Chapter 14
Enhancing the Trust of Members in Online Social Networks:
An Integrative Technical and Marketing Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The trust of members is essential to the sustainability of e-business. Unlike other business models, the success of online social networks is highly dependent upon the growth rate of social network size. In order to accelerate and continue the growth rate, online social networks need to be able to continuously roll out diversified services and use them to interest existing and new members. However, the nature of this business model can expose online social networks to ubiquitous security threats such as spam, viral marketing and viruses. In order to convince users to adopt social network services, cultivation of brand equity and trust in the online social networks is essential. This study integrates technical and marketing perspectives to examine the potential influence of website quality and brand equity on user satisfaction, thereby influencing users' formation of trust. A survey was conducted with 385 subjects to understand the causal relationships between the studied constructs. Regression analysis indicates that website quality, brand loyalty, brand association, and brand quality have a positive influence on user satisfaction, thereby increasing the trust of members in online social networks. Brand awareness shows no significant influence on user satisfaction. These findings lead us to derive theoretical and practical implications on the sustainable operation of online social networks.

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of leading online social networks largely depends on the trust of users engaging the socialization process on their networks. A high degree of trust can accelerate the growth rate of network size, which sets leading social networks apart from mediocre networks. Social networks can show honesty and consideration of members' privacy by the way they operate. Those efforts can help develop trust from social network members and increase their intention to revisit.

The ability to increase users' trust is crucial for sustainable development of an e-business. Trust is an important psychological factor in the online environment, because buyers and sellers do not see each other. With the absence of rich face-to-face communication, this intrinsic cognition becomes the foundation for transactions in the virtual world. However, measuring and managing this psychological trait is difficult because it is invisible to users. As part of an effective e-business plan, fostering this trust can potentially increase consumer participation (Pénard & Poussing, 2010).

Trust formation is contingent upon the successful development of use and gratification. Use and gratification theory asserts that people choose different media based on whether they can satisfy a range of their needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). On the Internet, human-to-machine relationships replace interpersonal relationships. The Internet mediates the formation of interpersonal relationships. The formation of smooth human-to-machine relationships depends on satisfying web experiences. The relationship building process evolves with how users choose to interact with websites and their satisfaction experience of each interaction.

User satisfaction can be improved via high website quality and positive user perceptions about vendors. The quality of a company's website can be enhanced by improving its technical design. Users' positive perceptions about the vendor can be supported through the incorporation of aspects such as personalization of service, third party as-surance and brand equity. This study examines how website quality and brand equity can contribute to a user's satisfying experience, thereby increasing a user's trust in socialization with others in online social networks.

LITREATURE REVIEW

Use and Gratification

Although social media are proliferating, they are not displacing traditional media. Users' decisions on media use depend on whether the media can satisfy their motives and needs (Kink & Hess, 2008). Social media need to compete with other media for users' attention. Creating the expectation that the chosen media will provide gratifying experiences to users could be an effective approach to get users' attention.

Use and Gratification theory asserts that gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO) can contribute to the intention of a user's continued use of products and services. GS focus on the expectancy value of media, whereas the focus of GO is on the actual value (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1982). GS are the expectancy/belief that a medium possesses certain attributes that can satisfy user's motives and needs. GO are the evaluation of these attributes after using the chosen medium. The chance of using social media is higher if users have a higher GS. This study aims to investigate the building of user trust in social media via the improvement of GS.

The Effect of Website Quality on Use and Gratification

Website quality can increase user's intention of initial purchase and of continued purchase (Kuan, Bock, & Vathanophas, 2008). Website quality can be improved in many areas: accessibility, navigation, bandwidth control, security, user friendliness design, interactivity, and aesthetics. Absence of

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