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CULTURAL ADAPTATION ON THE WEB: REVIEW AND IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Catering to the preferences of culturally diverse Web audiences requires adaptation in Web communication. In this article, we review existing literature on culture and Website design and discuss the impact of culture on Web communication using ten dimensions of culture drawn from Hofstede's (1991) and Trompenaars' (1993) cultural frameworks.

INTRODUCTION

Over fifty years ago, Duesenberry observed that all of the activities people engage in are culturally determined and that nearly all purchases are made either to provide physical comfort or to implement the activities that make up the life of a culture (Duesenberry 1949). One of the key manifestations of culture is how people within a society communicate. Communication takes place through cultural symbols that are assimilated and learnt within the culture. It is the lack of shared symbols and experiences that makes cross-cultural communication difficult (Kale and Barnes 1992).

The vital role of culture in communication has been well-documented over several decades (cf. Barnlund 1989; De Mooij 1997; Hall 1960; Kale 1995; Mueller 1996; Kanso and Nelson 2002). With the advent of the Internet as a global medium, scholars are now looking at how culture impacts communication on the Web (cf. Singh, Zhao, and Hu 2003; Hillier 2003; Robbins and Stylianou 2002). While these studies have helped in developing an appreciation of the impact of culture on Website design, scholars and practitioners are still at a loss when it comes to generalized norms or solid prescriptions for designing culturally appropriate Websites. This is largely due to the lack of a cohesive framework with which to assess the role of culture in Web-based communication. The problem is further exacerbated by the lack of generalizability of findings from previous empirical studies.

The advantages of using the Web to reach global markets are obvious – overall affordability, low support costs, local presence, and ubiquitous brand identity. The number of Internet users has recorded almost two-hundred percent growth between 2000 and 2005, and the number of users is currently estimated to exceed one billion individuals (*Internet World Stats*, 2006). International e-commerce activity is already into trillions of dollars and will only skyrocket with intensified globalization and increased net access. The time is therefore right to take stock of the existing literature on culture and Web design and to move toward generalizable norms on the cross-cultural aspects of Web design for practitioners.

A synthesis of scholarly work on culture and Internet communication accomplishes three worthwhile goals: (1) It helps researchers and educators in their quest to better comprehend existing research on culture and Web communication; (2) It assists practitioners in gaining an understanding of how consumer culture shapes the perception of their on-line communication activities; and (3) It identities important gaps in extant literature and thus points to research opportunities in this nascent exciting area.

Toward this end, this paper reviews the existing literature on culture and Web marketing across three broad disciplines – information technology, marketing and management. It then proceeds to formulate twenty propositions formalizing the relationship between culture and Web design. Finally, we conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of this discussion for managers.

EXTANT LITERATURE

Most scholarly articles relating culture to online communication have emerged only over the last five years. Thus far, the discourse on culture and Web communication has been dominated by narrow conceptual studies or empirical studies founded on fragmentary frameworks. Despite these

weaknesses, the extant studies, when collectively assessed, do provide value for scholars and practitioners.

Yoon and Cropp (1999) were among the first researchers to investigate the cultural dimensions of Web communication. Their findings comprising 20 South Korean and 20 U.S. national-brand product Websites reported no significant differences along culture-based measures of advertising content. Marcus and Gould (2000) examined how Hofstede's (1991) five dimensions of culture might affect user-interface design. By drawing from the Internet sites of several corporate and non-corporate entities of differing nationalities (Finland, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Costa Rica, Germany, etc.), the authors concluded that societal levels of power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation are reflected in several aspects of user-interface and Web design.

Consistent with the premise of our paper, Zahedi, Van Pelt and Song (2001) suggest that no single model of cultural understanding is sufficient for communicating effectively with all Web audiences. Accordingly, they identified six cultural factors and six individual factors that would influence people's Web experience. Their six cultural factors comprised of power distance, individualism, masculinity, anxiety avoidance, long-term orientation, and monochronic versus polychronic time orientation. The six individual factors were demographics (age and gender), professional knowledge, information technology knowledge, flexibility, information processing ability, and cultural knowledge. User satisfaction with the Website was postulated to consist of perceived usability, reliability, clarity, and comprehension. The authors then developed a series of propositions relating the aforesaid twelve factors to site effectiveness.

Warden, Lai, and Wu (2002) investigated the impact of different language interfaces on Web-based product searches. The results indicated that understanding the Web-page interface language enhances product evaluation for highly differentiated products but leads to decreased evaluations for products with low levels of differentiation. Robbins and Stylianou (2003) content analyzed Websites from ninety companies represented in *Fortune 500* international corporations. Fifteen companies headquartered in each of the six clusters based of Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions were investigated. The clusters were Anglo, Nordic, German, Latin, Asian, and Japan. Differences across clusters on various aspects of content and design were analyzed. The content component addressed what was included in the site, i.e., the various types of information provided. The design component probed the presentation and navigational aspects of the site. Results indicated that *site content* was significantly different across national cultures, and to a much lesser degree, across industry. However, very minor differences were found by national culture or by industry with regards to *site design*.

Singh, Zhao, and Hu (2003) surveyed forty large U.S.-based companies to investigate the degree of cultural adaptation in their Chinese Websites. Four of Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the context dimension of Hall (1960) were included in the study. Content analysis of the U.S. and Chinese Websites for each company was conducted. The results indicated a clear evidence of cultural adaptation being practiced by the chosen U.S. sample in their Chinese Websites.

Smith, *et al*., (2004) presented a "process model" for developing usable cross-cultural Websites. The model comprises of five main activities: planning the site development process, specifying the context of use, specifying user and organizational requirements, producing design solutions, and

evaluating the design concepts against requirements. The use of ethnography and application of Hofstede's (2001) typology figures in several of the processes. Complexity and level of detail of the process model make it more relevant to Web designers as opposed to cross-cultural researchers and international managers.

Lavie and Tractinsky (2004) argued that aesthetics is a primal factor in Website evaluation that significantly influences other perceptions of a site. They assessed the dimensions of aesthetics in Websites designed in English and Hebrew. The findings of this experimental study suggest that aesthetics has two elements: classical aesthetics and expressive aesthetics. Classical aesthetics deals with clear and orderly design, whereas expressive aesthetics involves breaking the mold with regard to design conventions in favor of creativity and originality. No attempt was made to relate aesthetic judgments with respondent culture. Hu, *et al*. (2004) studied audience impressions of B2C Web pages in three countries, Japan, China, and the U.K. Eight design factors were investigated: design format, title position, menu size, clipart size, main color, background color, color brightness, and color harmonization. The results suggest that color and spatial effects were differentially evaluated across the three countries.

Maynard and Tian (2004) examined Chinese Websites of the top 100 global brands. The results indicated the top brands did not follow the strategy of standardization when operating in China. Brand managers localized their Websites by integrating China's political, economic, and cultural characteristics into their online branding strategies.

A careful evaluation of the studies cited here suggests that researchers and practitioners will both be well-served by an integrative assessment of relevant literature. This is best accomplished by developing formal propositions relating culture to Website perception and/or effectiveness.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Cultural factors shape all levels of communicative interaction, and should therefore impact not only the nature of messages conveyed via a Website but also how these messages are processed and interpreted (Ito and Nakakoji 1996). As Hall (1960) pointed out almost fifty years ago, since culture is a system for creating, sorting, sending, storing, and processing information, it is, in essence, communication. Designers of a Website create Web pages using embedded cultural symbols. Web audiences, in turn, operate from their own cultural wiring when receiving the communication inherent in these pages. Successful decoding of the messages encoded by the Web designer(s) will depend on the level of psychological overlap between the designer and the audience. Chances of successful decoding will be greatly enhanced if Web designers exhibit cultural mindfulness and design sites in accordance with the beliefs, norms, and other cultural mores of the target audience (cf. Kim 2001).

Several competing frameworks exist by which to operationalize the phenomenon of culture (cf. Hofstede 1991; 2001; Inkeles and Levinson 1969; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961; Triandis 1995; Trompenaars 1993). From a practical viewpoint, it is unrealistic to expect Web designers to visualize every target audience along every major framework. Besides, since all frameworks probe the selfsame phenomenon of culture, there are inevitable commonalities across frameworks (for a through review of some of the earlier frameworks, see Clark 1990). The choice of cultural frameworks or particular dimensions for practical applications is ultimately a tradeoff between

parsimony and comprehensiveness. From the standpoint of Web communication, we have chosen to harness the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1991) and Trompenaars (1993).

Hofstede's work on the dimensions of culture is probably the most cited study in the field of national culture (Budhwar 2000). The validity and reliability of this framework have already been tested by many researchers (cf. Hunt 1981; Triandis 1982). Trompenaars' (1993) framework has been validated across scores of countries over two decades. The dimensions of this framework complement Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and when used in conjunction with Hofstede, provide a comprehensive inventory of the constituents of culture.

It should be pointed out, however, that both the Hofstede (1991) and Trompenaars (1993) frameworks have been subject to criticism (cf. Landis and Wasilewski 1999; Baskerville 2003; Baskerville-Morley 2004). Space limitations preempt us from discussing these issues in this article. Readers interested in the alleged potential weaknesses of these frameworks can access Hofstede (1996) and Mc Sweeney (2002). Certain drawbacks notwithstanding, both these frameworks offer the advantages of intuitive appeal, parsimony, and empirical validation.

Hofstede (1991) discusses five dimensions of culture – individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and long-term orientation. Trompenaars (1993) views culture as social attitudes and casts the culture construct as comprising of seven "dilemmas" underlying societal differences. The seven dilemmas are universalism vs. particularism, individualism vs. collectivism, neutral vs. affective, specific vs. diffuse, achievement vs. ascription, sequential vs. synchronous time, and inner vs. outer-directed locus of control.

The dimension of individualism vs. collectivism is common across the two frameworks. In our opinion, while each of Hofstede's (1991) dimensions has direct relevance to Web design, Trompenaars' dimension of "specific vs. diffuse" culture would not materially impact online communication. Trompenaars explains that specific cultures tend to keep their business and social relationships separate whereas a fusion of the two tends to occur in diffuse cultures. Because this dimension is unlikely to influence Web communication, it will be excluded from further discussion. We will now proceed to briefly discuss the remaining cultural dimensions across the two frameworks.

Individualism vs. Collectivism. This dimension assesses the strength of the bond between an individual and his or her fellow individuals. In individualistic societies such as the U.S. and Australia, "I consciousness" prevails and the individual tends to have fairly weak ties with others. In collectivist societies such as Taiwan and Pakistan, people regard themselves as part of a larger group such as the family, clan or tribe ("We" consciousness). People in individualistic cultures are more concerned about themselves and their immediate nuclear family whereas people in collectivist cultures are equally concerned about their in-group, be it the extended family, clan or tribe.

Power Distance. This dimension addresses the issue of human inequality. It suggests the amount of inequity a culture accepts in the distribution of power, status, and wealth. Small power distance societies strive to minimize distributional inequities whereas large power distance societies more readily accept such inequities. Visual manifestations of status differences are frowned upon in small power distance societies (such as Austria and Denmark) whereas such depictions are both

expected and welcome in large power distance societies (such as the Philippines and India).

Uncertainty Avoidance. Dealing with life's uncertainty and ambiguity is a challenge in every society. The dimension of uncertainty avoidance explains how societies respond to this challenge. Strong uncertainty avoidance societies (such as Japan and Belgium) attempt to create as much certainty as possible in the day-to-day lives of people through the imposition of procedures, rules and structures. Weak uncertainty avoidance societies (such as Denmark and Sweden), on the other hand, condition their members to handle uncertainty and ambiguity with relative ease and little discomfort. Because of the low tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, large uncertainty avoidance societies experience greater stress and anxiety as compared with weak uncertainty avoidance societies.

Masculinity vs. Femininity. This dimension concerns a society's subscription to stereotypical masculine or feminine values. In masculine cultures sex roles are sharply differentiated and traditional masculine values such as achievement, assertiveness, and competition are relatively more valued. In feminine cultures, sex roles are less sharply distinguished and attributes such as nurturing and caring are relatively more valued. Masculine societies (such as Japan and Austria) tend to be hero worshippers whereas feminine societies (such as Sweden and the Netherlands) tend to sympathize with the underdog.

Long-Term Orientation. Also called "Confucian Dynamism," this dimension assesses a society's capacity for patience and delayed gratification. Long-term oriented cultures (such as China and Hong Kong) tend to save more money and exhibit more patience in reaping the results of their actions. Short-term oriented societies (such as West Africa and Norway) want to maximize the present rewards and are relatively less prone to saving or anticipating long-term rewards. Hofstede (2001, p. 359) writes, "Long Term Orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented towards future rewards, in particular perseverance and thrift. Its opposite pole, Short Term Orientation, stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present, in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of 'face' and fulfilling social obligations." Having touched upon key aspects of the Hofstede (1991) framework, we shall now proceed to briefly explain Trompenaars' (1993) cultural dilemmas."

Universalism vs. Particularism. Universalism rests on the premise that ideas and practices can be applied everywhere and in every context without modification. Particularism is the belief that situational factors and circumstances should dictate how ideas and practices should be applied. Universalist cultures (such as Norway and Switzerland) tend to emphasize rules rather than relationships and there is an insistence on the ubiquitous following of procedures and contracts. Particularist cultures (such as Korea and Venezuela) are less concerned with rules, and tend to focus more on relationships and trust.

Neutral vs. Affective. Neutral cultures (such as Korea and Ethiopia) believe in keeping one's emotions in check. People in such societies try not to show their feelings in public or in business dealings and strive to maintain their composure at all times. Affective cultures such as Spain and Iran), on the other hand, allow the open expression of natural emotions. People in affective cultures smile a great deal, talk loudly when excited, and greet one-another enthusiastically. Such emotional display is usually held in check in neutral cultures.

Achievement vs. Ascription. In achievement-oriented cultures (such as U.S. and Norway), people's status is a function of their performance (what people do). Ascription-oriented cultures (such as the Czech Republic and Egypt), on the other hand, bestow status based on who or what a person is. Thus, while high-achievers are the beneficiaries of status in achievement-oriented cultures, factors such as age, gender, and family or social connections are often the important determinants of status in ascription-oriented cultures.

Sequential vs. Synchronous Time. Cultures with a sequential approach to time (such as U.S. and Norway) tend to perform only one activity at one point in time. They value punctuality in appointments and depict a strong preference for following plans. In cultures where a synchronous approach is common (such as Saudi Arabia and Japan), people tend to do more than one activity at a time, appointments are less stringently adhered to, and schedules are subordinated to relationships.

Inner vs. Outer-Directed. People in inner-directed cultures (such ass Canada and U.S.) believe they are in control of the outcomes of their actions. People in outer-directed cultures (such as the Czech Republic and Egypt) place less emphasis on their own actions and let things take their own course. Inner-directed people strive to control their environment whereas outer-directed people believe that they are controlled by their environment and that they cannot do much about it.

Impact on Website Perceptions

The challenge of Web communication is to effectively interact with culturally diverse audiences across long distances. The greater the congruence of Web communication preferences in form, function, and message between the site sponsor/designer and the target audience, the greater the chances of a Website having the desired impact on the intended audience. Understanding of the cultural dimensions discussed above allows for formulation of propositions in order to better appreciate the link between culture and Web communication.

A society's position on the continuum of *individualism* would dictate the tone and substance of the message in a preferred Website. Recall that people in individualistic cultures tend to have loose ties with their fellow individuals. Such cultures would place greater salience on Website personalization compared to individuals from collectivistic cultures. With regard to the promotional claims made on Websites, individualistic cultures would value a promise if the appeal is directed to them as individuals and purports to enhance their personal happiness or well-being. In addressing collective cultures, it would be more advantageous to frame the promotional appeal within the context of the individual's in-group (such as the family or tribe).

Individualistic cultures place a great deal of emphasis on seeking novelty, variety, and pleasure. Collectivist societies do not value these attributes nearly as much, and make their product and brand choices by taking into consideration the opinions of their in-group instead (Kale and Barnes 1992). This leads to the following propositions.

P_1: Features resulting in a personalized Website would be more valued by audiences from individualistic cultures than from collectivist cultures.

P_2: While individualistic cultures would be more favorable toward promotional appeals

addressing their individual needs, collectivistic cultures would be more favorably disposed toward Websites that make references to the appropriate in-groups.

> P3: Web themes connoting novelty, variety, and pleasure would be more appreciated in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic cultures.

Power distance will also impact people's preferences in relation to Web content. Kale and Barnes (1992) state that in certain large power distance societies (such as Japan), the buyer is king and the seller is accorded lower status than a beggar. Websites targeting such cultures would therefore want to assume a tone of subservience. Power distance should also dictate the degree of formality to be observed in the content and design of the Web pages (cf. Kale 1991). Large power distance societies would expect the content of the Web pages to be expressed in a very formal tone. Small power distance societies would prefer informality instead. For sites promoting products perceived as status symbols, audiences from large power distance societies would like to see the Web pages making overt references to status and class. Small power distance societies, on the other hand, would prefer that the Web pages for such products be free from such overt references. We therefore suggest the following propositions:

> P4: Websites depicting respect and subservience toward the audience will be favorably evaluated by inhabitants in large power distance societies.

> P5: Large power distance cultures will prefer a higher level of formality in Website tone compared to audiences in small power distance cultures.

> P6: Compared to small power distance cultures, overt appeals to audience status and power will be more favorably received by audiences in large power distance societies.

Uncertainty avoidance will impact site content with regard to the risk reduction elements of a Website. Societies with strong uncertainty avoidance will place a lot of emphasis on the security aspects of a Website. Features of strong uncertainty avoidance cultures such as low tolerance for ambiguity, distrust of outsiders, and skepticism toward youth should be considered when designing a Website targeted toward these societies. Audiences from weak uncertainty avoidance societies are more likely to demonstrate implicit trust in a Website. They would be relatively more willing to part with credit card information and other details or to make online transactions. Audiences from strong uncertainty avoidance societies are less likely to trust a site provider a priori and would engage in such actions only if they are absolutely convinced of a site's integrity and security features. Accordingly, we suggest that:

> P7: Relative to audiences from weak uncertainty avoidance societies, perceived trust in a Website would be valued higher by audiences in strong uncertainty avoidance societies.

> P8: Unless proper security assurances and explicit guarantees are offered, visitors from strong uncertainty avoidance societies will be very resistant to download Web documents, to part with personal information online, and to conduct online transactions.

P₉: Compared to strong uncertainty avoidance societies, cultures with weak uncertainty avoidance will be relatively more receptive to newer technologies and lesser navigation control in a Website.

Masculinity vs. Femininity refers to characteristics that affect both individual men and women within a culture. Masculine values consist of assertiveness, competition, and toughness. Feminine values include sympathizing with the downtrodden, nurturing, and a focus on people and environment as opposed to material possessions. These values would impact the way Web messages are designed as well as interpreted. Having audience competitions administered on the Web, making frequent references to high achievers, and a strong emphasis on the performance dimension of products promoted would be favorably received by audiences within masculine societies. Conversely, feminine cultures would be relatively more receptive to messages promoting the charitable causes of the site sponsor, environmentally-friendly policies adopted by the sponsor, and androgyny in site tone as well as language. The following propositions can thus be forwarded:

P₁₀: Depictions of successful achievers in a Website would be more favorably received by audiences from masculine cultures than those from feminine cultures.

P₁₁: Information on charitable causes supported by a site's sponsor would impact feminine societies more favorably than it would impact masculine societies.

P₁₂: Androgyny in the pictures and messages constituting a Website would be more valued by feminine cultures than by masculine cultures.

Long-Term Orientation covers issues such as adapting traditions to modern perspectives, being thrifty and sparing with resources, and perseverance toward slow results. Short-term oriented cultures live in the present (or past) and show relatively little concern for tomorrow. Accordingly, they will be relatively impulsive in making unplanned purchases on the Web while long-term oriented cultures would be expected to show more restraint. Given their past-orientation, appeals to tradition will be favorably interpreted by short-term oriented cultures as will overt comparisons with the audience's peer groups. This brief discussion suggests the following:

P₁₃: Relative to societies displaying long-term orientation, audiences from cultures with short-term orientation are more likely to be influenced by sites using peer group influence.

P₁₄: When it comes to online purchases, short-term oriented cultures will display greater impulsiveness than long-term oriented cultures.

Universalism vs. Particularism will impact the way in which the terms and conditions of transacting online business are displayed and enforced. Universalist cultures will appreciate clear and unambiguous disclosure of the terms and conditions for doing business. Furthermore, they would like to see objective evidence of uniform application of these terms and conditions. Particularist cultures, on the other hand, would prefer flexibility in the application of rules and practices. Rather than a statement of terms and conditions, they would be better served by instructions to contact the provider to get the terms and conditions given their particular situation.

E-CRM and site customization will yield better results in particularist cultures than in universalist cultures. We therefore propose that:

> P_{15}: A clear statement on Web pages highlighting the terms and conditions of transacting business would be more valued by inhabitants of universalist cultures than by those of particularist cultures.

The dimension *neutral vs. affective* would determine people's preferences for the amount of emotional content in Web pages. Cultures displaying neutrality in emotions would prefer Web pages that are fact-driven and largely devoid of emotion. The site design for audiences in neutral cultures should use colors and fonts that elicit neutrality in viewer emotions. Affective cultures, on the other hand, would like to see relevant displays of emotion in both the site design as well as content. Colors invoking strong emotional responses and appeals employing affect would be well-received in affective cultures. This suggests the following proposition:

> P_{16}: Audiences from affective cultures would be relatively more receptive to the use of emotions in Web content and to the use of emotion-invoking colors and fonts in Web design than audiences from neutral cultures.

Achievement vs. Ascription would determine Web content through its impact on who or what is regarded as respectable and trustworthy. Achievement oriented cultures bestow status based on the visible achievements of an individual. Portraying such individuals in the role of company spokespersons or product endorsers will have a favorable impact on product and company evaluations in achievement-oriented cultures. Societies that place more importance on ascription will be more swayed by factors such as gender, age, family roots and social connections when it comes to determining individual status. It is therefore postulated that:

> P_{17}: While achievement-oriented cultures will be more swayed by the individual accomplishments of spokespeople or product endorsers, characteristics such as age, gender and family connections will have relatively more impact on audiences from ascription-oriented cultures.

Sequential vs. Synchronous Time orientation within a culture would determine the navigational aspects of a site. Synchronous cultures would value multitasking capabilities in a Website whereas sequential cultures would prefer that the site design enables the completion of one task (e.g. document download or identity verification) before beginning another. Where a transaction requires a certain amount of time to complete (such as credit card authorization), audiences from sequential cultures would appreciate precise information up-front on how long the transaction is likely to take. They would also welcome features that minimize their time spent in Web navigation. Audiences from synchronous cultures would get impatient waiting for a Web transaction to complete and would appreciate any distractions (such as entertaining pop-up windows, music or quizzes) that would occupy them while the transaction is in process. We therefore suggest that:

> P_{18}: Web multitasking capabilities would be relatively more valued in synchronous cultures than in sequential cultures.

> P_{19}: Sequential cultures will value site navigational efficiency more than synchronous

cultures.

Inner vs. Outer-Directed locus of control describes the extent to which people in a culture feel that they have control over their surroundings. Audiences with inner-directed locus of control need to be convinced of how using the product depicted on the Web pages will make a difference in their life. Proactive appeals to deal with life's opportunities, challenges and uncertainties will be highly regarded in such cultures. Outer-directed societies do not believe that an individual has much control in shaping reality. Their preferred mode of handling opportunities, challenges, and uncertainties is therefore reactive as opposed to proactive. Appeals that respect the cycles of nature, destiny, or the will of God (*Inshallah!*) will be quite persuasive in outer-directed cultures. This leads us to the final proposition:

> P_{20}: Inner-directed cultures will be influenced by Website content that emphasizes individual choice in dealing with life's opportunities, challenges, and uncertainties in a proactive manner.

CONCLUSION

The illustrative propositions suggested in this paper, once empirically tested, should provide a good start for companies wanting to adapt their Web content and design to the various cultures constituting their market. Understanding Web audiences' culture along the ten cultural dimensions discussed here will point the way toward specific adaptations needed to effectively communicate with each culture. This will help the Web marketer bridge some of the inherent cultural distance with customers and enhance its prospects for persuasive communication.

Using the ten dimensions as cultural lampposts will enable greater congruence between the encoding of Web messages and audience cultural characteristics. It will enable Web designers to seek answers to several vexing questions such as: How formal or extrinsically rewarding should the Web interaction be? What specific appeal needs to be conveyed in the site to motivate different groups of people (money, fame, honor, achievement, etc.)? How much conflict can people tolerate in content or style of argumentation? How avant-garde should a Website be to differentiate itself in the Internet clutter within the context of a particular culture? Answers to these and other vital questions will go a long way in designing culturally compatible Websites.

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