Social Presence and User-Generated Content of Social Media in China

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ABSTRACT

As a representative of the flourishing development of the internet, social media is a critical platform for user-generated content (UGC). This study investigated the relationship between social presence and UGC through qualitative and quantitative methods. Social presence and user value were divided into three dimensions to comprehensively analyze how sensory, affective, and cognitive social presence produces emotional, social, and functional user value, thereby driving the formulation of UGC. Empirical research was carried out incorporating the moderating effect of perceived risk.

KEYWORDS
Perceived Risk, Social Media, Social Presence, User-Generated Content

1. INTRODUCTION

The technological revolution introduced by the Internet has made cognitive surplus a resource that can create enormous social effects (Cagliero, Cerquitelli & Garza, 2013). User-generated content (UGC) as a byproduct of Internet activity has become a prevalent new application and business model (García-Silva, Cantador & Corcho, 2012). As a representative of the flourishing development of the Internet, social media is a critical platform for UGC.

In recent years, social media has developed vigorously, and the number of users has grown rapidly (Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie, 2014; Nadeem, Andreini, Salo & Laukkanen, 2015; Agnihotri, Dingus, Hu & Krush, 2016). However, the proportion of free riders (i.e., users who purely browse online information without user interaction) has also continued to rise, resulting in a lack of marketing capital and the demise of social media platforms such as the Renren Network. Therefore, encouraging UGC behavior has become imperative. Given that social media users have more discourse opportunities in the virtual environment because group pressure is minimized, the prevalence of the silent majority warrants explanation. Various types of live stream apps have continued to emerge, resulting in the birth of “bullet curtain” (i.e., overlaying user comments directly onto the video) functions on video hosting websites (Nadeem et al., 2015; Islam, Islam, Rahman & Rahman, 2016). WeChat’s recent dominance in China in questions whether the presence of other users in relation to UGC favors or constrains the content host’s discourse and affects the perceived risks (e.g., temporal risk and reputation). Therefore, this study investigated how the presence of other WeChat users enhances the user value that drives content-generating behavior from the perspective of social presence. This study may serve as a reference for social media operational advice.

Social media as a platform for the vigorous development of the internet environment, the user’s activity, behavior and its future development potential is closely related. However, based on the actual reality, the decline of the Renren Network as the representative of the alarm for the free riders,

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nonactivity fans emerged as the trend, the user in the social media platform which silence, only browsing, no comment, no interaction, participation more and more Low undoubtedly affect the value of the platform and even the platform will die. How to encourage users to generate content for the construction of social media platform is an important issue in this complex era and can’t be ignored. Therefore, this study explores the relationship between the social presence, the user’s value and the user-generated content behavior, and deeply understands how the user’s value is awakened. It is helpful to motivate the users to generate the content behavior in practice and provide some suggestions for the operation of the social media. Finally, it would enhance the value of the platform and marketing capital constantly, and achieve a virtuous circle and rapid development in social media theory.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Foundations

Theoretically, motivation is a driving force of human desire and pursuit and an internal force that elicits certain behaviors. Motivation reflects the incentives for objective things in human activity. The motivation for a person to engage in or direct an activity to satisfy a certain desire or idea pertains to a combination of the need and incentive of the activity.

Social facilitation is also known as the audience effect. Many scholars have argued that social facilitation not only increases the quantity of individual behaviors, but also improves their quality. Worchel, Cooper and Goethals (1991) defined social facilitation as the improvement in the quality of behavioral performance resulting from the presence of audience or co-actors. Triplett argued that social facilitation is any effect of the presence of others on behaviors (Baron & Byrne, 1984) and that it comprises both facilitation and constraint.

2.2. Literature Review

Previous empirical studies have examined the effect of social presence on individual attitude and behavior in various scenarios. In terms of cognition and attitude, social presence can provide users with a different emotional experience. For example, Fonner’s empirical study revealed that social presence affected employees’ organizational identification (Fonner & Roloff, 2012). Leong argued that the social presence in online learning does not significantly affect satisfaction, but that it moderates the effect of cognitive focus on satisfaction (Leong, 2011). Kim et al. confirmed that social presence affects the feelings, such as trust and pleasure, of users through the moderating effect of perceived benefit (Kim, Park & Sundar, 2013; Islam et al., 2016). Ogonowski et al. (2014) revealed that social presence affects users’ perceived usefulness, enjoyment, and trust of online stores. Ogara, Koh and Prybutok (2014) revealed that social presence significantly affects users’ satisfaction with mobile instant messaging.

Social presence can induce indirect behaviors such as emotion, perception, and experience among users. The researcher revealed that increased social presence often enhances children’s participation in online learning (Tung & Deng, 2007; Wu & Tai, 2016). Shen (2012) investigated the mediating effects of perceived usefulness and enjoyment between social presence and online shopping behavior. Lin, Fan and Chau (2014) revealed that social presence affects social network site users’ satisfaction and sense of belonging, thereby influencing their continuance intention. In their study of business in virtual worlds, the researchers reported that social presence significantly affects users’ experience of flow, thereby affecting their purchase intention toward virtual products (Animesh, Pinsonneault, Yang & Oh, 2011; Nadeem et al., 2015; Agnihotri et al., 2016).
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