

Illustrations in User Manuals:

Preference and Effectiveness with Japanese and American Readers

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Business globalization has increased export of international products with localized user manuals. Aspects of illustrations and document design are oftentimes an afterthought in the translation process. This study examines the role of illustrations within instructional manuals. Comparing the respective preferences of American and Japanese users. Research finds that Japanese manuals include more illustrations and cartoon graphics than American user manuals. The study held interviews with American and Japanese users to gauge their preferences and perceptions regarding effective illustration in user manuals. Finding that there is no significant cultural push, in either group, against using more illustrations and cartoon aids. Subjects preferred formats with illustrations and found them easier to follow. The effect of illustrations on user perception aides long-term manual use and reliability. Documents that lacked illustrations all-together were deemed “less friendly” and decreased user confidence. Manual localization efforts should not assume American users are against or inept with illustrations. American manuals localized for a Japanese market would benefit from greater illustrative design. The study would benefit from a deeper dive into the usability of a manual’s format with subjects describing the effectiveness and their preferences. User manuals that have a healthy amount of illustrations have a positive effect on the average subject.