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**A Cross-Cultural Analysis of American and Dutch
Museum Web Sites Concerning Online Fundraising**

“Fundraising is the gentle art of teaching the joy of giving.”

Hank Rosso

{Henry A. Rosso (1917-1999), founder of
The Fund Raising School, San Francisco,
USA}

Abstract

This study focuses on the information that can be found online encouraging support and donations to Dutch and American museums. Four English language web sites, two American and two Dutch, are analyzed and compared to identify possible issues that potential American donors might have when visiting Dutch museum sites. The expert-evaluation technique and heuristics are used to locate potential problems in content presentation, audience awareness, tone, style and credibility. In an effort to model the effects of culture on web design, Hofstede's cultural dimensions are used as the theoretical basis for comparing the content presented. It was found that the information on the Dutch web pages concerning online fundraising could be improved significantly by including various features that would appeal more to an American audience.

Keywords: Online Fundraising, Intercultural Communication, Heuristics, Culturally Customized Web Design

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the Netherlands the role of government support and subsidies given to cultural institutions is changing. As the current Dutch government makes clear in its cultural policy document *More than quality, a new vision on cultural policy (Meer dan kwaliteit, een nieuwe visie op cultuurbeleid)* the cultural sector will have to deal with budget cuts of approximately 200 million euros (2). The basic cultural infrastructure will have to absorb most of these cuts, amounting to 125 million euros (2). In practice this means that those cultural institutions that receive direct subsidies from the government will be hit the hardest.

The policy document makes clear that the Dutch government believes that cultural institutions should become less dependent on government subsidies and that these institutions should strengthen their relationship with the public and society (21). It is suggested that these policy changes will stimulate a *culture of giving* and a *culture of asking*, where the “Maecenas” shall once again obtain a prominent role (22). Be that as it may, the budget cuts do mean that many Dutch cultural organizations are being forced to rethink how to operate and survive in this new post government-subsidy era. Any new Dutch government will be faced with the same need to cut government deficits to meet agreed European norms and, therefore, fundraising and a more entrepreneurial spirit in the cultural sector will most probably be of increasing importance in the Netherlands.

Due to these cultural subsidy cuts, which are affecting all European Union countries, the Dutch government as well as Dutch cultural institutions are focusing on the role that fundraising plays in the United States, where the government has never supported the cultural sector to the extent that it has in the Netherlands. In the cultural context, the role of private giving by

individuals is far larger in the United States than in the Netherlands. As Renee Steenbergen, art historian and mediator between private givers and museums, mentions on her web site:

“Participating in the arts by private parties is very common in the United States, much more so than in the Netherlands. This is because the American system constitutes mainly of a gift culture whereas the Dutch culture still has to develop this.” (*Reneesteenbergen.com*)

The American culture of giving and the drying up of government subsidies across Europe has meant that more and more European cultural institutions are focusing on winning donations from American individuals. As Paul Sonne writes in his article “The Culture of Giving” in the *Wall Street Journal*: “Iconic cultural institutions like the Tate, the Marinsky and the Louvre have all set up American or International “friends groups” in the last decade, cashing in on donations coming from the U.S. where American supporters take advantage of domestic tax write-offs” (15).

This same trend can be observed in the Netherlands where American benefactors are becoming a target for Dutch cultural institutions as well. Various Dutch museums, such as the Mauritshuis, have set up broadly similar support groups (“International Friends Circles” or “American Friends Circles”), which include private American benefactors. Furthermore, the importance of Americans as a potential donor target group is clear from data collected from the annual reports of various Dutch museums such as the Van Gogh Museum and the Rijksmuseum which indicate that Americans are the second largest group visiting their web sites after the Dutch.

Considering this, it becomes clear that the Internet provides an ideal channel from which to reach, engage and inform potential benefactors for any organization. Recent studies, such as

David L. Rogers' *The Network Is Your Customer*, suggest that "whereas in the past personal contacts were believed to be the most important factor in fundraising worldwide, online fundraising is of growing importance" (8). Nowadays, an institution's web site is almost like a welcome card, and it plays a vital role in helping people learn about the organization and what options there are for becoming involved. The impact of a web site should not be underestimated as the case of the Metropolitan Museum makes clear. Their 2010-2011 annual report mentions that an estimated amount of more than \$13 million was brought in by its website during the financial year (*Metmuseum.org*). Although a proportion of this is accounted for by online sales, the figure does suggest that its online fundraising section is a success.

The importance of a good web site and its potential role in attracting new donors has not been studied extensively in the Netherlands. However, American research published in the *International Journal of Non-Profit and Voluntary Marketing* by Harrison-Walker and Williams suggests that the design and structure of web sites are starting to play an important role in attracting new donors. As Harrison-Walker and Williamson emphasize: "It appears that online fundraising is proving to be an important component of the overall fundraising strategy and may be particularly useful in attracting new benefactors" (249). Online fundraising therefore has many advantages, allowing organizations to reach out and connect to more people from all over the world than ever before. However, online fundraising is more complex than it may first appear.

As fundraising spills over national borders, institutions have to be aware and understand that there are various culturally determined elements which are critical in determining the success of their web sites (Singh and Pereira 27). Designing a web site from one's own perspective without being prepared for cultural differences can lead to misinterpretation and

unsuccessful online fundraising. Studies on web sites and culture show that culture can influence lay-out, image and color preferences that directly affect the way that a user interacts with the site (Barber and Badre 8). Therefore, a key issue in the quest for global success through the Internet is: “the ability to design a web site that draws targeted audiences, generates the desired behavior, builds trust and loyalty with these customers, and is invulnerable to competitive marketing actions” (Singh and Pereira ix).

In the context of intercultural communication, this thesis will look specifically at the internationally oriented English language Internet web sites that the Van Gogh Museum and the Rijksmuseum have set up alongside their Dutch language sites. The sections of the web sites about supporting the museum will be compared, from an intercultural perspective, to the sections on supporting the museums of two leading American cultural institutions, the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, and the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The choice of these museums will be explained in further detail in Chapter Three.

The aim of this research is to analyze the extent to which those sections of the web sites concerning sponsorship of the two Dutch cultural institutions differ from the sponsorship sections of the American web sites in terms of their web design and cultural usability. The analysis will determine whether the Dutch web sites appeal to the American web visitor and if not why not. It is assumed that the American web sites will display culturally specific American features that can be used as an example to establish criteria helpful in the analysis and comparison between the Dutch and the American web sites. In the analysis of the chosen web sites, different aspects will be taken into account. The central question of this thesis is whether the web sites set up in English by Dutch cultural institutions present an identifiable Dutch cultural bias, when compared to those set up by American museums. If this proves to be the case,

they might be unintentionally discouraging potential American benefactors from signing up with Dutch museums because of their online presentation. A key question is whether Dutch institutions have, for instance, designed their web sites with American cultural proclivities in mind.

To determine if this is the case a two-part analysis of the four web sites will be conducted. Firstly, the comprehensibility of the web sites will be considered. Web sites have to be comprehensible and people have to be able to find what they are looking for with relative ease. Even if the designers and writers have taken into account cultural differences between American and Dutch readers, this will serve little purpose if the web site has not been structured in a comprehensible way. Therefore the heuristics of these web sites will be considered on the basis of the guidelines developed by Jan Spyridakis. Secondly, the web sites will be analyzed in terms of Hofstede's cultural dimension theory. As only translating a Dutch web site into English is not enough, special attention also has to be paid to cultural specific features and this goes further than language alone (Singh and Pereira 28).

Chapter Two will provide a theoretical framework that introduces the sources that are used in this thesis. It will provide quotations from the literature and cite studies that have proven to be useful in this research. At the end of the chapter, a number of hypotheses will be presented. Chapter Three will discuss the method used for the two-part analysis of the four web sites on the basis of comprehensibility, heuristics and cultural customization. Chapter Four will present the results of the analysis of the web sites based on their comprehensibility and heuristics. Chapter Five will continue with the second part of the analysis. The results of the investigation of cultural dimensions on the four web sites will be discussed. Chapter Six will present a conclusion of all findings. Chapter Seven will present a series of recommendations for improving the sponsorship

sections of the Dutch web sites and improve their appeal to an American audience. Chapter Eight will deal with the limitations of the research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Ever since the arrival of the World Wide Web it has been evolving. Today it is seen as providing unprecedented advantages to companies attempting to tap the global market. With this globalization, however, certain questions arise. One of these is the extent to which culture influences web preference and usability and the impact this has on the success of a web site. As the basis for improving web sites, web site evaluation and analysis are of great importance to locate potential problems successfully. This importance derives from the fact that analyzing and evaluating web sites may uncover certain culture specific features that can provide solutions for improving comprehensibility of web sites.

Web evaluation and cultural analysis theories are the focus of this chapter. The models that will be discussed, dealing with heuristics and the cultural customization of web design, form the theoretical basis for this thesis. Before taking cultural differences on web sites into account, it must first be determined if the web sites are comprehensible. Even if the designers and writers have adapted their web site in terms of cultural differences between American and Dutch readers, this will serve little purpose if the web site is not comprehensible and web site visitors cannot find what they are looking for with relative ease. As the goal of this research is to establish whether Dutch web sites are attracting as many potential American donors as possible, an analysis of this kind is expected to provide useful insight in regard to determining readers' comprehension and the overall effectiveness of web sites.

2.1 Evaluating Web Sites

According to De Jong and Lentz, specialists on web evaluation, web analysis can provide certain insights on the effectiveness of web pages. In the study *An evaluation of local*

government web sites from the perspective of user scenarios (Evaluatie van gemeentelijke web sites aan de hand van gebruikersscenario's) they mention different methods for web analysis.

These are the expert-evaluation method, where experts evaluate a web site and the user-evaluation method where feedback and evaluations on web sites are gathered from a group of web site visitors. De Jong and Lentz mention that the scenario-evaluation method is part of the expert-evaluation method but that the big difference is that web site evaluators judge the web site from different user perspectives instead of merely their own.

De Jong and Lentz argue that all means for evaluating web sites have their limitations and that the expert-evaluation method does not have their preference. One of their main arguments is that when the scenario method is not used the knowledge of the expert can have an undesired effect on the validity of the research (12). Furthermore, they suggest that it is hard for experts to judge the needs, language use and preferences of a specific audience (14). Despite these limitations, the expert-evaluation method remains a popular research technique for web site analysis, because it is efficient and less time consuming than the user-evaluation method or the scenario-evaluation method (De Jong and Lentz 14). Although the expert-evaluation method has some recognized shortcomings, it provides a variety of useful guidelines for locating problems with web sites (De Jong and Lentz 12). In the light of this, the expert-evaluation method has been used in this thesis.

To determine how effective a web site is features such as user friendliness, navigational structure, information quality and visual design are important (De Jong and Lentz 14). These features (amongst others) are what Lentz calls heuristics. Lentz defines heuristics as “recommendations for proper web sites” (12). According to Lentz, heuristics are used to judge if web visitors understand what they read on a web site. Lentz mentions that working with

heuristics can help uncover potential problems that might otherwise be missed (16). Furthermore, by using heuristics experts are offered new perspectives. Heuristics make the expert focus on certain parts of web sites and evaluate them with a set of criteria. By using these criteria as an analytical tool experts can judge if a web site is comprehensible or not. As potential donors visiting the web sites should be drawn in and immediately be able to find how they can participate in supporting the museum, heuristics are an important point of analysis in this thesis.

2.2 Comprehensible Web Sites

Spyridakis' study *Comprehensible Web Pages and Evaluating their Success* provides a number of heuristics for evaluating web sites. Spyridakis' study is important in the field of web analysis because, as she makes clear, unlike other research done on the subject, her research focuses on writing topics such as content selection, structure, word usage and tone etc. (359).

Spyridakis states that readers of hypertext have three tasks and that these are selecting what information to access on a web site, navigating the site, and forming a text representation of information that crosses pages and sites (360). To assist in maximizing readers' comprehension and improving the effectiveness of Web Sites, Spyridakis offers a set of guidelines that enables authors to create Web pages that their readers can understand and that helps evaluators to judge the comprehensibility of a specific web site (359).

According to Spyridakis, presenting content is an important point when evaluating the effectiveness of a web site. As Spyridakis makes clear: "Once users of a Web page locate the content they are seeking by scanning the page, they become real "readers" of the Web page, and like readers of print materials, they try to make sense of sentences, paragraphs, and pages" (359). Spyridakis mentions that organized content helps readers orient themselves and presents

information that is structured in a way that helps readers identify what is important to them with relative ease (360). Irrelevant or muddled content makes it harder for readers to find what they are looking for and makes the process of finding relevant information more of a challenge.

In addition to content, Spyridakis underlines the importance of identifying one's audience when evaluating the effectiveness of web pages (361). Being aware of the audience is important when designing web sites because the more interesting and relevant the reader finds a text to be the more likely they are to comprehend it (Spyridakis 362).

Another of Spyridakis' guidelines focuses on the subject of style and tone. Spyridakis suggests that the use of the active voice in a text makes readers move more quickly through a text while absorbing more from it (369). Spyridakis also mentions the advantages of using concise wording and short sentences for increasing comprehension (370). In addition, Spyridakis recommends choosing a tone that fits the message and audience of the web page (361).

Spyridakis recommends that readers are more likely to continue reading if they feel that the information given on the web site is credible and mentions various effective features in obtaining this seal of credibility (373). Credibility of web sites is easily affected by the absence or presence of certain web features. As Spyridakis makes clear: "For some, the credibility of a company or institution may begin with its Web sites" (373).

In line with Spyridakis, the *Federal Plain Language Guidelines 2010* (FPLG) offer a list of recommendations compiled by The Plain Language Action and Information Network of the United States to "improve communication from the federal government to the public" (*Plainlanguage.gov*). They advise that paragraphs should be kept short and include topic sentences that draw the audience into the new block of text (9). This makes the text more inviting

to read and easier to scan. Limiting each paragraph or section to one topic makes it easier for the audience to understand the information provided (10). It must be mentioned that as both Jan Spyridakis and the FPLG guidelines are American sources, this could create a bias in their suggestions. For the purpose of this thesis, however, this is not believed to be a disadvantage as American web users are the subject of this research.

In this thesis, the previously mentioned guidelines set up by Spyridakis', have been adopted as the tool for analysis. These heuristics provide insights into audience, content, tone, style and credibility. These points of analysis have been chosen to establish the level of accessibility, comprehensibility and effectiveness of the web sites. These points will be further discussed in the Method Chapter where the specific method of analysis will be explained.

2.3 Defining Culture

After comparing heuristics and judging comprehensibility, the first step towards analyzing web sites on the basis of culture is to explain what is meant by culture. For over a century, scholars have tried to define culture adequately, but to this day no agreement has been reached regarding its nature (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 13). It has, though, become increasingly accepted that culture affects people's behavior and interpretations of behavior and that central to any definition of culture is the concept of "shared values" (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 15, Singh and Pereira 28). The question that arises in the context of shared values is what exactly is meant by this term. One explanation, put forward by the social psychologist Milton Rokeach suggests that: "a value system is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct" (29).

The way people construct values is influenced by various factors including the environment they live in-and the way they have been taught to see things (Singh and Pereira 24).

Culture, however, is more than this alone. As Moore and Woodrow suggest:

...the cumulative result of experience, beliefs, values, knowledge, social organizations, perceptions of time, spatial relations, material objects and possessions and concepts of the universe acquired or created by groups of people over the course of generations. It is socially constructed through individual and group effort and interactions. Culture manifests itself in patterns of language, behavior, activities, procedures, roles and social peers and may even look similar to those of people from other cultures. (151)

Thus, culture manifests itself in a number of ways and differs from group to group. These manifestations of culture are important in the context of this thesis as they influence the process of communication.

As the same culture is not shared by everyone, coming in contact with different cultures can hardly be avoided. As Spencer-Oatey and Franklin make clear, this interaction between different cultural groups can be challenging in many different ways (90). Although the same language might be spoken, certain other factors and cues might be interpreted differently across different cultures (94). People are often unaware of their own culturally based communication styles and this can lead to misunderstanding. For communication to be successful, “each party must be aware of their own culture and the cultural starting points of the other” (Ferraro 106).

2.4 Hofstede’s Dimensions of Culture

Cultural values are often used to explain behavioral differences amongst different cultures (Singh and Pereira 24). In the early 1980’s, the Dutch social scientist Geert Hofstede,

derived four major dimensions of cultural values on the basis of surveys conducted in the early 1970's of one hundred thousand and sixteen IBM employees in more than seventy different countries on all four continents asking about their attitudes and work-related values (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 17). By averaging the score of all respondents from a particular country, Hofstede used statistical techniques to identify four dimensions of cultural values. This framework of value differences, found in various parts of the world, was designed to help explain and to better understand the value preferences most commonly observed across different cultural groups (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 18).

The four fundamental dimensions of country/cultural-level variation that emerged from Hofstede's study were: High/Low Power Distance; Individualism/Collectivism; Masculinity/Femininity; and High/Low Uncertainty Avoidance. Later a fifth dimension Long-Term/Short-Term Orientation was added. Although this last dimension is included in the table below, it will not be covered further in this thesis because it did not form part of the analytical framework that this research has used. Each of Hofstede's values implies differences in behavior. The cultural dimensions summarized below combine definitions used by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin and Singh and Pereira:

Table 1: Hofstede's Dimension of Culture

Power Distance	Expresses the degree to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. A belief in authority and hierarchy is present in these societies.
Individualism vs. Collectivism	Expresses a belief in the importance of the goals of the individual versus the goals of the group and indicates how closely or loosely a society is nit
Masculinity vs. Femininity	Expresses how gender roles are allocated in different cultures and what emphasis is placed on values like achievement, assertiveness, mastery, harmony, and caring.
Uncertainty Avoidance	Expresses to what extent members of a cultural group feel threatened by uncertain or unknown circumstances and except ambiguity and limited structure.
Long-term – Short-term Orientation	Expresses whether the focus of people's efforts is on the future or the present.

While there has been some criticism regarding Hofstede's work, his approach has been used extensively in research and has been accepted as being an important catalyst for the development of cultural theory (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 18). On this basis, it is considered to be "a valid foundation for the analysis of web sites and web site adaption to local cultures" (Singh and Pereira 55).

2.5 Values in Web Design

Nitish Singh and Arun Pereira's *The Culturally Customized Web Site* published in 2005 discusses whether the web is a culturally neutral medium of communication or a medium infused with cultural values. The book analyzes cultural aspects of international web site design and presents a tested framework for designing culturally adapted international web sites (Singh and Pereira 2).

To analyze the cultural aspects of web sites, Singh and Pereira devised their own Cultural Values Framework combining Hofstede's original four dimensions with a fifth High/Low Context Cultures dimension based on the work of T.E. Hall. Hall's dimension concentrates on behavioral differences and patterns found in communication and the way in which messages are used to convey meaning (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 23). Hall's work has been used widely and has been validated by various researchers when analyzing advertising and promotional differences between cultures (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 24). By comparing a self-made list of interactive features commonly found on web sites (newsletters, FAQ's, security policy, privacy policy, graphics, hyperlinks etc.) to Hofstede and Hall's cultural dimensions, Singh and Pereira found that web sites do indeed reflect values consistent with those predicted by the Cultural Value Framework. To understand what this implies for web design and how the model is used, a short summary of the five cultural dimensions used by Singh and Pereira and the implications that they have for web design is necessary.

2.5.1 Power Distance Dimension in Web Design

Countries scoring high on the Power Distance (PD) dimension tend to have a hierarchical social structure and place more emphasis on status and authority than countries that score lower do. In view of this, Singh and Pereira suggest that when targeting web site visitors in high PD societies certain elements need to be emphasized. Firstly, countries scoring high on the PD dimension often include pictures of important people and information concerning hierarchies on their web sites. This helps visitors get to know the organization and to establish a basis for authority. Secondly, proper titles are often highlighted on these web sites to show the professional degree persons hold and to delineate each individual's position in the hierarchy.

Thirdly, these web sites are likely to display quality awards and other marks of distinction prominently to show status (Singh and Pereira 115).

For targeting web site visitors in low PD societies, Singh and Pereira make clear that the characteristics mentioned above are not priorities. Although hierarchical charts and awards won may be found on such web sites, they are less necessary for establishing a basis for authority or importance. Instead, low PD societies tend to show a greater concern for equal rights and the expertise of the individual. Singh and Pereira's advice is that when designing for low PD societies, it is best to focus on one or more of the other cultural dimensions for which they have high scores.

2.5.2 Individualism vs. Collectivism in Web Design

According to Singh, Pereira and Hofstede individualist societies encourage personal achievement, and are generally more self-reliant and centered on "I-consciousness" (Singh and Pereira 75). Self-reliance, achievement and freedom are all valued to a greater extent in these societies than in societies scoring high on the dimension of collectivism. Therefore, societies scoring high on the Dimension of Individualism are more geared towards the individual web visitor and it is therefore more important to incorporate web elements such as a privacy policy and policies for the protection of personal information. Furthermore, images and themes depicting self-reliance, self-recognition and achievement are more common, as are other factors such as an emphasis on product uniqueness, a promotional tone directed toward individuals and individual acknowledgement (Singh and Pereira 87).

Countries scoring high on the Collectivism dimension, on the other hand, are more connected and less centered around the individual. In these societies, "strong societal bonds are

common where group well-being takes precedence over individual well-being” (Singh and Pereira 75). Singh and Pereira state that features such as chat rooms, community relations, family themed images and symbols and pictures of national identity are important to these societies because they reflect group precedence and a strong bond with others (78).

2.5.3 Masculinity vs. Femininity in Web Design

According to Hofstede and Singh and Pereira the Masculinity-Femininity Dimension explains how gender roles are allocated in different cultures and what emphasis is placed on values like achievement, assertiveness, mastery, harmony, and caring. Whereas masculine cultures value assertiveness, material possessions and success, feminine cultures place more value on helping others, preserving the environment, quality of life and nurturance (Singh and Pereira 129).

Singh and Pereira suggest that web design in masculine oriented societies commonly stresses success factors and performance indicators. The use of “direct, decisive and more aggressive language is preferred to emphasize a product’s superior performance and show strength” (Singh and Pereira 129). Secondly, less imagery is provided in favor of more to the point, pragmatic and factual information (Singh and Pereira 132). Lastly, clear gender roles are often depicted in masculine societies, where women are given nurture-related roles and men macho and strong ones (Singh and Pereira 135).

A key aspect of femininity in web design was found to be the soft sell approach, where language instead of being direct and aggressive, gave subjective impressions of intangible aspects of a product or service (Singh and Pereira 126). Another was the use of more entertaining and less factual themes ~~were used~~ to promote products (Singh and Pereira 126). A third was

giving more care to the aesthetics and harmony of the web site by using more colors and emphasizing images (Singh and Pereira 126).

2.5.4 Uncertainty Avoidance in Web Design

As mentioned above, the Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension measures the extent to which societies can deal with uncertainty and ambiguity. Cultures with a high score in this dimension tend to be “more risk averse, avoid ambiguous situations and value security over risk and adventure” (Singh and Pereira 97).

Singh and Pereira note that when designing web sites for Uncertainty Avoidance cultures, careful attention needs to be paid to features that can reduce an individual’s anxiety with the medium. To make the audience feel at ease and trust the web site they are on, it is important to incorporate features that help the customer along. The higher a country scores, the more relevant the following features become: customer service, guided navigation, traditional themes, local terminology, transaction security and testimonials. For countries at the low end of uncertainty avoidance the features above are not priorities (Singh and Pereira 99).

2.5.5 Hall’s High-Low Context in Web Design

High Context and Low Context are the opposites of the same cultural value. As Hall states “to communicate effectively across cultures, the correct level of context has to be found” (124). In High Context Cultures less explicit information is transmitted and symbols and nonverbal cues are more important in communicating than is the situational context. Low Context countries, on the other hand, are more action oriented and the manner in which they transmit information is more explicit and direct (Singh and Pereira 142).

Singh and Pereira note that by incorporating such features as politeness and indirectness, the soft-sell approach and aesthetics, a web site becomes more closely customized to high context cultures (142). On the other hand, low context cultures are more likely to incorporate such features as a hard-sell approach, the use of superlatives and rankings or prestige indicators (Singh and Pereira 140).

2.6 Cultural Value Scores Netherlands vs. the United States

As can be concluded from Singh and Pereira's survey research, different cultures tend to prefer different web site characteristics depending on their score on the Cultural Values Framework. To analyze and compare the cultural dimension of the web sites that are subject to this thesis, it is necessary to determine how the Netherlands and the United States score on the dimensions that Hofstede has incorporated in his Cultural Values Framework. For an overview, the scores of the Netherlands compared to the United States can be found in the figure below:

Fig.1 Dimension Scores Netherlands vs. United States



When considering the scores of both countries, certain differences and similarities can be perceived. Out of Hofstede's four original dimensions it is apparent that the scores in the Power Distance Dimension and the Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension are the most similar for both countries. The United States, with a score of forty on the Power Distance Dimension, scores just two points higher than the Netherlands, with a score of thirty eight on the same dimension. On the Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension, the Netherlands, with a score of fifty three, outscores the United States, with a score of forty six, by seven points.

The biggest difference can be found in the Masculinity Dimension, where the United States scores sixty two points, compared to only fourteen for the Netherlands. Here a difference of forty eight can be noted. When it comes to the Individuality Dimension, both the United States and the Netherlands score their highest total points. However, with respective scores of ninety one for the United States and eighty for the Netherlands, there is a noticeable difference of eleven points between them.

2.7 Expected Results

The research described above allows for the formation of hypotheses with respect to heuristics and comprehensibility as well as the presence of certain features reflecting cultural dimensions on the four chosen web sites. These hypotheses are presented below.

Hypothesis 1: As all the museums analyzed are professional institutions it is expected that all web sites can be classified as comprehensible according to Spyridakis' guidelines on comprehensible web sites.

Hypothesis 2: The content of all four web sites will have been arranged with a view to helping readers identify what is important to them. It is expected that the two American

sites will have an easier task of understanding and identifying their audience of potential US donors than the Dutch sites.

Hypothesis 3: The style and tone of the two American web sites will make more use of the promotional tone than the two Dutch sites.

Hypothesis 4: As the Netherlands and the United States rate highest on Hofstede's Dimension of Individuality (IDV), both countries are ~~therefore~~ expected to have incorporated relevant and important web elements such as a privacy policy and personal information protection.

Hypothesis 5: On the Dimension of Masculinity (MAS) the Netherlands scores significantly lower than the United States. It is therefore assumed that traits such as assertiveness, material possessions, and success, will be more evident on the American web sites; whereas feminine traits, such as helping others, preserving the environment and the quality of life and nurture, will be more apparent on the Dutch web sites.

Hypothesis 6: Because both the Netherlands and the United States score similarly low on Power Distance, it is not expected that either country's web sites will place much stress on social hierarchy or authority.

Hypothesis 7: On Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension, the Netherlands scores only slightly higher than the United States. Consequently, it is expected that not there will not be much stress on the characteristics that Singh and Pereira mention as being of importance in high uncertainty avoidance cultures.

Hypothesis 8: As both countries are classified as Low Context countries, it is to be expected that the manner in which they communicate will be similar. It is probable that they will both use explicit and direct language and a hard-sell approach and employ superlatives to promote their ranking as highly prestigious institutions.

Chapter 3: Method

To examine the validity of the formulated hypotheses an attempt will be made to establish whether the web sites set up in English by Dutch cultural institutions present an identifiable Dutch cultural bias, when compared to those set up by American museums. A two part analysis will be presented. Firstly, the comprehensibility of the web sites will be considered from the perspective of heuristics to determine differences between the American and Dutch web sites. Readers' comprehension and the overall effectiveness of the web sites will be taken into account. Secondly, the presence of certain culturally determined web features on the web sites will be examined. As presented in the theoretical framework, culture is believed to influence web site preferences. Specific web features for each cultural dimension will therefore be another important element of analysis to this thesis.

3.1 Source of Data

As mentioned in the introduction, the Dutch cultural sector has been looking to America both as an inspiration on how to raise funds from private individuals and as a means to make up for government subsidy cuts by winning donations from American individuals. Therefore, analyzing the ways that the web sites of Dutch cultural institutions differ from those of similar American institutions in terms of design and cultural usability might provide insights into ways to attract more American benefactors.

To test the hypotheses presented, two Dutch web sites were selected from a list published by the Nederlandse Museumvereniging (The Netherlands Association of Museums). The Nederlandse Museumvereniging is the national association of the museum branch in the Netherlands that, among other services, provides a list naming the most visited museums in the

Netherlands. The Van Gogh Museum and the Rijksmuseum were found to be ranking first and third on this list (with the Anne Frank House in second place). Thus, both museums can be perceived as leaders in the Dutch museum world. After having further investigated the museums on the list, both the Van Gogh Museum and the Rijksmuseum were selected due to the fact that both their annual reports mentioned that American web visitors were the second largest group visiting their web sites after the Dutch. Therefore, incorporating web features for American audiences on both web sites might prove useful.

After the Dutch museums were chosen two American museums were selected from “America’s Top 5 most visited museums” as listed on the American national newspaper USA Today’s web site (*Usatoday.com*). Having investigated all the museums on the list, the Metropolitan Museum and the National Gallery of Art were found to be most similar in terms of their collection to the Dutch Museums. This decision was based on the information provided on both web sites and was considered relevant because a similar target audience can be expected.

3.2 Chosen Points of Analysis

When analyzing and comparing the chosen American and Dutch English language web sites, specific elements have been taken from the work of both Spyridakis and Singh and Pereira. These are listed below and were chosen to uncover differences in the presentation of similar information on the four web sites. The American web sites were analyzed first, because it was presumed that they would set the standard for the Dutch sites and already incorporate elements that would appeal specifically to an American donor audience.

There is some overlap between the first and second parts of the analysis. Spyridakis’ guidelines are more general, those of Singh and Pereira are more specific to different cultures.

Although following different analytical paths, both occasionally come to very similar conclusions. For example, Spyridakis suggests using a tone and style that fits the message and the audience of the web page, in this instance an American one, with a marked preference for a direct and promotional style. Singh and Pereira, for their part, come to a similar conclusion suggesting that the Netherlands and the United States should both stress product uniqueness and personalization based upon the scores that their countries get on the Individualism Dimension of the Cultural Values Framework that they have developed on the basis of Hofstede and Hall.

Such an outcome could not be predicted at the beginning of the research and would not be the case if the countries chosen scored very differently on the Cultural Values Framework. Therefore, despite some occasional overlap, it was decided that for completeness and the integrity of the research, all the results of both the heuristic and cultural analyses would be presented separately.

Below, the guidelines defined by Spyridakis will first be discussed and points of analyses identified. Then the cultural dimensions utilized by Singh and Pereira in their study will be listed together with the specific web features analyzed in this research.

3.2.1 Content

Spyridakis suggests various guidelines for facilitating content selection and design that will help readers find their way and thus make web pages more comprehensible and easy to follow. First of all, Spyridakis makes clear that it is important that web visitors can orient themselves by quickly accessing those things that they are already aware of (relevant prior knowledge). This, in turn, can help them “easily comprehend the new information presented and find what they are looking for” (361). Spyridakis suggests that the following points prove

effective in orienting the reader namely: “An informative title at the top of each page, an introduction or introductory sentence that announces the topic and specifies the intended audience, repetition of company or agency names, redefinition of specific terminology, and spelling out of acronyms on each page” (361).

The FPLG mention the use of headings, short sections and breaking up material to assist the reader in comprehending content (9). By combining the FPLG guidelines and Spyridakis’ suggestions the points of analysis will therefore be:

- 1) Use of informative titles
- 2) Introduction/introductory sentence announcing the topic and audience
- 3) Presentation of company name
- 4) Short paragraphs containing one topic

3.2.2 Audience

It is important to discover whether the four museum web sites are aware of the audience discussed in this thesis and in what ways they have geared the text on their web sites to best meet the audience’s needs. Due to the fact that this thesis concentrates on American web visitors interested in supporting the museum, the points of analysis for audience will be:

- 1) Information on supporting the museum
- 2) Naming of audience
- 3) Relevant information for Americans on Dutch web sites

3.2.3 Tone and Style

Tone, writing style and language are culturally influenced to a great extent. Research has shown that whereas one culture might prefer detailed narratives and long sentences, others prefer

short sentences and concise language. Most commonly, Americans are typecast as preferring a direct form of language, with text that gets to the point. The FPLG advice is to use short sentences, break up ideas into parts and make each one the subject of its own sentence (8). They suggest this works better for conveying information and has been found easier to process for American audiences.

An important factor in employing a promotional tone is using personal pronouns and adjectives to draw in the reader. The FPLG state that: “personal pronouns help the audience picture themselves in the text and relate better. More than any other single technique, using “you” pulls users into your document and makes it relevant to them (30)”. Spyridakis also suggests that the use of personal pronouns can be quite an effective way for a web page author to draw the reader quickly into the information presented (373). Elements that will be taken into account in the analysis will be:

- 1) Use of concise language and short sentences
- 2) Use of the promotional tone
- 3) Use of the personal pronoun *you* throughout the text

3.2.4 Credibility

The question of credibility plays a big part in online fundraising. Without web visitors believing that a web site is credible, obtaining donations and attracting members through this medium will be nearly impossible. The features named by Spyridakis for obtaining credibility are the features that will be analyzed:

- 1) Publishing an author’s name, credentials and email address
- 2) Publishing the date that the site was last posted or updated

- 3) Citation of sources when appropriate
- 4) Up-to-date information
- 5) Links to relevant sites
- 6) Accurate information
- 7) Naming affiliation that the web reader can check out

3.3 Analysis of Cultural Design

After having analyzed the heuristics and determining whether each of the web sites is comprehensible, the second step of analysis will be evaluating their cultural design. Hofstede's and Hall's cultural dimensions are used for making a comparison of web design tendencies in the Netherlands and the United States. If the theory of cultural dimensions is a valid hypothesis, then both American and both Dutch web sites should have similarities in their cultural approach, which reflect national cultural proclivities. On this basis, it was decided that what was needed for meaningful conclusions was a comparative analysis, investigating the cultural differences between the American and the Dutch sites. In the following section, a checklist of specific web features, as constructed by Singh and Pereira, will be presented for discussion and analysis.

3.3.1 Web Analysis for Individuality

As both the United States and the Netherlands score high on Hofstede's cultural dimension of Individualism, features reflecting this tendency are thought to be more important than those reflecting Collectivism. Singh and Pereira suggest that there are specific features that should be incorporated into web design for countries with predominantly individualistic tendencies. These features, discussed below, will be important in the actual analysis of the four web sites and will form the basis for conclusions about whether the sites are fit for purpose:

3.3.1.1 Privacy statement

As personal identity is important in individualistic cultures, so is its protection (Singh and Pereira 86). People are therefore hesitant to share personal information and appreciate a privacy statement on the web page. Usually a privacy statement can be found at the bottom of a home page in a link form. This link provides web site visitors with assurance that their personal information will be safe and protected and not used for other purposes.

3.3.1.2 Product uniqueness

One feature of Individualism is wanting to stand out from the crowd (Singh and Pereira 87). Products that are thought to be responsive to individual needs are valued to a greater extent in individualistic cultures and often emphasize uniqueness and originality in those cultures. In the context of this thesis, it will be examined if these values are reflected in the four web site sections for supporting the museum. Presenting the web visitor with different membership options and ways for supporting the museum might reflect the value of individual needs and emphasize uniqueness.

3.3.1.3 Personalization

Singh and Pereira make clear that promotional appeals in individualist cultures should be directed towards the individual and made relevant to them. The use of the personal pronoun *you* will therefore be analyzed as will the naming of the American audience. In addition to this, Singh and Pereira advise that web sites “reflect the benefit individuals stand to gain from a product” (88). It will therefore be examined if the benefits for joining the museums are listed and prominently displayed.

3.3.2 Web Analysis for Masculinity/Femininity

As both countries score so differently on the cultural dimension of Masculinity, this dimension will be of special interest. Singh and Pereira's analysis would suggest that the Dutch sites should incorporate a soft sell approach, aesthetics and harmony, while the American sites are likely to stress product effectiveness, clear gender roles and fun factors such as quizzes, trivia and games. As the focus in this thesis is on the American target audience, the English language fundraising parts of the four museum web sites will be analyzed. It will be determined if the American sites reflect the masculine values that are considered to define their culture and if the more culturally feminine Dutch have managed to design fundraising web pages that appeal to their American audience. The features that will be analyzed are the following:

3.3.2.1 Stressing of Product Effectiveness

Appeals emphasizing a product's superior performance are common in masculine cultures (Singh and Pereira 129). To depict this factor on web sites, Singh and Pereira advise designers to emphasize success, achievement, quality and performance. An analysis will be made to discover if this emphasis can be found on the American web sites and if achievement and quality values are used to describe the museum itself and the different ways of supporting the museum. The approach on the American sites will be compared to that on the Dutch sites to see if more feminine cultural values can be identified.

3.3.2.2 Clear gender roles depicted in images

In masculine societies, images tend to depict men as important and powerful and women in familial situations associated with distinct female roles such as being a mother or a wife (Singh and Pereira 133). The images used on the American web sites will be compared to the images used on the Dutch web sites.

3.3.2.3 Hard-sell approach

A hard-sell approach is defined as using direct and aggressive language to promote a product or service. In masculine societies the use of aggressive promotions are more common than in feminine societies (Singh and Pereira 145). It will be examined if this hard-sell approach is present on the web site sections concentrating on gaining donations from web visitors.

3.3.2.4 Included trivia, games and quizzes

According to Singh and Pereira, masculine web sites often incorporate trivia, games and quizzes to make a web site more fun, exciting and success oriented. An analysis will be made to determine whether the web sites have incorporated these features in the sections on supporting the museum.

3.3.3 Web Analysis for Uncertainty Avoidance

In terms of Hofstede's cultural dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance both the Netherlands and the United States score relatively low in comparison to other countries. The Netherlands scores slightly higher, though, and therefore certain features might be more prominent on the Dutch web sites. Singh and Pereira mention that societies scoring high on Uncertainty Avoidance are often less used to using electronic media such as the Internet, since it is not well suited to reduce uncertainty. Certain web design features such as site navigation can assist in usability and are therefore thought to be important for avoiding user uncertainty. The following points will be examined:

3.3.3.1 Customer service

Customer service generally acts as bridge between the customer and an organization's web page that the customer is visiting or interested in buying from. The primary function of

customer service is to provide information to the customer and help resolve any problems the customer encounters on the web site. Customer service web features are usually found in countries scoring high in uncertainty avoidance. It will be investigated if this web feature is present on the sections of the web sites concerned with fund raising.

3.3.3.2 Guided navigation

Singh and Pereira make clear that individuals in high uncertainty cultures show a preference for clear directions and instructions (100). Incorporating guided navigation can help individuals feel more in control and offer more predictability. Guided navigation basically means offering the web visitors an easy route to navigate the web site by incorporating web features such as directions on how best to browse the site, clear buttons and a so called “breadcrumb trail,” which shows which path individuals have been following as they move from web page to web page, for example: Home >Support >the Museum->American Friend Circle>Annual Giving. This feature greatly facilitates navigation and makes it easier for individuals to move back and control where they have been on the web site (101).

3.3.3.3 Transnational testimonials

Consumers from High Uncertainty Avoidance cultures tend to be uncomfortable using their credit card or shopping online. To help reduce anxiety, testimonials from third parties are often depicted alongside other features on web sites to tell customers that the web site is secure.

3.3.4 Web Analysis for Power Distance

People in High Power Distance societies tend to show respect and obedience to the elderly and authority figures (Singh and Pereira 115). As the web does not easily allow for direct face to face interactive contact and a display of deference, it is important for web sites targeting

web users in High Power Distance societies to let users know the status of the people, company or products they are dealing with. Equally important is depicting respect for authority on the web sites. As the Netherlands and the United States score very low on Power Distance, the lack of high Power Distance characteristics will be identified and discussed on the American and the Dutch web sites.

3.3.5 Web Analysis for High-Low Context

The Netherlands and the United States can both be classified as Low-Context countries (Singh and Pereira 141). Therefore, it would be expected that features underlining direct communication and confrontational appeals, such as aggressive selling, would be incorporated into web site design (Singh and Pereira 142). The specific web features named by Singh and Pereira that could be incorporated by those designing web sites geared to fundraising are described below:

3.3.5.1 Hard-sell approach

See 3.4.3.2

3.3.5.2 Rank, Prestige and Superlatives

Singh and Pereira mention that superlatives are often used to highlight the prestige and importance of a company by using such phrases as “the most popular museum” (148). The Oxford Dictionary defines superlatives in the following way:

In grammar, the superlative is the form of an adjective (or adverb) that indicates that the person or thing (or action) modified has the quality of the adjective (or adverb) to a degree greater than that of anything it is being compared to in a given context. English

superlatives are typically formed with the suffix -est (e.g. healthiest, weakest) or the word most (most recent, most interesting). (*Oxforddictionary.com*)

In addition to superlatives, Singh and Pereira mention that Low-Context cultures use direct and rhetorical style features (148). The presence of these features will be taken into account when analysing the level of Low-Context web features found on the web sites.

Chapter 4: Results Comprehensibility

This chapter will present the results obtained from the application of the methodology discussed in the previous chapter. It begins by reporting the results of the analysis based upon Spyridakis' guidelines of the current online benefactor/fund raising sections found on the four museums' web sites. These sections and their subsections will be described using Spyridakis' guidelines for content, audience, tone and style, and credibility as a yardstick of their potential effectiveness. Building on these findings the chapter continues with an analysis of the previously mentioned web features found to be of importance for the American culture and web site visitors. For a concise overview, the findings of the chapter have been checked in the table below:

Table 2: Results Comprehensibility Analysis

	National Gallery of Art	Metropolitan Museum of Art	Rijksmuseum	Van Gogh Museum
1. Content				
Informative titles	✓	✓	✓	✓
Introduction	✓	✓	✓	
Introductory sentences	✓	✓	✓	
Company name	✓	✓	✓	✓
Short paragraphs containing one topic	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Audience				
Information on supporting the museum	✓	✓	✓	✓
Naming of audience	✓	✓	✓	
Relevant information	✓	✓	✓	✓
Option for donating online	✓	✓		
3. Tone & Style				
Concise wording	✓	✓	✓	✓
Short sentences	✓	✓	✓	✓
Promotional tone	✓	✓	✓	✓
Usage of “you”	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Credibility				
Site credentials	✓	✓		✓
Date of last update/creation	✓	✓		✓
Up-to date information	✓	✓		
Links to other web sites	✓	✓	✓	
Naming affiliation	✓	✓	✓	
Accurate information	✓	✓	✓	✓

4.1 Presentation of Content

The content on the web sites will be examined by looking at the way that textual content has been organized and is presented on each web site. The elements mentioned by Spyridakis in the methodology, namely the use of informative titles, the presence of introductory sentences and introductions, the presentation of the company name and the way that paragraphs have been organized will be taken into account.

4.1.1. National Gallery of Art

Upon accessing the National Gallery web site and choosing the “Support the Gallery” option on the web site home page, the visitor is sent to a new web page where specific information can be found for potential benefactors. As the new web page opens, the web site visitor is presented with a short piece of centered text explaining the importance of giving to the museum as can be seen below. On either side of the centered text, are two images (see Image 3.3) and seven optional internal links related to giving, namely: “Ways to Give”, “Annual Giving”, “Leadership Giving”, “Planned Giving”, “Make a Gift”, “Facts”, and “Contact Us”.

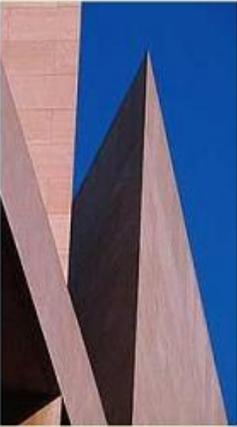
National Gallery of Art
Support the Gallery [Ways to Give](#) | [Annual Giving](#) | [Leadership Giving](#) | [Planned Giving](#) | [Make a Gift](#) | [Facts](#) | [Contact Us](#)



*Your gift opens the door to millions who visit
the National Gallery of Art
each year to enjoy our nation's
greatest cultural treasures.*

*Enter here to learn more about how
you can support the Gallery.*

We welcome your involvement.



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Each of these seven subsections has a similar content design. Each subsection uses concise language and has an image on the left of the page and an informative title at the top of the page. Information about the various donor options are presented in a short piece of text with links to more information in the middle of the page and clear headings. All also include the “Make a Gift Today” link at the bottom of the page.

Having several different subsections decreases the time needed to locate the required information and to discover interrelationships. This helps web visitors orient themselves more quickly. Furthermore, providing links to each separate section containing information on joining the National Gallery increases comprehensibility and makes it easier for web visitors to find what they are looking for, especially as the pages are short and to the point. In no more than three paragraphs, a subsection on the National Gallery of Art web site provides the visitor with comprehensive information on all the options there are for joining the museum.

4.1.2. Metropolitan Museum of Art

When web site visitors access the Metropolitan Museum of Art web site, they find a “Give and Join” section on the top banner. Clicking on the ‘Give and Join’ link, the visitor is presented with a drop down menu with the categories: “Donate”, “Membership”, “Planned Giving”, “Benefit Parties”, “Corporate Support”, “Curatorial Friends Groups” and “Gifts in Honor or Memory”. It is possible to access all of these subsections directly. However, if visitors click on the “Give and Join” title link directly, a web page opens under the toolbar in the same window. Here visitors are presented with an image of the Metropolitan Museum and links to the same seven subsections. Six of these are designed in the same way, using the same font and making use of organizational cues, such as an informative title and an introductory paragraph. The exception is the “Membership” subsection, which can be found on the top of the page and includes a large image, a bigger font, a series of bullet points listing benefits and a “Join Today” link.

When clicking on the titles of the subsection links, the visitor is sent to a new web page with further information on the subject. A toolbar on the left, listing the seven subsections, remains present on all pages. The web visitor can click on these to access other categories at all times. The web page discussed above can be found below:

Membership >

Join The Metropolitan Museum of Art today!

All Members receive a year of exclusive benefits, including:

- Free unlimited admission to The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Cloisters museum and gardens
- Members-only emails with advance notice of exhibitions, programs, events, and special offers
- Access to the exclusive Members Dining Room
- 10% discount in The Met Store, plus seasonal Double Discounts
- Discount on Audio Guides and Museum parking
- Members-only Shopping Days when the Museum is closed to the public

[Join Today >](#)

Join Today >

Get closer to the Museum with exclusive Membership privileges.

Already a Member? >

Sign in for exclusive content.

Members-Only Events

Drawing in the Galleries (Ages 9-11): Season 1
May 19, 2012 | (For Family/Dual Members and above) Fee: \$200 for the twelve-session semester

Drawing in the Galleries (Ages 11-14): Season 2
May 19, 2012 | (For Family/Dual Members and above) Fee: \$200 for the twelve-session semester

Members-Only Spring Shopping Day
May 21, 2012 | (For Museum Members only) Free with Museum Membership

Last updated Friday, May 18

[View all events >](#)

Donate >

Support the Metropolitan Museum and assist in meeting the enormous cost of providing its programs and services to audiences worldwide—help keep exhibitions open during public hours, protect the collection, support education programs, or donate to the Annual Appeal for general operating expenses.

[Donate Now](#)
[Make a Gift in Honor or Memory](#)
[Give to the Annual Appeal](#)

Planned Giving >

Contribute to the Metropolitan Museum's future by planning for a special kind of gift, such as a bequest in your will or a trust that pays you income. There are many creative and flexible planned giving options that can benefit you and the Museum.

Corporate Support >

Join other industry leaders in supporting the Museum. Sponsor a program or exhibition, host a private event, or invite your executives and employees to enjoy special Museum privileges as a Corporate Member.

Gifts in Honor or Memory >

A gift to the Met is a wonderful way to honor a loved one, commemorate a special occasion, or memorialize an important person in your life.

Secure >

Benefit Parties >

The Metropolitan is renowned for its glamorous galas and benefit parties throughout the year. Your attendance at an unforgettable evening helps support essential programs that enrich the lives of all our audiences.

Curatorial Friends Groups >

Members of the Metropolitan's Curatorial Friends Groups enjoy special programs and build relationships with curators and others who share similar interests, all in a behind-the-scenes, intimate setting.

There is a consistency in both content design and lay out between all of the subsections that a visitor may access. The title of the subsections can always be found at the top of the page. At the bottom, bold print titles lead the visitor on to the various options; and, between them, there is always an introductory paragraph specifying what the subsection covers. When clicking on one of the subsection options, the web site visitor is led to a new web page. The text in every subsection and under each category is kept very short, so that while there are many subsections to choose from, no extensive texts are present. Such a design clearly decreases the amount of

time needed to locate a required piece of information. It does, though, mean that there are very many options to choose from – fifteen for “Membership” alone and nine for “Planned Giving.”

Although the Metropolitan Museum web site might be perceived as being less attractive due to the amount of text and the smaller number of pictures, it does meet all the criteria in terms of Spyridakis’ guidelines on content in the same way as the National Gallery web site does. This may be attributed to the fact that Spyridakis’ guidelines are more concerned with textual comprehensibility than with overall design and aesthetics.

4.1.3 Rijksmuseum

When accessing the “Join Us!” section of the Rijksmuseum, the web site visitor is sent to a new web page and is presented with seven different subsections. Each of these seven subsections has been designed in a similar fashion. Every subsection contains an image with an informative title at the top of the page and a short topic sentence. Each also makes use of organizational cues such as headings, subheadings and concise language to assist the reader and to make the text visually accessible and comprehensible (see fig. 6). All subsections contain relatively short pieces of text and content is kept short and to the point as can be seen in the image below:



The existence of these seven subsections and their informative titles decreases the amount of time that is needed for the web visitor to locate required information and to discover relationships between all of the different subsections. In addition, the design of each section is consistent, predictable and has a limited amount of text. As is mentioned by Spyridakis this helps web visitors orient themselves more quickly and take in relevant information (361).

4.1.4 Van Gogh Museum

When accessing the Van Gogh Museum web site, an overall dropdown menu can be found, presenting seven categories namely: “Vincent Van Gogh”, “The Museum”, “What’s On”, “Research”, “Education”, “For Children” and “Tickets & Shop.” When the visitor clicks on one

of these options, the drop down menu falls down presenting the visitor with all the information that can be found under each section as can be seen below.

A visitor looking for information about how to support the museum financially needs to navigate to a subsection on “Sponsoring”, which can be found as the last link under the “The Museum” category. When visitors click on the “Sponsoring” link it does not open a new web page, but rather presents the information about sponsoring on the same page underneath the toolbar dropdown menu. Here the visitor is presented with a long piece of text that makes use of four headings in bold print separating the subsections.

The four subsections are: “Would you like to give the Van Gogh Museum your (financial) support?”, “Sponsoring”, “Donations” and “More information”. The right side of the page is blue, with the word “Sponsoring” written in white as a heading once again and two link options, namely: “Sponsors and Benefactors” and “Financing New Acquisitions.”



The screenshot shows the Van Gogh Museum website. At the top left, there is a banner with a painting of a tree and the text "The museum". To the right of the banner is the museum's logo: "Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam" on a black background, with a blue patterned background to its right. Below the banner, the breadcrumb "Homepage > Index all about the museum" is visible. The main heading is "Sponsoring". Below this, the text reads: "Would you like to give the Van Gogh Museum your (financial) support?" followed by a paragraph: "Acquisitions of masterpieces, unique exhibitions, a striking presentation of the permanent collection, intensive academic research and well-presented educational programmes all contribute to a dynamic museum environment that inspires about 1.3 million people to visit the Van Gogh Museum each year. These visitor numbers mean the Van Gogh Museum has for years ranked as the Netherlands' most popular museum." Below this, another paragraph begins: "Over the past few years, many companies and private individuals have made generous". On the right side of the page, there is a blue sidebar with the word "Sponsoring" in white, followed by two links: "- Sponsors and Benefactors" and "- Financing new acquisitions".

Although the text does not make use of separate links to sections and subsections, as is advised by Spyridakis, the content is organized and structured in such a way that readers can identify four different sections. By using bold font and a separate heading for each section, the text follows Spyridakis' guidelines on presenting content in an organized and visually comprehensible way. The reader is able to scroll the page and find the relevant information needed without difficulty. In addition, to assist the reader, paragraphs have been kept to no more than 50 words, which makes the text more inviting to read and easier to scan. As mentioned in the FLPG guidelines, limiting each paragraph or section to one topic makes it easier for the audience to understand the information provided (10).

Although no introduction or introductory sentence is present on the web page, the first heading: "Would you like to give the Van Gogh Museum your (financial) support?" makes clear that the content of the web page will deal with supporting the museum. When clicking on the two links on the right hand side of the first page ("Sponsors and Benefactors" and "Financing New Acquisitions"), the visitor encounters the same layout design of content as on the other pages. This means that layout and content are presented consistently, making it easier for the visitor to focus and process information.

The "Sponsors and Benefactors" link brings the visitor to a list of donors to the Van Gogh Museum. This list mentions works acquired for the museum from 1999 till 2011. When clicking on the "Financing New Acquisitions" link, the visitor is presented with the same list of paintings acquired by the museum from 1999-2011 as in the "Sponsors and Benefactors" section. There is more information on the paintings purchased, but this is all presented on one page and the visitor has to scroll down to see all of it. Instead of links, the same images and texts are used as in the "Sponsors and Benefactors" section and the user has the option of pressing the 'read

more' button for more information. A visitor, who chooses to do this, will be sent to a new web page with additional information on the paintings and how they were acquired, not presented on the previous pages. Although this information cannot be seen as irrelevant in itself, it could be argued that that it has little relevance for private benefactors who are considering supporting the museum. Indeed, although the private benefactor target group is mentioned in the sponsoring section, no additional information on becoming a benefactor can be found throughout the rest of this section.

Overall, there is no denying that generous amounts of information can be found on these pages of the Van Gogh Museum web site referring to sponsoring in one form or another. However this does not seem to be in conformity with Spyridakis' suggestion that there should only be a limited amount of information on any one page to allow users to easily find the information they need and read and retain it. An example is the presence of extensive information about the Dutch independent Central Bureau on Fundraising (CBF) on the sponsoring pages. While its stamp of approval might clearly increase a prospective donor's trust in the integrity of the museum's fundraising activities and programs, it would have sufficed merely to mention and link the organization, rather than have a whole paragraph in the text about it.

4.2 Audience

When content is provided in a comprehensible way to web site visitors, it is easier for them to find what they are looking for. The more relevant an audience finds content to be, the more they focus their attention on the information presented to them. It is therefore important for the four museum web sites to be aware of the audience. This section on audience will describe in

what way the four museum web sites present information about supporting the museum on their web site, if their audience is named in the text and if the information on the Dutch web sites is relevant for American web site users looking for ways to support the museum.

4.2.1 The National Gallery of Art

When analyzing the National Gallery of Art web site and particularly those parts providing information to donors, it seems that the designers have very much kept their audience in mind. The title of the link ‘Support the Gallery’, where information on becoming a benefactor of the museum can be found, makes it clear from the start that the visitor interested in supporting the museum should click on this link right away. All of the information to be found here provides relevant pointers for potentially interested benefactors, outlining all the possible ways of supporting and making a gift to the National Gallery.

This includes explanations on how to join the circle for annual giving, leadership giving, unrestricted giving, planned giving and other opportunities, such as gifts of art and real estate. Each option for membership and each separate membership circle (The Circle, The Tower Project, The Exhibition Circle, and the Collectors Committee) has its own link to further relevant information, covering the specific cost of joining and the ensuing privileges and benefits benefactors enjoy when joining the circle of their choice. This structure is used to encourage the intended audience to relate to the content and quickly search and find what they are looking for.

In addition, the National Gallery of Art specifically mentions its potential donor audience throughout the entire web site. This starts on the first web page after clicking on the “Support the Gallery” link: “Your gift opens the door to millions who visit the National Gallery of Art each year to enjoy our nation’s greatest cultural treasures” (*Nga.gov*). Furthermore, each individual

section ends with the link “Make a Gift Today”, making it clear that the intended audience is people looking to support the National Gallery of Art.

4.2.2. The Metropolitan Museum

The “Give and Join” category title can be found with ease and it is obvious for the web site visitor that information about supporting the museum can be found here. The information itself, as noted above, is divided into seven subsections namely: “Donate”, “Membership”, “Planned Giving”, “Benefit Parties”, “Corporate Support”, “Curatorial Friends Groups” and “Gifts in Honor or Memory”. As the emphasis in this thesis is on individuals and their willingness to support the museum, the categories on “Benefit Parties” and “Corporate Support” will be excluded from the following analysis.

The web site visitor who accesses the “Donate” web page is redirected to a new web page containing a form. The form lists various donation amounts and offers a series of possible donation destinations, such as “Support the Met’s education programs” or “Use my gift where it is needed most”. The information is to the point and clear for the audience. The “Gifts in Honor or Memory” subsections link presents the web visitor with a similar form to that on the “Donate” page and allows the visitor/donator to choose between various suggested monetary donations or to specify an amount that they themselves have chosen.

In the “Membership” section there are fifteen possible options to be chosen from. A broad audience has been kept in mind here. There are membership opportunities for people living outside New York, people between the age of 21-35, families, and individuals. Underneath each membership possibility three links can be found “Join”, “Renew Gift” and “More Information”. All of the membership categories can be found with ease but there are some gaps,

for example, despite the fifteen different membership options, there are none for young people. The web site also has some design inconsistencies. The left menu, for instance, lists categories, classes of members, private celebrations and reciprocal membership, but leaves out the Apollo Circle, Met Family Circle, young members and reciprocal membership, although all of these are named in the special membership groups under the “Membership” link.

Under “Planned Giving”, the visitor is greeted with an introductory paragraph. Nine options for planned giving are listed in the menu on the left and underneath the introductory paragraph. All of the subsections have an informative title, and a short topic sentence. The audience has been kept in mind and there is even a planned giving calculator on the web site where visitors can see an illustration of the income and tax benefits to which they may be entitled if they make a planned gift to benefit the Metropolitan Museum.

4.2.3 Rijksmuseum

When looking at the Rijksmuseum web site, the visitor is given the option of choosing between Dutch and English language versions. In view of the American audience which stands at the center of this thesis, it can be assumed that by presenting the information in English the audience has been kept in mind.

The title of the link where information about sponsoring is stored can be found with ease. The “Join Us!” link makes it clear to the audience that this is the place where they can find information about becoming personally involved in Rijksmuseum activities. On accessing the “Join Us!” link, the web visitor is presented with a new web page with an image that alters every minute, an option for the page to be read out loud and an introductory paragraph. Under this introductory paragraph, seven different subsections with links to new web pages can be found.

These are respectively: “International Circle”, “Named Fund”, “Corporate Support”, “Tax-effective Giving”, “Restoration”, and “Benefactors and Contact”.

The Rijksmuseum web site does not provide the opportunity for American visitors to donate directly on line and does not present them with a donation form. Instead, it suggests that potential donors should contact its development department. However, it is clear that an American audience has been kept in mind when constructing this page. This can be seen, for instance, in the “Tax-effective Giving” section. The name of the section itself shows an understanding of American web visitors and knowledge of their concerns, since tax-deductible giving plays a big role in the American donor culture. In three paragraphs, the “Tax-effective Giving” section provides the visitor with comprehensive information on ways the Rijksmuseum can help with tax deductibility. Moreover, it specifically targets and names the American audience:

To provide tax-deductible giving options for United States citizens and residents, the Museum has established The American Friends of the Rijksmuseum, hosted by the King Baudouin Foundation United States in New York City. Our Development Office can assist you with further information on tax-effective giving. (*Rijksmuseum.nl*)

By specifically naming its audience and referencing a relevant supporting organization, - the King Baudouin Foundation - in New York, the Rijksmuseum web site shows that it is very aware of its audience and seeks to increase comprehension and familiarity. Additionally, by immediately showing the audience that the museum has an understanding of the donor culture in the United States and by presenting information that is relevant to American benefactors, the museum encourages visitors to relate more to the organization and its donor-web site content.

4.2.4 Van Gogh Museum

When opening the Van Gogh Museum web site, the visitor is first presented with a Dutch language home page but is given the option of choosing an English language version in the toolbar at the top left of the page. It can therefore be assumed that the Van Gogh Museum is attempting to make the information on the web site comprehensible to an International audience.

On the Van Gogh Museum web site, when first processing the information found under the “Sponsoring” link, the target audience, namely private individuals willing to become sponsors are named:

Over the past few years, many companies and private individuals have made generous contributions to preserving the legacy of Van Gogh and his contemporaries for future generations. In the future, too, such contributions will continue to be of great importance to our museum. With your help we can make acquisitions, conduct research into Van Gogh and his contemporaries and present the museum's collection in such a way as to do it optimal justice. (*Vangoghmuseum.nl*)

This is in line with Spyridakis’ guidelines on naming the intended audience in the text. By explicitly mentioning private individuals the Van Gogh Museum shows potential benefactors that they consider them part of the target audience. Furthermore, by citing the importance of their contributions the museum expresses its desire to keep potential donors interested in the ongoing work.

The initial sentence of the last quote would suggest that further information about becoming a private sponsor will be given in more detail elsewhere on the web site. The

impression is that examples of acquisitions and research made possible by the donations of private individuals will be presented. In fact, no examples of private giving are mentioned anywhere on the site. There is no mention or information to be found on the possibility of joining, or even the existence of, an International/American Friends' Circle at the Van Gogh Museum. In practice, the only further information on what it entails to be a private donor to the Van Gogh Museum is the following: "As a donor you are involved with the museum and become part of a large network of passionate art lovers. Your involvement in the form of donations, legacies and bequests will contribute in a very personal way to the state-of-the-art management and presentation of the legacy bequeathed by Van Gogh and his contemporaries"

(Vangoghmuseum.nl).

This is followed by a paragraph on donating to the Van Gogh:

We welcome your donations on account number 14.65.22.222 (Rabobank), marked t.n.v Supporter Van Gogh Museum. Should you require further information on future exhibitions and events in the museum, then you are kindly requested to send your e-mail address and/or name and address details to fondsenwerving@vangoghmuseum.nl.

(Vangoghmuseum.nl)

Taking the above into account, it would seem that the Van Gogh Museum is not aware of a potential American audience wanting to learn more about the options of supporting and joining the museum. As no options for becoming a museum benefactor are presented for American visitors and no examples of American donors are given, the web site may not create a sense of familiarity among an American audience.

The Van Gogh Museum seems to be targeting a very different audience, namely Dutch companies and institutions, such as the Dutch branch of the Hilton Hotel group, Bankgiro Lotterij and the Dutch Ministry of Culture and Science. This is reflected in texts found on the Van Gogh web site where the targeted audience of the Van Gogh is named specifically and the benefits of joining as a corporate supporter are mentioned:

For you as a sponsor, the Van Gogh Museum offers a leading cultural platform for forging relations with (potential) clients and business associates, employees and the general public. By staging a special reception or event in the museum during a major exhibition, for example, you will be able to offer them a unique and unforgettable experience. In addition your position as museum sponsor will ensure extensive public exposure. Not only that, but sponsoring or a partnership with the museum allows you to link up with a striking and internationally powerful brand as well as offering possibilities for reaching out to a young and highly educated public. (*Vangoghmuseum.nl*)

In line with this, when clicking on the “Sponsors and Benefactors” link the visitor is not presented with the name of any private donor nor with any actual project that has been set up with private/individual donor funds. The Bankgiro Lotterij and the Prins Bernard Cultuurfonds are named throughout the web site but there is little mention of international corporations or non-Dutch institutions. These findings suggest that potential private benefactors are not considered a priority on this site.

4.3 Tone and Style

This section will describe the tone and style the four museums use on their web sites. One way to pull in audiences is selecting the right tone and style to communicate to them. As

presented in the method section, the way the four museum web sites incorporate Spyridakis' suggestions will be discussed. The features of analysis are: using the active voice in a text, using concise language and short sentences, using a promotional tone and personal pronouns throughout the text to draw in the reader. The findings on each web site are discussed below.

4.3.1. National Gallery of Art

When reading through the National Gallery of Art web site, it is clear that personal pronouns and a promotional tone are used throughout the "Support the Gallery" section and its subsections. The sheer number of adjectives used is also striking, for example: "Renowned collection", "vital activities", "significant impact", "major gift", "rewarding relationship", "special opportunities", "worldwide audience" etc.

By using personal pronouns throughout the web site the personal tone comes through on every web page. There is, however, a clear distinction in the use of personal pronouns in the various sections. The section "Ways To Give", which provides introductory information to the potential donor audience, uses the most personal pronouns: "The National Gallery of Art looks to friends such as you to help make its renowned collection and related programs accessible to a worldwide audience." And later on: "Your gift allows you to enjoy a rewarding relationship with the Gallery while helping to sustain vital activities."

In contrast, in the sections "Annual Giving" and "Leadership Giving" no more than three personal pronouns are used. Although sentences could have been constructed to include them, they have been left out. An example of this is the following sentence: "With an annual gift of \$2,500, members of The Tower Project provide support for modern and contemporary exhibitions in the Tower Gallery." It would have been possible to word this sentence along the

following lines: As a member of the Tower Project you support modern and contemporary exhibitions in the Tower gallery with an annual gift of \$2,500. But this approach has presumably been considered and rejected although it is not clear why.

4.3.2. Metropolitan Museum

The Metropolitan Museum web site has its own specific tone. It uses the active voice, including such exhortations as: “Join today, donate now.” At the same time, this web site does not use as many adjectives as the other web sites. The tone is more objective and focuses on providing the visitor with information. The Metropolitan Museum does not present itself in an overtly promotional way. No introduction or promotional sentences can be found trumpeting the greatness and importance of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Instead, when accessing the “Join & Give” section of the web site, there is an appeal to the visitor to help the institution to continue what they are already doing: “Support the Metropolitan Museum and assist in meeting the enormous cost of providing its programs and services to audiences, worldwide...”(*Metmuseum.org*)

The lack of a personal and promotional tone can also be found in the subsections “Donate” and “Gifts in Honor and Memory”. There are no promotional introductions to be found and no personal pronouns used to pull the reader in. Rather, the web site visitor is presented only with a donation form, with a brief word of thanks at the top: “Your gift to the Metropolitan Museum is greatly appreciated.”

Although the web site may not use an overly promotional and personal tone in its texts, appeals to the visitor are being made in different ways. For example, the benefits of joining and becoming a member of the Metropolitan Museum are laid out in great detail and can be found

throughout the web site. In the “Membership” subsection, for instance, under the “Categories” link, the only text a visitor finds is “Join the Metropolitan Museum of Art today” and a bullet list of benefits. Under this there is only a donation form listing the different memberships and their prices.

4.3.3 Rijksmuseum

When looking at the Rijksmuseum web site, it is clear that personal pronouns and the promotional tone are used throughout the “Join Us!” section. When accessing the section, the web visitor is greeted with an introductory paragraph, where the Rijksmuseum presents itself as: “Custodians of a world-renowned collection” (*Rijksmuseum.nl*). The web text immediately uses personal pronouns to draw in the reader and an active voice: “...Your involvement is where our dreams begin. With each visit to our permanent collection, a special exhibit or any of our many events in Amsterdam and abroad, you bring vitality and insight to our programs” (*Rijksmuseum.nl*).

This use of pronouns and the active voice continues throughout each subsection. Examples include: “Establishing a named fund enables you to select the topic of greatest interest to you”, “As we near the completion of the renovation of our landmark building, your support is crucial in helping to preserve, restore and display our treasured collection”, “We can help tailor unique ways to get involved so your leadership, employees or clients can enjoy special access” (*Rijksmuseum.nl*).

The Rijksmuseum has chosen a tone that gives Web visitors the impression that their needs will be taken into consideration by the Rijksmuseum and that what they want is of most importance. Furthermore, various adjectives are used to promote the museum and the benefits of

joining the Rijksmuseum, for example, “Members enjoy invitations to exclusive events such as the Rijksmuseum reception at TEFAF, the world’s largest art and antique fair in the Netherlands” (*Rijksmuseum.nl*).

4.3.4 Van Gogh Museum

The Van Gogh Museum is clearly aware of the effectiveness of a promotional tone in its web text. From the first it presents itself as: “...a dynamic museum environment that inspires about 1.3 million people to visit the Van Gogh Museum each year. These visitor numbers mean the Van Gogh Museum has for years ranked as the Netherlands' most popular museum (*Vangoghmuseum.nl*).”

In the Sponsoring section of the Van Gogh web site, the promotional tone is also evident, as is the use of personal pronouns. The first sentence that visitors come across when accessing the section on supporting the museum reads as follows: “Would you like to give the Van Gogh Museum your (financial) support?” This request is to the point and uses the active voice and the personal pronoun *you*.

The use of the personal pronouns *you* and *yours* continues throughout the Sponsoring section. Examples include: “For you as a sponsor, the Van Gogh Museum offers a leading cultural platform for forging relations with (potential) clients and business associates, employees and the general public,” “As a donor you are involved with the museum and become part of a large network of passionate art lovers,” “Your involvement in the form of donations, legacies and bequests will contribute in a very personal way to the state-of-the-art management and presentation of the legacy bequeathed by Van Gogh and his contemporaries” and “ With your

help we can make acquisitions, conduct research into Van Gogh and his contemporaries and present the museum's collection in such a way as to do it optimal justice” (*Vangoghmuseum.nl*).

Notably, however, when it comes to the additional “Sponsoring” links to the right of the page, neither the “Sponsors and Benefactors” link nor the “Financing New Acquisitions” link contains personal pronouns or a promotional tone. Instead, they only focus on presenting a large amount of information. As Spyridakis mentions some readers are “reading to learn” and will more actively engage in a text while other readers are “reading to do” (360). It is pertinent to mention that the Van Gogh museum wants readers to donate money. Therefore, the museum does not seem to follow Spyridakis’ suggestion that information provided for this purpose should not contain excess verbiage, but be succinct and action oriented.

4.4 Credibility

This section will describe the way credibility is established on the four museum web sites. Without web visitors believing that a web site is credible obtaining donations will be far harder (Spyridakis 365). The following section will present results and assess if the four museum web sites have integrated the suggestions made by Spyridakis on achieving credibility by incorporating the following features: an author’s name, credentials and email address, the date the web site was launched or last updated, up-to-date and accurate information and membership of relevant professional bodies (373).

4.4.1. National Gallery of Art

The “Make a Gift” link on the National Gallery of Art web site provides the web visitor with the opportunity of making a donation online. The subsection describes various ways to donate to the National Gallery of Art and provides a telephone number and an email address for

inquiries about the security of making gifts online and the security level of the web pages. In the “Make a Gift” section, there is an embedded link entitled “Privacy Policy”, which includes the following sentence: “For a description of the protections we offer for making a secure gift online, please see our privacy policy.”

When the “Privacy Policy” link is clicked, the web visitor is sent to a new web page containing information on online security. Here the National Gallery provides information regarding the safety of making gifts online. An example includes: “All credit card numbers submitted are encrypted using "Secure Socket Layer" (SSL) encryption. SSL technology is an industry standard for protecting sensitive information as it is transmitted over the Internet” (*Nga.gov*).

The “Support the Gallery” section its various subsections all include relevant links, phone numbers and email addresses and this works enhances the credibility of the site as a whole. The National Gallery of Art web site also has a 2012 Copyright at the bottom of the page. It can therefore be assumed that the site was last updated in 2012 and that the information is therefore up-to-date and contains accurate information. All of these factors contribute to making the web site credible to the web site visitor.

4.4.2. Metropolitan Museum

The “Donate”, “Membership” and “Gift in Honor or Memory” sections on the Metropolitan Museum web site provide the web visitor with the opportunity to donate online. Each of the web sections opens up to a new web page and presents the visitor with a donation form as can be seen below. Next to the form, on the right of the page, the Norton Secured image can be seen with two listed links - one named “Safe and Secure” and the other “Privacy Policy”:

Both links send the web site visitor to the same web page containing information about the privacy policy for online and electronic use. Information about online safety is provided here:

We utilize SSL (Secure Socket Layer) technology, which encrypts our visitors' credit card numbers, names, and addresses. This web site is also a VeriSign Secure Site and PCI DSS (Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard) compliant, and The Met Store online is a GeoTrust Secure Site, and PCI DSS (Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard) compliant, which ensures security and protection of sensitive customer credit card information. (*Metmuseum.org*)

In addition to this, the Metropolitan Museum names a number of affiliations that the reader can verify. It also incorporates other web features to enhance credibility such as names, mailing addresses, email addresses and contact numbers under various subsections, including the privacy policy link. The site also presents visitors with up to date information. At the bottom of the “Give & Join” web page, it is stated that the site was last updated on (May 7th, 2012), the day of the visit. In terms of credibility the Metropolitan Museum has incorporated many of Spyridakis’ suggestions making the web site seem trustworthy and safe.

4.4.3 Rijksmuseum

When accessing the subsection “Benefactors of the Rijksmuseum” the web site visitor is provided with a list of the names of benefactors of the Rijksmuseum and the partners and private funds managed by the Rijksmuseum. Moreover, the subsections “Named Fund” and “Corporate Support” provide the web visitor with a list of examples of (American) individuals and companies supporting the Rijksmuseum and the projects they have helped set up with their funding. All this information is open to the web site visitor and can be validated if desired. Mentioning examples of projects, activities and funds is essential for successful online fundraising because it makes clear what exactly the organization does with its gifts, funds and donations. Rogers suggests that this attracts new donors more successfully than organizations that are not clear about stating where the money goes that is given (15).

In addition to this feature, the Rijksmuseum name can be found on each page and provides the web site visitor with names and email addresses that can be validated. Links to relevant sites are also present, as are citations of sources. One area, however, where the credibility of the site might be questioned is its failure to offer proof that it is up to date. No statement on the web site can be found mentioning the last web site update and this could raise questions about the accuracy of the information presented to visitors.

4.4.4 Van Gogh Museum

The Van Gogh Museum’s ‘*Sponsoring*’ section and links also contain a number of features designed to make the museum’s sponsorship pitch more effective. Firstly, it presents its own credentials, such as the publishers name (Van Gogh Museum), email addresses, copy right

of the site and links, in a clear way. Secondly, the dates when the site was posted and was last updated are present and easy to find.

Thirdly, despite earlier stated reservations about the way in which this information is presented, the Van Gogh Museum's seal of approval from the independent Dutch NGO "The Central Bureau on Fundraising (CBF)" in the third paragraph of the "Sponsoring" section does increase the credibility of the fund raising and sponsorship operation. The site explains that this seal of approval is awarded for five years at a time and: "testifies to the fact that funds are raised in a responsible manner and are deployed prudently" (*Vangoghmuseum.nl*).

Lastly, the Van Gogh web site draws attention to the fact that if a sponsor wishes to donate money, but does not want to be named, this wish will be honored. This too serves to build up credibility by showing that the museum takes privacy into account in its fundraising activities and is responsive to benefactor wishes.

Chapter 5: Results Cultural Analysis

The following chapter will present the results found in the cultural analysis of the four web sites. In the previous chapter, the structure and design of each of the four web sites was potentially different. Thus, individual issues of comprehensibility and heuristics could arise on all of them. This made a site by site analysis worthwhile as it provided the basis for a comparison of all four web sites on a national and a cross-national level.

In contrast, the table below, which lists the cultural analysis findings per museum, shows that the differences between the national web sites are less significant than the differences between the American and the Dutch sites. Consequently most of the results will be presented in the form of a country to country comparison although individual museums are still mentioned to illustrate specific examples or to demonstrate a unique feature.

Table 3: Results Cultural Analysis

	National Gallery of Art	Metropolitan Museum of Art	Rijksmuseum	Van Gogh Museum
1. Individuality				
Privacy statement	✓	✓		✓
Product Uniqueness	✓	✓		
Personalization	✓	✓	✓	✓
Use of "you"	✓	✓	✓	✓
Benefits	✓	✓	✓	
2. Masculinity				
Product Effectiveness	✓	✓	✓	
Clear gender roles in images				
Hard-sell approach	✓	✓		
Included trivia, games, fun facts	✓			
3. Uncertainty Avoidance				
Option for online giving	✓	✓		
Customer service				
Guided navigation		✓	✓	
Testimonials				
4. Power Distance				
Hierarchy information				
Pictures of CEO's				
Mentioning of awards				
Use of proper titles				
5. Low-Context				
Hard-sell approach	✓	✓		
Rank or Prestige	✓	✓	✓	✓
Use of superlatives	✓	✓	✓	✓

5.1 The Dimension of Individuality

Both the United States and the Netherlands rate at the high end of the spectrum in terms of Hofstede's cultural dimension of Individualism. It can therefore be assumed that there may be significant similarities between them in terms of this specific aspect of web site design.

When the Dutch and the American web sites are analyzed a number of similar features can indeed be found. All web sites emphasize the individual in their texts and speak directly to them using *you* throughout. As Singh and Pereira make clear, independence and being one's own person are important cultural aspirations in both countries and the use of *you* underscores the independence theme (86).

Although all the four web sites are personal in their tone, there are differences. All four museum web sites stress the uniqueness of their institutions, something that Singh and Pereira suggest should be an important feature on web sites designed for an audience scoring high on individuality. When visitors access the fundraising sections on the Dutch web sites, the first paragraphs encountered focus on underlining the uniqueness of the respective museums. Both the Van Gogh and the Rijksmuseum make clear that they are old and respected institutions with renowned art collections. In contrast, when accessing the fundraising sections on the two American web sites, the first paragraphs encountered focus on the uniqueness of joining their museum and the benefits that an individual receives when signing-up. Neither of them mentions the uniqueness and importance of the museum itself at this point. Furthermore, the Van Gogh Museum recognizes its existing sponsors and links their company logo to an image of each painting paid for by their contribution. This is not the case on the American web sites, where the focus is more on what future donors can do than what current donors are doing now.

In addition to this, the two American web sites offer the web site visitor more choices than the Dutch web sites. This underlines the greater emphasis that they place on the individual and his/her needs. This can, for example, be seen on the Metropolitan Museum web site, where fourteen different membership options are offered for families, foreigners, individuals, students etc., and on the National Gallery web site, where those interested in supporting the museum can choose to join a variation of friends' circles or make a gift in the form of a legacy or planned giving. The Van Gogh Museum, in contrast, offers only an account number for donating money and thus makes this process far less personal and geared to the general audience instead of the individual looking to join or donate.

Singh and Pereira make clear that because personal identity is important in individualistic cultures, so too is its protection. It is, therefore, important to have a clear privacy policy on web sites where visitors share personal information, especially things such as credit card numbers. Although all four web sites offer a clear privacy policy on their homepage, there are differences when it comes to what is to be found in the sections specifically related to gathering support and donations for the museum. Both the American web sites and the Van Gogh Museum offer a clearly labeled link to their privacy policy which offers information on web safety and security measures. The Rijksmuseum, however, does not present privacy policy information in any way in this section. This might be because it does not offer the web site visitor the option of donating money online. Adding this feature would be recommended for Americans to be able to donate online, as, without it, American visitor might not feel safe donating money in this way.

5.2 The Dimension of Femininity/Masculinity

As previously mentioned, this dimension is interesting because the United States scores considerably higher on the dimension of Masculinity than the Netherlands, the biggest difference

between the two countries on all of the five dimensions used in this thesis. When looking at and comparing the way in which information is presented on the Dutch and American web sites, it becomes clear that there are notable differences in the so-called sell approach. The Rijksmuseum and the Van Gogh Museum, for instance, while mentioning the benefits of supporting their museum, do not specifically name or highlight them, but rather mention them in the body of text. The American web sites both use bullet points in their web page design, which offer a clear and direct list of the specific benefits that *you* get when joining a certain circle. Presenting the benefits in a bullet list in bold font enhances the visibility of unique selling points, a common feature found on masculine web sites according to Singh and Pereira. Furthermore, both American web sites first present web site visitors with their potential “rewards” in an apparent effort to convince them to choose their museum above another one. According to Singh and Pereira, this too can be seen as a more masculine way of designing web pages, because it emphasises the individual rewards to be obtained (115).

The lack of these features on both the Dutch web sites and their more soft sell approach may be due to the fact that neither the Van Gogh nor the Rijksmuseum offer the possibility for direct online giving. On the one hand, the museums may not have felt the need to develop a more culturally appropriate way of approaching the potential American benefactor. On the other hand, it could also be interpreted that this was not done because of a difference in culture or a desire to not scare of other nationalities.

The use of imagery and web site aesthetics was also analyzed. It was found that the Van Gogh web site contained nineteen images on its fundraising section, the Rijksmuseum twenty one, the National Gallery of Art eighteen and the Metropolitan Museum of Art thirty four images. At first glance, this might imply that the American web sites make more use of images

than the Dutch web sites do. It must, though, be borne in mind that the American sections on supporting the museum are much more elaborate than the Dutch ones. While the Van Gogh web site's sponsoring section only consists of three web pages, the equivalent section on the Metropolitan Museum web site has over forty web pages. This is also true of the Rijksmuseum with eight pages, compared to the National Gallery web site with twenty five such pages. On this basis, it is fair to conclude that the Dutch web sites use comparatively more images than the American web sites. They also use more colors and bold fonts than their American counterparts do.

When turning to an analysis of the images on all the web sites, no strong difference in the portrayal of gender roles could be found. The National Gallery of Art only uses images from its own art collection. These images are very diverse, varying from images of objects in the museum such as vases and portraits, to depictions of both men and women. The Van Gogh Museum, too, only uses images taken from its own collection, but it also includes the logos of its sponsor companies and organizations. The Rijksmuseum and the Metropolitan Museum use images from their respective art collections, mixed with real photographic images from within the museum itself. Most of these images portray younger children learning about art or on-going museum events and activities, such as restoration. There are no strongly masculine images depicting men in strong leader roles and women as wives or models or distinctly feminine roles on either web site.

When it comes to having a "fun" factor on the web sites, it was found that the National Gallery was the only museum that has incorporated a fun factor into its web site. Under the link "Facts" the web site visitor is presented with some quirky facts about the National Gallery, for

example: “The National Gallery of Art owns the only painting by Leonardo da Vinci in the Western Hemisphere.”

Incorporating this feature into web sites is thought to keep the web site visitors more interested and stop them from becoming bored. When looking to support an organization, however, this might not be the highest preference for the interested web visitor.

5.3 The Dimension of Power Distance

The Netherlands and the United States both score low on Power Distance. Singh and Pereira make clear that for those countries that score low on power distance, the focus should be on those values on which they have high scores. It was therefore to be expected that neither the American nor the Dutch museum web sites would contain features typical of more high power distance societies and this proved to be true. Not one of the web site sections on supporting the museum contains a hierarchical structure or stresses authority or power. No photographs of important people in the organization are present to help establish a basis of authority. Awards and certificates showing status could not be found on the web site sections analyzed.

5.4 The Dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance

In terms of Hofstede’s cultural dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance both countries score relatively low in comparison to other countries. As neither country scores exceedingly high or low on this cultural dimension no great differences were expected on the web sites. Singh and Pereira mention that the importance of predictably, structure, and order are important for countries scoring high on this dimension. Therefore web design features such as customer service, guided navigation, tradition theme, local terminology, free trials, toll free numbers and transaction testimonials were analyzed.

Although none of these features could be found on the web sites studied, Singh and Pereira mention that high uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to use electronic media less often, since they are not well suited to reduce uncertainty (106). Web site visitors from high uncertainty avoidance countries are known to be uncomfortable using their credit card online (106). The fact that the Netherlands scores higher on uncertainty avoidance than the United States does, might possibly explain why Dutch sites have incorporated fewer options for donating online than their American counterparts. Only having the account number of the Van Gogh Museum, might make Dutch web site visitors feel more secure about transferring money on their own terms at home or via bank transfer, while an American audience, less worried about making cash transfers online, might perceive it as an unnecessary hassle and something that takes up too much time.

5.5 The Dimension of High-Low Context

Both the Netherlands and the United States have been classified as low context cultures (Singh and Pereira 141). It is claimed that an aggressive and hard-sell approach are features found in these cultures. In the United States it is pervasive at every level, be it an Internet marketing company or a small town bagel restaurant (Singh and Pereira 148). In the Netherlands, directness and a no-nonsense approach are often cited by foreigners as defining Dutch business life (*Stuffdutchpeoplelike.com*). As already stated in Chapter Four, the overall tone of the four web sites could be characterised as direct and promotional in style.

Although the two American sites did not use more of a promotional tone filled with superlatives in their web text than the Dutch sites, it was apparent that they did provide the web site visitor with more direct and rational information on the benefits of joining the museum. These benefits were listed in bulleted lists emphasizing their presence on the web page and providing the web site visitor with rational arguments for choosing the museum. It can be

concluded that whereas the tone might not have been that much more direct on the American web pages, the way that content was emphasized was more hard sell than on the Dutch web sites.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis has examined the English language donor/benefactor sections of four web sites run by the National Gallery of Art and the Metropolitan Museum in the United States and the Rijksmuseum and Van Gogh Museum in the Netherlands. At issue is the extent to which each web site presents the information that a prospective donor might need to know in a comprehensible, effective and culturally aware manner and whether this information is likely to encourage such a visitor to donate to the museum concerned.

For the first part of the analysis, Spyridakis was used as a guide to analyze the comprehensibility of the web sites and the content, approach to the visitor, tone and style and credibility of the pages in question. In terms of overall navigation and comprehensibility it can be concluded that all four web sites were fairly easy to navigate. This supports Hypothesis 1 of this thesis, which suggested that as professional organizations, with access to professional web design expertise, all the museums would meet most of Spyridakis' guidelines on comprehensible web sites.

When it comes to accessing sponsoring information, however, a distinction can be made. Three museums provide direct links to specific sections covering supporting and joining the museum. Only the Van Gogh Museum does not currently have such a link to a separate section on the home page main menu. The fact that "Sponsoring" is not found on the main menu might affect the number of potential to actual donors, because it makes it more difficult for a potential donor to find and access the information they require easily and quickly and make an informed decision on sponsoring the museum.

In terms of the content recommendations made by Spyridakis (relevant links, an informative title, introduction, and introductory sentences) all four web sites were found to have incorporated these elements. For example, the Rijksmuseum, National Gallery and Metropolitan Museum all make use of subsections on the different types of membership available, making use of relevant links leading directly to information on the different membership categories. The presence of these subsections and the clear headings decreases the time needed to locate the information and discover inter-relationships. Furthermore, providing links to separate sections dealing with different kinds of membership, or ways to support the museum, helps to limit the amount of information on any one page and keep it short and to the point. All of which makes it easier for the web visitors to find what they are looking for. Although the Van Gogh Museum uses informative titles and introductory sentences, it does not provide the web site visitor with information on membership options.

The next step in the analysis was to ascertain the extent to which each museum seemed to be aware of its potential audience. In this case, potential American individuals, who might be encouraged or persuaded to financially support one of the museums. The two Dutch web sites both have English language sponsorship pages, thus making it possible for an American audience to access the information. All four museums showed an awareness of the fact that there might be potential benefactors who would use their respective web sites to find online information about donating to the museum. In addition, the Rijksmuseum, National Gallery of Art and the Metropolitan Museum provided web visitors with online information on the possibilities for joining various friend groups/circles. Although the membership options were different at all the museums, the Metropolitan Museum web site went the furthest in accommodating its audience's

needs by listing sixteen different possible membership categories, including family circles and young adult memberships neither of which were mentioned on any other web site.

Looking at the two Dutch Museums, the Rijksmuseum seemed very aware of its American audience throughout the site. It offers the option of joining an International Friends of the Rijksmuseum Circle and has an American audience specifically in mind in its '*Tax-Effective Giving*' subsection. The very name of the section shows an understanding of American web visitors and knowledge of their concerns, since tax-deductible giving plays a big role in the American donor culture.

The Van Gogh Museum on the other hand, seems to be geared at a different target audience, namely support from Dutch-based corporations. Although individual donors are referred to in the web site text and there is an option for donating directly to the museum online, there is no information about friends' circles or membership categories. Furthermore, there is no mention of any form of American involvement on the entire web site.

It is clear that in line with Hypothesis 2, the American museums have an easier task of identifying what is important to potential American benefactors. While the Rijksmuseum site does show a clear awareness of the need to appeal directly to an American audience, the Van Gogh Museum has not identified American donors as being a group worthy of special attention.

When analysing the tone and style used on the four web sites it is clear that all the museums have chosen a similar tone that fits the message and audience of the web page. This is the promotional tone that has been shown to appeal to web site visitors when it comes to the purpose of online fundraising. Of the four museums, the Metropolitan Museum uses this tone the least. As fundraising competition is fierce between museums at the moment, it seems reasonable

to presume that the promotional tone has been adopted in all cases because it is felt to be the best way to convince web site visitors that joining their specific museum is the best choice. Both the Dutch and the American web site texts use a large number of adjectives, such as: *world-renowned*, *dynamic*, and *significant* to promote the museum and the benefits of supporting it. However, it is clear that overall, the American web sites use more adjectives than the Dutch ones do. This could affect the efficiency of online fundraising, because the use of powerful adjectives might make a potential benefactors feel that they are making the right choice and feel confident about donating money.

In addition to the promotional tone, all the museum web sites make use of the personal tone, with the Metropolitan Museum once again using it the least. The web site visitors are addressed as *you*. Supporting the museum is something that *you* the web site visitor can do. The use of personal pronouns is intended to make the text more relevant to the reader and to draw them in and make them feel part of the activities of the museum concerned. This approach may well have been chosen by the museums to emphasize the bond between them and their benefactors. Considering the American audience and the goal of persuading them to support the museum an overly formal tone might not have had the desired effect.

Although both American museums do use the promotional tone, the fact that the Metropolitan museum uses it the least seems at odds with Hypothesis 3 that the two American web sites would make more use of the promotional tone than the two Dutch sites. This though should be taken in the context of the fact that the American web site, mention the benefits of sponsorship much more and clearly emphasize these benefits to potential benefactors and donors. The American sites are much more direct and explicit on the benefits of joining. All of the categories have a bullet list of all the benefits summed up. The Rijksmuseum only mentions the

benefactor privilege of joining in on the annual Maastricht Antiques Fair (TEFAF) but does not list other benefits that accrue from sponsorship of the museum.

All four of the web sites studied have made an attempt to establish their credibility. This can be seen from the fact that all four clearly present their institutional identity on each page of their respective web sites, supported by a series of emails and telephone numbers. This basic information about the museums themselves is supported by lists of existing benefactors, either private or corporate. Some lists are extensive, especially the American ones, but they are present on all the sites studied. The Rijksmuseum provides a separate list of international individuals and companies and the projects they have supported. The Van Gogh Museum, in contrast, cites mainly Dutch organizations in its list of main sponsors. The seal of approval from the Central Bureau on Fundraising might serve to increase the confidence of potential benefactors.

Only the Rijksmuseum fails to offer proof that it is up to date. The other three all offer a copyright update for 2012 and the Metropolitan Museum claimed to have been up-to-date on the date accessed for this thesis. Although it might not be of significance to a web site visitor, the absence of this feature on the Rijksmuseum web site could potentially cause a potential benefactor to hesitate. It must be noted however, that the Rijksmuseum is working hard on a new web site and this might be the reason why the site is not up-to-date.

The major distinction when it comes to the credibility of the four sites is that the two American ones appeal for and accept donations online. Although the Van Gogh Museum mentions an account number on its web page and invites visitors to donate, it does not present the visitor with a donation form online. The Rijksmuseum web site, for its part, suggests that potential benefactors contact its development department for more information. The American

web sites offer an elaborate privacy policy and guarantee the security level of the web site, while the Dutch web sites do not mention or contain a privacy policy link or guarantee any form of security. As they do not offer an option for donating online, it could be suggested that this does not affect their credibility. However, since this thesis concentrates on the American visitor, it could be suggested that the absence of these two features might undermine their credibility for American visitors, used to seeing such features on American web sites.

The second part of this thesis examined the same English language donor/benefactor sections of the four web sites and investigated to what extent these sections portrayed a culturally customized web site and whether the web features were consistent with the Cultural Values Framework set up by Singh and Pereira. Using Singh and Pereira as a guide, the second part of the analysis concentrated on uncovering cultural design differences between the Dutch and American web sites and determining if the Dutch web sites had taken their American audience into account.

Hypothesis 4 suggested that Individuality would prove to be an important dimension when reflecting on the web site design of both countries. This proved to be true, as both countries incorporate more of the web features mentioned by Singh and Pereira on this dimension than any other. Whereas both American web sites incorporate all of the features listed, the Dutch web sites do not include all of them. Although web features such as the personal tone and uniqueness of their institutions can be found, the Dutch sites both seem less focused on the needs of the individual web visitor. The American web sites offer visitors an array of choices to best suit them in supporting the museum, hereby taking individual needs and goals into account. The Dutch web sites provide general information and give the American visitor no choice in the kind of support they want to give. Furthermore, the Dutch web sites do not offer as much

thorough information on what the individual would gain by supporting the museum. This might be because the English language part of the site has not been designed with only American visitors in mind.

In terms of Hofstede's dimension of Masculinity it was predicted in Hypothesis 5 that identifiable differences might be found when comparing the four web sites as the United States is rated as being a more masculine society than the Netherlands. Traits such as assertiveness, material possessions, and success were anticipated to be more evident on the American web sites, whereas feminine traits such as helping others, aesthetics of the web sites and imagery were expected to be more apparent on the Dutch web sites. This proved to be partly true. While language was not found to be overtly more direct, decisive or aggressive on the American web sites, the way that the benefits of supporting the museum were represented was much more to the point and direct.

Additionally, it was found that the Dutch web sites use comparatively more images, making more use of colors and bold fonts than their American counterparts. This implies that the Dutch web sites may have been designed with a greater sense for the aesthetic. No clear gender roles are depicted in the images, however, and this might be because the museum world is not an overtly masculine domain or because they are aware of the negative effect such images might have. In terms of fun facts or trivia, the National Gallery of Art was found to be the only museum incorporating such a feature. Overall, while the Dutch sites do show some feminine traits, for example a greater use of images, both Dutch museums have taken into account the cultural values of the American audience in their choice of language.

As both countries score low on Power Distance, Hypothesis 6 predicted that none of the web sites would display features thought to be of importance to societies scoring high on this dimension. This proved to be true. It was found that both the American and the Dutch web sites did not contain any web features thought to be important in this dimension such as pictures of CEO's, proper titles and mentioning of awards.

Similarly, Hypothesis 7 suggested that none of the web sites were expected to display many of the features cited as being of importance in the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension as both countries score relatively low. In practice, though, one Dutch web site and one American web site incorporated a so called "breadcrumb trail" on their web site, a feature associated with decreasing uncertainty for web site visitors. Of much greater significance, however, is the fact that the Dutch sites, as opposed to their American counterparts, do not present web site visitors with an online donating option. This might be due to the fact that the Netherlands scores higher on Uncertainty Avoidance than the United States and that they are therefore more apprehensive of the Internet and online donations.

As both countries can be classified as Low Context countries, Hypothesis 8 assumed that the web sites would have a similar communication style and be action oriented. It was expected that all web sites would feature explicit and direct language, a hard-sell approach, use of superlatives and emphasize prestige. Whereas all web sites featured the use of superlatives that emphasized prestige, it was found that the American web sites used a more hard-sell approach when compared to the Dutch ones. On the American web sites the benefits of joining the museum are listed in bulleted lists stressing their importance. Although the communication style on all the web sites is influenced by the Low Context dimension, on the Dutch web sites its

effects may well be mitigated by the influence of the Feminine dimension, which lays less emphasis on assertiveness and the hard sell approach but more on the soft-sell approach.

Chapter 7: Recommendations

As both Dutch web sites have underdeveloped options for online giving compared to the American web sites certain recommendations based on the research done in this thesis can be made.

Firstly, it is advised that the Dutch museums should incorporate the possibility for benefactors to donate online through their existing web sites. As the research in this thesis illustrates, online fundraising and the role of the Internet is starting to become more important. Although setting up the web pages might cost some money and time, the research in this thesis suggests that if done in the right way, it would be worth it.

Secondly, it is advised that the Dutch web sites provide the American web visitor with different membership options. As is clear from comparisons with the American Museum web sites, Dutch museums should provide potential benefactors with a variety of choices when it comes to donating money. By customizing more to the needs of their audience and providing information on the benefits of different membership and different prices of membership a broader segment of people might be reached.

Thirdly, it is recommended that if the American audience is truly a target audience for both museums they be specifically named. This can already be seen on the Rijksmuseum web site where the American audience is singled out and addressed. By referring to specific institutions and by providing assistance to American benefactors, the Dutch museums can make it more attractive and easier for an American audience to donate.

Fourthly, both museums could use more adjectives to appeal to an American audience. Using adjectives could possibly pull Americans across the line to donate to their museums

instead of an American institution. Most importantly however, the Dutch web sites should concentrate on emphasizing the benefits of membership and donating. By presenting these benefits in a clear bullet list it becomes more apparent and explicit for the American web visitor what they stand to gain as an individual when choosing to support the museum.

Fifthly, if the option for donating online were incorporated in the Dutch web sites it is important that they include more up to date security information. This will mark the web site as being credible and safe. Ideally it might be wise to incorporate the Norton security logo seeing as this is used on both American web sites and will probably make the web visitor trust the web site.

Lastly, if the Dutch government is serious about giving cultural institutions less subsidy and making them more benefactor dependent, a tax and regulatory framework should be made and present on the web site to encourage giving.

Chapter 8: Limitations

Although the analyses of web site comprehensibility and cultural customization provide an important insight into the current support sections found on the Dutch and American museum web sites certain limitations must be mentioned.

It must be noted that the expert evaluation method used in this thesis is known to have certain shortcomings. This is due to the fact that this means of analysis may have an undesired effect on the trustworthiness of the research because experts cannot be seen as objective and free from bias. Furthermore, although research might have been done before hand, it is hard for experts to judge the needs, language use and preferences of a specific audience. Thirdly, as the expert evaluation method means that only one person is judging the web sites, certain features might be overlooked that could be of importance.

Although Hofstede's dimensions have proven to be a valid basis for web site analysis on local cultures, they are general and it should not be assumed that cultures are homogenous and that no subcultures exist. Therefore, the findings of this research by no means claim that all Americans or all Dutch people will agree that the web features presented are the important ones and that they will be effected by their existence in a positive or negative way.

It must be kept in mind that this thesis only examined the way in which web sites could be customized to appeal to a specifically American audience. The Dutch museums might be aware of web features that they could include to make the web sites more appealing to Americans but they may have chosen not to incorporate them in case it might put off people from other cultural backgrounds.

Finally, little research has so far been done on the success of customizing web sites. Therefore more data is required before any final conclusions can be made on its effectiveness.

Furthermore, as the Internet is such a global entity the cultural differences on web sites might become less apparent over time, as people from different cultures move across the Internet with more freedom and get used to one dominant approach to web site design and features.

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