Cultural Analysis of Video-Sharing Websites

Research Question:

Why are locally developed South Korean video-sharing sites used instead of video-sharing sites designed for global use (such as YouTube)?

Introduction:

This project is significant for cross-cultural technology design and the research within it. We began our research by looking for culture to be a primary reason for why some video-sharing site users in other countries, such as South Korea, still choose to use niche video-sharing websites as opposed to exclusively using YouTube (which was designed for global use). We focused on South Korean video-sharing websites in particular because of the unusually low market share of YouTube there. Despite being one of the top video-sharing websites in the world, YouTube has struggled with obtaining users in Korea. Through our research, we have determined that culture is not the primary reason for the use of niche video-sharing websites. While culture is not the central finding from our research, it does play a part in the content contained within these websites, and that specific culture-derived content is what users search for.
**Background:**

We looked into research pertaining to culture and technology and found a research paper titled: “The Gamer Experience: investigating Relationships Between Culture and Usability in Massively Multiplayer Online Games,” which tries to find a link between culture and the usability of the design of the game EVE Online. The researchers give scores to each country based on Hofstede's dimensions of culture and match it against the statistics of players from different cultures.¹ This type of analysis is useful for our research, as we also investigated the relationship between culture and the functionality and usability of an application. In this study, a relationship was observed between culture and the perceived usability in the game. Our research does not suggest that this relationship exists in the context of video-sharing websites as it does for game design, but we would not rule it out entirely for future research questions.

Early in our research, we began looking at the relationship between culture and the design of websites, and how they interplayed. We started off with the assumption that culture influenced the design of websites, which in return influenced particular groups of people to use that website over another. In *The Case of Facebook Japan: A Cultural Design in Postcolonial Conditions*, the author talks about how Facebook has had trouble with gaining popularity in Japan. This was due to the fact that Facebook required a full name and profile picture; in Japanese culture, pseudonyms are the popular form of expressing one’s self, and therefore Facebook had a difficult time competing with the top Japanese SNS website, Mixi². It was not until Facebook decided to change its content to accommodate Japanese preferences, by allowing users to
syndicate Facebook posts on Mixi, that it gained vast popularity. This article guided us in considering the perspective that a website’s design may not be so much of a factor as much as the website’s content was, for users deciding on which website to use. As we will explain, our data more closely supports this later hypothesis.

When researching government regulation in South Korea, we looked at the book “Cultural Identity and New Communication Technologies.” In the chapter The World Narrow Web, the chapter discusses how the government controls the South Korean internet. The author uses the term “panopticon” to describe this control, in which many are watched by one. Internet users, such as anti-government citizen mobilizations, are kept under continuous surveillance by the government. Many of the participants that we interviewed complained about not being able to watch Korean news while they were outside of their homeland. This book chapter was useful in understanding the implications of government control over the content that was shared on the internet.

**Method:**

We approached this research study with a qualitative humanities methodology in order to answer our research question. This methodology is helpful because we are trying to figure out why people choose to use a regional or culturally specific website, and this methodology prioritizes context and subjective experience.

Our first step was to analyze comparisons between some of the Korean sites we viewed, in relation to their connection with YouTube. From what we noticed, all of the sites appeared to be very similar in functionality and appearance (see Figure 3). We
interviewed people who had used at least one other video-sharing website in addition to YouTube. To find people to interview, we created a small questionnaire asking people to select the video-sharing websites they use from a list, and then had them answer “yes” or “no” to be interviewed. After we had sent the questionnaire (See Figure 1) to find participants, the second step was conducting semi-structured interviews with people that have used the selected sites before, or currently use these sites. We interviewed five Korean participants in a semi-structured format (See Figure 2), and transcribed our conversations for a data analysis. Some sites that were mentioned by interview participants included Daum, Naver, Nate, and Vandrama. Using a grounded approach, we then employed a hermeneutic theme coding analysis to find meaning in our transcriptions. This meant that we did our analysis while constantly interpreting our results in the context of the rest of the data, this caused a changing of the aim of the study toward what we viewed as especially interesting or noteworthy.

Results:

The interviews showed us many factors that affect the usage of particular video-sharing websites. The three main factors governing the usage of particular video-sharing websites were: 1) content, 2) connection speed, and 3) government regulation. Figure 4 shows these factors being listed as constraints. Content was the major factor that affects the choice of video-sharing websites to use. The Korean websites had more Korea-specific news, political videos and discussion. In one interview, the interviewee chose to discuss Vandrama, a site that hosts copyrighted videos that
aren’t on the other major video-sharing websites. This content was the main reason why he visited this site. Another interviewee, when asked to talk about content on YouTube, replied with:

“... I really want to watch Korean news....Since YouTube is a very universal thing, I was thinking I might get access to that through YouTube...Sometimes I search it, but it's not there.”

Issues relating to connection speed was also another major factor. A slow connection contributes to undesirable effects such as lag and long buffering times. These effects were often mentioned in our interviews. One particular quote describes the frustration of the interviewee dealing with YouTube:

“I don’t know exactly why but YouTube in Korea is usually very slow...This slowness is kind of like--how they shoo people away like ‘eh, YouTube, I don’t want to wait.”

Lastly, we found that government regulation was a factor affecting a website’s traffic. Websites restrict the viewing of copyrighted videos. As we looked into YouTube’s speed issues, we found that YouTube lacks servers in South Korea\(^5\). This article claims that ISP’s in Korea wanted to charge YouTube more than other sites for the extra bandwidth it uses. In the United States, the law protects the neutrality of internet. The
South Korean government allows for ISP’s to discriminate against websites. Because of these laws, YouTube put their servers in countries surrounding South Korea. YouTube’s data has to travel from other countries, making it hard to compete in the fast broadband environment of South Korea. Our research shows that when a site is slower than others, users notice. This shows how government regulation also can affect connection speed.

Figure 4: After analyzing our data received from the interviews, we created this diagram displaying what features users liked when it came to video-sharing websites and what deterred them. Our results showed that YouTube lacked in content and that the niche websites were often slow and government regulated, which users did not like.
**Discussion:**

We originally hoped to find cultural differences in the design of the website. Instead, we found cultural differences in the content and only minimal variation in the design of video-sharing sites. Many of the video-sharing websites have most of the same features, functions, and work in similar ways (See Figure 4). This ran counter to our original assumption that a society’s culture influenced the design and functionality of the video-sharing websites’ designs. A given society’s culture was found not in the website itself, but the videos that were uploaded.

Our analysis suggests that the relationship between videos and their website is similar to the relationship between books and their bookshelf. The design of bookshelves can be both similar and different; however, speaking in general terms, the functionality of bookshelves are the same, and the content placed upon those shelves are what separates one bookshelf from another. The content is what people are seeking when they come to a bookshelf. Some bookshelves are, in fact, different from others but generally, the books themselves are more important to the person than the bookshelf. What makes video-sharing websites different from each other are the content, or types of videos, being offered. This example of remediation gives insight to the way people decide to use these sites; the content is more important to the user than the framework in which it is stored. In some countries, certain books are deemed illegal and are therefore unavailable due to regulation. We found that specific videos are missing or unavailable to users in specific countries. This finding can be linked to the availability of certain books in other
countries being unavailable or illegal. We originally hoped to find cultural differences in the design of the website. Instead, we found cultural differences in the content and not much variation in the design of the video-sharing website.

**Conclusion:**

The analysis tells us that content, speed, and government regulations are the important factors that influence a website’s use. These factors affect how seamlessly you can watch the videos you want. Our results show us that the design of a video-sharing website was less important than we had originally predicted. Given more time, we could look in depth into the culture of the website’s image and compare video-sharing sites with other types of web applications for social/cultural interaction. A website’s images and design could influence the type of content uploaded to the site. For example, the website worldstarhiphop.com is known for its videos of street fighting. This website allows for these videos to be uploaded to it. This could induce people to upload their fight videos to the same site.

Our research is important for researchers trying to understand culture and technology. By viewing our results, one can see that culture does play some part in technology, just sometimes it is not in a broad sense. As shown before, our research shows that in the context of video-sharing websites, culture plays a part within it, just not in the design of it. The two still go hand-in-hand in some way or another.

Another reason why our research is important is because companies, such as YouTube, can use our findings which can help them gain users. One way to potentially
gain users would be to add culture-specific content. For example, many of our interview participants wanted to watch Korean news, therefore, if YouTube was to add a news sections for Koreans, they could potentially gain more popularity with Korean users.

Our research gives us insight into the effects of government regulation on the internet and its users. Regulation can have major and lasting effects on the image of the Internet.

References:


Figure 3: Some of the video-sharing websites we used. Clockwise from the top left: Daum, YouTube, Naver, Nate. Daum, YouTube, and Naver look very similar in terms of site design.
Figure 1: Our initial questionnaire to find participants to interview
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/JR8Y65B

Basic Information:

1. Name
2. What city do you live in now?
3. Where were you born?
4. How good are you with computers and technology (1-10)
5. How many hours a day are you on the internet?
6. On average how many videos do you watch a day on the internet or how much time do you spend watching videos?
7. What video-sharing websites do you use most?
8. What video-sharing website do your friends use most?
9. What type of medium (technology) do you use to view the site?

YouTube

1. How did you learn about YouTube
2. When do you use YouTube?
3. What kind of videos do you watch on YouTube?
4. How many videos do you watch a day on YouTube on average?
5. How good do you think YouTube looks from a design standpoint?
6. How easy is it to use YouTube (navigational-wise)?
7. Do you have an account?
   a. How often do you upload to the site? (rarely, frequently)
   b. Do you comment on videos?
   c. Do you read video comments
   d. Do you like/dislike videos
   e. Do you share videos
8. What do you like about YouTube?
9. Are there any features you think YouTube lacks?
10. Is there any content that you think YouTube lacks?
11. Do your friends use YouTube?
12. Do you feel connected to YouTube’s community?

Other Website

1. How did you learn about --|--|--?
2. When do you use --|--|--?
3. What kind of videos do you watch on --|--|--?
4. How many videos do you watch a day on --|--|-- on average?
5. How good do you think --|--|-- looks on a design standpoint?
6. How easy is it to use --|--|-- compared to YouTube?
7. Can you make an account?
   a. Do you have one?
8. Can you upload to the site?
   a. How often? (rarely, frequently)
9. Can you comment on videos on --|--|--?
   a. Do you comment on videos?
   b. Do you read video comments?
10. Can you like/dislike a video?
    a. Do you like/dislike videos?
11. Can you share videos?
    a. Do you share videos?
12. What do you like about \----------? 
13. Are there any features you think \---------- lacks? 
14. Is there any content that you think \---------- lacks? 
15. Do you feel connected to \---------- community? 
16. Do your friends use \----------? 

Compare 

1. How would you compare YouTube with \----------? 
2. Does the frequency of use of these websites change with where you are? 

Figure 2: The general outline of our interviews