid layout	690856
10	杏仁聊吧(Almond chat)	Public chating room	654889

Table 3. Top 10 most popular widgets in WidSets Chinese site.

It seems that horoscope widget is a popular relaxing tool in mobile phones for English speakers but not for Chinese ones. There are also Chinese Fengshui widgets in the Chinese site but they are not very popular, maybe Chinese do not want to link their traditional Fengshui with modern technologies. The popularity of Love century widgets again proves that Chinese speakers have high expectation on match making widgets in their mobile phones. Internet social networking services are underdeveloped in China, but it seems that Xiaonei, the Chinese SNS service for students, attracts lots of attentions in mobile internet. However, Facebook, the top 1 international SNS service with more users than the population of the United States, has only 1.2 million users in WidSets and is ranked out of top 20. It is obvious that Chinese speakers prefer to use mobile widgets as community tools but

English speakers tend to use the widgets as individual tools. We can maybe extend Hofsted's collectivism VS Individualism cultural dimension theory to mobile internet context because China has high collectivism score but most English speaking countries are individualism oriented. [1]

Another interesting observation is that there are several user-generated widgets in the top 10 list of the English site but all the top 10 widgets in the Chinese site are official widgets created by WidSets team. This might be explained with Hofsted's power distance cultural dimension theory because China has high score in power distance and official content and authority are more respected and recognized in China than in most other countries.

If all the official widgets are excluded in the Chinese site, we can get another top 10 list as shown on Table 4

Rank	Widget names	Explainations	Users
1	百度 (Baidu)	Top 1 search engine	538688
2	A8 音乐 (A8 Music)	Mobile music portal	285197
3	免费软件(Free SW)	Free mobile software	180285
4	明搜索 (Minfo)	Travel info search	108659
5	MM图片坊 (MM pic)	Pictures of hot girls	85757
6	百度手机频道 (M-Baidu)	Baidu mobile channel	83794
7	青年文摘-绿版(Youth)	Free Youth magazine	80824
8	《男人装》(Men)	Men' fashion	79118
9	手机软件大全 (M-SW)	Mobile software	76929
10	《读者》（Reader）	A famous magazine	56080

Table 4. Top 10 most popular user-generated widgets in WidSets Chinese site.

Search, media, and mobile software topics are dominant in the list. However, only the two search widgets are interactive and others are just for one-way reading. On the contrary, 8 of the top 10 user-generated widgets in the English site are interactive.

2.2 Preference Differences in Content Consumption

As shown on Figure 3, there is a rating system in WidSets. Users can press the thumb up button to higher one rating score or press the thumb down button to lower one rating score of the widget. Rating is only possible after login in and the widget has been opened at least once on the phone. And one user has only one chance to rate the widget. Normally users do not bother to rate a widget unless they feel it really cool or hate it a lot.
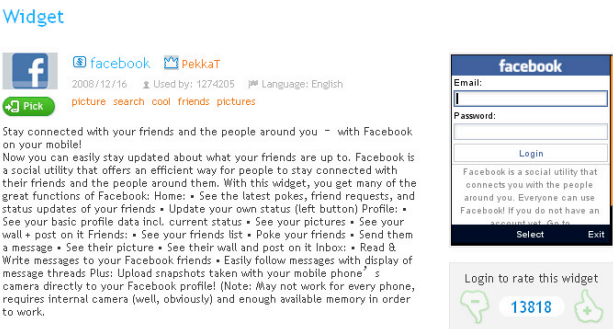

Figure 3. WidSets widget description and evaluation page

Table 5 lists the top 10 valuable widgets in each of the two sites. Surprisingly, 9 of the top 10 in the English site are interactive except for Bollywood Hungama widget. Obviously it is created mainly for Indian users. And 8 of the top 10 in the Chinese site are non-interactive widgets.

Rank	English site	+ %	Chinese site	+ %
1	Full-fill game	9.70%	中国电影报道(China movie)	6.67%
2	Multi-Clock	7.66%	柒柒's大美女の性福生活(A beauty's sexual diary)	6.02%
3	BOOM! game	7.09%	iMP3随身影音(MP3 music)	5.35%
4	Bollywood Hungama	5.70%	瞄瞄网(Fashion consultant)	5.19%
5	TransCreditBank	5.43%	秘密 (Personal secrets)	4.99%
6	GPS Converter	5.35%	QQ (Chating tool)	4.94%
7	Digg	4.99%	叽歪(China's twitter)	4.83%
8	WalkINet	4.96%	QQ空间(QQ Blog)	4.78%
9	Fruitsets game	4.87%	Collady!时尚女性(Fashion girl)	4.64%
10	Friendster	4.78%	MM图片坊(Hot girl pictures)	4.34%

Table 5. Facebook widget description and evaluation page

It seems that English speakers value the game or tool widgets with cool interactions and features, while Chinese speakers value more on the visual effects and content quality. There are two privacy exposure widgets on the list, and several of them are about beauties. This phenomenon provides supports to some Chinese sociologists' beauty driven eyeball economy theory starting in the beginning of the 21st century in China.

3. Conclusions

In mobile internet, Chinese speakers are quite different from English speakers in term of content creation, selection and consumption preference.

Chinese speakers created less content but the categories are more diverse, while English speakers' content selection is more focused even though there are more options for them.

English speakers tend to use widgets for individual purposes but Chinese speakers would like to use them as community tools. Weather widgets make a lot of sense for English speakers, while Chinese speakers like the text and visual content more.

Cool interactions and features add more value for English speakers but the widgets with strong visual impact and high quality text content get more favor from Chinese users.

Some international PC internet players have entered the top 10 list in China. However, we can not find any international big names in all of above top content lists in the WidSets Chinese site. Maybe mobile internet services are more local and need more efforts in localization from international mobile internet players. Probably localization is not a good strategy. A better strategy might be designing mobile services dedicated for Chinese users from the scratch instead of localizing existing ones for them.

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