

What Drives Post-Level User Engagement?

The Role of Attribute and Style Matching and the Moderating Effect of Social Ties

Prior research has shown that reader engagement to user generated content through positive responses to it, such as “like” and “useful” influences other readers’ purchase decisions. In this research, we propose and test a model of post-level user engagement based on similarity-attraction theory (e.g., Byrne 1971), wherein post-level attribute matching with the reader’s own behavior and geodemographic matching of the sender with the reader influence reader engagement (i.e., likelihood of giving positive feedback to the post). We test our model using two different datasets - one from a social networking platform in Japan and one from a review platform in the U.S. The results from both datasets reveal that when receiving posts from non-connected others, a reader is more likely to provide feedback for posts that more closely match the reader’s past posts in terms of easy-to-process post attributes, such as valence, text length, and emoji length. We also find that sender-reader matching in terms of geodemographic attributes promotes positive feedback. However, these matching effects are drastically attenuated for posts from connected others. Conceptual and practical implications will be discussed.

Keywords: consumer voting behavior, post matching effects, individual matching effects, and online social ties.