

**Exploring Human Images in Website Design
Across Cultures: A Multi-Method Approach**

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Author Biographies

Dr. Dianne Cyr is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Business at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. She is leading a government funded research project titled “Managing E-loyalty through Experience Design”. This investigation is focused on how trust, satisfaction, and loyalty can be built in online business environments through website design. Unique features of this work are comparisons across cultures, genders, and concerning applications to mobile devices. Further details of these research projects may be accessed at www.eloyalty.ca Dianne Cyr is the author of five books and over 50 research articles. Career information may be found at www.dianne Cyr.com

Dr. Milena Head is an Associate Professor of Information Systems and the Associate Dean at the DeGroot School of Business, McMaster University, Canada. Specializing in eBusiness and Human Computer Interaction, she has published over 50 papers in academic journals, books and conferences. Her research interests include trust and adoption in electronic commerce, interface design, mobile commerce, identity theft, cross-cultural issues in electronic commerce and human computer interaction, e-retailing, and web navigation.

Hector Larios is a Master of Science candidate at the School of Interactive Arts and Technology at Simon Fraser University. With a background in psychology and interactive arts, he has worked on research related to experience design and information visualization. His thesis work aims to investigate gender differences in virtual wayfinding.

Dr. Bing Pan is an Assistant Professor in the School of Business and Economics at the College of Charleston. He received his Ph.D. in Tourism Management at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Later he spent two years in the Information Science Program at Cornell University as a Post-doctoral Associate, working on projects concerning user behavior in online environments. His publications have appeared in *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Information Technology and Tourism*, *Journal of American Society for Information Science and Technology*, and *Information Processing and Management*. Research interests include online behavior and information technologies in business settings.

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Abstract

Effective visual design of e-commerce websites enhances website aesthetics and emotional appeal for the user. To gain insight into how Internet users perceive human images as one element of website design, a controlled experiment was conducted using a questionnaire, interviews, and eye-tracking methodology. Three conditions of human images were created including human images with facial features, human images without facial features, and a control condition with no human images. It was expected that human images with facial features would induce a user to perceive the website as more appealing, having warmth or social presence, and as more trustworthy. In turn, higher levels of image appeal and perceived social presence were predicted to result in trust. All expected relationships in the model were supported except no direct relationship was found between the human image conditions and trust. Additional analyses revealed subtle differences in the perception of human images across cultures (Canada, Germany, and Japan). While the general impact of human images seems universal across country groups, based on interview data four concepts emerged: aesthetics, symbolism, affective property, and functional property - with participants from each culture focusing on different concepts as applied to website design. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Keywords: human images, image appeal, trust, social presence, website design, culture, multi-methodology, eye-tracking