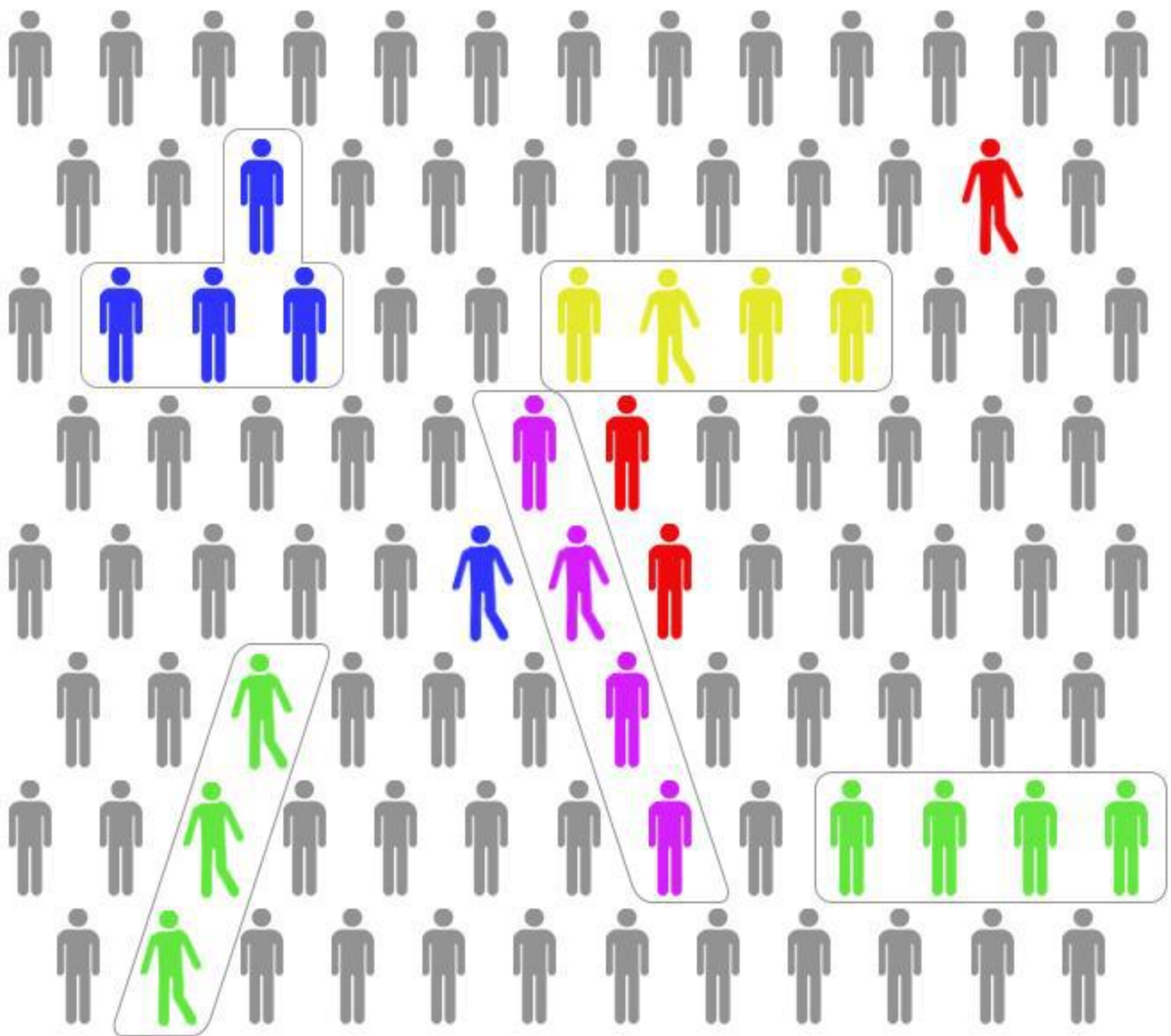




Cross Cultural Design

White Paper

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INTRODUCTION

Cross cultural design entails designing technology for various societies and languages. Design as a profession has always strived beyond the national frontiers, however, the rapid growth and spread of the internet in recent years across the remote areas of the world has brought the design industry to the realization that designing for universal consumers goes beyond mere performance to be successful.

we live in a progressively dynamic environment, where the market poses various challenges to designers in their quest to manage language and cultural barriers.

Cross-cultural exchange is a common phenomenon nowadays via relocation and travel, as a result of this, if a team wants to leave a lasting impression, then the design it creates must be useful and applicable to different cultures.

International enterprises such as Amazon, Microsoft, and Google, acknowledge the significance of localization when they grow into a new market. Several enterprises are beginning to focus on innovative ideas and designing wide range of products that present global users with differing experiences. This goal can be attained by adhering to the strategies for localizing and globalizing the websites as well as web applications, which is an added advantage to simply providing a translation of the material.

This whitepaper will be addressing the effect of cultures on design and how the designers, along with the team, can benefit from localization. What makes cross-cultural design important? What are the strategies employed by big enterprises in localization and market expansion? How can research and designs be carried out with cultural variations in mind and further generate fool proof solutions for global users?

In my own opinion, localization depicts, various methods employed in creating a product, an application or a program designed to cater to the needs, preferences, expectations and attitudes of remote users. it goes beyond mere translation from one language to another. In fact, for designers it entails a lot of features such as icons, symbols and sometimes text direction and content too. This information, when properly managed, can provide local users with the feeling of “the app or software was specifically designed for me” and they can share this interesting bond with the product.

OVERVIEW

Whenever we talk about Web Content Management, the first thought that comes to mind is “ok, I need to include a language pack and I need be changeable when integrated into the language encodings for the theme” and other related things. However, in reality, it is beyond that. It is rather easy to control things in a static site where you have free access to customize things but it gets more complicated in situations where we are handling an application or sites

infrastructure that has to support a variety of languages. Have you experienced the technical execution of such things?

Sometimes, you may be engaged in a project that is already planned out, and you joined the team at a juncture where the market structure has been determined, or perhaps they already considering localization, or the market is yet to be determined. But they have the infrastructure at their disposal, so you can no longer suggest the idea of technical infrastructure, but then you consider the business aspect of localization - what might be beneficial, expanding the market, penetrating the market, maximizing reach. And the decision has been made considering this is the market that possesses the strongest tendencies to succeed, we can investigate with the patrons of that market culture by initiating a solid interest in apps that feels more indigenous and more intuitive.

And with my area of expertise of been a user experience professional, we understand that when the user experience is designed in this manner, it attracts the loyalty of the users. Therefore, it means the user experience business matrix will decide: good, is it necessary to make this customization available, are we still interested in customizing it, or should we rather consider going for a minimum localization effort which is usually a translation and localization of content. Hence, the question that typically comes to mind is “what extent of localization is needed or how frequently should this factor be considered and put to use?”

The response to this question is, it varies from one Industry to another, It is determined by the level of the company, and what their goals are. For a budding company, it is not probable that they will entirely go through with the customization. It is unlikely for them to gain grounds by expanding into multiple markets while they are yet to determine their product market fit. but for a well-grounded company, for instance, BigCommerce or Groovespark, they own a market - a home market, that is functioning optimally and now they are considering expansion, perhaps in a specific market where their culture really stands out, for instance, Japan has possesses a lot of attributes and controls that can affect the template or the concept of localization.

Furthermore, we also need to examine what can be done to achieve success in the market? For example, as regards some markets, they might require minimal alterations compared to others. Therefore, I can state that, it very much depends on what is plausible and how far it goes beyond the basic level of localization?

Big institutions, often times have devoted localization team at their disposal that handles all matters related to localization. For instance, if the market team designs the checkout flow, it is therefore, the duty of the localization team to utilize the checkout flow and customise it for a totally different market. Depending on the size of the company, the well-grounded companies, could setup small teams that will be charged with the duties of managing the sets of different locations. Further examples: the Germany team, the Netherlands team, the Nordics team, the Latin-American team, etc. It is therefore necessary to employ individuals who will respect the cultural variations, of local expectations, and other factors such as the legal obligations which can determine the fate of the product. These set of people under consideration can either be recruited remotely or from their offices. The most important part is to employ experts, people

equipped with the necessary cultural understanding who can effectively design for that target market.

As a UX designer, it is expedient to ensure that our product is user-friendly and designed to meet the needs of the final consumers. Designing for cultures entails studying people who are residing in other countries, recognizing their wants. For example, type of apps, type of websites etc. and how it differs from the knowledge we have and what is familiar to us.

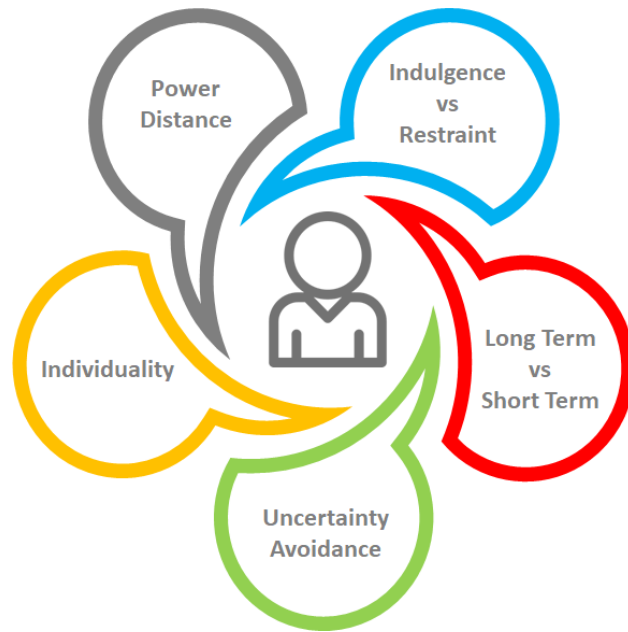
One thing that has been remarkably helpful is being curious. As designers who are not exposed to living abroad and carrying out research in another country, you can adopt the practice of taking out time to read through international tech news. You can even download apps or visit websites and familiarize yourself with how the designs or the software can be different. And concurrently stay abreast of the activities of other companies as regards localization.

APPROACH FOR INCLUSIVE DESIGNING

- ✓ Study cultural differences and how they affect design
- ✓ Examine the ROI of localization and ways to carryout localization in a cost-effective manner.
- ✓ **Research methods:** carryout investigations on local culture and perform local competitive analysis
- ✓ Localization design: Design interfaces that conforms to local user's expectations and habits
- ✓ **Cultural persona:** design personas of various cultures and endorse them.
- ✓ Designing inclusive conclusions: adhere to comprehensive design layouts as regards culture and demographic variations
- ✓ **Case studies:** take cues from how top-notch international companies handle localization
- ✓ User research in new markets: utilize strategies to engage participants in various locations for usability testing and interviews.

DIMENSIONS OF CULTURAL DESIGN CONSIDERATION

Digital design as a profession has always been recognized in the international frontiers, despite this, there are complications surrounding the cultural domains. The world-wide market poses new challenges for designers in terms of language barriers and ethnic discriminations. How can foreign users extract different interpretations from the available data or metaphors? What adopted standards might be considered strangely in other markets, for example banner placement and selecting menu items? Most designer conclude that designing products intended for foreign markets only requires language translation, swapping currencies, and possibly change a few fields. More so, cross-cultural design can get more complex.



Cross-cultural design is well rooted in the research works of two individuals: Fons Trompenaars and Geert Hofstede.

Trompenaars is widely recognized for his “The seven Dimensions of Culture” concept which he explained in his published work: “Riding the Waves of Culture”. Trompenaars carried out a comprehensive research and followed up with an interview that included more than 46,000 managers in 40 countries to achieve this template.

Rather than classify cultures based on language, Trompenaar came up with seven yard-sticks listed below: -

Universalism compared with particularism: how much importance is placed on rules, laws, and tenet? Or do people simply believe the world is controlled by fate.

Individualism compared with communitarianism: how much do people believe in personal liberation and achievement? or is an individual greater than a group of people?

Specific compared with diffuse: can work and personal lives be considered a separate entity or are they intertwined?

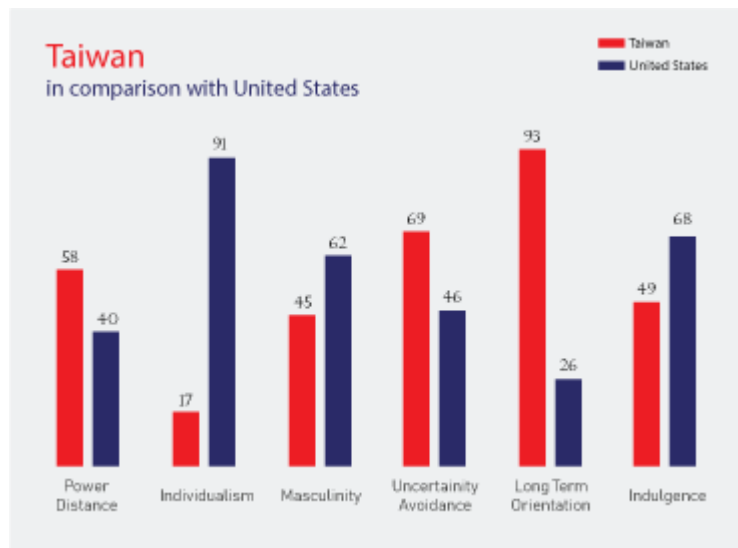
Neutral compared with emotional: do people struggle to express their emotions or are they capable of keeping it under control?

Achievement compared with ascription: are people respected based on what they do or based on who they are?

Sequential time compared with synchronous time: certain people prefers events to occur in a definite pattern. Others are of the opinion that the past, present and future are an interlinked continuum.

Internal Direction compared with outer direction: certain cultures claim to be in control of nature and the environment, while others believe this is not so.

In view of this, an American user is different from a Taiwanese user, precisely in individualism and long-term orientation.



Hofstede also probed the usually myopic views of language and culture. Everyone is aware that our childhood environment determines our spoken accents. less commonly talked about is the fact that our emotions and attitude is also a form of accent determined by our environment. The cultural perspectives describe cultural inclinations that separates countries and not individuals from each other. The country's belief on the affair is relative, considering that we are all humans and also unique individuals. That is, culture can only be meaningful when compared.

How do users react to power?

Hofstede classified all countries on unique areas on his power distance index (PDI), which examined how societies perceive power inequality. Certain cultures expect information from an authentic source, on the other hand, others do not believe in proficiency and certification. Therefore, as regards digital design, the conclusions are, that sensible and influential language or metaphors is like to accomplish more in high power distance regions. However, users in low power distance countries are more inclined to react negatively to this and wish to a more familiar imagery, or regular life.

Do users classify themselves as individuals or part of a group?

- ✓ How can you encourage a user in an individualistic culture compared with a collectivist culture?
- ✓ Does your product depict personal or joint success?
- ✓ How do you compensate your users?

Certain societies place some measure of importance on youth, while intelligence and proficiency are valuable assets elsewhere. Hofstede measures this phenomenon on the individualism vs.

collectivism index (IDX). Countries that have high values on the index are considered more individualistic.

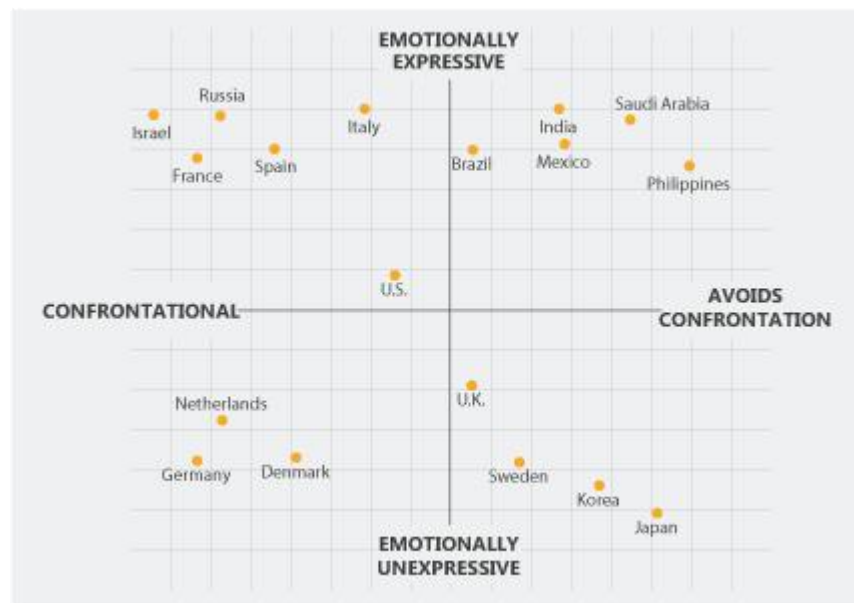
How satisfied are the users when faced with equivocality?

Cultures that do not entirely rely on rules and discretion react to emotional indicators. Whereas a society that is uncomfortable with abstract concepts rather prefer clear and assorted choices. How will these various groups react to directions and constraints?

For instance, on the IDV index, Germany scores a high value. Therefore, it deviates from uncertainty. This implies that product intended for Germany must provide users with a sensible and practical pattern of decisions to make. Meanwhile, countries that are located on the low side of the scale can permit users to find their way, or search through an interface.

PREPARING TO FACE YOUR COUNTERPART

This map below sorts nationalities according to how confrontational and emotionally expressive they are. Although negotiators often believe that the two characteristics go hand in hand, that's not always the case.



SOURCE ERIN MEYER
FROM "GETTING TO SJJA, HAI, AND DA," DECEMBER 2015

Eminent graphic designer, Paul Rand illustrated that word forms creates graphic shapes similar to any other element. We communicate with typography utilizing shape, distribution, weight and spacing of characters. As a result, when you change from one language to another, your graphic cognitive may also change. This becomes confusing especially when one is an alien to an alphabet.

Well written typography plays an important role in visual design and is regarded as one of the most profound elements in an interface, and it is quite necessary to pay attention to kerning, line breaks as well as lay emphasis on certain words, amongst other things.

How do you go about it on your own when you cannot decipher the language? How should you change a sentence, perhaps create impressions, without the basic knowledge of a specific

language? Be certain of the metaphors to be disseminated, and not mere grammatical rules. If you are financially buoyant, it is advised to employ a personal copywriter in order to improve the quality of the work done.

Demographics

A well planned-out concept of interface design is to put into consideration the user demographics, because it determines consumer choices and actions. However, it can be somewhat difficult to comprehend the culture of a local society.

Demographics is quite an important feature when designing brand for a new product. Symbols and metaphors rely on the user's prior knowledge.

The answer to the problem presented by alien demographics is that if you are not so familiar with a particular culture, research and ascertain what might be feasible. Several symbols describe variety of meanings across cultures. For instance, the American OK hand sign is known to be very insulting in Brazil.

Identify behavioral patterns and how they vary across cultures

Uber has drastically changed the transportation sector via a simple app that takes up little phone memory space, and works perfectly in areas of poor network reception. Uber is offering a service that meets the needs of their users. Uber Lite, made public in India, attends to users who may have simple Android phones with limited internet data plans, accepts cash payments. We can point out similar examples like Google maps that provides spectacular offline features.

Timely message

Various cultures have different approaches and scheduling engagements with their products and services when considering sending messages to users, put into consideration when the target audience might be the most compliant. For example, you decide to withhold notifications until a user is found at a particular location in order to avoid disturbance while driving or during meetings.

Appreciate underlying values

A design that permits you to purchase at an instance is likely to be more acceptable in the U.S but not quite as much in a country with high online fraudulent activities. In this scenario, without detailed payment checks or identity authorization, your users may be sceptical while an American perceive this as a streamlined process.

Avoid the usage of texts in images

This is not an ideal practice: because text in messages is impossible to translate and is not easily detected by search engines and it is also not accessible to users who use screen-readers.

Account for varied string lengths.

Various languages can occupy different amount of space on the screen. It is logical to think about text expansion and contraction for languages that will accompany the designs. Despite

the length of strings, it is expedient to be conscious of the directionality of the language. Sites and applications that depends on right-to-left (RTL) and Left-to-right languages requires to be designed for that purpose from the onset and constantly tested. Furthermore, when designers and engineers are informed of these demands, our excuses and logical explanation as English speakers would be sensible enough that our designs or code failed on RTL Languages.

Localise the language

Names or labels of some items may not make much sense when translated in another language or culture. What is for sale in the U.S as a Diet Pepsi can be found in other countries, particularly in Europe and Mexico as Pepsi light



The best approach to localize duplicates is to hire a copywriter. Expert copywriters are well experienced as to how to write the best copy for your demographics and avoid cultural taboos.

Ensure formatting is flexible

Southwest Airlines as well as several other sites offer users a calendar date picker to augment the text field so as to prevent confusion for users whether they write September 12th 2018 as 09/12/2018 or 12/09/2018. Hence, ensure your design does not depend entirely on certain formats that don't permit international differences. It is useful to consider that features like dates, measurements, and addresses all differ in format for different places.

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		1	2	3	4	5
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13	14	15	16	17	18	19
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27	28	29	30	31		

November 2019

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TRAVEL

Book

☒ Roundtrip
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DEPART

ARRIVE

DEPART DATE

RETURN DATE

ADULTS

SENIORS

Enter departure airport.

Enter arrival airport.

10/16

11/12

1

0

Wedge/CANCEL

Points

PROMO CODE (Optional)

Remain legit

It is necessary to note that various countries have legal differences. Ensure that you are abreast of any legal restrictions you may require to work with. For instance, public recording is illegal in several countries such as E.U. So, you might want to reconsider the data collection plans as regards the mobile app you are designing.

Cross-country collaboration

It is plausible that you will be teaming-up and coordinating people in other countries when designing for international users. Wide time differences can present coordination lapses amongst remote teams. Planning is necessary to improve your working time and will help you remain efficient. You can strategize this way, reserve an alone working time for yourself especially when your counterparts may be offline, as well as your meeting periods for the few hours you may encroach into his time. Taking cognisance of international holidays or other working plans will be necessary for planning too so you can keep track of how much you can get done within a deadline. For instance, people in America obtain breaks from form work for Thanksgiving, in Japan they request for a week break during Golden week, and in Israel, the working days spans from Sunday-Thursday instead of the typical Monday-Friday. For Chinese New Year, most parts of the country go on break. This not only concern scheduling meetings, don't be found in a position where you would be needing anything during that week for example mailing/feedback/information etc.

User Research and usability testing

Common with typical designs, do not rely entirely on your own personal opinions, instead, continually verify decisions and assumptions with your user. Conduct usability test because it will generate ideas for you that cannot be obtained via quantitative data. For example, characteristics such as users needs, expectations, and explanation of their behaviors cannot be justified by mere looking at conversion rate. If necessary, carry out test in the local environment where users utilize your products/services. The usability tests provide us with valuable ideas: critical pain points and use information for the users

In Paul Graham's words: "Go to where your users are"

Remote usability testing

The most effective way to conduct usability tests is to conduct it in-person, but it is not possible sometimes due to time limits or budget restrictions. The great news is, there are efficient tools to carry out remote usability test. The most effective way to utilize these tools is to select the one that works perfectly with your demographics

If your users are predominantly located in Southeast Asia, Netizen testing based in Singapore employs users locally as well as Southeast Asia. Perhaps, your users are located in Europe, Userzoom resident in the UK has test users in Germany, Spain and other countries around the world. UXTesting located in Taiwan and the U.S have competent testers across U.S. Canada, Taiwan, and India.

Data assessment

Data scientist are not the only set of people qualified to assess data; it can be a useful tool for UX designers as well. With data, designers can comprehend how users utilize the products and services, as well as the effect of their designs

Data tools such as Google analytics, heat maps and recordings can be useful in comprehending where users dropped and what and where they clicked.

Cross cultural design is challenging

Designing cross-cultural preferences may often lure you to see beyond conventional of thinking about demographics, towards broader issues and specific tool changes.

It is vital to be abreast of the known fact that languages can present problems with the use of symbols and themes. It will be wise not to put all your confidence in Google translate for some nuances requires in UI/UX design.

User's perspectives change between cultures as well as languages.

HOW TO DESIGN A MULTICULTURAL USER EXPERIENCE

- ✓ Accept your opinions – cultural exchanges are satisfactory on interpersonal basis. However, when designing, everyone is entitled to their own personal opinions,

especially at the international level. Your opinions come from the environmental exposures, cultural attitudes, thinking and past experiences. Respect it!

- ✓ Become a clean plain slate - *"I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing."*

- Plato

How do you handle your opinions? It is best to come as a plain slate. Assume nothing and keep an open mind to learn the culture that you are designing for, this keeps you from your biased opinions that is structured by your own particular exposure.

- ✓ Classify patterns – even though some cultures are different, yet they still have a lot of similarities. Formats exists everywhere – watch other people communicate, value, conclude and obtain data. Tag the patterns and utilize them in designing for a culture.

Find below a few examples of varying homepages from brands such as Uniqlo, Ikea and Starbucks. Comparing them, we realize how these brands localize by extracting patterns across websites.

Common patterns

Minimalism versus Density

Western lifestyles such as Sweden and the US place importance on Minimalism and Whitespaces due to the fact that those culture information in its acceptable forms needs to be easily readable and processed. Meanwhile, Eastern cultures such as Japan place importance on prompt finding of information, producing websites that by western cultural standard may be termed crowded and unlikable.

Fortunately, what is appealing to the west is rather the opposite to the east.

Uniqlo in the US, Germany and Japan comparison

Consider Uniqlo's websites in the US and Germany, they present similar contents, however, Germany's website is presented on a broader layout compared to the U.S. That disparity can reflect the lengthy words synonymous to the German language. It is necessary to carefully select a typeface and leave the whitespace to scale and localize between languages of similar origin such as English and German. A typeface should not look complex in another language with lengthy words and there should be enough whitespaces perhaps if the same word in another language has several words or one very lengthy word.

As regards Uniqlo's Japan website, the design is widely different from its English and German equivalence. This variety has a lot of compact information, and vertically oriented design. That adequately suits a culture that demands quick access to a lot of information.

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WÄRME, DIE VON INNEN KOMMT

DAMEN XS - XXL

BABYS



Reading Guidelines

Systems of writing differs across cultures. Western cultures read from left-to-right, while some middle east cultures read from right-to-left, some eastern read from top-to-bottom. This infers F and Z layouts, common with western user experience design will not internationally comply with the translation.

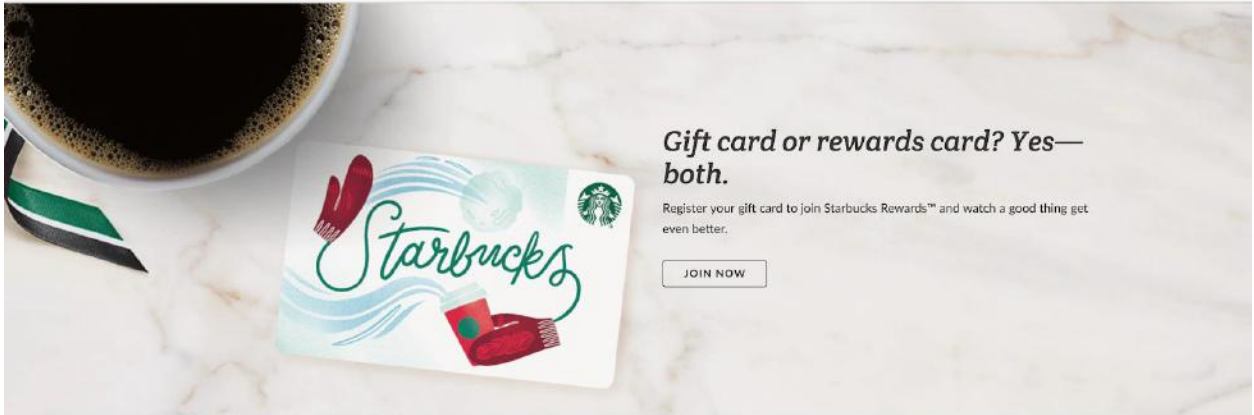
Comparing Starbucks in the US, Japan, Middle East and Austria

Starbucks does an excellent work of localizing their layouts. In the US, it has a usual Z pattern that shows the manner in which the users scan across websites in western cultures. In Japan, it shows a vertically oriented pattern because information is usually read and written from top-to-bottom and left-to-right. Although, it is not quite common to see vertical typography on websites, it is portraying a vertical sense. In conclusion, Starbucks's website in the Middle East depicts the pattern of the US, which works perfectly for cultures that read from right-to-left.



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Press Release

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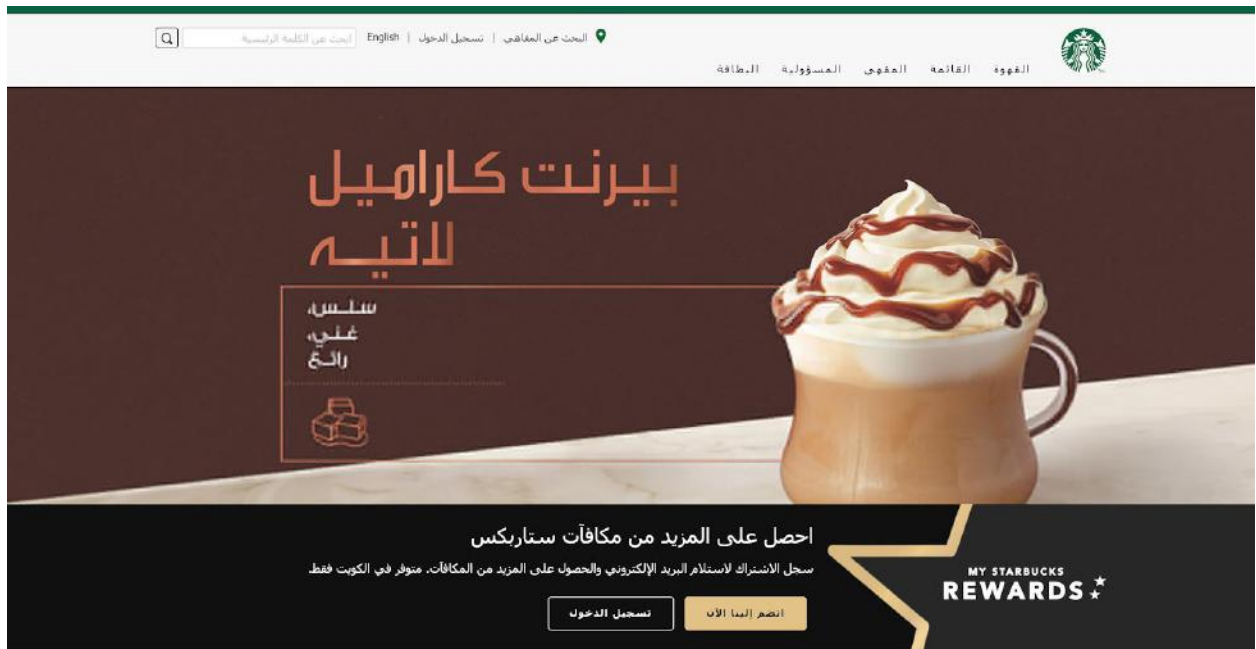


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Reflect

Now that we have seen some common and rare patterns across various cultures, it is logical to examine websites, simplify them and ask the necessary questions. Even though the location and the visibility of something can be extremely small and yet equally important such as a search button might vary across cultures, but conform to the trends within similar cultures.

Ikea Search Field in Sweden, Saudi Arabia, the US and Japan comparison

Ikea's website predominantly in Sweden has a long input search field. Does it need more space on the search input fields for lengthy words? In Saudi Arabia, the search button is located on the left while the logo is found on the right side, contrary to the location of the search button and logo in the US. That's called mirroring? Why is the search button not clearly displayed in Japan's Ikea website? Do Japanese use less search button where information should be promptly accessible to the users and not searched?

There are justifications behind every decision made during design including the slightest information on a product or a website can play a major role in making an enjoyable user experience.



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Think of design ethics

It is common to see Blackletter typefaces utilized in the US newspaper or journals or even beer bottles. But the Blackletter typefaces which were utilized in Nazi Germany, became synonymous to Nazism and nowadays it is associated with Neo-Nazism. It is thought that these typefaces depict uniquely strong interpretations, similar to the Swastika, it does not belong to the future and therefore should remain in the past.

The New York Times
Los Angeles Times
Irish Examiner
The Sydney Morning Herald

- ✓ Connect innovatively – you don't always have to depend on words to converse and at times you might not be capable. If words are not enough to communicate, use gestures, visuals etc. to close the language gap with your users or colleagues. you can try to communicate in two different languages at once if you understand the language, but have difficulty expressing in words. Furthermore, use gestures with carefulness because they might be interpreted as a different meaning across cultures
- ✓ Write Consciously - *"Rather than mere design templates, a user interface with the right semantic content can produce a measurable impact on the user in both task performance and emotional perception, depending on its background and context."*
– Alberto Ferreira

Direct translations don't usually extend and some words typically don't exist in other language. For instance, "my friend" translates as "my romantic partner" in German. When talking about a friend in German language, the strict interpretation of that English phrase would be written as "friend of mine." For example, using "my friend" instead of "a friend of mine" in German creates confusion and weird conversations. Therefore, it is important to utilize localized semantics to prevent misunderstandings.

Furthermore, it is necessary to ascertain culturally correct language in order not to get users vexed. Although, it is common worldwide to address the US as "America," a lot of Latin persons might dislike that title. Latin America and Canada also constitute America, therefore, addressing the US as "America" is indication of ethnocentrism to a lot of people.

- ✓ Analyze your designs

“Designing for mass localization on a digital platform on a scale is a fruitless endeavor unless it is correlated with quantitative data: analytics and tracking can help designers and Information Architects in finding the best structure for a site map or flow for transactional websites and customize it to suit the user needs.”

– Alberto Ferreira

You are expected to feel uncomfortable and vulnerable while working in different languages and culture. Likewise, you are also expected to commit errors as well. Bond with the people from the culture you are designing for. For example, final consumers, colleagues, or expert translators. The only recommended way your writing and designs can be considered culturally sensitive is by TESTING them.

CONCLUSION

Attentiveness and sensitivity to details of culture differences is important when designing for target international audience. We are required to question our cultural opinions and ensure our work is available beyond our individual cultural limits.

AUTHOR INFO



Faisal Siddiqui is a Group Technical Manager in EDGE Practice, HCL Technologies Ltd. He has over 16 years of industry experience in designing for touch based devices, web applications, e-Learning courses, and software products etc. Exceptional visualization skills, in-depth knowledge and experience in creating rich graphical environment for better user experience. He is from Multimedia and Mass communication background and this mix has given him a unique perspective in the multi-disciplinary field of Design.