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DOCTORAL THESIS

Adaptive search in consumer-generated content environment: an information foraging perspective

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ABSTRACT

Inefficiencies associated with online information search are becoming increasingly prevalent in digital environments due to a surge in Consumer Generated Content (CGC). Despite growing scholarly interest in investigating users' information search behaviour in CGC environments, there is a paucity of studies that explores the phenomenon from a theory-guided angle. Drawing on Information Foraging Theory (IFT), we re-conceptualize online information search as a form of adaptive user behaviour in response to system design constraints. Through this theoretical lens, we advanced separate taxonomies for online information search tactics and strategies, both of which constitute essential building blocks of the search process. Furthermore, we construct a research framework that bridges the gap between online information search tactics and strategies by articulating how technology-enabled search tactics contribute to the fulfilment of strategic search goals. Subsequently, our research framework was validated via an online experiment in which Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT) participants were recruited and tasked to perform searches on custom-made online review websites, which are modelled after their actual counterpart and populated with real review data of restaurants. Empirical findings reveal that the provision of different search features engenders distinct search tactics, thereby exposing users to varying levels of search determination control and search manipulation control. In turn, both types of search controls affect users' result anticipation and search costs, which when combined, determine the efficiency of goal-oriented search strategy and the utility of exploratory search strategy.

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