Chapter 1.14

The Role of Trust, Satisfaction, and Communication in the Development of Participation in Virtual Communities

Luis V. Casaló
University of Zaragoza, Spain

Carlos Flavián
University of Zaragoza, Spain

Miguel Guinalíu[1]
University of Zaragoza, Spain

ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of virtual communities has created a new interest in researchers. Indeed, understanding these communities is especially relevant because it may allow for the obtaining of valuable information (e.g. needs of particular groups of people). In this respect, this work tries to explore which factors motivate individuals to take part of a virtual community since participation is one of the most important variables for the development and sustainability of virtual communities. More specifically, we analyze the effects of trust in a community, satisfaction with previous interactions and the communication level of the members' intentions to participate in a given virtual community. The data (obtained through an online surveys made to members of several virtual communities) show that trust in a virtual community had a positive and significant effect on members' participation in a virtual community. In addition, we found that satisfaction with previous interactions and the level of communication in a community significantly increased the level of trust in that virtual community.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has come out as a new medium for social activities (Kim *et al.*, 2004) that favours the connection among individuals and organizations (Pitta *et al.*, 2005). Indeed, consumers are increasingly turning to computer-mediated

communication in order to get information on which to base their decisions (Kozinets, 2002). They are using several online formats to share ideas and contact other consumers who are seen as more objective information sources (Kozinets, 2002). These online interactions have motivated the creation of social groups in the Internet that have been traditionally called virtual communities (Rheingold, 1993).

The importance of virtual communities for marketers is continuously increasing since relationships between consumers may influence brand choice (Wind, 1976) or the election of a specific service (Pitta *et al.*, 2005). In addition, these online communities provide a great opportunity to understand the members likes, dislikes, needs, behaviours or concerns (Ridings *et al.*, 2002; Pitta *et al.*, 2005). However, there is still a lack of studies that analyze empirically which are the main precursors of consumer's participation in these virtual communities. In fact, although the concept of virtual community is almost as old as the concept of Internet (Flavián and Guinalíu, 2005), little is known about what motivations induce people to participate in virtual communities (Ridings *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, this study is designed to identify some of the factors that influence the members' intentions to participate in a virtual community. More specifically, following the trust-commitment theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), we firstly consider that to participate actively in a virtual community, an individual will need to trust first in that virtual community and in its members. Secondly, we also consider that a general satisfaction in the previous interactions with the virtual community and a higher communication quality in the community may increase the level of trust placed in a virtual community.

Taking into account the previous considerations, this work is structured as follows. Firstly, we carry out an in-depth review of the relevant literature concerning the concept of virtual community and the variables included in the study. Secondly, we formalize the hypothesis. Then,

we explain the process of data collection and the methodology employed. Lastly, the main conclusions of the work are discussed and the future research is presented.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The Virtual Community

Many definitions on the concept of the virtual community have appeared in the literature but, traditionally, this concept has been defined from a social point of view (Li, 2004). In line with this perspective, the concept of virtual community is firstly defined by Rheingold (1993) as a social group that is originated in the Internet when people discuss in this communication channel. Similarly, Ridings *et al.* (2002) expose that a virtual community is a group of people with a common interest that interact regularly in an organized way over the Internet. Thus, the Internet provides the infrastructure for enhancing the development of these communities since it is possible to overcome the space and time barriers to interaction that exist in traditional communities (Andersen, 2005). In addition, the justification to the exponential expansion of virtual communities is found in the advantages generated by these communities. In this respect, Hagel and Armstrong (1997) point out that virtual communities can help to satisfy four types of consumer needs: sharing resources, establishing relationships, trading and living fantasies.

Among all the typologies of virtual communities, this work focuses on virtual brand communities. To be precise, a brand community is a set of individuals who voluntarily relate to each other for their interest in some brand or product (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Furthermore, these authors point out that a brand community is characterized by three core components:

Related Content

A Social Framework for Software Architectural Design
Manuel Kolpand Yves Wautelet (2011). *Virtual Communities: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools and Applications (pp. 407-427).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-framework-software-architectural-design/48682

Fast Single Image Haze Removal Scheme Using Self-Adjusting: Haziness Factor Evaluation
Sangita Royand Sheli Sinha Chaudhuri (2019). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality (pp. 42-57).*
www.irma-international.org/article/fast-single-image-haze-removal-scheme-using-self-adjusting/228945

Knowledge Creation and Student Engagement Within 3D Virtual Worlds
Brian G. Burtonand Barbara Martin (2017). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality (pp. 43-59).*
www.irma-international.org/article/knowledge-creation-and-student-engagement-within-3d-virtual-worlds/169934

GLARE: An Open Source Augmented Reality Platform for Location-Based Content Delivery
Enrico Gandolfi, Richard E. Ferdig, David Carlyn, Annette Kratcoski, Jason Dunfee, David Hassler, James Blank, Chris Lenartand Robert Clements (2021). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality (pp. 1-19).*
www.irma-international.org/article/glare/290043

Teaching and Learning Abstract Concepts by Means of Social Virtual Worlds
David Grioland Zoraida Callejas (2017). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality (pp. 29-42).*
www.irma-international.org/article/teaching-and-learning-abstract-concepts-by-means-of-social-virtual-worlds/169933