The Effect of Culture on Uses and Gratifications in Online Shopping

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ABSTRACT

As the Internet's Web technology continuously improves interactivity it is increasingly recognized as viable channel for many activities. However, marketers and Web designers, in order to more effectively reach their online global markets, must understand what motivates people, within and across nations, to visit and patronize an online shopping site. This study proposes and empirical comparison between Anglo-American and Hispanic cultures in the US with respect to needs and motivations for online shopping; the effect on attitudes developed towards the site as well as revisit intentions. Based on uses and gratifications theory a conceptual model that proposes that culture moderates the effect of instrumental and ritualized needs on attitude toward online shopping which in turn determines the intentions to revisit the site. The research method includes data collection from the study groups who use Internet. Structural equation modeling and regression analysis will be employed in testing the proposed model.

INTRODUCTION

Using the Internet is an activity that an increasing number of people are participating in. It is acknowledged that the Internet is being used for varying reasons, including source of information, a method of communication, a marketplace medium and a social system (Maignan and Lukas, 1997). Concurrently, as browsing and interacting with the Web continuously improves, the Internet has become a viable channel for marketers and an increasing number of businesses see it to be indispensable in their daily lives. Though current expectations include increases in business-to-consumer sales as people from all demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds use the Internet, researchers and policy makers have pointed to a gap, commonly referred to as the digital divide, between those groups who can make effective use of information

technology and those who cannot. Many researchers argue that if the digital divide is to be bridged, then information system content needs to be meaningful and accessible to users from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Thus, from a managerial perspective, despite the benefits of the Internet, many companies are recognizing that success depends on, for example, utilizing the opportunities the new medium presents to meet the needs of previously ignored cultural groups. Given the global reach of the Internet, marketers and Web designers, in order to more effectively reach their online target markets, must have an understanding of what motivates people, within and across nations, to visit and patronize an online shopping site.

The purpose of this study is to examine the cultural effect of the causal relationships between motivations for using a Web site for shopping and the revisiting that site. The objective is to compare two ethnic groups (Anglo-American and Hispanic) in the US to establish if different sub-cultures can be detected within one country that based on needs and motivations for using the Web in online shopping context. To this end the study develops a structural equation model developed from extant literature that highlights user needs and motivations for using the Web for online shopping. Historically, new media often creates new gratifications and motivations, therefore the uses-and-gratification approach (U&G) would be a logical model for this line of study. This research seeks to use the U&G approach to explore the intended uses and gratifications of the Web and the expected cultural influences on these gratifications on Web use.

In particular we selected these cultural groups, Anglo-American and Hispanics, because of recent increases in the latter's population. According to 2000 Census returns, at 13% of the total population, Hispanics are now the largest minority group in the US - ten years ahead of schedule. The Hispanics population grew by 58% in the 1990s (45% was anticipated), and it is projected to reach $1 trillion by 2010, more than double its current figure (McCollum, 2001).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: First, previous research on user needs and motivations for using the Internet is reviewed. In particular, we draw from uses and gratifications (occasionally 'needs and gratifications') research which attempts to explain the uses and functions of media for individuals, groups, and society in general. Second, we review research focusing on the influence of culture on Web use and Internet in order to lay the basis for developing the hypothesized model. Third, we present the research model followed by the proposed methodology and analysis.

Uses and Gratifications Research

Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory contends that individuals actively seek out media to satisfy their own perceived needs (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). Thus, a primary goal of uses and gratifications research is to understand the major motivational factors that make people engage in media use. As emerging new media, along with conventional mass media, provide people with a wider range of media selection and contents, the uses and gratifications theory is considered one of the most effective paradigms for identifying media exposure in mass communication studies (LaRose el al., 2001).

Previous uses and gratification studies have dealt with virtually every kind of mediated communication tool from traditional media, such as newspapers (Elliott and Rosenberg, 1987) and television (Rubin, 1983; Rubin, 1985; Babrow, 1987; Conway and Rubin, 1991), through nontraditional media, including VCR (Levy, 1987; Cohen et al., 1988), computer mediated communication (Eighmey, 1997; Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999; Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000; Flanagin and Metzger, 2001; Lin, 2001), and even cellular phone (Leung and Wei, 2000). These studies have offered insights regarding various reasons why individuals use a certain medium of communication, as well as the relations between expected and obtained gratifications resulting from media use motivations. McQuail (1987) offers the following typology of common reasons for media use: information, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment. Lin (1999) notes that although media usage motives vary among individuals, situations, and media vehicles; most uses and gratifications studies deal with some or all of the following motivational dimensions: relaxation, companionship, habit, pass time, entertainment, social interaction, information/surveillance, arousal, and escape.

The rapid growth of the Internet has strengthened the potency of the uses and gratifications theory because this medium requires that its users to be more active, as compared to other traditional media (Ruggiero, 2000). While people are exposed to television or radio in a relatively passive way, Internet users more actively engage in using the medium by searching out information or exchanging messages (Kaye and Johnson, 2001). In an early attempt at Internet uses and gratifications research, Rafaeli (1986) argued that people using university computer bulletin boards are satisfying the following needs: recreation, entertainment, and diversion. With respect to the uses of the World Wide Web, Eighmey and McCord (1998) investigated users of commercial Web sites based on the findings of previous research on radio and television. They found that entertainment value, personal relevance, and information involvement are three major motivational factors for surfing commercial Web sites. Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) examined Internet users' motivations and concerns by categorizing 41 items into seven factors: social escapism, transactional security and privacy, information, interactive control, socialization, nontransactional privacy, and economic motivation. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) derived five primary motives for using the Internet: interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment. In sum, the uses and gratifications theory has been quite effective in understanding motivations and needs for using the Internet.

Despite its contribution to understanding user media patronage, the U & G approach has been criticized as "vulgar gratificationism" (Chandler, 1995). It is individualistic and psychologistic, tending to ignore the socio-cultural context. As a theoretical stance it foregrounds individual psychological and personality factors and backgrounds sociological interpretations. This study response to this line of criticism by employing U&G in a cultural context. For instance, David Morley (1992) acknowledges that individual differences in interpretation do exist, but he stresses the importance of sub-cultural socio-economic differences in shaping the ways in which people interpret their experiences with TV (via shared 'cultural codes').

Cultural Differences in Uses and Gratifications

The international marketing literature contains numerous studies concerning behavioral differences in consumers across nations (e.g. Brass 1991; McCarty and Hattwick 1991;

Hafstrom, Chae et al., 1992; Lynn, Zinkhan et al. 1993; Nakata and Sivakumar 1996: Chu, Spires et al. 1999; Steenkamp, Hofstede et al. 1999; Husted 2000). More specifically, studies comparing cultures in terms of information technology find significant differences in attitudes toward computers (Igbaria and Zviran, 1996; Choong, 1996; Omar, 1992; Straub et al., 1997, Rose, Straub, 1998; Srite, 2000), Web browsing (Rau, and Liang, 2003), software interface (Del Galdo and Nielson, 1996; Evers and Day (1997), and Internet shopping (Lim, Leung, Sia, and Lee, 2004).

Although these researches have made significant contributions toward understanding differences between nations, there appears to be a gap in the literature about sub-cultural differences within national boundaries, or intra-national differences (Andreasen 1990; Heslop, Papadopoulos et al. 1998). This dearth of activity may be attributed to what Valencia (1989) calls "ethnic marketing myopia from … academia" (p.23). Yet, at the same time, managers have stressed that understanding culture is very important when attempting to market to ethnic groups (Gore 1998). Erez and Earley (1993) warn that not all the people in a country may have the same cultural background. In the US, many citizens still retain identification with their own ethnic group and, consequently, may have different needs and values from the dominant group (Rueschenberg & Buriel, 1989).

Despite technology adoption increases across ethnic groups, the observation is that substantial differences in computer and Internet use are evident among racial and ethnic groups in the US (Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, 2003). In investigating whether there is a digital divide the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco indicated that with the unadjusted data, while 61.2% of whites and 62.7% of Asians use computers at home, only 35.7% of blacks and 31.6% of Hispanics do. However, a relatively unanswered question in this stream of research is the degree to which these observations are due to differences in socioeconomic status, versus ethnic, cultural, and/or motivational needs. Consequently, an underlying assumption of this study is that people actively select a Web site in order to satisfy their particular needs and motivations, and a person's cultural background will have an impact on Web patronage. In addition, cultural differences can affect consumer comfort levels online and have the potential for misinterpretations, if not actual conflicts, between consumers and businesses.

From an assimilation perspective (Rueschenberg and Buriel, 1989), acculturation of immigrant groups should ameliorate differences across ethnic groups such that the immigrant group begins to have attitudes and beliefs similar to the dominant group. However, researchers have noted that, for example, Mexicans who immigrate to the U.S. are more likely to retain their cultural identity. Mexican-Americans, like many other migrant groups, may experience pressure to maintain their Mexican values for several reasons including the geographic connection of US to Mexico and much of the immigration from Mexico is recent (Rueschenberg & Buriel, 1989). The implication of this conceptualization of the acculturation of immigrants is that overall attitudes toward certain products as well as technology applications should remain similar to those of their originating nations.

HYPOTHESIZED MODEL

In an attempt to identify the relationship between motivations and media contents from the uses and gratification perspectives, Rubin (1984) argued that a variety of motivations discussed above can be largely divided into two types of media usage orientations: ritualized and instrumental orientations. Ritualized use refers to needs that are mostly focused on companionship, entertainment, personal identity and escape. These needs generally refer to the gratification of abstract needs such a curiosity, adventure, advice seeking and community feelings (Bruck, Selhofer and Wurfl, 1997). Conversely, instrumental use is mostly focused on information needs and generally refers to the gratification of goal-oriented needs, such as achieving an economic advantage or gaining a useful piece of business information. Scholars content that audience uses active mode for instrumental needs and passive mode for ritualized needs (Bernoff, 2000), and that, cognitive or instrumental needs lead the audience seeking informational content and cognitive involvement (Rubin, 1983; Perse, 1990). From the literature review, Table 1 depicts these two needs and their associated gratifications.

Media Needs	Uses and Gratifications
Ritualized	Entertainment, Companionship, Escape, Curiosity, Adventure
Instrumental	Purchase, Information, News

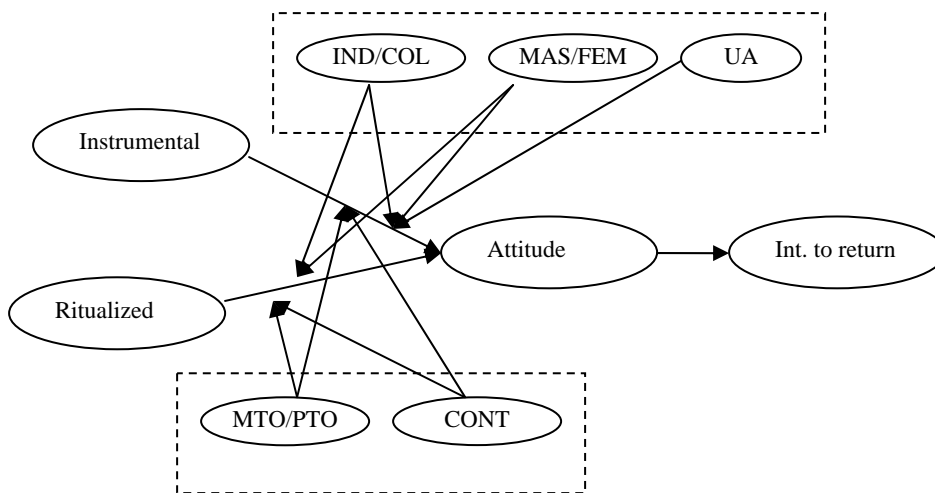**Table 1: Internet Needs and Gratifications**

Figure 1: Research Model

In this study we propose that behavior originates with expectations of anticipated gratifications and media attitudes, and that these gratifications are moderated by a person's cultural background. Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized research model.

With respect to the influence of culture, the literature on cultural studies reveals that cultural researchers have specified several frameworks that can be used to explicate behavioral differences across cultures. Hofstede (1997) specifies 5 dimensions as: individualism/collectivism, power distance, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. Schwartz (1994) suggests 7 dimensions: conservatism, intellectual autonomy, affective autonomy, hierarchy, egalitarianism, mastery, and harmony. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) also proposed 7 dimensions: universalism/particularism, individualism and communitarianism, neutral/emotional, specific/diffuse, achievement/ascription, time orientation (, and attitudes to environment. Hall (1989), and Hall and Hall (1987) suggest 3 dimensions as communication context, perception of space, and monochromic vs. polychronic time. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) employed nature of people, person's relationship to nature, person's relationship to other people, primary mode of activity, conception of space, and person's temporal orientation as dimensions of culture. These cultural values influence consumption related behaviors (Wang 1999). This study delineates 5 cultural variables, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1997), time orientation (Hall, 1989; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998), and communication context (Hall, 1989) that seem to suggest significant moderation toward attitude formulation toward online shopping among Anglo-Americans and Hispanics. Besides most often used, these dimensions appear to me common across the most of the cultural frameworks cited above.

While these researchers were mostly concerned with national cultures, the same idea can and has been applied to cross-intranational and even between differing corporate cultures. For example, Rau, and Liang (2003), using time orientation and communication style, and Hofstede cultural dimensions, found that there is a variety even within Chinese-speaking cultures toward user performance in browsing a web-based service. Their results showed that participants with polychromic time orientation performed faster and took fewer steps than those with monochromic time orientation and participants with high-context were more disorientated than those with low-context.

Individualism and collectivism (IND/COL) – Hofstede's (1997) individualism/collectivism dimension specifies that individualist cultures, such as most Anglo Saxon cultures, emphasize personal action and responsibility. Collectivist cultures emphasize interpersonal relatedness and group action. Most of Latin America is a collectivist culture and Hispanics display collectivist tendencies (Hofstede, 1997). Typical of collectivists, Hispanics see themselves as more closely interconnected than U.S. Anglo Americans (Gabrielidis, Stephan, Ybarra, Dos Santos Pearson, & Villareal, 1997). Hispanics believe in the inherent, innate uniqueness of a person that is not always evident through actions or achievements. In individualistic cultures, opinions of the members of the group will not have weight in their decision to adopt online shopping. Conversely, people holding collectivist values will be more concerned about the maintenance of the group cohesiveness. Thus, they will be expected to show more interest in other's opinions about patronizing online shopping. In other words, we hypothesize that:

H1: Anglo-American subjects (IND) will have a stronger moderation effect on both instrumental and ritualistic motivations than Hispanic subjects (COL) on attitude formed toward online shopping.

Masculinity/femininity (MAS/FEM) – Masculinity stands for the preference in society for competition, achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material success. Its opposite, femininity, stands for the preference for relationships, modesty, caring for the weak, and the quality of life. With technology application use such as in online shopping, the competitive nature of masculine cultures might provide an incentive to overcome challenges in using the technology. The usage of online shopping sites depend on the perception people develop about the contribution of IT to improve the shopping experience. This relationship will be more accentuated in masculine cultures, where achievement is defined more according to materiality, rather than in feminine ones, where the focus is on interpersonal contact, materiality. We thus, hypothesize that:

H2: Hispanic subjects (MAS) will have a stronger moderation effect on instrumental motivation and weaker moderation effect on ritualistic motivations than Anglo-American subjects (FEM) on attitude formed toward online shopping.

Uncertainty avoidance(UA) – This dimension is interpreted as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. It indicates the degree to which cultures establish rules, procedures, and rituals to buffer uncertainties of individual judgment and freedom. High Uncertainty Avoidance cultures develop rules to cover a broad range of possibilities. Low Uncertainty Avoidance cultures let individuals react more spontaneously and "go with the flow."

In countries with low uncertainty avoidance it is common that motivation comes from achievement, esteem or belongingness; there is a high tolerance for deviant or innovative ideas and behavior. In strong uncertainty avoidance countries there is resistance to innovation and motivation for work comes from security as well as esteem and belongingness (Hofstede, 1997).

The implications of uncertainty avoidance for interactive technology use is clear. In low uncertainty avoidance cultures new ideas such as online shopping will be more readily accepted than in high uncertainty avoidance cultures. Thus, low uncertainty avoidance cultures should experience faster rates of diffusion of Web-based information search and shopping. In addition, since IT doesn't allow the social presence, it could accentuate the feeling of uncertainty. Consequently, people in high uncertainty avoidance cultures will be less oriented to use online stores than individuals in low uncertainty avoidance. However, for ritualistic use, because such features as jokes, background music, animation, model figures, etc, which are often free and not bound by rules and regulations, both high and low uncertainty avoidance cultures may show no significant difference in Web site patronage.

H3: Anglo-American subjects (Low UA) will have a stronger moderation effect on instrumental motivation and than Hispanics (High UA). There is no significant difference in the moderation effect on ritualistic motivations between Anglo-American and Hispanic subjects on attitude formed toward online shopping.

Monochromatic/Polychromatic Time Orientation – Monochronic time emphasizes schedules, segmentation of time, and promptness. Events are compartmentalized and concentrated on sequentially, one thing at a time. Only a limited number of events can be scheduled and therefore priorities can be set for people and functions. The implications for this dimension on interactive

technology application such as Web use is that monochromatic cultures may find it easier since the online shopping task is compartmentalized and steps have to be completed sequentially. Polychronic time stresses involvement with people and completion of transactions rather than adherence to a preset schedule. The future is not firm and therefore cannot be planned. Appointments can be broken and plans may be changed right up to their execution; actions which are not supported on Web sites.

H4: Anglo-American subjects (MTO) will have a stronger moderation effect on instrumental motivation and weaker moderation effect on ritualistic motivations than Hispanic subjects (PTO) on attitude formed toward online shopping.

High/Low Context – Hall's (1976) high versus low cultural context dimension seems to be important in moderating the effect of online needs to attitudes. This dimension refers to the amount and specificity of information in a given situation. Low Context cultures transmit information in explicit code to make up for lack of shared meanings. High Context communication relies heavily on nonverbal and contextual and shared cultural meanings. In examining how multinationals' create websites for home-country and host-country markets Okazaki (2004) indicated a limited support for the proposed links between cultural context and Web content in term of information, an instrumental cue, but nevertheless stated that higher informativeness remains the significant discriminator between Japanese and US markets. Again, since High-Context oriented individuals prefer less coded messages, the Web as a transaction medium, implying very explicit content, will not be very useful as a means of communication. In high context cultures, information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person and therefore an explicit coding is often not necessary, whereas in low context cultures messages are transmitted explicitly and directly (Ting-Toomey and Gao, 1991). Latin America is seen as high context society as determined by Hall and Hall's (1990) cultural dimensions and, thus, it is expected that US Hispanics will be high context and will most likely use the Web for ritualistic motivation purposes rather than instrumental purposes. On the other hand, Anglo-Americans, a relatively context culture, will prefer the Web for online information search and shopping.

H5: Anglo-American (Low CONT) subjects will have a stronger moderation effect on instrumental motivation and weaker moderation effect on ritualistic motivations than Hispanic subjects (High CONT) on attitude formed toward online shopping.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

Survey research is a predominant uses and gratifications method and has been consistently validated by past studies (Rubin, 1994). Therefore, the data for this study will be collected via a self-report questionnaire, which will be useful for analyzing motivations and media usage patterns (Conway and Rubin, 1991) as well as cultural orientations. The study sample will consist of Internet users of all demographic groups in the US. A review of the relevant literature will be used to develop an initial item pool of the constructs, and then the reviewed items will be modified and adjusted to this study context.

In order to conceptualize online shopping patterns, respondents will be asked to indicate their frequency of visiting online shops as well as what they look for when at a site. Respondents will rate these items using a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree)

Data Analysis

Since the study is designed to formulate a structural equation model with the latent variables, data analysis will consists of factor analysis and correlation matrices to determine discriminant and convergent validities as well as multicollinearity among constructs. The correlation matrix will also serve as input data for estimating the structural equation model. In order to estimate the hypothesized model, a two-step procedure will be adopted. The first part of the two-step procedure involves estimating a measurement model and a simultaneous equation model. Therefore, a confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood estimation and a path analysis with the latent variables will be conducted, respectively. In the second part of the two-step procedure, the fits of the simultaneous equation model will be compared to those of the measurement model in order to examine whether estimating the structural model results in a significant decrement in fit. Both measurement and structural models will be estimated with LISREL by the method of maximum likelihood. In order to check the moderating effect of the cultural variables, the interactive effect of the cultural dimensions with the motivational/needs constructs will be examined using regression analysis to explicate any differences between the study groups.

REFERENCES

Available on request from author.