



American Vs Iranian University Websites: A Critical Discourse Analysis of About Pages

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ABSTRACT

In today's competitive world, official websites provide great venues for colleges and universities to express their institutional identity, "an abstract representation of the complexity of the whole organization" (Seidl 2005, p. 82) in order to leave an overriding impression on their potential clients and achieve institutional legitimacy and political power (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The combination of language and image are ingredients university websites employ to promote their institutions and establish a distinct identity (e.g., Anctil, 2008). Different sociocultural contexts, nonetheless, bear the potential to affect the way academic institutions represent their organizations on their official websites. This study, therefore, was an attempt to explore how top six Iranian and American universities used language to represent themselves on the About pages of their institutional websites. The results revealed significant differences in the way these universities promoted themselves on their official partially related to larger socio-cultural forces functioning in their societies.

Keywords: Institutional identity, Official websites, About pages, Colleges and universities



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INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive world where colleges and universities vie for establishing a distinct status in order to distinguish themselves from rival organizations, expressing institutional identity through official websites is a great asset at the disposal of such academic institutions. Institutional identity, "an abstract representation of the complexity of the whole organization" (Seidl 2005, p. 82), provides a general guideline for organizational practices and decisions (Luhman n 2000). As "a self-description of the organization," institutional identity provides "a sense of unity" on the basis of which the organization "observes its different parts as related to each other (Seidl 2005, p. 82)" and represents itself to other organizations.

A principal channel for communicating institutional identity in today's world is official websites on which organizations including colleges and universities represent a self-descriptive text of themselves as a unified social system. Colleges and universities welcome the use of institutional websites due to their capacity to rapidly communicate a momentous amount of information to a potentially massive audience (Abrahamson, 2000; Adelman, 2006; Anctil, 2008; Ashburn, 2007; Boyles, 2007). It is through a combination of language and image that colleges and universities attempt to market their institutions in order to establish a distinct identity and create a strong impression on their potential target audiences including future students (Anctil, 2008; Askehave, 2007; Hossler, 1999; McKnight & Paugh, 1999).

Like other organizations, colleges and universities compete not only for customers (i.e., students) and resources (i.e., tuition dollars) but also for institutional legitimacy and political power which translates into economic and social fitness (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). They utilize text and image to position and distinguish themselves from other institutions, publicize their efforts, and draw the attention of diverse audiences including prospective students, donors, and alumni (Urciuoli, 2003). Universities, as a result, rely on a variety of tactics in order to create a distinctive image as a means to enhance their identity and reputation in order to increase their admission and recruitment.

Little research, however, exists as to whether different socio-cultural contexts have an impact on the way universities utilize discourse to represent themselves on their institutional websites. The United States of America and Islamic Republic of Iran are two example countries with different socio-cultural and political contexts with the potential to have different impact on the way their academic institutions represent themselves online. The purpose of this study, accordingly was to understand how Iranian and American universities used language to represent themselves on the About pages of their institutional websites. More specifically research questions addressed in this study were as follows:

In what ways do Iranian and American universities use language to represent themselves on the About pages of their institutional websites?

- Is there any difference between Iranian and American universities in the way they represent themselves on the About pages of their institutional websites?
- Is there any difference between Iranian and American universities in the way they represent themselves in the opening of About pages of their institutional websites?

METHOD

Data for the present study was gathered from six top universities of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of the America as identified by the website of 2012 University Web Ranking (Retrieved from <http://www.4icu.org/ir> and <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities>, 26/04/2012). The selected universities are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Top six Iranian and American universities

Top Six Iranian Universities		Top Six American Universities	
1	University of Tehran http://www.ut.ac.ir/en/contents/UT-OverView/UT.Overview.html	1	Harvard University http://www.harvard.edu/about-harvard
2	Ferdowsi University of Mashhad http://www.um.ac.ir/?new_lang=eng#	2	Princeton University http://www.princeton.edu/main/about/
3	Tehran university of medical sciences http://www.tums.ac.ir/english/content/?contentID=2	3	Yale University http://www.yale.edu/about/index.html
4	Shahid Beheshti University http://en.sbu.ac.ir/default.aspx?TabID=66	4	Columbia University http://www.columbia.edu/content/about-columbia.html



5	Shiraz University	http://www.shirazu.ac.ir/en/?menu_id=1&menu_item_id=1	5	Caltech University	http://www.caltech.edu/about-caltech
6	Mashhad University of Medical Sciences	http://www.mums.ac.ir/admission/en/overview	6	MIT	http://web.mit.edu/aboutmit/

In this study an attempt was done to content analyze the About pages of top six American and Iranian universities in order to investigate how these universities presented their institution to the general public. This comparison would provide a golden opportunity to see whether different socio-political and cultural contexts could have an impact the language academic organizations employ to represent themselves on their institutional websites.

Having collected data from the About pages of the above-mentioned websites, they were subjected to content analysis in order to investigate any possible differences in the way the selected universities introduced their institution online.

DATA ANALYSIS

The content analysis of the About pages of top six American and Iranian universities indicated that the About pages of the official websites of those academic institutions essentially contained self-promotional language for establishing a sense of prestige by referring to the cherished traditions of the institutions and their ornamented histories. Topics that were mentioned on their About pages included the age of the institution (founding year), size and beauty of the campus (i.e., acres, number of buildings), and award-winnings.

Considering top six Iranian universities, almost all of them initiated their About pages with presenting an ample account of the history and origin of their institution, its location, age, and ranking, followed by a boastful enumeration of the raw statistics about the number of faculties, staff, faculty members, students, libraries, research centers and programs offered at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Besides such brief overviews, each university provided additional hyperlinks to refer their audiences to additional information about their organization.

The first ranking Iranian university as identified by 2012 University Web Ranking (Retrieved from <http://www.4icu.org/ir/>) was University of Tehran, as brought in Figure 1 with the maximum number of subpages among the studied Iranian universities with the titles of UT Overview, Cultural and Academic Activities, Facts and Figures, Guest House, History, Libraries and Publication Center, Office of International Relations, Present Status, and UT Organization (See Figure 1). This university started its About page with referring to the founding year of the university, the subjects that were taught at that time and the way it evolved into a modern school. As a picture caption at this page, this university also boasted about its status as the oldest, largest, and best university of the country with a ranking of 368 among the top universities around the world in 2009.

In its first subpage, Cultural and Academic Activities, it pointed out to its major cultural and academic activities as including cooperation with foreign countries in holding international conferences, seminars and workshops. It also mentioned the number of its scientific associations, student unions, student clubs and researchers who were awarded in national and international events. In this section of Facts and Figures, in addition, it referred to its year of establishment, size and location of the university, number of campuses, faculties, departments, faculty members, students, administrative staff, graduates in the previous years, research centers, labs, scientific journals, membership in international associations/unions, international agreements and the number of artistic and athletic medals won in the international competitions.

Following these came the description of the guest house, its location, the facilities it provided, and the manner in which it could be reserved by international guests and students. The subsequent sections i.e., History and Libraries and Publication Center were concerned with providing a comprehensive account of the history of UT and the number and quality of its libraries and publication centers. At the subpage of Office of International Relations, in addition, it introduced this particular office as a link between UT and international students, faculty members and researchers. In addition, on the page of Present Status, it reiterated the statistics related to the number of colleges, faculties, departments, campuses, personnel, students, and published journals.

Finally, in the last section, i.e., UT Organization, some information regarding the organizational structure of the university as to the positions of President, Vice President for Research and Technology, Vice-President for Planning and Information Technology, Vice-President for Student and Cultural Affairs, and Vice-President for International Affairs and Public Relations was provided. In this section, while a brief introduction of the responsibilities of each organizational position was provided, no reference to the picture, biography and personal and academic information of those positions was included.

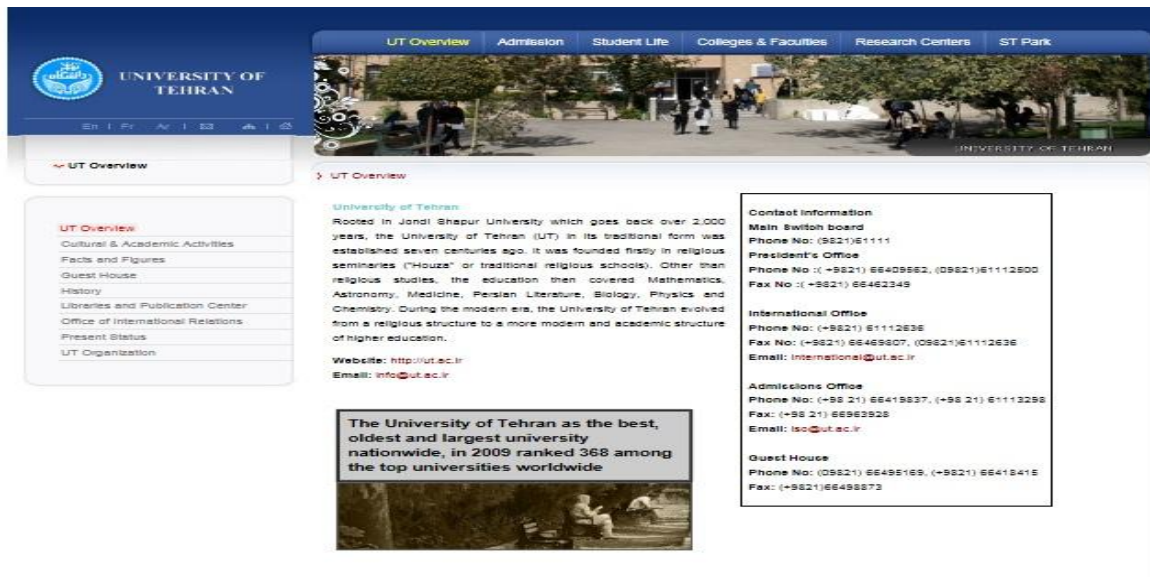


Figure 1: University of Tehran About Page

The second ranking Iranian university was Ferdowsi University of Mashhad with just one page of "A Word from the President" as its only subpage (Figure 2). The website of this university commenced its About page with explaining the origin of the name of the university: "Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (FUM) is a state university named after the great epic poet and scholar Ferdowsi whose Shahnameh (The Book of Kings) is a well-known classical chef-d'oeuvre in Persian literature." Themes that were addressed on this were university's location, age, ranking in the country in general and in the northeast part of Iran in particular, the number of its faculties, staff, faculty members, and students. In addition, on this page, this university mentioned some of its specific departments as centers for excellence and highlighted the university's success in attracting international students. It concluded the page by stating its mission as to striving to "expand minds, foster new ideas, and perpetuate intellectual and personal growth."

Among the top six Iranian universities surveyed, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad was the only one that enclosed a page as A Word from the President as part of its About page to restate an overview of the university's services and its mission statements as to aiming to "equip the students with substantial resources" in order to "join a legacy of thinkers, leaders, and global citizens". Comparing the university's achievements in two periods of pre- and post Islamic revolution was an additional common thread among Iranian universities run through the About page of them including Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.



Figure 2. Ferdowsi University of Mashhad About Page

The third ranking Iranian university was Tehran University of Medical Sciences with a single About page containing five parts of Introduction, Historical Sketch, Quick Facts about T.U.M.S., Academic Overview, and International Relations. Further Information, all brought on the same page without being hyperlinked (Figure 3). This university initiated its About page neither by referring to its history nor its mission statement but an essay-type introductory statement: "This introduction provides basic information about Tehran University of Medical Sciences and Health Services (T.U.M.S.);



offered courses, requirements for admission, a flavor of life on the campus, and the academic, sport, and social facilities available." In subsequent sections, some information was provided regarding the commitment of the university for providing a working and learning environment for students and researchers with a "perspective of high ethical and spiritual codes of behavior."

In addition, some information on the history of the university, its age, size, and ranking as an outstanding medical center in Iran, the number and excellence of the admitted students and courses offered and the amount of financial resources provided by the government was provided while bragging about the number of educational and health research centers, teaching hospitals, libraries, hospitals, and sport facilities this university has all around the country. This university concluded its About page with declaring its readiness for joining "research projects and collaborations with universities all around the world." It is worth mentioning that a page on Message from the Chancellor was also included in the institution's website but as a subpage of the main website not the About page itself.

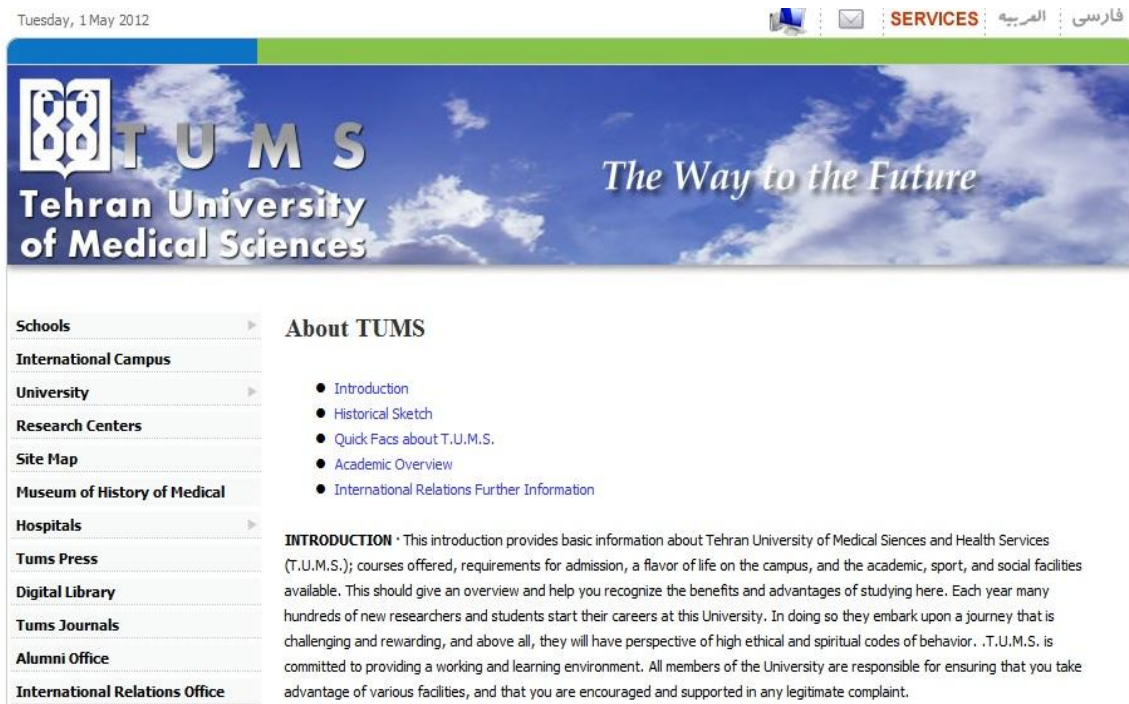


Figure 3. Tehran University of Medical Sciences About Page

The fourth ranking Iranian university was Shahid Beheshti University with one single About page started with an extensive account of the history of the university followed by portraying the current status of the university in terms of the number of offered postgraduate programs and faculties which have become active since 1978 (Figure 4). The page was wrapped up by boasting about the "outstanding" and "rewarding" academic environment provided by this university not only in the country but also in the region as stated: "the University and the members of the academia are at the forefront of world research in many fields and the teaching is informed by the very latest developments in each discipline."

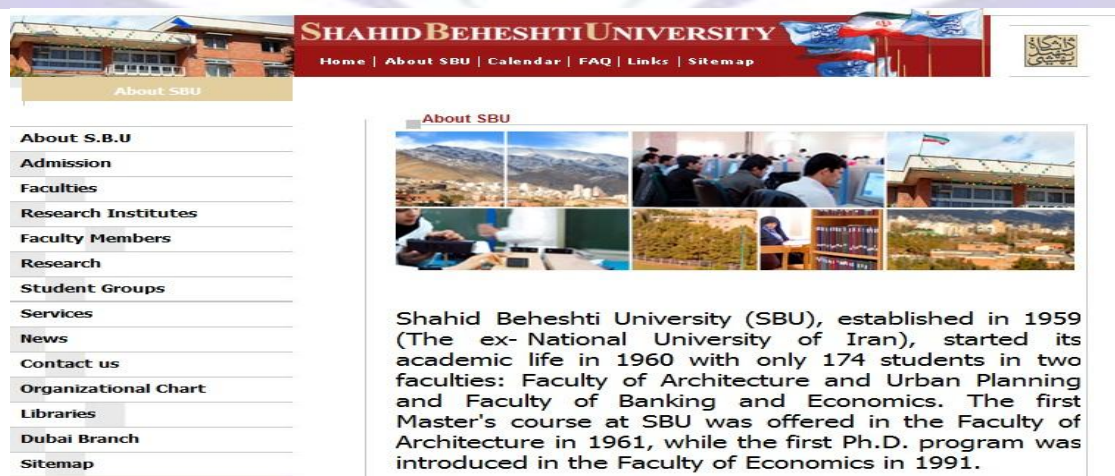


Figure 4. Shahid Beheshti University About Page

The fifth university surveyed in this study was Shiraz University which incorporated two pages of History and Welcome to Shiraz as two constituent parts of its About page. The page of History dedicated three paragraphs to the past of the university regarding the periods of before and after the Islamic revolution, while concluding with a single paragraph on the present status of the university specifying the number students attended there and the number of undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate programs offered. The second page, Welcome to Shiraz, presented an all-embracing account of the history of the province of Fars and the city of Shiraz accompanied by some additional links to the historical monuments of the city such as Arg (citadel) of Karim Khan, Jame' Atiq Mosque, Vakil Bazaar, Qur'an Gate, Afifabad Garden, Holy Shrines, Eram Garden, The Tomb of Hafez, and The Tomb of Sa'di.

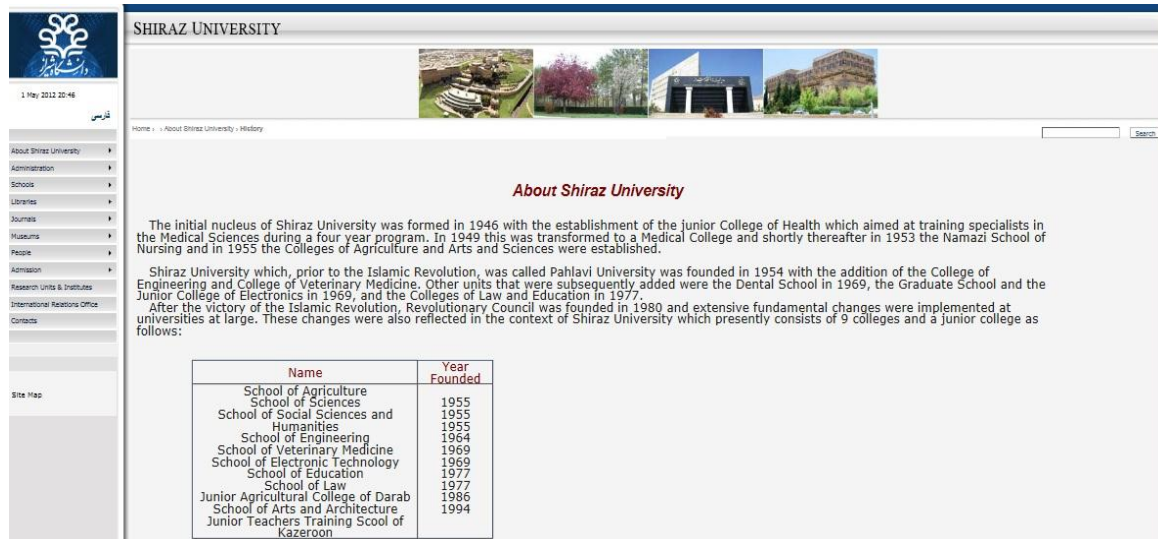


Figure 5. Shiraz University About Page

The last studied university was Mashhad University of Medical Sciences with an About page which composed of three subpages of History, Mission and Overview; quite interestingly having the History page, not the Overview as the first subpage. The history page started with a very brief account of the times of yore of the university wrapped up by an account of the current number of faculties, hospitals, rural and urban health centers, teaching staff, specialists, and employees making the university largest university of Medical Sciences in the country. The second page was devoted to expressing the mission of the university as to

provide highly standard education to... students and improve... community health. ...by providing educational opportunities in many biomedical and clinical sciences, by conducting research on the variety of areas, by providing comprehensive, innovative and cutting-edge patient care, and by facilitating public access to education and care through its public service and outreach activities.

In the last page, i.e., Overview, the founding year of the university, its location, origins, the current vision, motto, guiding values and key benefits to the region and country were evidently mentioned.



Figure 6. Mashhad University of Medical Sciences About Page



Among American universities, Harvard was the first ranking university as identified by 2012 University Web Ranking (Retrieved from <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/bestcolleges/rankings/national-universities>) was University of Harvard which contained five sub-pages of About Harvard, Harvard at a Glance, FAQ, Academic Experience, Maps and Directions, Harvard President and leadership. University of Harvard commenced this page with its mission statement as to being "devoted to excellence in teaching, learning, and research, and... to developing leaders in many disciplines who make a difference globally" with faculties "engaged with teaching and research to push the boundaries of human knowledge". Claiming to generously offer a financial aid program with over \$160 million, awarded to more than 60% of its undergraduate students, this university boasted about being the oldest university in the United States while mentioning its year of establishment and the number of schools, students and alumni around the world.

In the next page, Harvard at a Glance, the university published a full report of the number of its faculties and schools, students, professors, living alumni, Nobel laureates, library collection, and the magnitude of the university income, expenses, and endowment, in addition to mentioning school color and motto. In the next page, FAQ, Harvard provided answers to general questions such as how to apply to Harvard or what the mission statement of Harvard is in addition questions about financial resources and facilities of this university. At the page of Academic Experience, Harvard provided embedded links to all its faculties and schools for those who might be interested in contacting them or applying to their programs. At the page of Maps and Directions, in addition, the university offered maps of its schools, theaters, hospitals, clinics, museums, libraries, and athletic facilities. Finally, at the page of Harvard's President and Leadership, this university presented a brief introduction to the leadership vision of the university accompanied with a brief introduction to the president of the university while providing some links to the office and dean of each school.

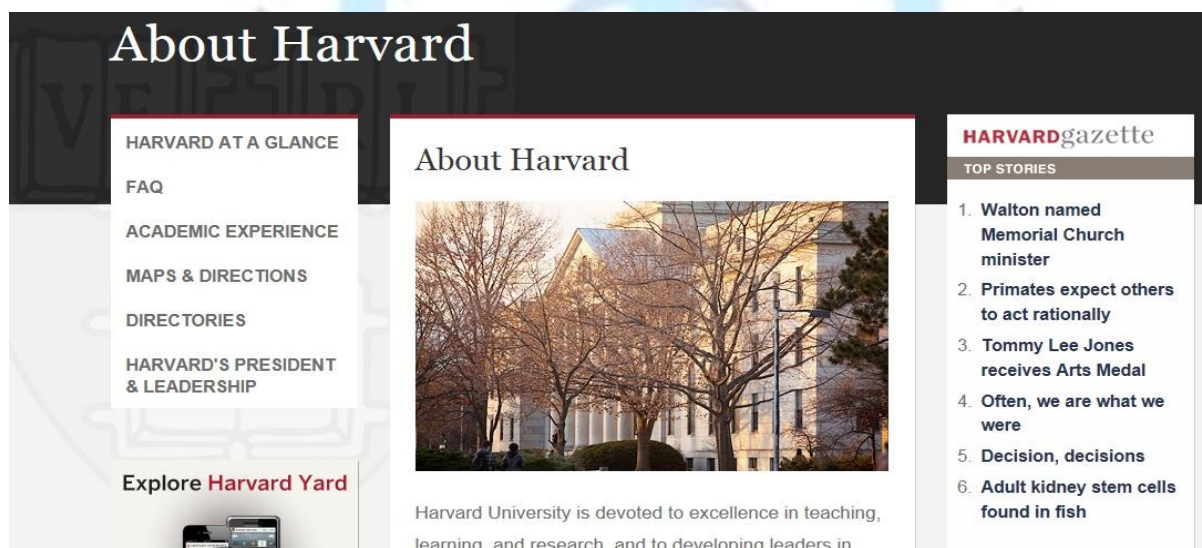


Figure 7. Harvard About Page

Princeton University was the second ranking American university with six main sub-pages of Overview, Facts and Figures, Princeton's History, University Governance, Our Neighborhood, and About This Site. Introducing itself as "a vibrant community of scholarship and learning that stands in the nation's service and in the service of all nations" this university ascertained its position in its main About page as to the fourth-oldest college in the United States seeking to "achieve the highest levels of distinction in the discovery and transmission of knowledge and understanding." This very page then concluded with a succinct illustration of the number of faculty members and students at both undergraduate and graduate levels while magnetizing the audience with the university's generous financial aid program ensuring that "talented students from all economic backgrounds can afford a Princeton education".

In its second page, Overview, it mentioned its year of establishment, who the president was, university location, size of the main campus, the residential college system, the number of faculties, the ratio of the undergraduate students to faculties, departments, interdisciplinary certificate programs, library holdings, student enrollment, undergraduate students on financial aid, and the countries international students came from, etc. In the following section, i.e., Facts and Figures, the university provided some information on buildings and architects, honorary degrees, national humanities medals, national medals of science, and Nobel prize winners. On the History page, afterwards, the university provided a glance of Princeton's university's history while referring to the American Revolution and Princeton's timeline as well.

In the next page, University Governance, a concise portrayal of the university's president along with that of the trustees of Princeton university, Princeton's academic officers and offices of the corporation, and the council of the Princeton university community was offered. On the page of Our Neighborhood, after that the Princeton area was depicted as having "tree-lined streets, specialty shops, restaurants, and parks" emitting "a friendly and safe atmosphere," the McCarter Theatre Center was widely extolled for the arts lovers. In addition, some further links were offered for getting familiar with



local activities and resources, the office of Community and Regional Affairs and getting around campus. Finally, in the About This Site, the website of the university, its history, and a guide to quick navigation was provided.

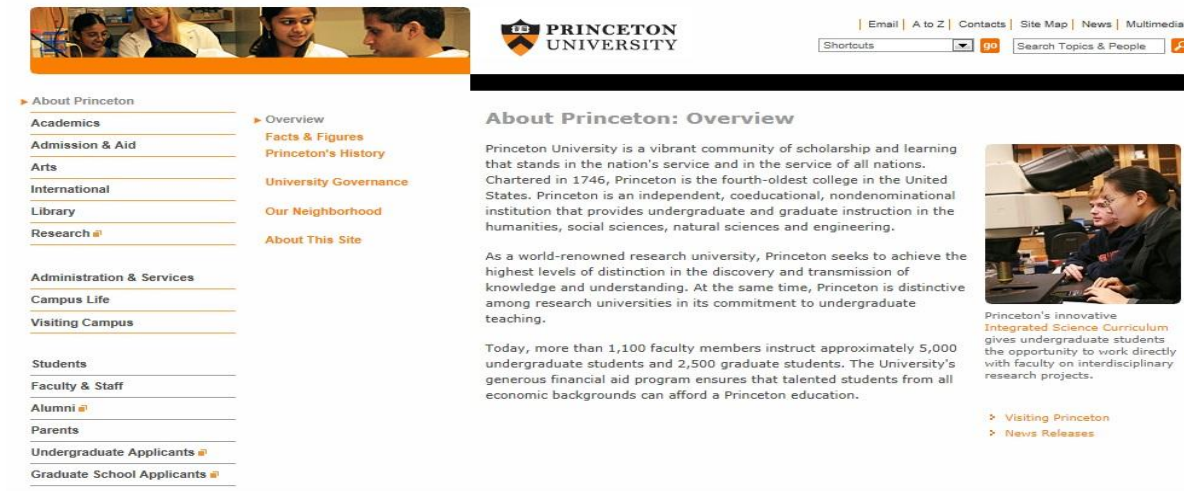


Figure 8. Princeton About Page

The third ranking university was the university of Yale with nine subpages of President's welcome, Yale facts, History, University Leadership and Organization, Governance and Historic Documents, Select Policies and Procedures, Financial Overview, Other Advisory Bodies, and Visiting Yale. The main About page started with listing the academic components of Yale University and the number of students attend there: "Yale University comprises three major academic components: Yale College (the undergraduate program), the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and the professional schools...Approximately 11,250 students attend Yale."In the President's Welcome page, the president invited students to visit Yale in person or through the website whileintroducing the university as a place of "compelling change"enjoying"global outlook" and "outstanding research." One the same page,further links were provided to the biography of the president, his speeches and statements and relevant contact information.

Other subpages, that is Yale Facts, History, University's leadership and organization, Governance and historic document, Financial Overview and Visiting Yalewere alike to similar pages of universities described above in terms of content and orienation. However, in its distinct page ofSelect Policies and Procedures, this university was the only university among those studied that provided links to many university-wide policies and regulations of each school. In addition, the page of Other Advisory Bodies, yet another differently titled page, provided someinformation on several advisory boards of Yale whose members were alumni and friends of this university.

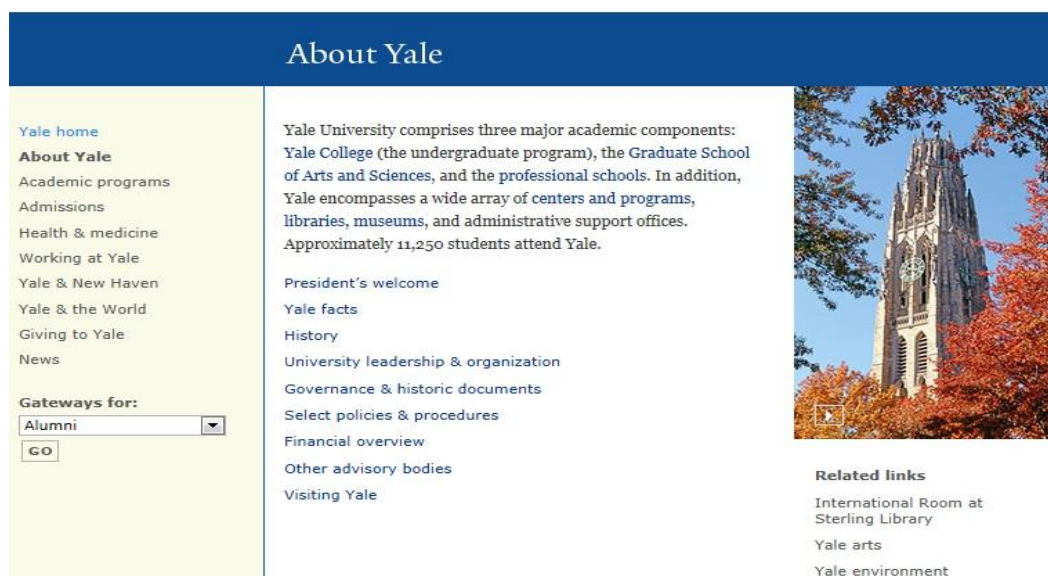


Figure 9. Yale About Page

The About page of Columbia University, the forth ranking university studied here, providedfour major sections of A Brief History, University Administration, Statistics and Facts, and Visiting Columbia's Campuses as its subpages each featured with a picture and some introductory sentences leading the visitors to the corresponding page by a click on the matching link. This page began with the university establishing itslong-standing superior positionin higher education both in the



nation and around the world for more than 250 years, mentioning its mission statement as including "the commitment to attract and engage the best minds in pursuit of greater human understanding, pioneering new discoveries and service to society."

A very comprehensive account of the history of university was provided on the first subpage, named A Brief History. On the page of University Administration, a brief introduction of the president and all vice-presidents of the university along with a portrait image of each was presented. In this section of Fact and Statistics, like that of other universities some rudimentary statistics related to the number of departments, faculties, programs, students and professors were provided. Finally, on the page of Visiting Columbia's Campuses some information on general campus tours was offered in addition to some further links titled Visitors Center, Frequently Asked Questions, Maps, Directions and Parking, Columbia Bookstore, It's Happening at Columbia, and Self-Guided Walking Tour. On the left side of the main page, moreover, some useful links were placed as to the Mission Statement, Campus Map, Exploring New York City, Columbia Bookstore, and Columbia's Nobel Laureates which provided more guidelines for prospective students of Columbia University.

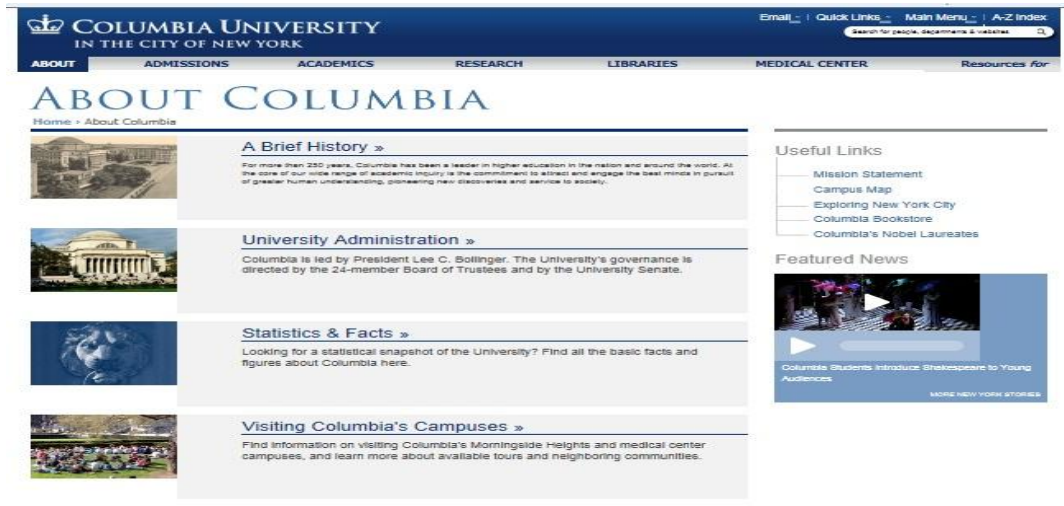


Figure 10. University of Columbia About Page

The Caltech University, the fifth ranking university surveyed in this study, appeared to have the most multifaceted About page among 6 American universities examined in this study with about 16 sub-pages. The very first part of the About page of this university, contrary to other universities included no primary content but a list of links to all its subpages. In its second main page, Caltech-At-A-Glance, this university stated its mission as to "expand human knowledge and benefit society through research integrated with education." Many of subpages of this university, such as At a Glance, Government Relations, Historical Info, and Information for Visitors were similar in content to corresponding pages of other universities. What distinguished this university from other universities was the inclusion of new sections such as Commencement, Emergency Information, Executive Education, Scientific Milestones, Media Relations, Outreach, Parents' Newsletter, Public Events, Streaming Theater, Sustainability at Caltech, and Volunteering at Caltech.



Figure 11. Caltech About Page

The last university examined in this study was MIT. Similar to the About page of Columbia University, the first page of the About page of this university didn't not contain extensive primary content but a brief reference to its subpages of Institute Facts, MIT Mission, Institute History, Visiting MIT, Administration, Offices and Services in addition to its mission statement as to "advance knowledge and educate students in science, technology and other areas of scholarship that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century — whether the focus is cancer, energy, economics or literature." Furthermore,



some additional links were provided on the same page as to Research and Educational Initiatives, Rankings and Awards, and More News from MIT in order to provide more comprehensive information about MIT. On the same page a very short introduction to the president of the university was also provided.

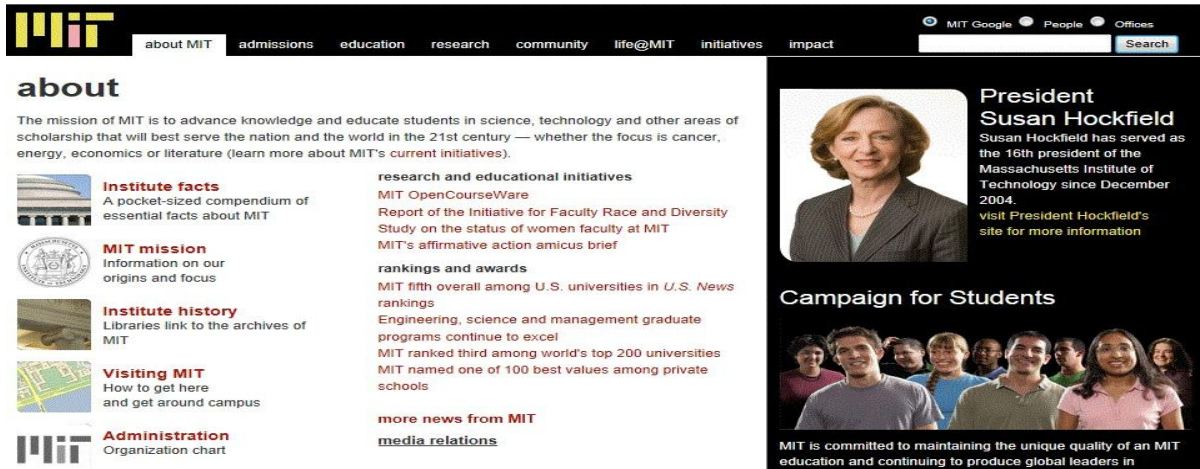


Figure 12. MIT AboutPage

At a glance, just by looking at the number of subpages appeared on the About pages of American and Iranian universities as presented in Table 2, it was apparent that American universities tended to share more details about themselves on their About page. The maximum number of sub-pages appeared on the About page of Iranian university belonged to the University of Tehran with nine subpages.

Table 2. Subpages of the About pages of top six Iranian and American universities

Top Iranian Universities			Top American Universities		
1.	University of Tehran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UT Overview • Cultural & Academic Activities • Facts and Figures • Guest House • History • Libraries and Publication Center • Office of International Relations • Present Status • UT Organization 	1.	Harvard University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About Harvard • Harvard at a Glance • FAQ • Academic experience • Maps and Directions • Harvard President and Leadership
2.	Ferdowsi University of Mashhad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview • A word from the President 	2.	Princeton University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About Princeton University • Overview • Facts & Figures • Princeton's History • University Governance • Our Neighborhood • About This Site
3.	Tehran university of medical sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction 	3.	Yale University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About Yale • President's welcome • Yale facts • History • University leadership & organization • Governance & historic documents • Select policies & procedures • Financial overview • Other advisory bodies • Visiting Yale
4.	Shahid Beheshti University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About SBU 	4.	Columbia University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A brief history • University Administration • Statistics and facts • Visiting Columbia's campuses Useful links: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission Statement • Campus Map • Exploring New York City • Columbia Bookstore • Columbia's Nobel Laureates



5.	Shiraz University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History • Welcome to Shiraz 	5.	Caltech University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access Caltech • At a glance • Accommodations • Emergency Information • Executive Education • Government relations • Historical information • Information for visitors • JPL • Maps (campus & surrounding areas) • Media Relations • Outreach • Parents' Newsletter • Public Events • Streaming Theater • Sustainability at Caltech • Volunteering at Caltech
6.	Mashhad University of Medical Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History • Mission • Overview 	6.	MIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institute facts • MIT mission • Institute history • Visiting MIT • Administration • Office+ Services

Other Iranian universities included just one or two subpages in their About page. It was just Mashhad University of Medical Sciences which included three subpages in its About page. For studied American universities, the maximum number of About sub-pages belonged to the University of Caltech with 16 links. The other universities included six to ten subpages on their About page.

The multifaceted and rich nature of About pages of studied American universities, compared to those of Iranian universities could be an indication of extensive and complex relationship American universities have with their website visitors. American universities utilize their institutional websites as a venue to market their educational services to their prospective students, many of whom are international. A great number of international students each year attempt to apply to American universities; thus, they need to acquire the required information about the offered programs through the official websites of those universities. In Iran, however, students are essentially admitted to undergraduate and graduate programs through a centralized entrance exam administered by the Organization of National Educational Measurement. As a result, applicants have little contact with the prospective universities either in person or via their official websites prior to admission. In addition, a very few of admitted students to Iranian universities come from other countries.

The ample amount of information provided by American universities on their About page might be an indication of their open attitude towards sharing more about their institutes to their website visitors. It could be a sign of their readiness to be more transparent in communicating the responsibilities they have for their students, facilities they provide, their organizational operations, and expectations they have from their students, and overall, their institutional identity.

For Iranian universities, on the other hand, not sharing extensive contemporary information about their organization could be an indication of a brief restricted relationship of those institutions with their clients. It could also be interpreted as an exercise of power and control and lack of willingness to share up-to-date and all-embracing information about the current status and operations of the university, indicating a top-down pattern of interaction between university authorities and their clients.

The country of Iran essentially enjoys a hierarchical culture where domineering and authoritarian patterns of interaction infuses every structure of the society including that of higher education. University authorities are principally advocates of top-down patterns of interaction, not prominently displaying readiness to communicate with their clients in a generous and transparent manner.

In addition, looking at the openings of the About pages of these universities, as manifested in Table 3, some aspects of larger socio-cultural dimensions of the societies these universities are rooted in are revealed. The departure point of Iranian universities to introduce themselves was their history, whereas American universities familiarized themselves to their audience with their current status and the academic vision they outline for their prospective students. The Islamic Republic of Iran is a very ancient country with a magnificent history and civilization. The honor of the glorious past Iranians have used to enjoy has seeped into every corner of people's lives even their use of the contemporary technological advances such as online websites. Top American universities such as Yale or Columbia universities have allocated an extensive part of their About pages to their outstanding histories, however in separately defined pages. They all initiated their About pages with illustrating their current status and their mission statement as to their goal to advance the scholarship of their students.

Among top six Iranian universities, just two of them, i.e., Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, and Mashhad University of Medical Sciences dedicated an explicit part to the mission statement of the university, most probably owing to their attempt to attract international students to their academic programs, trying to conform to international academic norms. The president of the Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, for instance, expressed this very goal in on this page: "FUM is now aiming at placing itself in an outstanding position by paving the way for getting more overseas students together and creating a friendly atmosphere amongst younger generations" recruiting international students from 17 nationalities.



Table 3. The openings of six top Iranian and American universities

Openings			
Top Iranian Universities		Top American Universities	
1	University of Tehran	Rooted in JondiShapur University which goes back over 2,000 years, the University of Tehran (UT) in its traditional form was established seven centuries ago.	1. Harvard University Harvard University is devoted to excellence in teaching, learning, and research, and to developing leaders in many disciplines who make a difference globally.
2	Ferdowsi University of Mashhad	Ferdowsi University of Mashhad (FUM) is a state university named after the great epic poet and scholar Ferdowsi whose Shahnameh (The Book of Kings) is a well-known classical chef-d'oeuvre in Persian literature	2. Princeton University Princeton University is a vibrant community of scholarship and learning that stands in the nation's service and in the service of all nations.
3	Tehran university of medical sciences	This introduction provides basic information about Tehran University of Medical Sciences and Health Services (T.U.M.S.); courses offered, requirements for admission, a flavor of life on the campus, and the academic, sport, and social facilities available	3. Yale University Yale University comprises three major academic components: Yale College (the undergraduate program), the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and the professional schools.
4	ShahidBeheshti University	ShahidBeheshti University (SBU), established in 1959 (The ex- National University of Iran), started its academic life in 1960 with only 174 students in two faculties: Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning and Faculty of Banking and Economics.	4. Columbia University For more than 250 years, Columbia has been a leader in higher education in the nation and around the world
5	Shiraz University	The initial nucleus of Shiraz University was formed in 1946 with the establishment of the junior College of Health which aimed at training specialists in the Medical Sciences during a four year program.	5. Caltech University The mission of the California Institute of Technology is to expand human knowledge and benefit society through research integrated with education
6	Mashhad University of Medical Sciences	Mashhad Faculty of Medicine was officially opened on Nov. 23, 1949 by Dr Zanganeh, the minister of culture.	6. MIT The mission of MIT is to advance knowledge and educate students in science, technology and other areas of scholarship that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century — whether the focus is cancer, energy, economics or literature

After analyzing the content of the About pages of the selected universities, it was found that the existing differences observed in the way top six Iranian and American universities present themselves on their About page could be traced back to larger socio-cultural driving forces operating in those societies.

CONCLUSION

The World Wide Web has modified existing genres (Crowston, and Williams, 1997) giving rise to new genres including home pages, brochures, resources, catalogues, search engines, and games, characterized according to content, form and functionality (Shepherd and Watters, 1999). What matters most for studying and identifying emergent cyber genres is document characteristics and the context in which the document is used (Crowston and Kwasnik, 2004). Whether About pages of the official websites of academic institutions including universities constitute a particular genre requires more comprehensive studies. Nonetheless, this study with its attempt to examine the About pages of top six Iranian and American universities revealed significant differences in the way these universities represented themselves online. Further detailed and comprehensive studies, however, are required to explore such differences in a more thorough manner.

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