

Evaluating Cultural Web Usability in Global E-commerce Sites

Abdul Rehman, Asad Ali, Irfan Ahmed Magsi

Faculty of Information and Communication Technology,
Balochistan University of Information Technology and Management Sciences, Quetta

Abstract

E-business has become the focus of multinational business due to enhancement and advancement in information and communication technology. The web sites are being designed on the bases basis of localization, but the cultural usability is still not the main concern of designer of e-commerce web sites. The culture plays vital rule in acceptance of web site by users. The purpose of study is to diagnoses cultural usability of global web sites.

Keywords: E-commerce, E-business, www, Web usability

Corresponding Author's email: abdul.rehman1@buitms.edu.pk,

INTRODUCTION

Internet is the most emerging technology & source of communication and information in this age. Most of the entrepreneur are looking forward for establishing their e-business. E-commerce sites the main source, for facilitating customer in an electronic environment. The web usability plays greater role in the success or failure of any site. Most of the e-commerce site focus on target market.

There are many dimensions of the web usability and HCI, that affect the acceptance of any web site by the users, culture is one of them and most important because of its broad parameters and geographic variation. Cultural characteristics of web site users are a key factor to determining the user acceptance of a web site (Daniel, 2011). The culture has a variety of dimensions that impact on usability of the site. The problem with culture is that it is not a tangible characteristic, but it has different definitions in different cultures, liking of one culture can be a dislike of another culture. Studies proved that users are more comfortable in their native language; web sites designed without culture consideration are likely to offend other cultures (Tina, 2011).

To study culture and apply it as web usability it is necessary to define it from some

prospects. The culture can be classified in two main categories objective and subjective (Daniel, 2011). The objectives characteristics of a culture are tangible properties like (color, text, language etc) on other hand subjective characteristics are properties that are intangible (values, religion, psychology thinking pattern). The e-commerce sites have uniqueness as they are designed to do online sales and purchases and it is important for a business to ensure its usability, the other challenges issue of e-commerce sites is that they are mostly applied in global market rather than focusing on local market with limited users, that increases the culture dimensions in term of variety of different cultures. E-commerce sites have high chances of success if their web sites are created with multiculturalism as the design focus (Tina, 2011). Daniel, 2011 in their paper examined cultural issues that influence web usability, by conducting a thorough study of cultural dimensions. Based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, they categorized the culture characteristics in two parts that is, Objective and Subjective. They showed that the acceptance of any web site depends upon cultural characteristics of the users too.

Tina, 2011 in her research document examines the characteristics of culture, focusing on language and iconography. On the bases of studies she presents two design

techniques i. Localization ii. Shared meaning approach. The document concludes that, every site must be designed to insure web usability measure. (Karatzas, 2010) In his paper investigates the web usability in term of technical and social dimensions, as social properties he uses Hofstede's model & technical properties. The study concludes that culture web usability area needs to be researched deeper and applied by developers. (Kang 2008) in her study on culture based e-commerce investigates usability in global e-commerce websites. It was confirmed that dynamic content attract users, but static information on the web provides much easier comprehension and navigation. In conclusion she suggests a designer to be aware of cultural differences. (Kralisch, 2005) their paper is based on navigational behavior with respect to user culture. They presented three hypothesis based on Hofstede's and Hall's model. They concluded that: The results of study broadly confirm the impact of cultural dimensions, on web site navigation behavior. (Krischer, 2006) presented a thorough study on color on web usability as cultural dimensions. She analyzed the impact of different colors on different societies. She concluded her study by "Website color plays an extremely important role to create a successful interactive environment for the user". (Jacque, 2007) in their research investigated impact of native language as cultural dimensions in web usability, the study was based on two hypotheses. They proved by experiment and concluded that users dislike site if the website is not in their own language and if their foreign language skills are not sufficient. (Aladwani, 2003) explored in his research about effects of national culture on web usability. The qualitative studies showed that there are many symbolic differences between two cultures like structure, function, security and focus (people, places). The Empirical Study results show that the usability variations could be more due to cultural reasons. (Sohaib 2012) in his e-commerce research paper explores the importance of usability as designers prospect ,the research was based on

- i. Culture & Trust in Electronic Commerce
- ii. Cross-Culture E-Commerce Usability

- iii. Cross-Cultural User Interface design.

He concluded that: For a business website to be interactive for the international users, the designers must be aware of cultural factors.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this work is to find out the cultural significance in worlds popular global e-commerce sites. For this purpose two of the most populated nations are selected i.e. China& India which are known for their rich culture and background. The sites chosen for this study are some most renowned e-commerce names in the world i.e Amazon, ebay, Alibaba & olx . As in the literature review it was clear that culture has many dimensions ,both the technical as well as social characteristics are involved in culture .In my study I have focused on some limited properties of culture i.e. Color, Language.

Table 1: shows the sites localization (version) with respect to China and India.

Website	Origen	Countries	Site for China	Site for India
<i>Amazon.com</i>	USA	09	Yes	No
<i>Ebay.com</i>	USA	37	Yes	Yes
<i>Alibaba.com</i>	China	04	Yes	Yes
<i>Olx.com</i>	USA	40	Yes	Yes

Color

(Krischer, 2006) color plays a key role in user's experience in website interaction. "A user engages to a website not only because of initial emotional response to the color but also because of the significance of the different colored elements on the site". Colors put very strong impact on user in its first glance; users like or dislike any website initially due to color. Color has basic three technicalities that is, Contrast, Saturation, Color blindness. These three characteristics must be taken into account according to the color while designing. The color is technical cultural issue, every culture has its own meanings i-e liking, disliking and symbolic representation for instance, in America the black dress is worn on funeral & in India the white color is worn. This shows clear contrast of color acceptance in any other culture. Table 2 shows that all the sites have used

white color as their basic color and background, whether it is their local site for China and India or the international version, the reason might be to create a site on general bases and not to involve cultures. Even the overall themes of all sites have been observed as light colors rather than giving some color flavor where required. Though the light color gives an impression of tranquility but other colors can be used with care to produce pages that grab attention. The text color of almost all the sites are blue & black only amazon used greens and oranges for Chinese site, it is an obvious thing because the comfortably level is better in blue and black text. All the sites used colors for their menus where amazon used orange for china and silver for international version, eBay used only silver, alibaba used blue & orange respectively for china and India, olx have kept all their site menus in blue, green, orange. Because all the sites have light theme and no green & red are mixed together so there is no issue for color blinds because color blinds have problem only with green and red used together. Overall it is observed that almost all sites have their country versions but none of them tried to play with colors on their cultural bases, which reduces the usability of any website.

Table 2: Websites Color Theme and Scheme

Site	Basic color	Text	Menus	Theme
Amazon/ch	White	Green,Black,Brown	Blue/Orange	Light colors
Amazon/in	White	Black,Blue	Silver	Light colors
Ebay/ch	White	Black,Blue	Silver	Light colors
Ebay/in	White	Black,Blue	Silver	Light colors
Alibaba/ch	White	Black,Blue	Blue (lit,dar.)	Light colors
Alibaba/inter	White	Black,Blue	Orange	Light colors
Olx/ch	White	Blue	Blue,orange,green	Light colors
Olx/in	White	Blue	Blue,orange,green	Light colors

Language

(Nantel, 2008) usability increases when the website was designed in the native language of the user. The literature review shows that even users are not comfortable with translated page, because the translation cannot achieve the exact meaning. Table 3 show the selected site with respect to language, it can be clearly observed that all sites are focusing on china and have created sites in chine language only except olx.com

which have all websites in English, but on other hand it is also observed that Indian versions of all the sites are created in English language rather than Hindi, which shows the less focus and attention to India market.

Table 3: Website in Regional Language Table

Website	Origen of Co.	Chaises lang.	Indian lang.
Amazon.com	USA	Yes	No
Ebay.com	USA	Yes	No
Alibaba.com	China	Yes	No
Olx.com	USA	No	No

Another aspect is that the literacy rate of China and India is 95 and 75 respectively, but from the language point of view, Chines are dependent more on their national language however, India has a good English Language reputation .This might be the reason that online business have created Chines site in their native language.

CONCLUSION

In this study we showed the effect of colors on e-business. The study clearly indicates that most of e-venders studied ignored cultural usability even after creating "localization" based sites. Another fact that is figured out that the second most populated country in the world which is million dollar business market is being ignored by most top global e-commerce companies.

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