

The role of cultural theories within international usability

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Abstract: This Special Interest Group will aim to share experiences concerning the role, or the lack of a role, for generic models of culture (e.g. Hofstede) in the development of usable systems in a global context. It will debate the future research agenda.

Keywords: culture, Hofstede, internationalisation

1 Background

Effective strategies are needed to address cultural issues in both the *product* and the *process* of international systems development. People differ across regional, linguistic and country boundaries and system acceptance is driven strongly influenced by local cultural perspectives. In relation to the *product* of development, cultural differences raise new research issues ranging from technical usability to methodological and ethical issues of culture in information systems. Effective strategies In relation to the *process* of development, cultural differences affect the manner in which users are able to participate in design and to act as subjects in evaluation studies.

There is no lack of theoretical underpinning for cross-cultural usability. Hofstede's (1991) dimensions of culture, are only one example but they are those most often quoted in relation to cross-cultural usability (e.g. Marcus and Gould, 2000). What is lacking is the explicit demonstration that such culture are actually applicable to usability.

2 Objectives

This SIG will allow those working in the internationalisation arena, either as commercial

designers or academics to meet, engage, and address a range of issues such as the following:

Cultural significance. Are the differences between cultures greater or less than the difference between types of user, irrespective of culture? Is the web a truly global phenomenon, operating irrespective of culture?

The role of generic cultural models? What evidence is there that such models are significant? Case study evidence. How do we develop systems based on such theories?

Usability evaluation. The role of cultural models in strategies for user testing.

Issues of trust? How do we engender 'appeal' and develop trust across cultures?

References

- Hofstede, G. (1991), *Cultures and organizations - software of the mind*, Mc-Graw Hill.
- Marcus, A. and Gould, E. (2000), Crosscurrents: cultural dimensions and global web user-interface design. *ACM Interactions*, VII (4), 32-46.