

Cultural Customization: An Analysis Of Chinese And Spanish B2C Web Sites

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ABSTRACT

The following paper analyzes the trends in e-commerce, the variations among global e-consumers, and in turn, the imperative for cultural customization of business-to-consumer web sites. A literature review delves into past research done in the field of cultural customization as well as the dimensions and values that distinguish cultures from one another. Furthermore, ten (10) Chinese and ten (10) Spanish B2C web sites from the service, retail and manufacturing sectors are analyzed to view the extent of their cultural customization. The findings conclude that none of the B2C web sites viewed were truly culturally customized, but that there exist advantages for businesses to take the initiative and put forth resources into achieving said status for their respective web sites.

Keywords: B2C, Culture, Spain, China, Websites, Localization, Hofstede, Business, Consumer, Globalization, Mandarin, E-commerce, Standardization, Language, Perception, Behavior, Uncertainty Avoidance, Collectivism.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet, once a resource for e-mail and instant messaging, has, in recent years, quickly become of the most efficient modes of doing business both on a domestic and global scale. As the number of global Internet users in 2007 exceeded 1.3 billion people, it is palpable that doing business in one market automatically denotes doing business with the world (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2008). Nonetheless, with over 6,900 languages spoken in the world, how can an e-business tap into the rich opportunities that await them on the Web? (National Virtual Translation Center, 2007). The following analysis intends to discuss and answer this question.

“If you want to grow and flourish in a flat world, you better learn how to change and align yourself with it” (2005, Pg. 339). This quote by Thomas Friedman, author of *The World is Flat*, encompasses the need for businesses, whether brick-and-mortar or on the Internet, to understand that globalization is an integral and permanent part of the business world. In response to this need, the localization industry has emerged within the past seven years. In essence, localization is “the process of adapting products and services in accordance to linguistic, cultural, technical and other locale-specific requirements of the target market” (Singh, 2005, Pg. 7). In other words, there is a need to culturally customize a web site to the target market or locale that one intends to enter.

Nevertheless, why must an e-business focus on localization? Why not standardize its web site and processes in order to save time and costs? According to Neil Payne, Director of UK-based cross-cultural communications consultancy group Kwintessential, “maximizing profits today involves reaching beyond national markets” (2008). Moreover, as 32% of Internet users are not native English speakers, and as Dr. Nitish Singh mentions, “marketing always takes place in the language of the target market,” it is imperative that an e-business understand that localizing a web site puts a target market’s customers at ease (Payne, 2008; Singh, 2008). According to 2004 research, “consumers prefer to shop and interact in sites that are specifically designed for them in their local language (Singh, 2005, Pg. 5). In fact, according to an Ipsos-Reid study, “90 percent of Internet users in non-Anglophone countries prefer their own languages over English” (DePalma, 2002, Pg. 8). Additionally, other vital

aspects of localization are that a culturally customized web site can lead to “more perceived usefulness, better attitude and higher purchase intentions,” and that there may actually exist legal requirements surrounding linguistics when content is developed for a locale (Singh, 2008). As a “born-global,” when an e-business decides to localize and expand to global markets, a spectrum exists as to how culturally customized their web site is.

According to the National Virtual Translation Center, as Mandarin has over 1.05 billion speakers, both native and second-language, making it the most widely spoken language in the world, and Spanish ranks fifth with a total of 382 million speakers, they both are vital markets for e-businesses to pursue (2007). The following analysis will describe how business-to-consumer businesses (B2C) have utilized localization as a tool to culturally customize their web sites in order to tailor to Chinese and Spanish consumers, respectively. A Literature Review will delve into past research done on cultural customization, its imperative, and cultural dimensions that affect how web sites are customized, in this case specifically to China and Spain. Additionally, a Conceptual Development will analyze ten (10) Chinese B2C web sites and ten (10) Spanish B2C web sites to visualize the extent to which they are customized and how they do or do not fit into their respective country’s cultural values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perusing through many large corporations’ web sites would show that separate web sites are localized to accommodate to Internet users and consumers of other nations, cultures and languages. Good examples would be Dubai-based luxury airline Emirates, with their web site customized to the Chinese, or low-cost furniture giant, Ikea, whose web site is tailored to the needs of Middle Eastern consumers. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, there truly is a spectrum to how localized a company decides to make their site. According to Dr. Nitish Singh and Dr. Arun Pereira, the first category is comprised of Standardized Web Sites. “These sites have the same web content for both domestic and international users, [with] no effort [being] made to reach out to international customers in terms of translation, internationalization, or localization” (2005, Pg. 10). Their classification of sites continues to Semi-Localized Web Sites, which, although may provide information as to addresses of international locations and/or subsidiaries, fail to “address the needs of...international customers,” such as the need for translation into their respective language (Singh, 2005, Pg. 12). Moreover, there exist Localized Web Sites. These tailor to international customers’ needs through “country-specific web pages with translation, wherever relevant” (Singh, 2005, Pg. 12). Likewise, Highly Localized Web Sites “offer country-specific URL’s,” such as “.co.uk” or “.co.jp” for the United Kingdom and Japan, respectively. Additionally, localization is at a higher level than other sites, especially with careful consideration taken with varying time, number, and date formats. Finally, there exist, or should exist, culturally customized web sites, which according to Singh, are sites that “reflect complete ‘immersion’ in the culture of the target market, [and] go beyond simple translation and cosmetic adaptation.” This type of web site truly encompasses and identifies with the locale that is being targeted, and reflects the perception, symbolism, and behavior of a specific culture (Singh, 2005, Pg. 15).

Pereira and Singh state that zero percent of US multinationals’ web sites are truly culturally customized (2005, Pg. 17). To achieve such status, as mentioned, a company must first understand what culture is. According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn, culture “consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, including...traditional ideas and especially their attached values (Singh, 2005, Pg. 28). Therefore, as Donald A. DePalma asserts, you must “offer customers [what] will make sense to their local eyes” (2002, Pg. 11). Perception is the first factor that must be taken into account. It is vital, according to Singh and Pereira, that a site comprehends spatial orientation, which is “how the web content is structured” (2005, Pg. 33). For example, with a language such as Arabic, which is read from right to left, it may be more facilitating to the consumer’s visual perception to have a site justified to the right. As far as symbolism is concerned, the use of certain symbols can denote different meanings depending on country, such as the swastika being a Hindu religious symbol in India, whereas in the Western world, being representative of the Nazi regime (Singh, 2005, Pg. 43). Moreover, one must be aware that certain colors may hold specific meanings for cultures such as, according to About.com, white representing purity in the Western world, while in the Eastern World signifying death. Finally, a site intending to culturally customize their web site must account for the varying behaviors of each locale. These can be recognized in more detail through the use of Geert Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions.

Hofstede's comprehensive study, according to geert-hofstede.com, are used to assist in differentiating cultures, and his four dimensions include: (1) Power Distance (PDI), (2) Individualism (IDV), (3) Masculinity (MAS), and (4) Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) (2003).

According to ClearlyCultural.com, Hofstede's Power distance Index "measures the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (2008). Therefore, when designing a web site for a culture that ranks high on power distance, some examples of culturally-customizing elements to utilize could be, according to Singh, vision statements to understand the ideas and philosophies of those at the top of the hierarchy, Quality Assurance and awards, and photos of CEOs.

To continue, "Individualism is the one side versus its opposite, collectivism, that is the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. On the individualist side we find societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family. On the collectivist side, we find societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) which continue protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (ClearlyCultural.com, 2008). In turn, when focusing on locales that embrace collectivism, it may be effective to include in a web site features such as a family or group theme, loyalty programs to help consumers feel part of "something," clubs and chat rooms, and/or newsletters (Singh). Individualism will focus more on independence themes, product uniqueness and personalization, as well as a privacy statement on the site.

Moreover, Masculinity "versus its opposite, femininity, refers to the distribution of roles between the genders which is another fundamental issue for any society to which a range of solutions are found" (Hofstede, 2003). A society ranking higher in masculinity will have "belief in achievement and ambition" and value success and assertiveness, whereas feminine cultures are more "nurturing and caring for others," and focus on "quality of life" (Singh, 2005, Pg. 55). Singh and Pereira state that clear gender roles, a realism theme and a focus on product effectiveness are effective and ideal characteristics of a site targeted to a masculine culture.

Hofstede's final dimension is Uncertainty Avoidance, and "deals with a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity; it ultimately refers to man's search for Truth. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations" (ClearlyCultural.com, 2008). Cultures possessing high uncertainty avoidance would work effectively with sites that utilize local terminology, local stores, guided navigation, efficient customer service, and a tradition theme (Singh, 2008).

An additional value that is vital to consider is High or Low Context. As noted by The Culturally Customized Website, high context cultures "have close connections among group members, and everybody knows what every other person knows...thus...there is little information that is explicit" (Singh, 2006, Pg. 55). A high context culture values indirectness, a soft-sell approach, and aesthetic details, while a low-context culture does not avoid a hard-sell approach and the use of superlatives (Singh, 2008).

Nonetheless, as far as this study is concerned, the focus will be on Business to Consumer (B2C) web sites of corporations and businesses in the Western world (Americas, Europe), targeted specifically to the Chinese and Spanish cultures. The following section, Conceptual Development, will describe how each web site met the requirements of each nation's respective cultural dimensions, and thus, the level to which they are culturally customized. However, there must exist a clear understanding of where these two cultures, China and Spain, rank on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. As far as China is concerned, according to ClearlyCultural.com, on a scale of 1-120, the nation ranks 80 in Power Distance (7th highest in the world) and 20 on Individualism, (18th lowest in the world). With a score of 66, China is a very masculine culture (10th highest in the world). Concerning Uncertainty Avoidance, China ranks lower than the United States at 40 (10th lowest in the world). According to The Culturally Customized Website, China is a High Context culture (2005, Pg. 141). On a scale of 1-120, Spain ranks in the middle at 57 with Power Distance and 51 with Individualism. Nevertheless, it ranks lower on Masculinity at 42, and high on Uncertainty Avoidance at 86 (ClearlyCultural.com, 2008).

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

To continue, after assessing the aforementioned cultural dimensions and their respective impact on the Chinese and Spanish cultures, it is vital to decide which specific variables corporations must take into account when tailoring their web sites for these consumers. In the case of Spain, due to above average and high scores for the Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance and High Context dimensions, this study will analyze the extent to which each web site fulfilled the requirements of these culturally-customizing variables. Furthermore, on a 1-120 scale, China ranked particularly high on Power Distance, Collectivism, High Context, and Masculinity. A total of ten (10) American and Western European B2C web sites are included in the study, comprising the retail, manufacturing and service sectors. Analyses describe how they have and/or what they ought to include in order for their web sites to achieve cultural customization.

1) **Nike**

Nike, a US-based athletic wear company that focuses on apparel and shoes for men, women, and children, has tailored web sites for both Spain and China.

Spain (<http://www.nike.com/europe/espanol>) – Upon entering Nike’s Spain web site, the appeal to the Femininity and High Context aspect of the nation’s culture is apparent. According to Singh, “the key elements of femininity that can be operationalized on a web site are shared with the cultural value of high-context” (2005, Pg. 135). Therefore, this study will analyze them together. To continue, Nike’s Spain site took advantage of a wide use of aesthetics, including soft colors such as shades of green, yellow, gold and blue. This created a bold statement, but still stayed within the boundaries of high context through a harmonious appeal. Nevertheless, the web site lacked in a soft-sell approach. Words such as “incomparable” and “maximum” are examples of superlatives describing Nike’s products, which definitely were not in keeping a feminine and high context cultural appeal.

As far as uncertainty avoidance is concerned, in order to decrease one’s anxiety while using the web site, Nike provided Spanish customers with a very in-depth FAQ section, help option, privacy policy, and links to local stores. The site was targeted to Castilian Spanish speakers, or in other words, those who speak the official dialect of Spain. However, Nike fails to include the 6.4 million Catalan speakers in Spain, especially in the northeastern region of the country (Ethnologue.com, 2008). Overall, Nike did an excellent job translating their Spanish site, yet lack a country specific URL, and users must first go to Nike.com. In keeping with the previously mentioned definitions, Nike’s Spanish site is classified as **Localized**.

China (<http://www.nike.com.cn>) – In accordance with with the Collectivist tradition of China, Nike employed many group and community pictures, included a forum for Chinese users in which they can discuss any topic, and made a wide use of Chinese models rather than Western models. Considering Power Distance, Nike provides a concise description of the company, but could have better described their vision statement and posted CEO pictures. Nevertheless, power distance was emphasized through the depiction of locally famous brand spokespersons such as Liu Xiang, a well-known Chinese runner. Through highlighting aesthetics, including liberal use of China’s auspicious flag colors of red and gold in their background as well as the color of shoes, Nike was able to fulfill the high context variable. Surprisingly, most products had little or no description, therefore producing difficulty in analyzing soft-sell or hard-sell language. Masculinity was noted through clear gender roles. Male figures such as Kobe Bryant and Liu Xiang dominated typically “male” sports, while females had a site devoted specifically towards them. In all, Nike provided Chinese customers with excellent translation and fulfilled many key cultural variables to an extent. However, on occasion links led to English pages, an example being the “Careers” section. Nevertheless, having utilized a “.com.cn” URL, Nike’s Chinese web site is **Highly Localized**.

2) **American Airlines**

American Airlines is a US-based airline providing a service, worldwide flights, from a multitude of locations.

Spain (<http://www.americanairlines.es>) - With regards to Femininity and High Context customization, American Airlines failed to make any adjustment of colors or aesthetic characteristic from their U.S. web site. Use of formal language, such as “usted,” was abundant and denoted respect and politeness towards possible customers. However, there was no attempt made to utilize a soft-sell approach. Superlatives such as “the best” and “the only” were still apparent. American Airlines took Uncertainty Avoidance into consideration through many means. Not only was all overseas contact information provided, but also the site included a site map, descriptions of online security and the privacy policy, and was designed for Spanish consumers who speak Castilian Spanish, Catalan as well as English. AA could have provided users with better links to local travel agencies and further culturally customized the site. It nonetheless utilized an “.es” URL. Therefore, the Spanish site is considered **Highly-Localized**.

China (<http://www.aa.com/content/cn/index.jhtml>) - With Collectivism, AA offers their loyalty program, AAdvantage, to Chinese customers, but offered little or no family theme, chat rooms or links to local web sites, which may make consumers feel that AA is not fully established in or dedicated to China. Power Distance was emphasized through a description of awards, company vision and history, but to be more creative, AA could have used CEO pictures or promotion by local celebrities. China’s High Context culture is not considered, as there is no aesthetic customization whatsoever, and hard-sell descriptions of the company, such as “fabulous,” “proud,” and “famous,” are abundant. Masculinity is somewhat fulfilled through descriptions of service effectiveness, but through nothing else. American Airlines offered excellent translation on their country-specific web page for China, but the overall template between the US site and the Chinese site was exceptionally similar. Additionally, the site lacked a “.com.cn” URL. Therefore, American Airlines’ Chinese site is considered: **Localized**.

3) eBay

eBay is a US-based online auction site that facilitates the sale of products and services by online sellers. eBay currently has many worldwide web sites.

Spain (<http://www.ebay.es>) - Compliant with with Spain’s sense of Femininity and High Context culture, eBay’s Spain site utilizes flash, aesthetic detail, and bold colors, especially in pictures of items up for sale. Nevertheless, instead of formal, polite language such as “usted,” eBay uses often the informal “tú” to refer the customer. Additionally, eBay Spain hails itself as a unique, different company that sells items not to be found at other sites. This is a claim, that although may be true, does not reflect a soft-sell approach. Understanding Spain’s high sense of uncertainty avoidance, eBay Spain provides an easily accessible site map, contact page, help page, and detailed information on how the eBay auction, selling, and buying process works. Translation is excellent, and by utilizing a Spanish URL, this site is considered **Highly Localized**.

China (<http://www.eachnet.com>) - eBay China is unique in the sense that, because eBay teamed with China’s Tom Online, instead of taking the company’s name, the site is called Eachnet.com. The site underscores collectivism by including a section called the EachNet Community, which includes a seller’s forum and user recommendations. Additionally, links to local web sites and government web sites are at the bottom of each page. Nevertheless, the site should focus on incorporating pictures that have more of a “group” theme rather than an individualist theme, as they are currently. Power Distance is noted through company information, history, achievements, and vision, the latter being to essentially bring domestic buyers and sellers online and promote eBay in the Chinese market. Through the extreme use of aesthetics, including numerous pictures, animations and bold colors such as orange, green, blue and pink, Eachnet.com displayed the characteristics of a high-context culture. While many soft-sell product descriptions such as “wonderful” and “good” are used, nevertheless superlative phrases such as the “world’s largest e-commerce company” in the “About” section still exist. China’s site, similar to its Spanish counterpart, is **Highly Localized**.

4) Ikea

As Yahoo! Finance notes, Ikea is “one of the world's top furniture retailers... [selling] Scandinavian-style home furnishings and other housewares in about 270 stores in 35 countries” (2008).

Spain (<http://www.ikea.es/>) - As far as Femininity and High Context is concerned, Ikea Spain denotes aesthetics through a video and wide variety of icons. However, Ikea does not leave their traditional blue and yellow template behind. The company effectively emphasizes Spain's high context culture through soft sell language. For example, in the "About Us" section, instead of saying "lowest prices," "accessible prices" was used. Instead of claiming that Ikea has "everything," they have a "wide selection." Although their furniture is inexpensive, instead of asserting that everyone can afford it, "most people can buy [it]." Uncertainty Avoidance is noted through a (1) site map, (2) Anna's virtual help in both Castilian and Catalan Spanish, (3) sites specifically designed for the Iberian peninsula of Spain, its Balearic Islands, and the Canary Islands, (4) a privacy statement, (5) list of local stores, (6) local terminology, and (7) transportation services. Ikea's Spain site is very culturally tailored, yet still needs to focus on bold colors, and could include a family element to their site, as Ikea is targeted toward the household. In all, it is **Highly Localized**.

China (<http://www.ikea.com.cn>) - Ikea's China site partially represents China's collectivist values. Although it heavily promotes a loyalty program called "Ikea Family," and focuses on furniture for the home and family, the site shows no pictures of groups or families, which may be effective in promoting Ikea's furniture in China. High Power Distance is maintained through a company vision statement, facts and figures, a picture of Ikea's founder, and company history. High Context is upheld through similar soft-sell terminology and phrases that are used on the Spain site. Masculinity is not especially emphasized, with the exception of to-the-point product descriptions. On the whole, Ikea's Chinese web site is **Highly Localized**.

5) **Hennes & Mauritz (H&M)**

H&M is a Sweden-based company that "designs cheap but chic clothing, mainly for men and women 18 to 45, children's apparel, and its own brands of cosmetics" (Yahoo, 2008).

Spain (<http://www.hm.com/es>) - Instead of highlighting Spain's Femininity and High Context culture, H&M puts no detail into customizing aesthetics or selling approach. In essence, the Spain site was a mirror image of the U.S. site, but was merely translated. Customers with high uncertainty avoidance were put at ease through links to customer service, local stores, contact information, a site map, a privacy policy, and a free download of H&M's fact sheet and code of conduct. Overall, H&M's Spanish site, lacking in customization and a local URL, is classified as **Localized**.

China (<http://www.hm.com/cn>) - To respect the collectivist values of China, H&M solely provided links to H&M Magazine, style reports, and corporate responsibility to the community. However, H&M might have benefited through utilizing group pictures, such as in a fashion show or even just groups of friends wearing H&M's designs. Additionally, chat rooms and a "China" theme may have better reflected collectivism. Power distance and hierarchy is shown through company description but especially through pictures of H&M's CEOs. Similar to the Spanish site, high context is neither emphasized through aesthetics nor through soft-sell language. Masculinity as a cultural value was not depicted in H&M's web site. Considering these characteristics, H&M's Chinese web site is considered **Localized**.

6) **Nivea**

Nivea, part of Beiersdorf AG, a Germany-based company, focuses on skin care products for men and women.

Spain (<http://www.nivea.es>) - Nivea's Spanish web site is very unique in the sense that it reaches out directly to women on the topic of beauty. It describes it not as an ideal, but rather as something that is inside us. The site is animated and its language is not forceful by any means, but rather polite. This is a prime example of ideally customizing to Spain's Feminine and High Context culture. To account for uncertainty avoidance, Nivea offers a complete FAQ section and privacy policy, yet does not provide direct contact information. In total, this is a **Highly Localized** web site.

China (<http://www.nivea.com.cn>) - Through the offering of a newsletter and pictures of groups together, it is apparent that Nivea understands China's collectivist culture. Nevertheless, it would be effective to include links to local Chinese web sites and companies that deal with skincare and beauty. To continue, a history of Nivea, including its founder, is the only way Nivea included an aspect of high power distance into their web site. Similar to Spain's site, Nivea's China site is soft-selling and describes beauty. Furthermore, it emphasizes masculinity through clear general roles and a separate site for males, but also through a section dedicated to games. Similar to Nivea's Spanish site, its Chinese site is also **Highly Localized**.

7) **Unilever**

Unilever is "a top manufacturer of packaged consumer goods worldwide, [and] operates in many countries, including Asia, Africa, North America, the Middle East, Western Europe, and Latin America" (Yahoo, 2008).

Spain (<http://www.unilever.es>) - Unilever focuses on aesthetics through the bold pink, green and orange colors of its web site. In addition, in order to use polite, soft language, Unilever does not make assumptions about customers. For example, although many of Unilever's brands are international household names, the company uses the subjunctive form of conjugation in order not to make assumptions about what the customer knows. Instead of saying that the customer must know Unilever's products, the site simply suggests that it is a possibility. Uncertainty Avoidance is catered to through the presence of a site map, contact information, FAQs, and a privacy statement. Nevertheless, the Spanish site differs little from Unilever's US site, but due to its defining characteristics is **Highly Localized**.

China (<http://www.unilever.com.cn>) - Links to local brands help Unilever make up for seldom using group photos, not having a newsletter, chat room, or focus on Chinese nationality. These all would have contributed to understanding China's collectivist values. A vision statement suggests power distance, but aesthetics similar to those of the U.S. and Spanish sites do not give the Chinese site unique characteristics from a high context perspective. Masculinity is not represented in this site. Nevertheless, this site is considered **Highly Localized**.

8) **Coca-Cola**

Coca-Cola is a US-based company selling their famous Coca-Cola brand soda and beverages internationally.

Spain (<http://www.cocacola.es>) - Having a world-famous name with high brand equity, it is no surprise that Coca-Cola would put in much effort to customizing their global web sites. Through the wide use of aesthetics, such as photos, hearts, shapes, and animations, Coca-Cola is able to understand the Femininity and High Context culture of Spain. Additionally, softer language and a unique campaign for Spain about "happiness" help to provide the user with a "fun" experience on the web site. Uncertainty Avoidance is taken into consideration with local terminology such as the "vosotros" form of Spanish conjugation, utilized more in Spain rather than in Latin America. This site is **Highly Localized**.

China (<http://www.icoke.cn>) - Through pictures of groups and a focus on the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, Coca-Cola is taking collectivism into consideration through building national pride and identity. Power distance is not focused on specifically in this site. The wide array of aesthetics, including China's auspicious colors, Red and Gold, and a soft-sell language are all techniques used to emphasize high context. Finally, a separate section for games displays respect for the masculine aspect of China's culture. Coca-Cola's Chinese site is **Highly-Localized**.

9) **Lacoste**

Lacoste, originally a French company, sells upscale men and women's sportswear internationally.

Spain (<http://www.lacoste.com/esp>) - Spain's high context and feminine culture is represented through Lacoste's liberal use of aesthetics and bright colors. However, in catering to uncertainty avoidance, the site runs into a few problems. Both the links to contact information and FAQ lead to English sites, which many Spanish speakers will not understand. Overall, this site is **Localized**.

China (<http://www.lacoste.com/chn>) - Whether intentionally or not, Lacoste satisfied the Chinese value of collectivism through the display of groups of models rather than one model alone. Power distance is emphasized through company history including description of its founder. Finally, similar to the Spanish site, use of aesthetics contributes to a high context culture. However, the Chinese site runs into similar problems with links leading to English sites. In total, this site is **Localized**.

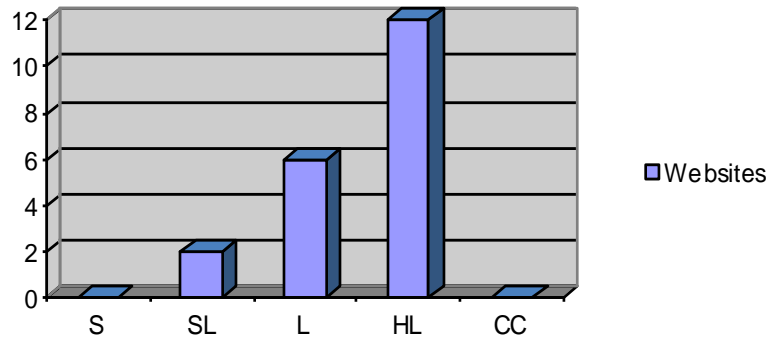
10) Dolce & Gabbana

Dolce & Gabbana is an Italian fashion house that “offers men's and women's collections of knitwear, leather goods, scarves, ties, shoes, underwear, and beachwear, donned by the rich and famous” (Yahoo, 2008).

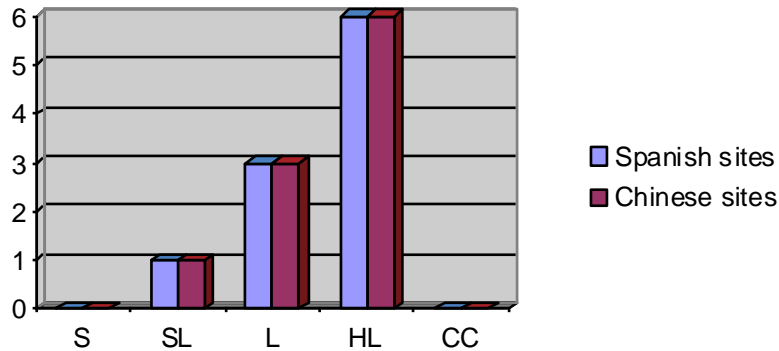
Spain (<http://www.dolcegabbana.es>) - Dolce & Gabbana has focused little attention on cultural customization of their web site for the Spanish consumer. Translation is minimal on the main page, and practically nonexistent on subsequent pages. The design template is equal to that of the U.S. home page. This web site does little to satisfy international customers’ needs, and therefore it is **Semi-Localized**.

China (<http://chi.dolcegabbana.com>) - Similar to the Spanish site, Dolce and Gabbana has focused little attention on global customers, including those in China. This site is **Semi-Localized**.

Graph I: Total Extent of Cultural Customization (20 Web sites- Spanish and Chinese)



Graph II: Extent of Cultural Customization: Spanish versus Chinese web sites



Key: S= Standard Web sites, SL= Semi-Localized, L= Localized, HL= Highly Localized, CC= Culturally Customized

CONCLUSION AND ANALYSIS

Analyzing the aforementioned companies' web sites and understanding their congruence to the cultures that they desired to tailor to is extremely vital. A company's web site is essentially the image of themselves that they put forth in each nation to which they endeavor. Presenting a poorly constructed web site, one that does not understand the symbols, perception, or behavior of a culture may not only hurt profits; it may taint a company's image for years to come.

Graphs I and II above total the number of Spanish and Chinese web sites that, due to their characteristics, fell into a certain part of the customization spectrum. Graph I describes how many firms are increasingly attempting to make their global web sites more highly-localized, while others still have not reached that level. None of the web sites analyzed were either standard or fully culturally customized. Some companies, such as Coca-Cola and Nivea, exerted much more effort in trying to make their sites similar to the Chinese and/or Spanish cultures. What is interesting to note as well, is that those companies who scored "Highly-Localized," "Localized," or "Semi-Localized" received the same score for both their Chinese and Spanish web sites. This may show that those specific companies whose Chinese and Spanish sites scored "highly-localized," such as Ikea, do not hesitate to spend resources on tailoring their web sites, and in turn, building global brand equity.

Something that may be interesting to further research is the case of Lacoste and Dolce & Gabbana. Both sites were ineffective with translation and localization, with links leading to English web sites. Because these companies target upper-class consumers, is it a possibility that they automatically have the expectation that these consumers are educated in English, regardless of nationality and culture?

In conclusion, for companies to truly grow and flourish in this flat world as Thomas Friedman said, they must put forth increased effort and resources into cultural customization of their web sites. As Singh and Pereira note, this will require "money, time, manpower commitment, a localization agency, departmental coordination," and so much more (2005, Pg. 153). But due to the fact that each online business, new or old, is automatically global, cultural customization is not solely an option anymore, but rather an imperative.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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During his undergraduate career, Ajanee has traveled extensively, most notably living and studying for five months in Madrid, Spain during the spring of 2007. Additionally, he studied Mandarin Chinese and completed marketing internships in Shanghai, China during summer 2007 and 2008.

In September of 2008, Ajanee's research, entitled Cultural Customization: An Analysis of Chinese and Spanish B2C Web Sites," was presented at the International Business and Economics Research Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada.

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