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A META-ANALYTIC REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA STUDIES

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Abstract

Social media such as social networking sites, blogs, micro-blogs, Wikis, are increasingly and widely used in our daily lives. In the information system (IS) discipline, social media have become a hot research area and draw the attention of many scholars. The paper systematically reviewed social media studies published in Association for Information Systems (AIS) listed top 20 journals from 2009 to 2013. The publication time, journal preferences, research objects and research topics are discussed. Generally, the current social media studies including four areas, namely user, management, technology and information. Each area has distinct focuses and topics. By thoroughly analyzing the research topics, the authors formulate our projections and recommendations for future social media studies.

Keywords: Social Media, Meta-analysis, Research Topics.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media are increasingly and widely used. Almost everyone has their own social media accounts. People not only view a social media account as a digital possession, they look at it as a digital storage locker for their personal lives (Greengard 2012). We use social media to communicate with others, maintain social ties, and have fun from a lot of social applications. In the society and organizations, social media are changing the methods they operate and create, such as democratic election, business model, branding, knowledge management et al. It shows that social media are playing an important role in our lives and works; they are fundamentally changing the way we communicate, collaborate, consume, and create (Ara et al. 2013).

With its rapid development, social media draws the attention of many scholars. Through meta-analytic review on studies relating to social media from 2009 to 2013 excellent journals, this paper particularly sums up and concludes these studies from four perspectives, namely user, management, technology, and information areas. Some suggestions of potential future research directions are proposed.

2 JOURNAL SELECTION & CODING PROCESS

This paper searched top 20 journals in the comprehensive journal ranking list on AIS website, and found 16 of them have published studies on social media from 2009 to 2013. These journals represent the highest academic level in IS field, can show us a big picture of current social media studies.

After initial literature review, the authors decided seven key words, namely “social media”, “micro-blog”, “blog”, “wiki”, “enterprise 2.0”, “online social networks” and “online community”, to search the journals. Every paper’s abstract was reviewed to determine if it should be considered a social media study. In case the reviewers felt the abstract could not provide enough information, the entire paper was read through. Every paper we judged to fall into the social media field was downloaded. Two authors independently read these papers and judge research objects and research topics. The questionable papers will be discussed by three authors.

A total of 249 papers from 16 journals published between 2009 and 2013 was identified and coded according to the procedures described above.

3 DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

3.1 Distribution of Time & Journals

The distribution of publication time and journals are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Quantity	22	47	65	56	59
Proportion	8.83%	18.88%	26.10%	22.49%	23.69%

Table 1. Number of Social Media Studies by Year (2009-2013)

Journals	Quantity	Proportion	Journals	Quantity	Proportion
Communications of The ACM	49	19.68%	Communications of AIS	10	4.02%
IEEE Transactions	29	11.65%	Management Science	9	3.61%
MIS Quarterly	28	11.24%	ACM Transactions	8	3.21%
Decision Support Systems	26	10.44%	Decision Sciences	8	3.21%
Harvard Business Review	23	9.24%	MIT SMR	6	2.41%
Information Systems Research	15	6.02%	European Journal of IS	6	2.41%
Journal of MIS	13	5.22%	IEEE Software	4	1.61%
Information & Management	12	4.82%	AI Magazine	3	1.20%

Table 2. Number of Social Media Studies by Journal (2009-2013)

3.2 Research Objects

In the aspect of research objects, we show that studies on multiple platforms accounted for 20.48% of the total, which is mainly because that there are more studies written by compared with several social media platforms and then collected the data. While in a single platform, the number of studies in social networking site, blog, virtual community and micro-blog has reached 137 and accounted for 55.02% of total papers, which shows that these social media are the main platforms in present studies. Conversely, the studies on Wiki, enterprise 2.0 system and some sharing websites only reached 16.87% of total papers. Moreover, it is worth to mentioning that the number of studies on blog has significantly decreased compared to that in previous years. While the number of studies on micro-blog and Wiki has been on the rise since 2012.

4 RESEARCH TOPICS

Generally, the current social media studies including four areas, namely user, management, technology and information, they are distinct but interrelated. During the process of social media studies, we need to take these four areas as an interrelated and interactive organism to make studies more comprehensive and meticulous.

Areas	Focuses	Topics
User	Relationships	Social Capital; Social Influence
	Behavior	Adoption; Switching; Paying; Sharing
Management	Society	Law; Ethics; Democracy
	Organizations	Decision; CRM; Marketing
	Groups	Collaboration; Communication; Creation
Technology	System Design	Recommendation System; Voting System
	Application Design	Social Application; User Interface
Information	Collection	Social Searching Engine; Clustering Technique
	Analysis	Prediction; Behavior Analysis; Content Quality

Table 3. Social Media Research Areas, Focuses and Topics

4.1 User

Social media are making individuals publicly visible in the last a few years, we are almost engaging with social media every day. In social media platforms, we can maintain our relationships with friends, listen and respond to others. Social media provide rich contents for academic researches. In recent studies, theories of sociology and psychology are usually drawn on to help explain relationships and behavior of users.

- Relationships

The study of relationship is always a hot topic in academic researches. It mainly shows in two aspects: social capital and social influence. In social capital aspect, networks of relationships in social media have important implications for how social capital may be generated, the advantages of social media reflect on establishing and maintaining users' relationships through communication (Ganley & Lampe 2009). Compared to traditional computer mediated communication, social media contain richer media, such as Facebook group, could effectively building and maintaining social capital (Ryan 2010).

In social influence aspect, the concepts peer influence and social contagion effect are frequently mentioned. Based on the psychological concept "homophily", researchers identify how individuals influence one another (Aral & Walke 2011; Aral 2013). Others show the significance of the effect of peers on online social networks (Garg et al. 2011), and some influential users will conduct huge social contagion (Lim et al. 2011).

- Behaviors

As we know, behavioral study is a very important branch of IS discipline, the point is to find out factors influence behaviors. According to literatures, we generalize behavioral studies on four aspects: adoption, switching, paying and sharing, and among them adoption researches are in the majority.

In the adoption research, based on Technology Acceptance Model, we know perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the two factors influence the adoption behavior. In addition, subjective norm, social identity, privacy risk perception, gratifications, social presence and extroversion also influence potential acceptance and use of social media (Cheung & Lee 2010; Hu et al. 2011; Xu et al. 2012; Chen 2013). Some researchers investigate the factors that influence users' intentions to continue using social media. They find that trusting beliefs, habit, attitude, subjective norm and technology readiness could lead to continuance adoption behavior (Lankton et al. 2012; Jin 2013).

Under studies on the switching behavior, satisfaction, sunk costs, and attractive alternatives are dominant factors which affect switching behavior, and moderating effects are found in gender (Zhang et al. 2009). Under studies on the paying behavior, some researchers use social exchange theory as a guide, distinguished between social and economic factors, explored the possibility that a buyer's price he or she is willing to pay and the price actually paid for a digital product on the iTunes marketplace (Marett et al. 2012). In sharing behavior studies, trust, social ties, reciprocity and users' emotions are the factors affecting users' sharing (Chai et al. 2011; Stieglitz & Xuan 2013).

4.2 Management

Management studies include three levels in terms of society, organization, and group. These studies are concerned with the general concept of management and are very closely related to social media. To make these studies more salient and avoid some confusion from other areas, we use the term

management to represent this part in our paper.

- Society

Society level is mainly concerned with ethical, legal, and democratic issues. Some researchers find that blogs may be restricted by legal and ethical boundaries, which may differ across countries, they also presents the benefits and risks associated with blogs (Strother et al. 2009). In democratic issues, because of the online engagement on social media, it could foster democratic debate and influence policy making, social media can complement or even replace the role of traditional media.

- Organizations

Studies on organization level are relatively more than others, research objects are mostly about firms. As we know, social media as a Web 2.0 technology, it can help improve management within most firms. Through social media, executives can manage employees and make business decisions more efficiently and with greater certainty. Topics of current studies on firms mainly contain branding, internal social media initiatives, customer relationship management et al.

Branding study on social media is a very hot topic, it plays an important role on business strategy. As traditional advertising is losing its impact, both advertisers and the media owners are desperately seeking alternative ways to reach consumers and alternative ways to earn revenues by social media (Clemons 2009). This shows that social media can provide management an effective channel for promoting products and service. Recently, location-based mobile advertising has huge potential to generate significant revenues leading to new business models (Dhar & Varshney 2011).

As internal social media initiatives, enterprise 2.0 systems are very widely deployed in firms. Enterprise 2.0 systems contain a lot of tools, such as profiles, incorporate community, knowledge management platform. Information-rich networks could be formed by social media, it help assimilate employees into firms, foster a knowledge sharing culture and improve performance (Leidner et al. 2010; Teo et al. 2011; Koch et al. 2012; Wu 2013).

Social media also play an important role on customer relationship management. Sales reps could use social media to prospect, qualify leads, and manage relationships (Giamanco & Gregoire 2012). The interaction between users and marketers in a brand community can also impact consumer purchase behavior (Goh et al. 2013). This strategy applies to niche products as well, the study shows that higher levels of interaction and participation can indeed enhance consumption intention (Phang et al. 2013). This shows that managers need to integrate social media initiatives with customer relationship to better serve customers and create sustainable business value.

- Groups

Group level is mainly concerned with communication, collaboration, creation, sharing in teams, including virtual and actual teams. Social media provide a novel virtual environment, just as 3D collaborative virtual environments Second Life. Researchers are increasingly tending to do some studies on virtual teams working in Second Life.

In actual teams, employees generally use Wiki and corporate blog to make their works. Wiki is mainly associated with knowledge management, managers should maintain a balance of both administrative and content oriented members to contribute to the collaborative process (Arazy et al. 2011). In the process, managers should strengthen the knowledge integration to improve Wiki content quality (Zhang et al. 2013). Through improved knowledge integration, groups can promote knowledge reuse as well (Majchrzak et al. 2013). Corporate blog can be used as a sustainable forum leading to a shared

understanding of organizational roles, increased sense of group cohesiveness, improved work processes, and improved professional and personal ties among employees in the organization (Baehr & Brown 2010).

4.3 Technology

Technology area is mainly concerned with system and application design, content on this part is mostly related to computer science and technology. Because social media are heavily depended on technological capabilities and advancements, it will play a revolutionary role on the use of individuals and organizations from studies of functional systems and applications.

- **System Design**

This field is mostly about various functional systems, such as voting system, recommendation system, detection system, business intelligence 2.0 system et al. Social media are platforms of user generated content, so researchers not only consider the needs of users, but also need to analyze the diversity and particularity of data during design these systems.

Voting system allows people to delegate their decision-making power to people they trust in their social networks. Generally speaking, the ballot on social media can be defined in various ways, including “one-vote” voting systems, “ranked” voting systems, and “rated” voting systems. In “one-vote” voting systems, a voter could exactly pick one candidate. In “ranked” voting systems, individual voters rank their candidates in order of preference. In “rated” voting systems, voters give a score to each candidate (Boldi et al. 2011).

Recommendation system of social media is used to share content ratings, provide accurate and personalized recommendations, some scholars consider it as a method of personalizing the presentation of information (Yang et al. 2013; Burke et al. 2011). In the process of design, preference similarity, recommendation trust, and social relations should be considered (Li et al. 2013).

Some researchers develop an earthquake detection system with high probability by monitoring tweets, the system could extract earthquakes from Twitter and send a message to registered users. (Sakaki et al. 2013). Other researchers design and development of an adaptive business intelligence 2.0 system underpinned by an evolutionary learning approach, it helps enhance top executives' mergers and acquisitions decision making (Lau et al. 2012).

- **Application Design**

Application designers need to think deeply about user interface, user preference, policies, and features. The design principle is the fewer distractions while reading, the more usable the interface (Hearst 2011). Others suggest the open social application program interface should include people and relationships, as well as activities and notifications (Häsel 2011).

In the mobile field, social applications are fast updating and the user interface is playing an important role on mobile applications. Some researchers point out the new user interface should employ two major mobile Web 2.0 technologies, the tag and the tag cloud, and multi-display buttons could increase the display size and flexibility of individual buttons (Kim et al. 2010).

4.4 Information

The salient information feature of social media is the user generated content (UGC). In last a few

years, social media have increasingly become popular platforms for information dissemination. Using UGC of social media to make academic research is a hot trend. This part mainly contains collection and analysis of UGC.

- Collection

As a content provider of social media, the collection of UGC is a very popular research direction. We could collect abundant information from social media, and how to find the useful information brings new challenges for social searching engines. Looking from the timeliness of information, Twitter generally has a higher real-time, study is given priority to with quality and velocity of information (Asadi & Lin 2013). Looking from the type of information, some researchers propose a graph-based sentiment crawler that incorporates topic and sentiment information as well as a graph-based tunneling mechanism for enhanced collection of opinion-rich Web content regarding a particular topic (Fu et al. 2012). Others propose a clustering technique of opinion on social media that enables the identification of themes within discussions and interactions of active participants in online social networks (Yang & Dorbin 2011).

- Analysis

The part of information analysis includes prediction, behavior and content quality et al. The main methods of information analysis are concerned with optimization and application of algorithms.

In predicting analysis, there are three mainstreams of social media platforms: micro-blogs, blogs, and video sharing sites. As we know, micro-blogs such as Twitter, have vast flow of data. Existing studies include predicting public sentiment and political activity, detecting earthquakes and flu outbreaks, users' potential interests, trendy topics detection (Savage 2011; Bao et al. 2013; Li & Li 2013). In the blogosphere, some researchers analyze communication within a set of individuals to extract the representative prototypical groups, and find that the prototypical groups can predict stock market movement and political polls (Choudhury et al. 2010). Others take advantage of both the queries from users and the blog posts published to give strong indications of the real-world events of users' concern, then propose a two-stage real-time event detection framework consisting of event fragment detection and event detection (Sun & Hu 2011). And in video sharing sites, studies are mainly about predicting content popularity (Szabo & Huberman 2010).

In behavior analysis, compared to user studies, it mainly aims to analyze human behavior through UGC. The research suggests photo-sharing sites such as Flickr and Facebook contain vast amounts of latent information about our world and human behavior (Crandall & Snavely 2012). And other social media provide abundant information as well, we could research interests and behaviors of users by refining and classifying these information. For instance, based on analysis of blogs and online product reviews, large corporations could know what types of people like or dislike their products (Argamon 2009).

Others aims at the analysis of content quality, they present an in-depth study of duplication and content overlap in YouTube, and analyze various dependencies between content overlap and meta data such as video titles, views, video ratings, and tags (Pedro et al. 2011).

5 CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH

The paper systematically reviewed social media studies published in Association for Information

Systems (AIS) listed top 20 journals from 2009 to 2013. The publication time, journal preferences, research objects and research topics are discussed. Especially, the research topics are summarized and analyzed in detail. Throughout the past five years, the rapid development of social media practices and surging social media academic researches make believe that a large number of high levels social media studies will emerge in the future. We hope this review can indicate some promising directions and pave the ways for further social media studies.

- Research Objects and Topics

For social media aimed at socializing, such as SNS, micro-blogs, Wechat et al. In the future, we could probe into topics of privacy, reputation and trust-transmitting based on theories of social capital and social influence, and embed these research situations into specific application fields, such as marketing, CRM, forecasting et al. For social media aimed at content sharing, such as YouTube, we predict future studies should focus on sharing behavior, content redundancy, reviews, big data analysis et al. For social media aimed at collaboration, such as Wikis, potential studies should focus on transmission and automatic extraction of knowledge, collaboration of virtual teams, crowd-sourcing, evaluation of content quality et al. Especially, we should pay attention to applications of social media like Wiki within organizations. A slow developing trend of studies on blog and online community is shown, and the existing research results are relatively abundant, so it is not recommended as the focus of future studies. Finally, there is a lack of the studies based on mobile social networking platform and 3D virtual collaboration environment in China, researchers could make studies on user behavior, teamwork and some technologies topics around these platforms.

- Research Methods

Current social media studies are mainly empirical and technical, here are some suggestions on empirical studies. According to our review, structural equation model (SEM) and econometric model (EM) are still mainstream research methods. We also find there is lack of empirical studies on social media in top Chinese journals; meanwhile the SEM is denounced by Chinese academic society recently. There for, we strongly suggest EM method for Chinese journal submission, while for international journals, SEM and EM are both OK. In addition, due to the social media platform combines social platform features and media platform features, using experimental or quasi-experimental methods to the studies of user behavior or system design are also very promising.

- Research Perspectives

Social media has the nature of multifunction and cross-discipline, which provides us more choices in research perspective. Such as privacy and information security research and social system and application design are not only limited to the technical aspects, we can also to explore these issues from the perspective of psychology, sociology and management science. More interdisciplinary studies combined different perspectives are strongly suggested which can bring us more systematic and comprehensive understanding for social media.

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