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A comparison of cross cultural behavior on the internet

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ABSTRACT

Many societies, groups have ethics codes which their members must follow. However the internet has none which is globally acceptable. It is not likely such a code would exist in the near future given the diversity of its users. However, we can study and define internet ethics for narrow domain like a social group or an educational institution or a country. This itself is not an easy task since many factors affect person's behaviour on the internet. One factor, nationality, affects how a person responds in a given situation. China and the US are two top internet users that have different philosophies, cultures, political systems and culture. Ethical context are very different. Chinese and the US users may use the internet in different ways. In this paper, we study the differences in perception of Chinese and American students of internet ethics.

Key words: Cross-cultural behaviour; Internet behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Internet is free and anonymous and Ethics refer to how people communicate/ behave in public or private. When internet, ethics and diversity are combined results could be unpredictable. Diversity create a heterogeneous environment which can have both positive or negative results. Diversity consists of both surface and deep level differences. Aggarwal (2012) defined diversity as "...Diversity relates to individuals that think, behave and act differently creating a heterogeneous social environment. Diversity in the social context relates to ethnicity, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion and many other similar factors." Aggarwal (2012) studied diversity among teams performing similar tasks and found diversity is better in the long term but in the short term. Nor Shahriza Abdul Karim, et al. (2009) studied the behaviour of Malaysian students in the context of academic ethics. Their findings indicate that personality traits such as (1) agreeableness, (2) conscientiousness and (3) emotional stability are significantly and negatively correlated with unethical Internet behavior in university students. These studies did not look at differences due to national diversity and were set in one university environment. This paper addresses differences in behavior between US and Chinese students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is well established that different cultures have different ethics and rule of behavior. Danon-Leva, Cavico, and Mujtaba (101) studied cross cultural behavior in HongKong and The US and

their research suggested “... that in any country, whether one works in the public or private sector, ethical norms exist--religious ethics, social ethics, and business ethics. Yet, despite the existence of ethical norms, ethics can be viewed differently within and among cultures and countries; such differing viewpoints may give rise to conflicts.” [Currás-Pérez](#), [Carla Ruiz-Mafé](#), [Silvia Sanz-Blas](#), (2013) analyzed the determinants of social networking site loyalty, paying special attention to the roles of user attitude, perceived risk and satisfaction. Their research shows that attitude is a key variable in increasing satisfaction and loyalty towards social networking sites. Sociability and entertainment gratifications and perceived risks (psychological, time loss and social) are the main drivers of user attitude towards social networking sites. There are many study done related to internet buying patter of individuals, however only recently some researchers have addressed the issue of cross culture in social media. Goodrich & Mooij (2014) studied cultural dimensions to compare the use of social media and other information sources for consumer decision-making across 50 countries. Their result indicate that the use of information sources that influence online purchase decisions strongly varies by culture. Barlett et. all (2014) studied study tested the relation between culture (Japanese and the US) and cyberbullying using a short-term longitudinal research design. Their research “..higher levels of cyberbullying change for the U.S. sample compared with the Japanese sample.” Given the emerging research in this area, it is important to augment this research. We extend these studies by studying student’s perception of netEthics in cross cultural environment, namely China and the US.

The following section describes the study.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Aggarwal (2012) studied group diversity (gender, age, cultural background, age, sexual orientation, experience etc.) and concluded that diversity creates a heterogeneous environment which, if not controlled, can create a dysfunctional or hostile environment resulting in a clash of standards and behavior. Though we did not address diversity in this study, the students’ perception of netEthics provides some insights into student thinking related to netETHics. We studied the overall perceptions of stakeholders irrespective of diversity. The following question was studied:

- Are there differences between American and Chinese Internet Users?

THE EXPERIMENT

The present study is being conducted at two urban universities one in the USA and the other in China. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: Do’s and Don’ts of posting in the internet. Students were asked to rank their importance with 1 being of high important and 10 being low importance. There were 44 students in the USA and 134 students in China who participated in the questionnaire. Students were provided the purpose and guidelines of the experiment. It appears that both groups gender diversity is similar but Chinese sample appears to be somewhat younger than the USA sample. Students were also asked their perception of anonymity of the internet. Table 1 shows the anonymity perception of the two groups.

Table 1 Anonymity

		USA			China	
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	6	13.6	24	91	67.9
	2	19	43.2	76	43	32.1
	Total	25	56.8			
Missing	System	19	43.2			
Total		44	100.0		134	100.0

Table 1 reveals some surprising results. Almost 68% of Chinese students think the internet is anonymous whereas only 24% of US students think the internet is anonymous. This could be due to the younger sample population of Chinese students.

Analysis of student’s perception of ethics on the Internet were analyzed using SPSS. It showed differences in Chinese and US students. Chinese students were less hostile (i.e., they ranked be hostile as last) and be respectful high, whereas US students ranked think before you post high. We will discuss final results at the conference.

CONCLUSIONS

The global nature of the internet makes it impossible to have a “standard” code of conduct. One man’s food is another man’ poison. Given this scenario it is hard to find a standard that can accommodate multiple perspectives in a borderless medium. Users, however, can agree on some “basic” code of conduct on netEthics in a given domain. This paper addresses cross culture comparison of students’ perception of netEthics. Current research addresses internet ethics in the context of marketing (internet selling), cyberbullying or medical ethics. This paper adds to the existing knowledge in terms of cross cultural differences in ethical perception of the internet conversations on social media.

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