Culture Matters: A Survey Study of Social Question-Answering Behavior

Online social networking tools are used around the world by people to ask their friends questions, because friends provide direct, reliable, contextualized, and interactive responses. However, although the tools used in different cultures for question asking are often very similar, the way they are used can be very different, reflecting unique inherent cultural characteristics. We present the results of a survey designed to elicit cultural differences in people's social question asking behaviors across the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and India. The survey received responses from 933 people distributed across the four countries who held similar job roles and were employed by a single organization. Responses included information about the questions they ask via social networking tools, and their motivations for asking and answering questions online. The results reveal culture as a consistently significant factor in predicting people's social question and answer behavior. The prominent cultural differences we observe might be traced to people's inherent cultural characteristics (e.g., their cognitive patterns and social orientation), and should be comprehensively considered in designing social search systems.