

Understanding Users in Emerging Markets – Is there a ‘Genre’ of Methods?

Apala Lahiri Chavan
Chief Oracle and Innovator
Human Factors International
apala@humanfactors.com

Abstract

We are aware of the use of different methods for conducting user research, in different cultures. However, are there macro level cultural ‘patterns’ that determine overall genres of methods to be used in emerging versus developed countries? This paper constructs a hypothesis that answers this very question.

1 Who and What are the Emerging Markets?

‘Creating a powerful emerging-market strategy has moved to the top of the growth agendas of many multinational companies, and for good reason: in 15 years’ time, 57 percent of the nearly one billion households with earnings greater than \$20,000¹ a year will live in the developing world. Seven emerging economies—China, India, Brazil, Mexico, Russia, Turkey, and Indonesia—are expected to contribute about 45 percent of global GDP growth in the coming decade. Emerging markets will represent an even larger share of the growth in product categories, such as automobiles, that are highly mature in developed economies.’ McKinsey Quarterly, April 2011.

The original report by Goldman Sachs identified Brazil, Russia, India and China as emerging markets. Recently, however, additional countries have been added to the emerging markets list. The list below shows the countries considered as emerging market.

And ‘what’ are the emerging markets?

In the 2008 Emerging Economy Report^[8] the [Center for Knowledge Societies](#) defines Emerging Economies as those "regions of the world that are experiencing rapid informationalization under conditions of limited or partial industrialization." It appears that emerging markets lie at the intersection of non-traditional user behavior, the rise of new user groups and community adoption of products and services, and innovations in product technologies and platforms.

Americas	Europe, Middle East & Africa	Asia
Brazil	Czech Republic	China
Chile	Egypt	India
Colombia	Hungary	Indonesia
Mexico	Morocco	Korea
Peru	Poland	Malaysia
	Russia	Philippines
	South Africa	Taiwan
	Turkey	Thailand

Fig. 1.0 – List of 21 Emerging Countries

Source: <http://www.mscibarra.com/products/indices/equity/index.js>

To understand the ‘veterans’ of the emerging market club, let's take a look at some data about Brazil, Russia, India and China and compare the data with USA (as representative of the mature market club).

Understanding Users in Emerging Markets - Is there a 'Genre' of Methods?

	Brazil	Russia	India	China	USA
Population	198M	140M	1.16B	1.35B	300M
Literacy	88.60%	99.40%	61.00%	90.90%	99%
Urban	86%	73%	27.80%	42.30%	81%
Rural	14%	27%	72.20%	57.70%	9%
Unemployment-2007	9.30%	8%	7.80%	4%	4.50%
				note: official data for urban areas only. Including migrants may total unemployment to 9%. substantial unemployment and underemployment in rural areas.	

Fig. 2.0 – Demographic Data comparing the BRIC nations and the USA

	Brazil	Russia	India	China	USA
0-14 years:	26.7%	14.9%	30.8%,	20.4%	20.2%
15-64 years	66.8%	71.8%	64.3%	71.7%	67%
65 years and over	6.4%	13.3%	4.9%	7.9%	12.8%

Fig. 3.0 - Comparison of Age Structure across BRIC and USA

A quick glance at the data in the above tables reveals the following:

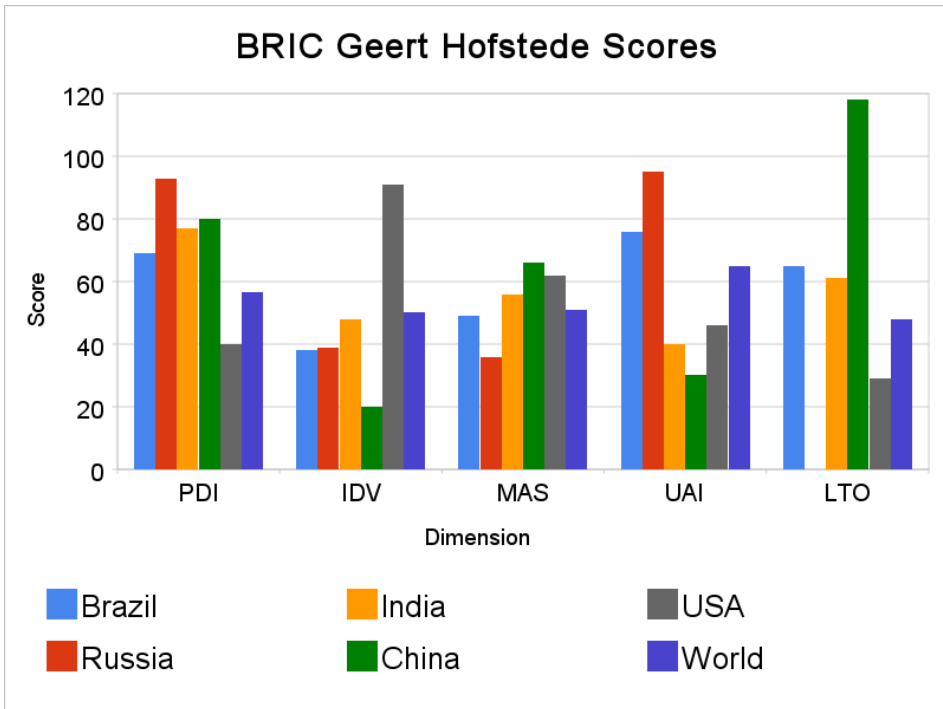
- The literacy rate certainly singles India out from the other emerging countries.
- The rural/urban divide also puts India into an entirely different category even within the BRIC nations.
- China too is very different in this respect, from Brazil and Russia.
- Russia has a larger % of the population (than the other BRIC nations) in

the 65+ years category while India has a larger % (than the other BRIC nations) in the 0-14 years category.

2 Cultural Differences

What about cultural similarities and differences? Can one assume that they are similar cultural entities?

Taking a look at the BRIC nations, using Hofstede's dimensions to measure cultural similarities and differences, here is what we get:



PDI – Power Distance

IDV – Individualism

MAS - Masculinity

UAI – Uncertainty Avoidance

LTO – Long Term Orientation

	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO
China	80	20	66	40	118
India	77	48	56	40	61
Brazil	69	38	49	76	65
Russia	95	40	30	90	10

Fig 4.0 – Data on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions for BRIC nations and the USA

Source: http://www.uiowa.edu/ifdebook/faq/faq_docs/emerging_markets.shtml

- The Power Distance (PDI) scores for all the BRIC countries are much higher than both the USA and the world average scores. In other words, the BRIC countries have more hierarchy in the culture than the USA and other countries in the world.
- The Individualism (IDV) scores for the BRIC countries are generally lower than the USA and the world average scores (with India being the minor exception). BRIC countries, therefore, tend to be more group oriented or collective in their behavior than the USA and the rest of the world.
- The Masculinity (MAS) scores for the BRIC countries are in the same range as the USA and the world average scores. The entire world seems to be more or less on the same page as far as being more masculine than feminine, on the whole.
- The Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) scores for Brazil and Russia are much higher than the USA and world average scores while the scores for India and China are much lower. Interesting difference even between the BRIC countries, on this dimension. Brazil and Russia seem VERY much more risk averse than India and China and the rest of the world.
- The Long Term Orientation (LTO) scores for the BRIC countries (and especially China) are much higher than the USA and the world average scores. In fact, the USA and

China seem on opposite ends of the spectrum for this dimension. Chinese culture orients its people to live for tomorrow even more than for today. While American culture orients its people in the opposite direction.

3 Focus On Two Dimensions

The 2 dimensions that form the basis of this paper are those of Power Distance and Individualism/Collectivism. Why these 2 dimensions? The reason I have been focusing on these 2 dimensions is because of insights gained during field - work and usability testing.

Ten years of working on user research and usability testing has given me the opportunity to experience contrasting style of responses from participants in different countries.

Early experience made it abundantly clear that in several Asian and African countries, participants had a very cautious, apprehensive and inhibited style when responding to the archetypal one on one interview or task based think aloud protocol.

On the other hand, the same one on one interview or task based think aloud protocol met with a confident, comfortable and candid response style in the USA UK and Nordic countries.

This led me to experiment with different user research methods based on analysis of underlying cultural dimensions and the 2 dimensions that I found most responsible for the difference in response styles, were the Individualism-Collectivism and Power Distance dimensions.

It was, in fact, only recently while I worked on a project amongst coffee farmers in Kenya that this difference in response style was reinforced once again.

When an exercise to compare and rate several financial institutions was presented in a manner that was different from the usual 5 point or 7 point scale that went from 'like very much' to 'dislike very much', the response was instantaneous and enthusiastic. All we did was to present pictures of animals from the Kenyan coffee farmer's ecosystem and ask the participants to associate each financial institution with the most appropriate animal. Once the associations were done (without the uncomfortable feeling that they were giving a definitive 'bad' rating to anyone), the rationale behind the associations revealed very surprising insights.

The ten years of experiencing contrasting response styles made me reflect deeply about the possibility of the emerging countries forming a cluster where

Understanding Users in Emerging Markets - Is there a 'Genre' of Methods?

participants may all exhibit similar behavior during research because of similarities in the Individualism-Collectivism and Power Distance dimensions.

As I looked at these specific dimensions and then examined the data for the emerging countries (fig 5.0), on these dimensions, a consistent picture presented itself.

Scores for the Hofstede IBM study			
Countries	Additional notes Hofstede	Power Distance*	Individualism *
Brazil		69	38
Chile		63	23
China	(estimated)	80	20
Colombia		67	13
Hungary	(estimated)	46	80
India		77	48
Indonesia		78	14
Israel		13	54
Korea (South)		60	18
Malaysia		104	26
Mexico		81	30
Morocco	(estimated)	70	46
Peru		64	16
Philippines		94	32
Poland	(estimated)	68	60
Russia	(estimated)	93	39
South Africa		49	65
Taiwan		58	17
Thailand		64	20
Turkey		66	37
United States		40	91
* Higher scores indicate higher levels of this dimension			

Fig 5.0 – Data on Cultural Dimensions for the 22 emerging countries

Understanding Users in Emerging Markets - Is there a 'Genre' of Methods?

Scores for the Hofstede IBM study (2001)		
Country	Power Distance	Individualism
Australia	36	90
Austria	11	55
Canada	39	80
Denmark	18	74
Finland	33	63
Germany	35	67
Great Britain	35	89
Ireland	28	70
Netherlands	38	80
New Zealand	22	79
Sweden	31	71
Switzerland	34	69
United States	40	91

Fig 6.0 – Data on Cultural Dimensions for 13 developed countries

17 out of the 22 countries officially listed as emerging countries, score high to very high on Power Distance and low to very low on Individualism.

These scores stand out in sharp contrast to the scores that USA and 12 other mature or developed countries have on these very dimensions (Fig 6.0).

Interestingly, Hungary, Israel and South Africa seem to be the outliers among the emerging countries and researching these 3 countries would be an interesting project by itself. Similarly, studying the outliers amongst developed countries would provide important insights.

What do we make of the scoring pattern we see for the 17 emerging countries?

We see an interesting pattern, which raises some important questions about user research methods in these countries.

High Power Distance, as we know, indicates a hierarchical and stratified culture, while Low Individualism implies a culture that values the group over the individual.

A combination of these 2 dimensions implies that there are bound to be a degree of 'conflict of interest' of sorts between what an individual 'really' feels and

what he/she can or will express when in a group. This ‘conflict’ would be even more heightened when the ‘group’ consists of members who belong to ‘strata’ higher than the individual who wishes / needs to express himself/herself.

3 Different Self - Construals

In fact, a lot of research has been focusing attention on the issue of ‘self’ and ‘identity’ and how this pans out differently in collectivist versus individualist cultures. It is, in fact the cross-cultural work from anthropology and social psychology that has led to the distinction between the independent self and the interdependent self. The hypothesis that has been put forward is that people who belong to highly individualist cultures tend to develop a view of self as an independent agent, while those who grow up in highly collectivist cultures develop a view of self as interdependent on others.

As Benradette says, “Social scientists from various disciplines have shared an interest in gaining a greater understanding of the self. The self is often seen as a link between the larger society and the individual. It represents a mechanism through which the society and culture influence and shape the behavior of individuals. The self is also typically conceptualized as a vehicle of individual and group agency, providing for the opposite direction of influence from the individual to the larger community and society [Callero 2003].

Markus and Kitayama [1991] introduced the concepts of the independent and interdependent self-construal, which refer to thoughts, feelings, and actions related to the self in relation to the group. They state, the Western notion of the self as an entity containing significant dispositional attributes, and as detached from context, is simply not an adequate description of selfhood. Rather, in many construals, the self is viewed as *interdependent* with the surrounding context, and it is the “other” or the “self-in-relation-to-other” that is focal in individual experience [Markus & Kitayama 1991, p.225].

The *independent self-construal* is associated with Western individualistic cultures while the interdependent self is associated with Asian collectivist cultures. The person with an independent self sees herself as a unique person, separate from others, with internal traits, thoughts, and abilities that are separate from the characteristics of the social situation.

This type of self involves an emphasis on expressing the self, seeking one’s own goals, and communicating in a direct fashion. Others are viewed in a similar fashion, as independent actors whose internal thoughts, feelings, and traits must

be understood in order to understand their behavior. To the person with a highly independent self-construal, the self is experienced as a private inner self.

The person with an *interdependent self-construal* sees himself as a part of a group, intertwined with others, and as influenced greatly by the social situation and context.

This type of self involves an emphasis on relationships, fitting in to the group, coordinating one's behavior to the needs of the group, and communicating in an indirect fashion. To a person with this type of self, others are viewed similarly as intertwined in relationships and as having their actions molded by the specifics of the situation.

Hence, reading the context allows one to communicate more indirectly and this often helps to maintain harmonious relationships. To this type of person, the public self takes center stage with the most significant aspects of self found in relationships and contexts rather than inside the individual. In fact, "...for the interdependent self, others are included *within* the boundaries of the self because relations with others in specific contexts are the defining features of the self" [Markus & Kitayama 1991, p.245].

4 Different Self Construals = Different Methods

Given the differences between the independent and interdependent self-construal, it is my contention that those with an interdependent self-construal (such as the population of the 17 collectivist and high power distance cultures in the 'emerging' world) consist, because of the intertwining of the self with the group, of many layers of personality. This is evident from the previously mentioned research on the topic. The very existence of the 'private' and 'public' self for those with an interdependent self construal indicates the duality that is absent in the case of those with an independent self construal, in, for example, the USA and the other 12 developed countries mentioned in fig. 6.0.

Another interesting perspective, that reinforces the idea of 'simple' or WYSIWYG cultures (individualist and low power distance cultures) versus 'complex', layered cultures (collectivist and high power distance cultures), comes from a comment by anthropologists Monaghan and Just, on Emile Durkheim. While discussing Durkheim's concepts of 'collective effervescence' and 'collective representations' they talk about how extremely 'ironic it is that simple, homogenous societies are intent on creating difference where little exists (individualistic and non-hierarchical cultures), while complex, heterogenous

societies must strain mightily to create unity out of organic diversity (collectivist and hierarchical cultures).

How does all this affect the core question of user research methods?

Based on the discussion on different self-construal, I present the following hypothesis:

1. Conducting user research in the USA or the other 12 countries, is very different from conducting user research in a culture that has a split public/private self-construal. In the USA or any of the 12 other countries with similar scores on the Individualist and Power Distance dimensions, an individual has one 'self' and this 'self' manifests consistently in every situation, whether private or public. These individuals (and cultures) are therefore very WYSIWYG! To understand such a culture (and the people thereof) it should be possible to get valid data with 'self-ethnography' followed by an in depth interview session based on theories and findings from social psychology.

By 'self-ethnography', I mean that the respondent/actor can be given a culture probe/diary/photo journal etc. as a means to record his/her own ecosystem and 'days in the life of'. This self-reportage would be an accurate representation of his/her relatively less layered ecosystem, driven by an independent self-construal. Moreover, the need for individual self-expression will motivate the respondent to 'conduct' the self-ethnography. This data from the 'self-ethnography' could then be used as input for the in depth interview, to be conducted at a research facility. It would, therefore, not be absolutely necessary for the researcher to visit the household/workplace and conduct the ethnographic study.

The theories and findings from social psychology (social proof, false consensus bias, social identity, conforming to the norm, need to individuate, status quo bias, etc.,) would help determine underlying common drives and blocks (between seemingly 'different' respondents), during the interview.

2. It is quite the opposite in a culture where an individual has different public and private selves! In such a culture, 'self-ethnography' will not work because of the complex, layered culture and the interdependent self-construal. The self-reportage, in this case is likely to reflect the view of the ecosystem and 'days in

the life of', from the perspective of the 'public' self of the respondent, the 'self' that will speak within the context of the relationship between the 'professional stranger' (the researcher) and himself/herself. To understand the 'private self', ethnography (in its modern day abridged avatar) needs to be done by the researcher and not by the respondent. The researcher needs to mandatorily visit the household / work place (as is relevant for the research) and piece together the complex and much layered ecosystem.

The theories and findings from social psychology need to be used here too (to uncover underlying differences in drives and blocks, between seemingly 'similar' respondents) and can be integrated within the ethnographic study.

5 Conclusion

The hypothesis of 'self-ethnography' as a developed country research genre versus 'ethnographer driven ethnography' as an emerging country research genre needs to be further validated.

The validation will also need to explore whether there is a watertight separation in terms of cultural attributes, between emerging and developed countries.

If the hypothesis is true, then what are the 'tools'/ techniques that constitute a developed country research genre versus an emerging country research genre?

Other questions that will determine which 'genres' can be used by researchers at which time and whether 'hybrid genres' are needed, are:

1. When does an emerging country 'emerge'?
2. Do the cultural attributes change, on 'emerging'?
3. Do emerging countries have 'developed' population segments and do developed countries have 'emerging' population segments? If yes, what research methods apply to these segments?

For meaningful and actionable insights to be arrived at, from user research in the fast changing emerging countries, it is imperative to understand the connection between social structure and personality. The emerging countries being in a state of flux makes it necessary to examine shifts in culture and social structure and linking these to changes in self and asking critical questions such as, 'How are these local social worlds being constantly influenced and shaped by the broader changes in culture and social structure?'

References

- Bijapurkar, R. *We Are Like That Only: Understanding The Logic Of Consumer India*, (2007). Penguin India
- Callero, P. (2003). *The sociology of the self*. *Annual Review of Sociology*
- Durkheim, E. (1893). *The Division of Labour in Society*
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Markus, H. R., Kitayama, S. (1991). *Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation*. *Psychological Review*
- Monghan J., Just P. (2000). *Social and Cultural Anthropology*. Oxford University Press
- Oyserman, D., and Lee, S. (2008). Does culture influence what and how we think? Effects of priming individualism and collectivism. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134 (2), 311 – 342.
- Prahalad, C. K. (2006). *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid: Eradicating Poverty Through Profits*. Wharton School Publishing
- Singelis, T. M. (1994). The measurement of independent and interdependent self-construals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.
- Triandis, H. C., McCusker, C., & Hui, C. H. (1990). Multimethod probes of individualism and collectivism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*
- Triandis, H. C. (1989). The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts. *Psychological Review*
- Whitney, P (edited), (2005). *Designing for the Emerging Markets: Interview with Marriott International*. Institute of Design, IIT
- Wylie, R. C. (1961). *The self-concept*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press