# An Investigation of the Factors That Motivate Users to Participate in Online Communities

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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to contribute to the understanding of the online community by empirically examining the major factors motivating online community members to participate and actively contribute to their communities. In pursuing this endeavor, a comprehensive conceptual model of motivations that drive online community participation is developed based on an extensive revision of the existing relevant literature. However, modest research had been conducted to understand the online participant's motivation to participate in online communities. Thus, the current research model will enhance understanding and add to the relevant existing knowledge by categorizing digital user's motivation to participate in online communities, through the employment of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and Herzberg's two-factor theory. The paper used a deductive methodological approach adopted.

## KEYWORDS

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Online Community Participation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, online communities have attracted significant attention from scholars and practitioners (Bressler and Grantham, 2000; Kim, 2000; Shafer, 2001). This is due to the fact that these communities have dramatically transformed the manner society operates, from communication, to learning, to production and commerce (Castells, 2011). However, although online communities have increasingly pervasive natures and voluntary structures, it still remains the choice of the individual to determine the nature and amount of participation (Moon and Sproull 2008). Therefore, individuals might participate in one-off transactions driven by general search and retrieval of relevant information (Pirolli and Card 1999). Indeed, research indicates that several participants in online communities soon disengage with these communities (Arguello et al. 2006). However, other studies demonstrate that online communities are not purely temporary collections of casual foragers that

sustain themselves, but some participants return repeatedly and participate in the online community (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2002, Lee and Cole 2003).

Although the importance of online communities is continuously increasing, there aren't enough studies that empirically analyze online communities participants motive to behave in a manner to increase satisfaction (intrinsic motivation-motivational) or reduce dissatisfaction (extrinsic motivation-hygiene). Indeed, most studies regarding communities have been conducted at a conceptual level (Koh and Kim, 2004) and from a sociological perspective (e.g. Barnes, 2007; Chen, Chang and Liu, 2012). In addition, several existing studies in the extant literature adopted multiple theories, such as technology acceptance model (TAM), trust theory, social cognitive theory, social capital theory and social network theory, to examine online community user participation (Ridings et al., 2002; Hsu and Lu, 2007; Hsu et al., 2007; Koh et al., 2007; Toral et al., 2009). However, none of these studies differentiate between motivational factors that encourage participation and hygiene factors that reduce dissatisfaction to sustain members' participation. This differentiation is significant to the understanding of the underlying psychological mechanisms of members' motivation to participate in online communities. Furthermore, this differentiation assists in designing and managing effective motivational and hygiene incentives to encourage members' participation in online communities.

To fully comprehend individuals' motivation to participate in online communities, three relevant objectives have to be addressed. The first objective is to provide an overview of the literature on online communities' participation, Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Theory, and Herzberg Two-Factor Theory. The second objective is to synthesize the existing literature with Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Herzberg Two-Factor Theory into a conceptual model framework that distinguishes between hygiene and motivational factors. The third objective is to derive proposals explaining individuals' motives to participate in online communities. Therefore, this work extends the current existing knowledge on online community in several important ways.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Online communities have dramatically transformed the manner society operate, from communication, learning, production and commerce (Castells, 2011). According to Akar et al., (2018), an online community is a social aggregation of people who carry out public discussion about mutual goals. Moreover, Roberts and Dinger (2016) stated that an online community is a group of people with common interests who engage in virtual interactions such as exchanging e-word of mouth and reviews. Consequently, online communities have become the subject of attention for many researchers and practitioners in the last decade (Barnes and Pressey, 2011; Bishop, 2016; Cao et al., 2013). In a social media community, people are connected with each other to share information, knowledge, and ideas (Tao Guan et al., 2018). Moreover, online communities involve people who ask, answer, and discuss common issues such as interests and practices (Zhao, Detlor, & Connelly, 2016). The definition of the term "online community" has been formulated across many disciplines; although these definitions vary, there is a significant overlap among them. There are two main principles that could be employed to define online communities. According to Roberts & Dinger (2016) online community is a group of people with common interests who engages in virtual interactions such as exchanging e-word of mouth and reviews. The first principle states that online community members dwell in a virtual space (Abuhashesh et al., 2019a). The second principle asserts that online members engage in various interactions that result in creating and building relationships which lead members to bond through mutual experiences, characteristics and principles (Bishop, 2016; Federspiel, Schaffner and Mohr, 2014). The second principle is one of the most difficult challenges of online communities due to the need to maintain the momentum of knowledge sharing and creation efforts by its participants through engaging in Q&A sessions, live chats, and providing asynchronous feedback (Hayes and Walsham, 2000). This requires a comprehensive understanding of participants needs that drive online community members to build, create, engage and remain loyal to the community. Moreover, marketers

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