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## Understanding national culture effects on user behavior in integrative IS implementations

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### Abstract

This study examines how national culture manifests itself in integrative IS implementations and how it influences user behavior. Adopting a case survey approach, a sample of 70 cases encompassing 18 countries/regions, 18 industries and over 25 different integrative IT systems resulted in 481 instances of national culture dimensions, manifestations and effects. These were analysed through the lens of Hofstede's five national culture dimensions. Three types of national culture manifestations were identified, namely trust and respect, management culture and conflict. Management style and implementation ownership were identified as effects of national culture on user resistance.

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### 1. Introduction

The user behaviors acceptance and resistance are among the most common concepts in the information system (IS) literature<sup>1</sup>. Scholars on user acceptance and resistance agree that contextual factors are paramount for our understanding. One of these contextual factors is organizational culture, which is studied thoroughly and acknowledged as a crucial factor impacting user behavior in IS implementation<sup>1</sup>. However, many scholars seem to neglect the effects of *national* culture on user behavior<sup>3</sup>. In this study we propose national culture as a relevant explanatory factor of user acceptance and resistance, especially in the case of integrative information systems.

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Integrative information systems, such as Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, cover many organizational units<sup>4</sup>. Due to their integrative and company-wide nature, ERP implementations are usually associated with multi-site implementations, which can be located in various countries and national cultures.

This study aims to contribute to our understanding of the influence of national culture on integrative IS implementations. Therefore, a descriptive analysis will be conducted in answering the following research question: *How does national culture manifest itself in integrative IS implementations and how does it influence user acceptance and resistance?* By employing a case survey approach, this paper not only addresses calls for further research on the effects of national culture on IS implementation but also for a stronger methodological basis in this research area, by incorporating different countries in the same qualitative analysis<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. Theoretical background

User behavior is acknowledged to be a key implementation issue among IS scholars<sup>6</sup>. Resistance to IS implementation depends on the interaction between the technology and the context of use<sup>7</sup>. If the specific technology decreases the power of users these individuals may resist, and vice versa. Rivard and Lapointe<sup>9</sup> emphasize that it is particularly the variety of different individual perspectives that calls for a multi-perspective approach in studying IS implementations. By employing the lens of national culture on user resistance, this paper extends the existing body of knowledge to identify and analyze resistance.

A leading theory in the cross-cultural management is Hofstede's<sup>10</sup> cultural dimensions theory. In the literature, these dimensions have been re-interpreted and phrased differently<sup>12,13</sup>, however they all describe the same core characteristics that were originally identified.

*Power distance* refers to the differences of power distribution among countries. When there is a large power distance there is a general acceptance of the hierarchical order in which only a selected few should have a say in<sup>10</sup>. Low power distance can be characterized by flat organizational structures and low centralization of power and high distance indicates more hierarchy and centralization of authority<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, a high power distance typically has a lack of feedback and discussion among the different stakeholders involved<sup>13</sup>.

*Uncertainty avoidance* is an indication for a general feeling of being threatened by uncertainty and attempting to avoid this at all costs. This is reflected in stable careers, an aversion of anomalous ideas or behaviors and the acceptance of an absolute truth grounded in expertise<sup>10</sup>. In a culture with low uncertainty avoidance individuals are more willing to take risks and have a tolerance for inaccurate information<sup>14</sup>. The creation of more laws, rules and procedures with the goal to minimize ambiguity and uncertainty is a characteristic for a culture with high uncertainty avoidance<sup>13</sup>.

The *individualism-collectivism* dimension refers to how people see their social network, either focused around themselves (individualism) or on their 'group' towards which they feel complete loyalty (collectivism). Individualist cultures typically support a competitive relationship among colleagues, while collectivist cultures support mutual loyalty<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, promotion in individualist cultures is based on levels of expertise and poor performance is punished, while in a collectivist culture poor performance is handled by changes in appointed work<sup>13</sup>.

In the *masculinity-femininity* dimension the masculine cultures are more likely to be focused on work goals such as the acquirement of money or property rather than caring for life quality or other people<sup>10</sup>, and, in these cultures, assertiveness is a dominant value<sup>12</sup>. In feminine cultures, managers are more concerned with personal goals instead of work goals only and with providing a good work environment and friendly atmosphere.

*Long-term vs short-term* orientation relates to how individuals consider time span in making decisions or taking action<sup>15</sup>. Short-term oriented cultures are typically found in Western countries and focus more on immediate impact of decisions such as quarterly business targets<sup>12</sup>. In comparison, long-term oriented cultures appoint more focus and value to tradition and have a more extensive consideration for long-term implications of actions and decisions<sup>12</sup>.

Some authors have attempted to link national culture (NC) with IS implementations. However, most studies use a limited set of countries<sup>5</sup>. Woo<sup>16</sup> identifies a NC manifestation present in a Chinese manufacturer, that probably also can be found in other cultures. In their study of a different Chinese implementation, Srivastava and Gips label this manifestation *change culture* which is described as the extent to which a culture 'puts value on the past and therefore it is reluctant to change'<sup>17</sup>. This reluctance can be an inhibitor of perceived usefulness and therefore can, for example, induce user resistance. Another manifestation that scholars identified was labelled 'Trust & Respect'<sup>17</sup>.

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