

Adapting REI.com for the Philippines

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Background

Everyone Should Spend Time Outdoors

Before attempting to translate REI's website to appeal to Filipino shoppers, it's important to understand REI's rich story.

Founded in 1938, REI (aka, Recreational Equipment, Inc.) is an iconic outdoor apparel and equipment retailer, with 147 stores in 36 states.¹ REI is also American's largest shopping cooperative, with more than six million members.² In 2016, REI reported \$2.56 billion in sales and an 18 percent increase in digital sales.³ Forbes ranks REI 28 out of 100 "best places to work" in America for its passion, pro-employee policies, and significant gear discounts.^{4, 5}

REI customers can shop at retail outlets, at rei.com, and via an REI smartphone app. (REI has seven additional apps, featuring National Parks; hiking, running, and mountain bike trail locations; skiing and climbing destinations; and REI credit card management.)

At a time when other lifestyle brands are losing sales, REI keeps growing because it offers its members and shoppers more than gear: it offers passion. Its mission: "To inspire, educate and outfit for a lifetime of outdoor adventures and stewardship."⁶ REI walks the talk by:

- Donating 70% of its profits to conservation projects⁷
- Offering customers a variety of classes, guided travel adventures, and special events
- Providing expert "how to" advice on its website

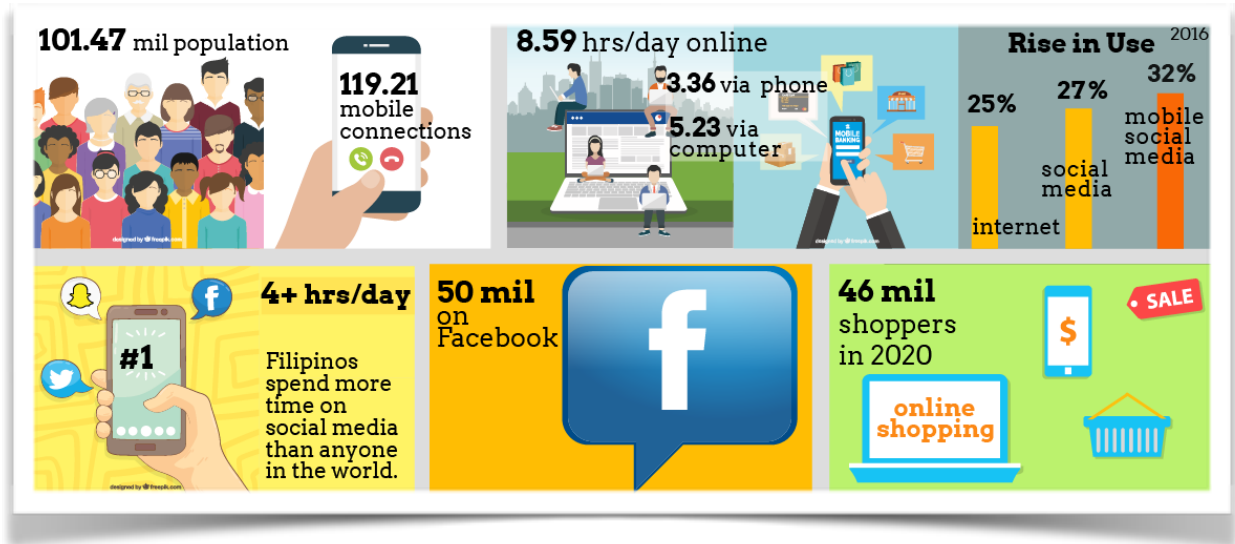
REI's dividends program and branded credit card give members a way to earn annual dividends and rebates, posting member earnings of \$193.7 million in 2016.^{8,9}

Access Is Everything

With 60 million internet users, the Philippines has incredible potential for boosting REI's online sales.¹⁰ Filipinos are avid social media users, and, increasingly, are using cell phones to access social media and the internet. Currently, thirty-eight percent of internet traffic in the Philippines comes from mobile phones.¹¹

The chart on the next page highlights why the Philippines is a smart choice for an REI website: **Millions of users are accessing the internet, spending a lot of time there, and using mobile phones.**

According to Deloitte Insights, the Philippines is poised for growth in digital technology, citing examples of national banks that have embraced tech, creating



more efficient and user-friendly digital experiences for its customers. Deloitte Insights also reports that the Philippines has one of the “largest incubator hubs” in the region, an indication that the country will be leading innovative technology in the future.¹²

With millions of young tech-savvy consumers adapting to smartphone use and eager for innovation, e-commerce is growing. In the fourth quarter of 2016, 26% of people in the Philippines had made an online purchase in the past month.¹³

E-Commerce is M-Commerce

Where Filipinos Shop

In the Philippines, as with other South Asian economies, “mobile first” is driving online shopping. Most Filipinos access the internet from cell phones, and according to a survey by Visa, respondents are more likely to shop if a retailer has a mobile-optimized site. Eight of ten respondents said they would download a shopping app from their favorite brick and mortar retailer.^{14,15}

Shopee Philippines, a popular Southeast Asian department store that sells a variety of products, including apparel, electronics, and household items, is the leader in mobile e-commerce, or rather, m-commerce, in the Philippines. Another online department store, Lazada, is the most popular online retailer selling to the Philippines market and also offers a shopping app. Online fashion retailer Zalora is another online favorite with its own shopping app. Other top online retailers in the mobile-commerce category include Carousell (a Singapore-based app that connects sellers and buyers of used items); Zaful (a Hong Kong-

PH Shoppers

- 60% under 35
- 50% male, 50% female
- middle-income earners

based department store); Taobao (a Chinese department store selling everything from apparel to washing machines); and, from the United States, Amazon and Etsy.^{16,17}

Values, Needs, Motivations

Payment Options are Essential

The Philippines is a cash based society, with extremely low credit card penetration. Shoppers also have a heightened concern around security, which is partially based on the low transmission rates in the Philippines.

Therefore, shopping sites and apps need to include a variety of payment options, including: ²¹

- Web-based payment services
- Payment gateways
- Mobile transfers
- Cash on delivery
- 7 Eleven's 7Connect
- Credit card
- Bitcoin
- Other methods

Sites should also include some type of information or icon on the home page that indicates a connection with a reputable, well-known security entity to help build trust around security concerns. Including a progress bar during purchases would also help users know that they are still connected to the system during the long transmission periods.

Deals and Discounts

Filipino shoppers want a good deal, and they will spend a lot of time online, conducting research for the best prices before returning to shop.

Variety of Products

Consumers shop online for convenience. They can buy just about anything at Lazada, so they are used to having a large range of products, as well as popular brands, available to them in one location.

Reputation

Quality matters, and brands matter. Filipinos care about the reputation and standing of a store and of its brands. They also like philanthropic companies.

Service

Shoppers expect good customer service, an enjoyable and fluid user experience, and other offers that

Shopping Behaviors^{18,19,20}

- Research before purchase
- Don't respond to ads in sites
- Like reviews
- Shop at work
- Favor environmentally-friendly sites & sites that donate to a good cause

Design Considerations

- English is one of national languages
- Slow internet; slow data transfer
- Balance cultural models with most-visited Philippines e-commerce sites and apps.

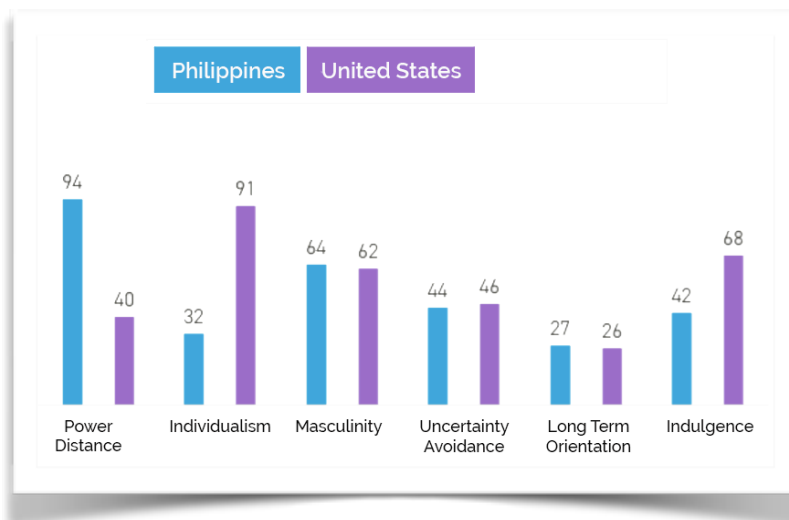
making online shopping easy and convenient. Discounted and free shipping are important. These options should be apparent on the home page.

Since most shopping is done during work hours, peaking between 1pm and 4pm on Wednesdays and Thursdays, one “service” m-commerce shoppers might appreciate is a quick way to hide or exit the site or app.²²

Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede’s Model

The chart below, created using the Country Comparison Tool at www.hofstede-insights.com, shows that the United States and the Philippines have vast differences in Power Distance and Individualism, and a significant difference in Indulgence.²³ They have almost identical scores for Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Long Term Orientation.



Additional Models

While these “scores” alone have been translated into design and interface guidelines by several researchers, it’s helpful to look at additional models for further insights.

Edward Hall’s concepts of Low- and High-Context are relevant in the REI.com to REI.com.ph redesign because the U.S. and the Philippines are on either

end of the spectrum, respectively. Adapting an American style of communication and engagement to an Asian style using Hall’s model adds more depth to Hofstede’s Individualism dimension. What types of non-verbal communication elements does an interface for Filipino shooters need?

Trompenaar and Hampden-Turner’s seven dimensions provide a model with which to analyze core beliefs, values, and communication styles. Without a “Trompenaar” Country Comparison Tool, however, it’s less clear how to apply Trompenaar and Hampden-Turner’s dimensions. It might be notable that Trompenaar and Hampden-Turner include a dimension about how individuals feel in relation to their environment. Does that extend to a culture’s (or individual’s) attitudes about spending time outdoors and land conservation?

Creating A Culture Model

Translating Culture into User Needs

The chart below, from "Knowing What a User Likes: A Design Science Approach to Interfaces that Automatically Adapt to Culture," a research paper by Katharina Reinecke, contains clear guidelines on adapting cultural dimensions into website interfaces.²⁴

	Low Score	High Score	Reference
Power Distance	Different access and navigation possibilities; nonlinear navigation	Linear navigation, few links, minimize navigation possibilities	Burgmann et al. 2006 Marcus and Gould 2000 Voehringer-Kuhnt 2002
	Data does not have to be structured	Structured data	Marcus and Gould 2000
	Most information at interface level, hierarchy of information less deep	Little information at first level	Burgmann et al. 2006 Marcus and Gould 2000
	Friendly error messages suggesting how to proceed	Strict error messages	Marcus and Gould 2000, 2001
	Support is only rarely needed	Provide strong support with the help of wizards	Marcus and Gould 2000
	Websites often contain images showing the country's leader or the whole nation	Images show people in their daily activities	Gould et al. 2000 Marcus and Gould 2000
Individualism	Traditional colors and images	Use color to encode information	Marcus and Gould 2000
	High image-to-text ratio	High text-to-image ratio	Gould et al. 2000
	High multimodality	Low multimodality	Hermeking 2005
	Colorful interface	Monotonously colored interface	Barber and Badre 1998
Masculinity	Little saturation, pastel colors	Highly contrasting, bright colors	Dormann and Chisalita 2002 Voehringer-Kuhnt 2002
	Allow for exploration and different paths to navigate	Restrict navigation possibilities	Ackerman 2002
	Personal presentation of content and friendly communication with the user	Use encouraging words to communicate	Callahan 2005 Dormann and Chisalita 2002 Hofstede 1986
Uncertainty Avoidance	Most information at interface level, complex interfaces	Organize information hierarchically	Burgmann et al. 2006 Cha et al. 2005, Choi et al. 2005 Hodemacher et al. 2005 Marcus 2000 Marcus and Gould 2000, 2001, Zahed et al. 2001
	Nonlinear navigation	Linear navigation paths / show the position of the user	Baumgartner 2003 Burgmann et al. 2006 Corbitt et al. 2002 Kamentz et al. 2003 Marcus 2000 Marcus and Gould 2000, 2001
	Code colors, typography & sound to maximize information	Use redundant cues to reduce ambiguity	Marcus and Gould 2000, 2001
Long Term	Reduced information density	Most information at interface level	Marcus and Baumgartner 2004 Marcus and Gould 2000
	Content highly structured into small units	Content can be arranged around a focal area	Marcus and Gould 2000

Table 1. Relationships between Hofstede's Dimensions and UI Design Aspects (Reinecke 2011)

The highlighted areas indicate which categories fit the Philippines' cultural dimensions per Hofstede. Uncertainty avoidance has a graduated highlight because

the measurement for this dimension is just under 50%, whereas the other dimensions had definite "high" or "low" measurements.

In order to find a way to map middle scores, Reinecke and co-author, Abraham Bernstein, created a set of adaptation rules, referred to as "MOCCA," to create a "to do" list of interface design essentials. (I have modified the chart to reverse the column order of "cultural dimension" and Interface element.) **Note:** chart rows are not in the same order as in Table 1.

Cultural Dimension	Interface Element	Low	Medium	High
Long Term Orientation (LTO)	Information Density	To-do items provide little information at first sight, requiring a user to click before seeing more information	To-do list shows all information at first sight	Complex version that additionally presents encoded information with big icons
Power Distance (PDI)	Navigation	Tree menu and to-dos in list view, allows nested sorting	Flat navigation and list view, or tree menu and icon-represented to-do list	Flat navigation and icon-represented to-do list
Power Distance (PDI)	Accessibility of functions	Functionalities are always accessible but grayed out if not needed	Functionalities appear on mouse-over	Functionalities are always accessible
Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)	Guidance	While users enter a dialog, all other information on the UI retains visible and accessible	Information other than the current dialog is still visible, but inaccessible	Unnecessary information is hidden in order to force users to concentrate on a currently active dialog
Power Distance (PDI)	Structure	Minimum structure: Different elements of the UI are only structured through alignment	Elements are separated and each color-coded for better distinction	Maximum structure: Elements are bordered and affiliations between information is accentuated across elements
Individualism (IDV)	Colorfulness	Many different colors	A medium number of colors	The UI is homogeneously colored
Masculinity (MAS)	Saturation	Pastel colors with little saturation	Medium saturation and contrast	Highly contrasting, bright colors
Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)	Support	On-site support with the help of short tool-tips	The UI offers question mark buttons that expand into help bubbles	An adaptive wizard that is always visible

Table 2. MOCCA's Adaptation Possibilities According to a Classification of the User's Cultural Dimension Score into Low, Medium, or High

REI.com/ph

The Redesign

Step One: Navigation

1. Remove Excess Text
2. Reduce menu options
3. Change search
4. Add security and shipping
5. Add "contact"
6. Add main info icon

REI already has flat navigation and some icon use (for High PD). To address Uncertainty Avoidance and build trust with Filipino shoppers, I will let them know about payment options, free shipping, and secure shopping on the home page, in "wizard-style" overlays that appear on hover. I will also add a "help" or "info" button in the header since the information in Table 2 suggests adding one for users with mid-range Uncertainty Avoidance.

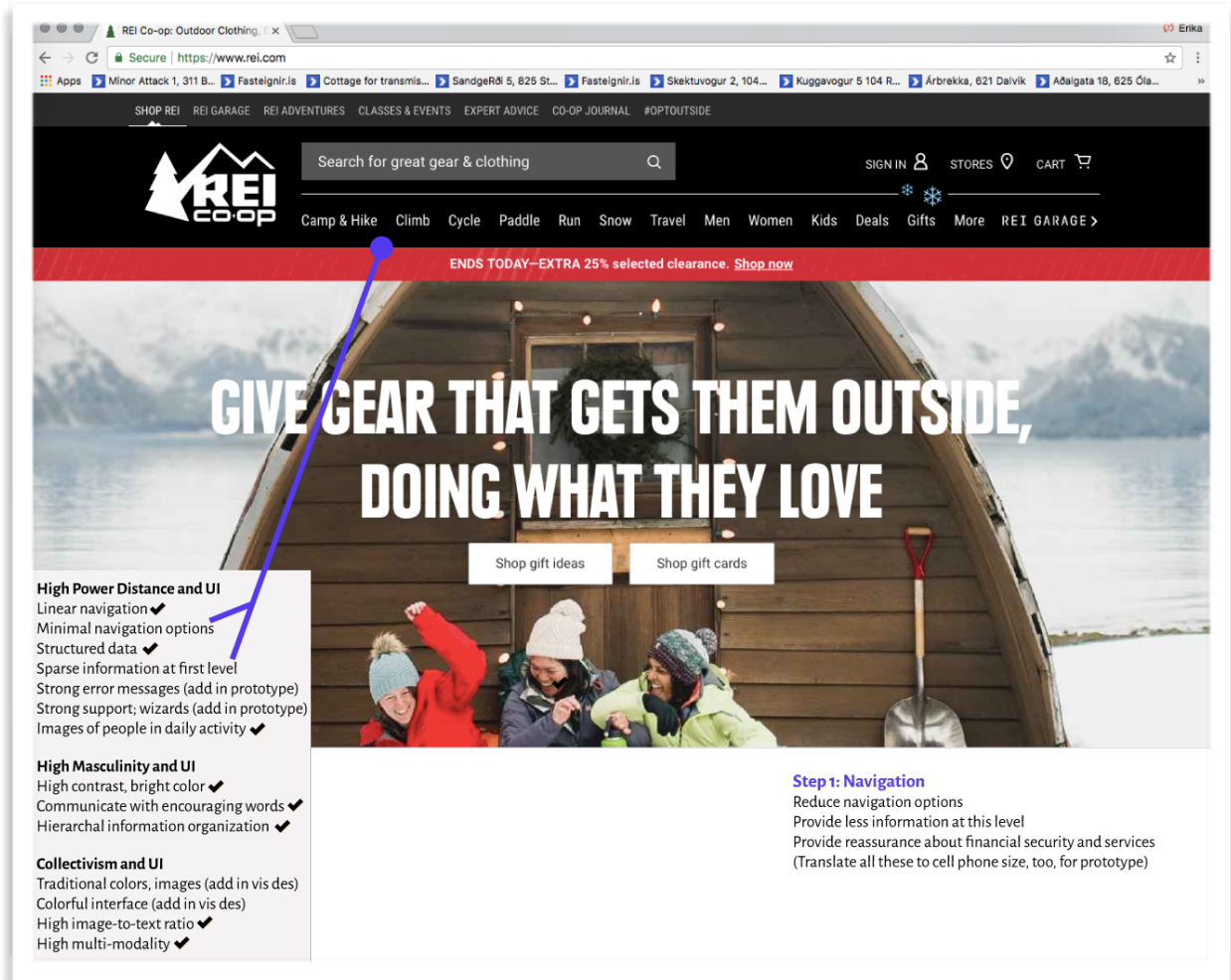
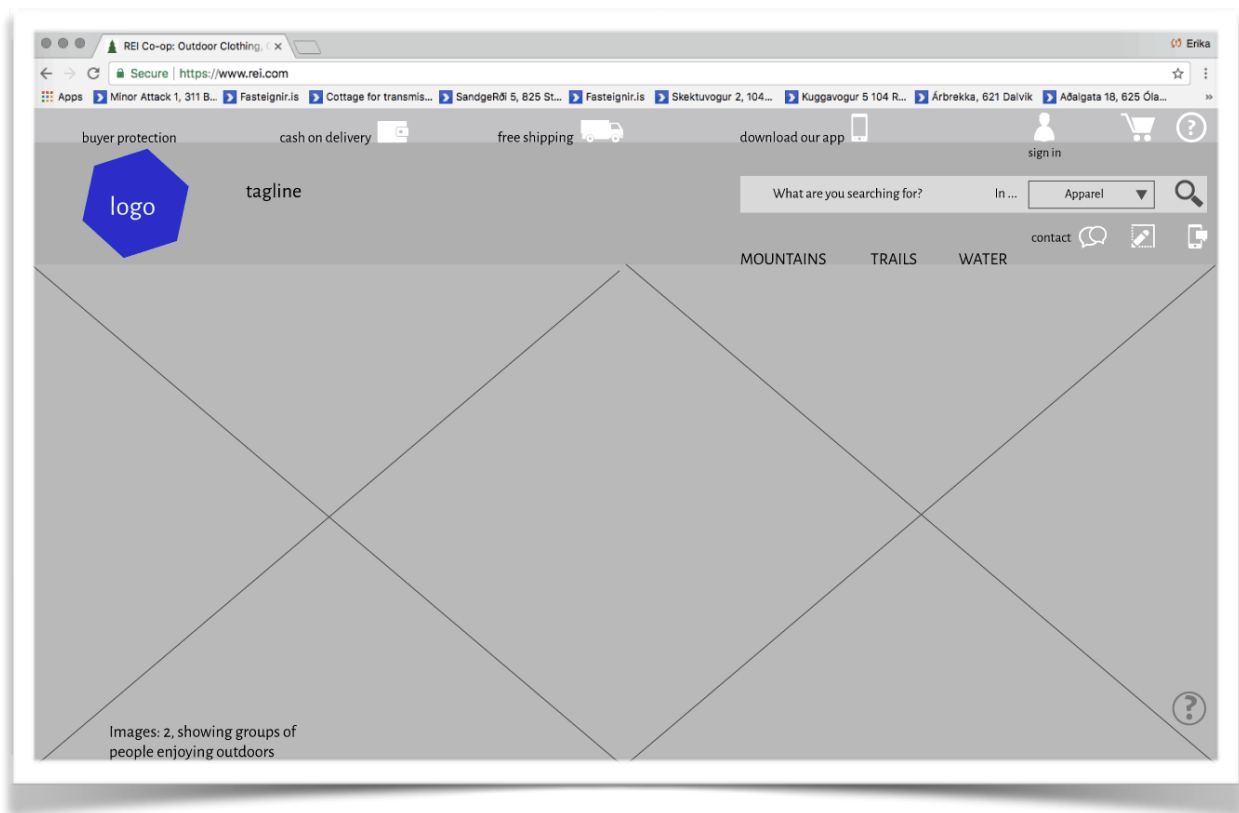


Figure 1: REI Home Page

I have designated with check marks the places on the REI home page (Figure 1) that may not need changing, or only need minor changes, since the U.S. and the Philippines share virtually the same scores for Masculinity. The checkmarks in the other categories show me that some design trends override cultural dimensions. Whether shoppers reside in Boulder, Colorado or Luzon, Philippines, a picture's worth a thousands words.

The wireframe here (Figure 2) shows key changes to the header and navigation areas, namely, text and icons to reassure shoppers, a guided search to improve confidence (for uncertainty), and a scaled-down navigation and menu with more information



accessible at lower levels to appeal to a high Masculinity score culture. Also, the functionality of the first-level of access are always accessible, as recommended in Table 2 for high Power Distance. Three modes of contact are available, and the question mark help icon shows at the top right corner of the page and again just above the fold in the lower right hand corner. Text and elements are aligned in the frame and in relation to each other to show order, again to appeal to a high Power Distance user.

Step Two: Visual Design

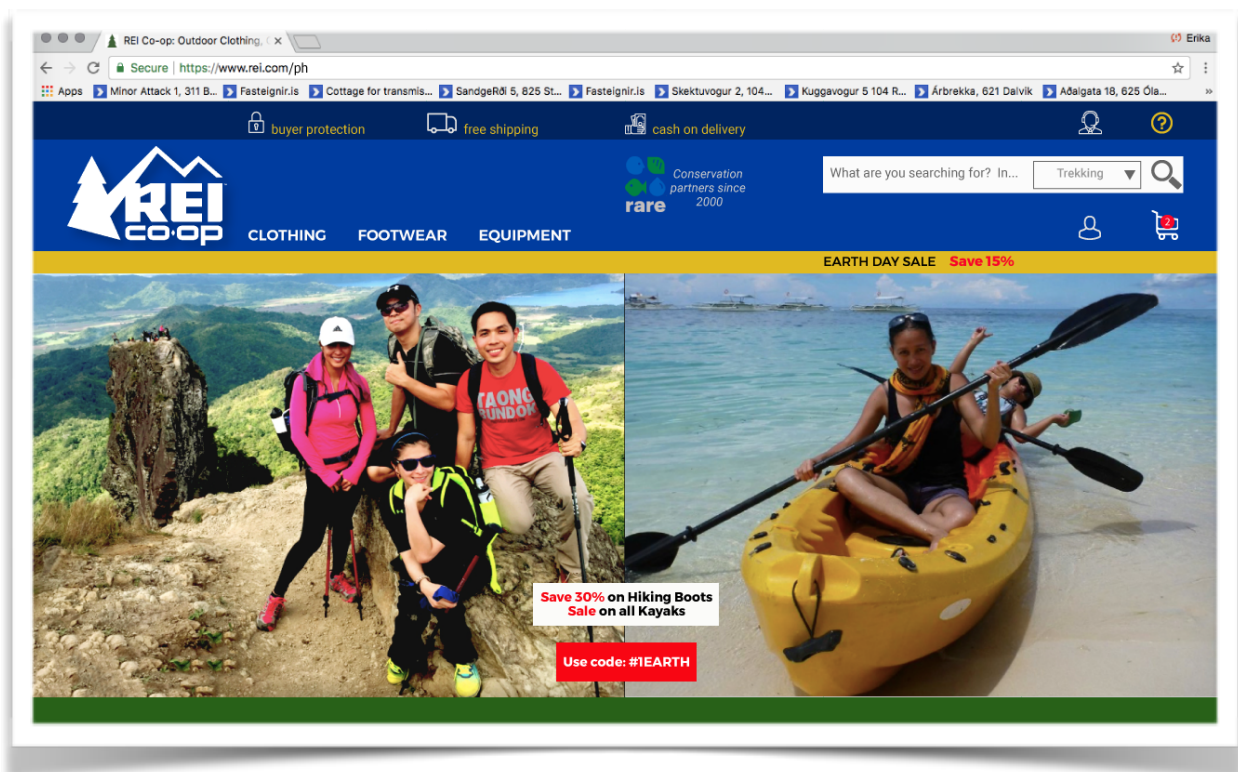
In adopting the visual design of REI.com, I was guided by the Philippines high Masculinity and low Individuality scores, using bright (and traditional), contrasting

colors and a high image-to-text ratio. I stuck with a flat design for the header, with the small exception of adding a slight drop shadow to the logo to break up the blue/white pattern so it wouldn't get boring.

In addition to cultural dimensions, I compared popular e-commerce sites, Zalora, a minimalist fashion apparel site with a black header, minimal design, and minimal UI to Lazada, an interface packed with visual elements and text, [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) style, taking a middle-of-the-road approach style and composition-wise since [REI.com/ph](https://www.rei.com/ph) is a lifestyle brand that needs to be a bit more busy than Zalora and not as busy as Lazada's "we have everything for everyone" approach.

In terms of color, use of images, and composition, I was inspired by REI's use of imagery, contrast, and flat design (a suggested style for high Power Distance).

First, I changed the header and top nav bar to blue since it is universally both men's and women's favorite color. I added red and yellow highlights in the form of call-to-action buttons and text (i.e., users will know to click on these colors). Now, I had all the colors of the Philippines flag, pictured at right, in the interface. Then I used a green bar to separate the "above the fold" view of the site from the rest of the scrolling page. Green is also a positive color, and good for transitions.



I added a logo for a popular Philippines conservation organization because more than 60% Filipinos want to shop at stores whose corporate culture includes philanthropy.²⁵

The final prototype of [REI.com/ph](https://rei.com/ph) on page nine has a less cluttered header than the U.S. REI site, with fewer navigational choices for shopping; the reassurances Filipino shoppers want around saving money, shopping securely, having payment options; and available-when-needed wizard-style information boxes that provide more detailed information. This style supports low Long-Term Orientation and mid-to-high Uncertainty Avoidance users.

The search options are much reduced, allowing users to filter after selecting to shop via primary product categories. The search box text guides users to type in what they want to find, and provides further filtering with a drop-down menu. The entire header is very structured, with items aligned vertically and horizontally to appeal to the high Masculinity score users.

Sales and deals are important to Filipino shoppers, so while leaving the home page fairly clean, the few call outs I used are highlighted.

Finally, for high Power Distance and low Individualism, I used two photos instead of one, as in REI's original site, to show groups of people spending time together in outdoor activities. Their colorful equipment and gear are the focal points and connected to the main site colors.

Please view a quick interactive demonstration at: <https://invis.io/Z6F0PQZQP>.

Start with home screen,

1. Click on account icon
2. Click on sign-in box
3. Click on "x" top right
4. Click on "clothing," then click on "x" top right.
5. Click on "footwear," then click on "x" top right.
6. Click on "equipment," then click on "x" top right.
7. Click on "security," top left, then click on "x" top right.
8. Click on "shipping," top left, then click on "x" top right.
9. Click on "payment options," top center, then click on "x" top right.
10. Click on "customer service icon" top right, then click on "x" top right.
11. Click on "info icon," top right then click on "x" top right.
12. You will end the home screen. Thank you for visiting.

Note: screens are linked, but don't reflect link color change or exact functionality of the final site. There is also one element, a shopping cart, that slipped above the black-out screen on the "security" slide.

The search box slide was having trouble, so I removed it. I designed the search box to allow users to type in a search term and/or refine with drop-down menu. (Also, images on Philippines interface borrowed without attribution, academic use.)

Step Three: The App

Since e-commerce will be quickly overtaken by m-commerce, I also created a wireframe of a mobile app. In this case, I compared REI's shopping app with the apps for Lazada and Zalora.

The same principles are included on the rei.com/ph app, with the interface emphasis on low-res images that will download quickly and encourage scrolling and swiping. (Figure 3) The app is focused on enticing users with daily deals, seasonal deals, and trending items.

Reassurances about payment options and delivery, a guided search, and info button give the user confidence and build trust. The cart always shows how many items it contains.

When user taps on the search, a list of search options appear (making it easier for a user who doesn't want to type), along with another search box that will activate the keyboard. (Figure 4) When the user selects a category, gender filters appear to filter the search.

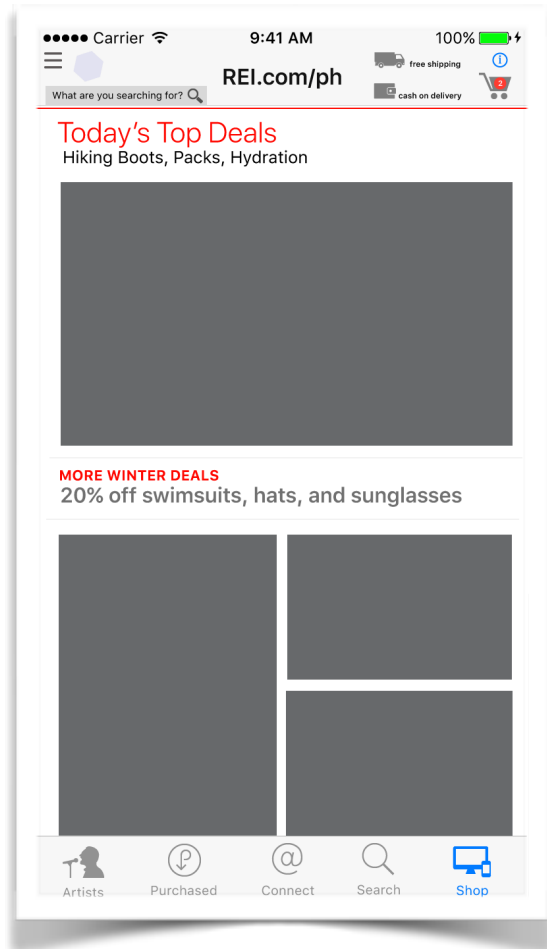


Figure 3: App Wireframe

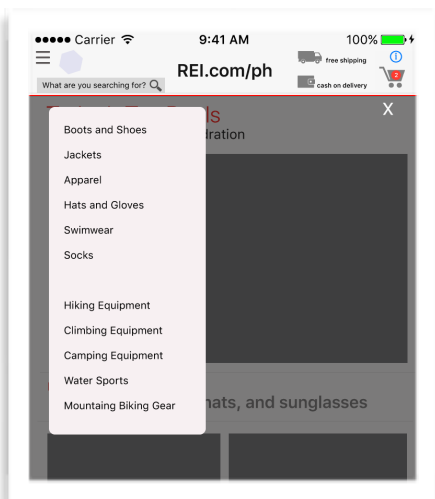


Figure 4: App Wireframe Search

The menu (Figure 6) works the same way. A tap reveals a list of priority items, such as finding what to shop for, then information related to users shopping status, history, and account

Similarly, when the user taps in the “i” button, an overlay reveals top-levels interests, such as payment options, returns, and sizes (all items uncertainty avoidance shoppers will need.) (Figure 7)

As you can see in Figures 4-7, a dark overlay covers the main screen, making it in accessible but still slightly visible. This style is the middle ground design option in Table 2 for Uncertainty Avoidance.

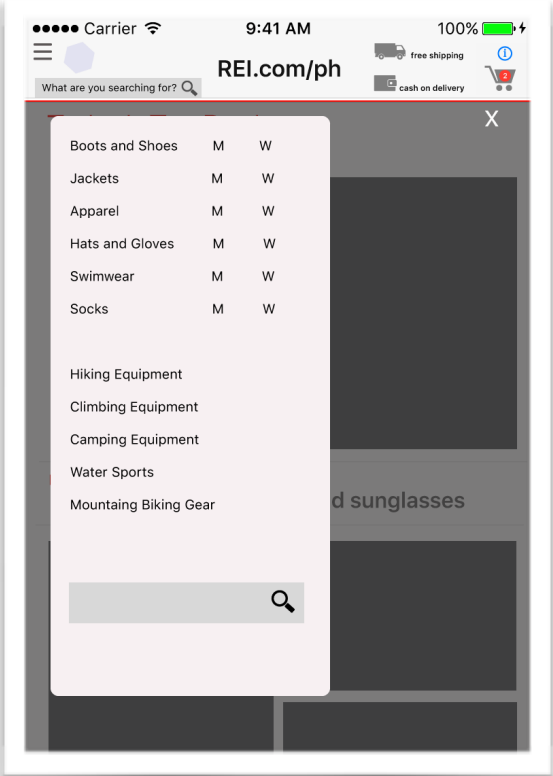


Figure 5: App Wireframe Search with Gender Filter

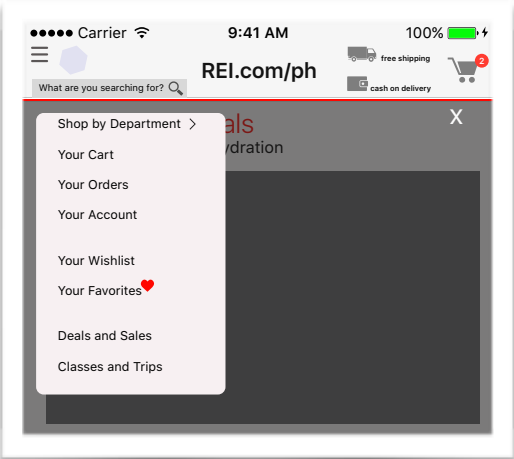


Figure 6: Menu

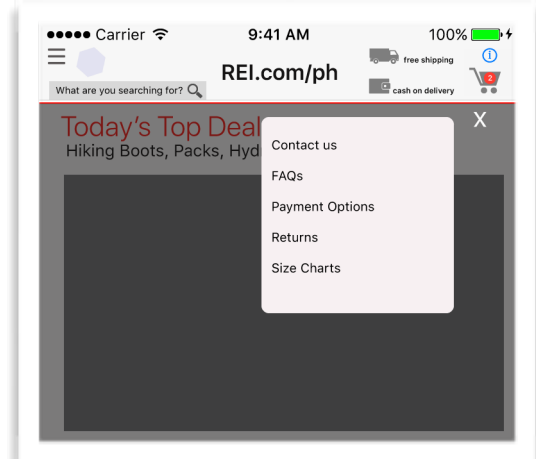


Figure 7: Info

Conclusion

I was surprised that the cultural models informed me as much as they did.

I didn't find the same level of difference in between the U.S. and the Philippines for "high" and "low" context as I had learned in class when the countries compared were the U.S. and China, so I stuck with Hofstede's models and other popular sites.

I think "context" is a word I heard and read a lot this term, and it really is the most important thing to keep in mind when designing any website. I followed the culture-model inspired web guidelines, but relied heavily on current popular sites, demographic information, and statistics on how and why people use web and mobile for shopping.

The digital options in the Philippines are just beginning to be exploited. When they get faster connection speeds, they will be driving the m-commerce innovations.

Notes

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