Telematics and Informatics xxx (xxxx) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Telematics and Informatics

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tele

The perceived importance of credibility cues for the assessment of the trustworthiness of online information by visitors of health-related websites: The role of individual factors

Hana Machackova*, David Smahel

Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Credibility
Trustworthiness
E-health
Motivation

ABSTRACT

The varying quality of information available on the internet has increased the need for the assessment of the trustworthiness of online information. This need can be even more pressing in the consideration of information that has the potential to harm one's health. This study examined the perceived importance of credibility cues for the assessment of the trustworthiness of online information among visitors of websites focused on nutrition, dieting, and fitness. Using cross-sectional survey data from 695 Czech respondents aged 13–62 (84% females), four credibility components were identified. The most important for the assessment of trustworthiness was reported as the surface component, followed by external sources, author-oriented component, and feedback. An examination of the links with individual factors showed that the perceived importance of these components was linked to demographics, online experiences, and the motivation for visiting the websites. The surface component was more important for women and those with the motivation to lose weight; external sources were more important for those with higher education, author-oriented component was more important for those who are more active online and who have motivation to lose weight and improve their health; and feedback was more important for visitors with weight-loss motivation. The findings are discussed with regard to the role of diverse credibility cues for trustworthiness assessment, inter-individual differences, and the implications for praxis.

1. Introduction

The internet is a source of free and easily accessible health-related information which is commonly sought by users who strive to change or maintain their nutrition, fitness habits, or general health. The use of the internet to search for health information is quite prevalent (Fox and Dugan, 2013). However, due to the enormous diversity of online sources, the process of the online search is usually guided by the individual preferences of the users. As described by the Rational Choice Theory, people act upon their own preferences and goals, and choose what is best (in terms of cost-benefits) for their interest, which also applies for information searches (see e.g. Prabha et al., 2007). Thus, if users search for health-related information, their search can be affected by their specific motivation, like whether they want to improve their health or if they only focus on weight loss. Moreover, since the amount of information available online is almost unlimited, people cope with this abundance of information by following the principle of "satisficing": they stop when their needs are met in a satisfactory way, even though they did not necessarily find the best information

* Corresponding author at: Institute for Research on Children, Youth and Family, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Jostova 10, 60200 Brno, Czech Republic.
E-mail address: hmachack@fss.muni.cz (H. Machackova).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2018.03.021
Received 16 November 2017; Received in revised form 28 March 2018; Accepted 29 March 2018
0736-5853/ © 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

or review all of the sources (Bawden and Robinson, 2009; Prabha et al., 2007). In practice, this can be an example of limiting the search to the first links provided by the search engines (Eysenbach and Köhler, 2002).

In essence, users must choose which information is good for them. One of the factors that influences the selection of information (e.g., diet plans) is whether it is deemed trustworthy. The question of trustworthiness is highly pronounced, especially for health-oriented information, since the use of low-quality online information might be detrimental to one's health. Therefore, the assessment of what can be trusted and consequently used for personal benefits remains an issue of importance for internet users. This assessment process has been addressed in research on online credibility and online trustworthiness in general (Metzger and Flanagin, 2008, 2013; McKnight et al., 2002; Riegelsberger et al., 2005; Wathen and Burkell, 2002) and in relation to the credibility of health information specifically (Beldad et al., 2010; Kim, 2016; Ma and Atkin, 2017). This article focuses on the assessment of trustworthiness among visitors of websites oriented towards nutrition, dieting, and fitness, for whom using untrustworthy information could lead to harmful consequences and health risks. Our aim is to examine the perceived importance of diverse credibility components in the assessment of the trustworthiness of the online health-related information among these users. We want to further deepen current knowledge by examining the roles that individual factors, including demographics, online behavior, and experiences, and specific types of motivation, play in this assessment.

1.1. Trustworthiness of online information

Trustworthiness is considered a crucial dimension of credibility (together with the perceived expertise of the source) (see e.g., Beldad et al., 2010; Chen and Dhillon, 2003; McKnight et al., 2002; Metzger, 2007; Metzger and Flanagin, 2013). The assessment of information as trustworthy reflects the confidence that the information can be trusted. Trust is an interdisciplinary multidimensional construct (see e.g., Beldad et al., 2010; McKnight et al., 2002) that is defined as the intention to accept vulnerability and possess a positive expectation of the trustee's actions (Colquitt et al., 2007).

Prior research showed that trust in online health information is an important factor which plays a role in seeking it and its usage (Lemire et al., 2008; Ye, 2010). The assessment of trustworthiness is partially based on personal experience and skills but can be derived from diverse cues related to the information. These trust-invoking cues can be related to the information itself, or they can be based on the perceived familiarity or similarity with the author (Fan et al., 2014). Thus, there are specific cues directly related to the message (e.g., how text is structured), to the context of the message (e.g., quality of web design), and to the source (e.g., authors' expertise, or their values), but there are also clues related to the users themselves (e.g., predisposing characteristics such as their motivations, preferences, opinions, attitudes) (Sundar, 2008; Wathen and Burkell, 2002).

The importance of credibility cues in how we assess and judge information was elaborated upon in Metzger's (2007) Dual Processing Model of Credibility Assessment, which is based on prior information processing models, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and the Heuristic-Systematic Model (Chaiken, 1980; Todorov et al., 2002). In essence, these models depict how people process messages differently, ranging from quick, effortless judgements that depend mostly on different cue-based heuristics, to more systematic, analytical evaluations that are based on the careful consideration of the intrinsic quality of the information. The diverse cues play a significant role in our assessment, since they serve as anchors for our conclusions. Moreover, the cue assessment can be part of a more systematic evaluation of the whole message (Todorov et al., 2002), since they provide additional information which shapes our final judgement about the message.

1.2. Credibility cues

The role of credibility cues in the assessment process can be even more pronounced in the online environment. Considering the amount of available online information, it is not surprising that users spend less time on the development of a thorough judgement and often rely on individual and quick evaluation strategies (Fogg, 2003; Metzger, 2007). The cues help us form the initial judgement (i.e., whether we will pay more attention to the information) and consequential scrutiny of the message, which is again complemented with the concurrent consideration of the cues. The process is, therefore, iterative (Hilligoss and Rieh, 2008; Rieh, 2002). The online environment comprises a lot of different cues (e.g., specific design, feedback from other users, hyperlinks to other sources), whilst lacking others to guide our judgment in other contexts. Specifically, author-related information, such as expertise, is often absent or difficult to identify. Prior research provided several conceptualizations of the diverse types of cues that users utilize in their scrutiny. For instance, the review by Beldad et al. (2010) identified the categories of website-based trust antecedents, including the perceived ease of use of a website, graphical characteristics, and social presence cues. However, a question prevails as to which categories – or components – are more or less important for the final judgement.

Our study specifically focuses on the role of cues related to the author of the information, the design and look of the text and webpage, other users, and the references to other sources (including experts). These cues have been shown to be credibility markers in prior studies (Beldad et al., 2010), although we can presume that there are differences in the level of importance they ultimately have for the assessment. According to Fogg's (2003) Prominence-Interpretation Theory, the cue must first be noticed (this likelihood is indicated by its prominence) and then interpreted in terms of the importance for credibility judgement. Thus, diverse cues might be more or less noticeable and, depending on our interpretation, have larger or smaller influence on the judgement about trustworthiness.

Considering that the importance of cues can vary, our first research question asks about the perceived importance of the selected cues in the trustworthiness assessment. While prior research already pursued similar questions, we aim to provide more insight, specifically in relation to the health-oriented information present on the websites targeted in our study. Prior research showed

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6889584

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/6889584

Daneshyari.com