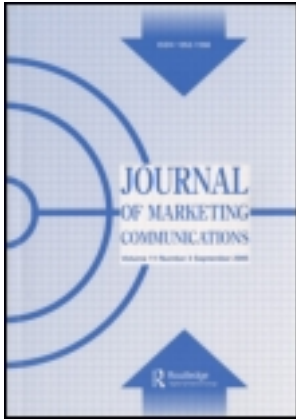


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## Journal of Marketing Communications

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rjmc20>

### An exploration of the standardization of targeting strategies and the use of promotional disciplines on the web: A cross-national study

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Version of record first published: 19 Nov 2009.

To cite this article: Yuhmiin Chang (2009): An exploration of the standardization of targeting strategies and the use of promotional disciplines on the web: A cross-national study, Journal of Marketing Communications, 15:5, 327-343

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13527260802481314>

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## **An exploration of the standardization of targeting strategies and the use of promotional disciplines on the web: A cross-national study**

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This study examines how leading corporations standardize their regional sites from the integrated marketing communication (IMC) perspective. In terms of standardizing *targeting strategies*, data show that many leading brands view the online audiences as one mass. Customers and media are the two most targeted and standardized stakeholders for all brands and in each of the product categories (i.e. non-durable goods, durable goods, and service). This study also reveals that financial communities/investors, communities, and channel members are the other three most targeted and standardized stakeholders, even though their rankings are somewhat different across the product categories. Employees, government regulators, and special-interest groups are seldom targeted through corporate websites. In terms of standardizing promotional disciplines on the web, advertising is the most standardized, followed by customer relations, direct marketing, public relations, and sales promotions for all brands and each product category. As a whole, service brands have the highest standardization mean, while durable goods rank second and non-durable goods are last. The three product categories do not significantly differ in terms of the standardization of promotional tactics. A Web Standardization Model is developed to be compatible and comparable to Moriarty and Duncan's Standardization Model.

**Keywords:** cross-national; integrated marketing communication (IMC); promotion; standardization; targeting; web

The web is a medium that cannot be ignored for multinational corporations (MNCs) who would like reach consumers on a global scale (Ellison 2000; Riedman 2000; Taylor 2005). Unlike traditional international communication, the web can connect global consumers beyond physical boundaries: it acts as a virtual world where each country is just one click away. Standardization and adaptation are the two most discussed issues in traditional cross-cultural advertising literature. Little research has been invested into whether corporate websites were standardized or adapted across nations (Maynard and Tian 2004; Okazaki 2005; Wachanga and Daechun 2005).

The web is a promising vehicle for global communication that can use all kinds of tools, including: advertising; public relations; sales promotion; direct marketing; and personal selling (Duncan 2005; Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Schultz 2003). Consumers can be made aware of, form attitudes about, and purchase a product on this communication platform (Sheehan and Doherty 2000). The combination of these factors induced many scholars to attempt to view IMC from a cross-national perspective (Ellison 2000; Kitchen

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and Li 2005; Patti et al. 2005; Riedman 2000; Taylor 2005). Similarly, few studies have investigated corporate websites from an IMC perspective. Therefore, from an IMC perspective, this study aims to investigate how leading corporations standardize or adapt their regional sites.

### **Globally Integrated Marketing Communications (GIMC)**

Grein and Gould (1996) proposed the first definition for globally integrated marketing communications (GIMC):

A system of active promotional management which strategically coordinates global communications in all of its component parts both *horizontally* in terms of countries and organizations and *vertically* in terms of promotion disciplines. It contingently takes into account the full range of standardized versus adaptive market options, synergies, variations among target populations and other market-place and business conditions. (My emphasis)

The vertical dimension (i.e. coordination across promotional disciplines) is the basis for traditional IMC, whereas the horizontal dimension (i.e. coordination across countries and organizations) is the central aspect and key extension of GIMC (Gould, Lerman, and Grein 1999).

Grein and Gould (1996) believed that vertical or horizontal coordination could be either standardized or adapted in terms of execution. Therefore, the standardization or adaptation of promotional disciplines indicated that message executions across promotional disciplines, such as advertising and public relations, are the same or different respectively. This view is very similar to avocations made by many IMC scholars. For example, Petrison and Wang (1996) argued that variations were necessary because forcing the communication vehicles to look the same or to convey the same message can result in an overall loss of communication effectiveness. Percy (1997, 86–7), as well as Duncan and Moriarty (1997), believed that one-voice and one-look consistency does not mean every execution must be the same. They stated that some variation is essential to maintain the attention and interest of a campaign.

Horizontal standardization or adaptation, on the other hand, involves having similar or different message execution across countries and organizations. Some scholars believe that consumer preferences became more and more homogeneous with the advent of the web (Okazaki and Rivas 2002; Roberts and Ko 2001). Therefore, a standardization strategy should be applied. Others believe that multinational corporations are being forced to localize their websites because the world does not communicate in one language (Warden, Lai, and Wu 2002).

The four GIMC strategies identified by Grein and Gould (1996) include: (1) a multi-domestic non-integrated strategy (i.e. executions are adapted across disciplines and countries); (2) a multi-domestic integrated strategy (i.e. executions are standardized across disciplines but adapted across countries); (3) a global but non-integrated strategy (i.e. executions are adapted across disciplines but standardized across countries); and (4) a globally integrated strategy (i.e. executions are standardized across disciplines and countries).

Analyzing the level of standardization for all visual and verbal executions across promotional disciplines and countries on the web is not an easy task. A corporate website may promote several brands of the corporation; also, a corporation may not launch the same campaign for the same brand at the same time across countries. So far no study has investigated how marketing communication tools are used across countries on the web. This study focuses on how leading corporations use online platforms to practice each promotional discipline across countries. The results of the study shall serve as a

benchmark and help reduce the complexity for future studies that are interested in examining executions across countries and disciplines.

### **The web and the standardization of promotional disciplines**

There are several types of studies that focus on the level of standardization of corporate websites.

One type of study focuses on evaluating the level of online and offline integration for brands in the United States. Schlosser and Kanfer (1999) pioneered this research paradigm. They selected the six magazines with the highest circulation and covered a broad range of demographics. Then, they selected 65 print advertisements that listed URLs and analyzed the print advertisements along with their associated websites. To examine the integration of the two media, they measured the size and coded the placement of the URL in the print ad, examined whether the print ad mentioned the URL, and examined whether the advertised product could be easily found on the website. They also compared the product information given by the websites and print ads. They concluded that the two media did not yet appear to be effectively integrated, where the level of integration was determined by examining the performance of each coding category.

Most successive studies also compared magazine advertisements with their associated websites (Kanso and Nelson 2004; Schlosser and Kanfer 1999; Sheehan and Doherty 2000, 2001). Kanso and Nelson (2004) revealed that a product promoted in print advertisements could be located easily on the web page, in contrast to Schlosser and Kanfer's (1999) findings. Sheehan and Doherty (2000, 2001) concluded that advertisers were better at integrating tactics than strategy. Kim, Hwang, and McMillan (2003) analyzed the content of 55 Super Bowl TV commercials and their associated websites from 40 advertisers. They found that message strategies were more consistent than creative strategies across media.

The second type of study observes the level of standardization in terms of the creative strategies and the execution used for global brands' localized websites (Okazaki 2005; Okazaki and Alonso 2003; Okazaki and Rivas 2002). However, these studies classify message content somewhat arbitrarily (e.g. choice availability and playfulness), and did not categorize the content into the five promotional disciplines – for example, advertising and public relations. Okazaki and Rivas (2002) and Okazaki and Alonso (2003) found that Japanese firms tend to localize their online communication strategies for their Spain and US sites. Okazaki (2005) found that US brands mainly standardize the logo, color and layout while localizing textual information and visual images for their European regional sites (including the UK, France, Germany, and Spain).

The third type of study investigates only one promotional discipline across countries. For example, Wachanga and Daechun (2005) analyzed web advertising content for the USA and Korea. Web advertising was defined as a commercial message that clearly promotes a brand on the official website, excluding banner, button, or other types of web advertising. They found that localized visual strategies are applied. Maynard and Tian (2004) focused on public relation practices on the web between the USA and China. They found that Chinese websites show a high level of localization. They also found that the higher the rank of the brand did not lead to more localization for the Chinese sites.

To date, no study has investigated the integration of major promotional disciplines across countries on the web. Some studies focus on multiple communication tools (e.g. advertising and public relations). These studies, however, only focused on a single country (Abrahamsson and Lundgren 2004; Perry and Bodkin 2000; White and Niranjana 2000).

Perry and Bodkin (2000) conducted a content analysis for websites of Fortune 100 companies. They found that the websites varied widely, from focusing on basic company information to incorporating a mix of promotional elements. White and Niranjana (2000) interviewed 22 website designers; none of them reported conducting formal research before launching the sites and based their designs on personal preferences or other sites. The most often stated purposes of a website were to provide advertising and marketing information and to communicate with customers. Other purposes include public relations and online-retailing. Abrahamsson and Lundgren (2004) conducted three case studies and discovered that revenue generation and image building were the two most important objectives for practicing IMC on the web. The number of IMC tools used on the web varied among cases, thus generating one of the research questions that we attempt to answer.

RQ1: How do leading corporations standardize promotional disciplines on the web across countries?

In their Standardization Model, Moriarty and Duncan (1991a) identified that advertising was easiest to standardize across nations and sales promotion was the least standardized. The results of this study provide the initial empirical evidence for their model.

### The standardization of target audiences on the web

Relatively few studies have compared target strategies on the web across countries. IMC views target audiences from the stakeholders' perspective. Stakeholders are defined as individuals or groups that affect or are affected by a corporation (Duncan 2005). White and Niranjana (2000) found that most website designers intend to reach 'anyone surfing the net' p. 411. Abrahamsson and Lundgren (2004) discovered that customers and media are two key target audiences.

From the GIMC perspective, several questions should be asked. First, does a corporation try to communicate with stakeholders in other countries? If the answer is yes, does the corporation view different nations as one mass or different segments? If a corporation views different regions as one mass, a standardization strategy is most likely applicable. He (2001) and Hopkins (2000) indicated that a corporation that translates global content into many languages was relatively more insensitive to cultural differences than to tailoring language and content to fit each nation's need. Therefore, direct translation of the global content is considered to be a standardization strategy (Okazaki and Alonso 2003). Finally, does the corporation try to communicate with the same stakeholders (e.g. employees and media) for each regional site? This prompts another research question that we explore.

RQ2: How do the leading corporations standardize their targeting strategies on the web across countries?

Moriarty and Duncan's (1991a) Standardization Model classified target audiences in terms of their roles. They suggested that target audiences differ in their ease to be standardized. The order from easiest to hardest to standardize is: the international youth market, business travelers, industry buyers, new mothers, home makers, blue collar workers, and subsistence farmers. The results of this study will revise their model by developing the first Web Standardization Model from the stakeholder perspective.

### Factors influencing standardization

Moriarty and Duncan (1991a) identified several important factors that influence the standardization and adaptation of global advertising. *Product category* is considered to be

the most important factor. They suggested that high-tech, touch (e.g. cosmetics) and fashion products were the easiest to standardize, followed by industrial/computers, fun/foods/cigarettes, and services. Homecare/decorating, food/beer, and contraceptive/bikinis were harder to standardize. Typology was determined by the level of cultural influence.

Other studies applied similar typologies. Jupiter Communication interviewed company executives and concluded that high-tech products were more likely to integrate online and offline messages than low-tech products (Riedman 1999). Sheehan and Doherty (2001) analyzed the content of online and offline advertisements for information-rich (e.g. automobiles and computers) and information-poor (e.g. personal care and apparel) products. In contrast to Riedman's results, they found that the advertisements for the two types of products are not executed differently. Okazaki (2005) found that durable goods were more standardized in terms of visual and verbal execution than non-durable goods. Since Okazaki's (2005) study was the only cross-national web study among the three, his typology will be used in this study. Other questions our research investigates include the following.

RQ3: Do different product categories differ in their likelihood of standardizing the use of *promotional disciplines* on the web across countries?

RQ4: Do different product categories differ in their likelihood of standardizing the use of *targeting strategies* on the web across countries?

## Research method

Over the past 10 years, content analysis has become the most popular method used for examining international advertising (Taylor 2005). To examine cross-national integrated marketing communication on the web, this study analyzes the content of leading brands' sites across the USA, Taiwan, and China.

Taiwan and China were selected for the following reasons. First, Kim, Han, and Schultz (2004) believe that in order for an IMC study to be representative of practices worldwide, studying non-English-speaking countries is necessary. Second, in international advertising studies, Asia is the most studied region because of rapid growth in many East Asian economies (Taylor 2005). Third, the popularity and prevalence of IMC in these two regions is constantly growing in both industry and academia.<sup>1</sup> Finally, IMC studies in Taiwan and China are rare in the literature.

## Sampling

We use the 100 top global brands selected by *Business Week* in 2005 as the sampling frame. This sampling frame not only fits well with the objective of this study, but was also used in many previous studies (Daechun and Wachanga 2005; Maynard and Tian 2004).

## Unit of analysis

McMillan (2000) found that the most common unit of analysis for the web is the 'website', even though many studies do not clearly define the term. Macias and Lewis (2004) provide a clear definition of a website as 'all links and pages associated with that particular site without going beyond the main root address (e.g. [www.viara.com](http://www.viara.com))' p. 48. Nonetheless, a pilot study showed that coding the entire site was not only time consuming, but also complex for studies involving multiple communication tools and countries. This complexity introduces errors and reduces reliability.

In his cross-cultural web content analysis, Okazaki (2005) analyzed only the homepage to improve accuracy. The homepage was identified by McMillan (2000) as the second most common unit of analysis. It is the first HTML page of a site (Hong, Park, and Kim 2005), which determines visitors' willingness to browse the rest of the site. Nevertheless, the pilot study also discovered that some homepages list only a few information categories and lack enough information for coding decisions. Therefore, the units of analysis for this study include the homepage and the sitemap.

### ***Procedure***

Two bi-lingual coders, both graduate students majoring in mass communication in Taiwan, were thoroughly trained on the procedure and the operational definition of the coding scheme. Both coders reported having no problems reading English or simplified Chinese on the web (simplified Chinese, used by people in China, is a simplified version of Traditional Chinese, used by people in Taiwan; the two dialects may look very different). All of the web pages were saved to ensure that both coders were accessing the same information (Macias and Lewis 2004). All web pages were saved and coded from 18 July to 5 August 2006.

The coders were instructed to independently code 50% of the qualified sites to establish reliability (Macias and Lewis 2004). If there was disagreement, each coder was asked to independently code the items one more time. If they reached consensus, the data were used in the analysis. If not, the disagreement was resolved by discussion between the two coders and the solution was used in the analysis (Cho and Cheon 2005). Finally, each coder independently coded the remaining one-quarter of the sites (Macias and Lewis 2004).

### ***Coding scheme***

#### ***Basic information***

The coders were requested to identify the brand name, product categories (i.e. non-durable goods, durable goods, and services) and country of origin (i.e. the USA, Taiwan, and China).

#### ***Stakeholders***

The coders were asked to identify the presence (=1) or absence (=0) of each targeted stakeholder for each site. The stakeholders include consumers, channel members, employees, marketing communication agencies, media, financial communities/investors, communities, government regulators, and special-interest groups.

#### ***Promotional disciplines***

The coders were asked to identify the presence (=1) or absence (=0) of each promotional discipline. Advertising elements include: product list buttons; general product information; and brand-specific information. Public relation elements include: corporate information (e.g. about us, division, history, financial, stock quote, cause, annual report, and sponsor); news releases; news; investor relationships; job/career information; and employee educational information. Sales promotion elements include: free gifts; contests/sweepstakes/prizes; coupons; sampling/free downloads; refunds/rebates; and

special offers. Direct marketing includes: catalog and online purchase. Most of these elements were referred to in the works by Abrahamsson and Lundgren (2004), Okazaki (2005), Okazaki and Alonso (2003) and Perry and Bodkin (2000).

Customer relations are also a key concept in IMC (Duncan 2005) and the web is considered to be an effective medium for facilitating two-way communications and maintaining relationships (Cho and Cheon 2005). So, web features related to customer relations were also coded in this study. These web features include: inquires or comments (e.g. guest book/customer feedback/email/toll-free number); electronic surveys; personal registration; personal choice helper/online problem diagnostics/instant communication; and office/store locators.

### Standardization

Standardization is defined as the coexistence of an item between two countries. For example, if both US and Taiwanese sites target consumers, they are considered to be standardized (=1). Otherwise, they are considered to be adapted (=0). Results revealed that coders were able to easily reach agreement. For stakeholders and promotional disciplines, Scott's pi was one across the three regions.

### Data analysis

SPSS 15.0 software was used for data analysis. RQ2 and RQ4 are concerned with targeting strategies and will be discussed together. Two levels of target audiences, the nation and stakeholders, were the foci of the study.

RQ2 aims to examine the standardization of targeting strategies for the leading corporations across countries. Hewlett-Packard was inaccessible during the time of the study and thus was deleted from the study (see Table 1). On the national level, all of the leading brands have US sites. Twenty-five brands have neither Taiwanese nor Chinese sites.<sup>2</sup> Four brands have only US and Chinese sites (i.e. Morgan Stanley, Caterpillar, Tiffany, and Nivea). Hermes and Louis Vuiton have only US and Taiwanese sites. Therefore, 68 brands have sites for all three regions.

Among the remaining 68 brands, 21 (30.88%) translated most of the US website content to both the Taiwanese and Chinese sites.<sup>3</sup> Three of the brands (4.41%) translated

Table 1. The standardization of target audiences: national level ( $n = 100$ ).

Target	Percentage
Inaccessible	1
USA	25
USA & China	4
USA & Taiwan	2
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>32</b>
(USA, Taiwan, China)	21
(USA, Taiwan) & China	3
(USA, China) & Taiwan	2
USA & (Taiwan, China)	7
USA, Taiwan, China	35
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: The regions in the parentheses indicate that the contents of the regions were in direct translation.

the US website content to the Taiwanese sites (i.e. GE, Goldman Sachs, and Amazon.com). Two brands (2.94%) translated the US website content to the Chinese sites (i.e. Dell and eBay). Seven brands (10.29%) did not translate US website content to the two Asian sites, but the content of the Taiwanese and Chinese sites were very similar (i.e. Nokia, Marlboro, UPS, SAP, Apple, Philips, and Levi's). Overall, 21% of the companies saw the consumers in the three regions as one mass, 3% viewed the USA and Taiwan as one mass, 2% viewed the USA and China as one mass, and 7% saw Taiwan and China as one mass. The remaining 35% saw the three regions as distinct segments.

The data also show that most of the brands targeted customers (USA vs Taiwan: 100%; USA vs China: 95.6%) and media (USA vs Taiwan: 72.1%; USA vs China: 72.1%) across regional sites at the same time. The percentage in the parentheses indicates the amount of overlap in targeting. For example, 100% of the brands target both US and Taiwanese consumers on both regional sites. Some of them targeted the financial community (USA vs Taiwan: 32.4%; USA vs China: 19.1%) and general community (USA vs Taiwan: 11.8%; USA vs China: 17.6%) with one accord. A few targeted channel members and marketing communications (marcom) agencies across regional sites simultaneously. When computed the means for each stakeholders, customers were most likely to be standardized (97.8%), followed by media (72.1%), the financial community (25.75%), and the general community (14.7%) (see Table 2).

RQ4 aims to investigate whether the different product categories differ in their likelihood of standardizing targeting strategies on the web across countries. The chi-square test shows that the likelihood of using direct translations did not differ among product categories between US and Taiwan sites ( $\chi^2(2) = .36, p > .05$ ) nor between US and China sites ( $\chi^2(2) = .41, p > .05$ ). More than half of the brands did not directly translate the contents from the US sites to either the Taiwanese or the Chinese regional sites for each product category. In other words, most of the non-durable goods, durable goods, and service brands perceived each country as a distinct segment.

As for the stakeholders, the chi-square tests show that the likelihood of simultaneously targeting media/suppliers ( $\chi^2(2) = 3.64, p > .05$ ) or financial communities/investors ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.44, p > .05$ ) did not differ among product categories for the US and Taiwan sites. Analyses for other stakeholders for the USA and Taiwan – and for all comparisons between the USA and China – could not be interpreted because too many expected counts were less than five. Also, no statistics were computed due to the fact that the numbers were constant.

The mean percentages for each product category and overall, as shown in Table 3, suggest that customers and media are frequently standardized on the web; the financial community, general community and channel members were occasionally standardized. For service brands, marcom agencies were surprisingly often standardized.

Table 2. The standardization of target audiences: stakeholder level ( $n = 68$ ).

	Overall (%)	Non-durable (%)	Durable (%)	Service (%)
Customer	97.8	100	100	100
Channel member	5.15	25	21.65	29.15
Marcom agency	2.2	None	0	45.85
Media	72.1	58.15	81.9	81.4
Financial community	25.75	27.3	38.8	35.45
Community	14.7	20.55	36.7	28.65

Note: The percent in the cell represents the mean percentage of the two nation-wise comparisons for brands targeted the same stakeholder across or within each product category.

RQ1 and RQ3 are both concerned with promotional disciplines and will be discussed together hereafter. They aim to investigate whether the leading corporations standardize their practice of each promotional discipline across countries on the web as a whole (RQ1) or across different product categories (RQ3).

In terms of the likelihood of standardizing *advertising* tactics across the three product categories (RQ1), product information ranks the highest (100%), followed by brand information (67.65%). As for *public relation* tactics, providing corporation information has the highest rank (84.55%), followed by news releases (73.50%) and job information (63.95%). For *sales promotions*, sampling has the highest rank (54.4%), with free gifts (14.4%) ranked second. For *direct marketing*, providing a catalog is the highest ranked (95.55%) and online purchasing (17.6%) is second. Finally, for *customer relations*, online inquiry/comments (88.95%) ranked the highest; personal registration (57.35%) and office/store locators (53.65%) have similar percentages. Since our examination of employee information (a PR tactic), refunds/rebates (a SP tactic) and electronic surveys (a customer service tactic) did not give data, they were excluded from the analysis.

More specifically (RQ3), data show that different product categories significantly differ in terms of standardizing actions of collecting personal information through the web ( $\chi^2(2) = 8.43, p < .05$ ) for US versus Taiwan sites. Different product categories were marginally different in the standardization of providing store/office locations to consumers

Table 3. The standardization of promotional disciplines ( $n = 68$ ).

Promotional disciplines	Overall (%)	Non-durable (%)	Durable (%)	Service (%)
<b>AD</b>				
Product info	100	100	100	100
Brand info	67.65	75.75	64.85	86.55
<b>Mean</b>	<b>81.6</b>	<b>87.88</b>	<b>82.25</b>	<b>93.28</b>
<b>PR</b>				
Corporate info	84.55	88.1	89.3	87.85
News release	73.50	60	83.75	82.80
News	4.4	0	58.35	None
Investor relation	25	27.3	36.45	33.6
Job info	63.95	76.9	69.9	73.1
<b>Mean</b>	<b>50.28</b>	<b>50.46</b>	<b>67.55</b>	<b>69.34</b>
<b>SP</b>				
Free gift	14.7	41.7	50.58	42.5
Contest/sweepstake	10.3	58.35	21.8	10
Coupon	1.5	None	0	50
Sampling	54.4	32.2	50.55	52.75
Special offer	6.65	9.05	0	13.95
<b>Mean</b>	<b>17.51</b>	<b>35.33</b>	<b>24.59</b>	<b>33.84</b>
<b>DM</b>				
Catalog	95.55	97.05	96.8	100
Online purchase	17.6	30.95	45	61.25
<b>Mean</b>	<b>56.58</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>70.9</b>	<b>80.63</b>
<b>Customer relations</b>				
Inquiry/comment	88.95	82.35	96.45	90.7
Personal register	57.35	70.85	55.65	85.45
Office/store locator	53.65	55	68.9	86.2
<b>Mean</b>	<b>66.65</b>	<b>69.4</b>	<b>73.67</b>	<b>87.45</b>
<b>Mean (product category)</b>		<b>55.41</b>	<b>63.79</b>	<b>72.91</b>

Note: The percent in the cell represents the mean percentage of the two nation-wise comparisons for brands targeted the same stakeholder across or within each product category.

Table 4. Web Standardization Model.

Area	0–20% (Adaptation)	21–40%	41–60%	61–80%	81–100% (Standardization)
A: Non-durable goods.					
<b>Stakeholders</b>		■ Community ■ Channel member ■ Financial comm	■ Media		■ Customer
<b>Advertising</b>					■ Brand info ■ Product info ■ Corporation info
<b>Public relations</b>		■ Investor relation ■ Sampling	■ News releases ■ Free gift ■ Contest/ sweepstakes	■ Job information	
<b>Sales promotions</b>	Special offer	■ Online purchase ■ Sales promotions	■ Office/store locator ■ Public relations		■ Catalog ■ Inquiry/comments ■ Advertising
<b>Direct marketing</b>				■ Personal registration ■ Direct marketing ■ Customer relations	
<b>Customer relations</b>					
<b>Promotional disciplines</b>					
B: Durable goods.					
<b>Stakeholders</b>		■ Channel members ■ Community ■ Financial comm		■ Media	■ Customer
<b>Advertising</b>					
<b>Public relations</b>		■ Investor relation	■ News	■ Brand info ■ Job information	■ Product info ■ News releases ■ Corporation info
<b>Sales promotions</b>	Coupon Special offer	■ Contest/ sweepstakes	■ Sampling ■ Free gift ■ Online purchase ■ Personal registration		■ Catalog ■ Inquiry/comments ■ Advertising
<b>Direct marketing</b>		■ Sales promotions		■ Office/store locator ■ Public relations ■ Direct marketing ■ Customer relations	
<b>Customer relations</b>					
<b>Promotional disciplines</b>					
C: Service.					
<b>Stakeholders</b>		■ Community ■ Channel members	■ Marcom agencies	■ Media	■ Customer

Advertising	■ Financial comm		■ Brand info
Public relations	■ Investor relation	■ Job information	■ Product info
Sales promotions	■ Contest/ sweepstakes	■ Free gift	■ News releases
Direct marketing	■ Special offer	■ Coupon	■ Corporation info
Customer relations		■ Sampling	
Promotional disciplines	■ Sales promotions	■ Online purchase	■ Catalog
			■ Personal registration
			■ Office/store locator
			■ Inquiry/comments
		■ Public relations	■ Direct marketing
			■ Customer relations
			■ Advertising

( $\chi^2(2)=4.85$ ,  $p<.10$ ). The standardization of providing brand information ( $\chi^2(2)=2.41$ ,  $p>.05$ ), news releases ( $\chi^2(2)=3.57$ ,  $p>.05$ ), investor relationships ( $\chi^2(2)=1.02$ ,  $p>.05$ ), and job/career information ( $\chi^2(2)=.72$ ,  $p>.05$ ) was not significantly different between product categories.

For the comparisons between the USA and China, most elements were not interpretable because too many expected counts were less than five, or no statistics were computed due to fact that the numbers were constant. The standardization of providing job/career information ( $\chi^2(2)=.19$ ,  $p>.05$ ) and personal registration ( $\chi^2(2)=2.15$ ,  $p>.05$ ) was not significantly different among product categories.

Although the data show that the level of standardization for each specific promotional tactic (e.g. product information) is somewhat different, a clear and consistent pattern is revealed when the mean percentage of each promotional disciplines (e.g. advertising) within and across product categories is compared. The data consistently show that advertising is most likely to be standardized, customer relations ranks second, direct marketing third, public relations fourth, and sales promotion last. The data also show that, as a whole, service brands (72.91%) have the highest standardization mean, durable goods (63.79%) rank second, and non-durable goods (55.41%) rank last. This study developed a Web Standardization Model (Table 4) to be compatible and comparable to Moriarty and Duncan's (1991a) Standardization Model.

## Conclusion and discussion

Taylor (2005) conducted a comprehensive review of international advertising papers published in the *Journal of Advertising* from 1994 to 2004. He suggests that researchers should move forward to gain more insight, particularly in global integrated marketing communication (IMC) strategies, which involves utilizing multiple marketing communication tools, such as advertising, public relations, sales promotions, and direct marketing. This study was the first attempt to analyze the content of the 100 leading brands' American, Taiwanese, and Chinese sites to investigate how leading corporations standardize or adapt regional sites from an IMC perspective.

First, this study observes targeting strategies, including national and stakeholder levels, for the leading brands as a whole and across different product categories. On a national level, the data show that a quarter of the leading brands did not try to communicate with consumers in Taiwan or China through the web. It is quite surprising to see so many leading brands ignoring the web's potential to reach their consumers and other stakeholders in the two regions. The data also show that a little more than a quarter of the brands directly translated US website content to one or both of the two Asian regions. This tendency did not differ significantly among durable, non-durable, and service brands. Only 35% of the brands truly localized their regional website content. In other words, although some brands viewed the three regions as distinct segments, many leading brands viewed the online audiences as one mass.

This finding is similar to results of the study by White and Niranjana (2000), which concludes that most website designers intend to reach 'anyone surfing the net'. Whether consumers' preferences really became more and more homogeneous with the advent of the web, as advocated by Okazaki and Rivas (2002) and Roberts and Ko (2001), was beyond the discussion of this study. Nonetheless, multinational corporations should start thinking about this issue when they are developing and maintaining their sites. Warden et al. (2002) believe that websites should be localized because the world does not communicate in one language and localized content may be needed by stakeholders in other regions.

In terms of stakeholder levels, Abrahamsson and Lundgren (2004) argue that customers and media are the two key target audiences for corporate websites. Our study provides similar findings. Among the 68 brands that target all three regions, customers and media are the most targeted and standardized stakeholders for all brands and for each of the product categories. This study also reveals that financial communities/investors, communities, and channel members are the three most targeted and standardized stakeholders, even though their ranks were somewhat different across the product categories. In addition, financial communities/investors and communities are primarily targeted by US websites. Employees, government regulators, and special-interest groups are seldom targeted through corporate websites. Interestingly, no non-durable and durable goods brands standardize their targeting efforts on marcom agencies, but almost half of the service brands do so. Moriarty and Duncan's (1991a) Standardization Model classifies target audiences in terms of their roles (e.g. youth travelers and new mothers) and not the stakeholders. The results of the present study provided the first Web Standardization Model from the stakeholder perspective.

In terms of the promotional disciplines on the web, advertising is most standardized, followed by customer relations, direct marketing, public relations, and sales promotions for all brands and for each product category. Moriarty and Duncan (1991a) suggest that advertising is the easiest to standardize and sales promotion is the hardest. The results of the current study provide the initial empirical support for their model.

Kitchen and Li (2005) found that advertising is considered to be the most important tool in China, with PR ranking second. Kuo and Hsu (2003) reveal that advertising is also considered the dominant tool in Taiwan, followed by public relations, event, sales promotion, and direct marketing (Kuo and Hsu 2003). This discrepancy could be caused by traditional media being on the minds of the survey respondents in the two studies, since most of the marketing communication budget was spent on the traditional media.

The present study also extends Moriarty and Duncan's (1991a) Standardization Model by providing more details about the tactics within each of the promotional disciplines. For example, I find that for advertising tactics, product information is more likely to be standardized than brand information for all brands and each product category. For public relations tactics, corporate information is the most standardized and investor relation is the least standardized for the three product categories. Interestingly, news is frequently standardized by durable goods brands and did not exist for non-durable and service brands.

As a whole, the data show that service brands have the highest standardization mean, durable goods rank second and non-durable goods rank last. Further analyses show that the three product categories do not significantly differ in terms of standardizing promotional tactics. Two factors may contribute to the insignificant differences or inability to quantify the likelihood of standardization among the three product categories. The first factor is the probability that website decision makers tend to copy other sites across brands (White and Niranjana 2000). The second factor is the high percentage of direct translation across regions.

Several scholars suggest that brands should practice all forms of promotional disciplines on the web to inform and persuade consumers and prospects, leading to purchase behavior in the end (Duncan 2005; Peltier et al. 2003; Sheehan and Doherty 2000). Nonetheless, the data show that the leading brands do not consistently utilize the online platform to its full potential. Combined with findings regarding the targeting strategies, the objectives of corporate websites are further articulated.

The data suggest that the main objective of the websites is to provide advertising messages, such as product and brand information, as well as catalogs to consumers and

prospects. If consumers need to engage in dialogue with the company, they can inquire or comment on the web. Many corporate websites also offer sampling or free downloads that allow trials of their products. All of this information helps consumers be aware of, comprehend, and yield to the brands. Nonetheless, interested consumers are forced to make their purchases through traditional outlets. Many leading brands give office/store locations, but few provide direct purchase through their websites. This is probably why sales promotion is ranked last among all disciplines. Sales promotion messages on the sites seem to complement more offline marcom efforts than induce online shopping behaviors.

None of the websites provide instant communication, which is obviously in ignorance of this unique feature of the web. A large percentage of the brands launched personal registration programs, a way to attract constant visits to the sites. Data show that service brands are significantly more likely to standardize their efforts to collecting personal information, followed by non-durable goods and durable goods for the US and Taiwan sites. It is interesting to see service brands with the highest likelihood of standardization yet again.

The second major objective of the websites is to maintain relationships with, and facilitate works for, the media. The leading brands provide information such as corporate information and news releases. Nonetheless, locating news releases publicly may not be a good idea. Third-party endorsement occurs when news media, who have no explicit intent to persuade, express approval of a product or person publicly and definitely. The credibility of the news media then carries over to the content of publicity and generates favorable responses (Cameron 1994). When consumers or prospects are exposed to news releases and then the online product news, the third-party endorsement effect may not occur because the objectivity of the news media is questioned.

To communicate with the community, the brands offer information such as job information (Strauss and Raymond 1999). Surprisingly, most brands do not try to communicate with their employees through the sites. Strauss and Raymond (1999) suggest that corporations can offer information such as employee accomplishments, employee benefits, employee directories, or training programs to their employees on the web.

### **Future research and limitations**

Gould et al. (1999) list several organizational factors that influence the effective implementation of GIMC, including: (1) inter-office coordination; (2) coordination of communication tools across countries; (3) degree of centralization; (4) frequency of inter-office communication; and (5) use of information technology. Future research efforts are encouraged to explore the possible influences of these factors in more detail.

This study only explores targeting strategies and the use of promotional disciplines on the web. Globally integrated marketing communication focuses on the integration of visual and verbal messages across cultures. This study is only the first step toward a more in-depth investigation. To reduce possible complexity, future research may need to focus on one stakeholder at a time, or focus on the level of integration among more prominent functions, such as brand information, news releases, and sampling.

This study analyzes only the leading brands. Future research should also compare the practices between the well- and ill-performing brands. This can provide deeper understanding of what makes a brand perform well in terms of total communication.

Moriarty and Duncan (1991b), as well as Hassan and Katsanis (1994), called for people to use the web to reach cross-country segments. Nonetheless, few if any academic or industrial surveys explore the browsing behavior of these segments. Also, the literature

does not show how browsing and search behaviors influence attitudes, decision-making processes, or purchasing behaviors. Without this knowledge, web developers cannot understand how to effectively communicate with consumers. Future research efforts are encouraged to explore these areas.

After serious consideration, this study decided not to analyze the content of entire websites to ensure accuracy. Some information may not be found within the unit of analysis used and results should be interpreted with this in mind. In addition, this study only shows how the leading brands use the web to communicate with their key stakeholders and practice all kinds of marketing communication functions. These findings cannot be over generalized as the best practice. Further experimental studies are needed to draw such conclusions.

### Acknowledgements

This research was supported with research grants from the National Science Council of Taiwan (ROC).

### Notes

1. Industry wide, Kitchen and Li (2005) found that 83% of advertising and 70% of PR agencies in China offered IMC services to the clients even though agency respondents admitted that they lacked knowledge and expertise across different marketing communication functions. Relatively few clients requested integrated services because they may not understand or be convinced of the benefit of IMC. Similarly, many advertising agencies in Taiwan offered multi-functioning services (Liu 2001). Agencies in Taiwan also ranked the client's lack of knowledge on IMC as the top barrier for IMC and their own lack of IMC expertise was the third (Liu 2001). Different from China, however, the client's request for IMC services was considered the biggest drive for agencies to adapt IMC concepts (Liu 2001). Liu (2001) also found that few corporations relied on agencies to develop and implement their online promotional activities in Taiwan.

Patti et al. (2005) analyzed IMC syllabi and found that only five IMC courses were offered in China and 13 were offered in Taiwan. Considering the size of the student population and geographical area, Taiwan offered significantly more IMC courses compared with China. Nonetheless, Kitchen and Li's (2005) observation suggested that formal education was not the single contributor to the increasing knowledge of IMC. Don Schultz's visit to China generated widespread media coverage and enhanced people's interest and knowledge about this new concept. Similarly, in Taiwan, an increasing number of trade and popular magazine articles discuss IMC from 1998 to the present.

2. Gillette, Merrill Lynch, Budweiser, JP Morgan, Kellogg's, Gap, UBS, Harley-Davidson, Heinz, Gucci, Nintendo, Wrigley's, Colgate, Danone, Kraft, Rolex, Zara, Hertz, Hennessy, Smirnoff, Johnson and Johnson, Moet & Chandon, Prada, Bulgari, and Armani.
3. Microsoft, IBM, Intel, Cisco, Oracle, Google, Siemens, Accenture, Philips, Volkswagen, Kodak, Chanel, Adidas, Motorola, Reuters, BP, Porsche, Audi, Cartier, Shell, and LG.

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