Chapter XI
Global Internet Usage, Web Site Design, and Cultural Communication Preferences: Contributions from Cross-Cultural Marketing and Advertising Research

Marc Hermeking
Ludwig-Maximilians University, Munich, Germany

ABSTRACT

Though the Internet continuously gains much popularity on a global scale, marketing research reveals enormous national differences and disparities in the numbers of Internet users worldwide. To date, most users still live in North America, in the Asia Pacific Basin, and in Western Europe. In response, an increasing body of research on global Internet usage, interface design, and Web site usability has been undertaken by human-computer-interaction (HCI) and localization specialists during the past few years. Similarly, questions of global standardization vs. local adaptation are also central to international marketing, research on consumer behavior, and marketing communications. Since the Internet, including its most popular usage platform, the World Wide Web (WWW), is part of the media, its culture-specific potential and conditions for global usage—and respectively its culturally appropriate design for worldwide consumption—can be described in general by contributions from cross-cultural marketing and advertising research. This chapter presents a foundational examination of this situation and its implications for professional practices related to marketing and online consumers.
cultural and other kinds of adaptation or localization will be necessary. This question of global standardization vs. local adaptation is also central to the discipline of international marketing, which includes, for example, research on consumer behavior, appropriate product design, and marketing communications. Some international marketers have predicted a final convergence of culturally different markets into a “one-world culture,” which would facilitate globally standardized marketing activities (Levitt, 1983). This, however, has turned out to be an illusion—too many non-cultural hard factors and cultural soft factors still exist or arise as constraints on international marketing, so there is no real 100% standardization at all. This even applies to so-called “culture-free” products like industrial goods and high-tech digital products or information and communication technologies (ICTs) (de Mooij, 1998; Hermeking, 2000). Since the Internet, including its most popular usage platform, the World Wide Web (WWW), is part of the media, its culture-specific potential and conditions for global usage—and respectively its culturally appropriate design for worldwide consumption—can be described in general by contributions from cross-cultural marketing and advertising research.

GLOBAL INTERNET USAGE

The Worldwide Disparity

Though the Internet continuously gains much popularity on a global scale, marketing research reveals enormous national differences and disparities in the numbers of Internet users worldwide. To date, most users still live in North America, in the Asia Pacific Basin, and in Western Europe. One crucial point, however, is the definition of Internet usage. Online access quotas, which are the most commonly cited databases, are no valid indicators of any real online activity or usage. Moreover, even daily online activities may only include a retrieval or sending of e-mail messages lasting just a few seconds, especially at the workplace. A more valid indicator for Internet usage is defined by “active” Web use, which happens nearly every day, takes about one hour at least, and is typically done at home in order to meet individual needs online.

The percentage of the population using the Internet as active Web users at home in early 2005 was, for example, in the United States—48%, in Australia—46%, in Sweden—53%, in Germany—36%, in the UK—38%, in France—26%, in Spain—22%, in Japan—29%, and in Brazil—only 6%. In early 2006, this percentage was: in the United States—48%, in Australia—49%, in Sweden—53%, in Germany—39%, in the UK—40%, in France—28%, in Spain—27%, in Japan—29%, and in Brazil—still only 6% (Nielsen NetRatings, n.d.).

Some of these countries show a little increase in Web usage; others, however, seem to remain on their relatively high or very low usage level. Although those figures change continuously over time, there is a clear continuum of descent from high Internet usage in the (developed, western) North to low Internet usage in the (often less-developed, non-western) South—also known as the digital divide. Economic development, like technical infrastructure or GDP per capita, is only one (hard) factor. A close look at highly developed countries like France or Japan, for example, with their relatively moderate Web usage of the referenced kind, reveals that some cultural values as soft factors obviously play an even more important role.

Cultural Values as Key Factors

Culture is a complex phenomenon. As such, it is not easy to define without any simplifications, therefore hundreds of definitions of culture exist; Müller and Gelbrich (2004), for example, report more than 240 different definitions. Cultural values can be described here as collectively shared
14 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the product's webpage:  
www.igi-global.com/chapter/global-internet-usage-web-site/25570?camid=4v1

Recommend this product to your librarian:  
www.igi-global.com/e-resources/library-recommendation/?id=1

Related Content

**Effects of Narcissism, Leisure Boredom, and Gratifications Sought on User-Generated Content Among Net-Generation Users**  
Damon Chi Him Poon and Louis Leung (2013). *Evolving Psychological and Educational Perspectives on Cyber Behavior* (pp. 49-63).  
www.igi-global.com/chapter/effects-narcissism-leisure-boredom-gratifications/67876?camid=4v1

**Flashlight as a Process Tracing Method**  
www.igi-global.com/chapter/flashlight-process-tracing-method/64744?camid=4v1

**Mobile Media Use, Multitasking and Distractibility**  
www.igi-global.com/article/mobile-media-use-multitasking-distractibility/70087?camid=4v1

**Can the Virginia Internet Safety Program Improve Fourth Graders' Internet Safety Knowledge?**  
www.igi-global.com/article/can-the-virginia-internet-safety-program-improve-fourth-graders-internet-safety-knowledge/113793?camid=4v1