



Compatible quality of social media content: Conceptualization, measurement, and affordances



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ABSTRACT

Building and maintaining favorable social media relationships with customers require that organizations produce quality content that fits customers' needs. So far, little if any research has conceptualized and measured this kind of content quality in the context of social media. Therefore, this study proposes and empirically examines a new construct, compatible quality of social media content, which adds to knowledge by expanding prior online content quality research beyond the traditional focus on non-fit quality beliefs. The results of structural equation modeling of responses collected from a sample of active social media users reveal at least three worth noting findings. First, the study confirmed the multidimensionality of compatible quality of social media content, which encompasses reflective, stimulated, practiced, and advocated components. Second, there was equivalence in the measurements of the studied constructs and the structural weights of the proposed network of relationships across the different gender and experience subgroups. Third, compatible quality of social media content was found to influence continued interest, active confidence, and feedback openness. The practical and research implications of these results are discussed.

1. Introduction

Approaching social media content quality from the perceptions of customers' viewpoints is important for organizations to build and maintain favorable online relationships with their social media clients. The usual focus of organizations on quality as a technical materiality is relevant but not sufficient to explain uses and impacts of digital artifacts (Markus & Silver, 2008) because the notion of quality is best understood within its context of use (Harris & Chaney, 1969). Some empirical studies have shown that capitalizing on affordances of the content of an emergent digital technology is contingent upon many factors including the level of its quality (Setia, Venkatesh, & Joglekar, 2013) and the fit of the same with customers' needs (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995). One would expect, therefore, a given organization could improve the relationship with its online audience by producing quality social media content that matches users' attitudes, preferences, and abilities. By doing so, the organization could take the produced content beyond the simple idea of quality as a technical materiality to the domain of the multidimensional design of customers-oriented content quality; a move that could trigger a long and honest relationship between the organization and its social media customers.

In theory and practice, the general notion of content quality (a key dimension of online quality) continues to be worthy of investigation. The substantial and growing number of research studies that have

examined the topic in recent years attests to this interest (Aladwani, 2013, 2014a; Aladwani & Palvia, 2002; Dang et al., 2014; DeLone & McLean, 2003; Figueiredo et al., 2013; Loiacono et al., 2007; Lukyanenko, Parsons, & Wiersma, 2014; Palmer, 2002; et al., 2012; Tan, Benbasat, & Cenfetelli, 2013). A quick review of this useful literature reveals a few notable observations. First, previous measurements of content quality have adopted a non-fit view by focusing on technically oriented, non-situational measures. Second, most studies have focused on the unidimensional conceptualization and measurement of content quality beliefs and have downplayed the other possible dimensions of the concept like feelings and actions. Third, prior research has so far paid limited efforts to explore whether content quality structure and measurement parameters would or would not be precarious in a particular group of respondents. Finally, it is not clear yet how a multidimensional, fit-based content quality construct influences online relationships with customers.

To address the above gaps in prior research, the present paper introduces "compatible quality of social media content", which represents a new conceptualization and measurement of content quality in the context of social networking services. Although some useful studies have discussed content quality in social media in general (Aladwani, 2014a; Dang et al., 2014; Figueiredo et al., 2013; Lukyanenko et al., 2014), not a single study exists – as far as we can tell – that expands the issue beyond the limits of content quality beliefs to the wider domain of

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other relevant attitudinal types, treats the issue as a fit concept, and examines its affordances. Building on task-technology fit theory (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995) and on the tripartite view of attitudes (e.g., Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960), we define “compatible quality of social media content” as the attitudes of an individual user toward how well social media content supports his or her needs. We argue that the new construct opens a fruitful avenue for exploring the evolving structure and function of quality in the domain of social media content. Re-conceptualizing content quality to account for other human processes, actions, and contexts will (1) enable a better depiction of the concept, and (2) encourage theory building in the area.

This article, therefore, tries to make at least four contributions to the information systems literature. First, this study follows the suggestions of the task-technology fit theory and the tripartite view of attitudes to conceptualize and measure compatible quality of social media content. The compatible quality construct takes into account users’ motives behind consuming the content, characteristics of the content, and individual users’ abilities. The article also differentiates between reflective, stimulated, practiced, and advocated quality types. Second, the paper examines the structure of the main components of compatible quality. Third, it utilizes an invariance analysis to test whether there is or there is not equivalence in the proposed measurements across gender and experience subgroups. Finally, it builds on the theory of affordances (Gibson, 1977) to analyze potentialities of compatible social media content quality including continued interest, active confidence, and feedback openness.

The rest of the manuscript is organized as follows. In the next section, the paper summarizes the conceptualization of the construct. Research method, measurement as well as affordances results, and conclusions are discussed in sections 3, 4, and 5, respectively.

2. Conceptualization

2.1. Content quality: from accuracy beliefs to contextualized attitudes

Several research disciplines including computer science and information systems have addressed the notion of content quality and provided a plethora of relevant definitions. In the computer science field, for example, the concern of early studies on data/information quality was on finding and correcting errors and on quantifying quality attributes. Recently, this field has shifted closer towards a more perceptual or user-focused measurement of quality (i.e., “fitness for use”). Quality attributes in this stream of research represent content stimuli that drive how individual users perceive and react to them. Although this stream of research “presumes” the issue of user context, its “explicit” conceptual and measurement approaches center on users’ beliefs about the intrinsic data or information quality characteristics of the examined object(s). The articles by Zmud (1978) and Wang (1996) signify this stream of research, which has its roots in data/database accuracy research.

In the information systems field, website content quality has become at the center of researchers’ interest after the advent of the popular internet and e-commerce applications. Aladwani and Palvia (2002), for example, defined the general notion of website quality as “users’ evaluation of web site’s features meeting users’ needs and reflecting overall excellence of the web site” (p.469). The authors considered users’ beliefs about content quality attributes (e.g., accuracy, clarity, conciseness, etc.) as an important component in their conceptualization. Many other authors have also adhered to the beliefs-oriented view (Aladwani, 2002, 2013; Barnes & Vidgen, 2002; DeLone & McLean, 2003; Loiacono et al., 2007; Palmer, 2002; Parasuraman et al., 2005; Tan et al., 2013). Like earlier quality research, this stream of research also assumes the issue of user context (fitness for use) in a limited fashion. In this study, we try to find other ways to expand upon this somewhat narrow view of content quality.

One way to expand prior content quality research is through

defining it as a fit construct. The notion of fit has been interpreted and applied by scholars to explain many information technology phenomena (Goodhue, Quillard, & Rockart, 1988; McKeen, Guimaraes, & Wetherbe, 1994; Tait & Vessey, 1988; Tiwana, 2009). One popular interpretation of this concept was introduced by the theory of task-technology fit (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995). Overall, the theory argues that an information technology should be utilized and should match one’s task(s) to show a positive influence on one’s job performance and effectiveness (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995). It defines fit as the “correspondence between task requirements, individual abilities, and the functionality of the technology” (Goodhue & Thompson, 1995; p. 218). The theory clearly highlights the importance of identifying the activities an individual user might carry out as well as the features of the technology that help the user in finishing those activities. In other words, the theory emphasizes the interaction among the task, technology, and individual user.

This interaction delimits the nature of what we call “compatible quality of social media content”, which focuses on valued content that fulfill certain users’ needs. Therefore, elements that are considered as important for the quality of data/information such as accuracy are also considered as important in the context of social media content but not sufficient to help us understand to what purpose users’ interpret and act upon quality signs of the content. In this study, compatible quality of social media content describes the fit between users’ needs, users’ abilities, and characteristics of the content. We, therefore, define compatible quality of social media content as the attitudes of an individual user toward how well social media content supports his or her needs. Stated differently, the analysis of users’ needs for excellent content quality should be channeled through multiple attitudinal avenues that include users’ perceived, felt, and exploited value of the examined content. This view, therefore, elevates social media content far beyond the idea of simple beliefs about technically oriented content quality to the domain of multidimensional design of customers-oriented content quality.

2.2. Components of compatible quality

Besides building on task-technology theory, this study adopts the tripartite view of human attitudes to model the components of compatible quality of social media content. According to Rosenberg and Hovland (1960), “attitudes are predispositions to respond to some class of stimuli with certain classes of response and designate the three major types of response as cognitive, affective, and behavioral” (p. 3). Greenwald (1968) argued in favor of treating these dimensions as parts of one whole because each one of them is acquired and formed differently. Furthermore, Zanna and Rempel (1988) affirmed that these three components have been treated as separate by most attitude theories. The model has enjoyed strong theoretical as well as empirical support from many scholars (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Therefore, we think the tripartite schema could be used as a basis for understanding compatible quality.

Unfortunately, our review of past online quality research (see Table 1) shows that no online quality study has conceptualized quality (or any of its subcomponents) as a tripartite attitudinal construct within a task-technology framework. In another review of prior online quality research by Ladhari (2010), the author found that prior studies focused more on functional attributes and less on outcome aspects. The concept of online quality in this functional-focused research has been treated more often as a cognitive belief and hardly ever as an affective feeling (Aladwani, 2014b) or as a behavioral outcome (Tan et al., 2013). The three conceptualizations of quality are indeed different. One’s beliefs about quality are based on one’s reflections on and perceptions of the quality reality, whereas one exhibits no conscious control over feelings about quality. Behavior towards quality, on the other hand, is a tendency to take an action with respect to a given quality target.

This study further differentiates between two types of behaviors

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