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The impact of cultural collectivism on knowledge sharing among information technology majoring undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is to investigate the impact of cultural collectivism on knowledge sharing among information technology majoring undergraduates in Turkey. The study proposes a research model based on the theory of reasoned action (TRA). A structural equation model was used to test the research model against the data collected by means of a self-report questionnaire. Results show that cultural collectivism has a positive and significant impact on attitudes toward and subjective norms with regard to knowledge sharing. Confirming the TRA, results also suggest that behavioral intentions are jointly determined by attitudes and subjective norms. Implications of these findings are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Culture can be defined as a system of values, norms, and beliefs that influence and affect attitudes, subjective norms, and in turn, behaviors, including knowledge sharing. In this context, knowledge sharing is partaking information and experiences with others in organizations, teams, or classes (Gibbert & Krause, 2002; Wang & NOE, 2010; Lytras & Ordóñez de Pablos, 2011; Zhang, Ordóñez de Pablos, & Zhou, 2013). Such a definition of knowledge sharing includes both explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge exists in symbolic or written forms (i.e., reports, proposals), whereas implicit knowledge may be expressed in a written form but is not yet expressed (i.e., experience, know-how, know-whom, know-where) (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Lee, 2001; Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Zhang, Ordóñez de Pablos, & Zhang, 2012).

The impact of culture on knowledge sharing has been a frequent theme of recent research. For example, Zhang, Ordóñez de Pablos, and Xu (2014) investigated how cultural values affect explicit and implicit knowledge sharing within a multi-national virtual class. Their findings suggest that whereas some cultural dimensions (i.e., collectivism) have direct effects on knowledge sharing, most others

(i.e., uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and Confucian dynamism) have interactive effects. Similarly, Xiao, Li, Cao, and Tang (2012) investigated the effect of culture on knowledge exchange in online social networks based on the Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1985) and the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). They developed a theoretical model that predicted the knowledge exchange behavior in online social networks, where outcome expectation and trust mediated the relationship between personal culture orientation, online social tie, online social identity, and the effect of knowledge exchange. Their findings show that online social attributes are key facilitators in knowledge exchange in the online social networks.

Jarvenpaa and Staples (2000) investigated the effects of information culture on knowledge sharing in online communities and found that perceived information usefulness, task interdependence, and the user's computer comfort were most strongly associated with the use of collaborative electronic media. However, results also indicated that the use of collaborative electronic media for sharing knowledge was weakly associated with a more structured, closed-information culture. Ardichvili, Maurer, Li, Wentling, and Stuedemann (2006) conducted a qualitative study of national and ethnic cultural impacts on knowledge sharing in virtual communities at Caterpillar Inc. They found that culture played a significant role in knowledge sharing in virtual communities. More recently, Siau, Erickson, and Nah (2010) investigated whether national culture affects communication and the types of knowledge sharing in virtual communities and found national culture differences between the U.S. and China.

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The impact of national culture on knowledge sharing in an organizational context has also recently received increasing attention. For example, [Howell and Annansingh \(2013\)](#) investigated whether path-dependency existed in relation to the cultural expectations of knowledge generation and sharing in knowledge intensive organizations. They adopted a constructivist approach facilitated by focus-group discussions, which were conducted in two U.K. universities. Results showed that institutional culture and path dependency play a major role in the willingness of institutions to generate and share knowledge. [Mueller \(2014\)](#) aimed to investigate the cultural antecedents of knowledge sharing among project teams. Results of this quantitative survey indicated that time, structure, output orientation, and openness have positive effects on knowledge sharing among project teams.

[Shao, Feng, and Liu \(2012\)](#) developed a theoretical model to explore the mediating effects of organizational culture and knowledge sharing on transformational leadership and the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) success. Results suggest that transformational leadership is directly related with organizational culture and indirectly related with knowledge sharing and the ERP success. Specifically, developmental culture has a direct impact on the ERP success, whereas hierarchical culture, group and rational culture are indirectly related with the ERP success, mediated by explicit and tacit knowledge sharing. [DeLong and Fahey \(2000\)](#) investigated the impact of organizational culture on knowledge-related behaviors (i.e. creating, sharing, and using) based on a multi-site case analysis of chief knowledge officers and found that organizational knowledge-related values shape subsequent knowledge-related behaviors. For example, values that embrace the individual ownership of knowledge do not facilitate knowledge sharing. On the other hand, values that embrace the organizational ownership of knowledge facilitate knowledge sharing.

[Bock, Zmud, Kim, and Lee \(2005\)](#) developed an integrative understanding of the factors supporting or inhibiting knowledge sharing intentions. They found that attitudes toward and subjective norms with regard to knowledge sharing as well as the organizational climate affect intentions to share knowledge. In addition, results show that anticipated reciprocal relationships affect attitudes toward knowledge sharing whereas both the sense of self-worth and the organizational climate affect subjective norms.

[Chow, Deng, and Ho \(2000\)](#) investigated the impact of national culture on knowledge sharing among professionals based on the data collected from the U.S. and Chinese managers and found that the U.S. professionals were much more willing to share knowledge with out-of-group members than the Chinese counterparts were. However, consistent with their collectivistic value system, Chinese professionals were more likely to share knowledge within group members. In another study, [Rocha, Antonsen, and Ekstedt \(2014\)](#) investigated whether the effect of behavioral information security governance factors on the establishment of security knowledge sharing differed based on national culture. They found that national culture has a significant moderating effect on the association between the proposed relations. Their findings also suggest that national culture has a significant impact on knowledge sharing behavior and decision making.

In sum, studies reviewed provide convincing evidence that national culture plays a significant role on knowledge sharing behavior. However, we have not come across any research investigating such relations in the Turkish population. Therefore, the present study focuses on cultural collectivism as we hypothesized that there would be a strong relationship between this cultural value and knowledge sharing behavior in the context of Turkish culture.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

This study adopted the theory of reasoned action (TRA, [Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975](#)) as an initial theoretical framework to develop an integrative view of the impact of cultural collectivism on knowledge sharing. The TRA is a widely recognized model in explaining human behavior ([Ajzen, 2002](#)). The theory suggests that behaviors are predicted by intentions and that intentions are jointly determined by attitudes and subjective norms about the behavior. [Fig. 1](#) presents the proposed research model to be empirically tested in the present study. The research model suggests that behavioral intentions to share knowledge are predicted by attitudes and subjective norms about knowledge sharing, whereas attitudes and subjective norms are predicted by collectivism.

2.1. Collectivism

[Hofstede \(1980\)](#) introduced a number of national cultural dimensions, including individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity. Later, short term-long term orientation ([Hofstede & Bond, 1988](#)) and indulgence-restraint ([Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010](#)) were added to the model. Among these dimensions, Turkey has significantly diverged in collectivism from other countries ([Hofstede, 2001](#)). Previous studies suggest that collectivism constitutes the most important dimension of national culture in social behavior (e.g., [Kâğıtçıbaşı, 1987](#); [İmamoğlu, 1998](#); [Triandis, 1995](#)). Furthermore, dominant collectivist and individualist values in a society are considered as the main reasons for the cultural differences in self-construal ([İmamoğlu, 1998](#); [Hofstede, 2001](#); [Triandis, 2001](#)). Therefore, this study focused on the impact of collectivism on knowledge sharing through attitudes toward and subjective norms about knowledge sharing among information technology majoring undergraduates in Turkey.

Collectivism is “the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups” ([Hofstede & Bond, 1988](#), p. 10). Turkey may be considered as an example of traditional collectivist society ([McConatha, Hayta, Rieser-Danner, McConatha, & Polat, 2004](#)). Although she attempts to achieve independence and autonomy, the Turkish society has a strong loyalty to family and the group ([Kâğıtçıbaşı, 1994](#)). Naturally, individuals living in a collectivistic society consider the interests of the group (e.g., family members or friends) before theirs ([Hofstede, 2001](#)). This suggests that students living in Turkey may have positive attitudes toward knowledge sharing. Therefore, we hypothesized that collectivism would have a significant positive impact on attitudes toward knowledge sharing (H1) and that collectivism would have a significant positive impact on subjective norms about knowledge sharing (H2).

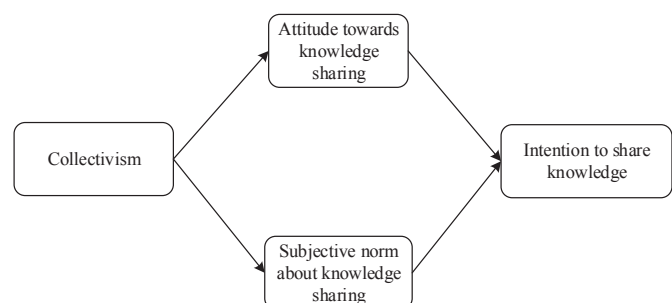


Fig. 1. Proposed model.

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