The Effects of Web Cultural Appeals on Students' Information Processing Patterns: an Empirical Investigation of Chinese Students

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of Internet access and the ever-increasing volume of user-generated online content have led to complex Web consumption practices among Internet users across the globe. More and more users engage in multiple and simultaneous activities while surfing the Web (e.g. listening to music while working online). Because of the interactive nature of the Web, online media environments have become highly conducive to multitasking. The latter is particularly common among students. Multitasking has been examined in various contexts, but limited attention has focused on multitasking or changes in information processing when dealing with Web sites with different cultural cues. Today's multicultural web environment necessitates cultural adaptation of Web communications. This is particularly important in e-learning. As e-learning, especially distance learning, continues to grow and rise in importance in academia, it is useful to better understand the influence of Web cultural appeals on students' multitasking ability.

This study explores the relationship between culture and multitasking in Web-based communication. The study reports the findings of an experimental investigation that examined the effects of culturally oriented Web sites on multitasking and information processing patterns among Chinese college students. The findings indicate that culturally relevant Web sites can be distractive. In particular, the presence of cultural appeals in Web sites led to multitasking and diminished cognitive performance. These findings were particularly salient among Chinese students with strong ethnic identities. These findings are different from the outcomes of previous research on the customization of Web technologies which suggested that culturally oriented Web sites are more persuasive in inducing higher learning.