The Role of Information Quality of a Website: Examining Consumer Information Search through the IS Success Model

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the nature of information quality in the context of consumer information search on a website is vital for Information Systems as well as for marketing managers who want to use their websites for strategic purposes. This study brings together the Information Systems (IS) Success Model and consumer information search literature to propose and test a comprehensive model investigating information quality, and extends the IS Success Model. Our model tests antecedents to and consequences of information quality of a website. Findings on data collected from 575 respondents reveal that perceived cost and self efficacy (among others) are significant antecedents to information quality. Findings also reveal that information quality significantly affects online WOM and trust, which has implications for managing users on social media as well as on websites. This study adds to the literature on IS and on consumer information search, and offers practical guidelines for managers.

Keywords: Information Quality, Information Search, Information Systems Success Model, Online Word-of-Mouth (WOM), Trust

INTRODUCTION

Consumer information search on websites is a key element of consumer decision-making. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking survey (conducted in February 2012), 91 percent of adult online users in the United States used a search engine to find information (Pewinternet.org, 2012). Online information search strategies include using a generic search engine to specify one or more broad search terms (“broad first”), specifying key attributes on search engines (“search engine narrowing down”), using “to-the-point” keywords on search engines that will drive specific results, or navigating directly to a website (“known address”) (Thatcher, 2008, p. 1316). The end goal of the user is to reach a website that will address the user’s information needs.

Recent research indicates that consumers evaluate the quality of information on websites while undertaking online information search (Hughes, Wareham, & Joshi, 2010). The quality of information provided on a website is pivotal to the success of the website (Liua & Arnett, 2000), and has been found to be an important factor affecting the perception of that website (Lepkowska-White & Eifler, 2008). For example, WebQual (Loiacono, Watson, &
an instrument for measuring website quality, includes information quality as a sub-dimension. However, little research has been done to investigate the role of information quality in the context of consumer information search on a website. An enhanced understanding of this construct is necessary as Websites continue to grow in importance, providing consumers with information that they find useful (Su 2008).

The Information Systems (IS) Success Model (DeLone & McLean, 1992; 2003; 2004) provides us with a framework for examining information quality, which may be applied to the context of consumer information search on a website. Therefore, we use the IS Success Model and the information search paradigm from literature in the marketing discipline (e.g., Punj & Staelin, 1983; Srinivasan & Ratchford, 1991) to build and test a model that investigates the role of information quality of a website in an attempt to identify specific antecedents and consequences of this construct in the context of consumer information search on websites. The IS success model is particularly useful in the context of consumer information search since it is based on the premise that information communicated to a recipient influences the recipient, which in turn impacts outcomes at an individual (or organizational) level. Outcomes of using an IS (i.e., a website in our study), include satisfaction with the IS and the “net benefits” obtained. DeLone and McLean (2004) point out that the net benefits of an IS is different across different contexts: “… it is impossible to define net benefits without first defining the context or the frame of reference (p. 33).” It is expected that the quality of information that a user obtains at a website during her visit will prompt the user to speak about the website to other online users. The Pew Internet & American Life Project Tracking surveys also finds that 66 percent of adult online users in the United States use a social networking site like Facebook, LinkedIn or Google Plus (Pewinternet.org, 2012), and 32 percent post comments on online blog, news group or website (Pewinternet.org, 2010), which represent potential platforms where these users can share information with other users online. It is also expected that quality of information will impact the user’s attitude towards the website. We, therefore, identify online word-of-mouth (WOM), and trust as net benefits of information quality in the context of consumer information search.

Use of a website, in our study, is the information search undertaken by users on a website prior to making a purchase. Online information search has been extensively investigated (e.g., Jepsen, 2007), and literature identifies several antecedents (e.g., perceived cost, perceived risk, prior experience, self efficacy, product involvement) to this construct. We expect these antecedents to significantly impact information quality, and also expect that information quality mediates (either fully or partially) the relationships between information search and its antecedents.

Our research makes several important contributions. First, this research offers valuable insights for managers. Users of websites often participate on online forums, write or comment on blogs, and interact with other users on social networking sites to share their experiences about those websites (Berthon et al., 2007). Understanding what drives users’ online WOM intention is of importance to all businesses that strive to increase their footprints, and hence influence brand awareness, brand engagement, brand associations and WOM, on the World Wide Web (WWW). Second, this research brings together separate research literatures to investigate an important aspect of information systems use, and the findings theoretically situate information quality in the context of website use. Third, we contribute by extending the IS Success Model.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The following section sets forth the model, reviews the research questions, and discusses the theoretical underpinnings. The next section presents the research methodology and data analysis toward model testing. The final sections present the implications of our study, limitations and proposals for future research.
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