



Cultural Dimensions of the Dimensions of IA

A Summary of
“Incorporating the Cultural Dimensions into the Theoretical
Framework of Website Information Architecture”

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LIS 690 – Information Architecture
Assignment #3, Part 1

Presentation Overview

- About the Article
- Cultural Dimensions
- Information Ecology, the Dimensions of IA
- Practical Relevance of Culture to Website IA
- Impacts of Culture on the Dimensions of IA
- Article Conclusions
- Questions

Also...

- Additional Handouts are provided, including the article
- All quotations in this presentation are from: Wan Abdul Rahim, W. M. I., Nor Laila, M. N., Shafie, M., "Incorporating the Cultural Dimensions into the Theoretical Framework of Website Information Architecture", 12th International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction 2007 (HCII 2007), Beijing, CHINA, July 22-27, 2007.
- This article is not paginated; refer to corresponding section.

About the Article

- Wan Abdul Rahim et al. wrote “Incorporating the Cultural Dimensions into the Theoretical Framework of Website Information Architecture” to propose a theoretical framework for accommodating the web needs of different cultures.
- Is there a need for a framework to apply cultural dimensions to IA?
 - Empirical evidence shows that culture influences Web behavior.
(For more, see Reference 3 in article)
- This theoretical framework for tailoring websites to cultures is:
 - based on the work of cultural theorists Hofstede, Hall, and Trompenaar
 - reliant on inductive logic, wherein conclusions are supported by premises but do not follow necessarily from them.
 - focused on website interface issues

Cultural Dimensions

- What are cultural dimensions?
 - A cultural dimension is a model for measuring the magnitude or importance of an attribute of a culture using a continuum measuring the presence or absence or indicators of that attribute.
- Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory has been expanded by Hall and Trompenaar.
 - A combination of various cultural dimensions proposed by these theorists have been selected for analytical use by Rahim et al.
 - Reasons for writing the article
 - Review of Information Ecology
 - Introduction of Cultural Dimensions

Examples of Cultural Dimensions

- Perhaps examples will be useful. The following are cultural dimensions.
 - Individualism vs. Collectivism
 - High Power Distance vs. Low Power Distance
 - Universalism vs. Pluralism
 - Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-term Orientation
 - the concept of *delayed gratification* indicates long-term orientation
- *FOR ELABORATION ON THESE AND OTHER CULTURAL DIMENSIONS SELECTED BY THE AUTHORS, SEE SECTION 2 OF THE ARTICLE*

Information Ecology – the dimensions of IA

- Context, Content, Users comprise the dimensions of IA
- IA dimensions are especially important for IA's Research Framework
- Rahim et al. apply cultural dimensions to the dimensions of IA
 - BUT, Rahim and friends understand the User dimension as the Navigation dimension. In accordance with the article, the User dimension will henceforth be referred to as the Navigation dimension.
- By applying selected cultural dimensions to IA dimensions, Rahim et al. create a cultural theoretical framework with practical implications for website design.
 - “The design prescription is not much concerned about giving advice on how culture can be *controlled*, but as an attempt of *practical relevance* of what may be attained by providing constructive ideas for the development of website IA.”
(italics added)

Practical Relevance of Culture to Website IA

- “[T]he values prescribed by the culture dimensions will influence the creation of IA art[e]facts.”
- Websites are artifacts
 - “Art[e]facts are treated as visible and audible patterns of culture which exist on a surface level.”
- Cultural dimensions are indicators of values
 - “Values...concern what ‘ought’ to be done.”
- “[T]he values prescribed by the culture dimensions will influence the creation of IA art[e]facts.”
 - Rahim et al. therefore propose that the cultural dimensions framework actually provides web design guidance for the localization of websites.

Impact of culture for Navigation

- Navigation dimension defined:
 - “[T]he navigation dimension is oriented towards reinforcing user location inside the information hypertext space ... with the contextualization process of sign, icon, symbol, layout, architectural nature (entrance and transition zone)”
- How does the application of the cultural dimension framework help designers to localize the navigation of a website?
 - If the cultural dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance is low, then the website needn’t allow the user to have high control of navigation. In other words, the designers may employ links that open new windows and lead the user away from the original location.
 - If the cultural dimension of Context is low, website designers should provide a navigation bar that is arranged alphabetically.
- *For more on how cultural dimensions should affect the navigation dimension, see Table 1.*

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Impact of culture for Content

- Importance of Content dimension:
 - Content considered “with culture dimensions may deter user from experiencing information overload and may assist in refocusing user attention back to the information structure.”
- How does the application of the cultural dimension framework help designers to localize the content of a website?
 - If the cultural dimension of Power Distance is high, a website with a deep hierarchy may be more appropriate for the user. If the culture features a Low Power distance, users will be more comfortable with a shallower hierarchy. (See pp. 69-73 of our textbook)
 - If the cultural dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance is high, then website designers should employ redundant cues, such as color and font, to reduce ambiguity for users.
- *For more on how cultural dimensions should affect the content dimension, see Table 2.*

Impact of culture for Context

- Context defined:
 - “The sense of delightfulness may be imposed, by including the IA elements based on the context or the recognizable sense, in which the underlying surface is used to support the appropriateness of the creation of website IA.”
 - This is verbatim from the article.
 - In other words, a web site’s Context is its existence within a particular circumstance, milieu or climate and deployment of appropriate and recognizable representations.
- How does the application of the cultural dimension framework help designers to localize the context of a website?
 - If the cultural dimension of Power Distanced is high, a website designer should frequently emphasize the social and moral order, such as religious portrayals or symbols of nationalism.
- *For more on how cultural dimensions should affect the context dimension, see Table 3.*

Article Conclusions

- Benefits and Risks of using the Cultural Dimensions Framework, and the Next Step
 - Benefit
 - “[A]mong the implication and contribution of this research is the identification of cultural web design for website IA that my maximize the browsing task strategy for information. The effort may contribute towards increasing the usability level of the website.”
 - Risks
 - Evaluations and design processes based on the cultural dimensions paradigm may run the risk of stereotyping cultures.
 - The Next Step
 - Future investigations of the applicability of the cultural dimensions framework to website IA will be greatly enhanced by case-study research, as it will directly engage a culture. Case studies will thus provide empirical evidence of the framework’s effectiveness.

My Questions to You!

- Do you think the pursuit of a cultural dimensions framework to inform website IA is a legitimate field of study? Do you think principles of IA are culturally relative?
- How well do the dimensions of IA (content, context, navigation) referenced in the article comport with your understanding of Information Ecology from the Morville and Rosenfeld text?
- The authors of the article reside in Malaysia. How much do you think their location and culture motivated them to write this article or pursue this line of study?
- Do you know anyone from a Non-native-English speaking culture? Have they remarked on English-language-based websites, either positively or negatively? Are you bilingual? If so, do you find differences in IA in the websites of your languages? What are they?
- The cultural dimensions framework is meant to be applied to macro-cultures. Do you think this framework would be helpful in micro-cultures, i.e. in an organization such as a library? If so, how so?
- The cultural theorists from which the cultural dimensions paradigm is drawn have been criticized on various accounts. Do you think the use of the cultural dimensions framework—as applied to website IA—risks stereotyping cultures? Are other audiences/users stereotyped in a way that disadvantages web use?
- Do you have any questions for me? Please ask! I will do my best to answer!