



DISCOURSE QUALITY IN ONLINE TRAVEL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Web 2.0 is changing the patterns of creation and sharing of knowledge among tourists. Today prospects have online communities of travelers, advisors and experts to help them in gaining information about tourism destinations, planning their trip, and purchasing of the services. Travel trade also uses these communities to assess customers' taste and preferences. A large number of texts and messages make it difficult for users to analyze whether the information is accurate and complete. The Biased, non-credible and unreliable information can mislead the users. So it becomes crucial to measure the discourse quality of online travel communities. This study attempts to investigate it in online travel communities. The findings elucidate some dimensions to measure the discourse quality by considering timelines, usefulness, information completeness, correctness, up-to datedness, structure, and way of presentation and personalization.

Keywords: Online Travel Communities, Discourse Quality, Timeliness, Correctness

Introduction

Online Travel Community is a virtual space where a group of people come together to interact and share information, experiences and knowledge about a particular topic like travel, destinations, adventure, accommodation, money etc. (F.S.L. Lee, D. Vogel, M. Limayem, 2003). In online travel communities (OTC), their members can have interactions with each other about any field. They can post their queries in the OTC and other members who have knowledge and experience can answer the post or give the required suggestions or recommendations. The community postings or messages are called threads. So a community can have a various number of threads about a particular topic. The number of members and the number of postings affect the discourse in an online community. Purpose, people and policy, dialog and social support, information design, navigation and access were found success factors of online communities (Preece 2001). The discourse in the OTC should be according to the communities' policies and guidelines. Researchers have paid attentions to importance of discourse and its various dimensions in web 2.0. These qualities influence the usefulness of OTC information, purchase intentions and intentions to transact (Zheng, et al,2012, Huang, Kwei-shan 2014). In the longitudinal study of China Information consumers Klein, (2016) showed the consumers' changed preferences to various information quality dimensions rating believability, reputation, and value-added as less important while representational consistency and concise representation as more important than the beginning of the study. This study attempts to investigate the discourse quality in online travel communities from the literature.

Methodology

The review paper is based on the secondary data only. The research articles of the Discourse quality in Online Travel Communities are studied in order to achieve the objective. The various dimensions of information quality are extracted from the literature. The sites of various Online Travel Communities such as Thorn Tree, Indiamike.com, Virtualtourists etc. are also studied and analyzed for the paper.

Objective

The purpose of the study is to investigate the discourse quality in online travel communities and to explore the Discourse Quality Dimensions in Online Travel Communities.

Online Travel Communities

Online Travel Communities (OTC) can be illustrated as “groups of people trying to achieve goals with similar interests, and interested in building relationships, making transactions, and engaging in fantasy, governed by rules and using new information technology as the means” (Wu, Xiao & Wu, 2016, p.2). Online forums, message boards, news groups, etc are the few major platforms. Online Travel Community is a field of online communities which focuses on information, solutions and experiences pertaining to travel. In OTC the travelers are the members who use this platform for interacting with each other and gaining information about the various components of tourism. From information search to decision making these communities are widely utilized by the travelers. These are the fine platforms for the travel companies for attracting and retaining customers and to reduce costs (Y. Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004).

Discourse Quality in OTC

Discourse quality or Information quality is a measurement of individual value perception about the information or the content presented to him or her. Relevancy, appropriate amount, accessibility, interpretability and completeness are the highest rated dimensions of IQ among the Chinese and Mexican for internet sources while access security, accuracy and objectivity are considered to be lowest rated dimensions (Klein, B. D., Valero, M., & Guo, Y. M. (2011b). In online travel communities there is a large number of information available about destinations, attractions, activities, hotels, tourists, their experiences etc. Travelers use OTC on a large scale for a variety of purposes such as gaining fundamental benefits i.e. Functional, Social, Hedonic and Psychological benefits (Y. Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004). These benefits cover a wide range of motives of joining an OTC for instance getting useful factual information about destination, establishing relations and enjoyment, fun and entertainment. A field survey conducted by Zheng, et al, (2012) found that information and system quality directly affect perceived individual benefits and user satisfaction. The proposed information quality dimensions in the study included reliability, timeliness, objectivity, value-added, richness and format. Perceived individual benefits and

user satisfaction further determine user intention to consume and to provide continuous information. Wang et al. (2017) stated that information quality in terms of up-to dateness, relevance and completeness positively influence the purchase intentions in online brand communities through uncertainty reduction with the moderating effect of involvement. The key categories and dimensions of information quality and their antecedents have been explored for the benefits of the users, marketers and researchers.

Elements of Information Quality

Author	Categories	Dimensions
Wang and Strong's (1996)	Intrinsic quality	Accuracy Objectivity Believability Reputation
	Contextual quality	Relevancy Appropriate Amount Timeliness
	Representational quality	Ease of Understanding Interpretability
Doll and Torkzadeh, 1988		Information content, accuracy, format, timeliness
DeLone and McLean (2003)	e-commerce studies	accuracy, relevance, understandability, completeness, currency, dynamism, personalization, and variety
Chuang, et.al. 2008	Argument quality	relevance, timeliness, accuracy, and comprehensiveness
Knight and Burn (2005)		accuracy, security, completeness, reliability, availability, relevancy, understandability, consistency, timeliness, concise, accessibility, objectivity, and useability

Internal Discourse Quality in Online Travel Community

Internal discourse quality of an online community is the combination of various quantitative and qualitative measures of the discourse quality. The qualitative measures

include reply quantity, waiting time while reply quality, reply discipline, kind of initial posts and kind of the reply are the qualitative measures (Aschoff,2012). Due to the little participation of travel members to the travel communities, the growth of online communities is not proficient (Hsu, Ju, Yen & Chang,2007). The activity level of community members is dissimilar in these communities that affect the internal quality. Lee, Reid, and Kim (2014) found that travel involvement influences the relationship building among users and they share information more frequently in community. The internal discourse quality of an online travel community can be improved by providing usefulness in information, encouraging members to reply and comment, periodicals check on member's activities etc.

Timeliness

The members having any query, post their questions in the OTC for the possible answers, suggestions, or recommendations from other fellow members. The members would further answer the questions. This word of mouth information provided here can be based on the memory, experience knowledge of the one who answers. Thus it is obvious that the information can be old-fashioned or outdated by the time information seeker needs it. So timeliness is a major dimension for measuring information quality in OTC. Timeliness refers to the state of up-to-datedness of information and availability for acceptance in the timeframe (Schwabe et.al.2007). It depends on the up-to-datedness of the information at the time of inserting in the source and how frequently it was changed (Bouzeghoub & Peralta 2004). Four elements of Timeliness can be elaborated as time to publish, up-to-datedness, speed and accessibility (Schwabe et.al.2007). These factors vary in different information sources such as printed media or user generated content. In OTCs these factors mainly depend on the activity of members because new information is always added by the members from time to time. The higher the involvement and activity of the members, the higher the timeliness will be in OTC information (Woo Gon Kim 2012). In the empirical study Schwabe et.al.(2007) found the same level of quality of timeliness in the wiki community and printed guide book. The information should be up-to-date and provide timely in order to make it useful.

Correctness

Accurate and appropriate information influences customer experience and information usefulness positively (Huang, Kwei-shan 2014). The information provided on internet in the form of User Generated Content (UGC) influence the readers' purchase intentions, decisions and other behavioral intentions(Arsal, 2008). Accuracy, appropriateness

and credibility of internet information positively affect the customer experience and information usefulness (Huang, kuo, 2014). Online reviews, users' comments, traveler's postings etc are the UGC which are used by potential travelers in information search and decision making. So, the information provided by the online communities must be accurate and approved.

Completeness

The conventional definition of completeness can be defined as "the ability of an information system to represent every meaningful state of the represented real world system" (Lukyanenko, Parsons, and Wiersma 2014b). Information completeness is determined by the satisfaction level of information seeker, It should be measured from the information user's point of view. It is difficult to estimate the ideal information for anyone as the primary motive behind generation of information on a large scale can be different from what the users may anticipate (Prestipino et. al., 2006). In wiki communities also the information completeness and reliability vary in different languages (Lewoniewski, 2017). Prestipino et.al. (2006) found the nearly same level of information completeness in the comparative study of printed guidebooks and OTC. In online travel communities the members can search for the information from the existed contents by the users in spite of putting a query in the forum which may fulfill their needs. Users consider the information useful when they find it complete.

Personalization

Personalization is another key dimension of discourse in online travel communities. It means the fitness of the information and content according to the needs of the user. Specifically customized, necessary and suitable information is presented for the user (Prestipino et.al 2006). In an OTC the travelers seeking for information about particular attraction at the destination would seek for the discourse in the threads that specifically talk about his/her interest area. The OTC is the platform where the members can get the personalized information from the fellow members.

Conclusion

The travelers, tourism planners, marketers, Destination Management Companies use the various platforms of web 2.0 such as review sites, facebook, youtube, instagram, wiki communities, blog sites, message boards, online travel communities etc for information gaining and sharing. Online travel communities have played important role in promoting

tourism destination, marketing travel trade and enabling the stakeholders knowing their customers. Thus the discourse provided by these communities should be accurate, complete, up-to-date, reliable and accessible for the users.

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