

Chapter 4

Persuading for Change: The Impact of Culture on the Principles of Authority and Social Proof

Sean Watts

Yonsei University, Korea

Teppo Räisänen

Oulu University of Applied Sciences, Finland

Sami Halonen

University of Oulu, Finland

ABSTRACT

Persuasion happens when somebody tries to change someone else's attitudes or behavior without using coercion or force. In different cultures, different persuasion principles seem to work better than others. This has to be taken into account in marketing and design. It is especially true when developing persuasive systems, i.e. systems that aim at changing the user. In this chapter, the authors study the role of culture in the context of authority and social proof. This was examined through a positivist survey conducted by South Korean and Finnish College Students. The received results suggest that authority plays a bigger role in the Republic of Korea than in Finland. Ergo, the authors conclude that the implications of culture should be regarded when designing systems that aim at any kind of change.

INTRODUCTION

Persuasive technology has been defined as using technology to change our behavior or attitudes without using coercion or deception (Fogg, 2002). Examples of such technology are hearth rate monitors and smoking cessation websites. In its basic form, technology can persuade users in

three ways: 1) as a tool, 2) as a media, and 3) as a social actor. As a tool, technology makes target behavior easier to perform. As a media technology provides motivational experiences and helps rehearse behavior. In addition, as a social actor technology can cue social responses and take a social role in interaction (Fogg, 2002). Persuasive systems are such information systems that have

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emphasis on supporting intended behavior or attitude change.

As our understanding of the field of persuasive technology has increased, the expectations for persuasive designs have also increased. This is especially evident in competitive markets such as Web 2.0, e-business and the mobile domain. When designing solutions for these kinds of environments, the designers must have a thorough understanding of the various persuasion, motivation, and influence strategies to gain competitive advantage. Various persuasive principles could be used in public sector transformation processes to improve the changes of achieving the desired goals.

In this chapter, globalization is defined as the major social transformations caused by the enhancement of global consciousness and increased interconnectedness of different societies (Walsham, 2002). Leidner (2010, p. 69) points out how globalization “encompasses the exchange of production materials, the substitution of production processes, the relocation of services, the redistribution of resources, and the diffusion and infusion of cultural norms, artifacts, and values.” Today organizations share their processes with other organizations in order to operate more efficiently. Consequently, companies sharing their processes have become increasingly intertwined. Thus, their respective cultural levels have become more convergent and act as catalysts for change. This is where Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and culture play a pivotal role. ICT can be seen as the enabler of concurrency in organizations communication. Culture can be considered as the restraint for ascertaining seamless supply chain. The difficulty in implementing global systems is that it includes an assumption that the best for one business location automatically equates well to all other business locations as well (Leidner, 2010).

The need to understand Information Systems (IS) in cultural context have been increasing for many IS scholars (see e.g. Myers & Tan, 2003;

Leidner, 2010; Walsham, 2002). In different cultures, the relationship between behaviour and interpretation vary. Therefore, individuals reason to make sense of their realities (Adler, 1986). Hence, when an information system developer is not familiar with the end users’ focal culture it is not apparent how the focal culture should be considered in IS development. If the developer does not know his own culture, it is not possible to acknowledge what is typical for developer’s own behaviour regarding to the developed system’s requirements in the light of cultural context.

There are various information system development issues, which are seemingly connected to persuasive systems and where cultural context appears to have an impact. These issues include perceptions of IS design techniques (Kumar, et al., 1990), user experience (Dey & Abowd, 2000; Orlikowski, et al., 1995; Kettinger, et al., 1995), user requirements (Tuunanen, et al., 2006), and system use (Myers & Tan, 2003). According to Leidner and Kayworth (2006), studies concerning information systems design and culture are affected by variations in cultural values. Differing values lead to different approaches for developing information systems in varying cultures. In this chapter, we argue that culture plays a major role in persuasive system design as well.

BACKGROUND

Anthropologist Kahn (1989, p. 13) writes that “culture is contested, temporal and emergent.” Thus, culture is seen as a dynamic construct. Consequently, culture is a very intricate construct and there are numerous attempts to define it. One widely referred definition has been set by sociologists Namewirth and Weber (1987, pp. 8), who view culture as “a system of ideas,” which constitutes “a design for living.” In this research, culture is understood as a system of values and norms that are shared among a group of people. According to Hill (2008) values are abstract ideas

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