A Revisit of the Concept of Interactivity and its Dimensions

Hui Wang, University of Chester, Chester, UK
Vipin Nadda, University of Sunderland, Sunderland, UK

ABSTRACT

With the development of Information and Communication Technologies, social networking platforms have permeated into every aspect of industries and our lives. This new digital phenomenon brings opportunities for companies to reach and communicate with their audiences in different ways. In the same vein, this revolutionary phenomenon has largely accelerated the rate at which relationships develop and information is shared. It is worth noting that during the communication process there has been a growth in the potency of interactivity, which lays emphasis on conversing with audiences rather than merely communicating to them. This paper draws on the literature developed in various disciplines with the help of tri-dimensional features of interactivity identified as active control, two-way communications, and real-time communications. These three principal dimensions are explored within a Weblog context to provide a comprehensive understanding of the concept of interactivity and its dynamics.

Keywords: Active Control, Interactivity, Real-time Communications, Travel Weblogs, Two-way Communications, Weblogs

INTRODUCTION

Importance of the Paper

The past few decades have witnessed tremendous progress in the development of the concept of interactivity. From the process and functional view (1980s – 1990s) to the contemporary perception view (2000s to present), the concept has increasingly received considerable scholarly attention across different academic disciplines. For instance, the vast majority of interactivity literature resides in the field of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Electronic Commerce (EC), Information Technology (IT) and Web-based Education (e.g., distance learning).

Whilst a plethora of literature on testifying the significance of the term ‘interactivity’, no consensus has been reached on probing the nature or content of its dimensions (Lee, 2005). Scholars propose different views which attribute to certain characteristics, from an experimental to a conceptual manner (Levinson, 2010; Karimova, 2011). Owing to the complexities and
popularity of the concept, an explicit investigation of the dimensionality of interactivity construct has yet to be successfully addressed.

According to Jiang et al. (2010), interactivity has been studied as an essential feature of social networking platforms wherein visitors’ attitudes and behaviours can be enticed and driven. Thus, interactivity can be one of the key functions on a corporate travel weblog site to build a positive virtual relationship between travel companies and weblog users (Pan et al., 2007; Levinson, 2010). Nevertheless, extant researchers in corporate weblog marketing have yet to comprehensively study the significance of interactivity functions in weblogging environment. Furthermore, in viewing previous research little attention has been devoted to understanding constructs of interactivity in a corporate weblogging context.

Given these gaps in our knowledge, it is critical to realise the multidimensional nature of interactivity particularly their relative effectiveness within a corporate weblogging setting. In brief, it is important for both academicians and practitioners to fully understand how people use interactive functions on corporate travel weblogs and how interactivity may influence attitudes towards a corporate travel weblog and towards prospective behavioural intentions.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

The rapid and continuous development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has shaped the media landscape, through both human and technology mediated interaction (Rambe, 2012). With the proliferation of ICT, the Internet has become a significant part of people’s daily lives and serves as an important medium for people to interact in the virtual world (Hogan and Wellman, 2012).

According to Internet World Stats (2015), 3.2 billion people had Internet access in 2015, penetrating approximately 46.1 percent of the global population. The Internet has touched every aspect of our lives, changing how we keep in touch, share information, and conduct business among other activities. As a communication medium, the Internet opens up opportunities for making communications more interactive and participatory (Rahman, 2008; Gibson et al., 2014). Compared with traditional mass media, the Internet allows greater user control, two-way communications, and real-time communications (McMillan and Hwang, 2002). For example, web users can select the information to access, as well as their browsing time. They can control the sequence to browse the web and access information at their own pace. Also, a real-time feedback application of the web facilitates reciprocal communications among different users.

Reaping the benefits of modern technology, particularly Internet mediated communications, a large number of Internet-based conversational applications, such as weblogs, podcasts and other social networks have sprung up all over the information-based society. On behalf of the recent technology trends, weblogs or blogs as they are commonly referred to, have a great effect among individuals, research institutions, and corporations (Rose, Hair, and Clark, 2011).

As a digitalised communication medium, weblogs are regarded as the most explosive outbreak in the information world, since it better supports online communications and facilitates human interaction owing to its outstanding interactive traits (Schuff, Turetken, and Asif, 2010). As a conversational medium, weblogs have different capabilities to other Internet technologies. Weblogging has helped turn web consumers, such as end-users, into web content providers. It is worth noting that weblogs offer interactivity at a higher rate over other communication media by increasing the frequency of hyperlinks and feedback features (De Maeyer, 2012).
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