

## **CULTURE AND LOCALIZATION ON THE WEB: EVIDENCE FROM MULTINATIONALS IN RUSSIA AND TURKEY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The broad goal of this study is to explore how the perennial debate on standardization and localization is being shaped on the Worldwide Web. More specifically, the study explores the depiction of cultural values on the web. With limited research investigating this issue, there is no consensus yet regarding whether multinationals depict local cultural values in their international web sites or design standardized sites for global audiences. In an attempt to broaden the empirical evidence from different cultural settings (Russia and Turkey) and to provide a regional perspective, we examined through both qualitative and quantitative analyses the international (Russian and Turkish) web sites of 115 multinationals from the US, Europe, and Asia-Pacific with respect to 37 cultural values in seven cultural dimensions. The results provided support for depiction of local cultural values; however, the multinationals utilize a multi-focus in their web communication strategies that include cultural (domestic and foreign) and marketing strategy elements.

Keywords: Standardization, localization, cultural depiction, the Web, international marketing communication strategy

### **1. Introduction**

The debate over “standardization versus adaptation (or localization)” is at the very heart of international business research; Griffith, Cavusgil, and Xu [2008] identified these, *inter alia*, as emerging themes for international business research (p.1226-1227). This debate is further complicated when we extend it to analyze communications over a global medium like the World Wide Web. On the web, technology makes mass customization or adaptation possible, while forces of global integration [Sackmary and Scalia, 1998] justify the use of a standardized web marketing and communication strategy. Lim et al [2004] argued that cultural differences affect internet shopping

behavior despite the global reach of the web. The broad goal of this study is to explore if international sites are adopting a standardized web style or is there any evidence of cultural adaption on these sites.

Standardization is commonly defined in the literature as a strategy wherein marketers assume global homogeneous markets and in response offer standardized products and services using a standardized marketing mix [Jain 1989; Mooij 1998]. The advocates of the standardization approach argue that as technology develops and is globally dispersed, cultural distance will be minimized, leading to convergence of national cultures into a homogenous global culture. However, research studies are showing that standardization as a strategy does not really impact financial performance of the firms [O'Donnell and Jeong 2000; Samiee and Roth 1992]. Furthermore, the complex nature of the international marketing environment promotes diversity in terms of physical environment, political and legal systems, cultures, product usage conditions, and economic development. Several researchers [Boddewyn et al. 1986; Hill and Still 1984; Wind 1986] argue that, because of these fundamental differences across markets, it is neither desirable nor feasible, for firms to achieve standardization of their international marketing activities. For some companies, especially for those 'born global', defined as companies that from or near inception obtain a substantial portion of total revenue from foreign sales [Knight and Cavusgil 2005; McDougall et al 1994; Oviatt and McDougall 1994], standardization instead of localization may not be effective in tapping global markets as they have global reach.

Emerging evidence related to global online user expectation of standardized versus localized approach to marketing is also pointing more favorably towards a localized marketing approach on the web [Singh and Pereira 2005; Singh et al. 2006]. Research shows that consumers prefer to shop on and interact from sites that are specially designed for them in their local language [Singh and Pereira, 2005]. More than 75 percent of Chinese and Koreans online shoppers prefer web sites in Mandarin and Korean respectively [Ferranti, 1999]. Likewise, French and Spanish have a strong preference for sites in their local language [Lynch et al., 2001]. Studies by Luna et al. [2002] and Singh et al [2006] confirm that country-specific web content that is adapted to local culture and language enhances usability, and perceived usefulness, leading to higher purchase intentions. Similarly, Hermeking [2005] argues that web design that is culturally familiar to local culture will engender higher trust. Therefore, the research question of the study is "Do multinationals take into account local cultures on their international web sites by depicting local cultural values?" In line with this research question, the objective of the study is to test whether international web sites<sup>1</sup> of companies from the US, Europe, and Asia-Pacific depict local (Turkish and Russian) cultural values.

Thus, the study contributes to the emerging debate on localizing or standardizing the web content for international markets. The main contribution of this study is that it provides empirical evidence of degree to which multinationals from three main world regions (North America, Europe and Asia) are culturally localizing their web content to Russian and Turkish consumers. The unique contributions of this study include:

1. The study takes a much broader and global view of localization activities of multinationals. This is achieved by including a sample of multinationals from three major world regions including North American (USA), Europe, and Asia Pacific. No prior studies to our attention have explored how multinationals from the US, Europe, and Asia Pacific attempt to culturally localize their sites for Turkey and Russia.
2. This study actually provides the validation of the framework for measuring cultural values on the web [Singh and Matsuo, 2004; Singh et al., 2005] and extends the applicability of the framework to assess multinational sites around the world.
3. Finally, beyond the region level (North America, Europe and Asia) analysis included in this study, the study also looks at how multinationals from specific European countries and Asian countries differ in their web localization efforts toward their Russian and Turkish sites.

## 2. Literature Review

We have been witnessing for over two decades an emerging phenomenon affecting both domestic and international business: the proliferation of the Internet and e-commerce. The volume of e-commerce has been over several trillion US dollars and this volume is increasing rapidly. Table 1 shows various statistics related to internet usage population.

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<sup>1</sup> An international web site of a company refers to a web site designed for a foreign country such as PepsiCo's Russian web site ([www.pepsi.ru](http://www.pepsi.ru)) while a domestic web site refers to a web site designed for the domestic market such as PepsiCo's US web site ([www.pepsico.com](http://www.pepsico.com)).

Table1: The World Internet Usage and Population Statistics (Source: [www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm); using US Census Bureau, Nielsen/Net Ratings, and International Telecommunications Union.)

World Regions	Population (2008 Est.)	Internet users in December 2000	Internet users in June 2008	Usage growth (%) 2000-2008
Africa	955,206,348	4,514,400	51,065,630	1,031
Asia	3,776,181, 949	114,304,000	578,538, 257	406
Europe	800,401,065	105,096,093	384,633,765	266
North America	337,167,248	108,096,800	248,241,969	129.6
Latin America/ Caribbean	576,091,673	18,068,919	139,009,209	669.3
Oceania/Australia	33,981,562	7,620,480	20,204,331	165.1
World Total	6,676,120,288	360,985,492	1,463,632,361	305.5

It is clear from Table 1 that more than half of internet users in the world are from non-English speaking countries and this portion is increasing as the highest growth rate of internet usage is in emerging markets especially in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In addition to the increasing number of internet users in emerging countries in these regions, emerging countries such as China, India, Brazil, Mexico, and other Asian countries attract many foreign investors and thus the volume of foreign investment in such countries is high [WIR 2008, p. xvii-xviii]. One implication of this fact can be that foreign investors, especially those from western countries, may be urged to use adaptation (or localization) strategy in their international business operations both online and offline to effectively tap foreign market potential.

As the numbers indicated, the Internet is expanding rapidly and offering new and innovative ways of doing business. This change has stimulated organizations to adapt themselves to the online world in addition to the offline world. Growing opportunities in e-commerce have stimulated companies to present themselves, to communicate with stakeholders, and to market and sell their products and services online. According to Simeon [1999], Internet today affects many business transactions and both consumers and companies can easily participate in international markets as buyers and sellers. Sharp [2001] and Topalian [2003] point out that the company web sites are effective means of communicating and promoting corporate image and constructing relationships with stakeholders as these sites offer opportunities to transmit limitless information.

Although company web sites are convenient and effective tools to present and promote corporate image, to communicate with stakeholders, and to sell products and services, there are some challenges for the effectiveness of web sites such as the usability of the web site, the credibility of the corporate message, and the value of the content [Pollach, 2005]. An effective web site is the one which may motivate consumers to take desired actions such as to remain at the site for a certain time period, download the content of interest, forward it to other people, ask for information from the site, and/or purchase products or services [Liu et al, 2004]. To achieve such effectiveness, the content of the web site is crucial and its importance is equal to the importance of location in the offline world [Foergensen and Blythe, 2003]. The quality and effectiveness of a web site, which can be considered a marketing tool, will be affected by the extent to which a web site reflects the culture of the country for which it has been designed [Fletcher 2006; Singh and Pereira 2005]. Junglas and Watson [2004] argue that national culture, technological infrastructure, and economic development play important role in the growth of electronic commerce and corporate web sites are one of the most noticeable depictions of national culture. In line with these arguments it is crucial that the web sites be localized to meet the cultural expectations of the target locale. Localization of websites involves modification based on several cultural parameters including language, symbols, graphics, content, color etc. Some of the important adaptations needed during web site localization include:

1. Translating web sites based on the requirements of the target locale. For some countries, it is not only important to translate in one language but in multiple languages. For example, in Switzerland, Canada, Belgium there are multilingual populations. Thus, multi-language web sites are necessary.
2. In addition to translation, the translated text should be of good quality and show translation equivalence.
3. The graphics and images need to conform to local specific requirements to emphasize local cultural values and not to offend local audience. For example, In India the use of swastika in marketing and commercial material is very common and even company names and brands have swastika in them. But when communicating with international audience over the web, Indian companies need to consider that Swastika may not be culturally appropriate in various countries.
4. The relevant character set should be supported. For example, the Japanese use double byte characters for encoding, so if the program is built in western languages it must be made double byte compatible (e.g. using Unicode). A fully internationalized Web site normally is Unicode enabled.

5. Finally, international web sites will require modification on how cultural values are being depicted in the content of the website. It is important to make showcase cultural values via web content and features that reflect cultural expectations of the society [Singh and Periera, 2005].

The scholarship on the subject of cultural depiction or standardization-localization of cultural values on the web is very recent as evidenced by the date of the related studies and thus has been developing. The research in this area can be classified into two groups of studies: one is on domestic web sites and the other is on international web sites. The first group of studies analyzes depictions of local cultural values in domestic web sites in different countries and compares them in order to see whether significant differences exist. Studies by Burgman et al [2006], Singh and Matsuo [2004], Singh et al [2003], and Singh et al [2005a] are included in this group. The second group examines cultural issues in international web sites of companies from a particular country or countries to see whether companies reflect local cultural values in their international web sites; examples for this group include Okazaki and Rivas [2002], Okazaki [2004], Singh et al [2005b], and Singh et al [2006]. In addition, studies utilize different frameworks to analyze culture although Hofstede's [1980, 2001] framework is the most widely used one. Since this stream of research is very recent, there is no established consensus as to whether organizations do really take culture into account especially in international web sites.

With respect to the first group of studies, Singh and Matsuo [2004] examined the US and the Japanese domestic web sites and found evidence for cultural sensitivity. Singh et al [2003] analyzed the US and the Chinese domestic web pages and reported that these companies do depict local cultural values on the web. Singh et al [2005a] analyzed domestic web pages in the US, China, India, and Japan and found out that national culture was reflected in the web sites of companies in their native countries. Burgmann et al [2006] examined German, British, and Greek domestic web sites and found evidence for both differences and similarities with respect to cultural depictions. As to the second group, Okazaki and Rivas [2002] found limited evidence regarding the depiction of local culture in the Japanese international web sites in the US and Spain. Okazaki [2004] examined product-based web sites of Japanese multinationals in the US and Spain and found limited evidence with respect to standardization of product-based web sites in general. The author, however, indicated that standardization was maximized and more uniformity was found with respect to cultural values reflected in the web sites. Singh et al [2005b] analyzed the US international web sites in Germany and France and reported limited evidence as to the cultural depiction of local German and French values in the US international web sites. In contrast, Singh et al [2006] analyzed the international web sites of US companies in Germany, China, and India and provided positive evidence with respect to local cultural depiction in the web sites.

It seems that cultural depiction is more prevalent in domestic web sites as evidenced by relatively much consensus as indicated by the results of the studies mentioned above. Perhaps, this is normal since companies know their own country culture better and thus depict local cultural values even instinctively. However, there is a debate as to whether local cultural values are depicted in international web sites as evidenced by the contradictory results of the studies in the second group. This study contributes to this debate on whether multinationals take into account or depict local cultural values in their international web sites. Therefore, this study belongs to the second group of studies since we examined international (Russian and Turkish) web sites of Fortune 500 and Fortune Global 500 multinationals from the US, Europe, and Asia-Pacific to find out whether these multinationals depict Russian and Turkish cultural values in their international web sites within the framework of Singh and Matsuo [2004] that include two frameworks by Hofstede [1980; 2001] and Hall [1976].

The contribution of this study with its large sample is to enlarge empirical evidence in this newly developing stream of research on cultural issues on the web. In addition, unlike other studies that provided country-specific evidence, this study provides regional evidence from the three important trade regions of the world (the US, Europe, Asia-Pacific) in different cultural settings, Russia and Turkey.

The choice of Russia and Turkey was guided by their cultural distinctiveness and their growing Internet populations. Figure 1 shows, with respect to Hofstede's cultural framework, that Turkey and Russia share mostly similar cultural characteristics with Asia-Pacific countries and are mostly distinct from the US and Europe; the only exception is masculinity.

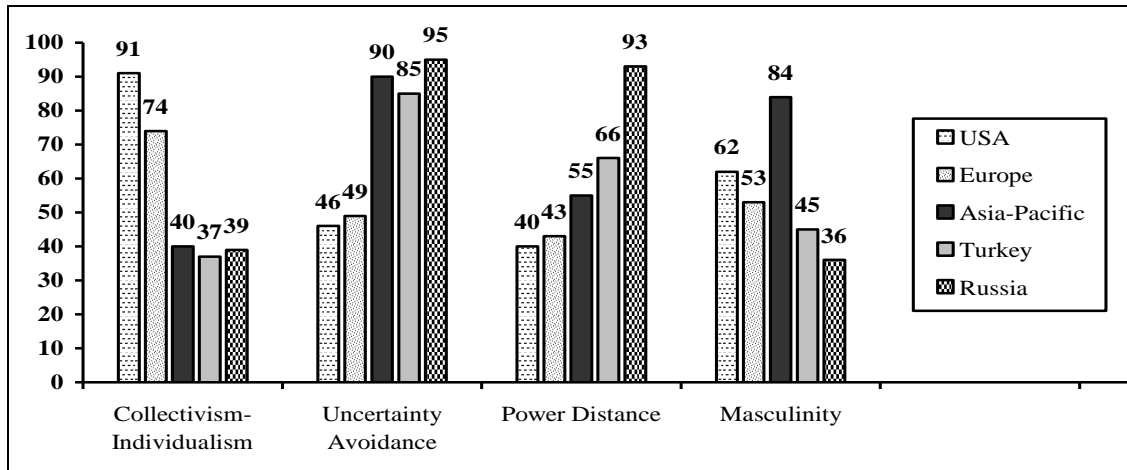


Figure1: Country Scores in Hofstede's Cultural Framework (Source: Based on [Hofstede 2001]).

Note: The bars show (from left to right) USA, European, Asia-Pacific, Turkish, and Russian scores. For the collectivism-individualism dimension, high scores mean more individualism whereas low-scores mean more collectivism. The European and Asia-Pacific scores reflect weighted averages.

So, it provides a good opportunity to test whether multinational's from the US, Europe, and Asia Pacific tend to culturally localize their Turkish and Russian websites. If they do so, then, their cultural depictions should be in line with Turkish and Russian country scores. For example, Turkey and Russia are collectivistic (37 and 39, respectively). If cultural localization exists, then the web sites of the US, European, and Asia Pacific multinationals should display high degree of collectivism instead of individualism. Therefore, these two countries are good choices for the purpose of this research. From the consumer point of view, as both countries are highly nationalistic, localization will be a good strategy as such highly nationalistic people are expected to be happy to sense values they are used to. Second, Turkey and Russia have considerable internet users. The average internet users in Europe are 24% of the total population. The corresponding rates in Russia and Turkey are 45% and 42%<sup>2</sup>, respectively. This means that there are considerable numbers of people in these countries using internet.

### 3. Cultural Values Framework

Studying the depiction of culture in international marketing communications has been an important part of international advertising research. [Albers-Miller and Gelb, 1996; Cho et al., 1999; Zandpour et al. 1994; Tse et al., 1989]. Cultural values prescribes broad guidelines for acceptable ways of behaving and acting in particular situations [Feather, 1990], and they influence how we interact and socialize with other members of the society [Rokeach, 1973]. To study the role, depiction, and importance of cultural values, various cultural frameworks have been proposed. The cultural value framework proposed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck [1961] was one of the earlier attempts toward categorizing cultural values to study world cultures. Work on universal human value analysis came from Rokeach [1973], who identified 18 instrumental and 18 terminal values. Later then Schwartz [1992] refined the 36 values of Rokeach and developed the Schwartz value system. An important framework for studying cultural appeals in advertising was proposed by Pollay [1983] and includes a set of forty-two cultural value appeals in advertising. Similar attempts to categorize culture in terms of unique value orientations have come from Hall [1976], Hall and Hall [1990], Hofstede [1980], and Trompenaars [1994]. Some of these frameworks are theoretically derived but lack extensive validation (e.g., [Parson and Shils, 1951; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961]), others are empirically derived and lack a general theory (e.g., [Trompenaars, 1994]). However, the cultural value framework by Hofstede [1980] explains group-level variation, is based on empirically derived dimensions, and is based on a globally representative sample. Furthermore, the framework organizes cultural values based on broad overarching value patterns and facilitates cross-national comparison [Oyserman et al., 2002]. In fact, Steenkamp [2001] identified this framework as a rigorous and comprehensive one highly appropriate for cross-national theorizing by marketing researchers. The cultural value framework has been extensively applied and tested in the advertising literature [Albers-Miller and Gelb, 1996; Cho et al., 1999; Milner and Collins, 2000; Zandpour et al., 1994] and was subsequently extended to study web communications by Singh and Matsuo [2004], Singh et al., [2005 a,b] and

<sup>2</sup> [www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com)

others. The cultural value framework proposed initially by Singh and Matsuo [2004] extends the cultural value framework of Hofstede [1980] and Hall [1976] to measure cultural values on the web. The framework by Singh and Matsuo [2004] demonstrated good reliability and was tested cross-nationally [Singh et al., 2005a,b]. To our knowledge, the framework by Singh and Matsuo provides one of the most extensive categorization based on 37 categories to measure cultural values on the web. According to Singh and Matsuo [2004] and Singh et al. [2005a,b] various cultural dimensions of Hofstede and Hall were operationalized for analyzing culture on the web by relating web elements to certain cultural values (Refer: [Singh and Pereira, 2005]). For example, the collectivism dimension is operationalized in the context of web communications in terms of depiction of community relations, clubs and chat rooms, newsletters, family theme, pictures and symbols of national identity and loyalty programs on the web sites (see Table2). The rationale behind selecting these categories to operationalize collectivism is that collectivist societies place emphasis on community-based social order [Hofstede, 1991], group well being [Cho et al., 1997], and the welfare of others [Gudykunst, 1998]. Thus, this study adopts Singh and Matsuo's [2004] cultural value framework to measure cultural values on the web. Table 2 shows the cultural values framework proposed by Singh and Matsuo [2004]. The hypotheses developed in the next section not only apply to and test Singh and Matsuo's [2004] framework in Turkey and Russia, but also provides insights into how multinationals from the U.S., Europe, and Asia Pacific are culturally customizing their sites to the cultures being investigated in this study. We hope that such analysis will contribute to the growing body of research to clarify the usage of localized versus standardized web marketing strategy.

Table2: Cultural Values Framework [Sing and Matsuo, 2004; Singh et al, 2005]

<p><b>Collectivism</b>  <i>Community Relations:</i> Presence or absence of community policy, giving back to community, social responsibility policy.  <i>Clubs or chat rooms:</i> Presence or absence of members club, product-based clubs, chat with company people, chat with interest groups, message boards, discussion groups, and live talks.  <i>Newsletter:</i> Online subscriptions, magazines, and newsletters.  <i>Family theme:</i> Pictures of family, pictures of teams of employees, mention of employee teams and emphasis on team and collective work responsibility in vision statement or elsewhere on the web site, and emphasis on customers as a family.  <i>Symbols and pictures of national identity:</i> Flags, pictures of historic monuments, pictures reflecting uniqueness of the country, country specific symbols in the form of icons, and "indexes".  <i>Loyalty programs:</i> Frequent miles programs, customer loyalty programs, and company credit cards for specific country, special membership programs.  <i>Links to local web sites:</i> Links to country locations, related country specific companies, and other local web sites from a particular country.</p>
<p><b>Individualism</b>  <i>Good privacy statement:</i> Privacy policy and how personal information will be protected or used.  <i>Independence theme:</i> Images and themes depicting self-reliance, self-recognition, and achievement.  <i>Product uniqueness:</i> Unique selling points of the product and product differentiation features.  <i>Personalization:</i> Features like gift recommendations, individual acknowledgements or greeting, and web page personalization.</p>
<p><b>Uncertainty Avoidance</b>  <i>Customer service:</i> FAQ's, customer service option, customer contact or customer service e-mails.  <i>Guided navigation:</i> Site maps, well-displayed links, links in the form of pictures or buttons, forward, backward up and down navigation buttons.  <i>Tradition theme:</i> Emphasis on history and ties of a particular company with a nation, emphasis on respect, veneration of elderly and the culture, phrases like "most respected company", "keeping the tradition alive", "for generations", "company legacy".  <i>Local stores:</i> Mention of contact information for local offices, dealers, and shops.  <i>Local terminology:</i> Like use of country specific metaphors, names of festivals, puns, and a general local touch in the vocabulary of the web page not just mere translation.  <i>Toll free numbers:</i> To call at any time around the clock.  <i>Free trails or downloads:</i> Free stuff, free downloads, free screen savers, free product trails, free coupons to try the products or services, free memberships, or free service information.  <i>Testimonials:</i> Testimonials from customers, trust-enhancing features like reliability seals, seals of trust, and ethical business practices from third parties.</p>
<p><b>Masculinity/Femininity</b>  <i>Quizzes and games:</i> Games, quizzes, fun stuff to do on the web site, tips and tricks, recipes, and other fun information.  <i>Realism theme:</i> Less fantasy and imagery on the web site, to-the-point information.  <i>Product effectiveness:</i> Durability information, quality information, product attribute information, and product robustness information.  <i>Clear gender roles:</i> Separate pages for men and women, depiction of women in nurturance roles, depiction of women in</p>

positions of telephone operators, models, wives, and mothers; depiction of men as macho, strong, and in positions of power.
<p><b>Power Distance</b></p> <p><i>Company hierarchy information:</i> Information about the ranks of company personnel, information about organizational chart, and information about country managers.</p> <p><i>Pictures of CEO's:</i> Pictures of executives, important people in the industry or celebrities.</p> <p><i>Quality assurance and awards:</i> Mention of awards won, mention of quality assurance information and quality certification by international and local agencies.</p> <p><i>Pride of ownership appeal:</i> Web sites depict satisfied customers, fashion statement for the use of product, and the use of reference groups to portray pride.</p> <p><i>Proper titles:</i> Titles of the important people in the company, titles of the people in the contact information, and titles of people on the organizational charts.</p> <p><i>Vision statement:</i> <i>The vision for the company as stated by the CEO or top management.</i></p>
<p><b>Low-Context</b></p> <p><i>Rank or prestige of the company:</i> Features like company rank in the industry, listing in Forbes or Fortune, and numbers showing the growth and importance of the company.</p> <p><i>Hardsell approach:</i> Discounts, promotions, coupons, and emphasis on product advantages using explicit comparison.</p> <p><i>Explicit Comparisons:</i> Comparison of the company to others.</p> <p><i>Use of superlatives:</i> Use of superlative words and sentences: like "We are the number one", "The top company", "The leader", and "World's largest".</p> <p><i>Terms and condition of purchase:</i> Product return policy, warranty, and other conditions.</p>
<p><b>High-Context</b></p> <p><i>Politeness and indirectness:</i> Greetings from the company, images and pictures reflecting politeness, flowery language, use of indirect expressions like "perhaps", "probably" and "somewhat". Overall humbleness in company philosophy and corporate information.</p> <p><i>Softsell approach:</i> Use of affective and subjective impressions of intangible aspects of a product or service, and more entertainment theme to promote the product.</p> <p><i>Esthetics:</i> Attention to esthetic details, liberal use of colors, high bold colors, emphasis on images and context, and use of love and harmony appeal.</p>

#### 4. Hypotheses

*Individualism-Collectivism:* Individualism-collectivism is the degree to which individuals in a particular country tend to act on their own or as group members; in other words, it is the degree to which a person seeks his own interests, and individual expression is referred to as individualism. People in individualistic societies are independent and care about only themselves whereas people in collectivistic cultures care about the group and society to which they belong and therefore they retain close relationships with others, and accept this as a social fact [Hofstede, 1980, 2001].

In line with Hofstede's findings, researchers indicated that in collectivistic countries commercials reflected group affiliation, social, and family ties [Han and Shavitt 1994; French and Weis; 2000; Lin 2001] while in individualistic cultures, the reflections were more on self-reliance, achievement, independence [Albers-Miller and Gelb 1996; Cho et al 1999; Zandapour et al 1994]. Scholars conceptualized individualism and collectivism as conceptually opposite constructs presenting contrasting world views [Hui 1988; Oyserman et al., 2002]. A meta-analysis of academic studies using individualism and collectivism constructs found that various studies treat these two dimensions as distinct when comparing country or regional level cultural differences [Oyserman et al., 2002]. Both Turkey (37) and Russia (39) score low on individualism; this means that Turkey and Russia are rather collectivistic. Based on these scores, we hypothesize that:

*H1a: The Turkish web sites of the US, European, and Asia-Pacific multinationals will depict low levels of the individualism-oriented values and high levels of the collectivism-oriented values.*

*H1b: The Russian web sites of the US, European, and Asia-Pacific multinationals will depict low levels of the individualism-oriented values and high levels of the collectivism-oriented values.*

*Uncertainty Avoidance:* This is the extent to which individuals accept uncertainty of future events, rules, measures, or guidelines to lessen the nervousness or danger of uncertainty. Cultures high on uncertainty avoidance will formulate firm rules to reduce the uncertainty whereas cultures low in uncertainty avoidance will assume less controlled way of life [Hofstede, 1980, 2001].

In cultures high on uncertainty avoidance, there is a need for clear explanations, clarifications, and rules [Hofstede 1980; Gudykunst 1998]. The reflection of uncertainty avoidance on the web is that people in countries high on uncertainty avoidance tend to use less electronic media [Straub et al 1997], to feel less secure when shopping online [Lynch et al 2001], and to have less online shopping adoption rates [Lim et al 2004]. Therefore, in cultures high on uncertainty avoidance, people need more safety and uncertainty decreasing values to increase their level of

involvement with the Internet [Singh et al, 2005]. Turkey (85) and Russia (95) scores very high on uncertainty avoidance; that means that the two societies are risk-averse and value security. Therefore:

*H2a: The Turkish web sites of the US, European, and Asia-Pacific multinationals will depict high levels of the uncertainty avoidance-oriented values.*

*H2b: The Russian web sites of the US, European, and Asia-Pacific multinationals will depict high levels of the uncertainty avoidance-oriented values.*

**Power Distance:** Power distance refers to the extent to which members of a particular society accept unequal power distributions. This dimension is related to a society's willingness to accept differences in power over other members of the society. Societies high on power distance are likely to accept differences in the distribution of power among members of the society whereas societies low on power distance will welcome equal distribution of power [Hofstede, 1980, 2001].

Previous work indicated high levels of appeal for higher power distance related values [Ji and McNeal 2001; Straub et al 1997]. In line with Singh et al [2005], we hypothesize that web sites of high power distance societies will also depict features relating to status appeals, referent power, and hierarchy. Both Turkey and Russia are high power distance societies; Turkey scores high (66) whereas Russia scores very high (93) on power distance. That means that there are some inequalities in Turkey and lots of inequalities in Russia in the social structure. Therefore:

*H3a: The Turkish web sites of the US, European, and Asia-Pacific multinationals will depict high levels of the power distance-oriented values.*

*H3b: The Russian web sites of the US, European, and Asia-Pacific multinationals will depict very high levels of the power distance-oriented values.*

**Masculinity:** The masculinity-femininity dimension is related to the degree to which individuals compete, value achievement, and resolve conflicts. Masculine societies stress on assertiveness and achievement while feminine cultures accentuate harmony and caring [Hofstede, 1980, 2001].

Hofstede's masculinity/femininity dimension functions as a guide to envisage gender roles cross-culturally. Masculine societies are more likely to accept women and men role separation, which will lead to greater gender role differences [An and Kim, 2007]. Previous research also indicated that as the level of femininity in a country increases, so does the probability to demonstrate women as a key character in marketing communications [Milner and Collins 2000; Wiles et al 1995]. Extending these previous studies to the web and following Singh et al [2005], web communications are also expected to reflect the masculinity/femininity features. Both Turkey (45) and Russia (36) score low on masculinity; that means that these two countries are rather feministic societies. Therefore:

*H4a: The Turkish web sites of the US, European, and Asia-Pacific multinationals will depict low levels of the masculinity-oriented values.*

*H4b: The Russian web sites of the US, European, and Asia-Pacific multinationals will depict low levels of the masculinity-oriented values.*

**High- and low-context cultures:** Hall's [1976] cultural framework consists of a bi-polar construct of high-context and low-context. In high-context cultures, less information is included in the verbal part of communication; instead, much information is implicit and derived from the context of the communication. Language and communication are hidden and indirect. In low-context cultures, communication and message are direct and explicit. Much of the ideas to be communicated are worded.

The emphasis in high-context cultures is on accord, loveliness, and oneness with nature [Cho et al., 1999]. The characteristics of high-context cultures reflect themselves in marketing communications as indirect, polite, and ambiguous statements [Mooij de, 1998]. In contrast, explicit and direct statements in marketing communications are some characteristics of low-context cultures [Cutler and Shekhar, 1992]. According to Hall [1976], Turkey and Russia are both high-context cultures, in which high-context values are expected to be prevalent. Therefore:

*H5a: The Turkish web sites of the US, European, and Asia-Pacific multinationals will depict low levels of the low-context-oriented values and high levels of the high-context-oriented values.*

*H5b: The Russian web sites of the US, European, and Asia-Pacific multinationals will depict low levels of the low-context-oriented values and high levels of the high-context-oriented values.*

**The European and the Asia-Pacific countries comparison:** The European sample consists of 11 multinationals from Germany, nine from France, eight from the UK, six from Switzerland, four from Holland, two from Sweden, and one from Belgium, Finland, and Italy, each. The Asia-Pacific sample consists of 16 multinationals from Japan, three from South Korea, and one from Taiwan. The country scores in the Hofstede's typology and country classification in the Hall's typology are shown in Table 3.



Table 3: Scores and Classification: European and Asia-Pacific Countries (Source: [Hofstede 2001; Hall 1976]).

	Collectivism- Individualism	Uncertainty Avoidance	Power Distance	Masculinity	High-Low Context
Germany	67	65	35	66	Low
The UK	89	35	35	66	Low
France	71	86	68	43	High
Switzerland	68	58	34	70	Low
Netherlands	80	53	38	14	Low
Sweden	71	29	31	5	Low
Belgium	75	94	65	54	High
Finland	63	59	33	26	Low
Italy	76	75	50	70	High
Japan	46	92	54	95	High
South Korea	18	85	60	39	High
Taiwan	17	69	58	45	High

Based on this table, the European countries in the sample differ (in terms of scoring low or high taking 50 as the cut point) in the uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity, and high-low context dimensions whereas the Asia-Pacific countries differed in just masculinity dimension. Therefore, the test will involve uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity, and high-low context dimensions for the European countries whereas just masculinity for the Asia-Pacific countries. The following hypotheses were developed according to the scores in Table 3. According to this table, on the uncertainty avoidance dimension Germany, France, Switzerland, Netherlands, Belgium, Finland, and Italy score high whereas the UK and Sweden score low. On the power distance dimension, France, Belgium, and Italy score high whereas Germany, The UK, Switzerland, Netherland, Sweden, and Finland score low. On the masculinity dimension Germany, The UK, Switzerland, Belgium, and Italy score high whereas France, Netherlands, Sweden, and Finland score low.

*H6a: the German, French, Swiss, Dutch, Belgian, Finnish, and Italian multinationals will depict on their Turkish web sites significantly higher levels of uncertainty avoidance-oriented cultural values than the British and Swedish multinationals will.*

*H6b: the German, French, Swiss, Dutch, Belgian Finnish, and Italian multinationals will depict on their Russian web sites significantly higher levels of uncertainty avoidance-oriented cultural values than the British and Swedish multinationals will.*

*H6c: the French, Belgian, and Italian multinationals will depict on their Turkish web sites significantly higher levels of power distance-oriented cultural values than the German, British, Swiss, Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish multinationals.*

*H6d: the French, Belgian, and Italian multinationals will depict on their Russian sites significantly higher levels of power distance-oriented cultural values than the German, British, Swiss, Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish multinationals.*

*H6e: the German, British, Swiss, Belgian, and Italian multinationals will depict on their Turkish web sites significantly higher levels of masculinity-oriented cultural values than the French, Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish multinationals will.*

*H6f: the German, British, Swiss, Belgian, and Italian multinationals will depict on their Russian web sites significantly higher levels of masculinity-oriented cultural values than the French, Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish multinationals will.*

*H6g: the French, Belgian, and Italian multinationals will depict on their Turkish web sites significantly higher levels of high context-oriented cultural values than the German, British, Swiss, Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish multinationals will.*

*H6h: the French, Belgian, and Italian multinationals will depict on their Russian web sites significantly higher levels of high context-oriented cultural values than the German, British, Swiss, Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish multinationals will.*

*H6i: the German, British, Swiss, Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish multinationals will depict on their Turkish web sites significantly higher levels of low context-oriented cultural values than the French, Belgian, and Italian multinationals will.*

*H6j: the German, British, Swiss, Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish multinationals will depict on their Russian web sites significantly higher levels of low context-oriented cultural values than the French, Belgian, and Italian multinationals will.*

*H6k: the Japanese multinationals will depict on their Turkish web sites significantly higher levels of masculinity-oriented cultural values than the South Korean and Taiwanese multinationals will.*

*H6l: the Japanese multinationals will depict on their Russian web sites significantly higher levels of masculinity-oriented cultural values than the South Korean and Taiwanese multinationals will.*

## 5. Methodology

The objective of the study is to analyze whether the international web sites of the US, European, and Asia-Pacific multinationals depict local cultural values. In other words, the paper shows the extent to which the multinationals in the study take into account cultural values of the countries in question, Russia and Turkey, in their web communications materials. To this end, we examined all the Russian and Turkish web sites of Fortune 500 and Fortune Global 500 multinationals from the US, Europe, and Asia-Pacific within the cultural values framework that comprises the cultural typologies by Hofstede [1980; 2001] and Hall [1976] and that was used in Singh [2003], Singh and Matsuo [2004], Singh et al [2003], and Singh et al [2005a].

The study includes both qualitative and quantitative research methods. In the first part, content analysis, a useful measurement tool in web communication research [Okazaki and Rivas, 2002], is used to evaluate the cultural depiction on the Russian and Turkish web sites of the multinationals. Cultural scores are calculated using the cultural coding sheet suggested by Singh and Matsuo [2004] and then these scores were compared to the scores of the individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power-distance, masculinity dimensions in Hofstede [2001] and the scores of the high- and low-context dimensions in Hall [1976]. The degree of depiction of each cultural value category is evaluated on a five-point scale: one (not depicted), two (slightly depicted), three (depicted), four (nicely depicted), and five (prominently depicted). Two coders native in Russian and two other coders native in Turkish rated the cultural depictions in seven cultural dimensions and total 37 cultural values. The coders implemented a sample session prior to the actual coding and the results were satisfactory; the inter-coder reliability was 85 percent.

In the second part, ANOVA was used to see whether cultural depictions differ according to country or region (USA, Europe, and Asia-Pacific). The seven cultural dimensions used in the study act as dependent variable and the country or region of multinationals whose web sites are analyzed acts as independent variables in the ANOVA design.

**Study Sample:** All 2007 Fortune 500 America's largest corporations that have Russian and Turkish web sites are included in the US sample used in the study; similarly, all 2007 Fortune Global 500 corporations that have Russian and Turkish web sites are included in the European and Asia-Pacific sample used in the study. Therefore, comparisons were made related to the same companies' web sites in Turkey and Russia. If a company had Turkish web site but did not have Russian web site, we excluded this company. This was necessary in order to provide a meaningful comparison. This fact also prevented us from increasing the number of websites as our sample included all available company sites. Similarly, we could not perform industry comparison analyses as sample sizes were very low. The web sites are mostly B2C type sites. The overall study sample included 52 US, 43 European, and 20 Asia-Pacific multinationals. The European sample consists of 11 multinationals from Germany, nine from France, eight from the UK, six from Switzerland, four from Holland, two from Sweden, and one from Belgium, Finland, and Italy, each. The Asia-Pacific sample consists of 16 multinationals from Japan, three from South Korea, and one from Taiwan. Therefore, a total of 115 web sites were included in the study. All major web pages of the web site were analyzed. On average, 15-20 web pages per web site (almost 2000 web pages) were content analyzed for all 37 cultural value categories included in the cultural value framework.

**Reliability:** To determine the coefficient of inter-coder reliability for 37 cultural values, we utilized the percentage of agreement method as suggested by Kassarian [1977]. The overall inter-coder reliabilities were 87.4 percent for the Turkish sample and 88.6 percent for the Russian sample; the inter-coder reliabilities for USA, Europe, and Asia-Pacific were 86.3 percent, 87.1 percent, and 91.4 percent, respectively, for the Turkish sample and 88.3 percent, 90.6 percent, and 93.7 percent, respectively, for the Russian sample.

In the study, we mainly provided a regional (the US, Europe, and Asia-Pacific) comparative analysis. The countries in the European sample differ in terms of Hofstede's and Hall's typologies whereas countries in the Asia-Pacific do not differ in terms of these two typologies, except for the masculinity dimension in Hofstede's typology. Therefore, in order to test whether there are differences among countries in the European sample regarding these two typologies and in the Asia-Pacific sample regarding just the masculinity dimension in the Hofstede's typology, we did t-tests; t-test indicated whether high and low groups of countries in the European and the Asia-Pacific samples differed in terms of depiction of cultural values on their Russian and Turkish web sites.

**6. Results**

Table 4 and Table 5 show the mean values and ANOVA results with respect to seven cultural dimensions for Turkish and Russian samples, respectively.

Table 4: Cultural Dimensions (Mean values and ANOVA results for Turkey)

Dimensions	Mean Values				F-value	Group Comparisons Tukey Test
	Overall	USA	Europe	Asia-Pacific		
Individualism	2.66	2.98	2.86	2.12	8.56**	USA & EU > AP
Collectivism	2.24	2.14	2.04	2.58	5.80**	AP > EU & USA
Uncertainty Avoidance	2.86	2.94	2.66	3.02	5.39*	USA & AP > EU
Power Distance	3.17	2.92	2.99	3.63	13.22**	AP > USA & EU
Masculinity	2.63	2.68	2.55	2.64	0.427	NS
Low-context	2.18	2.03	2.31	2.28	3.35*	EU > USA
High-context	2.87	2.57	2.69	3.36	9.43**	AP > EU & USA

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01; Tukey test significant at <0.05 level; EU: Europe, AP: Asia-Pacific, NS: Not Significant.

Table 5: Cultural Dimensions (Mean values and ANOVA results for Russia)

Dimensions	Mean Values				F-value	Group Comparisons Tukey Test
	Overall	USA	Europe	Asia-Pacific		
Individualism	2.71	3.01	2.69	2.44	3.409*	USA > AP
Collectivism	2.21	2.04	1.66	2.93	11.17**	AP > USA & EU
Uncertainty Avoidance	2.67	2.79	2.34	3.06	15.56**	AP & USA > EU
Power Distance	3.03	2.73	2.97	3.41	4.333*	AP > USA
Masculinity	2.54	2.48	2.51	2.76	1.757	NS
Low-context	2.28	1.98	2.53	2.35	7.74*	EU > USA
High-context	3.24	2.81	3.43	3.93	66.018**	AP > USA & EU; EU > USA

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01; Tukey test significant at <0.05 level; EU: Europe, AP: Asia-Pacific, NS: Not Significant.

Since the cultural values were rated from one (lowest-not depicted) to five (highest-prominently depicted), we took 2.5 as the point distinguishing high and low levels; values below 2.5 are low level of depictions whereas those 2.5 and higher are high level of depictions. Similarly, we took 50 as the point distinguishing low and high levels in the Hofstede’s framework. Table 6 and Table 7 below show the results of hypotheses testing.

Table 6: Hypotheses Testing Results for Turkey

Hypotheses	Test Results			
	Overall	USA	Europe	Asia-Pacific
H1a: Turkey low on individualism	X	X	X	✓
H2a: Turkey high on uncertainty avoidance	✓	✓	✓	✓
H3a: Turkey high on power distance	✓	✓	✓	✓
H4a: Turkey low on masculinity	X	X	X	X
H5a: Turkey low on low-context culture	✓	✓	✓	✓

✓= Supported, X= Not Supported

Table 7: Hypotheses Testing Results for Russia

Hypotheses	Test Results			
	Overall	USA	Europe	Asia-Pacific
H1b: Russia low on individualism	X	X	X	✓
H2b: Russia high on uncertainty avoidance	✓	✓	X	✓
H3b: Russia high on power distance	✓	✓	✓	✓
H4b: Russia low on masculinity	X	✓	X	X
H5b: Russia low on low-context culture	✓	✓	X	✓

✓= Supported, X= Not Supported

*Individualism-Collectivism:* With respect to individualism, the mean values in the Turkish sample are 2.66, 2.98, 2.86, and 2.12 for Overall, USA, Europe, and Asia-Pacific samples, respectively; the US and European samples are significantly different and have higher mean values than that of the Asia-Pacific sample (F=8.56, p<0.01). This means that H1a is not supported for Overall, the US, and the European samples. However, the mean

score of the Asia-Pacific sample is 2.12, which lends support to H1a. For the Russian sample, the mean values are 2.71, 3.01, 2.69, and 2.44 for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples, respectively. The US sample is significantly different and has higher mean values than that of the Asia-Pacific sample ( $F=3.409$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Therefore, while H1b is not supported for Overall, the US, and the European samples, it is supported by the Asia-Pacific sample.

On the collectivism dimension, the mean values in the Turkish sample are 2.24, 2.14, 2.04, and 2.58 for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples, respectively. The Asia-Pacific sample is significantly different and has higher mean values than the US and the European samples ( $F=5.80$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Therefore, from the collectivism side, H1a is not supported either for Overall, the US, and the European samples whereas it is supported for the Asia-Pacific sample. For the Russian sample, the mean values are 2.21, 2.04, 1.66, and 2.93 for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples, respectively. The Asia-Pacific sample is significantly different and has higher mean values than that of the US and the European samples ( $F=11.17$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Therefore, while H1b is not supported for Overall, the US, and the European samples, it is supported by the Asia-Pacific sample.

*Uncertainty Avoidance:* For the uncertainty avoidance dimension, the mean values for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples are 2.86, 2.94, 2.66, and 3.02, respectively, for the Turkish sample. Therefore, H2a is supported for all groups and the US and the Asia-Pacific groups have significantly higher mean values than that of the European sample ( $F=5.39$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). For the Russian sample, the mean values are 2.67, 2.79, 2.34, and 3.06 for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples, respectively; the Asia-Pacific and the US samples are significantly different and have higher mean values than that of the European sample ( $F=15.56$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Therefore, H2b is supported for all but the European sample.

*Power Distance:* For the power distance dimension, the mean values for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples are 3.17, 2.92, 2.99, and 3.63, respectively, for the Turkish sample. Therefore, H3a is supported for all groups and the Asia-Pacific group has significantly higher mean values than those of the US and the European samples ( $F=13.22$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). For the Russian sample, the mean values are 3.03, 2.73, 2.97, and 3.41 for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples, respectively; the Asia-Pacific sample is significantly different and has higher mean values than that of the US sample ( $F=4.333$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Therefore, H3b is supported in the sense that the mean values for all samples are higher than 2.5. However, we see lower mean values than Turkish sample. As Russia (93) scores higher on the power distance than Turkey (66), it was expected that Russian mean values were higher than Turkish ones. So, from this point of view, multinationals did not reflect the “high” and “very high” difference on the power distance dimension.

*Masculinity-Femininity:* With respect to the masculinity-femininity dimension, the mean values in the Turkish sample are 2.63, 2.68, 2.55, and 2.64 for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples, respectively. The groups are not significantly different from each other ( $F=0.427$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Thus, H4a is not supported for any group. For the Russian sample, the mean values are 2.54, 2.48, 2.51, and 2.76 for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples, respectively. The groups are not significantly different from each other ( $F=1.757$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Thus, H4b is not supported for any but the US sample.

*Low-context culture:* In the low-context culture dimension, the mean values in the Turkish sample are 2.18, 2.03, 2.31, and 2.28 for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples, respectively. Thus, H5a is supported for all groups. The European sample is significantly different than the US sample and has higher mean values ( $F=3.35$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). For the Russian sample, the mean values are 2.28, 1.98, 2.53, and 2.35 for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples, respectively. Thus, H5b is supported all but the European sample. The European sample is significantly different than the US sample and has higher mean values ( $F=7.74$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

*High-context culture:* Last, in the high-context culture dimension, the mean values in the Turkish sample are 2.87, 2.57, 2.69, and 3.36 for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples, respectively. Thus, from the high-context culture side, H5a is also supported for all groups. The Asia-Pacific sample is significantly different than the US and the European samples and has significantly higher mean values ( $F=9.43$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). For the Russian sample, the mean values are 3.24, 2.81, 3.43, and 3.93 for Overall, the US, the European, and the Asia-Pacific samples, respectively. Thus, H5b is also supported all samples. The Asia-Pacific sample is significantly different and has higher mean values than the US and the European samples and the European sample is also significantly different and has higher mean values than the US sample ( $F=66.018$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

So far, we saw the overall results related to the seven culture dimensions. Now let us examine the results related to 37 culture values belonging to the seven culture dimensions. Table 8 and Table 9 show the results regarding 37 culture values.

Table 8: Cultural Values (Mean Values and ANOVA Results for Turkey)

Cultural Dimensions	Mean Values				F-value	Group Comparisons Tukey Test
	Overall	USA	Europe	Asia-Pacific		
<b>Collectivism</b>						
Community	2.16	2.00	1.84	2.65	6.45**	AP > USA & EU
Clubs	2.13	1.99	2.24	2.81	2.02*	AP > USA
Newsletter	3.65	3.61	3.48	3.88	2.22*	AP > EU
Family	2.07	2.14	2.32	1.89	2.16	NS
Symbols	1.75	1.66	1.75	2.55	4.36**	AP > USA & EU
Loyalty	1.60	1.88	1.78	1.25	3.16*	USA > AP
Local Web Sites	1.74	1.77	1.49	2.24	4.70**	AP > EU
<b>Individualism</b>						
Privacy	2.96	3.48	2.99	2.24	7.18**	USA>EU&AP; EU>AP
Independence	2.63	2.77	2.64	2.30	6.97**	USA&EU>AP
Uniqueness	3.13	3.29	3.38	2.71	6.18**	USA & EU > AP
Personalization	2.04	2.16	1.75	2.20	2.87	NS
<b>Uncertainty Avoidance</b>						
Customer Service	3.34	3.25	3.35	3.42	0.32	NS
Navigation	3.83	3.83	3.81	3.85	0.02	NS
Local Stores	3.79	3.72	3.27	4.40	4.84**	PR > EU
Local Terminology	2.91	3.24	2.66	2.85	6.35**	USA > EU
Free Trail	1.74	1.88	1.24	2.12	6.01**	USA & AP > EU
Testimonial	2.21	2.30	1.93	2.42	0.71	NS
Toll Free Numbers	2.19	2.37	2.11	2.10	0.43	NS
Tradition	2.33	2.20	2.26	2.93	7.81**	AP > USA & EU
<b>Power Distance</b>						
Hierarchy	2.66	2.88	2.45	2.94	3.46*	AP > EU
Pictures of CEO	3.02	2.90	3.02	3.70	8.27**	AP > USA & EU
Quality	2.89	2.82	2.97	4.08	12.34**	AP > USA & EU
Vision	3.19	3.09	3.29	3.83	2.23*	AP > USA
Pride of Ownership	3.29	2.92	3.16	3.79	2.12*	AP > USA & EU
Titles	3.13	2.73	3.09	3.59	2.76*	AP > USA
<b>Masculinity</b>						
Games	1.20	1.26	1.22	1.13	0.28	NS
Realism	3.55	3.45	3.51	3.70	0.68	NS
Effectiveness	4.01	4.05	3.63	4.35	7.05**	USA & AP > EU
Gender Roles	1.74	1.99	1.85	1.38	3.31*	USA > AP
<b>Low Context</b>						
Rank	2.60	2.58	2.95	2.27	3.35*	EU > AP
Hardsell	2.04	1.79	2.02	2.32	1.46	NS
Explicit Comparisons	1.10	1.03	1.03	1.25	8.57**	AP > USA & EU
Superlatives	2.31	2.43	2.40	2.12	0.59	NS
Terms & Conditions	2.95	2.28	3.11	3.45	5.87**	AP & EU > USA
<b>High Context</b>						
Politeness	3.18	2.76	2.82	3.97	12.46**	AP > USA & EU
Softsell	2.98	2.69	3.06	3.21	6.89*	AP & EU > USA
Esthetics	2.81	2.66	2.62	3.35	9.37**	AP > USA & EU

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01; Tukey test significant at <0.05 level; EU: Europe, AP: Asia-Pacific, NS: Not Significant

Table 9: Cultural Features (Mean Values and ANOVA Results for Russia)

Cultural Dimensions	Mean Values				F-value	Group Comparisons Tukey Test
	Overall	USA	Europe	Asia-Pacific		
<b>Collectivism</b>						
Community	2.14	1.64	1.81	2.97	9.47**	AP > USA & EU
Clubs	2.02	1.89	1.15	3.03	10.63**	AP > USA & EU
Newsletter	2.84	2.97	2.63	2.94	3.201*	AP & USA > EU
Family	2.46	2.97	1.50	2.96	67.85**	AP & USA > EU
Symbols	1.86	1.36	1.29	2.93	8.433**	AP > USA & EU
Loyalty	2.38	2.44	1.84	2.87	5.55**	AP > EU
Local Web Sites	2.18	2.43	1.59	2.77	4.27**	AP > EU
<b>Individualism</b>						
Privacy	2.43	2.56	2.24	2.47	0.835	NS
Independence	3.26	3.53	3.35	2.90	3.282*	USA > AP
Uniqueness	3.39	3.85	3.51	2.82	4.563*	USA > EU
Personalization	1.63	1.59	1.65	1.67	1.824	NS
<b>Uncertainty Avoidance</b>						
Customer Service	2.68	2.63	2.09	4.00	17.53**	AP > USA & EU; USA > EU
Navigation	3.69	3.77	3.55	3.90	5.306**	AP & USA > EU
Local Stores	3.10	3.05	2.94	3.57	2.461	NS
Local Terminology	2.37	3.47	3.94	4.43	20.834**	AP > USA & EU; EU > USA
Free Trail	1.76	2.03	1.26	2.10	8.857**	AP > EU; USA > EU
Testimonial	1.19	1.36	1.07	1.00	3.742*	USA > EU & AP
Toll Free Numbers	2.48	3.20	1.59	2.45	13.545**	USA > EU
Tradition	2.90	2.03	3.33	4.25	68.505**	AP > USA & EU; EU > USA
<b>Power Distance</b>						
Hierarchy	2.87	2.64	2.56	3.42	9.58**	AP > USA & EU
Pictures of CEO	2.93	2.45	3.09	3.25	6.82**	AP > USA
Quality	3.06	2.65	2.97	3.57	11.973**	AP > USA & EU; EU > USA
Vision	3.09	2.69	2.86	3.72	5.189**	AP > USA; EU > USA
Pride of Ownership	3.08	3.14	3.33	2.77	3.301*	EU > AP
Titles	3.01	3.06	2.52	3.46	7.41**	AP & USA > EU
<b>Masculinity</b>						
Games	1.42	1.40	1.29	1.75	1.929	NS
Realism	3.32	3.43	3.17	3.37	4.110*	USA > EU
Effectiveness	3.28	2.94	3.40	3.92	15.329**	AP > USA & EU; EU > USA
Gender Roles	2.13	2.15	2.17	2.00	0.164	NS
<b>Low Context</b>						
Rank	2.21	1.90	2.50	2.43	4.557*	EU > USA
Hardsell	2.20	1.79	2.40	2.27	23.689**	AP & EU > USA
Explicit Comparisons	2.09	1.38	2.46	1.93	47.910**	EU & AP > USA
Superlatives	3.17	2.95	3.22	2.60	4.309*	EU > USA
Terms & Conditions	1.92	1.87	2.07	1.75	1.218	NS
<b>High Context</b>						
Politeness	3.34	3.04	3.46	3.82	10.888**	AP > USA; EU > USA
Softsell	3.03	2.72	3.28	3.32	14.649**	AP > USA; EU > USA
Esthetics	3.69	3.46	3.67	4.32	10.886**	AP > USA & EU

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01; Tukey test significant at <0.05 level; EU: Europe, AP: Asia-Pacific, NS: Not Significant

In the collectivism dimension, the Asia-Pacific sample generally has significantly higher mean values than the US and the European samples in both Turkish and Russian group analyses. Community, clubs, symbols, and local web sites are the values for which the Asia-Pacific sample has relatively higher mean values and significant than the other two samples.

In the individualism dimension, the US and European samples have generally higher and significant mean values than the Asia-Pacific sample. In the Turkish group analysis, the US and the European samples have significantly higher values regarding privacy, independence, and uniqueness values whereas in the Russian group analysis, the US sample has significantly higher values concerning independence and uniqueness values.

In the uncertainty avoidance dimension, we see high values with respect to customer service, navigation, local stores, local terminology, and toll free numbers values while free trials and testimonials values have low values. While in the Russian group analysis, the Asia-Pacific sample has generally significantly higher mean values than the other samples, this is not much the case in the Turkish group analysis as the US sample has also higher values together with the Asia-Pacific sample.

In the power distance dimension, the Asia-Pacific sample has significantly different and have higher mean values than those of the other groups in both the Turkish and the Russian groups' analyses. Hierarchy, pictures of CEOs, quality, vision, and titles values have significantly higher mean values related to the Asia-Pacific sample in both the Turkish and the Russian group' analyses.

In the masculinity dimension, there are mixed results; there are no significant differences regarding games in both the Russian and the Turkish groups' analyses. While there are no significant results among groups concerning the realism feature in the Turkish group's analysis, there are significant differences in this feature in the Russian group's analysis and the US sample has higher values than the European sample. With respect to the effectiveness feature, the US and the Asia-Pacific samples have significantly different and higher than the European sample. The gender roles feature is not significantly different among groups in the Russian group's analysis while it is significantly different in the Turkish group's analysis, the US sample being significantly different and higher than the European sample.

In the low-context culture dimension, the European and the Asia-Pacific samples have generally significantly higher mean values. The US sample has low scores related to explicit comparisons, terms and conditions, rank, hardsell, and superlatives values.

In the high-context culture dimension, the Asia-Pacific sample has significantly different and higher mean values than the other samples in both the Turkish and the Russian groups' analyses. Second, the European sample is generally significantly different and higher than the US sample.

Table 10 shows the last part of analyses related to the comparisons of the European countries among themselves and the Asia-Pacific countries among themselves.

Table 10: European and Asia-Pacific Countries: T-test and Hypotheses Test Results

Hypotheses	Russian Sites		Turkish Sites	
	t-value	Hypothesis Test Result	t-value	Hypothesis Test Result
H6a: Uncertainty avoidance - European Sample (Turkish sites)			3.316**	✓
H6b: Uncertainty avoidance - European Sample (Russian sites)	2.321*	✓		
H6c: Power Distance - European Sample (Turkish sites)			4.296**	✓
H6d: Power Distance - European Sample (Russian sites)	8.488**	✓		
H6e: Masculinity - European Sample (Turkish sites)			-0.605	X
H6f: Masculinity - European Sample (Russian sites)	-1.114	X		
H6g: High-context - European Sample (Turkish sites)			12.671**	✓
H6h: High-context - European Sample (Russian sites)	5.983**	✓		
H6i: Low-context - European Sample (Turkish sites)			3.324**	✓
H6j: Low-context - European Sample (Russian sites)	3.937**	✓		
H6k: Masculinity - Asia-Pacific Sample (Turkish sites)			0.571	X
H6l: Masculinity - Asia-Pacific Sample (Russian sites)	-0.776	X		

\*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01; ✓ = Supported, X = Not Supported

With respect to the European countries, the countries significantly differed in uncertainty avoidance, power distance, high, and low context dimension whereas they did not differ in the masculinity dimension. Similarly, Asia-Pacific countries also did not differ in the masculinity dimension.

## 7. Discussion

The results of the study for the Turkish web sites indicated local cultural depictions on the uncertainty avoidance, power distance, the low-context culture, and the high-context culture dimensions whereas there is no

such depictions related to the masculinity dimension. With respect to individualism and collectivism dimensions, while the Asia-Pacific sample provided local cultural depictions, the US and the European samples did not show such depictions. This may indicate that the US and the European multinationals did not prefer localization with respect to these dimensions. Privacy statement, independence theme, product uniqueness, and personalization are the items of the individualism dimensions. High mean values related to this dimension indicate that these multinationals preserved their individualistic tendencies. They value such features. In contrast, on the web sites of the multinationals from Asia-Pacific, we see high levels of depictions of community, clubs, and newsletter features indicating high levels of collectivism. Thus, on the Turkish sites, Western and Eastern multinationals have different orientation toward localization.

The results for the Russian web sites indicated local cultural depictions for the power distance and high-context culture dimensions; for the uncertainty avoidance and low-context culture dimensions, we also see local cultural depictions for all but the European sample. We see findings similar to the Turkish web sites on the individualism and collectivism dimensions in that while the Asia-Pacific sample provided local cultural depictions, the US and the European samples did not provide such depictions. With respect to the masculinity dimension, the Russian web sites did not provide local cultural depictions for all but the US sample.

When we compare the results of the Turkish and the Russian web sites, overall we see similar findings in that the multinationals depicted on their both Turkish and Russian web sites local cultural values related to *power distance* and *high-context cultures*. In addition, these multinationals also depicted such cultural values related to *uncertainty avoidance* on their Turkish and Russian web sites; the only exception here is the European multinationals as they did not depict local cultural values related to uncertainty avoidance as the mean value (2.34) is less than 2.50. However, the mean value (2.34) is still close to 2.50. Therefore, we may say that they also almost depicted uncertainty avoidance-oriented local cultural values. For the *masculinity* dimension, the multinationals did not depict local cultural values on their Turkish and Russian web sites; although the USA multinationals did depict masculinity-oriented local cultural values on their Russian web sites, the mean value is 2.48 and that means that they barely depicted masculinity-oriented local cultural values. On this dimension, high values related to the effectiveness and realism items resulted in high scores of the masculinity dimension, resulting from the fact that companies provided lots of information related to products and services such as durability, performance, and quality. In addition, although the European sample scores 53 on this dimension, we see that some countries in this sample are low (such as France 43, Netherlands 14, Sweden 5, and Finland 26). The low mean 2.48 should have partially resulted due to the existence of countries with the low scores in the European sample.

For the *low-context culture* dimension, the multinationals depicted local cultural values on their Turkish and Russian web sites; although the European multinationals did not depict such local cultural values on their Russian web sites, the mean value is 2.53 and that means that they almost depicted low-context culture-oriented local cultural values. Therefore, the European sample is not a serious exception on this dimension. With respect to the individualism and collectivism dimensions, we do not see local cultural depictions except by the Asia-Pacific multinationals.

In the individualism dimension, both Turkish and Russian samples provided the same results. However, we do not see variation on this dimension ( $F=0.454, p>0.05$ ). Similarly, there is not variation related to the collectivism dimension ( $F=0.759, p>0.05$ ), the masculinity dimension ( $F=0.862, p>0.05$ ), the low context dimension ( $F=0.648, p>0.05$ ), the uncertainty dimension ( $F=0.937, p>0.05$ ), and the power distance dimension ( $F=0.825, p>0.05$ ). The only significant variation is related to the high context dimension ( $F=4.43, p<0.05$ ). These indicate that out of seven dimensions, there are significant differences between the Russian and the Turkish samples regarding just one dimension. Therefore, we can say that there is not much variation between the Russian and the Turkish samples and the results are generalizable.

We see, especially in the Russian sample, that more hypotheses in the European sample were not supported compared to the US sample. The European sample consists of Germany, The UK, France, Switzerland, Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Finland, and Italy. We attribute higher number of not-supported hypotheses to the diversity that exists within the European sample. We acknowledge this fact as a limitation of these analyses. On the other hand, such a mixture was also necessary since the paper has a regional (the US, Europe, and Asia Pacific) focus. In hypotheses H6a through H6l, we broke down this diversity and did tests by classifying the European countries that are similar in country scores. Therefore, we addressed the limitation to some extent.

In sum, we see that the multinationals depicted some local cultural values on their international web sites as expected whereas they did not depict some local cultural values as well. We did not find support for following cultural dimensions: individualism, collectivism, and masculinity. Masculinity consists of games, realism, gender roles, and effectiveness. Games and gender roles values have low scores (1.20 and 1.74 in the Turkish sample and 1.42 and 2.13 in the Russian sample); therefore, these two values provided support for the hypothesis as Turkey and



Russia score low on this dimension. The other two values (realism and product effectiveness) of the masculinity dimension have high scores (3.55 and 4.01 in the Turkish sample and 3.32 and 3.28 in the Russian sample). Realism means that less fantasy and imagery information is depicted and instead the web site includes more actual, true-life, and to-the-point information. On the other hand, product effectiveness feature refers to the information related to product durability, quality, attributes, and robustness information. In terms of marketing and advertising point of view, such information related to realism and effectiveness is no doubt important and much information (not less) on these can help marketers create positive product perceptions on the minds' of consumers. Therefore, from the cultural point of view these two values reflect more masculinity (i.e. low femininity) since masculine cultures are assertive, ambitious, success and performance-oriented [Hofstede, 1980] and Russia and Turkey are rather feminine cultures; that's why the hypothesis stated low scores related to this dimension. The results indicated high scores and this can be explained by the fact that marketing concerns (e.g. efforts to create strong product image) may be more important and thus accounted for this high values.

With respect to individualism and collectivism dimensions (the other two hypotheses not supported), there are interesting findings related to the US and the European samples; as the Asia-Pacific sample scored low (2.12 in the Turkish sample and 2.44 in the Russian sample) in the individualism dimension and scored high (2.58 in the Turkish sample and 2.93 in the Russian sample) in the collectivism dimensions, the Asia-Pacific sample provides support for these hypotheses (see Tables 3 through 6). The US and the European multinationals seem to have reflected their own cultural values on the individualism and the collectivism dimensions. If we modify the related hypotheses according to the US and the European scores in the Hofstede's framework, the modified hypotheses ( $H_M$ ) would be as follows:

*H1a<sub>M</sub>: The Turkish web sites of the US and the European multinationals will depict high levels of the individualism-oriented values and low levels of the collectivism-oriented values.*

*H1b<sub>M</sub>: The Russian web sites of the US and the European multinationals will depict high levels of the individualism-oriented values and low levels of the collectivism-oriented values.*

If we tested these hypotheses, the results would then indicate support for H1a<sub>M</sub> and H1b<sub>M</sub>, which were not supported earlier (H1a and H1b). Therefore, we may say that the US and the European may have reflected their own cultural values on these dimensions rather than local cultural values.

The results of the comparisons of the European countries and the Asia-Pacific countries indicated similar results with the results of the regional comparison. While hypotheses were supported for uncertainty avoidance, power distance, high, and low context cultures dimensions, the hypotheses related to the masculinity dimension were not supported. This fact also provides support for the feature of the masculinity dimension, which was explained above.

## 8. Research Implications

The implications of the study for academia are as follows. Since research in web localization issues is new and has been growing recently, more empirical studies especially with different and/or mixed cultural frameworks and from different unstudied cultures are needed to enlarge the empirical base and the scope of this research stream. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that many countries do not have homogenous cultures. Countries such as U.S, U.K, Australia, Canada, South Africa, France etc have large ethnic populations and it is important to consider whether marketers need to further localize their web communications to meet cultural expectations of these large ethnic consumer segments. Already in the US there is evidence that several companies are localizing their web content to meet Hispanic online consumer's cultural and language expectations. It will be interesting to explore how levels of acculturation among ethnic consumers may impact their web localization expectations. Another interesting area which seems to be under-researched in the web localization space is how localization of b2c and b2b websites may differ. Future research may explore if the Singh and Matsuo's [2004] cultural value framework is applicable to analyze web localization efforts on b2b sites or other unique localization dimensions may be needed. From a methodological perspective this study relied on content analysis of web sites to understand the degree to which companies are culturally localizing their websites. Future research may triangulate this method by using surveys of local consumers to identify their expectations of cultural localization of websites. Furthermore surveys of managers responsible for web localization strategies can also reveal valuable insights into specific issues and challenges associated with web localization. Recent turmoil and pro-democracy demonstrations in Middle Eastern countries has shown the impact that social media can have on people and the way people communicate. Localization of social media may play an important role to effectively reach geographically dispersed and multilingual user communities. Thus, in terms of expanding the context of web localization research it may be interesting to see how companies are localizing their social media efforts to meet different socialization norms of countries.

## 9. Implications for Practice

According to industry consultant John Yunker [2005], companies seem to be lacking knowledge, skills, and frameworks that can facilitate their localization efforts. This study demonstrates how to assess cultural content on the web and thus may provide marketers with insights into culturally customizing their international websites. Furthermore, the implication of this study for marketing practitioners is that multinationals do take into account or depict local cultural values on their international web sites, but not fully. The multinationals rather seem to reflect a multi-focus on their web communication strategies. This multi-focus is mainly derived by local (foreign market) culture as indicated by the results providing support for local cultural depiction. Then, this focus is supported by marketing efforts to create strong product images. Last, the multinationals also reflect their own cultural values on their international web sites. In sum, this multi-focus incorporates: local cultural values, marketing concerns, and multinationals' their own national cultures. Therefore, marketing professionals or other professionals in charge of web communications may explore the use of such a multi-focus in their web communication strategies if they want to take the multinationals as benchmarks. Another implication or recommendation for marketing practitioners is that during our intensive analysis of the web sites of the multinationals, we observed best and worst practices. It is very interesting that some multinationals, especially the US and the European, do not pay attention to one of the most important cultural feature, local language. There is limited information on the web sites in Turkish and Russian languages whereas there is more information in the native languages of these multinationals. From the consumer perspective, consumers prefer web sites in their local languages [Ferranti 1999; Hermeking 2005; Lynch et al 2001; Luna et al 2002; Singh and Pereira 2005; Singh et al 2006]. Limited local language usage prevents communicating with stakeholders and marketing and promoting image. Therefore, local language should be used in international web sites. The recommendation for practitioners is that they should not ignore local language. Finally, in this study the sample included almost 115 multinational and almost 2000 web pages. We hope this extensive, laborious and time-consuming effort will help provide both academics and managers with more generalizable results to guide their future web localization related efforts.

## 10. Conclusion

Berthon et al [1996] indicated that international marketers need to pay close attention to the content of the marketing communications on the web because of the potential to reach global audience. Similarly, Taylor [2005] argued that more research is needed to find out the influence of culture on international advertising practices. This study is one attempt to examine the influence of culture on web communications. Thus, this study contributes to the newly growing stream of scholarship on the subject of web localization in general and cultural depiction or standardization-localization of cultural values on the web in particular. As this stream of research has been developing recently, there is no consensus yet regarding whether multinationals take into account or depict local cultural values on their international web sites. In an attempt to provide empirical evidence from two different cultural settings (Russia and Turkey) and to provide a regional perspective, we examined through both qualitative and quantitative analyses the international (Russian and Turkish) web sites of 115 multinationals from the US, Europe, and Asia-Pacific with respect to 37 cultural values under seven cultural dimensions to find out whether these multinationals depict local cultural values on their international web sites. Based on the results, we see that the multinationals from the US, Europe, and Asia-Pacific generally depict local cultural values on their Turkish and Russian web sites and thus we did find support for cultural localization on the web. However, marketing concerns (as explained in the discussions of findings related to the masculinity dimension), sometimes seem to affect localization efforts as well.

In conclusion, this study adds to the growing literature related to web localization issues by providing evidence related to cultural customization efforts of multinationals worldwide.

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