

# The Differential Efficacy of Ecommerce Sites: South Korea Vis-à-vis United States

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## ABSTRACT

Every shopper's cultural heritage affects how one shops depending on what part of the globe the shopper lives. Referencing Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions [0], this paper examines two countries, the United States and South Korea citing differences (and similarities) of how their ecommerce sites were designed and their presumed effectiveness to their intended users.

## KEYWORDS

Ecommerce, Multicultural, Design, Languages, User Interface

## INTRODUCTION

The United States has one of the largest ecommerce sites in the world, amazon.com. Per the Alexa traffic web analytic site, the traffic it generates each day makes it the number 1 ecommerce site that buyers go to in the U.S. and in the world [4]. On the other hand, one of South Korea's biggest online site, 11st.co.kr is lesser known globally but is as quite popular in South Korea [9]. Comparing the two ecommerce sites side-by-side with the latter in its English version will not show much difference in both design and use of ecommerce site functionalities that much. But when the Korean version is viewed and compared to amazon.com or to its English version, the differences on the presentation is much more distinguished. Now cross-referencing Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions on the conduct of their design may help anyone understand the rationale of the designers' choices.

## CULTURAL MODELS

To investigate the influence of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions to the ecommerce site design, it is imperative to compare the United States with South Korea.

### Power Distance

This is the cultural dimension that declares all people in the society are not equal. Hofstede defines this as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally [0]."

The United States scored lower in Power Distance dimension (40) than South Korea. It implies that Americans understand that the use of power is legitimate but they also see it as subject to scrutiny. It may also denote that hierarchy could mean inequality of roles established just for convenience [2].

South Korea scored near the middle in Power Distance (60). This means that it leans towards a slightly hierarchical country [1]. Its citizens may accept the fact that there's an order of how society places them. This also connotes that they respect authority and will perform what's asked of them with minimal questions [1].

### Individualism

This dimension offers the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members [0].

The United States is well known for its individualistic society. It's bill of rights is one of the most copied amendment by constitutions of other countries especially those previously colonized by the United States. U.S. citizens expect equality as a birth right and will fight and demand for it. It scored 91 in Geert Hofstede's tool making it one of the top individualistic countries in the world [2].

South Korea scored 18 suggesting that it is a very Collectivist country which manifests to its "citizen having a close but long-term commitment to the member 'group', be that of a family, extended family, or extended relationships [2]".

### Masculinity

This dimension is defined as "a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success." Feminism is defined as "a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success." [0].

The United States scored high in masculinity (62) while South Korea is low at (39). This shows that Americans are quite motivated to show their masculinity individually more or less the opposite of what South Koreans believes which is to "working in order to live" [2].

### Uncertainty Avoidance

This dimension has something "to do with the way that a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known. [2]."

The score of the U.S. is below average which could mean that Americans has a high regard to accepting "new ideas, innovative products and a willingness to try something new or different [2]."

With the score of 85, "South Korea is one of the most uncertainty avoiding countries. They maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas [1]".

### Long Term Orientation

This is described as “how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future. [0]”

The U.S. scored 26 here. This means that “Americans are prone to analyze new information to check whether it is true [2].” With the score of 100, “South Korea is one of the most pragmatic, long-term oriented societies. They live their lives guided by virtues and practical good examples [1].”

### Indulgence

This dimension is best described as “the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised.”

Americans scored high here (68) which means that they have “a tendency toward a relatively weak control over their impulse [2].” South Korea scored a low 29 which means that they belong to the Restraint society. “Restrained societies do not put much emphasis on leisure time and control the gratification of their desires [1].”

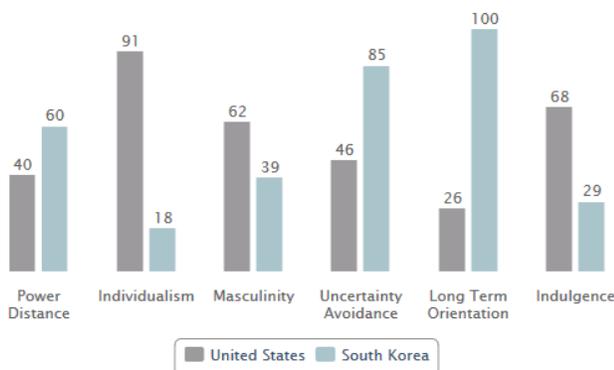


Figure 1. Cultural Dimensions Scores of United States in comparison with South Korea [2].

### CULTURAL IMPACTS ON ECOMMERCE DESIGNS

Based on the cultural dimension modeling, the ecommerce design features that Americans will prefer a less dense and informally organized structure with clear access to products that offer multiple choices of categories. They will also appreciate content that portrays activities of daily life, popular images, symbols and colors associated to the product they are looking for. They want to see the more current industry best practices that most ecommerce universally use. They would want flexible interactions that guide them in case they make an error with help guides on demand. Additional features that will likely assist the users on their quest to find the best product. based on materialism and consumerism should include common and simple language use complimented with sound, videos and metaphors that emphasize individualism.

South Koreans would want their ecommerce site to have a more formal layout that may include informative visuals and pictures of the products they want to buy. They would expect a clear navigation that present all information readily at once. Buyers will also appreciate the advertisement of known personalities that will help them understand the products they are buying. Designers might need to design the site to have limited but clear choices of products that they are selling. The ability to forward links by buyers of products they are interested in to their friends will be a welcomed feature.

### ECOMMERCE SITE PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

Taking the possible cultural impacts listed, I investigated if the current designs of 11st.co.kr Korean version and its English version would reflect them and if there are any notable differences that exist. I also made a comparison of its Korean version with Amazon.com.

#### 11st.co.kr Korean Version

The Korean Version appears to reflect all the cultural considerations as seen in their site [Figure 2]. It has a more structured (and formal) navigation architecture as evidenced by a prominent left navigation links and a boxed set of links to the right to include a footer type of universal links. The main section is dominated with images of models wearing items that the site sells that vividly inform buyers of the products that they sell and that they want buyers to buy. All product detail pages have a link to easily share the item through Facebook, Tweeter and Cacao [Figure 3]. Using a 1366 x 768 resolution window, the main page takes eight clicks on the vertical bar to go to the bottom signifying to the buyers the commerce site’s intent to fully inform the user of many of its available products.

#### 11st.co.kr English Version

The English version takes a more similar design approach as amazon.com. The content is not deep – it takes only three clicks to go to the bottom of each page making it less dense than the Korean version. The main navigational links are situated at the top understating the important categories

#### Amazon.com

The English version takes a more similar design approach as amazon.com. The content

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APPENDIX A: ECOMMERCE SITES



Figure 2. 11st.co.kr Korean version home page



Figure 3. 11st.co.kr Korean with Share Feature



Figure 4. 11st.co.kr Full Length Korean version

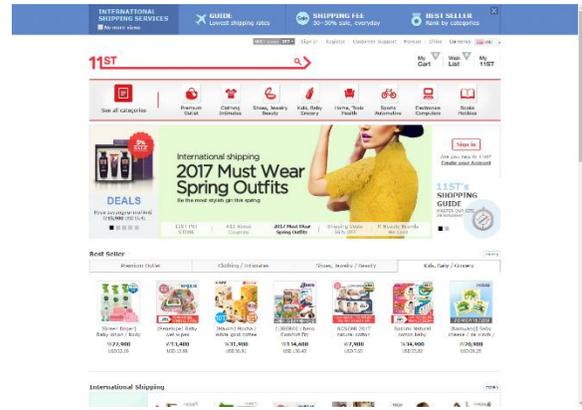
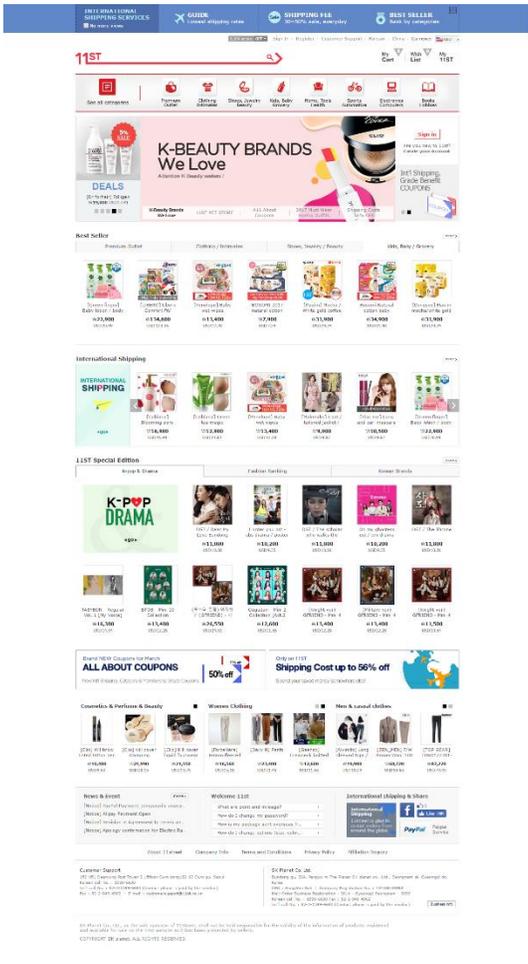


Figure 4. 11st.co.kr English version

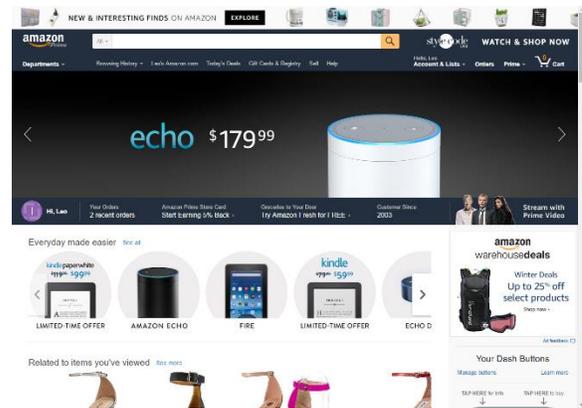


Figure 4. amazon.com Ecommerce Site

Figure 3. 11st.co.kr Full Length English version

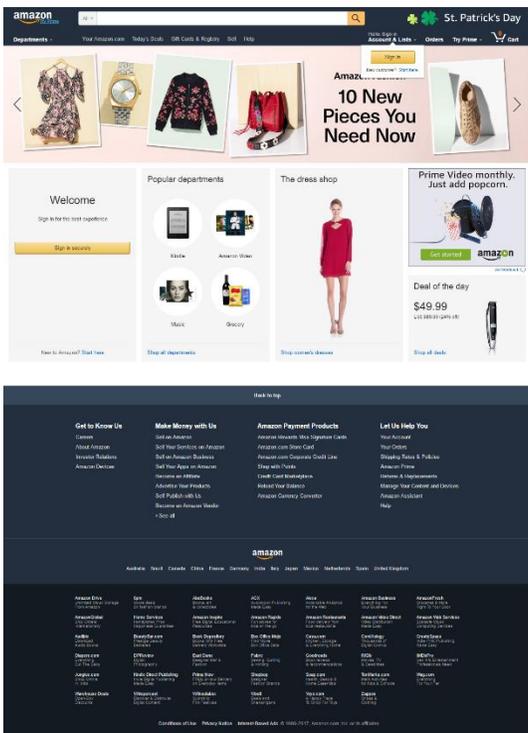


Figure 4. amazon.com Full Length Ecommerce site

