

## THE DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS OF INDONESIAN AND GERMAN HOTEL WEBSITES: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the hotels website design of two culturally discrete countries. Indonesian hotels website represents the eastern countries that have high-context culture, while Germany hotel websites represent low-context culture. This study evaluates the website of both countries to seek differences in terms of design elements. This study used samples from 30 five-star hotels in Indonesia and 30 five-star hotels in Germany. Content analysis was used to evaluate the website design, the Mann-Whitney U test was performed to compare the differences between Indonesia and German hotel website design. The results of this study found that there is a significant difference in hotel website design between Indonesia and the German in terms of website presentation and navigation. The results proved that that hotel website from the high-context culture has lower quality than the hotel websites which have a low-context culture. Future research can be conduct by adding more samples to provide better statistical results as well as to add more hotel categories based on the classification.

Keywords: Hall's cultural dimension, hotel industry, Indonesia, Germany, website design.

### INTRODUCTION

Based on the latest global digital report, more than 84% of internet users are browsing for products or services before they buy it (Kemp, 2019). While travel category including accommodation, is the highest e-commerce spending with total \$750.7 Billion around the globe (Kemp, 2019). With the exponential growth of internet utilisation, hotel industry also needs to acquire the advantage of the internet. The thorough analysis of how the hotel can utilize the internet is utterly essential. Nowadays, the internet generates a more significant portion for hotel reservation than traditional channels. According to Brains (2016) 57% of hotel bookings were created from the internet where 65.4% of the bookings were made by corporate hotel websites. Consequently, building a good website is crucial for hotel companies to attain potential customers. In terms of the site, one of the most critical characteristics is design (Tarafdar and Zhang, 2005).

To deliver the hotel's global sales potential in its website, it is important to make careful consideration of how cultural content is presented on the website (Luna, Peracchio and de Juan, 2002). Many website designs and content across firms may be justified by cultural factors (Usunier, Roulin and Ivens, 2009). Such cultural factors includes the communications context (Baack and Singh, 2007; Usunier and Roulin, 2010), power distance (Burgmann, Kitchen and Williams, 2006; Usunier, Roulin and Ivens, 2009), individualism-collectivism (Baack and Singh,

2007; Usunier, Roulin and Ivens, 2009), masculinity-femininity (Baack and Singh, 2007), and foreign language (Luna, Peracchio and de Juan, 2002; Usunier and Roulin, 2010). In some cultures (e.g. Scandinavians and German) communication occurs through an explicit statement in text and speech, while in other cultures (East and Southeast Asia countries) messages include other communicative cues. These different communication cultures are expected to be implied in the ways websites presented online (Würtz, 2005). This research focuses on how communication context as the element of national culture, will have an impact on hotel websites.

Most research on the impact of culture on company websites has been carried out in the context of the industry generally both in business-to-business (B2B) or business-to-consumer (B2C) firms. However, studies examining the influence of culture on the website that made specifically to the specific industry are remaining scarce. In the hotel industry context, studies investigating corporate cultures in association with hotel management studies are prompting concern for future (Chen, R X Y. Cheung, C. Law, 2012). There are no exact best rules on how to present a website online; the way the company present its website will be according to the targeted audiences of the company (Sharp, 2001). The way the company manage visual representation, website design influences user preferences through the use of space, text, layout, sounds, and other interactive features (Visinescu *et al.*, 2015). It is expected that there will be differences in terms of website design between two countries in the research samples, based on the cultural difference in the communication. Using two countries as the basis of comparison for the national cultures, this research examines the influence of national cultures on website design characteristics in the hotel industry. As Germany and Indonesia represent two different cultures, this study will explore and compare the design characteristics of German and Indonesian hotel websites.

Indonesia has significant potential in terms of internet, internet penetration reaches 56% of the population or more than 150 million active internet user, this number has risen by 13% (17.3 million) from 2018 to 2019 (DataReportal, 2019b; Kemp, 2019). In terms of culture, Indonesia is considered to have high communication context dimensions (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001). In terms of the hotel industry, the hotel occupancy rate during 2018 is 55.33% on average from 33 provinces in Indonesia (Kementerian Pariwisata Republik Indonesia, 2018).

In comparison, Germany is considered to have low communication context cultures (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001). From the recent data for internet development, Germany is among the highest internet user countries in Europe with 96% penetration and it continues to grow (+5.8%) (DataReportal, 2019a). In the hotel industry in Germany, the occupancy rate is around 53.7% in 2018 (Eurostat, 2018). Using two discrete cultural dimensions of Indonesia and Germany; this

research is expected to be able to exemplify the impact of national cultures on corporate hotel websites.

### **Website design**

Having an internationally accessible website enables firms to communicate with a more substantial range of potential customers. Consequently, firms can build the company image and create a website comprising information to educate and inform audiences globally (Robbins and Stylianou, 2003). The design features of the website cover the presentation and a navigational component of the website (Wong and Law, 2005; Cyr, 2013). The design features of websites include presentation, navigation, security, and speed (Robbins and Stylianou, 2003; Cyr, 2013). The presentation features measure visual appearance, general attractiveness as well as the interactivity of websites (Abdullah, Jayaraman and Kamal, 2016). The features include the presence of animation, frames, graphics, sounds, and video (Evans and King, 1999; Robbins and Stylianou, 2003; Bilgihan and Bujisic, 2015). Navigation features will make visitors to have easier access to information (Fang and Holsapple, 2007; Bilgihan and Bujisic, 2015). Navigation features include hyperlinks to other sites (Fang and Holsapple, 2007), search engine, and site map (Merwe and Bekker, 2003; Robbins and Stylianou, 2003; Leung, Law and Lee, 2016). The security issue relates to the secure access used by the website. In the hotel website context, secure access associated with secure online booking and secure online payment guaranteed by the websites (Robbins and Stylianou, 2003; Cyr, 2013). Lastly, the speed feature relates to the waiting time for the visitors to access each web page. However, since the speed parameter depends on other factors such as bandwidth, weather, etc., the speed factor is omitted from this research.

### **Cultural dimensions**

There is strong logic to assume that national cultures influence the design of company websites. When firms are in a home country, they usually also have homogeneous employees in terms of nationality and cultures. Employees talk in the same language will transmit similar cultural codes and some unique communication patterns (Usunier, Roulin and Ivens, 2009). Therefore, in the process of development and updating of hotel website by employees, website design is likely to be influenced by cultural norms; in this research is the communication style of one country. It is likely that website design will be influenced not only by customer preferences but also employee's backgrounds.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on cultural dimensions. Hofstede (Hofstede's cultural dimensions) and Hall's cultural dimensions are widely known to analyse the

differences between cultures among nations. This study used Hall's (1976) cultural dimension, the communications context. Hall (1976) introduced the concept of high and low context communication. He posted that a high context language is embedded in the communication or message of one person. In a low-context culture, delivery of the message is more precise, explicit, informative, and direct (Hall, 1976, p. 91).

On the contrary, the information contained in high-context cultures is less informative, less coded, implicit, and indirect. Instead, more information is derived from the context of the message. Most of the low-context countries are in Europe, especially the Scandinavians, Swiss, and German, while the high-context culture is mostly from East Asia, Arabs, and Latin America (Burgmann, Kitchen and Williams, 2006).

Communication context is also expressed in company websites. Moreover, it leads to differences in corporate website design (Cho and Cheon, 2005). Since low-context cultures involve more explicit, context-free information, it is easier to code the message into digital communication media (in this context, is the hotel website) than information from high-context cultures (Usunier & Roulin, 2010). More precisely, websites from low-context cultures are easier to find on the internet, use graphics and colour more effectively, have more user-friendly navigation site, and provide more corporate and product information. Websites from low-context culture are more transparent, have more precise content, and more consistent in terms of the design aspect of the websites (Würtz, 2005).

Several studies have shown that communication context is reflected on the corporate website (Cho and Cheon, 2005; Usunier, Roulin and Ivens, 2009; Usunier and Roulin, 2010). High-context communication has a negative influence on both informative and interactive aspects of the website (Usunier and Roulin, 2010). There were also negative impacts of high-context communication on the availability and quality of website design in terms of accessibility, interface, and navigation (Usunier, Roulin and Ivens, 2009). There are differences in terms of communication styles used by corporate websites between East and West countries (Cho and Cheon, 2005). Those studies examined websites from different countries with different product categories (cross-industry study). Based on Hall (1976) theory, Indonesia is closer to the high-context language communication country's group since it is in South East Asia, while Germany is closer to the low-context language communication country's group. From the differences between national cultures of Germany and Indonesia, it is predicted that there will be significant differences between how the countries present the design of their hotel websites. From previous research, it can be concluded that lower-context countries (as represented by Germany) will be more user-

friendly and thus will have better design aspect. Therefore, the main hypothesis is made to be tested in this study:

**H1.** There is a significant difference between Indonesian and German hotel website design.

Mix results are proven in terms of the influence of culture on corporate websites. Corporate websites from low-context countries are more likely to utilize interactivity functions than the high-context countries (Singh and Matsuo, 2004; Cho and Cheon, 2005). J.-C. Usunier & Roulin (2010) also proves that high context communication styles have a negative influence on the interactive aspects of websites. Other research suggests that high-context countries have a great emphasis placed on interactive features such as images and animation (Ahmed, Mouratidis and Preston, 2009). As website interactivity is perceived as website design presentation aspects, it is also expected that there will be significant differences between the presentation aspect in Indonesian and German hotel websites. Countries from low-context culture are expected to make better use of presentation features in their hotel websites. Although the result later may differ, the sub-hypothesis is made in this research:

**H<sub>a</sub>.** There is a significant difference between Indonesian and German hotel website presentation design.

Websites from western countries tend to present better navigational features to help customers rather than websites from Asia countries (Cyr, 2013). There were also negative impacts of high-context communication on the availability and quality of website design in terms of accessibility, interface, and navigation (Usunier, Roulin and Ivens, 2009). The same results are also expected in the hotel website samples between Germany and Indonesia. Germany hotel website may have better navigation aspect than Indonesia's. It is expected that there will be significant differences between Indonesian and German hotel websites. Hence sub-hypothesis is derived in this research:

**H<sub>b</sub>.** There is a significant difference between Indonesian and German hotel website navigation design.

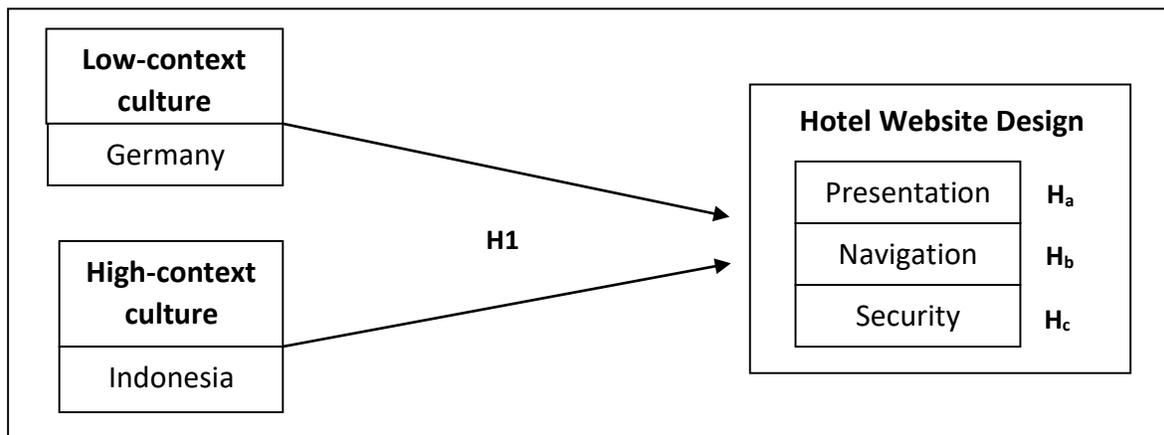
Users from western countries tend to take more risk in shopping online. This website security is not the main factor to be considered since the advantage is more significant than the risk (Cyr, 2013). The websites from western countries may adopt the user's behaviour by not

putting security factor as the main consideration in designing a website. This result may be different from the website in the Asia region.

**H<sub>c</sub>.** There is a significant difference between Indonesian and German hotel website security design.

## METHODS

This research examines how hotel website design from low-context culture country differs with the one with high-context culture. As can be seen from Figure 1, this research analyses how hotels from two countries present their website design. Germany represents a country with low-context culture, while Indonesia represents a country with high-context culture. Content analysis is used to examine how hotels put and maintain the design aspect of their websites.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

## Data Sampling

The samples for this study are 30 five stars hotel in Germany and 30 five-star hotel in Indonesia from both chain and non-chain hotels. The period to take the website measurement was in March 2016. Purposive sampling technique is used to choose samples in this research. Purposive sampling is a random selection of sampling units within a segment of the population that has the most information on the characteristic of research interest (Guarte and Barrios, 2006). Purposive sampling technique is a non-probability sampling that is most effective in the type of research that needs a specific cultural domain with experts in it (Tongco, 2007).

In this research, several criteria layers were applied to select samples. The first criterion is that the samples should be at least having a five-star rating, higher hotel class is allowed. The second criteria are that the samples need to come from the local hotels. Local hotels were

selected because it is likely that local hotel brands adopt more cultural traits rather than international chain hotels which may have more standardise websites. The third criterion is that the samples need to have an accessible website during the sampling period. Some websites were not accessible or under construction so they cannot be included as the research samples. The fourth criterion is that all the hotel website sub-pages need to be accessible. As several sub-pages of hotel websites are not accessible or only has blank pages, these kinds of websites were not included in the samples.

### Data Analysis

Content analysis is a technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of the research object. Content analysis includes several steps: (1) selecting the topic, (2) deciding the samples, (3) defining units to be counted, (4) creating coding forms, (5) collecting data, (6) analysing data, (7) reporting results (Lai and W., 2015). In this study, content analysis is used to evaluate the score of hotel website design. The website coding instruments are based on corporate website literature and hotel website literature.

**Table 1. Hotel Website Information Design Attributes**

Dimension	Attribute	Score range
Presentation	Animation	0/1
	Frames	0/1
	Graphics	0/1
	Sounds	0/1
	Video	0/1
Navigation	Hyperlinks	0/1
	Search engine	0/1
	Site map	0/1
Security	Secured online reservation (https)	0/1
	Secured payment	0/1

Sources: Adapted from Cyr (2013); Merwe & Bekker (2003); Robbin & Stylianou (2003); Cho & Cheon (2005); Evans & King (1999); Fang & Holsapple (2007); Bilgihan & Bujisic (2015); Leung, Law, & Lee, (2016).

The derived coding instrument attributes are presented in Table 1. This research used a nominal scale to evaluate the design of the hotel website (Baloglu and Pekcan, 2006).

The website evaluator assesses the website design quality by opening each page of hotel samples, then examines whether the website attributes are presented on the website. If the attribute is on the website, the score is one (1) and if the attribute is not presented on the website the score is zero (0).

Firstly, the open question attributes (qualitative data) will be coded and categorised (Phelan *et al.*, 2011). In open coding, individual data points are compared to one another and clustered with a similar group. Secondly, this section will calculate all the quantitative data used in this study. The calculation for the design quality will be by merely summing up the total score of each of the attributes of every design quality dimensions. This will show that the higher the scores, the better the design quality adopted by the websites (Xi *et al.*, 2007). After the average score for each dimension for each country is calculated, the next quantitative calculation is to test the normality assumption of the data series. All data will be examined for the normality of their distribution. Since this study has a small number of samples, the Shapiro-Wilk test is utilised to assess the probability that a sample of observations comes from a normal distribution (Lewis and Traill, 1998).

**Table 2. The Shapiro-Wilk Test Results**

Country	Dimension	Statistic	Distribution frequency	Significance
Germany	Presentation	0.715	30	0.000
	Navigation	0.868	30	0.000
	Security	0.656	30	0.000
Indonesia	Presentation	0.657	30	0.000
	Navigation	0.831	30	0.001
	Security	0.594	30	0.000

Source: authors.

Table 2 provides the results of the normality test. It was found that no dimensions were distributed normally. Given concerns that as the normality assumption was not entirely fulfilled by all variables, non-parametric statistical techniques were applied to run the variables simultaneously to test the hypotheses. Non-parametric techniques are more robust in their assumptions than their parametric equivalent (Fink and Laupase, 2002). The next step is Mann-Whitney U test statistics, will explore the differences between those dimensions between German and Indonesian hotel websites. Mann-Whitney U test is one of the measurements that can be used to compare two independent samples, in which the concept of matched pairs does not arise,

and the samples are not normally distributed (Lewis and Traill, 1998). To arrive at a U-value, this test calculates the sum of ranks (or median value) in both populations, instead of using the mean ranks. Thus the U-value will show whether there is a significant difference between population (Jedamus, Taylor and Frame, 1976).

## DISCUSSION

The number of the hotel which presents each category of the presentation attribute is based on the observation with score zero (0) was given to the hotel websites who did not have specific attributes, while score one (1) is given to the website which presents the attributes in the hotel websites. With 30 hotel samples for each country, most hotel websites have animation, frames, and graphics on its hotel website. A study by Ahmed, Mouratidis, & Preston (2009) who stated that high-context countries had emphasized more the images and animation on the websites, is not proved in this study. However, for the presence of sounds and video on the hotel website, the German hotel website has scored higher than Indonesia's. From the findings, we can conclude that sounds, and the video was not prioritize yet by Indonesia's hotel website since only five hotels have sounds effect, and six hotels have a video on the website.

**Table 3. Website presentation score**

Measurements	Country	Frequency		Percentage (%)	
		Not Available (0)	Available (1)	Not Available (0)	Available (1)
Animation	Germany	0	30	0,0%	100,0%
	Indonesia	1	29	3,3%	96,7%
Frames	Germany	0	30	0,0%	100,0%
	Indonesia	0	30	0,0%	100,0%
Graphics	Germany	0	30	0,0%	100,0%
	Indonesia	1	29	3,3%	96,7%
Sounds	Germany	18	12	60,0%	40,0%
	Indonesia	5	25	16,7%	83,3%
Video	Germany	19	11	63,3%	36,7%
	Indonesia	24	6	80,0%	20,0%

Source: authors.

**Table 4. Mann-Whitney U test of German and Indonesian hotel websites**

Categories	Country	Mean Rank	Sum of rank	Mann-Whitney U value	P Value
Presentation	Germany	34.15	1024.50	340.500	0.066**
	Indonesia	26.97	805.50		
Navigation	Germany	34.03	1021.00	344.000	0.095**
	Indonesia	26.97	809.00		
Security	Germany	35.75	1072.50	417.000	0.542
	Indonesia	31.60	948.00		

\*Significant with 5% confidence level, \*\*Significant with 10% confidence level, one-tailed  
Source: authors.

From Table 4, the mean rank of all category (presentation, navigation, and security) of hotel website design aspect showed that German hotel website has better design quality than Indonesia's. In detail, there are significant differences in terms of hotel design aspect between German and Indonesia websites in the presentation (P-value 0.066) and navigation (P-value 0.095) categories. It can be concluded that the primary hypothesis (**H1**.) there is a significant difference between Indonesian and German hotel website design is accepted.

This research used different website design aspect than the previous research on the impact of culture on the corporate website. This research tailored the design aspect of the website like the previous research mostly in the hotel industry. Although this research tested different design aspect, the conclusion drawn with the research related to the reflection of the culture in the corporate website has similar research findings. Since Indonesia hotel website was found to have lower design quality (lower mean rank and the lower sum of rank), this finding was aligned with Usunier and Roulin (2010) stated that there is a negative impact of high context communication in the interactivity aspect of the website. This study is also aligned with Cho and Cheon (2005); Singh and Matsuo (2004) who concluded that websites from low-context cultures have better utilisation of the website's interactive functions. It can be concluded that Indonesia who has high context communication, has a hotel website that is not as interactive (has an excellent presentation) as a hotel website of low context country (Germany). The first sub-hypothesis (**H<sub>a</sub>**) that stated that there is a significant difference between Indonesian and German hotel website presentation design is accepted.

From Table 4 giving the P-value 0.095, which is there is a significant difference between the two countries. The findings were also similar to the results from Usunier et al. (2009) who

concluded that high context communication countries have a negative impact on the accessibility, interface, and navigation of the websites. These findings were also aligned with Cyr (2013) who stated that Western countries who have low-context cultures have better navigational features than the Eastern's. Indonesia's hotel website also has significant differences as well as lower quality of navigation, interface (included in navigation aspect), and accessibility of the hotel websites. The second sub-hypothesis ( $H_b$ ) that stated that there is a significant difference between Indonesian and German hotel website navigation design is accepted

Meanwhile, the  $P$  value of the security aspect is not significant (0.542). This result is not similar with Cyr (2013) who stated that Western countries who have low-context cultures tend to ignore the risk, thus, to have lower security aspect on their website design- more than the Eastern's. Therefore, the third sub-hypothesis ( $H_c$ ), there is a significant difference between Indonesian and German hotel website security design is rejected

**Table 5. Website navigation and security scores**

Measurements	Germany				Indonesia			
	Frequency		Percentage (%)		Frequency		Percentage (%)	
	Not Available (0)	Available (1)						
<b>Navigation</b>								
Hyperlinks	5	25	16,7%	83,3%	12	18	40,0%	60,0%
Search Engine	25	5	83,3%	16,7%	26	4	86,7%	13,3%
Site Map	17	13	56,7%	43,3%	21	9	70,0%	30,0%
<b>Security</b>								
Secured Online Reservation	2	28	6,7%	93,3%	1	29	3,3%	96,7%
Secured Payment	10	20	33,3%	66,7%	8	22	26,7%	73,3%

Source: authors.

From Table 5 the results of navigation and security features on Indonesia and German hotel websites. The results for the navigation features both for Germany and Indonesia were varied. For the hyperlinks available, some hotels provided hyperlinks while the rest did not provide hyperlinks in Indonesia hotel websites. As for search engine, similar results were found in the presence of search engine and site map on the website. Both countries mostly did not have a

search engine or search feature but provided search map on the website. The security factor for both Indonesia and German hotel website was similar in details. Both countries hotels have secured online reservation (the hotel address was in https:// format), but the payment pages were lack of secured trustee party (e.g. verified by Geotrust - a digital certificate provider).

## CONCLUSION

This research has reached similar results to previous investigations regarding differences between website characteristics of low-context (western country) and high-context countries (eastern country), as represented by Germany and Indonesia. There were significant differences in the presentation, navigation, and speed aspects of hotel websites. Indonesia hotel websites also have lower design aspect quality than German websites. Indonesia hotel website has lower quality in two aspects of website design attributes that were tested in this research (presentation and navigation,). It may be concluded that the hotel website from high-context cultures has lower quality than countries from low-context cultures. From this study, it can be concluded that Indonesia hotel manager can learn a lot from the German hotel website in order to improve the website design quality. The adding of sounds and video to the website will add interest. Providing the website with useful navigational features also will make it easier for potential customers to acquire a better understanding of the website. Navigational features will also help customers to find what they want faster, for example by merely searching the search feature on the hotel website.

For further studies, the approach could be improved by providing more than one website evaluator thus later performing the reliability and validity test to reduce the bias from the website evaluation results. Subsequent research might add more countries to be represented as western countries and eastern countries to make a more general conclusion regarding the differences in website design between west and east hotels. The future researcher may also add more samples to provide better statistical results as well as to add more hotel categories based on the class of hotel.

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