

A Reflection on Intercept Survey Use in Thailand: Some Cultural Considerations for Transnational Studies

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Abstract: How people respond to research surveys has been of long standing interest to investigators. In this paper, we reflect on our experiences in using the intercept survey as part of a study that examined m-payment in Thailand. The paper does not report the findings of the original m-payment study, but highlights how the cultural features of the target population were an important consideration at the survey translation, pilot testing and data collection stages. We propose that cultural features such as face-to-face interaction, the intrinsic notion of politeness (Kreng Jai) and conveying respect to potential participants (giving the Wai) as significant elements in achieving a relatively high participation rate. Survey translation occurred via moderated discussions where the cultural dimensions of collectivism and personal status (relevant in high PDI societies) were observed to influence group dynamics. In the field, the intercept survey promoted direct engagement with people (preferred amongst collectivism cultures), with respondents observed to be highly considerate of investigator needs and thus more likely to participate in the study. The paper's contribution is one of highlighting the importance of considering national culture in the initial survey translation stage and later when collecting data in the field. Although a reflective piece, we believe that the findings have the potential to inform and assist researchers to improve the quality of their survey instruments and data responses in similar cultural settings.

Keywords: Culture, intercept survey, Hofstede, Thailand, data collection, methodology, Kreng Jai, The Wai

1 Introduction

In recent times, research undertaken in non-Western countries has highlighted the importance of accommodating national culture in explaining findings, particularly when considering behavior at the group and individual level (Hofstede et al. 2010). Indeed, there is an increasing incidence of transnational research being undertaken, where theories developed in Western countries are subsequently replicated in culturally diverse non-Western settings— researchers often spending considerable effort in adapting their Western-derived concepts, questionnaires and methods to the cultural setting of the new country (Smith et al. 2011). According to Davidov et al. (2014), the collecting of data for transnational research has its challenges, as participants may be influenced by a myriad of contextual issues based on cultural diversity. Furthermore, although studies can be modified to adapt concepts to accommodate cultural differences, Smith et al. (2011) suggest that researchers need to pay more attention to their choice of sampling frames and data collection modes, as certain approaches are capable of improving the quality of data collected for analysis.

In examining studies that are adapted for use in non-Western countries, especially those in Asia, it is our observation that while meticulous care is taken to adapt Western-originated theories and concepts, the same amount of attention is not paid to cultural issues when actually collecting data. This notion follows from Smith et al. (2011), who indicate that survey data collection across cross-national studies aims to be meaningfully and comparable with the unfortunate consequence that "...this requirement has at times been thought to imply that identical surveys must be uniformly fielded— using identical methods— in all countries" (p.485). Arguably, the use of identical methods can potentially lead investigators to overlook the influence of national culture on practical data collection. For instance, Davidov et al. (2014), re-iterate good survey design for cross-cultural studies to address translation, appropriate sampling, high response rates, the same mode of data collection and instrument validity. It is not clear as to whether the reference to the same mode of data collection relates to practical on-the-ground approaches that might be influenced by cultural factors. Riemer & Shavitt (2011) report response differences amongst people from collectivists or individualist backgrounds— noting the that collectivists had different approaches when answering surveys. Their study collected data from US, Hong Kong and Singapore students through a replicated approach— not mentioning if the influence of cultural orientation was accommodated in the actual practical collection of data. Investigations by Fang et al.

(2016) noted that collectivist cultures are more likely to disengage when undertaking online surveys, compared to people in individualistic cultures. The study used the same data collection approach— however, in collectivist societies, group interaction and participation is an important social norm (Hofstede et al. 2010). Given that the study used an email invitation to solicit responses, Collectivists in the study may have performed/responded differently should they have been invited to take the online survey as part of a group— for instance in a classroom setting. In these examples, there is replication of western-originating concept in different cultural settings, using the same data collection approach— an issue overlooking respondent cultural issues that may have potentially impacted the collection of the data.

In this paper we reflect on the practical issues behind the use of the intercept survey as a data collection instrument when investigating the adoption of mobile payment (m-payment) services in Thailand. The motivations for the original study (Phonthanukitithaworn et al. 2016) were premised on a mismatch between the Thai government’s significant investment in mobile payment infrastructure and the relatively low levels of adoption of mobile services by the Thai population. The original study’s research design and methodology followed a typical transnational replication process where Western-derived theories of innovation diffusion (Rogers 2003) and technology acceptance theory (Davis 1989) were used to explore the adoption of mobile services in a South East Asian country. Indeed, the intercept survey used in the original study was found to be convenient and direct—enabling the interviewer to the further engage with participants (Churchill et al. 2008). However, in retrospect, the authors were able to conclude that the intercept survey was a data collection instrument that was relatively compatible in accommodating the specific cultural features encountered in Thai society— subsequently improving data collection process. Although focused on Thailand, the intercept survey method is potentially relevant for investigators that undertake research in Asian countries— where similar cultural characteristics are encountered (Niffenegger et al. 2006).

The paper’s contribution is one of highlighting the importance of considering national culture in the initial survey translation stage and later when collecting data in the field. Although a reflective piece drawing from investigator experiences, we believe the findings have the potential to assist researchers in improving the quality of their survey instruments and data responses in similar cultural settings.

2 Literature Review

Appropriately designed surveys and questionnaires are a common and important data collection method used in research (Tourangeau et al. 2000; Bradburn et al. 2004). Indeed, the traditionally administered survey method is credited as a quick, inexpensive, efficient and accurate instrument of gathering information from a sample population that can be easily administered (Bradburn et al. 2004). Survey methods can range from traditional post-out and return mail questionnaires, online surveys and cold-calling using the telephone (Tourangeau et al. 2000; Harzing et al. 2013). Surveys have been argued as embodying various social features, as well as having various perceived cognitive tasks (Sudman et al. 1996). A survey may be typically self-administered, or may involve listening to questions posed through an interview— scenarios that are reflect a diverse situational factors that may impact data collection, participant behavior and subsequent research results (Wright & Ogbbueho 2014). Clearly, when considering data collection methods, each will have its own strengths as well as limitations, and selecting an appropriate survey method depends on the research objectives and the study’s design (Hackett 1981). In recent times, the use of online surveys has received a great deal of attention from many researchers, as it is an inexpensive and enables the capture of people’s views and perceptions in a relatively short period of time (Harzing et al. 2013). However, such online surveys can have inherent limitations in cultures where there is preference to engage with other people in a face-to-face manner.

2.1 Transnational studies

According to Harzing et al. (2013), large-scale international studies often use online or traditional mail surveys to collect data. The authors note that face-to-face and telephone surveys may not be feasible in international investigations due to cost and language issues. Uskul et al. (2010) suggests that people will interpret survey questions based on their cultural background and inclination— where answers are potentially shaped or directed by these cultural preference and features. Indeed, they argue that participants might draw certain pragmatic inferences from reading questions— potentially altering or modifying their response accordingly. Seemingly, there are certain considerations needed when it comes to conducting transnational surveys which are aimed at obtaining consistency across survey groups. Transnational (or cross-national) studies generally

involve the extension of Western-oriented research to non-western countries in order to expand pre-existing knowledge through the inclusion of new perspectives. Furthermore, the cross-national differences reported in such studies may be of concern should they be influenced by survey collection modes reflecting artifact of methodology rather than actual national differences (Smith et al. 2011). Clearly, there is also the need to consider the implications of the person's national culture and setting in regards to how to refine research questions and even collect the data.

In terms of transnational survey outcomes, even the most meticulously designed survey can result in frustration or failure when the data collected is non-representative of the target population and/or delivers a poor response rate (Bradburn et al. 2004). In general, it has been shown that response rates for traditional mailed questionnaires can be poor, particularly when the topic is of low interest or the questionnaires too long (Sellitto 2006). Apart from these traditional drawbacks, survey research can have some inherent limitations in a transnational setting such as encountered in Asian countries, where response styles, attitude and behavior influences data collection (Dolnicar & Grun 2007; Smith et al. 2011; Davidov et al. 2014). For instance, the use of online surveys can have inherent limitations in cultures where there is a preference to engage with other people in a face-to-face manner. This preference for face-to-face contact tends to be encountered in collectivist cultures which are prevalent in Asia (Uskul et al. 2010). Smith et al (2013) identify certain data collection methods that were being commonly used for transnational studies ranging from self-administered surveys, face-to-face interviews or a combination of these. Although the authors note the challenge of these data collection approaches in cross-national study, they allude to accommodating cultural preferences of the surveyed population as a means for improving the quality of data response.

2.2 The intercept survey

A data collection approach used in the field is the intercept survey (or interview). The intercept survey allows the investigator to undertake a personal face-to-face interview that is generally conducted in an open public area where potential respondents are politely stopped and asked to participate (Churchill et al. 2008). An open area might include a location such as a university campus, the environs surrounding a sport stadium, a public thoroughfare or a shopping mall. Hence, the intercept survey in such an open area enables a researcher to conveniently access a large random pool of potential participants and moves away from a self-administered situation where participants potential control the flow and tempo of the response process (Wright & Ogbueho 2014). The intercept survey technique has proved very useful in studies involving new products or services where respondents might need to visualize or try a product before they can express meaningful feedback (Malhotra et al. 2002). Furthermore, since the interaction occurs in real time, prospective respondents are able to raise queries regarding themes covered in the questions— the interviewer being able to provide further information to clarify any concerns. Hence, the important characteristics of the intercept survey include:

- Being able to be conducted in public areas as a personal or face-to-face interview
- Allowing potential respondents are politely stopped and asked to participate
- Significant cost savings compared to other types of surveys where data capture is difficult
- Being a frequently applied tool in marketing research
- The opportunity for respondents to visualize, touch or try a product before giving feedback or opinions
- Being also known as an intercept interview or the central location personal interview

The personal face-to-face nature of the intercept survey and the polite nature needed to engage with potential respondents can be argued as being well suited to collectivist societies commonly encountered in Asia. Some research bodies, such as the European Social Survey, use face-to-face surveys in order to minimize errors and subsequently ensure data quality (Smith et al. 2011). Clearly, the face-to-face and error-minimization features of the intercept survey intrinsically align with being used in transnational studies where it is culturally adaptive, as well as focused on data quality.

3 The Research Study

The paper reports the personal experiences and reflections of the primary investigator in the conduct of an intercept survey in the Thai capital of Bangkok in 2012. The use of personal reflection and experience is well documented in the research literature, and is particularly important in social science, teaching and education (Larriee 2000; Scanlan et al. 2002; Sellitto 2010; Rich 2014), where an introspective review of the practical activities one undertakes can be implicitly or explicitly used to explain certain findings and/or be subsequently

reshaped for future actions (Sellitto 2010). Furthermore, first-hand author experiences have been shown to make import contributions in understanding on-the-ground aspect of data collection and have provided insight in multidisciplinary and culturally sensitive research (Wardale et al. 2015); cross-cultural interviews (Hill 2004); the influence of culture when investigating Indian adults (Miltiades 2008) and the potential impact of socialization with interviewees (Wong 2015).

3.1 The study details

The survey itself collected data that would allow subsequent modelling of mobile services adoption in Thailand and involved conducting some 500 intercept survey interviews over a 3-4 month period. In the original study, a significant success rate was achieved at the pre-study pilot testing stage (95% people approached participated), whilst some 75% of all the people approached during the intercept survey proper agreed to participate. After the study, the primary investigator was able to reflect on the practicality of the data collection and concluded that his background and understanding of Thai culture was implicit in the success of the relatively high participation and response rates associated with the survey.

3.2 The application of the intercept survey method for this research

In terms of the study, the reflective views of the primary investigator when translating the survey instrument for use in Thailand, and also during the practical conduct of the research are seen as being the two main points where cultural factors were important to consider and act on. These practical points included—

3.2.1 The translation of the Intercept Survey for use in Thailand

This involved aggregating questions from the relevant western literature and then checking the suitability for inclusion in the study. Several iterations of question development occurred. The initial development of the questions was in English and used a one-on-one feedback approach with native English speakers to check for clarity and representativeness. Once the questions were translated, they were presented to a group that included Thai-speaking nationals in order to gain feedback on any ambiguities that may have occurred in the translation and also on the suitability of questions.

3.2.2 The Intercept Survey in the Field

Local conditions needed to be explored before running the survey proper. This allowed the primary investigator to determine how to best approach people in a public space, so as to engage with them appropriately and get them to undertake the intercept survey. At this point any practical challenges of running the survey were able to be identified, such as the suitability of locations, adherence to local regulations and the time needed for completing the survey.

These above practical points reflect a pre-data collection stage and the collection of data in-situ that are typical of most survey research studies. However, when reflecting on these processes after the study, it became apparent that Thai cultural features were implicitly considered in the initial translation and subsequent practical running of the intercept survey.

4 The Implications of Thai Culture When Using the Intercept Survey

There are various approaches to explaining national culture however, the one used in this paper is Hofstede et al.'s (2010) five cultural dimensions. Culture reflects the unwritten, tacit aspects of a person's environment and can be viewed as the "collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede et al. 2010:6). Notably, some five dimensions can be used to distinguish different national cultures which include a power distance index (PDI), individualism versus collectivism (IDV), the country's uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), masculinity vs femininity (MAS) and whether a culture has a long-term orientation (LTO) in regards to achieving future objectives and values. Many national scores for each cultural dimension have been calculated including those relating to Thailand. Hofstede et al.'s (2010) five dimensions of national culture for Thailand are now succinctly summarized with (this summary also gives comparative examples of selective Asian-based nations to show similarity).

4.1 Power distance

Power distance reflects the extent to which a member of a society passively accepts that the power controlled and authorised in institutions is distributed equally among individuals in the society. Thailand scores moderately high in terms of authoritative distribution of power apportioned to people, organisations and leadership with a PDI of 64. High PDI societies tend to value status and authority and there is an inclination for people to respect as well as obey directives that might be given by others in a position of perceived leadership, power or authority. Status and authority are very important in Thai society with Thais potentially more willing to undertake certain tasks when they are directed to do so, since they are inclined to show respect for authority and conform to the expectations of superiors. Moderately high PDI in the Asian region tends to be commonly encountered with countries such as Singapore (74), Malaysia (104) and Japan (54) all having scores much higher than encountered in Western-based countries that typically have low PDI index scores. Western-based countries tend to have a culture that considers community status and authority differently than might be expected in Asian nations.

4.2 Individualism versus collectivism

Thailand is considered to score relatively low with respect to individualism, having an Individualism index (IDV) score of 20. Individualism reflects the extent to which people emphasize qualities such as loyalty, solidarity, interdependence and identification with others that form part of a group. In individualist societies people are “I” conscious— where individual decisions are valued more greatly than group decisions. A low IDV score tends to indicate that a society is collectivist in nature where people are “we” conscious— where identity is based on the whole social system of relationships and interactions, rather than individual needs. Thailand is a collectivist society and there is a primary tendency to build and maintain relationships by people amongst their social group. Hence, people’s opinions play an important role in affecting an individual’s behavior. In general, countries in the Asian region tend to have low Individualism index scores as seen in countries such as Singapore (20), Malaysia (26) and Japan (46)— scoring lower than countries such as the USA (91), Australia (90) and Denmark (73). In western countries, personal needs and interactions tend to revolve around the individual and are more focused on ‘me’ (immediate needs, close family and friends). This sharply contrasts to Asian cultures, where there is a decidedly ‘we’ focus of people that tends to underpin the social and cultural fabric of society.

4.3 Uncertainty avoidance

Thailand scores moderately high when it comes to uncertainty avoidance having a UAI of 64. Uncertainty avoidance reflects the extent to which people in a society feel threatened by ambiguous situations and attempt to avoid such situations through the enactment of particular rules, regulations and religions. People in high UAI cultures are more interested in the process of how a thing works— rather than in final outcomes. Thais may perceive unusual requests as threatening and hence will draw on the expected societal norms when dealing with such scenarios. This cultural feature for Asian countries sees a diversity of UAI scores across nations— some countries having a relatively low score such as Malaysia (36) when compared to the highest score in Japan (92). A similar observation can be made for western-based countries with significant diversity being found across countries— the USA (44), Australia (51), Great Britain (35) and Denmark (23). Arguably, the UAI between Asian and western countries does not appear to be a distinguishing cultural factor.

4.4 Masculinity versus femininity

The cultural issue of masculinity-femininity refers to the general disposition of individuals in a society as characterized by the features of assertiveness or nurturance— features that reflect the extent to which people adhere to societal expectations of gender roles. Thai culture embodies femininity attributes— reflected in one of the lowest Masculine index (MAS) scores in Asia of 34. The masculine-feminine dimension embodies the extent to which people value feminine values such as relationships, equality, caring for others and preserving the environment— in contrast to masculine values which are the opposite. Groups that score low on the MAS index are more service-oriented and have a strong people focus. The strong human orientation in Thai society is likely to make personal face-to-face conversations an important element of Thai culture. Other countries in Asia all have higher MAS scores than Thailand however, there is a decidedly common femininity feature noted amongst many of these countries when compared to a majority of western-based nations such as the USA (62), Australia (61), Great Britain (66). Some outlier MAS scores are noted with the western nation of Denmark (16) having a lower score than Thailand, whilst Japan (95) has one of the highest scores.

4.4 Long-term orientation

Thai society has cultural characteristics that are considered to reflect a moderately-high value in regards to long-term orientation (LTO index of 56). Long-term/short-term orientation refers to the attitudes and beliefs held by people of different cultural groups with regard to the future, and this determines how they behave. A high LTO index reflects the extent to which people give greater consideration to thrift, cost saving, stability and continuity in planning for the future. Thais are more likely to be resourceful and potentially engage in activities they perceive as beneficial to them or their society in the long run. Such activities might include planning a child's education, saving for later life, or investing in buying the latest tools. Long-term orientation is typically underpinned by the foundations of Chinese Confucius teachings that reflect a set of pragmatic rules that people can use to direct their everyday life. As expected other Asian nations whose people have historical links to Sino-based values have a relatively high LTO index— for instance China (118), Taiwan (87) and Singapore (48). For Western-based nations such as the USA (29), Australia (31) and Great Britain (35) with relatively low LTO indexes— the observation can be made that such countries tend to be more short term oriented in regards to how people might plan their future needs.

4.5 Thai culture and the intercept survey

As a general summary, Thai society is characterized as having a relatively high PDI, high LTO and a high UAI. Conversely, Thai society scores relatively low on cultural features relating to individualism (IDV) and masculinity (MAS). These scores for Thailand can be argued to typically be representative of some of the cultural dimensions that distinguish Eastern societies from their Western counterparts. The five cultural dimensions are now discussed in the context the main features and characteristics of the intercept survey.

A power distance index (PDI) reflects the extent to which a member of a society passively accepts that the power controlled and authorised in institutions is distributed equally among individuals in the society. Thailand has a high PDI score and people tend to respect and obey certain directives of people with perceived status or in a position of authority— hence, there can be an assumed willingness of Thais to feel that they need to comply. A feature of the intercept survey is to approach and politely request people's participation to undertake an important survey task. This particularly cultural dimension may be an influencing aspect for Thais being more conducive to participation in the survey. Arguably in a society with a high PDI, people may be more willing to participate in a survey when they are directed to do so, since they are inclined to show respect for authority and conform to the directives of a leader or manager when asked to do so. Some researchers have used this directed approach as a method for gathering data (Murphy et al. 2010).

Thailand has a low individualism index (IDV) and people exhibit collectivist attributes that highly value social interactions. The collectivist cultures of South East Asia have been noted to have inherent societal values that stress the importance of a person being interconnected with other individuals as well as being accepted within a group, thus having a sense of belonging (Niffenegger et al. 2006; Uskul et al. 2010). Thais tend to value relationships within groups and perceived opinions influence individual's behavior. The intercept survey requires face-to-face interaction in order to engage prospective participants and collect data. This face-to-face aspect of the intercept survey lends itself to social engagement which aligns very well to the relationship features encountered in collectivist society. Hence, the use of intercept survey amongst low IDV scoring cultures as a direct face-to-face method may be a better fit than traditional and online surveys that have limited social engagement.

The Uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) of Thailand is relatively high and as such people may view any unusual request as potentially challenging, drawing on the expected societal norm of politeness when in this situation. Perceived uncertainty suggests that Thais are considerate of anticipated future ramifications of their actions, trying to avoid ambiguous situations or risks (Hofstede et al., 2010). Because the intercept survey involves an approach and request scenario, Thais may perceive this as a relatively uncomfortable situation. Part of their reaction may involve politely participating in the survey in order to not offend. The culturally dimension of uncertainty avoidance amongst Thais appears to have a synergy with the PDI cultural dimension where being polite is also noted.

Thailand has a low Masculine index (MAS) and embodies elements of femininity— reflected in values of caring, relationships, equality and concerns for nature. The feminine nature of Thai society is an indicator of Thais preferring informal and personal relationship-based communication (Sammapan 1996). Low scoring MAS

societies have a strong people and human orientation— placing significance on personal face-to-face conversations. Clearly, the intercept survey with its fundamental face-to-face approach would fit well with this Thai cultural dimension. Indeed, the feminine nature of Thai society aligns acutely with a preference for informal and personal relationship-based communication promoted via the intercept survey approach.

Thailand's high cultural dimension score associated with long-term orientation (LTO) reflects how people consider various future aspects their actions. These actions tend to be directed by personal thrift, stability, resourcefulness and planned endeavors. This cultural dimension does not appear to align with any of the features of the intercept survey *per se*.

Clearly, an understanding of Thai national culture in the translation and testing of research instruments and at the data collection stages serve to address some of the challenging issues encountered when needing to accommodate a country's purviews, preferences for engagement and even history (Smith et al. 2011). Furthermore, by considering various cultural elements, particularly when collecting data in the field, researchers can potentially overcome bias and improve the quality of data collected (Miltiades 2008).

5 Identifying Issues in Administering the Intercept Survey

The study involved the initial development of survey questions in English, and the subsequent translation of the questions into the Thai language. The translated questions were then tested amongst a cohort of native Thai citizens. Subsequently, the finalized survey was field-tested in Bangkok before being rolled proper across several areas of the city.

5.1 The translation of the Intercept Survey for use in Thailand

The initial proposed survey questions were tested for clarity in a one-on-one discussion scenario using native English speakers. This allowed the survey questions to be checked for context and clarity issues with native English speakers— who were deemed to be most appropriate for this exercise. Once clarity and context issues were finalized the survey questions were translated into Thai.

When it came to determining the integrity of the Thai translation, the primary investigator's understanding of Thai cultural behaviour favoured a discussion group approach over one-on-one interaction. Having grown up in Thailand, the decision to use a group approach was supported by understanding that Thais tend to prefer working in a pleasurable atmosphere, wishing to avoid conflicting situations and having a desire to foster harmonious social relationships. These attributes demonstrate a feminine (low MAS) aspect of Thai culture which had been personally experienced by the primary investigator across a life-time of family, community and group interaction. Having lived in a collectivist culture, the lead investigator's personal experience suggested that there needed to be an emphasis on collaboration, saving face, tradition and community. Indeed, researcher experience suggested that group discussion was more conducive environment to facilitating greater exchange and interaction amongst Thai nationals. Such a group scenario would allow direct exchanges with the moderator (primary investigator) as well as group interaction, allowing feedback on survey questions. The discussion group approach also facilitated an important degree of useful informal dialogue which provided insight and cues to the nuance of wording in certain questions. This type of group activity reflects the collectivist aspects encountered in Thai society that emphasizes collaboration, tradition and community. Indeed the strong human orientation in Thai society is likely to make personal face-to-face conversations an important element of Thai culture noted through the country's low MAS. Group dialogue can also be argued to align with a society that embodies collectivist (reflected in a low IDV as encountered in Thais) where people tend to be "we" conscious and value social interactions— rather than focus on an individual.

An interesting aspect of using the group discussion approach was noted when it came to getting participants to give feedback. Some of the younger participants, even though previously active in group discussion, became quiet and subdued. However, the more senior participants were seemingly more dominant in giving their opinion and tended to influence other members of the group, thus potentially shaping overall views and feedback. Indeed, the younger participants tended show emotional neutrality in their behaviour and adhered to agreeing with the senior participant's ideas by avoiding comments or views that may have contradicted the more senior person. This example of emotional neutrality fits with the Thai's going out of their way to avoid confrontation as part of their traditional values. This provided a challenge for the moderator in needing to get a balanced viewpoint of the outspoken dominant members of the group, as well as encouraging the more shy

members to speak up. Even with dominant members of the group, there was a need to not openly challenge their views in case it may have been seen as confrontational and potentially offending. For example, one senior participant (even more senior in age than the moderator) confidently suggested that more questions should be added to garner further information— even though these questions were not relevant to the research. With this issue, the moderator was reluctant to directly argue with him in front of the other people— as this might cause him to lose face, which in turn might potentially result in him being reluctant to give further feedback. In this situation, the primary investigator responded “That’s a good point. I will take this into consideration and discuss about this issue with my supervisor”. This circumvented the situation of still acknowledging his contribution (*paying him respect*) and whilst not causing him to be embarrassed (*to lose face*) in front of his Thai colleagues.

Thai society has a moderately high PDI, hence there is a cultural expectation and practice that individuals that are perceived to have low societal status, need to show respect to those deemed to have a higher status. Societal status can be determined by appearance, education, family name, job, and age. Therefore, younger participants would adhere to respecting older participants by following (and not challenging) their suggestions or ideas. Arguing against people perceived to have a high cultural status can potentially be interpreted as being impolite and disrespectful. With this behavioural situation it could be seen that Thais emphasize working in a pleasing atmosphere— avoiding conflicts and paying more attention to harmonious social interactions (reflected in the cultural attribute of a moderate UAI). These harmonious interactions are also closely aligned with feminine cultural characteristic (low MAS) among Thai people, whilst a preference for community or group settings aligns with collectivism (low IDV). Collectivist cultures tend to emphasize collaboration within a group, being polite, avoiding embarrassment (*saving face*), adhering to traditional values and fostering community. We introduce the term *Kreng Jai* as applied to an attitude and behaviour associated with saving face in Thai society. *Kreng Jai* is a term that draws its basis from the Buddhist religion which is relatively widespread in South East Asia countries (Niffenegger et al. 2006). Most of Thais always feel considerate to others— they do not want to cause any embarrassment, inconvenience or hurt someone’s feelings. This behaviour can be noted in high UAI cultures, in which people try to avoid situations that might cause discomfort to others. This situation we propose as being implicit with a *Kreng Jai* attitude, which reflects a situation where individuals, in order to maintain relationships, restrain their own views or values (an emotional neutrality) wherever there is possibility for conflict. The issue *Kreng Jai* was evident in the interaction between younger members of the discussion group not challenging the more respected older people in the group. *Kreng Jai* was also practiced by the moderator in subtly ameliorating the outspokenness of one of the members of the discussion group, without creating offence to them (or revealing their own views/thoughts).

5.1.1 Recommendations

Clearly, the questions associated with trans-national studies require translated surveys to be a subsequent validation for integrity, potential bias and inconsistency. This is an important process and it is recommended that a *discussion group* approach be used, with participants being drawn from the country or culture in which the research will be undertaken. The person moderating the group feedback needs to also have a confident understanding of the cultural characteristics and sensitivities of the people that compose the discussion group. Indeed, the group moderator also needs to be aware of the culturally important practice of *Kreng Jai* amongst the participants and anticipate possible behaviours and interactions. Importantly they themselves need to have experience in *Kreng Jai* allowing appropriate moderator-to-participant interaction.

5.2 The Intercept Survey in the Field

An important aspect of undertaking research surveys is the need for pilot testing the instrument under field conditions in the country of interest. In this study, the primary investigator had confirmed that the questions finalised were clearly understood and properly interpreted by the Thai target audience. The aim of the pilot testing activity was to gain familiarity with the respondents in the field and to further check for survey question issues. Being a native Thai, the direct understanding of cultural values enabled the lead researcher to inform several field aspects of the study. Clearly, the values associated with collectivism and the high PDI and UAI dimension of Thai culture had a natural fit with interacting face-to-face with respondents. This instilled confidence and sureness in the lead researcher that the personal face-to-face approach would be the most culturally successful way to talk to people. This type of engagement was something he experienced amongst friends, colleagues and community and was warmly reciprocated by other Thais. Moreover, it was felt that

understanding values associated with *Kreng Jai* (aligned with high UAI cultures) also supported the scenario of engaging people face-to-face which would lead to a situation where people would invariably be polite and obligingly cooperate.

Pilot testing of the survey involved approaching 50 people— of which only 2 declined to participate. Notably, the majority of people intercepted during the pilot testing of the survey questions were willing to participate in the study. A significant factor for the high co-operation rate was that after people were told that the survey was part of the primary investigator's doctoral study— many people became very keen to help. The declaration that the survey was part of a person's doctoral studies was a significant point in getting participation. Thai society values the notion of improving one's education as an important pathway to elevating an individual's status. Indeed, an enhanced status in Thai society can be reflected through one's educational achievements and a person's professional vocation. Thailand has a moderately high PDI which fits with this type of behaviour where recognition of societal status (or trying to improve one's status) may entice a duty of cooperation. The other cultural feature noted in this scenario was that of *Kreng Jai* which aligned with endeavouring to be polite and considerate of others (reflective of high UAI cultures). Hence, people did endeavour to assist and cooperate with a request to complete the survey. However, the obliging nature of people's behaviour that is reflected in *Kreng Jai* did also provide important insight into the actions of a small, but notable group of respondents. Because of people felt obliged to cooperate, it was observed that a small but identifiable group of respondents did not at times heed fully the nature of completing the questionnaire properly. For instance, this group was noted to provide the same answer across many questions for expediency purposes. This suggested that even though agreeing to assist, this small group of people may have actually been unwilling to help, but agreed to participate because they did not wish to cause the primary investigator lose face or be negative toward them— especially when they knew that the research survey was of educational importance. Clearly, the issue of *Kreng Jai* was a feature that did assist with increased participation in the survey. However, the pilot stage allowed the researchers to become aware that *Kreng Jai* did have the propensity in a small group of participants to provide what could be bias responses— responses that needed to be noted when potentially encountered in the broader study.

Different cultural meeting and greeting styles were also identified as important in the survey collection process. It was relatively straight forward to approach younger respondents to request cooperation from them. The primary investigator being typically under the age of thirty-five fitted with the same social demographic as many younger respondents. However, when approaching people that were seemingly older, it was important to acknowledge a level of respect commonly accepted in Thai society. People that were deemed to be older participants were given the *Wai* first before they were engaged in conversation. The *Wai* can reflect values of respect and gratitude, or even be an apologetic notion when used. The *Wai* is a gesture where both hands are joined together and placed on one's head or chest. It has religious symbolism and is a strong cultural feature of Thai society and falls under the realm of societies having a moderately high PDI— where in this instance there is respect and recognition directed at people perceived as being notably important.

These two important issues were fundamental in running the intercept survey. Because the survey was undertaken at different locations around Bangkok it became important to leverage the observed culture characteristics noted in the initial pilot testing. This included clearly articulating that the intercept survey was part of a doctoral project, highlighting the educational nature of the study, which potentially reflected improving ones status in Thai society— a cultural feature associated with a high UAS. Importantly, the ability to get a sample that included an 'older' set of participants was enhanced by the primary investigator using the culturally important gesture of giving the *Wai* when approaching and engaging with this group— a feature important in a moderately-high scoring PDI culturally environment. The final survey proper achieved a 75% participation rate, which in hindsight allows the researchers to conclude that many of the aspects of Thai culture that intuitively informed the initial refinement of the survey questions and the pilot testing were significant in the final overall study's successful response rate.

5.2.1 Recommendations

Notably, the practical aspects of engaging in the face-to-face intercept survey indicate that clearly articulating the reason for the data collection is important. Fang (2016) in recent work indicates that Collectivist cultures are more likely to disengage than Individualist cultures when undertaking online/paper surveys. Indeed,

declaring that the study was associated with educational outcomes appears to have been a powerful element in getting people to cooperate. This initial declaration tends to impart a certain status value to the person undertaking the research which is recognised and respected in Thai society. *Kreng Jai* can also be encountered in the field. Hence, the data collector needs to be aware that this cultural practice although important in assisting in survey participation, might also result in certain selective negative situations.

The use of the *Wai* is a significant cultural greeting when engaging with older-aged participants and reflects respect and gratitude for this particular group. This becomes important when data sampling needs to include such a group for completeness. The greeting has strong societal value and religious links that will improve this particular group's response rates.

6 Conclusion

The paper reflects researcher experiences and provides important insights into practical data-collection issues associated with using the intercept survey. The intercept survey was a data collection instrument that was relatively compatible in accommodating the specific cultural features encountered in Thai society—subsequently improving data collection response rates. The researchers identified that face-to-face interaction, a focus on cultural politeness reflected in *Kreng Jai*, and practicing respect through the traditional enactment of the giving the *Wai* were factors that led to increased survey participation. These features were also argued as being aligned with several of Hofstede's dimension commonly found in Thai natural culture. The paper's contribution is one of linking features of national cultural with the practicalities of undertaking the survey in situ— an issue that is seldom reported by researchers.

The paper places a strong and unique focus on Thai cultural factors and how it affected the process of conducting fieldwork research. Although identifying a number of key factors associated with collecting data, further work in other Asian countries will potentially confirm and extend our observations. Indeed, future research will potentially focus on a comparison study across a panel of Asian countries. This will allow researchers to identify if the concept of *Kreng Jai*, and the practice of the giving the *Wai* are also identifiable in other countries and/or hold similar importance when undertaking the intercept survey to improve data collection and response rates. Indeed, the notion of *Kreng Jai* draws from the Buddhist religion which is relatively wide spread in South East Asian countries. Hence, the tenets of this cultural feature can be expected to be relevant in other areas of Asia that embody a high UAI cultural dimension and/or where Buddhism is encountered. Future research may also highlight any differences in regards to expected behaviour that one may assume to be associated with a country's national culture. For instance, we noted that there as a relatively high diversity of Hofstede's UAI scores across Asian nations and it would of interest to see if this factor was more significant in some countries compared to others when it comes to data collection.

7 The Limitations of Reflection

The paper was a reflective piece based on the retrospective examination of our original m-payment study. Through reflection the authors identified what we judged and perceived to be an important and under-reported methodology topic. Hence, the main limitation of the paper in that it reflects our personal experiences and viewpoints. Bradburn et al. (2004) suggests personal experience as a reporting mechanism can be limiting in that certain aspects of a topic can be incomplete or not evident. One of the incomplete issues in the paper is that we have not been able to provide a greater number of culturally-relevant themes encountered at the various stages of survey translation, pilot testing and data collection.

Personal reflection informed the paper's findings which did require elements of researcher judgement. Hence, the researcher's subjective judgement was needed to determine what to include and the value of the themes identified. Judgement was thus important in being able to deem what may have been novel, interesting and worth reporting. Another set of researchers undertaking the same reflective activity may have approached the task differently with diverse outcomes. Hence, the papers findings cannot claim generalizability per se. Reflective pieces also tend to be reliant on individual recall and the retrospective question of 'why didn't I record that?'— which are also limitations. However, we believe that the identified issues recorded provide important cultural insights for researchers to consider at the practical stages of survey translation and data collection when undertaking transnational studies.

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