Book Review of *Global Social Media Design: Bridging Differences Across Cultures:* Huatong Sun, Oxford University Press, 2020.

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Introduction

The digital era has allowed us to connect, communicate, and share information in various ways than ever before. This technological revolution has impacted how we shape our identities and interact with others in different parts of the world. In her book *Global Social Media Design: Bridging Differences Across Cultures*, Huatong Sun explores the nature of social media in response to this interconnected universe. The book's value lies in its examination of technology design that embraces cultures, ranging from national and regional traditions to the subtleties of socio-economic and interest-based communities, and caters to a range of users. Additionally, Sun emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and cultural sensitivity within platforms. In this review, I discuss the book's concepts and insights to better understand the intricate relationship between social media design and global studies. By doing so, we can navigate the many opportunities and challenges presented by our interconnected, technology-driven world.

In the Introduction, Sun introduces the notion of "social media design" as the foundation of her framework, which emphasizes the significant role social media designers play in shaping cross-cultural communication. This concept encompasses a range of design decisions, from elements to functionality, and features influence user interactions. According to Sun, these choices have an impact on whether social media platforms bring people from different backgrounds together or amplify cultural divisions. A central theme in the book is "culturally sustaining design," which entails recognizing and engaging with differences in design practices. Sun explores this idea by focusing on the application of design, local culture, user experience, and meaningful interactions to bridge gaps through thoughtful design interventions. Notably, this approach is not just about recognizing the presence of diverse cultural backgrounds but also about creating technology that genuinely resonates with and empowers users from these various cultural contexts.

Empowering Global Design with a Critical Practice Approach

In Chapter One, "A Move to Global Design," we are introduced to the challenges faced by cross-cultural technology design and development in terms of dealing with values. In today's world, where power dynamics have shifted from states to global corporations, the book emphasizes a new kind of dominance driven by multinational capital investments and global money movement. This adds another layer of complexity to the design process. Additionally, the intense competition among social media companies, fueled by network effects and a data-driven economy, further complicates the task of creating technology that truly empowers individuals. Empowerment, especially in the context of global social media design, stands as a fundamental theme. Sun believes in designing technology that respects diverse cultures, which aims to create tools that do more than just work—they should transform and liberate. This idea suggests that technology should empower users by bridging cultural differences and fostering understanding and making the digital world more inclusive and respectful of everyone's background. The book

highlights a significant gap in the current landscape of cross-cultural research and design practices, indicating the need for a more advanced critical framework. To set the context for this discussion, Sun provides a significant scholarly work focused on designing for social justice within disciplines such as Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) informatics and technical and professional communication. According to Sun, what is required is an approach rooted in practice theory. This method aims to close the divide between organizations and everyday interactions by engaging with and transforming the world through practical experiences facilitated by different tools and technologies.

In Chapter Two, "Designing for Empowerment with a Critical Practice Approach," Sun highlights the importance of practice theories as a departure from design approaches. These theories emphasize that knowledge is not just abstract but also informs a way of taking action. This means implementing practical, design-focused steps that embody diversity and inclusivity and utilizing tools to achieve these goals. These practices involve material objects and artifacts that play a role in addressing the limitations of norm-based notions of action. A critical perspective on design that is practice-oriented envisions a future characterized by diversity, inclusivity, and active engagement. This approach emphasizes how design, rooted in embodied practices, can create a world where different cultures coexist, participate, and interact with each other.

Within this framework, the concept of "Designing for Empowerment" emerges as an approach that focuses on how everyday life influences inequality. It explores how design can be a force in addressing these disparities. At its core lies the use of the IDEO methodology known as design thinking. This methodology proves to be valuable because it encourages stakeholders to participate in the design process. By doing so, it creates an atmosphere that encourages creativity, allowing for the generation of solutions while considering a wide range of perspectives. This ensures that the final outcome aligns with the needs and aspirations of all parties involved.

Furthermore, Chapter Two introduces the Culturally Localized User Experience (CLUE) approach, which is firmly grounded in activity theory. This approach considers technology design as a practice with the aim of bringing about transformation, empowerment, and emancipation. It aligns perfectly with the theme of this book – connecting experiences to broader contextual influences. This shift goes beyond recognizing diversity; it encompasses a diverse range of knowledge and understanding. Essentially, the CLUE approach advocates for technology design that not only respects cultures but also seeks to empower individuals, foster transformation, and liberate them from social inequalities by embracing a wealth of diverse knowledge and experiences.

In Chapter Three," Understanding the Criticality of Differences in Cross-Cultural Design," which builds on Chapter Two, the author evolves the CLUE approach into Culturally Localized User Engagement and Empowerment (CLUEE), or CLUE2. This approach emphasizes a deeper engagement with cultural differences. According to Sun, "the culturally localized user experience (CLUE) approach is thus developed into the approach of culturally localized user engagement and empowerment (CLUEE), simplified as the CLUE2 (CLUE-squared) approach" (Sun, p. 58). This advanced framework adds layers of user engagement and empowerment, expanding the

initial objectives of the CLUE approach. Sun highlights the shift from merely recognizing cultural differences to actively using them as design resources, stating, "Based on the articulation of a practice-oriented critical vision of differences that turns communication deficits into design resources" (Sun, p. 58). It is not that CLUEE has replaced CLUE; rather, CLUEE is an evolved concept that incorporates and extends the foundational ideas of CLUE. Scholars in this field may refer to both CLUE and CLUEE, with CLUEE representing an advanced stage of the CLUE framework. This signifies an evolution in the approach to design, focusing on active participation and empowerment within the design process.

Cross-Cultural Design and Social Media Evolution: Bridging Gaps and Global Perspectives

Extending the exploration from Chapter Three, the book explores the subject of bridging cultural differences within the realm of global design. It places a significant focus on the concept of social justice by emphasizing the importance of acknowledging and respecting differences that exist among various groups based on ethnicity and race. A key concept introduced in this chapter pertains to the differentiation between two fundamental types of cultural differences: categorical differences, which are firmly grounded in fixed and predefined categories, and interactional differences, which arise from ongoing interactions and engagements among individuals.
This shift towards embracing and valuing cultural differences marks a substantial departure from conventional approaches to understanding cultural diversity. As such, it involves a fundamental shift in perspective—one that perceives these differences as dynamic and continuously evolving, emerging from ongoing interactions and engagements among individuals with diverse backgrounds. Sun argues that adopting this perspective can revolutionize our understanding of differences, making them less rigid and more adaptable to changing circumstances. This new viewpoint empowers us to effectively address design challenges linked to ever-evolving identities within our constantly changing world. It offers a more inclusive and dynamic approach to creating designs that can meet the diverse needs of a global society.

In Chapter Four, "Facebook Japan: Connecting Micro to Macro with Discursive Affordances," Sun focuses on the idea of cultural differences and how they affect social media design and usage. Through the example of Facebook Japan, the book sheds light on the challenges and resistance that can arise when local users have different ways of understanding online social networks. This part emphasizes the importance of a practical and critical approach to global design, and it highlights an unequal power structure inherent in how people from different cultures use social media. The concept of "networked sociality" is explored, focusing on the global trend of people connecting and forming online social groups while managing their personal relationships in a digital space.

Facebook's journey in Japan provides an illustrative example that includes both successful aspects and points of contention. It is a case where technology innovation managed to facilitate social interactions online, but it also sparked discomfort and controversy in Western societies. The book underscores a common issue in current research, which often overlooks the cultural and individual aspects of social relationships. This oversight can lead to resistance from local users, who come from backgrounds with extensive internet experience. It serves as a reminder that in a world where technology and culture intersect, there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Chapter Five, "Weibo of China: Hybridizing Performative Practice Into Normative Genre," continues discussing the CLUE approach. This chapter places affordances at the core of the conversation. Affordances are discussed as the opportunities and limitations that technology provides, emphasizing both what it enables and what it constrains. The concept of "discursive affordances" looks at these aspects as contributing to communication for intentional actions, with a focus on the material context and how it structures our interactions. Sun discusses how Facebook Japan's struggles in the market can be linked to its localization efforts, which fall somewhere between "designing with differences" and "designing across differences." This raises an important point: we need more design efforts that bridge the gap between the individual user experience and the larger socio-economic forces, particularly in the context of how corporations are capitalizing on our social relationships.

In Chapter Five, Sun takes a detailed look at the evolution of Sina Weibo that was launched by Sina Corporation in 2009. Sina Weibo is a Chinese social media platform, which traces its journey from a Silicon Valley-like technology to a significant political forum and later, a social media marketing platform. Sun highlights the vital role of critical scholarship and the CLUE approach in illustrating the emergence and development of this particular technological genre. The concept of technology as a genre is a central theme, emphasizing that technology encompasses both behaviors and structures, with the interaction between action and meaning embodied through a process of structuration. This chapter underscores the importance of examining local technology practices within a global context. Sina Weibo's success is attributed to its unique features deeply rooted in Chinese Internet culture, including rich media, threaded comments, Wei-groups, and Wei-events. However, Chapter Five also sheds light on the challenges and controversies which arise when a social media platform becomes a powerful force in a country with constraints on journalism and freedom of speech. The internal censorship implemented by Sina Corp, the parent company that owns Sina Weibo, as discussed in the book, highlights the delicate balance between maintaining a strong online presence and adhering to local regulations.

In Chapter Six, "War of Social Messaging Platforms: Articulating Local Uptakes for Global Innovation and Competition," Sun immerses us in the development and evolution of social messaging apps, with a particular focus on WhatsApp, WeChat, and Facebook Japan, within the context of global mobility. This chapter offers a relational perspective on design and investigates how both tangible and communicative elements converge to articulate value propositions that embrace cultural diversity and worldwide movements. The research, as detailed in the book, centers on the early advantages enjoyed by mobile apps in East Asia and how they were embraced by a diverse user base in Seattle. It underscores the notable transformations that have unfolded in the global landscape of these apps, with KakaoTalk emerging as a frontrunner and influencer in the design of other apps like WeChat and LINE.

The rise of Facebook Messenger as a globally popular messaging platform highlights the dynamic nature of the digital landscape. The intricate global cultural exchange surrounding social messaging technology, as discussed in the book, forms a complex and interconnected phenomenon. Sun further underscores the mobile phone's role as the most prominent Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D). Sun emphasizes the need for a nuanced approach in technology design and a deeper understanding of the various forms of

mobility in the digital age. The research project detailed in the book brings to the forefront the cultural and technological dimensions of mobile text messaging, creating a bilingual archive of literature on social messaging apps. This extensive study explores how the fusion of material and communicative components shapes what we call "discursive affordances," ultimately influencing value propositions that resonate on the global cultural stage.

Chapter Seven, "Reshaping Crossroads Into a Design Square," brings to the forefront the notion of global social media design and its potential to raise awareness about the environment. It strongly advocates for a shift towards what it calls a "design square." This is a place where a wide array of ideas, design styles, ways of talking, and different ways of understanding the world all come together to spark new, creative concepts. This shift is in harmony with the CLUE-squared approach discussed throughout, which sees design as deeply connected to the way people use technology in their everyday lives. Sun makes an important point: culturally unique social practices do not exist in isolation in the global cultural mix; instead, they are what drives the need for cross-cultural and global design in our world today. The book highlights that the spreading of things like skills, ideas, and tools, which are the building blocks of these practices, can be actively encouraged by design professionals. This way, they can help bridge the gaps between different cultures, bringing people closer together and fostering a greater understanding of each other and our world.

Conclusion

This book serves as a valuable guide through the intricate realm of social media design, where technology and culture come together and sometimes clash. It takes its readers on a journey across various platforms and settings, shedding light on the complexities and challenges that both users and designers encounter in this swiftly evolving landscape. The CLUE-squared approach, introduced in the book, provides a refreshing perspective for understanding the intricacies of global design. It emphasizes the importance of bridging the gap between the big picture and the finer details, combining critical analysis with creative solutions, and uniting theoretical concepts with real-world practices.

Global Social Media Design: Bridging Differences Across Cultures by Huatong Sun offers significant insights that resonate with the fields of technical communication and social justice. The book's focus on diverse international contexts and its advocacy for a global design approach, which prioritizes people over an individualistic perspective, are key contributions to the discussion of social justice. By emphasizing the importance of considering various cultural backgrounds and experiences, the book aligns with the principles of social justice in striving for equitable access, fostering understanding among different cultures, and promoting inclusivity in the digital landscape. In this connected world, where technology plays a pivotal role in communication and information sharing, *Global Social Media Design* inspires us to address the pressing issues of our interconnected, global society by adopting a more holistic and socially just approach to technical communication and design practices. It makes us think about big questions involving technology, culture, and power and offers a strong framework for tackling the challenges of creating social media platforms that welcome everyone and give them the power to use them. This book is an important starting point for more discussions and research about social media design, which is always changing and growing.