

Examining participation willingness of internet community using structure equation model

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Abstract

Rapid growth in the number of Virtual Internet Communities (VIC) over the Web cyberspace has brought together Internet users who have common interests, want to circulate and share information, wish to learn things, and desire to do business. In the process of

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socialization, participation willingness generally comes from user perceptions and social behavior, and it is therefore one of the most important issues for the VIC life cycle. Based on the perspectives of Taiwan's Internet users, this paper presents an empirical investigation on VIC participation willingness by using structure equation model. Results were obtained showing that (1) users are more likely willing to have full freedom of using Internet; (2) social relationships showed no significance, mainly due to the effect of virtual trust on users' behavior and unknown Internet social structure; and (3) communication tools did not indicate significance because they are a prerequisite for motivating user participation, rather than an significant factor to enable the VIC participation. Discussions and implications are also presented.

Keywords and phrases : Virtual community, participation willingness, internet.

1. Introduction

Advances in Internet technology have demonstrated success in enhancing interactions among computer users by breaking through geographical barriers and time zones. This has resulted in the rapid growth of Internet users. Consequently, Virtual Internet Communities (VIC) have been extensively built in the Web cyberspace, bringing together Internet users who have common interests, want to circulate and share information, wish to learn things, and desire to do business [1, 2, 3, 4]. Importantly, VIC is increasingly capturing the attention of management in various domains as well as of people whose life depends highly on the Internet. It can be an effective way to improve the performance of e-commerce and knowledge management because it can improve benefits for both marketing mangers and VIC members and enhance capability of knowledge sharing [5].

For example, marketing managers can obtain information via a VIC about customers' preferences for a particular product and then do personalized marketing. In the same way, a VIC member can share information or learn things from other members about products and services such as price, personal experience, promotion activities, and technical skills. Through the features of a market fragment, a VIC acts to share the purchasing experiences and resources in a common cyberspace [6]. VIC can cause positive customer satisfaction by enabling members to join in a case study of health maintenance [7]. The main reason for this is that a health maintenance organization can better understand the customer behaviors through web analysis. A VIC can also be linked into e-commerce efforts to widen services and to support democracy,