

Crowd-Sourced Evaluation: A Qualitative Study of User-Generated Product Review Videos on ExpoTV.com

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Background: While user-generated videos are typically associated with humorous or shocking videos far removed from the rigorous world of evaluation, this paper explores the potential for utilizing user-generated videos as evaluation data. This topic is addressed through a qualitative pilot study of product review videos available on the ExpoTV.com website.

Purpose: The primary purpose of this study is to identify characteristics or insights about the user-generated content that could serve as a guide for future studies and the development of new theory or methodology to enlarge the scope and relevance of data used in evaluations.

Setting: The ExpoTV.com website.

Intervention: Not applicable.

Research Design: Grounded theory.

Communication of first-person experience through user-generated video is an increasingly common form of expression in our time-starved, media-saturated information age. While these videos are most typically used for entertainment purposes and often prized for their novelty or shock value, this paper explores the potential for utilizing consumer-generated videos as evaluation data. This broad topic is addressed through a qualitative study of product

Data Collection and Analysis: User-generated videos downloaded from the ExpoTV.com website. Analyzed in three stages – In Vivo coding, Axial coding and theme identification.

Findings: This article finds intriguing strengths to user-generated video as an evaluation data source because user-generated product review videos consistently demonstrate three important elements of evaluation: they provide a description of the product, explain the broader context for both the product and nature of the specific review, and provide an evaluative conclusion that is logically related to specific evaluative descriptions.

Keywords: *user-generated video; grounded theory; video data; evaluation methodology*

review videos available on the ExpoTV.com website (ExpoTV.com, 2011). The primary purpose of this study is to identify characteristics or insights about the user-generated content that could serve as a guide for future studies and the development of new theory or methodology to enlarge the scope and relevance of data used in evaluations. The specific research questions addressed include:

1. What are the common features of videos used to communicate findings from product evaluations?
2. What aspects of the features found in video product evaluations are transferable to the purposes of program evaluation reports?
3. Do user-generated product review videos meet the definition of evaluation and provide a “determination of merit, worth or significance” (Scriven, 2007)?
4. What factors undermine the credibility of user-generated video as sources of credible evaluation data?
5. What observed structures and conventions of video communication are most helpful to understand for effectively using user-generated video as evaluation data?

Methodology

Grounded theory methodology was selected to address the research questions because it was the best overall fit given the goals and limitations of this study (Creswell, 2007):

- There is no existing literature directly related to this subject
- The questions relate to a potentially new methodology within the field of evaluation that needs new theoretical development.
- The open/exploratory approach of grounded theory is most likely to identify unexpected insights and

findings as appropriate for exploring new conceptual territory.

- The goal of this study is new explanation of the investigated phenomena.

The analysis was an iterative process seeking to identify and explore the primary themes and trends within the video reviews. The videos were analyzed using three sensitizing concepts (Charmaz, 2003), including the definition of evaluation (Scriven, 2007), the visual qualities of the communication, and the organization/structure of the content of the videos.

Sampling, Subjects, and Setting

Eleven videos were intentionally sampled from the over 340,000 user generated videos available on ExpoTV.com at the time of this study (ExpoTV, 2011). The sampling procedure started with a random selection of product sub-categories and random selection of individual videos within the selected sub-category, but in a few cases involved reselection to achieve greater variety of factors such as product price range, racial background of reviewer, and number of views of the video. The goal of this approach was to collect a sample that is reasonably representative for the purposes of this exploratory analysis, recognizing that a fully randomized sample large enough for statistical significance was beyond the scope and intent of this study. A descriptive overview of the sampled videos and subjects is provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Sampled Videos and Subjects

Product	Gender	Race	State	Length	Plays
Stroller	Female	White	MI	1:09	246
iPhone	Male	Asian	TX	6:09	140
Mac-n-Cheese	Female	White	VA	1:49	6
Waffle maker	Female	White	IN	1:36	20
CDR	Female	Asian	NY	2:00	56
Lacrosse Ball	Male	White	CO	1:06	2
Pillow	Female	Black	AL	2:26	429
Whirlpool 1	Female	White	NE	3:30	1640
Whirlpool 2	Female	White	FL	2:59	3600
Mascara	Female	White	FL	1:17	448
Nissan ZX	Male	White	TX	3:11	830

The setting for the study was the publicly available ExpoTV.com website, and the subjects were those videos selected through the process noted above. Since the videos were posted by adult subjects within a publicly accessible forum and under the conditions of an explicit “ExpoTV terms and conditions” legal release (ExpoTV.com, 2011), no notification or consent form was necessary for inclusion in this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

This data was collected by downloading an .mp3 copy of the audio from each of the selected videos, from which transcriptions were developed for coding and analysis in three steps (Creswell, 2007):

1. Intensive in vivo coding (i.e., “the exact words used by participants.”)
2. Axial coding of in vivo codes (i.e., “categories around the core phenomenon.”)

3. Identification of groups and themes of axial codes

In addition to the coding and analysis noted above, the videos were also analyzed to gather visual data related to body language, lighting, camera angle, etc. Because of the small sample, these aspects of the data did not factor significantly into the findings of this study. Out of the 346 lines of transcription there were 486 in vivo codes generated, or an average of 1.5 in vivo codes per line, indicating that the videos were in fact a very rich source of data.

Findings

By analyzing and grouping the 486 in vivo codes noted above, 30 axial codes emerged which both closely fit the underlying data and served as a more manageable and useful list of descriptors (Creswell, 2007). These axial codes were further condensed into six groups representing higher-order descriptions of

the axial codes, and these six groups were ultimately combined into three key themes that represent the primary findings of this study.

The first theme is ‘describing,’ and is comprised of two groups of axial codes—product characteristics and cost description. As shown in Table 2 below, the product description group includes eight axial codes which represent 242 in vivo codes, and the cost description group represents three axial codes and 9 in vivo codes for a total of 251 in vivo codes represented within this theme.

The significance of this theme as relates to the use of user-generated video as evaluation data is its confirmation that users intuitively ground their product review in a description of the product. While there were varying levels of detail and clarity between the reviewers, all provided clear identification of the product, described the product function, provided demonstrations, and in most cases also were emotive in their descriptions, such as “very beautiful device.”

Table 2
Theme: Describing

Product Characteristics	In Vivo #	Cost Description	In Vivo #
Function description	63	Product cost	7
Product description	48	Additional cost	1
Emotive description	32	Cost context	1
Product identifying	31	Group sub-total	9
Demonstrating	34		
Comparing	29		
Product origin	3		
Support services	2		
Group sub-total	242		

The second theme is contextualizing, comprised of the ‘product context’ group that represents 92 in vivo codes and the ‘reviewer relationship’ group representing 48 in vivo codes. The significance of this theme as relates to the questions of the study is that it indicates that product reviewers also intuitively know to provide a broader context for their evaluation of the product beyond basic description of the product and cost. While only a few reviewers explained where the product was purchased, all provided context for the personal needs and situation that influenced their purchase decision and/or

ongoing use of the product. Additionally, many of the reviewers also provided context for the product’s fit within a broader product line, and many videos included recordings of relevant product sounds (e.g., engine revving for the car, phone and washing machine sounds.) With the exception of three, all reviewers provided their name, directly thanked the viewer, and explained their own strategy for maximizing the usefulness of the product; all reviewers worked to establish a first person connection with the viewer (e.g., “you definitely need to check out the...”).

Table 3
Theme: Contextualizing

Product Context	In Vivo #	Reviewer Relationship	In Vivo #
Purchase location	4	First person connection	24
Personal context	57	Name ID	8
Line context	16	Thanks	8
Identifying with brand	8	Use strategy	8
Sound effects	7	Group sub-total	48
Group sub-total	92		

The final theme is evaluating, and is comprised of the 'pros/cons' group representing 110 in vivo codes and the 'summing it all up' group representing 66 in vivo codes. The significance of this theme for this study is its indication that the evaluative conclusions such as endorsing (e.g., 'definitely worth it'), recommending (e.g., 'get yourself one!') or recommendations against (e.g., 'I wouldn't get this') were logically grounded in the evaluative descriptions of specific benefits or drawbacks of the product. This finding indicates that unsupervised users generating their own videos intuitively know to provide background and justification as grounding for evaluative judgments. Another interesting finding is that some reviewers provided an endorsement of the overall brand (e.g.,

"recommend...the McLaren name") or statements indicating a broader community of endorsement (e.g., "everyone knows that this is good"). This finding highlights the independent nature of user-generated videos; since they are developed through an unsupervised process, each individual is free to make any statement they feel relevant or appropriate and are not constrained by a narrow approach (e.g., one individual's thoughts on one specific product.) While this is a clear limitation on the rigor associated with user-generated video as evaluation data, it also highlights a potential opportunity, as the nature of these 'free association' connections or statements could carry significant meaning.

Table 4
Theme: Evaluating

Pros/Cons	In Vivo #	Summing it all Up	In Vivo #
Drawback	47	Endorsing	44
Benefit	45	Recommending	11
Cost benefit	7	Brand Endorsement	5
Health benefit	7	Community of endorsement	4
Taste benefit	4	Recommend against	2
Group sub-total	110	Group sub-total	66

Conclusion

This study found that generated product review videos provide content that consistently demonstrates three qualities: a description of the product, the broader context for deeper understanding of both the product and nature of the specific review, and an evaluative conclusion that is logically related to specific evaluative descriptions. The available time, technical knowledge and equipment needs required for user-generated video do clearly limit the use of this form of data in educational or nonprofit evaluations. This study, however, demonstrates that there are potentially unique strengths as well. As a pilot study on this subject, the findings need to be understood within the limitations of the small sample size and purposeful sample, and larger studies with fully random selection should be done to strengthen the reliability of these findings.

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