



# Glocalization in Website Writing: The Case of MNsure and Imagined/Actual Audiences

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## Abstract

Glocalization is an approach that considers audience expectations related to both local and global concerns. As websites become increasingly complex, glocalization requires closer attention to the needs of multiple and layered audiences. This case study uses a glocal perspective to examine one website that represents different audience groups that might wish to purchase health insurance in Minnesota as mandated by the Affordable Care Act (2010). In this case, attention to actual audiences was just as critical as attention to imagined audiences. Usability methods including personas, site visits, and usability testing—in combination with dimensions of difference—are mentioned as ways to anticipate glocal audience needs.

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## 1. Introduction

Web writing has become a staple in rhetoric and writing curricula and programs (Meloncon & Henschel, 2013). As the need for web writing and design proliferates, web courses must also address “glocalization,” designing online materials to reach broader global audiences while also accommodating local needs. Glocalization is typically discussed in terms of international applications (e.g., how a website or business in one country might be received by individuals in another country). However, it is just as important to consider glocalization in regional and national contexts, especially as our populations represent greater diversity.

Using a case study that illustrates the challenges of today’s glocal audiences for web writing, in this article I address the following question:

*How can web writers prepare to address complex glocal audiences?*

Specifically, I share details of a Minnesota website that supports MNsure, the state’s insurance exchange program in support of the Affordable Care Act of 2010. The website was built to facilitate insurance purchases among the entire Minnesota state population (native, immigrant, rural, and urban); consequently, the MNsure program considered a broad range of user characteristics including language, race, socio-economic status, and Internet experience. Ultimately, this

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case demonstrated the complexities of writing website information for a glocal, regional audience, and it underscored the importance of usability research in the web writing process.

## 2. Aspects of glocalized web writing

Glocal web writing involves layered audiences and complex web tasks, and it relies on interactivity. Ginny Redish (2010) described writing for the web as an inherently conversational act, in which web writers must invite readers into an existing discussion or activity. Jay Bolter (2001) similarly described hypertext as an interaction between reader, writer, and text (p. 119). Other common characteristics of web writing such as plain language, active voice, pronouns, chunking, consistency, and conversational style also accentuate interactivity between web writers and audience(s) (<http://usability.gov>). Because web writing strives for interaction, audience is a central concern (Redish, 2010; Halvorson & Rach, 2012). Accordingly, a glocal perspective examines web interactivity in terms of both local and global audiences who are inherently involved in website activities. Addressing a glocal perspective involves three different, interconnected areas: glocalization, dimensions of difference, and audience.

### 2.1. Glocalization and adapting content for culture

Glocalization has frequently been described as a blending of “globalization” and “localization” (Robertson, 1995; Wellman, 2002; Willems & Bossu 2010; Govindarajan, 2012). As an approach, “glocalization” seeks to balance the universal (broad range of cultures) of globalization and the particular (specific cultures) of localization in a way that caters to a broader range of audiences (Robertson, 1992). Because glocalization relies on both globalization and localization, it is important to review how these concepts have been addressed.

In writing studies, globalization has been discussed in terms of increasing awareness of audience outside ourselves (Bazerman, 2008; Huckin, 2002; Dubinsky, 2008; Zemliansky & St. Amant, 2008; Angouri & Harwood, 2008; Starke-Meyerring, 2005, 2010). In this vein, several scholars have advocated

- Partnerships between the U.S. and other countries (Rice & Lauren, 2014; Starke-Meyerring, Duin, & Palvetzian, 2007; Herrington & Tretyakov, 2005; Maylath, Vandepitte, & Mousten, 2008; Piretti, McNair, & Holloway-Attaway, 2007)
- Collaborative online experiences or virtual teams (St. Amant, 2007; Starke-Meyerring & Wilson, 2008; Piretti & McNair, 2008)
- Pedagogy of globalization (Hoft, 1995; Starke-Meyerring, 2010; Mousten, Vandepitte, & Maylath, 2008).

Of pedagogy, Doreen Starke-Meyerring (2010) argued that textbooks often simplify globalism and that more robust curriculum in globalization should acknowledge its complexities (for example, globalization should resist “homogeneous identities”) (Starke-Meyerring, 2005; Benhabib, 2002). Complexities of globalization often involve understanding local contexts and resisting the urge to standardize global concerns.

From a writing studies perspective, localization means paying attention to the characteristics and needs of a particular culture, population, or even individual (see Sun, 2012). Individuals, for example, may differ in their uses of technology, and it is important to resist stereotypical characterizations of culture that may manifest when we think of “globalization.” Doing so requires researchers to work more closely with the individuals for which materials are designed to better understand how, when, and where they make use of such materials (see, for example, Samalionis, 2009). In this way, localization emphasizes understanding the local conditions of use through methods such as field research, interviews, and usability testing (see Barnum, 2010; Govindarajan, 2012).

In sum, “glocalization” can be understood as an approach that strives to balance both universal (broad range of cultures) and particular (specific cultures) needs and concerns. Note that discussions I have just reviewed primarily address ideas of glocalization as associated with international contexts. While I support this characterization, glocalization need not be limited to international contexts, businesses, or designs. Rather, it is an approach that can inform our understanding of cultural differences within regional and national boundaries. This awareness, moreover, is especially important for web writing and websites that increasingly serve diverse populations within national borders.

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