The Informational Structure of University Websites: A Comparison between American and South Korean Universities’ Websites

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Abstract

Change in the educational system, such as pedagogical informationization and issues of knowledge productivity, has changed the development of universities and knowledge and education institutions as a whole (which includes, among other, sub-components such as administration, education, and research.) Change is also identified in a universities website, which reflects the organization and characteristics of itself and represents the purpose and function of the institution. In addition, there has been a trend to change websites from repositories of information to portal sites which can provide all the universities’ services synthetically. The major information components of a universities’ website range from broad to specific and have clearly predicted user groups. According to these features, information organization is constructed in a similar way universities’ websites have similar structure.

However, the structural similarities of university websites are differentiated by the informational, cultural, and educational environment to which they belong. American universities, though often made up of diverse and independent schools, are from an administrative and organizational perspective more homogenous, which is reflected in the website structure. Foreign universities on the other hand have adapted a more varied informational structure to their websites. This shows that the cultural and educational environment affects the organization of universities which is reflected in a university’s website.

Compared to the United States, universities in South Korea have a thoroughly different social and educational system, and in general are also smaller in size. The latter attribute, makes it easier for South Korean universities to be managed and controlled by only one organization, namely the administrative main office (as opposed to the independent operation in American Universities). This characteristic of South Korean universities is reflected in the website, where the focus on the provision of information and services direct all information onto the main page of the website. On the other hand, American universities’ websites concentrate on communication with users and try to enhance the usability of their website resources. This aspect of American universities’ websites makes it possible to decentralize information, which is an inherent capability of the World Wide Web. Differences between South Korean and American universities’ websites represent the double-faced feature of portal sites and the universities’ websites: centralization vs. decentralization and unification vs. variety.

One can propose that by considering the characteristics of universities’ website according to the differences of their social and educational environment; it might be possible to identify the websites’ functions and the way of their development. Through this analysis, the most appropriate informational structure of universities’ websites can be predicted and the efficiency and the usability of universities’ website can be raised.