Information-Seeking Stopping Behavior:
On the Role of Information Visibly Created by Other Social Actors

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The quantity of available information in online media has been growing exponentially during the last decade. As a consequence, the Internet is constantly replacing traditional offline media and catalyzes the development of new behavioral strategies for coping with the large amount of information provided to information seekers in the context of organizational decision-making and sense-making tasks (Kim, 2009). However, not only the pure amount of information available via online media is rising, but also the variety of sources which are used to distribute this information to its requesters – such as e-commerce websites, microblogging, social networking or company websites – is increasing continuously. Over the last 15 years, there has been a constant transformation process from static web pages to highly interactive ones, setting a focus on content created and rated by its users. Therefore, issues with respect to information quality are another important dimension influencing online information seeking activities: Information, visibly created and rated by a heterogeneous group of people seems to be highly appreciated by today's Internet users, although it is often hard to judge the objective quality of the information delivered to the seeker (Bawden and Robinson, 2009).

Hence, it is the goal of this study to explain why and when human information seekers stop seeking for information when solving corporate tasks. This termination – either purposive or unconscious – is mandatory as the amount of information available to the users in online settings commonly significantly exceeds the information processing capacity of the corresponding human beings (Browne and Pitts, 2004, Browne et al., 2007, Prabha et al., 2007). Terminating seeking activities too early or too late, however, might lead to a sub-optimal overall performance of the information seeker. While extant literature on information seeking stopping behavior focuses primarily on purely rational processes, the research at hand also sheds light on the importance of impulsive mechanisms affecting the termination of seeking activities. It is assumed, that the presence of social cues in the source information will activate heuristics in the information seekers mind which bias his or her behaviors and may finally lead to premature stopping.

For answering the aforementioned research question, a research model has been created based on dual processing theories and its derivates (Strack and Deutsch, 2004). These theories differentiate between implicit, automatic and explicit, rational activities of information acquisition. While in the former mode, problems are solved holistically and strongly based on heuristics, in the latter, the person has to invest a significant amount of cognitive effort to scrutinize all issue-relevant information cues. Information high in social richness is likely to convey cues which go "beyond objectively correct information" (p. 439) and activate a holistic approach for making sense of the acquired information without a thorough argument scrutiny (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

Since it is difficult for subjects to verbalize if they followed a strongly heuristic or purely systematic approach of acquiring information and terminating the seeking process, it is essential to collect neurophysiological data beyond traditional ways of data collection. Thus, data on the subjects' heart rate variability and brain activity (EEG) are included into the analysis of the results of a web-based laboratory experiment on information-seeking stopping behavior in addition to traditional questionnaires and interviews. Only by getting real-time data on the subjects' physiological responses, it is possible to explain and predict the subjects' behavior while at the same time reducing the risk of potential biases (social desirability, post-experiment questionnaires etc.). Finally, the subjects' physiological reactions might also deliver insights into subconscious processes, which remain undetected when using traditional data collection approaches exclusively.

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