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I'm sure you've been approached by someone who asked you "Why do we need to buy this expensive textbook when there is so much free information out there on the Web?" What was your answer? In this month's column Shim, Ahn, and Kim ask questions about perceptions of Web content usefulness and Wikipedia reliability. They also describe the users who create and post information to the Web. This is a particularly appropriate article following last month's column by Tony Clement on the phenomenon of social computing. Reliability of information is particularly interesting to me because in 1986 I published an article in *Information & Management* about using folklore in documenting software. I thought then that even information that was not proven to be true (or may not be true at all) might still be useful to users attempting to get their software to work. Has anything changed in the last twenty-some years? Read what Shim, Ahn, and Kim have to say about contributing to collaborative content on the Web. [Kenneth E. Kendall, Feature Editor]

Trends and Differences of Perceptions among Web 2.0 Users: Lessons for the Future Use and Study of Web 2.0

by J. P. Shim, Mississippi State University; Kyung-Mo Ahn, Korea Culture & Content Agency and Kyung Hee University; and Juyeon Kim, International Tourism Strategy Institute and Kyung Hee University

The era of Web 2.0 has propelled Internet use to a higher level of interactivity, openness, and sharing among users. One of the notable characteristics of Web 2.0 is the "user-centered" feature in which users can add value by creating and sharing data with other users on the Website, whereas on traditional Websites the users are limited to viewing and receiving the content and there is no method of input.

User created content (UCC) is the core of Web 2.0 and it flows in a variety of forms such as photos, images, text, moving pictures, and music through communities, media or portal site platforms. For example, a "netizen" (net citizen) might discover an interesting piece of information which she posts on her own homepage or blog. Other users are invited to post their opinions on the Internet forum board which becomes

a powerful medium in forming public opinion. The netizens' interests are expressed through UCC, and is circulated and re-created.

Questioning Usefulness and Reliability on Web Information

A new form of the users' campaign and participatory democracy has been revealed through the Web network. Web users are now actively participating in forming public opinion on various subjects. However, there are some criticisms regarding the usefulness and reliability of Web information that has not been proved objectively.

This criticism can occur because of distorted information which spreads widely and is caused by information from unreliable and unfiltered sources. In addition, security and privacy are important issues which have become a

concern due to occurrences of personal information exposure and the breaching of financial accounts. As Shim and Yang (2009) pointed out, with many more users interfacing with Web 2.0 applications the reliability of Web information (e.g., Wikipedia) and the security of the Web system has to be solved completely.

The purpose of this research is to find out how Web users utilize the new service system of Web 2.0 according to characteristics of demographic information. The research goal is to find out whether there are perceptual differences on the usefulness and reliability of Web 2.0 information between Web users who are actively participating in Web 2.0 activities, including creating and posting user created content (UCC), and Web users who are not actively participating in Web 2.0 activities.

Research Methodology

The research measurement items are based on previous survey results from Internet users: i.e., users' possession of a personal Web page or blog, Web page activity frequency, content creation, posting experiences onto Web page, as well as having the motivation for creating and posting. It includes questions about their perception of the usefulness of Web information and reliability of Wikipedia, and demographical information about the respondents. In addition, questions on the users' perception of Web security and Web information reliability are included as a factor in facilitating Web 2.0.

To measure the reliability of Web information, believability, accuracy, and trustworthiness presented by Flanagin & Metzger (2000) were used. The users' perception on the importance of security and reliability was measured on a five point Likert scale (1 = very unimportant, 5 = very important). The survey collected data using a direct entry method in schools and office areas in the Seoul metropolitan area. Survey period was mid-January 2009.

In total, although 343 questionnaires were collected, 23 were incomplete thereby rendering them invalid, so 320 questionnaires were used for analysis

	N	1	2	3
High school graduate	51	2.725		
High school student	45	2.933	2.933	
University student	78		3.154	3.154
University graduate	122		3.213	3.213
Post graduate	24			3.333
Sig.		0.217	0.117	0.318

Table 1. Education-UCC usefulness perception Duncan test.

(Gender – 167 males and 153 females; Age – teens (52 participants), 20s (107 participants), 30s (102 participants), 40s (39 participants), and over 50s (20 participants); Occupation – public service (22), housewife (22), student (134), employee (92), professional (20), self-employed (17), other (13); Education – high school graduate (51), high school student (45), university student (78), university graduate (122), post graduate (24).

UCC Creation and Posting Experience

There were significant relations between ages, careers/occupations, and academic backgrounds and UCC creation and posting. Within the users who were in the categories of teens, 20s, and 30s, the number of users who have experienced UCC creation and posting was much greater those who did not. As expected, among the users in their 40s and 50s, the number of inexperienced users was much more than those who had experience.

The results also indicated that there were significant relations between careers and a Web page data posting experience. For example, students, employees, and professionals demonstrated having had more experiences with UCC creation and posting, while self-employed people and housewives showed fewer experiences. It also indicated that there were significant relations between education and experiences of writing and posting photos. It was illustrated through undergraduate students having had the most frequent experiences, followed by the high school students and graduates, university graduates, and graduate students.

Users' Perception of Web Information Usefulness

To figure out the relations between demographical statistics and the perception of UCC usefulness, this research did ANOVA analysis. As a result, there were insignificant relations between gender, ages, and careers and the perception of UCC usefulness according to small groups. According to the Duncan test (see Table 1), high school graduates and high school students were classified as a group with a low perception of UCC usefulness; on the other hand, the results of university students and university graduates ranged in the middle, while post graduate students and university graduates were a group with a high perception of UCC usefulness.

Users' Perception of Wikipedia Reliability

Among the factors of demographical statistics, academic backgrounds showed a significant difference in perception on Wikipedia reliability, and the groups had significant differences in the usefulness perception of Wikipedia. According to the Duncan test (see Table 2), graduate students, university graduates, and university students were classified as a group with a low perception of Wikipedia usefulness; on the other hand, high school graduates and high school students were classified as a group with a high perception of UCC usefulness.

Perception of Web Security

This research studied the differences according to gender, ages, careers, and academic backgrounds to understand whether there are perceptual differences on the security of Web 2.0. Results

revealed only gender and age showed significant differences on security perception. More females thought a security system establishment was necessary than their male counterparts (Mean of female=4.445, Mean of male=4.090). In terms of ages, participants in their 50s showed the lowest perception of security, followed by teens, 30s, 20s, and those in their 40s, in that order. According to the Duncan test (see Table 3), participants over 50, teens, and those in their 30s were classified as an equivalent group, and participants in their 20s and 40s belonged to the same group.

Discussion

This study deduced distinctive results and implications from empirical research. First, there are significant relations between ages, careers, and academic backgrounds and UCC creation and posting experiences. The younger users (teens, 20s, 30s) have much more experience and a higher frequency of UCC creation and posting than the older users (40 years and over). As a result, this supports the existing study (Rosen & Weil, 1995), in which age is a crucial factor in using new technology. In terms of careers, students and professionals showed a high usage of UCC creation which indicates the characteristics of careers that influence UCC creation and posting. Second, differences in motivation for creating content and posting correlated to ages and careers.

For example, while participants in their teens, 20s, and 30s were usually motivated by entertainment purposes, those in their 40s were motivated from a utility standpoint. While the younger generation pursues personal entertainment through Web activities, middle-aged users pursue function and utility, indicating their values on Web activities are different. Third, the higher the level of the users' academic backgrounds, the higher the users perceived UCC usefulness and Wikipedia reliability. American adult Internet users also use Wikipedia more actively as their academic backgrounds advance.

Lastly, in terms of the security needed for Web 2.0 revitalization, there were significant differences according to

gender and age. Regarding information reliability, only gender was a variable.

Conclusion

This study features a variety of practical dimensional viewpoints with a focus on perceptual differences, and it deals with issues such as usage trends and perception according to the characteristics of computer or Internet users. It is worthwhile to conduct a study on users who 'participate' in activities via Web network, regardless of whether they actively or passively participate, thus showing positive attitudes on Web information. It is expected that their attitudes on receiving Web information the effect of the communication, or information exchange efficiency through UCC depend on whether they are passive receivers, active participators, or passive participators.

Although there may be research limitations due to the fact that the survey was only conducted in Korea, the exploratory research results provide implications regarding future trends and differences of perceptions among Web 2.0 users in other countries. Since Korea is leading in every segment of telecommunications, social networking, and the Internet, exploring the Korean sample shows meaningful trends in this area. It is expected that the above research results will be crucial in-

formation for companies providing Web service or for researchers interested in users' characteristics. However, in addition to studying Web users' general features or participation forms used in this study, it is necessary to do multi-dimensional research to grasp Web 2.0 usage trends and to consider users' psychological factors such as lifestyles and values.

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	N	1	2	3
High school graduate	51	2.549		
High school student	45	2.733	2.733	
University student	122		3.016	3.016
University graduate	24		3.125	3.125
Post graduate	78			3.218
Sig.		0.0357	0.064	0.346

Table 2. Education-Wikipedia reliability perception Duncan test.

Age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Over 50s	20	3.900	
Teens	52	4.036	4.036
30s	102	4.252	4.252
20s	107		4.365
40s	39		4.405
Sig.		0.069	0.066

Table 3. Age-Web security perception Duncan test.