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Cross-Cultural Web Design: Differences in Chinese and Western web use and interface design.

Comparing English and Chinese user behaviors finding that culture influences how people view and use websites.

As companies become more international, it is also becoming important for companies to speak with customers from different cultures. For example, the customers who use an international company's website must be able to understand the site, even if they come from a different culture. Even though this is very important, there has not been a lot of research on how people from other cultures understand information and use webpages differently. To understand how culture influences the way people interpret information and use websites, I studied how Chinese people and western people use webpages. It turns out that Chinese people tend to understand information as a whole. The Chinese users often look all around the website. This is different from western people who are more specific and look at central places on the site. To explore this trend in depth, I made two websites based on a Chinese design and a western design. Both of these news sites had a version in English and one in Chinese. The big difference between the pages was the amount of information. The western site had a more plain design whereas the Chinese site had a lot of information. I created a test for users that measured their response times to complete certain tasks. These tasks asked the users to find different information on the news site and click on this information. The information users were asked to find were scattered. Half were outside the F-shaped pattern and the other half was inside of it. The F-pattern is a scanning pattern westerners usually use on websites (see picture).

This let me see how quickly and accurately people found information on these pages. I also asked users survey questions about their feelings toward the two websites. Finally, I analyzed the data to see if there was a big difference between the two groups. 101 people participated in the survey, 59 of them English speakers and 42 of them native Chinese speakers.

With this research I could draw three conclusions! 1) The way Chinese people and western people understand information was different, 2) western people use the F-pattern more than Chinese people, and 3) Chinese people liked and were comfortable with the western site! Also, the western people were as fast as Chinese people on both sites, but they did not like the Chinese version at all! However, Chinese people said they liked both sites very much and they were fast on both sites. This is very cool! It means that one type of interface can be made for international companies, as long as it follows a clean style, similar to the western sites.