BEAUTY BRANDS VERSUS VLOGGERS: EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY ON INFORMATION ADOPTION ON YOUTUBE

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BEAUTY BRANDS VERSUS VLOGGERS: EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY ON INFORMATION ADOPTION ON YOUTUBE

Research in Progress

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Abstract

This research-in-progress paper explores the effects of information source credibility (brands versus vloggers), information type (how-to tutorial versus product demonstration), and viewer characteristics on perceptions of information quality, information usefulness, information satisfaction, and information adoption in the context of YouTube makeup videos. The primary goal of this study is to understand how users process information provided through YouTube videos by brands and vloggers, as well as extend existing models of information adoption that solely focus on information and source characteristics without considering characteristics of the user or viewer. Envisioned future steps in this project are discussed as well as implications for research and practice.

Keywords: Source Credibility, Information Quality, Information Usefulness, Information Adoption, User Characteristics, YouTube, Social Media, Cosmetics Industry

1 Introduction

YouTube, the second largest search engine in the world, generated 9.8 billion views of makeup videos (Pixability, 2014). Increasingly more women are watching beauty related content on YouTube: video views have more than doubled in three years, climbing from 300 million views per month in 2010 to 700 million views per month in 2013. The most popular beauty vloggers have millions of YouTube subscribers to their channels, such as Michelle Phan—the first cosmetics and makeup vlogger in the US—who has more than 7 million subscribers and 1 billion video views.

Because of the popularity of these beauty vloggers, brands—such as L’Oreal Paris—have begun to understand the influence of these beauty vloggers. Although brands currently control a mere 3% of YouTube’s cosmetics-related videos, recent marketing research reports show that make-up brands are growing their investments for marketing through YouTube channels (Pixability, 2014) to improve their presence on YouTube among the influence of beauty vloggers. However, do these massive amounts of views translate into brand or vlogger influence and do viewers act on the content or suggestions in these videos?

Despite the growing popularity of make-up videos on YouTube and the increasing use of this channel by make-up brands, no studies were identified that explore viewer behavior in the context of the cosmetics industry. Although various studies on online consumer behavior have studied social media such as Facebook (Kim et al., 2010) or Twitter (Johnson and Yang, 2009), we identified only a single study regarding YouTube as a source of information on the H1N1 Influenza Pandemic (Pandey et al., 2010). However, none of the above have focused on how viewers process information from videos and how their information processing is affected by source credibility and in turn influences the user’s intention to act on the content or suggestions from the video.

Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research question: What is the effect of the information’s source credibility (brands vs. vloggers) on information quality, information usefulness,
**Source Credibility and Information Adoption on YouTube**

Information satisfaction, and information adoption in the context of YouTube makeup videos? In addition to analyzing perceived characteristics of the information embedded in the video, this study moves beyond existing IS studies on information adoption in organizational settings (e.g., Sussman and Siegal, 2003; Wixom and Todd, 2005) by also incorporating viewer characteristics, such as prior knowledge and information relevance.

Therefore, this study offers two contributions to existing research on information adoption. First, by analyzing information adoption in the context of YouTube make-up videos, we shift to an analysis of source credibility and information quality in a voluntary, online environment compared to studies focusing on organizational settings. Second, by incorporating viewer characteristics—prior knowledge and relevance—we extend existing models that have solely centered on characteristics of the source and the information itself thereby overlooking the interactions between the viewer and the source/information.

Beyond the abovementioned contributions to theory, this study is expected to generate practical implications by shedding light on the credibility of brands versus vloggers in the context of YouTube as well as reveal which types of product-related videos—how-to tutorials versus product demonstration—are most likely to result in information adoption.

The remainder of this research-in-progress paper is organized as follows. First, we review the prior literature on source credibility, information quality, and information adoption as well as literature pertaining to viewer characteristics. These theoretical foundations will be used to formulate a set of hypotheses regarding the interplay of these source/information and viewer characteristics. Subsequently, we present the hypothesized, research model, envisioned research approach, experimental manipulations, and measurement scales. Finally, we discuss future steps of this study and expected contributions to research and practice.

## 2 Literature Review

In this section, we review the literature regarding the key constructs underpinning this study, namely: perceived source and information characteristics (source credibility and information quality), viewer characteristics (relevance and prior knowledge), and key dependent variables in this study (information usefulness, user satisfaction, information adoption).

### 2.1 Source and Information Characteristics

The two key characteristics of the source and information that will be explored in this study are source credibility and information quality.

The concept of credibility has previously been studied in psychology by McGuire (1968), who studied how intrinsic attributes affect the credibility of a source. McGuire analyzed intrinsic attributes such as, trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness and their effects on credibility and ultimately someone’s attitude towards said source. It was found that high source credibility induces greater positive attitude toward the position advocated (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). Specifically, these previous studies found that high source credibility leads to higher persuasion than low source credibility; hence source credibility plays a key role in the transmission of information and subsequent decisions to adopt content or suggestions provided by the source.

Although these original studies were conducted in offline environments, recent studies have extended source credibility into the online environment. For instance, Metzger et al. (2003) studied the differentiation of source, message, and media credibility in an online environment. Hong (2006) studied the perceived source credibility of websites regarding message features and structural features. However, these works have been largely exploratory in terms of developing measures of media credibility for online media rather than exploring impacts on information adoption.
For the present study, the following definition of source credibility is retained: “the extent to which an information source is perceived to be believable, competent, and trustworthy by information recipients” (Bhattacherjee et al., 2006).

The other key characteristic in this study is information quality, a multi-dimensional concept. In what follows, we will discuss some of the various conceptualizations developed in different papers. For instance, McKinney et al. (2002) found that information quality has two sub-dimensions, which are information persuasiveness and information completeness. According to Taylor’s (1986) definition of quality, information quality encompasses the dimensions of accuracy, comprehensiveness, currency, reliability, and validity. The latter is similar to Klein’s (2002) five-dimensional conceptualization of information quality as: accuracy, completeness, relevance, timeliness and amount of data. Naumann and Rolker (2000) discovered three main dimensions underpinning information quality including the perception of the user about the information, the information itself (completeness), and the process of accessing the information.

In the present study, we will analyze information quality as a subjective factor determined by the user’s personal view, experience and his background in line with the suggestion of Strong and Wang (1997) who argue that information quality cannot be assessed independently of the people who use the information. Therefore, in line with this subjective approach to conceptualizing information quality as well as appreciating its multi-dimensional nature, we adopt the following definition of information quality by Sussman and Siegal (2003): “the extent to which users think that information is relevant, timely, accurate, and complete”.

2.2 Viewer Characteristics

In addition to the two characteristics of the source and information, this study also incorporates two characteristics of the viewer (or user), namely information relevance (or interest) and prior knowledge.

Information relevance or interest has long been studied to determine its effect on attention, engagement, and cognitive processing (Sadoski, 2001; Deci, 1992; Ryan, 1991). Given its direct link to engagement and attention, and these dimensions vary by individual, it is plausible that information relevance or interest may display a moderating role on other relationships found in the context of video viewing and the end goal of information adoption.

Second, prior knowledge—a user characteristic that refers to a person’s awareness of and information about a topic, product, or technology (Rogers, 2003)—influences people’s perception of the attributes of that product. Existing studies have found evidence for relationships between knowledge and perceived innovation attributes, including relative advantage (Edmonson et al., 2003), risk (i.e. uncertainty) (Feder and O’Mara, 1981), as well as observability and trialability (Pagani, 2004) of a technology. Furthermore, prior knowledge appears to moderate core relationships found in the processing of information such as the adoption of a new technology or in learning environments (Kim and Park, 2011; Dunlosky et al. 2013).

Similarly, one can anticipate that a viewer’s prior knowledge would interact with his or her perception of source credibility and information quality in the context of YouTube makeup videos.

2.3 Dependent Variables: information Usefulness, Information Satisfaction, and Information Adoption

In addition to the information- and viewer-centric independent variables, this study incorporates the following three dependent variables, namely information usefulness, information satisfaction, and information adoption.

Information usefulness has been studied across various settings including health (Pandey A. et al., 2010) and organizational contexts (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). Similar to the concept of usefulness in the technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989), research on information has identified information usefulness as an important driver of information adoption (Satzinger and Olfman, 1995). In this study,
the following definition is retained: “information usefulness refers to the degree to which the information is perceived to be valuable, informative and helpful” (Sussman and Siegal, 2003).

Information satisfaction is the equivalent of user satisfaction in IS and consumer research, which is largely a function of the effectiveness of the interaction of a user with a technology or product (Bailey and Pearson, 1983; Cameron, 1986; Oliver and DeSarbo, 1988). Prior research links user satisfaction to attitude and attitude change (c.f., Melone, 1990; McGuire, 1969; Ajzen, 1988). In this study, we define information satisfaction as “a person’s feelings or attitudes toward a particular informational message” (adapted from Wixom and Todd, 2005).

Finally, information adoption—our ultimate dependent variable—has been previously studied in both offline (Winter, 1975) and online (Watts and Zhang, 2008) settings. We will mostly leverage the literature on content and information adoption in computer-mediated communication contexts, such as Sussman and Siegal (2003)’s study about email information adoption and Watts and Zhang (2008) study of information adoption in online communities. In line with Watts and Zhang (2008), we define information adoption as “the extent to which people accept content that they are presented with as meaningful, after assessing its validity”.

3 Research Model and Hypotheses

Given the limited space available, Table 1 summarizes the hypotheses underpinning our research model and provides references to supporting research. Figure 1 visualizes all hypothesized relationships in the overall research model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis Number</th>
<th>Hypothesis Description</th>
<th>Supporting Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>Source credibility positively affects information usefulness</td>
<td>Sussman and Siegal (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>Source credibility positively affects information quality</td>
<td>Chaiken and Maheswaran (1994); Wood, Kallgren, and Preisler (1985); Watts and Zhang (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Information quality positively affects information usefulness</td>
<td>Wood et al. (1985); Sussman and Siegal (2003); Jin et al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>Information relevance will have a positive moderating effect on the relationship between source credibility and information usefulness</td>
<td>Petty and Cacioppo (1981); Sadoski (2001); Deci (1992); Ryan (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>Prior knowledge will have a negative moderating effect on the relationship between information quality and information usefulness</td>
<td>Winter (1975); Park and Lessig (1981); Johnson and Russo (1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>Information usefulness positively affects information satisfaction</td>
<td>Wixom and Todd (2005); McKinney et al. (2002); Jin et al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7</td>
<td>Source credibility positively affects information satisfaction</td>
<td>Jin et al. (2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H8</td>
<td>Information usefulness positively impacts information adoption</td>
<td>Sussman and Siegal (2003); Davis (1989)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H9</td>
<td>Information satisfaction positively impacts information adoption</td>
<td>Wixom and Todd (2005)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Proposed Hypotheses and supporting sources
4 Methodology

For this study, we will adopt a 2 (Brands vs. Vloggers) * 2 (Product presentations vs. Tutorials) experimental design. Hence, participants will be randomly assigned to one of four videos prior to answering a research question.

4.1 Source and Video (Message) Selection

For the selection of vloggers, a selection will be made based on popularity as defined by total number of views and channel subscribers as well as experience as determined by the number of videos and date of joining YouTube. However, vloggers that have established official contracts with brands will be eliminated so as not to undermine the distinction between the information source—namely brand versus vloggers.

For the selection of official make-up brands, we will use a ranking generated by Pixability (2014) where they ranked cosmetics brands based on the total number of videos posted on YouTube.

For the content selection, we classify the videos into one of two main categories (see Table 2). Although two additional video types exist, hauls (showing off recently-purchased items) and vlogger’s way of life (aimed at creating intimate relations with subscribers), these are not used by brands, hence, are inappropriate for comparing the two source types. For each cell, we will select a video from the selected vlogger or brand.
Source Credibility and Information Adoption on YouTube

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product presentations</th>
<th>Tutorials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand</td>
<td>“How to” videos published by brands which show how to apply a particular product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vloggers</td>
<td>Similar Do It Yourself videos that show how to get a desired look (e.g., Kim Kardashian Make-up)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Video Categories and Descriptions

4.2 Constructs and Measures

The constructs and measures as used in this study are presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Definition (in this study)</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sample Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of the Source Credibility</td>
<td>The extent to which an information source (brand or vlogger) is perceived to be believable, competent, and trustworthy by viewers.</td>
<td>Bhattacherjee et al. (2006)</td>
<td>“The person/brand who published the video was knowledgeable on this topic”. “The person/brand who published the video was trustworthy”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Quality (adapted)</td>
<td>A viewer’s assessment of whether the information in the video is accurate, valid, and timely.</td>
<td>Teo, Srivastava, and Jiang (2008)</td>
<td>“Information provided by this video is accurate”. “Information provided by this video is reliable”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewer Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance/Topic Interest (adapted)</td>
<td>The viewer’s level of interest in beauty and cosmetics.</td>
<td>McQuarrie and Munson (1992); Koufaris and Marios (2002)</td>
<td>“Important-unimportant”. “Irrelevant-relevant”. “Means a lot to me—means nothing to me”. “Unexciting-exciting”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior knowledge (adapted)</td>
<td>The viewer’s familiarity, associations, and knowledge with/about cosmetics</td>
<td>Roehm, Pullins, and Harper (2002)</td>
<td>“Please rate your knowledge of makeup, as compared to the average person’s knowledge of makeup”. &quot;One of the least knowledgeable&quot;-&quot;one of the most knowledgeable&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent Variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Usefulness (adapted)</td>
<td>The extent to which a viewer believes that a specific video would enhance her effectiveness in using or applying a particular product.</td>
<td>Pavlou and Fygenson (2006)</td>
<td>“This video would be useful for getting valuable information about this product”. “This video would enhance my effectiveness in getting useful information about makeup product”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Adoption (adapted)</td>
<td>The viewer’s intentions towards adopting particular advocated ideas and behaviors in the video.</td>
<td>Sussman and Siegal (2003)</td>
<td>“How likely are you to act on the content of this video”? “To what extent does the content of the video motivate you to take action? Not at all motivated – Totally motivated”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Constructs and Measures
5 Discussion and Conclusion

Research on social media has proliferated in recent years, however, the majority of prior studies have focused on the message without regard for either the source or the recipient of that message. We attempt to overcome this gap in the literature through the study in progress. Hence, the foremost contribution to theory will be the provision of a unified view on the underlying mechanism of information adoption, one that incorporates characteristics of both the source/information as well as the user and explains their associated effects on information adoption.

Furthermore, results – which will be presented at the conference - will highlight the extent to which mediation occurs between constructs that have previously been studied in isolation, such as the relationships between source credibility, information usefulness, and information adoption (Sussman and Siegal, 2003).

In regards to implications for practice, a clear contribution will be made in identifying which of the two prevalent, product-centered video types – product demonstrations and how-to tutorials – is more effective in leading to the viewer’s adoption of the communicated information. Accordingly, a brand can invest in the creation of such digital assets, as they may ultimately lead to greater product sales.

Lastly, a two-fold analysis of source credibility will reveal whether (i) commercial brands are more or less credible than individuals when it comes to product information dissemination, and (ii) the relative effect of credibility on perceptions of information quality, information usefulness, and information satisfaction.

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