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Understanding Users' Ask Intention on Paid Q&A Platform from the Perspective of Impression Management

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1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Online paid Q&A platform is one of the knowledge payment platforms which has become popular in recent years. To attract askers to ask questions, askers usually disclose personal information to build image and increase credibility^[1], which is called impression management where users can take text and picture information as effective ways of showing ideal image. It is worth noting that previous research about answerers' self-image on paid Q&A platforms is limited to objective data displayed on their accounts such as the number of followers and likes, rather than the information proactively disclosed by the answerers themselves including texts and pictures^[2, 3]. What's more, very little research has considered the attribute of knowledge that the askers are seeking, which is one of the most important factors that affect which kind of answerers will be chosen. Particularly, although some factors that influence the ask intention have been proposed in prior studies^[2, 4], there is a lack of research digging into whether there exists any difference in such effects under different types of knowledge sought by askers.

On this basis, our study aims to fill these two gaps by analyzing the congruence between answerers' proactively disclosed information and their provided knowledge. Such congruence shows the suitability between answerers' self-image and knowledge sought by askers^[5]. Thus, we propose the following research questions: (1) How does the congruence between the attribute of knowledge sought by askers and the answerers' self-image reflected from the text and picture information disclosed by themselves affect the ask intention? (2) For different types of knowledge sought by the askers, will the above congruence affect the ask intention in a different way?

2. THEORY AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Based on the information management, the hypotheses and research framework are proposed herein (Figure 1).

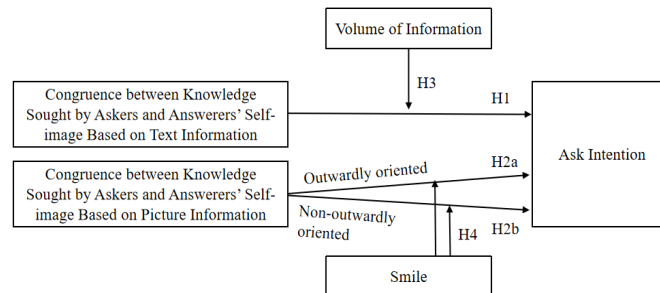


Figure 1. Research framework

This study constructed a cross-sectional dataset with 9,887 answerers on Weibo Q&A platform, which is one of the largest online paid Q&A communities in China, to test hypotheses through a Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial regression model.

3. RESULTS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

This study observed some valuable and interesting findings: (1) For all the answerers, the congruence between the biography and the topic has a positive impact on the askers' willingness to ask questions, with the length of the biography

having a substitution effect on it. (2) For answerers under the ‘outwardly oriented’ topic, the congruence between the avatar and the topic has a positive impact on the askers’ willingness to ask questions. For answerers under the ‘non-outwardly oriented’ topic, the congruence between the avatar and the topic has a negative impact on the askers’ willingness to ask questions. (3) If the avatar contains a smile, it will strengthen the influence of the congruence between the avatar and the topic on the askers’ willingness to ask questions.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS

The present research makes several novel theoretical contributions. First of all, to the best of our knowledge, we are one of the first to extend impression management from traditional social media context to online paid Q&A platforms^[1], exploring the impact of impression management when presenting the individual information disclosed by themselves on the online paid Q&A platform. Secondly, previous literature mainly applied image congruence to marketing, focusing on exploring the congruence between consumer image and brand image^[6]. Our study further extends the image congruence to the knowledge payment platforms, linking user image with the context and exploring the influence of answerer image congruence on askers’ willingness to ask questions. We also find that the self-image congruence effects vary on the type of knowledge. Finally, the positive effect of self-image congruence on performance found in previous research does not always exist. When the importance of the visual under the topic is low and the self-image congruence is deliberately emphasized by the answerers, it will lead to a decrease in credibility due to ‘non-compliant behavior’. For the practical implications, it provides guidance to answerers on how to effectively disclose information to attract attention. From the perspective of platform, a recommendation mechanism for the answerers can be established based on their disclosed information so that the traffic of the answerers who can increase the askers’ willingness to ask questions can be increased, thereby increasing the probability of being asked and improving the user activity.

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