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Do People Trust Information from Social Media?

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ABSTRACT

Social media may have started with the simple notion of casually connecting friends and relatives, but from those origins, have become complex of overlapping nexus involving every sort of human activity imaginable. Users of social media have shown themselves to be a contradiction- both savvy and gullible in their consumption and transfer of information. The nature of information quality in the context of social media is mostly unstudied and consequently, mostly not understood. The quality of information moving through social media, and the social media users' confidence in the quality of the information, are vital factors to be studied in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of such an important global phenomenon. This research investigates users' trust in information obtained from social media.

Keywords

Social media, information quality, trust.

INTRODUCTION

The usage of social media has increased rapidly in recent years. People are using social media for many purposes beyond the intended original 'social' component. More businesses have also noticed the influence of social media in people's daily lives, and are investing ample resources in an attempt to utilize social media as a means by which to reach out to potential customers. There is a vast quantity of information traveling through different types of social media. However, the quality of the information in social media and its impact on social media users has yet to be theoretically studied. This study investigates whether users of social media trust information they obtained from social media.

As a new field of study, there is serious lack of theory in social media and its impact on user behavior. Particularly, unlike organizational information systems, the source of information in social media could come from anywhere and anybody, therefore, there is fundamental lack of information quality assurance in social media. Thus, there is a need for a study of understanding information quality in social media.

BACKGROUND

Social media

Participation in social networks has grown exponentially over the last decade, blossoming from use chiefly by young, technologically savvy users to now including essentially every demographic. A handful of the most popular social networks boast literally hundreds of millions of users. The activities of people involved in social networking and the information they obtain from social media have the potential to influence users' attitudes and behavior. There are different types of social media, such as blogs, microblogs, social networks, social shopping sites, in addition to other Web 2.0 sites, such as YouTube and Flickr. The following is a list of the types of social media and examples of each (Liang & Turban, 2012):

- Blogs, wikis, microblogs (Twitter, Plurk)
- Social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Presentation sites (YouTube, Flickr)
- Social shopping Web sites (Kactoos)
- Group buying Web sites (Groupon)

Trust

Trust is an important factor that has the potential to influence a user's perception of any system, and further impact a user's behavior, e. g. , a consumer's trust of an e-commerce website may lead to intent to purchase. Through its focus on building relationships and fostering interaction, social media can serve as a channel to help users and consumers overcome their reluctance (Chaney, 2013). Users of social media often seek information from trusted sites and other trusted people. Of particular interest is a study of how much people trust recommendations and advice from other people online, whether it will have an impact on their behavior. In the management literature, trust is a set of specific beliefs with the integrity, benevolence and ability of another party (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Trust has been included in many management and information systems studies, such as organizational value creation (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998), information systems group performance (K. M. Nelson & Coopriider, 1996), online transactions (Chang, Cheung, & Lai, 2005; Gefen et al., 2003; Gefen & Straub, 2004; Pavlou & Gefen, 2004), and knowledge sharing in virtual communities (Ridings, Gefen, & Arinze, 2002). Trust can create and maintain exchange relationships, which may lead to sharing knowledge of good quality (Blau, 1964).

Information quality

Concerns for the quality of information have been studied both from the academic and practical perspectives in the last couple of decades together with the development and widely used applications of information systems, such as accounting information systems, decision support systems (DSS), enterprise research planning (ERP), and more recently in Internet related fields like e-commerce, and m-commerce. However, there is no current theoretical study in the social media area regarding information quality from users' perspectives; most studies are either practitioner based without strong theory support or focus on business, not from social media users' perspectives. The proposed study will fill this research gap. Although there is no one standard definition for information quality, this study will use the commonly accepted and well-tested dimensions, which are: accuracy, timeliness, completeness, format, and consistency (Ballou & Pazer, 1982, 1985, 1987; Ballou, Wang, Pazer, & Tayi, 1993; R. R. Nelson, Wixom, & Todd, 2005; Wang & Strong, 1996; Wixom & Todd, 2005). The ultimate goal of having high quality information is to provide useful information to its users (Huang, Lee, & Wang, 1999). Therefore, this study will investigate whether the social media user trust information from social media, and whether their perceptions of information quality will impact their perceived usefulness of the information from social media.

METHODOLOGY

A large scaled survey will be used as the method of data collection. People that have had experience in using any type of social media would be the population of the study. The survey questionnaire will be distributed through different social media networks by open invitations. Control variables such as age, gender, and occupation will be used in order to distinguish different respondent groups and test whether there are any differences in the responses among different groups.

Data analysis will use a two-step approach to assess the reliability and validity of the measures. The first step involves the analysis of the measurement model; the second step tests the structural relationships among latent constructs. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) will be applied to assess the construct validity of components proposed in the research model. The proposed structural model will be tested to see whether it reflects the assumed linear causal relationships among the constructs. The model fit indicators will be used to accept or modify the research model. From the results of the data analysis, the research question will be answered. A discussion section will be used to provide additional insights into the meanings of the research findings. Finally, this study's contributions to the theory and practice will be included. Because of the primitive stage of social media academic research, this study is likely to have contribution to theory building in the area of social media information quality. It is also likely to provide practical implications to social media users, developers, and social commerce businesses.

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