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Pirumyan, Tatevik; Broeder, Peter

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Cultural Face of E-commerce: Armenian and Dutch Online Consumers

Tatevik PIRUMYAN

Tilburg University, Communication and Information Sciences, the Netherlands

Peter BROEDER

Tilburg University, Communication and Information Sciences, the Netherlands

ABSTRACT One of the restrictions of online shopping is that buyers cannot actually see, taste and try the product. This increases the importance of availability of product information in a web shop. This study investigated cultural differences and the effect of product information on online shopping. The assumption was that consumers of collectivistic (high-context) cultures prefer experiential and explicit information, whereas members of individualistic cultures (low-context) prefer factual and implicit information. Armenian and Dutch consumers were representatives of collectivistic and individualistic cultures respectively. In an online survey 444 respondents (out of which 234 were Armenians and 210 were Dutch) reported their attitude and purchase intention towards a camera in a web shop. The information provided for the camera was manipulated in six conditions (factual/experiential (information in general and reviews), implicit/explicit). The results indicated no significant differences in the effect of different types of product information on the online purchase intention between the two cultures. The implications for developing an effective (local/global) marketing strategy are discussed.

Keywords: online shopping; cultural dimension; online information

JEL classification: M31, M37

1. Introduction

Successful marketers increasingly recognise culture as the most powerful determinant of consumer attitudes, lifestyles, and behaviours. Internet and Web 2.0 technologies have fundamentally changed the way businesses interact, transact and communicate with consumers and promote the increasing prevalence of e-commerce (Pookulangara and Koesler, 2011). Online shoppers do not have an opportunity to directly experience and examine the product, try it, touch it or smell it, therefore detailed information about its characteristics and specifications gains significant importance. Additionally, Web 2.0 technologies made it possible to receive information about the product not only from sellers, but also from online reviews of buyers.

The role of culture is highlighted in various e-commerce studies (e.g. Hermeking, 2005, Keisidou, Sarigiannidis and Maditinos, 2011; Ozen and Kodaz, 2012). However, existing comparative studies mainly explore buying behaviour in both offline and online conditions of consumers from the United States, Western Europe and Asian countries such as China (e.g. Aaker and Schmitt, 2001) and Korea (e.g. Bagozzi and Lee, 2002). The regions that are situated somehow in-between remain relatively overlooked.

The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of culture on information preferences of Armenian and Dutch consumers and their online purchase intention. Consumers from the two groups were studied, as being different by their attitude towards collective goals and values, influence of network and preferences in communication styles. The Armenian culture significantly differs from the Dutch culture: it is collectivistic, high-context culture, with high level of uncertainty avoidance. In addition, online shopping is more developed in the Netherlands than in Armenia. In 2014, people from the Netherlands spent over 10.5 billion Euros online (Ecommerce Europe, 2014). In the same year Armenians spent approximately 10.2 million Euros online (Nahapetyan, 2015). Although the online spending by Armenians seems little in comparison to that of Dutch, it is an interesting country to study also from the perspective of practical implications of the results, since it has an emerging market of online shopping.

2. Consumer behaviour and its preconditions

Various theories have been developed aimed at explaining people's buying behaviour in general and the concept of online shopping in particular. Despite the differences in approaches and focus, positive attitude towards the product and purchase intention remain the central elements that result in an actual buying.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) proposed by Ajzen (1985, 2011) postulates three conceptually independent elements of intention: the degree of (un)favourable evaluation of a certain behaviour, perceived normative beliefs about the acceptability of the given behaviour by others and their strength (subjective norm) and perceived ability to perform the behaviour as well as possession of means to do it (self-efficacy). The more favourable the attitude and social norms and the greater the perceived self-efficacy, the stronger the person's intention to perform a certain behaviour will be. Fishbein and Yzer (2003) elaborated further on the attitude – intention – behaviour approach and created an Integrative Model of Behavioural Prediction (IMBP). According to the Model a behaviour will likely happen when one has a strong intention towards its performance, required skills and abilities and if no environmental constraints keep them from actually performing that action. Intention is determined by three types of beliefs: behavioural, normative, and efficacy. One of the main inputs of the IMBP in behavioural studies and importance for this research is that it emphasises factors affecting the development of those beliefs, one of which is culture.

Lim (2013) developed a Theory of Online Buying Behaviour (TOBB) using structural equation modelling to explain the process buyers go through while making a purchase in a web shop. He based his approach on the studies of Hsin Chang and Wang (2011), and Lim and Ting (2012) who stated that perceived ease of use and usefulness are important predictors of online buying intention. Lim (2013) posits that the online purchasing process starts by online buyers developing an attitude toward online shopping and a certain product. This attitude is derived from the perceptual beliefs of value, ease of use, and usefulness of online shopping. Favourable attitude is highly likely to increase online shopping intention. However, much depends on the previous experience of online shopping, which can either strengthen or weaken consumers' trust towards such action. Good online shopping experiences in the past and high trust are likely to fortify person's intention to make purchases online again, and vice versa.

Culture is the broadest factor in consumer's behaviour as it shapes basic human values, wants and perceptions. There are different classifications of culture, starting from single dimension models, such as high-context vs. low-context (Hall 1976) to models with six dimensions (Hofstede, 2011). The concept of high/low-context cultures goes in line with Hofstede's (2011) description of individualistic/collectivistic cultures. In high-context and collectivistic cultures personal touch is very important. Relationships are closer and little needs to be said,

in order to be understood. The preferred communication style is more informal, indirect and often based on symbols or pictures. High-context cultures make more use of implicit information (Hofstede, 2011). On the contrary, people from a low-context and individualistic culture prefer explicit information. This means that they wish to know the specific contents of what one is saying and rely heavily on written word (Claes and Gerritsen, 2007).

Cultural differences may have an effect on actors' behaviour also in e-commerce environment (Hermeking, 2005). Thus, for being successful, an e-commerce platform should consider the cultural habits of consumers and existing communication practices.

2.1. Online shopping and the role of information

More and more information is becoming available online and consumers are able to access that information from locations all over the world. Consumers only have limited processing capabilities to deal with this enormous amount of information. One way of giving consumers control over the information they seek, is to adapt it to their wishes, experience and preferences. In case of web shops, it may be the information about the product. According to Morrison and Firmstone (2000) to have a high level of trustworthiness, a web shop should contain information that is familiar, predictable, and corresponds to the habits and culture of the consumer. The more available information conforms to the culturally familiar values and communication style, the more trust towards the web shop will be established. Therefore, there will be more positive attitude towards purchasing the product. People from collectivistic cultures generally have a stronger need for uncertainty avoidance than people from individualistic cultures (De Mooij and Hofstede, 2010). Additionally, Keisidou, Sarigiannidis and Maditinos (2011), who conducted a research among 204 Greek Internet users, found that because of the fact that online shopping is something relatively new in Greece, the level of consumers' self-efficacy to make online purchase and perceived benefits from it are low. E-commerce is a relatively new phenomenon in Armenia as well. Additionally, Greek culture is described as collectivistic and as having a high level of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2011) like the Armenian one.

Consumers from the Netherlands (individualistic and low-context culture) have less personal attachments. Therefore, the persuasive communication should be detailed and explicit. Given the fact that in Armenian culture the level of uncertainty avoidance is higher than in Dutch Culture, it can be assumed, that Armenians use the Internet for making purchases less and value all cues that can help to decrease the level of uncertainty more than the Dutch. These two factors may have an influence on the attitude towards online shopping as well as towards available information about the product among Armenian consumers.

Hypothesis 1: Dutch online consumers have a more positive attitude towards online shopping than Armenian online consumers.

Hypothesis 2: Armenian online consumers value availability of information about the product more than Dutch online consumers.

2.2. Factual and experiential information

Information in a web shop provided by sellers or consumers can contain more subjective or more objective features. According to Park, Lee and Han (2007) objective information is usually quite a specific claim about a product, based on arguments with respect to its certain properties. Xia and Bechwati (2008) call this "factual information". Subjective information contains few or no supporting arguments and is often emotional in nature. Xia and Bechwati (2008) call this "experiential information" (i.e., behaviour, experience and feelings of other buyers). Factual and experiential information affects the purchase intention of consumers with different cultural backgrounds differently. People from low-context cultures expect

information to be factual (Claes and Gerritsen, 2007), while those from collectivistic cultures prefer more experiential information. Mueller (2004) also found that advertising focused on the experience of others with the specific product is more valued in collectivistic cultures. In contrast, consumers from individualistic cultures prefer advertising that focus on the factual information about the product. Cui, Liu, Yang and Wang (2013) had similar findings. They showed several ads containing factual and experiential information on a camera. The results indicated that the Chinese (collectivistic culture) prefer experiential information to factual information.

*Hypothesis 3: Factual product information will have a stronger influence on purchase intention of Dutch online consumers than on Armenian online consumers.
Experiential product information will have a stronger influence on purchase intention of Armenian online consumers than on Dutch online consumers*

Consumers can easily contribute their thoughts and opinions about a certain product, service or web shop through ratings, reviews and discussion groups (Sridhar and Srinivasan, 2012). As a result, reviews illustrating consumers' opinions, user experiences, and product characteristics have become an important information source for consumer's purchase decisions. According to Fong and Burton (2008) a view of another person or opinion of a group has a significant influence on the decisions of consumers from collectivistic cultures, whereas this is much less the case with consumers with individualistic culture. In individualistic cultures, the consumers prefer being independent from others and mainly rely on their own experiences and knowledge.

Lee and Park (2006) found that people from collectivistic cultures (Korea) were more influenced by online reviews than people from individualistic culture (i.e., the United States) due to the importance one places on their actions fitting into the norms of the group. Additionally, reviews that gave information about the experiences of other consumers had more influence on the purchase decision of Koreans than reviews that gave information about the product.

*Hypothesis 4: Factual reviews will have a stronger influence on purchase intention of Dutch online consumers than on Armenian online consumers.
Experiential reviews will have a stronger influence on purchase intention of Armenian online consumers than on Dutch online consumers.*

2.4 Explicit and Implicit information

Another way in which cultures differ from each other is their preference for implicit and explicit information. In the context of the Relevance Theory, Yus (1999) stated that in every conversation, one seeks for the relevance in incoming (non)verbal stimuli. When information is presented in the most efficient and influential way possible, it can be classified as explicit. Rather, when something is not purely informational, and is in need of contextual cues, it is implicit. In her study, Bruys (2012) differentiated implicit and explicit recommendations in an online environment. According to her, implicit information is a user oriented, positive evaluation. It is an indirect way of promoting to purchasing the product. Explicitly presented information contains direct recommendations to buy the product. Bruys (2012) compared individualistic cultures (the Netherlands, Germany, and the United States) with collectivistic cultures (Indonesia and Turkey) and found that the average purchase intention of the collectivistic groups was higher than that of the individualistic groups when presented an implicit factual review. This is indicative that implicit information is more persuasive to people from a collectivistic than an individualistic culture. Hall's (1976) explanation of how low/high-context cultures deal with information adds to this.

*Hypothesis 5: Explicit product information will have a stronger effect on purchase intentions of people from the Netherlands than on people from Armenia.
Implicit product information will have a stronger effect on purchase intentions of people from Armenia than on people from the Netherlands.*

3. Method

The aim of this study was to examine differences between Dutch and Armenian consumers concerning the influence of different types of information on their purchase intention when shopping online. The study used a 2 (type of information) x 2 (culture: Armenian vs. Dutch) between-subject design. The constructs were gender, age, level of education, culture, buying intention, evaluation and perception of the provided information, shopping motivation and role of information about the product. More detailed descriptions of method and findings are given by Pirumyan (2015), Schaap (2015), and Sleddens (2015). The main issues are summarised in this paper.

3.1. Population

The sample population consisted of 444 respondents. Their age ranged from 18 to 35 years (mean age 23.1 years). With a view to the cultural background (*What ethnic group do you belong to?*) 234 respondents were from Armenia (42.9% male and 57.1% female) with a mean age of 27 years (SD = 4.99), and 210 from the Netherlands (41.6% male and 58.4% female) with a mean age of 24 years (SD = 4.99).

3.2. Advertisement

The respondents were presented with an image of a camera in a web shop. An example of an advertisement with the corresponding (implicit persuasive) information is given in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Example of an advertisement (implicit information text)

The chosen product was a compact, not expensive digital camera for everyday use since it was a fairly neutral, non-gender specific product, not associated with stereotypes in the two countries. Also, a compact camera is a high-involvement product, associated with a short-

term buying behaviour. All brand and product information was removed from the images of the cameras to avoid the possible effect of factors other than those that were deliberately manipulated. Two silver compact cameras were used in the final advertisements. Silver was chosen as it is a neutral and gender unspecific colour. In the web shop background elements such as price, social media buttons etc. were removed so that the focus would be only on the context information and the product. White, blue, green and black were used for the web shop background. The choice of colours was based predominantly on the research of Madden, Hewitt and Roth (2000) conducted in eight countries, which showed that those colours were the most liked in all of those countries

The design had six conditions. The text used for the web shop images was different depending on the condition that the respondents were assigned to:

- Conditions (1) and (2) contained factual and experiential information respectively, provided by the web shop and other buyers.
- Conditions (3) and (4) presented factual and experiential reviews respectively.
- Conditions (5) and (6) presented explicit and implicit information respectively.

The text used in the web shop images was different depending on the condition that the respondents were assigned to. Textual manipulation of factual and experiential information and reviews was based on Park, Lee and Han's (2007), Xia and Bechwati's (2008), and Bruys' (2012) ideas and examples. The textual manipulations of implicit and explicit information have been adapted from Bruys' (2012) study. Appendix 1 of this paper gives the texts used in each of the six conditions.

Respondents from both cultural backgrounds were randomly assigned to one of the six conditions. Table 1 shows the distribution of the number of respondents per cultural background and per condition.

Table 1. Distribution of the respondents per cultural background and per condition

Condition	Armenian (N _{tot} =234)	Dutch (N _{tot} =210)
(1) Factual information	37	30
(2) Experiential information	47	32
(3) Factual review	41	36
(4) Experiential review	36	49
(5) Explicit information	30	38
(6) Implicit information	43	35

3.3. Questionnaire

The respondents of the online questionnaire were first asked to *“Imagine that you want to buy a compact photo camera for everyday use online. On the following pages, images of cameras and information about them will be shown”*.

General purchase intention. The first question was a general one:

- *Would you like to buy the camera in the advertisement? (Yes, no).*

Online consumer behaviour. Respondents were asked questions related to preferences of ways of shopping (*online or in regular stores*) and overall experience of using the Internet (*from daily use to once in six months and more*):

- *How do you prefer to buy products?*
- *How often do you buy products via the Internet?*

Attitude towards available information. To examine the attitude of the online consumers towards the (factual or experiential) information provided, the respondents were asked to indicate their opinion on three statements (5-point scale: 1= *strongly disagree* 5=*strongly agree*):

- Attention (*When I buy a product online I always read all the information that is presented on the website*),
- Importance of product specifications (*When I buy a product online, the product specifications available on the website are helpful for my decision-making*),
- Review confidence (*When I buy a product online, the reviews presented on the website make me confident in purchasing the product*)

Purchase intention of the product. The scale that addressed the purchase intention consisted of the following six statements (5-point scale: 1= *strongly disagree* 5=*strongly agree*):

- *The likelihood of me buying this camera is high*
- *If I were going to buy a camera, I would consider buying this camera*
- *Buying this camera is appealing to me*
- *I am likely to buy the camera shown in the advertisement*
- *The probability of me buying this camera is low*
- *I would not like to order this camera*

The six responses were combined into the earlier mentioned construct “Purchase intention”. The questionnaire was almost similar for all six conditions, except for the questions regarding the role of information for the consumers. In the first two conditions questions regarding the attitude of consumers towards the information in general were included, while in the third and fourth conditions questions concerning attitude towards the reviews were asked. In the fifth and sixth conditions questions regarding consumers’ self-efficacy were included.

4. Results

In the context of this paper the hypotheses presented above are tested, that is the online behaviour of the respondents and the effect of culture and web shop conditions (information type) on respondents’ attitudes and purchase intention.

4.1. Manipulation check

Reliability analysis and manipulation check were conducted for all used scales and information conditions. The results showed that in all cases Cronbach’s α was higher than the .70, which, according to Pallant (2007), is the minimal value that is considered acceptable. Conducted t-tests showed that the manipulation of the texts for all conditions was also correct and perceived by the respondents as it was foreseen.

4.2. Online consumer behaviour

All respondents but one indicated using the Internet every day ($n=443$). One Armenian respondent indicated using it at intervals of a few days. Respondents were also asked to indicate how often they purchase online. An independent t-test revealed that there was a significant difference between Armenian ($M = 4.90, SD = 1.46$) and Dutch ($M = 4.18, SD = .89$) respondents, indicating that Armenians purchased online less frequently than the Dutch, $t(444) = 6.18, p < .001$.

Table 2: The frequencies and percentiles of online purchases per cultural group

Condition	Armenian (N _{tot} =234)	Dutch (N _{tot} =210)
Almost every day	6 (2.6%)	0 (-)
At intervals of a few days	11 (4.7%)	7 (3.3%)
At intervals of a week	18 (7.7%)	29 (13.8%)
At intervals of a month	49 (20.9%)	108 (51.4%)
At intervals of a few months	63 (26.9%)	54 (25.7%)
At intervals of six months or more	55 (23.5%)	9 (4.3%)
Never	32 (13.7%)	3 (1.4%)

65.5 per cent ($n = 291$) of all respondents indicated that they prefer to purchase products in regular shops, whereas only 28.4 per cent ($n = 126$) indicated preference for purchasing from web shops. The rest 6.1% ($n = 27$) of the respondents indicated that both options were equally preferable. Armenians, compared to the Dutch, preferred to purchase online less frequently. Particularly, 75.2 per cent ($n = 176$) indicated preference for buying in regular shops and only 18.4 per cent ($n = 43$) in web shops. By contrast, 54.8 per cent ($n = 115$) of the Dutch respondents indicated preference for making purchases in regular stores and 39.5 per cent ($n = 83$) in web shops.

An independent samples t-test revealed that the attitude difference between the two groups were statistically significant, with $t(444) = 4.31, p < .001$. Since the mean age of Armenian respondents was higher (i.e. 27.00) than the mean age of Dutch respondents (i.e. 23.54), additional tests were conducted to analyse whether age had an influence on purchase preferences. Correlation analyses revealed no significant effects of age on buying preferences, $r = -.038, p = .544$. Thus, the cultural differences can presumptively not be attributed to the differences in mean ages.

An additional regression analysis was conducted to check whether frequency of shopping online was affected by the attitude towards that action. The results of the linear regression indicated that attitude towards purchasing products online was indeed a significant predictor of how often people actually did shop online ($B = 1.45, SE B = .14, \beta = .05, p < .001$).

Thus, Hypothesis 1 was confirmed.

This is consistent with the self-efficacy beliefs in these countries. Armenians were found to have significantly lower self-efficacy when making online purchases ($M = 3.38, SD = .53$) than the Dutch ($M = 3.90, SD = .50$), $t(136) = -5.93, p < .001$. Additional analysis revealed that self-efficacy was negatively correlated with how often respondents purchased online, $r = -.34, p < .001$. This means that self-efficacy led to fewer purchases online.

4.3. Attitude towards the available information

In general both Armenian and Dutch respondents valued the information provided on web shops quite high for making a buying decision (means varying from 3.24 to 4.03). The conducted one-way between-group ANOVA revealed no significant difference between Armenians ($n = 66$) and the Dutch ($n = 62$) regarding the influence of availability of product specifications on decision-making, with $F(1, 126) = .18, p = .669$ and online reviews, with $F(1, 270) = .60, p = .441$. However, a significant difference between the two cultural groups was found for the attention paid to the information available on the web shop, $F(1, 126) = 11.19, p = .001$. The mean score of Armenian respondents for this item ($M = 3.86, SD = .93$) was higher than the one of the Dutch respondents ($M = 3.24, SD = 1.17$).

Similar results were found in regard to online reviews. No significant difference was found between Armenians ($n = 67$) and Dutch ($n = 75$) regarding the influence of reviews on decision-making, with $F(1, 140) = .58, p = .446$. In the meantime, there was a significant

difference between two groups in regard to attention paid to the reviews, $F(1, 140) = 11.19$, $p = .017$.

Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was partly confirmed.

3.4. Effect of factual/experiential information on purchase intention

Scores on buying intention were tested by a two-way between-group ANOVA, having two levels of condition and two levels of culture as independent variables. Levene's test showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variances has not been violated, $F(3, 141) = 0.44$, $p = .726$. A significant main effect was observed neither of culture ($F(1, 141) = .18$, $p = .670$) nor condition ($F(1, 141) = 3.13$, $p = .079$). However, with the significance level exceeding the .05 p value not very significantly in the case of the conditions, a certain trend was observed. Respondents in the factual information condition ($n = 67$) displayed higher buying intention ($M = 2.41$, $SD = .78$) than respondents in the experiential information condition ($n = 78$) ($M = 2.16$, $SD = .78$). The interaction effect was statistically non-significant, $F(1, 141) = .05$, $p = .538$.

Thus, Hypothesis 3 was not confirmed.

3.5. Effect of factual/experiential reviews on purchase intention

A two-way between groups ANOVA tested the influence of culture (independent variable) on the relationship between the type of information (independent variable) and purchase intention (dependent variable). The assumption of independent observations and homogeneity of variances has not been violated. No significant main effect was observed either of culture $F(1,148) = 1.48$, $p = .23$ or review condition $F(1,148) = 1.17$ $p = .28$. No interaction effect was found between the type of information in the online consumer reviews and culture, $F(1,148) = 0.31$, $p = .58$. This shows that there was no significant difference in the effect of the type of reviews (i.e. factual and experiential) on purchase intention of the Dutch and Armenians.

Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not confirmed.

3.6. Effect of implicit versus explicit information

Scores on implicit and explicit information effect on purchase intention were also subjected to a two-way ANOVA having two levels of condition and two levels of culture. Levene's test showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variances has not been violated. There was no significant main effect of condition, $F(1, 142) = .68$, $p = .411$. Also, no significant main effect of culture was observed, $F(1,142) = 1.62$, $p = .206$. Finally, no significant interactions were observed, as well. $F(1,142) = .21$, $p = .651$.

Thus, Hypothesis 5 was not confirmed.

5. Conclusions

This study explored the effect of culture on online shopping behaviour, i.e. the influence of product information on online consumers from Armenia and the Netherlands. No differences in the effect of product information were found between the two cultures. However, other differences in online purchasing were indeed found. Specifically, people from the Netherlands had a more positive attitude towards online shopping, made more purchases online and had higher self-efficacy when making such purchases. Consumers from both cultures were similar in their use of the Internet; both used it on a daily basis.

Park, Lee and (2007) suggest that factual information usually has a greater impact on buying intention than experiential information as it has more potential to eliminate the uncertainty about the product. This assumption was confirmed in the current study only to a certain

extent. The results indicated no statistically significant effect of product information on purchase intention. However, a certain trend was observed, that consumers in the factual information condition displayed a higher purchase intention than consumers in the experiential information condition.

Another difference between Armenian and Dutch consumers found in this study was related to the role of information provided on the web shop. It was expected that Armenian consumers, compared to the Dutch, would express greater need for information to overcome the uncertainty of online environment and that their purchase intention would be more influenced by it. The provided information and reviews appeared to be significantly more important for Armenian than for Dutch consumers. This finding can partly be explained also by Lim's (2013) idea that lack of online purchase experience and thus, trust towards it negatively correlates with purchase intention. Online shopping is a relatively new and not very popular phenomenon in Armenia. There is still a lack of trust towards the online environment, as well as a low level perceived self-efficacy amongst Armenians. Thus, potential consumers from this culture tend to decrease the uncertainty, and availability of information is one of the supportive elements for that.

The similarity in the Internet usage between Armenians and the Dutch may be explained by the globally increasing Internet accessibility (Internet Live Stats, n.d.). The finding that culture has no effect on purchase intention under different information conditions was unexpected, since such differences were found in previous studies (Cui et al. 2013, Lee and Park, 2006; Bruys, 2012, Mueller, 2004). The current results are not in line with the findings of Ozen and Kodaz (2012) either, who found a significant effect of culture on information preferences and purchase intention, when comparing Turkish and American online consumers. This study is especially important, as Turkey is one of Armenia's neighbouring countries, which also had a strong effect on Armenian culture for centuries. A reasonable explanation of the observed differences can be the fact, that Turkey is a Muslim country while Armenia is a Christian one. The priorities and preferences of consumers from Turkey can be affected more by religion than by other determinants of culture.

The similarities between Armenian and the Dutch can also be explained by the extensive process of cultural globalisation, which primarily affects educated youth. Consumers with the mean age of 23.5 years and with predominantly higher education participated in this study. Another explanation of finding no effect of culture on purchase intention under different information conditions can be the fact that e-commerce is a relatively new trend in Armenia and national web shops are quite scarce. The range and variety of the products offered by local web shops are quite limited. Style and content of the provided information, design and other attitudes of the websites are copied from similar western web shops. In addition, prices in those web shops are often higher than prices for the same products in web shops based in Europe, the USA and China. Therefore, Armenian consumers prefer to buy from more famous international web shops with a cheaper price.

Findings, related to the differences and similarities between Armenian and Dutch online consumers can have practical implications. First of all, the current findings provide further insight into how online marketing strategies can be improved. Specifically, the way in which information about a product is presented and which of its characteristics are emphasised (factual vs. experiential) can improve potential consumer's attitude towards the product and increase the intention to purchase it. De Mooij and Hofstede (2010) indicated the important role of culture in online shopping preferences and the necessity to adapt the web shop considering different cultural dimensions, such as individualism and collectivism. However, the current study, in line with the findings of Keisidou, Sarigiannidis and Maditinos (2011) provides a ground to think that controlling levels of uncertainty, risk perception and self-efficacy may be more important than adaptation of the website based on individualistic

versus collectivistic dimensions of culture. E-marketers should pay more attention to building trust amongst potential consumers and design their web shop keeping that issue in mind. As both Armenian and Dutch consumers prefer factual information more, sellers should provide as detailed and overwhelming factual information about the product as possible, regardless of the culture and target group.

6. Research limitations and future research

Although Hofstede did not provide direct data on Armenia and almost no research has been conducted in Armenia aimed at detailed study of its culture during the last 25 years, it was considered as having a predominantly collectivistic culture based on the information derived from older sources. Meanwhile, globalisation and technological developments could have made essential changes of the culture in this country leading to a decrease in cultural differences between Armenians and the Dutch.

The findings from this study suggest several recommendations for future research. First, studies should be conducted aimed at investigating the characteristics of the main actors (sellers and consumers) of online shopping in Armenia, variance in supply and demand, and popularity of global web shops, particularly in comparison with the local ones. This will provide detailed information about online shopping peculiarities in Armenia and establish a stronger basis for future cross-cultural research and studies including various types of manipulations. Second, additional studies should be conducted to improve the current knowledge about Armenia's culture and its reflection in the commercial sphere and to reveal how it fits into popular concepts such as those of Hofstede (2011) and Hall (1976). This will allow its better positioning in marketing research. Third, further research of this type should be conducted with a large variety of products and on larger groups. More differences between the two cultural groups may be found when examining their preferences in e.g. household goods and clothes than in electronics. What is more, studies with manipulation of other components of provided stimuli (e.g. design of the web shop, presence of the seller) should also be conducted. Finally, the role and effect of culture, as well as the validity to use its dimensions defined on a national basis as preconditions of behaviour in e-commerce should be thoroughly investigated and reassessed in the era of online life dominance and globalisation.

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Author description

Tatevik Pirumyan: studies cultural aspects of social media and online marketing communications, and recently intercultural communication and knowledge transfer in multinational organisations.

Peter Broeder: investigates socio-psycholinguistic aspects of intercultural communication, teacher training, and recently, intercultural differences in online consumer behaviour. These issues are addressed in Europe, South-Africa and China (www.broeder.com).

Appendix 1. Text of the advertisements in each of the six conditions

Condition	Informational text	
Factual information	<p>Product specifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 million-pixel CCD sensor • 16x super zoom wide-angle lens • 300 shots per battery charge • 30 MB internal memory • 10 shooting modes, including Live View control mode • Bluetooth • Not waterproof <p>Consumer reviews By David on May 01, 2015 <i>It has a SMART Auto mode that automatically selects the optical shooting settings.</i> By Anna, on April 25, 2015 <i>The 16x zoom provides a healthy 250-300mm equivalent focal length range.</i></p>	<p>Product specifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 million-pixel sensor • 12x optical zoom lens • 230 shots per battery charge • 25 MB internal memory • 19 scene modes • Adjusts the settings automatically • Wi-Fi connectivity • Not waterproof <p>Consumer reviews By Arthur on May 02, 2015 <i>It has an auto-shooting mode and includes also Fisheye and Toy Camera for more creative shots.</i> By Maria on April 27, 2015 <i>It is possible to do about 200-220 photos when the batteries are fully charged</i></p>
Experiential information	<p>Product specifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is one of the most popular cameras of 2015 • It is comfortable, easy to keep in a pocket and simple for usage. • It has been significantly improved compared to previous models • 45 people from your region have bought this camera in the last 6 months • 273 consumers liked this product <p>Consumer reviews By David on May 01, 2015 <i>This is the best camera I have ever seen! I'm really enjoying it and it is hard to put it down!</i> By Anna, on April 25, 2015 <i>Woouooooow! I have searched for days and compared every camera and finally bought this one!</i></p>	<p>Product specifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is one of the best compact cameras of 2015 and you can • Keep it in your pocket • It is comfortable, easy to use and without any sophisticated features • 72 people from your region have bought this camera in the • last 6 months • 264 consumers liked this camera <p>Consumer reviews By Arthur on May 02, 2015 <i>I was looking for a camera for three weeks and I found the best one. Can't wait making photos with it.</i> By Maria on April 27, 2015 <i>Wow! How wonderful! I can't stop using it. All my friends envy me.</i></p>

Appendix 1 Text of the advertisements in each of the six conditions (cont.)

Condition	Informational text	
Factual review	I bought this compact camera two weeks ago and I'm really happy with it! Immediately, when I got the camera, I tried it. The camera has 16.3 megapixels and a 21x zoom lens which totally lives up to its promise of very high quality photos! Even in bad light conditions, the camera takes beautiful and clear pictures. The touchscreen works great. The camera also has WIFI and can be connected to your phone. In short, I recommend you to buy the camera, because it met all expectations!	I bought this camera three weeks ago and I am very happy with it! After I bought it, I tried it right away. The camera takes clear pictures and delivers good quality, because of its 16.3 megapixels and 21x zoom lens. It also takes very clear pictures under poor lightning conditions, because of its High Sensitivity System. The touchscreen reacts well and the camera has a WIFI connection! In short, I am very satisfied and I definitely recommend this camera!
Experiential review	I bought this camera two weeks ago and I am totally satisfied! I tried it at a friend's birthday party right away. After my first photo, my friends noticed it. They all really liked it! I had a great night because of the camera! Also, this camera is very hip and super innovative with its beautiful touchscreen. I could even connect the camera to my phone, my friends were impressed! It is so compact that I can easily carry it in my pocket, which is really useful! You really want to be seen with this camera! In short, I highly recommend buying the camera as it met all expectations.	I bought this camera three weeks ago and I am so happy with it! Right after I bought it, I took it on a ski trip. I made really pretty pictures from the snowy views, my friends were impressed! The camera is totally innovative and a real eye catcher, because it has a nice looking touchscreen and it even send pictures to your phone! My friends found this awesome too! I really had a fantastic vacation because of the camera! It is compact and I could carry it in my ski
Implicit information	This camera takes high quality pictures of 16.3 megapixels and has a 21X zoom lens. It has a well-functioning touchscreen that allows for navigating and adapting the various settings. Also, the camera can be connected to smartphones via WIFI.	This camera has a 21X zoom lens and takes high quality photos with 16.3 megapixels. Also, the settings can easily be navigated using the touchscreen. Moreover, these settings can easily be adapted. The camera can connect to other devices via wireless internet without any trouble at all.
Explicit information	You must get this camera! You can take high quality pictures with its 21X zoom lens and 16.3 megapixels. It has a well-functioning touchscreen that allows you to navigate and adapt the various settings. Also, you can connect the camera to your smartphone via WIFI. In sum, it is very easy to use!	You have to buy this camera! It takes high quality pictures with its 16.3 megapixels and 21X zoom lens. You can easily navigate through the settings using the touchscreen. Moreover, you can easily adapt these settings. Also, you can connect the camera to other devices via your wireless internet without any trouble at all. In general, it is very handy.