News article: Vancouver Province, March 11 2004

An international study of online shopping habits conducted by researchers at Simon Fraser University indicates that the majority of e-commerce website designers are failing to address issues of cultural differences.

The study, Managing E-loyalty Through Experience Design, available online at www.eloyalty.ca, involved participants from Canada, the U.S., Germany and Japan. Each was asked to navigate a local and a foreign version of a personal-electronics company's website and then answer a survey on their experience.

"There needs to be more attention to design the site to appeal to different cultural consumers," said Dianne Cyr, a professor at SFU's School of Interactive Arts and Technology and the director of the study.

"This is just coming on the horizon now, because online buying is relatively new, but companies really need to pay attention to this because it will enhance e-loyalty."

The three-year study, which is entering its final year, was federally funded by a $286,000 grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

It sent a researcher to four locations of corporate partner Creo -- in Boston, Munich, Tokyo and Vancouver -- to gather data from 30 people in each country.

Cyr said the study showed that different cultural groups experience online trust and loyalty in different ways. North Americans are more trusting of the online-purchase process than are Germans and the Japanese are the least trusting.

Other findings included:

- The Japanese like bright colours and warm, emotional images.

- Germans prefer darker colours and consider bright colours and flashy animation unprofessional.

- Canadians are least concerned about misuse of credit cards.

- Americans require less detailed product information.
jjamieson@png.canwest.com