Are the “Best Answers” in Online Question-Answering (Q&A) Sites Really Best?

TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

Online question-answering (Q&A) sites are platforms for askers to seek information by posting questions and for answerers to contribute their knowledge by answering questions. Today, Q&A sites’ role is not simply providing answers for only askers but establishing knowledge creating and sharing communities for a broader audience (Anderson et al. 2012). With more and more people relying on online information, Q&A sites have become one of the important online sources for such information. According to the websites’ strategies, the “best answers” selected by askers are prominent on the page. Other online users or information seekers tend to rely on the “best answers” more often than they rely on other answers. Thus, reliable and unbiased judgments by users of the “best answers” are very important.

When dealing with a substantial amount of information, people often rely on heuristics to make judgment (Wu and Cheng 2011). Their judgment processes tend to be influenced by psychological biases, such as anchoring bias and confirmation bias (Hagafors and Brehmer 1983; Tversky and Kahneman 1974). A bias is a systematic deviation from a fact or desired result (Kahneman 2011) and results in a propensity to make decisions when being impacted by some underlying beliefs (Chira et al. 2008). In Q&A sites, when askers make judgment on the “best answers,” they are likely to rely on their heuristics. They may exhibit anchoring bias and confirmation bias in the process.

However, to the authors’ knowledge, a research gap still exists in investigating askers’ biases and their effects on the judgment of the “best answers.” This study develops a research model to investigate anchoring bias and confirmation bias and their impacts on source credibility, information quality, and judgment of the “best answers.”

The objectives of this study are three-fold: (1) to identify whether askers exhibit anchoring bias and confirmation bias in Q&A sites; (2) to investigate sources of the two biases; (3) to examine the influences of the two biases on askers’ judgments of the “best answers.” The current study will have both theoretical and practical implications. It will enrich extant IS research on decision makers’ biases and judgment. The findings will help not only online Q&A sites but also other knowledge-related online communities to understand their users’ information seeking behavior and decision making processes.

References


