

Impact of Host Country Culture on Glocalisation of Corporate Websites

Purva Kansal*

ABSTRACT

Internet has become a hybrid means of sales, service, and communication channel. Its penetration and acceptability in areas of e-commerce across cultures have given it a growth rate of 566 percent in the time period 2000-2012. Internet helps a marketer to reach target customers across cultures and borders. Therefore, the Internet or its usability in a business environment could not avoid the continuous debate of standardisation versus localisation. This debate revolves around the argument that people live within a traditional core cultures and that these cultures affect communication messages and people's perceptions toward those messages. Therefore, a globally designed website might reduce the cultural acceptability of a website. Practically, more than often the globalisation of content might reduce a company's target audience to a much smaller group in terms of its way of life, customs and religious beliefs.

Literature indicates that another significant element in making websites effective is to realise the importance of content and its understanding the users. One of the important issue is the relationship between culture and "feature and content" of a corporate website. Evidence from the emerging body of literature on the cultural dimensions of website design and content attributes cuts both ways on the assumption of culturally-neutral, web-based communication. The present study was undertaken with an objective to examine cultural differences and similarities between the content of existing corporate websites from the three countries i.e. India, China, and Denmark, across Hofstede Cultural Dimensions.

Websites of 24 companies from each host country were analysed. The results of the study were more supportive of localisation of content.

Keyword: Content Analysis, Glocalisation, Culture, International Marketing

INTRODUCTION

Internet is the latest medium of communication and has influenced every aspect of our lives. It is a tool which has exponentially increased the speed of information sharing with an added advantage of mass communication but to a targeted group. Internet provides many such tools which help companies to achieve their public relations objectives effectively and efficiently. Corporate websites is one of such mediums on the internet which help companies communicate and interact with their stakeholders better (Coombs, 1998). Corporate website helps a company not only communicate with its stakeholders but also allows companies to use this vehicle for better dispersion of information, create and promote corporate visual identity, disclosure of financial information, and also at times as a servicing, sale or delivery channel for their product and services (Liu, Arnett, Capella, & Beatty, 1997; Perry & Bodkin, 2000; Sullivan, 1999). Therefore, corporate

websites have become an indispensable tool for businesses targeting domestic or an international marketing space.

However, communicating in this virtual space comes with its own set of challenges. One of the major challenges of an online corporate communication strategy is sensitivity of communication to culture (Aune, Hunter, Kim, & Kim, 2001; Gudykunst, Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim & Heyman, 1996; Martin & Nakayama, 1999). The sensitivity of communication to culture has given rise to a debate of globalisation vs localisation of content. Many researchers have studied various aspects of this debate (Schuerkens, 2003; Voisey & O'Riordan, 2001; Zeki, 2001). Research has concentrated on verbal and non-verbal communication (Aune *et al.*, 2001; Martin & Nakayama, 2004; Schuerkens, 2003), metaphors (Fitzgerald, 1993; Gannon, 1994), advertising (Kansal, 2013; Miracle, Chang, & Taylor, 1992) and even on negotiation skills (Adair & Brett, 2005; Brett, Adair, Lempereur, Okumura, Shikhirev, Tinsley & Lytle,

* Assistant Professor, University Business School, Chandigarh, Punjab, India. Email: purvakansal@gmail.com

1998). Enough evidence is there to establish that there is a significant relationship between design, layout and content of corporate websites and culture (Cyr, Head, Larios, & Pan, 2009; Fletcher, 2006; Marcus & Gould, 2000). These studies have indicated that companies need to have knowledge about this relationship to know what to do and what not to do in terms of their websites. These studies have proposed generalised frameworks for companies standardising and localising the corporate website content. The debate of standardisation versus localisation has been a long discussed topic. Proponents of standardisation school of thought believe that people worldwide want the same product and for the same reason, therefore, companies can decrease their expenditure by having the similar communication strategies across their markets. However those who are in the favour of the localised approach are sceptical and believe that most blunders in international business have been made because the communication strategists have failed to understand nuances of foreign culture.

The present study is perceived in this backdrop and is an attempt to target the other side of the coin i.e. how much do companies sensitise and vary their content across cultures. Present study is an attempt to study website content, in terms, of web site organisation and visual representation. An area cited by researchers as a neglected area in today's cross cultural website design research (Callahan, 2005).

COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

Past research has indicated that there is a strong relationship between culture and website design and content (Cyr et al., 2009; Fletcher, 2006; Marcus & Gould, 2000). Czinkota and Ronkainen (2003) in their study emphasised that different studies that have been conducted on culture and have made it possible to develop some generalisations about cultures and its elements for example language (verbal and non-verbal), religion, values and attitudes, manners and customs, material elements, aesthetics, education, and social institutions (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2004, p. 61). However, based on Fletcher (2006) only three of these elements are interesting to look at when investigating culture on websites; language, values and attitudes, and aesthetics (Fletcher, 2006). Present study uses elements listed by Fletcher, to analyse the content of corporate websites.

The elements proposed by Fletcher are studied within the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede i.e. power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity and uncertainty avoidance, and long-/short-term orientation. (Hofstede, 1983, 1984).

Power distance: This dimension reveals the dependents relationship. It states that in countries with low power distance, the subordinates will have limited dependence to the superiors and there will be a tendency to consult and freedom to disagree with superiors.

Uncertainty avoidance: This dimension refers to how society and its members deal with the future risk possibilities. In cultures with high UAI, people tend to have a structured approach to bring in more predictability.

Individualism versus collectivism: It refers to the degree members of the society feel a sense of belongingness to a group. Individualism refers to "I" societies where the relations are weak and everyone is expected to only watch for himself or his family.

Masculinity versus femininity: This refers to delegation of responsibilities between males and females in societies. For example masculine societies focus on competition and hardship in ideas and materiality.

Past research, has used all or some of the dimensions of Hofstede Cultural Index to study the effect of culture on communication. Though not much work was found on specifics of website content yet a lot of work seem to have been done on another means of corporate communication i.e. advertising. Therefore, advertising research across cultures has been used for theory building in the present context because of two reasons namely it is also a popular means of corporate communication and corporate identity and secondly, it is also subject to cross cultural issues.

In their study, Han and Shavitt (1994) studied the use and effectiveness of core dimension of cultural variability i.e. individualism-collectivism, in the types of persuasive appeals across two cultures (USA and Korea). Their results indicated that U.S. advertisements emphasizing individualistic benefits were found to be more persuasive, and ads emphasizing family or in group benefits were less persuasive in US than they were in Korea (Han & Shavitt, 1994). Similarly a study across Germany and China concluded that an individualistic appeal was more effective when communicating with the individualistic

German audience, however, when appealing to a collectivistic Chinese audience, either a collectivistic or an individualistic appeal could be used (Han & Shavitt, 1994).

Proposition: Communication content would vary across cultures with different IDV.

Moon and Chan (2005) in their study investigated difference in advertising appeals in Hong Kong and Korea, and is the difference between the two countries could be attributed to the differences in nations' cultural characteristics. The results of their study indicated that femininity was an important variable for explaining differences, and values of low uncertainty avoidance were found to be more prevalent in television commercials in Korea, a country of high uncertainty avoidance, than Hong Kong, a country of low uncertainty avoidance (Moon & Chan, 2005). Research has also established that a consumer who is exposed to a specific culture becomes committed to that culture's style of thinking and feeling (Hong, Muderrisoglu, & Zinkhan, 1987) therefore, an individual in low uncertainty avoidance culture (India) would accept less information in communication than a person with high uncertainty avoidance culture (USA). An analysis of information vs Attractiveness cues across two nations indicated that Indian advertisements on an average have 4.83 attractiveness cues out of 6.60 cues per advertisements while US advertisements have 4.55 attractiveness cues out of 7.54 cues per advertisement (Kansal, 2013).

Proposition: Communication content would vary across cultures with different MFI.

Proposition: Communication content would vary across cultures with different UAI.

Marcus and Gould (2000) have extended the culture and communication research to website design and given dimensions which would account for website changes across cultures. They indicate that user-interface and web design are influenced by Hofstede dimensions i.e. a website targeting high power distance index culture would be highly structured, would show tall hierarchies in mental models, will focus on expertise, authority, experts, certifications, official stamps and logos; targeting individualistic cultures would show motivation based on personal achievements, use materialistic and consumerism based images of success, argumentative speech with

prominence of youth and action in images; targeting masculine cultures would show traditional gender/family/age distinctions in content and images, would allow exploration and control and would have high use of games, competitions, graphics, sound, and animations; targeting high long term orientation would show content focusing on practice and practical value (Marcus & Gould, 2000).

Proposition: Communication content would vary across cultures with different PDI.

In summation, review of literature indicated that website content and design is influenced by culture. However, limited research was found on adaptation of content and design of websites across cultures. The present study has been undertaken to bridge this gap in the literature. Therefore, the current study has been undertaken to study and test the hypothesis based on the proposition that as is true for other forms of communication, website design would vary with country culture. For current study it was important to collect data from countries which were significantly different in terms of Hofstede index. To meet this objective it was decided to choose countries from two cultural clusters i.e. Asian and Nordic. Asian and Nordic clusters were chosen because in terms of Hofstede index these are significantly different. The unit for data collection was website of different countries. Exploratory nature of the study required that data analysis be done not only across the two clusters but also within the cluster. This sampling strategy would help control for other external factors which influence the content of a website. Therefore, to study the similarity two countries were chosen from the Asian cluster and to study across clusters one country was chosen from the Nordic culture. Thus, three countries were chosen for the study i.e. India, China and Denmark.

METHODOLOGY

The current study is an exploratory study which was undertaken to study the similarity and differences between the content of corporate websites across cultures w.r.t. Hofstede cultural dimensions. A study of the four chosen Hofstede indexes indicated that in terms of the indexes India and China were relatively similar while Denmark was significantly different. Therefore, the choice of the countries sufficed our objective requirements.

Table 1: Hofstede indexes

<i>Country</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Denmark</i>
PDI	77	80	18
IDV	48	20	74
MFI	56	66	16
UAI	40	40	23

Source: Generated from <http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>

Based on these indexes the propositions being explored in this study are

P1: Indian and Chinese corporate websites are more likely to show a higher frequency of high power distance features than those of Denmark.

P2: Denmark corporate websites are more likely to show a higher frequency of individualist features than those of India and China.

P3: Denmark corporate websites are more likely to show a higher frequency of Feminist features than those of India and China.

P4: Indian and Chinese corporate websites are more likely to show a higher frequency of uncertainty avoidance features than those of Denmark.

Sample Design

Judgmental sampling was used to select websites for the current study. In second stage of sampling, 24 companies were chosen from each country on basis of their listing in Fortune 500 or National Stock exchange of the respective country. It is important to mention here that companies were chosen on basis of stock listing and therefore the sample were from different countries i.e. some part of the sample had a different country of origin. For example, out of 24 corporate websites chosen from India, 10 were Indian companies while 8 were from USA, 1 was from Switzerland, 1 from Germany, 1 from Netherland,

1 from UK and 2 from Japan (Table 1). Similarly, the sample chosen from China and Denmark also consisted of companies with different countries of origin. The sampling strategy was considered adequate as difference in countries of origin of companies chosen from a country, but similarity of content of these websites would help support the proposition that home country culture influenced website content.

Furthermore final sample consisted of 21 MNCs from India, 6 from China and 11 from Denmark. Details of these are in Table 3. Most of the companies chosen were present in multiple countries. Therefore, these companies had faced the standardisation vs localisation debate and developed strategies to deal with it, and therefore were adequate sample for present study. In order to evaluate impact of culture on corporate websites, homepages of corporate websites were used however; the entire website is used as the unit of analysis.

The study compared corporate websites using content analysis. Content analysis is a means of analysing the message itself and not the communicator or audience (Kelley, 1956).

Code Sheet

Works of major researchers i.e. Gould, Zalcaria & Yusof, (2000), Marcus and Gould (2000), Robbins and Stylianou (2002), Singh and Baack (2004); and Singh and Matsuo 2004 were referred to prepare a list of features

Table 2: Country of Origin of the sample Chosen

	<i>Country of Origin</i>									
	<i>India</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Switzerland</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Netherland</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
India	10	0	0	8	1	1	1	1	2	0
China	0	20	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0
Denmark	0	0	17	5	0	1	1	0	0	0

Table 3: Sample Configuration

		<i>MNC</i>	<i>Global</i>	<i>International</i>	<i>Domestic</i>
country in which corporation is present	India	21	0	3	0
	China	6	0	15	3
	Denmark	11	2	10	1

for analysing the websites. These features were used as a premise for code sheet. These features have been listed in Table 4. Using these features questions were framed to code the content of a website on Hofstede Cultural dimensions.

Coding of the Data

For coding the content of the websites two coders were used. The coders were selected on basis of their marketing knowledge, some exposure to the technique of coding and most importantly with international exposure and fluency in English. It was felt that an international exposure would give coders a knowledge and tolerance to the diversity of three countries cultures and thus would help them code the websites across three different nations more efficiently. The coders were given two-hour training and were briefed about the goals and techniques of the method and were supplied with definitions and

examples of the analysis in form of a code book. The coders' agreement on different variables ranged from 70-100 percent. Little disagreement was found in terms of content. The disagreement varied from 10-30 percent. An inter-rater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic was performed to determine consistency among raters. The inter-rater reliability for the raters was found to be $Kappa = 0.70$ ($p < 0.05$). Kappa values were calculated to judge the reliability and these were found to be above the acceptable limit of 0.70 (Landis & Koch, 1977).

During the pretesting of code sheet it was realised that many of the websites had some dynamic content. Therefore, to maintain comparability of data the homepages of all 72 websites were saved offline within the same window of one week and then provided to the coders for coding. Additionally coders were provided urls of all websites and could visit the website for any clarifications or cross referencing.

Table 4: Features used for Content Analysis of Websites

<i>Power distance index</i>	<i>Uncertainty Avoidance Index</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information related to Hierarchy/Rank of company personal • CEO/Officials picture present in the website • message of CEO/Officials given in the website • Bio-sketches of CEO/Top leaders present • Vision statement given in the website • special title been used in the website • website provide access to highly structured information • website contains pride of ownership appeal • website contains quality information and awards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • customer service present in the website • website provide secure payment • website provide guided navigation • traditional theme present in the website • website make use of local terminology • free trials or downloads provided by the website • website contains toll free numbers • website contains navigation scheme intended to prevent users from becoming lost
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masculinity/Femininity • financial information (annual report) given in the website • website contains Quizzes and Games • website contains realism themes • website provide visitor counter • website contains information related to product effectiveness • website provide information related to gender role • website signify mutual corporation, exchange and support • website provides attention to poetry and visual aesthetics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualistic/Collectivist • site security provisions present for the website • privacy policy of the website been given • Does the website provide a wide range of choices and not presume to select default • community policy given in the website • social responsibility newsletter given in the website • links to local websites present • links to other organisation present • symbol of national identity present • message related to national identity symbol given

Percentages and averages were used to analyse the data.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

The current study compares content of corporate websites across Hofstede dimensions so as to measure the standardisation Vs localisation extent of the content. Corporate website is a composite of multiple components which are used to communicate with various stakeholders. In order to understand the use of these components all the components were analysed across Hofstede dimensions. In this section results of the study are discussed. A two-step analysis was undertaken to understand the data. First an overall analysis across the type of companies was undertaken and in second stage the detailed analysis across content of website and cultural dimension was done.

In the first stage of an overall analysis of the content of websites was done across the type of companies. The sample was checked for four basic type of companies i.e. global, MNCs, international and domestic companies. Information present on the website was used to code companies into these four categories. Most of them used the phrase international, MNCs or global companies in the “About Us” segment of their website. If the information was found to be absent then the indicators on the website regarding their integration, type of operations, international revenues, diversity in their human resources etc. were used for categorisation. There were six companies which had to be coded in this manner. After the coders had coded the companies, experts in area of marketing were asked to categorise the companies. All six companies were categorised by coders and experts in same manner. The end sample from China consisted of majority of domestic (12.5%) or international companies (62.5%) while the Indian sample consisted of 87.5% MNCs and Denmark had majority MNCs (45.8%) and global (8.5%) companies (Table 3).

The analysis across type of companies was done to test the perception that as companies became global, their presence in multiple cultures forces them to be more geocentric in their management and communication strategies i.e. focus no similarities across cultures. Therefore, it can be deduced from a geocentric approach that companies would be more inclined to follow standardised communication strategies as they are concentrating on similarities across their markets. For this deduction to be valid, the results

should indicate a significant difference in the content of websites across type of company within a culture i.e. there should be a significant difference in the content of a global, MNC, international and domestic company. The results indicated that there was not much difference across the type of company and content within a culture. The average scores indicated that the content of a global website was not much different from that of a MNCs or an international website with a culture. Interestingly there was not much difference even across these three types of companies and domestic companies, indicating that the content of MNC, global and international companies had been adapted to sensitize the content to nuances of host country culture (Table 5). Table 5 indicates that the mean score for content indicators for MNCs in India for PDI was 79.86, in China was 77.5 and Denmark was 18. The results indicated that there was not much difference in mean score of the content within a particular country (Table 5) i.e. the mean score for PDI content indicators for MNCs and international companies were similar. It also important to note that the results did indicate that some dilution took place as companies moved from international to MNC or global category; for example the score changed from 80 to 79.86 in case of PDI. Though not all type of companies features in the stock market based sample yet no difference were found between a MNC and a domestic company’s content in China or a global company and domestic company’s content in Denmark. Therefore, indicating that companies might belong to different home cultures but when they enter into a host country there is some degree of adaptation of content according to host country culture. However, to get a detailed insight into the specifics of the content of website an in-depth analysis of the content across Hofstede dimension was done.

In the second stage of data analysis the content of corporate websites from all three countries was explored across Hofstede dimensions. In order to achieve this objective first the corporate website content was coded across 17 items for power distance dimension of culture, 19 for collectivism dimension of culture, 19 for uncertainty avoidance dimension of culture and 13 for masculinity dimension of culture. Results of this analysis are discussed in this section.

Corporate Website Content and Power Distance Index (PDI)

Table 5: Average Score of Corporate Website Content for Hofstede Indicators Across Countries and Type of Companies.

<i>Hofstede Dimension</i>			<i>MNC</i>	<i>Global</i>	<i>International</i>	<i>Domestic</i>
<i>PDI</i>	<i>country</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>79.86</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>0</i>
		China	77.5	0	77	77
		Denmark	18	18	18	18
IDV	country	India	21.33	0	20	0
		China	43.33	0	48	48
		Denmark	74	74	74	74
UAI	country	India	40	0	40	0
		China	40	0	40	40
		Denmark	23	23	23	23
MFI	country	India	65.52	0	66	0
		China	57.67	0	56	56
		Denmark	16	16	16	16

The mean score for all the 17 elements of PDI content indicated that in India and China the corporate websites exhibited a content which catered to a higher PDI than Denmark. The mean score for corporate websites in India was 79.88, for China the score was 77.13 while for Denmark the mean score for indicators of PDI in content of website was only 18.00. These scores when compared with PDI scores given by Hofstede indicated that there was a strong inclination of the content of the analysed corporate websites towards overall PDI score which is 77, 80 and 18 respectively¹. Therefore results of the current study indicated support for Hypothesis 1 i.e. H1.

However to develop a more in-depth understanding of the content items all the 17 items were analysed across 3 countries (Table 6). Results indicated that most of the websites across 3 cultures were highly structured and used official logos and stamps, used special titles and emphasised on value. However, significant differences in content were there across four basic elements i.e. organisational chart, message from CEO, Focus on user and presence of quality information standards. It was found that websites from India and Denmark focused more on users, their needs and quality variables than China. These two were low PDI indicators and therefore high score of these two nations on these elements resulted in difference in the overall average score of the dimensions. Denmark overall scored high on content for Low PDI as well. An

analysis indicated that the High PDI was not absent on these websites rather the company had standardised the content to contain both while trading off on variables like organisational chart. Organisational chart was less common in India and Denmark than in Chinese websites. The results also indicated that though these companies were from different countries yet the content matched PDI measures of the host country. Interestingly, again there was no difference in the content of a Domestic or MNC or Global companies either. Therefore the results implied that the content had been adapted by the MNCs as well as the Global companies to adjust to the cultural nuances of the host country. However, if they are present in too diverse a cultures then the content of the website was adapted to contain both the indicators rather than choosing between one or the other.

Corporate Website Content and Individualistic Collectivism Index (IDV)

The mean score for all the 19 elements of IDV content indicated that in India and China the corporate websites exhibited a content which catered to a higher collectivism than Denmark. The elements framed had items to measure both collectivism and individualism characteristics in content. The mean score for corporate websites in India was 21.17, for China the score was 46.83 while for Denmark the mean score for indicators of IDV in content of website was 74.00. These scores when compared with IDV scores given by Hofstede indicated that there was a

¹ Recovered from <http://geert-hofstede.com/india.html>; <http://geert-hofstede.com/china.html>; <http://geert-hofstede.com/denmark.html> on 15th Nov 2013.

Table 6: Power Distance Index Measures Across Corporate Websites

	Content Indicators	Present or not	Country				Content Indicators	Present or not	Country		
			India	China	Denmark				India	China	Denmark
1	Hierarchy/Rank of company	yes	24	20	24	10	Focus on expertise	yes	24	24	24
		no	0	4	0			no	0	0	0
2	Organisational chart	yes	7	19	9	11	Focus on certification	yes	1	4	0
		no	17	5	15			no	22	20	24
3	CEO/Officials picture	yes	22	20	24	12	Focus on official stamps and logos	yes	24	20	24
		no	2	4	0			no	0	4	0
4	Message of CEO/Officials	yes	18	12	24	13	Highly structured information	yes	24	21	24
		no	6	12	0			no	0	3	0
5	Bio-sketches	yes	20	19	24	14	Less-highly structured information (Low PDI)	yes	0	3	0
		no	4	5	0			no	24	21	24
6	Focus on users and their needs (Low PDI)	yes	21	12	24	15	Pride of ownership appeal	yes	20	20	24
		no	3	10	0			no	4	0	0
		can't say	0	2	0			can't say	0	4	0
7	Vision statement	yes	24	24	24	16	Proper titles	yes	24	24	24
		no	0	0	0			no	0	0	0
8	Special titles	yes	24	20	24	17	Quality information	yes	16	10	0
		no	0	4	0			no	7	14	24
		can't say	0	0	0			can't say	1	0	0
9	Emphasizes value (Low PDI)	yes	24	22	24						
		no	0	2	0						

strong inclination of the content of the analysed corporate websites towards overall IDV score which is 48, 20 and 74 respectively².

An in-depth analysis of the content items all the 19 items across 3 countries (Table 7) indicated that there was significant difference in the content of websites across 3 cultures. i.e. the results supported H2. The results indicated that the content of Indian websites was more collectivist in nature followed by content of Chinese websites and lastly Denmark i.e. the content of websites from Denmark was more individualistic in nature. Individualistic content indicated that the content on Denmark corporate websites was more social responsibility oriented and maintained a individualistic identity by keeping focus on value products and consumerism. Significant difference was found across 4 items in this construct i.e. social responsibility newsletter, links to other organisations, national identity, family themes and use of case studies. It was found that websites from Denmark had a regular social responsibility letter, focused less on links to other organisations or

national identity. These websites did not have a family theme or use case studies (an indicator of collectivism). On the other hand Indian and Chinese websites were more family oriented with frequent links to other organisations. An analysis indicated that though the elements of High IDV were more in the content of websites from Denmark yet some indicators of collectivism were also found. These indicators were not as frequent or prominent as the ones of high and low PDI but were present. The results, re-stressed our earlier observation that though these companies were from different countries yet the content matched IDV measures of the host country, implying that the content had been adapted by the MNCs as well as the Global companies to adjust to the cultural nuances of the host country.

Corporate Website content and Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

The mean score for all the 19 elements of UAI content indicated that in India and China the corporate websites exhibited a content which catered to a higher UAI than Denmark. The elements framed had items to measure both high and low UAI characteristics in content. The

² Recovered from <http://geert-hofstede.com/india.html>; <http://geert-hofstede.com/china.html>; <http://geert-hofstede.com/denmark.html> on 15th Nov 2013.

Table 7: Collectivism Dimension Measures Across Corporate Websites

	<i>Content Indicators</i>	<i>Present or not</i>	<i>Country</i>				<i>Content Indicators</i>	<i>Present or not</i>	<i>Country</i>		
			<i>India</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Denmark</i>				<i>India</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Denmark</i>
1	Community policy	yes	1	5	0	10	Family themes (collectivism)	yes	14	6	0
		no	23	19	24			no	10	18	24
2	Social responsibility newsletter	yes	21	14	24	11	Case studies (collectivism)	yes	6	1	0
		no	3	10	0			no	18	23	24
3	Links to local websites	yes	3	10	9	12	Sharing experience	yes	22	20	24
		no	21	14	15			no	1	4	0
		can't say	0	0	0			can't say	1	0	0
4	Links to other organisation	yes	10	12	0	13	Website cookies	yes	2	0	0
		no	14	12	24			no	19	1	24
		can't say	0	0	0			can't say	3	23	0
5	Loyalty programme given	yes	6	3	7	14	Registration requirements	yes	0	0	0
		no	18	21	17			no	24	24	24
6	Is symbol of national identity (Collectivism)	yes	5	15	0	15	Site security provisions	yes	9	5	6
		no	19	9	24			no	15	19	18
7	National identity (Collectivism)	yes	0	5	0	16	Privacy policy	yes	23	12	24
		no	24	19	24			no	1	12	0
8	Social and organisational goal	yes	24	20	24	17	Clubs and chat rooms	yes	0	0	0
		no	0	4	0			no	24	24	24
9	Emotional affiliation to society (Collectivism)	yes	23	14	18	18	Country specific news (Collectivism)	yes	10	6	18
		no	1	9	6			no	14	18	6
		can't say	0	1	0			can't say	0	0	0
					19	Wide range of choices	yes	24	17	24	
							no	0	7	0	

mean score for corporate websites in India was 40.50, for China the score was 38.50 while for Denmark the mean score for indicators of UAI in content of website was 23. These scores when compared with UAI scores given by Hofstede indicated that there was a strong inclination of the content of the analysed corporate websites towards overall UAI score which is 40, 40 and 23 respectively³. Therefore, there was significant difference in the content of websites from India, China and Denmark, indicating support Hypothesis 4 i.e. H4.

The results indicated that the content of Indian websites was more structured and predictable than from Denmark (Table 8). Significant difference were found in content of websites of 3 countries across 10 items i.e. customer service, toll free numbers, free trials, terms and conditions

of use, organisational chart, navigation schemes, guided navigation, job descriptions, listing of job openings, and redundant cues to reduce ambiguity. The content indicated that the content on Denmark corporate websites was more customer service oriented, was clearer in terms of use indicating higher UAI nature of content but at the same time the content was also lacking in organisational chart. The websites promoted free trials and queries and did not try to control every aspect of consumer experience. They accepted curiosity as natural and encouraged customers to be curious and had clearer toll free numbers. These indicated towards low UAI characteristics in the content of websites from Denmark. Interestingly Chinese websites scored low on job description and job posting items. This could be attributed to Chinese corporate working on "Guanxi" and relationship basis. On the other hand Indian and Chinese websites were more structured, simple and predictable. An analysis indicated that though the elements of High UAI were more in the content of

³ Recovered from <http://geert-hofstede.com/india.html>; <http://geert-hofstede.com/china.html>; <http://geert-hofstede.com/denmark.html> on 15th Nov 2013.

Table 8: Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension Measures Across Corporate Websites

	<i>Content Indicators</i>	<i>Present or not</i>	<i>Country</i>				<i>Content Indicators</i>	<i>Present or not</i>	<i>Country</i>		
			<i>India</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Denmark</i>				<i>India</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Denmark</i>
1	Customer service	yes	16	14	24	11	Free trials	yes	21	11	18
		no	8	10	0			no	3	13	6
2	Index/Directory	yes	24	23	24	12	Toll free numbers	yes	2	18	24
		no	0	1	0			no	1	3	0
		can't say	0	0	0			can't say	21	3	0
3	Information related to company	yes	24	24	24	13	Less control of navigation (Low UAI)	yes	0	2	0
		no	0	0	0			no	24	21	24
4	Terms and conditions	yes	19	6	24	14	Navigation scheme to prevent users from becoming lost	yes	22	1	17
		no	5	18	0			no	2	23	7
5	Organisational chart	yes	7	19	9	15	Complex with maximal content and choices	yes	0	1	0
		no	17	5	15			no	24	23	24
6	Service	yes	16	15	24	16	Description of career/jobs	yes	23	13	24
		no	8	9	0			no	1	10	0
		can't say	0	0	0			can't say	0	1	0
7	Secure payment	yes	1	0	0	17	Listing of job openings	yes	23	12	24
		no	0	0	0			no	1	10	0
		can't say	23	24	24			can't say	0	2	0
8	Guided navigation	yes	22	1	17	18	Redundant cues(colouretc.)to reduce ambiguity	yes	22	0	11
		no	2	23	7			no	2	23	13
		can't say	0	0	0			can't say	0	1	0
9	Traditional theme	yes	8	9	0	19	Mental models and help system	yes	2	0	0
		no	16	14	24			no	22	24	24
		can't say	0	1	0			can't say	0	0	0
10	Local terminology	yes	3	1	6						
		no	21	23	18						

websites from India and China yet some indicators of low UAI were also found. Among the corporate websites from Denmark both high and low UAI indicators were strongly present. The results, re-stressed our earlier observation that though these companies were from different countries yet the content matched UAI measures of the host country, implying that the content had been adapted by the MNCs as well as the Global companies to adjust to the cultural nuances of the host country.

Corporate Website Content and Masculinity and Femininity Index (MFI)

The mean score for all the 13 elements of MFI content indicated that in India and China the corporate websites exhibited a content which catered to a higher MFI than Denmark. The elements framed had items to measure both masculine and feminine characteristics in content. The

mean score for corporate websites in India was 65.58, for China the score was 56.42 while for Denmark the mean score for indicators of MFI in content of website was 16. These scores when compared with MFI scores given by Hofstede indicated that there was a strong inclination of the content of the analysed corporate websites towards overall MFI score which is 56, 66 and 14 respectively⁴.

An in-depth analysis of the content items all the 13 items across 3 countries (Table 9) indicated that there was significant difference in the content of websites across 3 cultures. i.e. the results supported H3. The results indicated that the content of Indian and Chinese websites was more masculine than from Denmark. Significant differences were found in content of websites of 3

4 Recovered from <http://geert-hofstede.com/india.html>; <http://geert-hofstede.com/china.html>; <http://geert-hofstede.com/denmark.html> on 15th Nov 2013.

countries across 2 items i.e. certificates and awards and visitor counter. The results indicate that as compared to Indian and Chinese websites, corporate websites from Denmark had more of a feminine content i.e. websites were supportive of involvement of the visitor and promoted equality and quality. The content promoted mutual cooperation and exchange and sales promotion campaigns were more common. The content indicated that the content on Denmark corporate websites had both cultural sensitivity and social responsibility underlining in their content indicating lower MFI nature of content but at the same time the content also had realism themes and sales promotion campaigns on websites which indicated towards a higher MFI nature of the content. An analysis indicated that though the elements of low MFI were more in the content of websites from Denmark some indicators of high MFI were also found. Among the corporate websites from Denmark both high and low MFI indicators were strongly present. The results, re-stressed our earlier observation that though these companies were from different countries yet the content matched MFI measures of the host country, implying that the content

had been adapted by the MNCs as well as the Global companies to adjust to the cultural nuances of the host country.

The results of the study indicated that the content of the websites across three countries were very different and the average score of content characteristics to a large extent matched the score of the country's cultural dimensions (Hofstede index). Majority of the differences and similarities displayed by the websites could be explained by cultural variables and nuances however some of them were influenced by the scale of operations, number of countries the companies were present in also by the role the website was to play in the corporate visual identity scheme. For example Indian and Chinese websites were found to have more attractiveness cues i.e. pictures, animations and visual aids than corporate websites from Denmark. Websites were found to be a function of control exhibited by the top management. In summary the results of the study indicated that the content of the corporate website was influenced by the cultural context of the company.

Table 9: Masculinity Dimension Measures across Corporate Websites

	<i>Content Indicators</i>	<i>Present or not</i>	<i>Country</i>				<i>Content Indicators</i>	<i>Present or not</i>	<i>Country</i>		
			<i>India</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Denmark</i>				<i>India</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Denmark</i>
1	Certificate/awards (M)	yes	16	11	0	8	Product effectiveness (M)	yes	24	24	24
		no	8	13	24			no	0	0	0
2	Financial information(annual report) (M)	yes	23	16	24	9	Mutual corporation, exchange and support (F)	yes	23	20	24
		no	1	8	0			no	0	3	0
		can't say	0	0	0			can't say	1	1	0
3	Advertisement/sales promotion (F)	yes	24	20	24	10	Poetry and visual aesthetics (F)	yes	24	19	24
		no	0	4	0			no	0	5	0
4	Gender role(F)	yes	0	0	0	11	Visitor counter (M)	yes	21	3	24
		no	24	23	24			no	3	21	0
		can't say	0	1	0			can't say	0	0	0
5	Ranking/performance of company (M)	yes	24	23	24	12	Social responsibility (F)	yes	24	19	24
		no	0	1	0			no	0	4	0
		can't say	0	0	0			can't say	0	1	0
6	Quizzes and Games (M)	yes	0	0	0	13	Cultural sensitivity (F)	yes	15	11	17
		no	24	23	24			no	7	12	7
		can't say	0	1	0			can't say	2	1	0
7	Realism themes (M)	yes	24	17	24						
		no	0	7	0						

CONCLUSIONS

Internet is a borderless tool and the literature supports standardisation of content however, it was found that when companies use this tool their communication strategies are still largely influenced by host country cultures. The study was an attempt to explore the debate of standardisation vs localisation of corporate content as a function of culture. Since all the companies chosen were either fortune 500 companies or listed on national stock exchanges, the success and strong corporate identities indicated that there might be an inclination towards standardisation. However, most of these companies did not adopt a standardised approach. The content was largely found to be in tune with the country or operations culture. As they moved from domestic to MNC they seem to struggle between centripetal force of standardisation and centrifugal force of localisation and adopt a path dominated by the centrifugal forces.

The results of the study have practical implications for practitioners who need to realize cultural nuances even for a borderless tool like the internet. Companies in both developed and developing economies have recognised the importance of using websites for corporate communications. However, in order to reap advantages of this channel completely, the common perception is that the companies need to understand and cater to socio cultural, legal, economic, and political characteristics (SLEPT) of the environment they intend to operate in.

This study can be expanded to other cultures and so as to deepen our understanding of relationship between communication and cultural traits. Future studies could also concentrate on other dimensions of culture like the high context and low context cultures.

REFERENCES

- Adair, W. L., & Brett, J. M. (2005). The negotiation dance: Time, culture, and behavioral sequences in negotiation. *Organization Science*, 16(1), 33-51.
- Aune, M., Hunter, J., Kim, H. J., & Kim, J. S. (2001). The effect of culture and self-construals on predispositions toward verbal communication. *Human Communication Research*, 27(3), 382-408.
- Brett, J. M., Adair, W., Lempereur, A., Okumura, T., Shikhirev, P., Tinsley, C., & Lytle, A. (1998). Culture and joint gains in negotiation. *Negotiation Journal*, 14(1), 61-86.
- Callahan, E. (2005). Cultural Similarities and Differences in the Design of University Web sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(1), 239-273. doi: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.tb00312.x
- Coombs, W. T. (1998). The Internet as potential equalizer: New leverage for confronting social responsibility. *Public Relations Review*, 24(3), 289-304.
- Cyr, D., Head, M., Larios, H., & Pan, B. (2009). Exploring human images in website design: A multi-method approach. *MIS quarterly*, 33(3).
- Fitzgerald, T. K. (1993). *Metaphors of identity: A culture-communication dialogue*: SUNY Press.
- Fletcher, R. (2006). The impact of culture on web site content, design, and structure: An international and a multicultural perspective. *Journal of communication management*, 10(3), 259-273.
- Gannon, M. J. (1994). *Understanding global cultures: Metaphorical journeys through 17 countries*: Sage Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Gould, E. W., Zalcara, N., & Yusof, S. A. (2000). *Applying culture to Web site design: a comparison of Malaysian and US Web sites*. Paper presented at the Professional Communication Conference, 2000. Proceedings of 2000 Joint IEEE International and 18th Annual Conference on Computer Documentation (IPCC/SIGDOC 2000).
- Gudykunst, W. B., Matsumoto, Y., Ting-Toomey, S., Nishida, T., Kim, K., & Heyman, S. (1996). The influence of cultural individualism-collectivism, self-construals, and individual values on communication styles across cultures. *Human Communication Research*, 22(4), 510-543.
- Han, S.-P., & Shavitt, S. (1994). Persuasion and culture: Advertising appeals in individualistic and collectivistic societies. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 30(4), 326-350.
- Hofstede, G. (1983). National cultures in four dimensions: A research-based theory of cultural differences among nations. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 46-74.
- Hofstede, G. (1984). Cultural dimensions in management and planning. *Asia Pacific journal of management*, 1(2), 81-99.
- Hong, J. W., Muderrisoglu, A., & Zinkhan, G. M. (1987). Cultural differences and advertising expression: a comparative content analysis of Japanese and US magazine advertising. *Journal of advertising*, 16(1), 55-68.

- Kansal, P. (2013). Information vs attractiveness cues in advertisements: OTC drugs in India and USA. *Journal of Asia Business Studies*, 7(2), 140-152.
- Kelley, W. T. (1956). The development of early thought in marketing and promotion. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 21(2), 62-67.
- Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data. *biometrics*, 159-174.
- Liu, C., Arnett, K. P., Capella, L. M., & Beatty, R. C. (1997). Web sites of the Fortune 500 companies: facing customers through home pages. *Information & Management*, 31(6), 335-345.
- Marcus, A., & Gould, E. W. (2000). Crosscurrents: cultural dimensions and global Web user-interface design. *interactions*, 7(4), 32-46.
- Martin, J. N., & Nakayama, T. K. (1999). Thinking dialectically about culture and communication. *Communication Theory*, 9(1), 1-25.
- Martin, J. N., & Nakayama, T. K. (2004). Intercultural communication in contexts.
- Michael R. Czinkota, & Ronkainen., I. A. (2004). *International Marketing* (7th ed.). Ohio, USA: Thomson Learning.
- Miracle, G. E., Chang, K. Y., & Taylor, C. R. (1992). Culture and advertising executions: a comparison of selected characteristics of Korean and US television commercials. *International Marketing Review*, 9(4).
- Moon, Y. S., & Chan, K. (2005). Advertising appeals and cultural values in television commercials: A comparison of Hong Kong and Korea. *International Marketing Review*, 22(1), 48-66.
- Perry, M., & Bodkin, C. (2000). Content analysis of 100 company web sites. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 5(2), 87-97.
- Robbins, S. S., & Stylianou, A. C. (2002). A study of cultural differences in global corporate web sites. *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, 42(2), 3-9.
- Schuerkens, U. (2003). The sociological and anthropological study of globalization and localization. *Current Sociology*, 51(3-4), 209-222.
- Singh, N., & Baack, D. W. (2004). Web Site Adaptation: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of US and Mexican Web Sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 9(4), 00-00.
- Singh, N., & Matsuo, H. (2004). Measuring cultural adaptation on the Web: a content analytic study of US and Japanese Web sites. *Journal of Business Research*, 57(8), 864-872.
- Sullivan, J. (1999). What are the functions of corporate home pages? *Journal of World Business*, 34(2), 193-210.
- Voisey, H., & O'Riordan, T. (2001). Globalization and localization. *Globalism, localism and identity: Fresh perspectives on the transition to sustainability*, 25-42.
- Zeki, S. (2001). Localization and globalization in conscious vision. *Annual review of neuroscience*, 24(1), 57-86.