THE SUSTAINABILITY OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT: UNDERSTANDING CONTINUANCE AND SWITCHING PRODUSAGE BEHAVIOR

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用户自創內容的可持續性: 「生產性使用」行為的持續與轉換機制

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ABSTRACT

Produsage, a synthesis of production and usage of media content, is an unprecedented type of audience behavior that emerges with the rise of Web 2.0. Produsage presents especially disruptive challenges to the traditional mass communication system: the boundaries among content producers, distributors, and consumers are blurring. The produser, a hybrid role of producer and user, produces and distributes content to the mass communication system. Scholars in communication have discussed political and economic influences brought about by large-scale produsage behavior in Web 2.0. However, there is a lack of empirical research on the sustainability of produsage behavior that obviously determines the fate and social significance of Web 2.0.

This study is one of the first communication studies to make a systematic effort to provide insight into persistent user-generated content (UGC) produsage behavior. Communication research focuses overwhelmingly on adoption phenomena, yet overlooks the academic and social value of post-adoption phenomena. However, adoption does not necessarily lead to successful implementation of innovations. The (intended/desirable and unintended/undesirable) consequences brought about by any adopted innovation can be established only after considering the effects produced by the adopter’s continuing use of the innovation for a fairly long time. Innovation diffusion research, however, seems to have implicitly isolated itself from considering the subsequent behavior after adoption. This study aims to fill the gap by examining the under-studied individual post-adoption behavior in the context of UGC.

The UGC ecosystem consists of a variety of platforms/services (e.g., blogging, micro-blogging, video/photo sharing, etc.). After the initial adoption of UGC, some individuals continue to use a specific platform whereas others switch among different UGC platforms. As an ecosystem, there are two types of post-adoption behavioral
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dynamics on UGC. First, individuals can choose to continue or discontinue using a
certain UGC service, which is referred to as intra-platform dynamics or continuance
behavior. Second, individuals can choose to stay with the incumbent UGC service or to
switch to an alternative, referred to as inter-platform dynamics or switching behavior.
Previous studies focus on the intra-platform human dynamics and overlook the
inter-platform dynamics. The present study contributes to the literature on audience
behavior by extending the concept of sustainability of produsage behavior beyond the
intra-platform realm to that of the UGC ecosystem context, based on empirical
examination of both individual continuance behavior and switching behavior.

The objective of this study is to further our understanding of how individuals’
evaluations and behavioral experiences influence their future post-adoption behavior.
Contextualized in blogging and micro-blogging, this study proposes and tests theoretical
models of two types of post-adoption behavior: (1) continuance in blogging and (2)
switching between blogging and micro-blogging. An “integrated framework of
continuance behavior” (IFCB) is proposed to investigate continuance behavior in
blogging whereas a “refined push-pull-mooring” (RPPM) model is proposed to
investigate switching behavior from blogging to micro-blogging. The proposed
theoretical models are attempts to synthesize two different approaches underlying
post-adoption phenomena: (1) a cognitive approach based on an “intention-behavior”
mechanism and (2) a behavioral approach based on a “past behavior-further behavior”
mechanism.

The study uses multi-source data to test the proposed IFCB and RPPM models,
including an online survey of 358 blog/micro-blog authors selected from a random
sample of 20,000+ bloggers, a manual content analysis of 24,000+ blog posts published
by about 750 authors, and a computerized web mining of user-generated data (UGD)
from 20,000+ authors. UGD refers to the data files (e.g., visitor logs) that record information about individual online activities, which are publicly available online.

The results show that, of various measures of past behavior, activity rate (e.g., inter-event time) is the most important predictor of continuance behavior. Specifically, the higher the activity rate is, the less likely a produser is to continue blogging. That’s to say, if the time interval between two consecutively published blog articles is short, the blogger is less likely to sustain blogging. The results also show that pull and mooring factors have a stronger impact than push factor does on switching behavior. Of a variety of pull and mooring variables, alternative attractiveness and perceived popularity are the most important drivers of switching behavior.

This study introduces sustainability of behavior into research on post-adoption process underlying UGC produsage. Treating UGC as an ecosystem, the study empirically examines both intra-platform continuance behavior and inter-platform switching behavior, thus expanding our understanding of post-adoption behavior. The study thus contributes to the literature on media audience behavior by offering the IFCB and RPPM models that help understand persistent UGC produsage behavior. Different theoretical approaches (i.e., individual cognitive approach and behavioral approach) are integrated to the study, as one of the first attempts to overcome limitations of individual cognitive approach for explaining and predicting future behavior. The study is also among the first to discover that the predictive power of past behavior is not contingent on its frequency. By mining users’ past behavior, we can find more variables besides past behavior frequency (e.g., activity rate) that can be used to explain and predict future behavior. The methodological implications of the study include the importance of utilizing multi-source data in media audience behavior research and the potential benefits of implementing computerized web mining analysis.