Developing a Theoretical Framework for Web Credibility Assessment—A Case of Social Q&A Sites: Preliminary Findings

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Introduction

- Social question-and-answer (Q&A) allow users to "ask and answer question, evaluate content submitted by others, and view the com-munity's aggregate assessment of which questions, answers, and users are best."[1]
- Characterized by their content-focused and collaborative nature, Q&A sites allow users to express their information needs as questions in natural language and obtain answers based on the community's collective knowledge.
- Relatively less research has focused on web credibility issues in social Q&A sites.

Theoretical Background

- Two-factor model of credibility[2]
  - **Trustworthiness:** Perceived *willingness* of the source to provide high quality information
  - **Expertise:** Perceived *ability* to provide high quality information
- Web credibility framework[3]
  - **Operator (author):** Source characteristics
  - **Content:** Attributes of the content
  - **Design:** Design elements related to organizational, technical, aesthetic, and interactive features of the site
- Extended typology of web credibility (Table 1)[4]

	Trustworthiness	Expertise
Operator	Operator Trustworthiness	Operator Expertise
Content	Content Trustworthiness	Content Expertise
Design	Design Trustworthiness	Design Expertise

Table 1. Six types of web credibility

Study Design

- To develop a platform-type specific framework for web credibility assessments, a three-phased study was conducted.
- **Phase 1 – Literature Analysis:** To understand how previous studies on social Q&A sites or similar peer knowledge production communities have conceptualized and operationalized the credibility of information on such sites
- **Phase 2 – Synthesis of Findings of Phase 1:** To create a conceptual framework for web credibility assessments of social Q&A sites.
- **Phase 3 – Content Analysis:** To test and refine the framework by analyzing two specific cases—the Stack Exchange network of Q&A sites and Wikipedia Reference Desk.
  - ❖ *Note: The current poster reports on preliminary findings of the first two phases.*

Findings & Discussion

- **Phase 1: Twenty-one criteria** for web credibility assessment of social Q&A sites have been identified.
- **Phase 2: An extended typology of web credibility for social Q&A sites**, categorizing the 21 criteria into six types of web credibility has been proposed (see Table 2).
- **Existing frameworks focus more on content-related attributes** (e.g., evidence-based, semantic clarity), but less on operator- or author-related attributes (e.g., credentials).
- Design-related attributes (e.g., interactive design) were rarely included in the frameworks, which warrants **further investigation on the potential influences of design** on people's web credibility assessments of social Q&A sites.

	Trustworthiness	Expertise
Operator	Operator (author) trustworthiness: • Decency • Integrity • Non conflict of interest/ Benevolence • Transparency	Operator (author) expertise: • Credentials • Reputation
Content	Content trustworthiness: • Consistency • Currency • Citing Sources • Social Validation • Unbiasedness	Content expertise: • Accuracy • Evidence-based • Novelty • Reinforcement • Semantic Clarity/ Comprehensive • Structural Complete • Usefulness
Design	Design trustworthiness: • Responsive Design	Design expertise: • Appropriate Design • Ease of Use

Table 2. Proposed typology of web credibility assessments in social Q&A sites

References

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