



# 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, & Moustun, 2008; Parette, McNair, & Holloway-Attaway, 2007)
- Collaborative online experiences or virtual teams (St. Amant, 2007; Starke-Meyerring & Wilson, 2008; Parette & McNair, 2008)
- Pedagogy of globalization (Hoft, 1995; Starke-Meyerring, 2010; Moustun, 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, globalization 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.

## 2.2. Dimensions of difference

Glocalization involves thinking about cultural audiences in terms of both a range of cultures and a specific culture. Michael L. Best and Thomas N. Smyth (2011) noted key areas in which cultures can differ in terms of when and how they access information or use technologies. These areas, called “dimensions of difference,” include

- Literacy (oral, print, and technological)
- Linguistic difference (alphabetic, roots, native or learned)
- Physical environment (climate or built)
- Cultural norms (privacy, age, gender, individual or community-based)
- Technological infrastructure (technology and/or communication networks).

Interestingly, these dimensions of difference can also occur in communities within state and national borders, and applying them as part of a web writing process could strengthen awareness of glocal audience.

The dimension “language,” for example, recognizes linguistic diversities such as multilingual/monolingual speakers or native/non-native speakers, while “literacy” addresses primary forms of literacy, whether oral or print and technological literacy, or the ability to interact with technologies. The dimension of “physical environment” acknowledges the diversity of locales where individuals seek Internet access, and it also encompasses rural or urban locations and public vs. or private online access. The dimension “cultural norms” refers to attitudes individuals may bring toward websites and/or web tasks including inclinations about privacy and information sharing as well as attitudes about seeking help for web-based tasks. The final dimension, “technological infrastructure,” addresses both the available technical infrastructure that supports Internet success (e.g., high-speed Internet, modem, mobile, etc.) and also help lines or technological support. Combined, these dimensions offer ways to think about web audiences in diverse settings, whether international or regional.

## 2.3. Imagined/actual audience

The overlapping global and local rise of social media also means we need to reconsider how we think of audience. Eden Litt (2012), in turn, offered a framework for considering web audiences through the constructs of “imagined” and “actual” audience. Litt defined an imagined audience as “the mental conceptualization of the people with whom we are communicating, our audience” (p. 331); she noted audience is not necessarily stable and can range from a conception of individuals to full communities. Her perspective, connected to Anthony Giddens’ (1991) ideas of structural theory, described the imagined audience as a blend of “macro-level factors” (environment, infrastructure, or cultural norms) and “micro-level factors” (individual motivation, skills, experience, or attitudes). Ultimately, Litt endorsed Giddens’ idea of a “duality” in which micro-level and macro-level factors complement one another (p. 334).

The contemporary practice of persona development—often used in web development—is an example of imagined audience, where web writers and designers create a profile of an individual based on a range of audience characteristics. In essence, personas are “a composite of characteristics of many real people” (Redish, 2010, p. 19) and typically include a picture, name, demographic characteristics, and anything else that may be relevant to that person’s story. Litt’s conception of “imagined audience” is similar to the process of creating personas. In fact, Litt commented that imagined audience drives most of our thinking when we write and/or interact in Web 2.0 worlds; however, Litt also notes the “actual audience”—those “on the other side of the screen”—ultimately have control in terms of “reacting and judging the performance” (p. 333). Actual audiences may also include social media responses, which provide direct input from users and readers.

Table 1 uses these ideas to offer a framework of glocal audience considerations that might be applied to local or regional web writing tasks. The left column identifies an audience perspective; the middle column identifies considerations related to that perspective, and the right column articulates questions that might guide analysis or production of glocal web writing.

Table 1  
Glocal audience considerations for web writing.

Imagined/actual Audience	Individuals	How are imagined/target audiences identified in website content, either as individuals or groups?
	Audience groups	
	Income	How are actual audiences reflected in website content?
	Nationality	
	Special circumstances	
Dimensions of difference	Language(s) – alphabetical, numerical, multilingual	How are dimensions of difference acknowledged in website content?
	Literacy – oral, print, technological	
	Cultural norms – attitudes towards task	
	Physical Environment – where task occurs	
	Infrastructure – support for task	

### 3. Method

To examine these ideas of how glocalization can be applied to web writing in different contexts, I conducted a case study involving the launch of the MNsure.org website—Minnesota’s online insurance exchange developed in support of the 2010 Affordable Care Act. In selecting this website, I adopted a case study approach that involved empirical research of an event or phenomenon with particular emphasis on contextual factors (Yin, 2003, p. 14). For this case study, I examined the period between October 2013 (after MNsure had been signed into law in Minnesota) and July 2015 (when an evaluation of MNsure and its second enrollment period were completed). My examination of MNsure in this bounded time period fits Yin’s description of a single-case, holistic design (p. 43). Further, this case could be described as a *unique case* (Yin, p. 41), for it could inform our efforts to understand web writing for increasingly diverse audiences in regional contexts.

#### 3.1. Overview of the case

The case is unique for many additional reasons; one reason is that MNsure.org could be described as a “massively transactive site,” intended to reach a very large audience for a potentially complex task (reviewing and purchasing insurance online). MNsure was created in response to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010, which is a law ensuring healthcare and insurance options for all U.S. citizens. ACA had three distinct goals:

- (1) Improve healthcare experience
- (2) Improve the health of populations
- (3) Reduce the costs of healthcare per capita (“[The Impact of the Affordable Care Act on State and Local Public Health Systems](#),” 2013).

The state of Minnesota decided to create its own health insurance marketplace, called MNsure, and in 2013 was one of only ten states in the U.S. to choose the state-led path to a health insurance “marketplace” (others included Alabama, Colorado, Maryland, Michigan, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Virginia) (Hill, Courtot & Wilkinson, 2013). Each state received federal funding to support its efforts—Minnesota received \$22 million (Crosby, 2013). Consequently, MNsure was highlighted and carefully tracked, along with the other state-led programs, in a series of assessments sponsored by the Urban Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The MNsure.org case was also unique because of its glocal reach: it was designed to accommodate the needs of different cultural groups and networks within the state of Minnesota, including native Minnesotans as well as Hmong, Somali, Vietnamese, Russian, and Hispanic immigrant populations. As such, even though MNsure.org was not designed for individuals outside of the U.S., it was “glocal” because the program addressed a complex diversity of residents. Thus, MNsure.org illustrated the complexities of a high-stakes, transactional website designed to reach “glocal” populations, layered audiences, and intersecting networks within a single U.S. state context.

### 3.2. Content audit

My analysis involved a content audit of the MNsure.org website (Halvorson & Rach, 2012), or a listing of web pages and their relative hierarchies. The content audit allowed review of the entire website at a glance, including all main landing pages and two levels of content sub pages. (See Appendix A.) To address content for each enrollment period, I reviewed four website snapshots:

- October 2013: MNsure.org at its initial launch
- July 2014: MNsure.org after the first enrollment period concluded
- November 2015: MNsure.org at the beginning of its second enrollment period
- June 2015: MNsure.org after its second enrollment period concluded.

Each snapshot included the site's six main pages as well as two levels of sub-pages.

In examining these pages, I also identified key words related to the glocal audience considerations listed in Table 1. For example, imagined and actual audiences matched well with web pages that identified specific audience groups, nationalities, or individual user stories. I conducted a word search in the content audit for key glocal audience identifiers and recorded the frequency of those words as they appeared in page and sub-page titles. (See Appendix B.) This approach visualized the change and growth of content over time. I supplemented this analysis with demographic information on MNsure enrollees and with media reports in which actual users reacted to and/or used the MNsure.org website during the initial enrollment period.

## 4. Results

The case study of MNsure.org yielded many insights about glocal audience considerations, both “imagined” and “actual.” Analysis of “imagined” glocal audience demonstrated MNsure spent considerable time learning about the audiences within Minnesota, and positive efforts were apparent across all dimensions of difference including language, literacy, physical environment, cultural norms, and infrastructure. These efforts were reflected on the website, in advertising campaigns, assister networks, demographic analyses, and news media reports. Analysis of “actual” glocal audience demonstrated high user frustration, due unfortunately to problems with essential website functions such as creating an account and saving account data. Consequently, the categories of infrastructure and literacy emerged as challenges, revealed by the heavy reliance on assisters and technical support to complete the task of enrolling in the MNsure program. In response to these challenges from actual audiences, MNsure.org responded in the second enrollment period by providing more content related to “help” resources.

### 4.1. “Imagined” glocal audience

The concept of “imagined” audience suggests the degree to which MNsure was able to anticipate the needs of their glocal audience before the launch of the website. A key part of the “imagined” audience involved engaging as many uninsured Minnesotans as possible. To do so, MNsure first gathered demographic information, and this research provided insight on a key audience group known as “young invincibles”—young, uninsured Minnesotans who were healthy and not convinced of the need for health insurance. Previous reports about health insurance coverage in Minnesota revealed that in 2011, 9.1% of Minnesotans were uninsured, an increase from 2009 (“[Health Insurance Coverage in Minnesota](#),” p. 1). The 2011 survey also showed rates of uninsured were 1.5 to 3 times higher for African-American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino populations in Minnesota (p. 4). Further, uninsured rates were highest for those in age groups 18-25 and 26-34 (p. 3), the so-called “young invincibles.” These 2011 survey results comprised the most comprehensive data about health insurance in Minnesota that likely informed MNsure efforts in 2013.

Evidence of MNsure's imagined audience was apparent on MNsure.org through the paths created for two primary user groups: “individuals or families” and “small businesses & employees.” Each path required that enrollees enter specific information (e.g., tax information or considerations related to a self-employed business), and further steps were tailored based on information provided. The site also contained embedded local paths for other audiences. For example, the “individuals or families” path included information specific to American Indians, with information unique to their

financial situations. Additionally, the site's home page rotated messages tailored to specific audiences and needs, such as "special enrollments" for those with changing circumstances, and "public health care programs" for those receiving federal assistance. Combined, the web paths on MNsure.org reflected its imagined glocal audience, including two key starting points as well as several "local" distinctions that further tailored insurance options.

MNsure's advertising campaign also reflected a sense of imagined audience, particularly in relation to Best and Smyth's dimension of "cultural norms." The campaign "Minnesota, Land of 10,000 Reasons to Get Health Insurance" featured fictional characters well known to Minnesotans: Paul Bunyan, a logger from the north woods, and his big blue ox, Babe. Advertisements were featured on the initial website, and by the beginning of the second enrollment period were part a YouTube-based "Media Library." (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSZn6X8JRVw>.) Television commercials, billboards, and radio ads showed Paul and Babe getting into a variety of situations that required healthcare (e.g., water skiing and sledding accidents); the advertisements used an edgy, funny approach to appeal to both the "young invincible" audience and all audiences in Minnesota.

The dimension of cultural norms was also apparent in a "fact sheets" page that remained on the website during both enrollment periods; however, its content grew to include "myths" as well as facts that seemed designed to address cultural norms or expectations about purchasing insurance through MNsure. For example, "myth 1" stated "Almost no one has been able to enroll in a plan through MNsure," and this statement was linked to a page with further information that dispelled the myth, in effort to imagine audience reaction to the myth.

Evidence of MNsure's imagined glocal audience was also apparent in terms of language and linguistic differences, two additional dimensions of difference mentioned by Best and Smyth. In anticipating MNsure's reach to its immigrant populations, MNsure.org included fully translated materials of MNsure program information and applications in Somali, Hmong, and Spanish during the first enrollment period. The second enrollment period expanded the number of translations to include Russian and Vietnamese.

Finally, MNsure's imagined, glocal audience was demonstrated in terms of Best and Smyth's dimension of difference known as "infrastructure." The strongest evidence of infrastructure was a network of "assisters," or local sites for MNsure support, which was a required aspect of the ACA (Crosby, 2013). The assister network was prominently featured on the homepage as one of three audience paths ("assisters"). The ACA developed categories of assisters including (1) "navigators," or organizations that volunteered to offer in-person support for the enrollment process, (2) "brokers," or insurance agencies that assisted enrollment processes, and (3) "certified application counselors," or individuals who volunteered to help with enrollment processes. Minnesota's assister network included over 3,000 assisters of various categories (navigators, brokers, and counselors) across Minnesota (<https://www.mnsure.org/assisters>). The geographic locations of assisters demonstrated the dimension of physical location in that assisters were distributed across both urban and rural communities—a "glocal" effort. Indeed, assisters were strongly promoted prior to the MNsure.org launch as a source of help and assistance, a kind of "technical support" for MNsure. These, and other factors noted in this section, suggest MNsure made several efforts to understand and support its imagined glocal audience, through dimensions of language, literacy, physical environment, cultural norms, and infrastructure.

#### 4.2. "Actual" glocal audience

Analysis of "actual" audience demonstrated that MNsure experienced many more challenges as actual audiences began to respond to MNsure.org. While some progress was made in terms of the dimensions of cultural norms, language, and physical environment, challenges resulted in infrastructure and literacy.

To begin, MNsure's actual audience did not fully reflect the "young invincible" audience they tried so hard to address. Yet, MNsure met and exceeded its overall enrollment goals (Stawicki, 2014). In fact, reports indicated a 41% drop in the uninsured rate in Minnesota (SHADAC, 2014). However, initial analysis indicated that age groups were the opposite of MNsure expectations. The largest group of enrollees included individuals aged 55-64 years (31.7%), followed by those between 45-54 years (19.2%). Those in the "young invincible" category were distributed more broadly. As Table 2 shows, 18.1% of enrollees were between ages of 26 and 34, 10% were between 0 and 18, and 5.9% were between ages 19 and 25. Less than .2% were 65 and older (Leitz, 2014). Although the enrollments by age were somewhat surprising, the overall enrollment turnout was positive.

Best and Smyth's dimension of cultural norms was perhaps most strongly reflected in the analysis of actual audiences. Cultural norms were reflected through stories of individual users, and one website feature, "your stories," linked to several individual accounts of decisions to enroll in MNsure and the benefits they experienced.



Table 2  
MNSure enrollee age demographics, April 1, 2014.

Age Groups	Percent of Total MNSure Enrollees
65 and older	.2%
55-64	31.7%
45-54	19.2%
35-54	14.9%
26-34	18.1%
19-25	5.9%
0-18	10%

The stories included pictures, a first name, age, and the situation of the individual in relation to MNSure (see <https://www.mnsure.org/learn-more/your-stories/>). Many of the stories described turning points in attitudes about purchasing insurance. Not coincidentally, several of these accounts fell into the “young invincible” category of ages 24–32 and reflected the ethnic diversity of Minnesotans. The content audit revealed that more stories were added as enrollments continued: snapshot 1 included four stories; snapshot 2 included 12 stories; snapshots 3 and 4 included 31 stories. (See Appendix B.)

A second feature related to the dimension of cultural norms called “MNSure minute” was added in the second enrollment period (snapshots 3 and 4). Found under the “learn more” page, it included short videos of Minnesotans talking about their MNSure experiences and illustrated the reaction from “actual” glocal audiences in favor of MNSure. Some “MNSure minute” videos featured “assisters” who were bilingual and could speak with enrollees in their native language (see <https://www.mnsure.org/learn-more/library/MNSure-minute.jsp>). Interestingly, these videos clearly used elements of personas (an imagined audience technique) and improved upon the persona method by using actual information and data from real MNSure users. The pictures, information, and video accounts of individuals on the site demonstrated real experiences intended to inform potential customers who were considering MNSure.

Contrary to the positive reports found on MNSure.org, accounts from other actual users in the media described significant challenges that related to Best and Smyth’s dimension of infrastructure. According to user accounts shared in online forums on the website for the Minneapolis-based daily newspaper *Star Tribune* and Minnesota Public Radio, the most frequent initial problems with MNSure.org involved the inability of users to create an account or retrieve account information. From a user experience perspective, these problems were so fundamental to the site that they blocked users from going any further, hence preventing successful enrollment. Errors such as the inability to verify or create accounts were common in the first weeks and months of the rollout, and unfortunately, Minnesotans also had trouble receiving help from the many assisters trained to help people enroll in the program. Media reports documented wait times for calls at 50 minutes or more, and even when calls were answered, help was not always provided (Breuch, 2015). One woman was so frustrated with her experience that she wrote an editorial to the *Star Tribune* called “MNSure Made Me Cry: My Five-Month Quest for Health Care” (Wurtzel, 2014). Several other news media stories reported accounts from users who struggled to enroll in the program, and the problems were so persistent that the MNSure director was asked to resign in December 2013 (Stawicki, 2013). Surprising media reports suggested that MNSure officials had never tested the site prior to launch (Richert & Stawicki, 2014). Audits of the website showed that dozens of critical tasks were not functioning in the first enrollment period, and that MNSure did not take appropriate steps to address the errors (Meitrodt, 2014; Olson, J., 2013).

A significant turning point occurred on January 1, 2014, when the state stopped accepting paper applications for Medical Assistance (Minnesota’s version of Medicaid) and defaulted to MNSure.org. Until then, individuals on Medical Assistance in Minnesota could submit paper applications anytime for immediate healthcare assistance. After January 1, 2014, the move to online MNSure applications significantly delayed applications, sometimes causing great stress to low-income families in need of immediate medical help through their healthcare programs (Serres, 2014). According to news media reports, individuals who applied online had no idea if they were actually enrolled in the program because they received no online confirmation (Serres, 2014). These problems involving online applications created the need for additional navigators and assisters, who continued to accept paper applications to help low-income individuals in the Medical Assistance program. In spite of this extension, applications were still delayed because of the complications of the new overall system. Paper applications were thus the “workaround” for MNSure. Serres reported that some

organizations serving low-income individuals never even began using MNsure.org because of the delays and problems with the online interface.

Problems described here in relation to infrastructure and literacy affected MNsure so thoroughly that additional help centers were created to provide hands on assistance with the enrollment process. Here, the dimension of physical environment became a factor, because these help centers (noted as either “brokers,” “navigators,” or “certified counselors”) provided both computers and trained assisters who could walk persons through the process. These physical entities became a life-line for many persons seeking to enroll in MNsure. Jeremy Olson (2013) described one such center, a social service agency that received so many requests for MNsure assistance that they decided to hold “classroom” sessions with small groups so they could accommodate demand (2013). Another example involved a MNsure event held in a Minneapolis Somali neighborhood, complete with local Somali movie stars from the movie “Captain Phillips” who signed autographs and guided people to a table with MNsure navigators (Crosby, 2014). This event was apparently one of over 1,000 events that MNsure sponsored across the state of Minnesota to target uninsured individuals, and it served as another example of how the dimension of physical environment was important to the enrollment process.

The issues with infrastructure and literacy mostly occurred during the first enrollment period, and MNsure addressed these issues in their website for the second enrollment period. For example, the “assisters” web page was renamed “get help,” and content on the page was rewritten to directly address an audience of those trying to enroll. In addition, the second enrollment period website more prominently highlighted “FAQ” or frequently asked questions. A “forms directory” was also added that included links and access to several forms. (See Appendix B.)

## 5. Implications

What can we learn about glocal web writing from this case study? As we consider the analyses of “imagined” and “actual” glocal audiences in relation to MNsure.org, it is clear that, at least initially, MNsure succeeded more in terms of its imagined glocal audience than in its actual glocal audience. Its initial website was designed well to address the overall cultural norm against purchasing insurance, and the decline in the uninsured rate in Minnesota demonstrates that MNsure experienced some success in this area. MNsure.org also did a good job appealing to glocal audiences by providing translated materials and customized links for special audience groups defined by culture or by financial situation. They also understood the importance of stories and videos of actual MNsure members and began to add this content through the enrollment periods. However, MNsure.org was not technologically ready to support the complex web tasks involved in determining eligibility, reviewing options, and purchasing insurance online.

If there is a glocal theme in the MNsure.org case, it is complexity, and this theme echoes ways that scholars have described globalization and professional communication. The complexities of the MNsure.org case illustrated tensions involved in globalization, and they also help us identify areas where “imagined” audience analysis is not sufficient for complex web writing tasks. Said differently, glocal web writing requires that we attend to both imagined and actual audience(s) as we write these online spaces. This renewed attention to audience supports glocal web writing as a fully rhetorical activity. In fact, MNsure.org reflects new challenges that web writers face today: how to engage audiences not just to read information, but also to act on information. Despite MNsure’s strong preparations for imagined glocal audience in its first enrollment period, more could have been done to address actual audiences, including conducting user testing with representatives from key audience groups. Indeed, one could argue that this case demonstrated the necessity of usability research when writing for glocal audiences. On this note, this case offers two concrete implications for glocal web writing: (1) identifying essential glocal messages and (2) clarifying options for user help and support. Each of these implications emphasizes usability as an important consideration in glocal web writing.

### 5.1. Identify essential messages

Identifying essential messages involves tuning in to actual audiences to learn how to better write in anticipation of audience needs. This process might happen by logging information from help centers, conducting site visits, or developing personas. For example, essential messages in the MNsure.org case became clear shortly after launch, when help requests circled around two key questions:



- (1) Does MNsure work?
- (2) How can I get help specific to my situation?

These questions emerged repeatedly, and MNsure.org responded by hiring more help staff and creating several “frequently asked questions” (FAQ) pages that addressed facts and myths about MNsure as well as ways to contact assisters for additional help.

In addition to tuning into help centers, web writers can seek essential messages by developing personas. As Redish and others have suggested, personas tell the story of a fictitious individual, but they are actually based on a composite of real audience or demographic data (Redish, p. 19). Personas often include a key scenario or reason for using the website, questions that individual might have, as well as a narrative or story of the user’s experience. MNsure began to make use of a persona approach through its capture of “your stories” and “MNsure minute” videos, and these are great sources for mining essential glocal messages. With glocalization in mind, a series of personas might represent different native and immigrant audience groups; as well, personas might integrate different ages, income levels, and occupations.

Another way to identify essential messages is through site visits, or visits to environments where websites would naturally be used, whether an organization, library, place of business, or other locale (Hackos & Redish, 1998; <http://usability.gov>). Site visits typically involve both observations and interviews with real users and could be an approach for more fully understanding the questions, hopes, and challenges that actual audiences bring to complex websites.

## 5.2. Clarify options for help and support

A second implication for glocal web writing involves clarifying help and support options. Glocal audiences are layered, diverse, and bring many unique situations and needs to complex websites. Although MNsure had developed elaborate “assister” networks with different categories such as “navigators” and “counselors,” they learned that users were not always sure whom to contact. By the second enrollment period, MNsure.org changed the language of the “assisters” web page to “get help” for clearer resonance with the audience, and they created several FAQ pages. Glocal web writers might be advised to highlight help options similarly, such as creating entire pages devoted to help and support. Clarifying options for help and support might also be addressed through usability testing.

As a research method, usability testing involves the observation of real people conducting real tasks (Barnum, p. 13). It includes careful planning to recruit participants, design task scenarios, conduct the tests, and interview participants. Often up to 10 participants are recruited and asked to complete realistic website tasks. Researchers can measure task completion, time-on-task, and user preferences regarding satisfaction with the website. The power of usability testing is that it often reveals surprising insights about basic usability functions that have been neglected. As noted, MNsure did not conduct any direct user research or testing with MNsure.org before its launch and initial open enrollment period (Richert & Stawicki, 2014). If they had conducted usability testing, significant usability problems with user accounts would have been detected, and MNsure would have had an opportunity to revise their website before launch. Similarly, usability testing could help identify specific issues or problem areas of any website, and it could help web writers and developers anticipate the different types of help that participants might need.

## 6. Conclusion

The concept of *glocalization* extends our understanding of globalization to include both local and global audience considerations in website writing, and glocalization can be productively applied in local and regional contexts. In our increasingly complex and glocal society (even within state borders), it is more important than ever for web writers to conduct audience analysis on multiple levels and to engage real users in the process.

To better prepare web writers for glocalization, I have suggested a framework of “imagined” and “actual” glocal audience considerations that integrates dimensions of difference such as language, literacy, physical environment, cultural norms, and infrastructure, which can provide helpful ways to better understand glocal audiences when writing for the web. I also have suggested ways to integrate usability research to increase attention to “imagined” and “actual” glocal audiences considerations so we can better address glocal audiences in our local communities. These suggestions underscore a more active, involved notion of audience in web writing practices.

### Appendix A. Partial content audit, MNSure.org

Page ID	Page Name	Page Type	URL
0.0	Home Page	Landing page	<a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20131010101523/http://www.mnsure.org/">https://web.archive.org/web/20131010101523/http://www.mnsure.org/</a>
0.1	Sign in	content page	<a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20131014013931/https://auth.mnsure.org/login/Authredirector.jsp">https://web.archive.org/web/20131014013931/https://auth.mnsure.org/login/Authredirector.jsp</a>
0.2	Individuals or families	content page	<a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20131008215058/http://mnsure.org/individual-family/">https://web.archive.org/web/20131008215058/http://mnsure.org/individual-family/</a>
0.3	Small business & employees	content page	<a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20131008231352/http://mnsure.org/employer-employees/">https://web.archive.org/web/20131008231352/http://mnsure.org/employer-employees/</a>
0.4	Assisters	content page	<a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20131010101558/http://mnsure.org/assisters">https://web.archive.org/web/20131010101558/http://mnsure.org/assisters</a>
1.0	Individuals or families	Landing page	<a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20131008215058/http://mnsure.org/individual-family/">https://web.archive.org/web/20131008215058/http://mnsure.org/individual-family/</a>
1.1	Find a plan	content page	<a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20140214222451/https://plans.mnsure.org/mnsa/planadvisor/plan_advisor.htm?flow=anonymous">https://web.archive.org/web/20140214222451/https://plans.mnsure.org/mnsa/planadvisor/plan_advisor.htm?flow=anonymous</a>
1.2	Create account & apply	content page	<a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20140214215438/https://auth.mnsure.org/RIDP/?account_type=Individual">https://web.archive.org/web/20140214215438/https://auth.mnsure.org/RIDP/?account_type=Individual</a>
1.3	American Indians	content page	<a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20131004063839/http://www.mnsure.org/individual-family/american-indian.jsp">https://web.archive.org/web/20131004063839/http://www.mnsure.org/individual-family/american-indian.jsp</a>
1.4	Assister Network	content page	<a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20131004180300/http://www.mnsure.org/individual-family/assister-network.jsp">https://web.archive.org/web/20131004180300/http://www.mnsure.org/individual-family/assister-network.jsp</a>
1.5	Cost Overview	content page	<a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20131005074938/http://www.mnsure.org/individual-family/family-individual-cost-overview.jsp">https://web.archive.org/web/20131005074938/http://www.mnsure.org/individual-family/family-individual-cost-overview.jsp</a>

### Appendix B. Number of MNSure.org web pages reflecting audience and dimensions of difference across four snapshots

		Enrollment Period 1 (2013-2014)		Enrollment Period 2 (2014-2015)	
		Snapshot 1 (10/1/2013)	Snapshot 2 (7/1/2014)	Snapshot 3 (11/1/2014)	Snapshot 4 (7/1/2015)
Imagined/Actual Audience					
Imagined	Individuals or Families	17	18	29	31
	Small business	17	19	23	23
	SHOP	0	0	4	2
	American Indians	1	1	3	3
	Assisters	13	15	5	5
	MA & MinnesotaCare	2	4	2	1
	Special enrollment	1	0	3	2
Actual	Your Stories	3 (4)	4 (12)	1 (31)	1 (31)
	Social Media (Share)	1	3	0	0
	Social Media (News)	0	0	2	2
	Mnsure eNews	0	0	1	1
	Media Library	0	0	8	9
Dimensions of Difference					
Language	Translated documents	1	1	1	1
Literacy	Paper forms	0	1	3	3
Cultural Norms	Fact sheets	1	1	3	3
Physical Environment	Assister Network	1	1	0	0
	Find an assister	3	3	5	4
	Assister Directory	0	1	2	1
Infrastructure	Navigator	1	1	0	0
	Help	12	15	15	15
	Resources	2	2	1	1
	Assisters	8	9	5	4
	FAQ	3	3	18	15
	Contact Center	0	0	0	1

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**MNSure** Where you choose health coverage

search MNSure

individuals or families | small business & employees | assisters

# 1. id verification

ID verification is a critical step in creating your account. For your security, we will verify your identity before you can proceed with your application.

Photo source: Minnesota Tourism

1 2 3 ||

**individuals or families** >

Need insurance? Compare plans from Minnesota insurers. See if you qualify for a low-cost or free plan.

**small business & employees** >

Discover the new way to shop for health insurance and get the right plan for your business. Employees, find out how to sign up.

**assisters** >

Join our Assister Partner Network of navigators, agents/brokers and certified application counselors. Stay updated on the latest Assister information.

Figure 1. MNSure.org home page and audience categories.

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