



Trust factors influencing virtual community members: A study of transaction communities

Jyh-Jeng Wu^a, Ying-Hueih Chen^{b,*}, Yu-Shuo Chung^c

^a Department of Business Management, National United University, Miaoli, Taiwan

^b Department of Computer Science and Information Management, Providence University, Taichung, Taiwan

^c Graduate School of Business Administration, Providence University, Taichung, Taiwan

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 May 2008

Received in revised form 1 August 2008

Accepted 1 March 2009

Keywords:

Virtual community

Trust

Shared values

Stickiness

Satisfaction

Commitment

ABSTRACT

Virtual community is a valuable business medium for web vendors in terms of disseminating information and retaining customers. This research investigates the underlying driving forces that cultivate both the trust and returning behavior of virtual community members. In particular, this research examines the influence of shared values, satisfaction with previous interactions, and website privacy policies on the trust of 381 active virtual community members. The findings suggest that the shared values of virtual community members have a positive impact on both trust and relationship commitment. Second, satisfaction with previous interactions not only increases the level of trust in virtual community members, but also enhances relationship commitment and member stickiness. Third, website privacy policies enhance the level of trust significantly. Finally, trust shows a positive and significant effect on both the stickiness and the commitment of virtual community members.

© 2009 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The widespread rise of virtual community has changed the way of social interactions. Virtual community comprises communication platform and a social network through which people holding the same interests and concerns can interact with one another in cyberspaces (Turban et al., 2006; McKnight et al., 2002). The popularity of virtual communities has opened a new avenue for e-vendors to enhance website visibility and generate web traffic (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997).

A virtual community serves both social and business functions. From the social perspective, a virtual community provides a communication platform and a social network—fostering interaction between individuals. The members of these communities come together to develop friendships, share common interests, and exchange information (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997). From the business perspective, a virtual community comprises a viable trading and marketing platform that enables commercial interaction between sellers, buyers, and intermediaries (Schubert and Ginsburg, 2000). Hagel and Armstrong (1997) suggested that a virtual community provided three major business functions. First, virtual communities

allow e-vendors to leverage customers' ideas in terms of designing and customizing new products. For example, the rich information generated within virtual communities provides valuable insight and feedback on the quality of existing products and services, which in turn allows organizations to continuously improve products. Second, a virtual community can serve as an operational mechanism through which organizations can pursue targeted marketing and consequently stimulate transaction tendencies. For instance, a detailed customer transaction history yields rich data in regards to customer preferences and transaction intensity, which enhances the ability of e-vendors to identify current and potential customers. Third, a virtual community represents a tremendous opportunity for e-vendors to reach a critical mass of purchasing power at a minimum cost.

Despite promising in terms of e-commerce, Internet-based virtual communities are relatively informal, and their business value remains subject to members' willingness to constantly employ the virtual community for information exchanges and business transactions. Steady traffic flow to the site and member loyalty are both imperative for a virtual community to be commercially useful. Prior research has designated trust and relationship commitment as key facilitators of e-commerce (Bhattacharjee, 2002; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; McKnight et al., 2002; Eastlick et al., 2006). Empirical research in this area has primarily focused on online shoppers. However, virtual community members are expressly different from the conventional e-shoppers because the social groups are able to balance the power associated with both vendors and customers through the release and exchange of information (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997). Thus, a gap exists in

* Corresponding author. Department of Computer Science and Information Management, Providence University, 200 Chungchi Rd., Shalu 433, Taichung, Taiwan. Tel.: +886 4 26328001x18115; fax: +886 4 26324045.

E-mail addresses: jjwu@nuu.edu.tw (J.-J. Wu), yhchen@pu.edu.tw (Y.-H. Chen), fafa0219@hotmail.com (Y.-S. Chung).

terms of the underlying dimensions, causes, and effects of trust on virtual community members.

This quantitative research applies the commitment–trust theory of relationship marketing to investigate trust factors associated with virtual communities and their consequents. Following the introduction, the next section presents the theoretical background through a review of the literature on trust and the commitment–trust theory of relationship marketing. Next, the research model, the hypotheses, and the research methods are discussed. The final section summarizes the findings as well as research implications.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Trust

Trust is a cornerstone in terms of constructing a long-term business relationship and partnership. Trust refers to the depth and assurance of feelings based on inconclusive evidence (Giffin, 1967; Doney and Cannon, 1997; McKnight and Chervany, 2002). Uncertainty and risk are the necessary conditions that reveal the value of trust (Moorman et al., 1993).

Researchers have explored the trust development process. Moorman et al. (1993) divided the process of trust development into antecedents, trust, and behavioral intentions. Antecedents of trust refer to elements that determine the formation of trust. McKnight et al. (1998) suggested that personal traits, structural assurance and situational normality of the Web, initial impressions, and personal interactions are important factors forming trust. Moreover, trust also demonstrated on the confidence of trustees' benevolence, ability, integrity, and predictability in uncertain circumstances (Gefen, 2000). Behavioral intentions reflect the scope and depth of consumer relationships with vendors. McKnight et al. (2002) pointed out that when users develop trust in a website, they tend to continue participating and conducting transactions with the content provider. Liu et al. (2004) suggest that trust can lead to repeat purchases, website visits, and website recommendations. Eastlick et al. (2006) conducted empirical study and found that trust is an important antecedent for individuals to maintain continuous and valuable relationships with e-tailers. Li et al. (2006) further revealed trust to be an important predictor to stickiness intention.

According to McKnight and Chervany (2002), trust comprises ability, benevolence, integrity, and predictability. Ability refers to the perceived competence level of individuals or firms to perform some intended behavior. Ability is domain-specific: individuals or organizations that demonstrate expertise in a certain area are more likely to be trusted. For example, virtual communities that demonstrate the knowledge and skills to provide high quality e-commerce service and prove capable of identifying member needs are more easily to gain members' trust.

Benevolence refers to the trustor's perceptions of the trustee's efforts, as well as a willingness to achieve some value that is desirable in a relationship without rewards. Benevolence expresses kindness and altruism, which together reduce concerns about uncertainty and opportunism. Within a virtual environment, a benevolent community should at least actively respond to consumer questions and proactively search out member needs and desires.

Integrity refers to righteous behavior. Within a virtual environment, integrity implies the compliance of the commonly accepted values, principles, and rules. Perceived integrity can substantially reduce the uncertainty associated with online transactions. The virtual community may construct perceived integrity by imposing a code of ethical conduct, and thereby build a perception of justice.

Predictability refers to the trustor's beliefs that the trustee will adhere to the promised transaction, as well as interaction policies and guidelines. Predictability reduces uncertainty and risk. Within a virtual community, consistent information quality, behavior guide-

lines, and information exchange rules are operational mechanisms to enhance the predictability. Adherence to the set of rules and regulations is essential in terms of enforcing the perceived predictability of the community.

Indeed, trust is a set of specific beliefs that reflect the confidence of consumers in an organization (McKnight and Chervany, 2002). In the context of a virtual community, trust is an important catalyst facilitating social interaction and long-term relationships.

2.2. Commitment–trust theory of relationship marketing

Relationship marketing discusses the key issues involved in all forms of relational exchange. Trust and relationship commitment are central for establishing, developing, and maintaining successful cooperation between relationship parties (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust manifests the confidence that a trustworthy party is associated with valuable qualities such as ability, integrity, predictability, and benevolence (McKnight and Chervany, 2002). Relationship commitment is built on trust. Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 23) define relationship commitment as "an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it". Relationship commitment exists only when the relationship parties consider the relationship is important, beneficial, and valuable. When a committed partner wants to retain some relationship, important behavior attributes including high motivation and loyalty present themselves.

Shared values, trust, and satisfaction are the three antecedents of relationship commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Li et al., 2006). Shared values regarding appropriate behaviors, goals, and policies are important antecedents to both trust and commitment because they increase the perceived ability of the partners to predict the other's intentions and behavior (Morgan and Hunt 1994). When exchange parties share common values, they are more likely to maintain the social relationship. Satisfaction is a positive affective state resulting from the appraisal of all aspects of the community services and interaction. Satisfaction with the interaction that begins at the outset of the relationship tends to lead to the development of trust and continuous relationships (Ramaseshan et al., 2006). Trust in the ability, benevolence, integrity, and predictability of partners is central to constructive cooperation and dialogue. Because trust reduces uncertainty, it is likely to motivate the parties to continue the social relationship.

In sum, trust and relationship commitment are both important within the context of a virtual community because they reduce uncertainty and motivate members to visit frequently.

3. Research model and research hypothesis

Researchers suggest that trust is the catalyst in making virtual communities vibrant. McKnight and Chervany (2002) develop a trust-building model (TBM) to observe web consumer behavior. Integrating the TBM and the commitment–trust theory allows us to propose shared values, a privacy policy, and satisfaction as the antecedents of trust for virtual communities, as they capture the impact of institutional and cognitive issues on trust development. Based on the commitment–trust theory, shared values, user satisfaction, and trust also lead to member stickiness and a commitment to maintain a relationship with the virtual community (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). The relationship commitment may lead to further stickiness (Li et al., 2006). Fig. 1 depicts the research model and the hypotheses.

3.1. Antecedents of trust

3.1.1. Shared values

Shared values are fundamental drivers of culture. Shared values refer to common social principles, norms, and goals that guide

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات