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## It can pay to customise your website to the culture you target: A comparison of Korean and US e-commerce consumers

Research by Dongwoo Ko, Yuri Seo and Sang-Uk Jung has investigated whether and when culturally customised websites are an effective way to influence consumers in their online purchasing decisions.\*\* E-commerce activities often transcend borders by operating across multiple economies, reaching consumers from a range of cultures at an accelerated pace. The researchers consider the rapid emergence and growth of e-commerce in Asian countries, the region's distinct culture and unique cultural dimensions, and Asia's projected future growth within the global e-commerce landscape. Through conducting two empirical studies, focusing on the experience of consumers from two distinct cultural environments, Korea and the United States, Ko, Seo and Jung set out to identify cultural differences between websites of Korean and US travel agencies; and, secondly, to investigate the influence of culturally customised websites on willingness to pay (WTP) in these two markets. They draw on the theory of processing fluency (described as the extent of metacognitive ease or effort with which people process information). In this study, processing fluency was measured as the time (in minutes) it took participants to complete travel bookings online, across either culturally congruent or incongruent platforms.

Online decisions involve extensive information processing in a complex information environment. Ko, Seo and Jung suggest that congruence, or "fit", between an individual's cultural background and the features of a culturally customised website may influence the individual's online purchase decisions. The study shows that cultural congruence is associated positively with processing fluency in online purchase decisions. A culturally congruent website increases consumers' willingness to pay when compared with a culturally incongruent website, as the online content is more familiar and requires less effort to process. Consumers will therefore experience higher levels of processing fluency when they browse and purchase from websites that are perceived to be culturally congruent.

The findings also suggest that cultural congruence between a consumer's background and a website's features is more effective in the context of some cultures than others, with cultural dimensions influencing a wide range of consumer perceptions and attitudes. The dimension of uncertainty avoidance (the extent to which members of a culture attempt to cope with anxiety by minimising uncertainty and risks) was found to influence consumers' processing fluency, and therefore online purchase decisions. This was especially true for the Korean participants. Korean consumers had a high level of uncertainty avoidance, and therefore encountered greater difficulties in processing culturally incongruent websites than US consumers, who exhibited low uncertainty avoidance. This indicates that culturally customised websites influence Korean consumers' willingness to pay significantly more than US consumers.

Importantly for online marketers, managers and business owners, the authors stress that an understanding of cultural characteristics in a target market should be advanced before designing culturally customised websites. Although culturally customised websites are often shown to have a positive impact on consumers' processing fluency, and overall willingness to pay, there are distinct cultural differences in consumers' perceptual judgment of a website's content. Overall, culturally customised websites are more important for consumers in cultures that are characterised by higher levels of uncertainty avoidance.

\*\*The full study results are available in an article authored by Dongwoo Ko, Yuri Seo and Sang-Uk Jung: "Examining the effect of cultural congruence, processing fluency, and uncertainty avoidance in online purchase decisions in the US and Korea" *Marketing Letters*, Vol. 26, pp. 377-390. (2015)

