Chapter 58
The Continued Use of a Virtual Community:
An Information Adoption Perspective

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of the Internet, so too came several new means by which people share and acquire information. One such method is the use of virtual communities. Virtual communities are steadily becoming a valuable resource for today's organizations. However, a large number of virtual communities fail because their members withdraw from using them. Motivated by this concern, this study investigates the factors which motivate individuals to continue using a virtual community for information adoption. The proposed model integrates the IS continuance model with the information adoption model and is validated through an online survey of 240 users of a Bulletin Board System established by a local university in China. The results reveal that continuance intention within a virtual community is primarily determined by user satisfaction with prior usage, as well as by perceived information usefulness. The results also suggest that a long-term sustainable virtual community should be provided with high-quality and credible information. The findings of this study contribute to both theory building in virtual community continuance and practice in virtual community management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the low cost, bidirectionality, and lack of temporal and physical constraints, virtual communities are becoming unprecedentedly popular for both organizations and individuals. Virtual communities, also known as online communities, are computer-mediated spaces where a group of people generate content and share such content among themselves (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997). In this definition, *computer-mediated space* and *member-generated content* are considered to be the two key elements of a virtual community. *Computer-mediated space* implies that the activ-

ity is taking place in cyberspace, helping virtual communities overcome time and space constraints (Rheingold, 1993; Wellman & Gulia, 1999; Preece, 2001). This creates new opportunities for users to discuss ideas, share knowledge and extend social networks. *Member-generated content* denotes that the words and ideas in a virtual community are all generated in discussions conducted by its members (Rheingold, 1993; Hagel & Armstrong, 1997; Preece 2001; Lee et al. 2003). These two elements emphasize the unique nature of purposeful social interaction in cyberspace and distinguish virtual communities from other online information services and offline communities.

A successful virtual community can and do provide valuable benefits for both business and organizations. On the one hand, a sustainable virtual customer community (e.g., eBay, Amazon) can decrease the cost of customer retention and customer service, increase product sales and overall consumer satisfaction, and make a brand stronger (Banks & Daus, 2002; Wenger et al., 2002). On the other hand, an employee community of practice (e.g., IBM employee community) can not only facilitate knowledge flow between geographically dispersed coworkers within organizations (Constant et al., 1996), but can also help employees gain access to external knowledge resources cross organizational boundaries (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). These benefits are generated from community size and volume of communication activity (Butler, 2001). Despite the benefits of participating in virtual communities, a lot of virtual communities fail to retain their members and foster members' long-term participation (Sangwan, 2005). Discerning how to establish a sustainable virtual community is still an appealing objective for both researchers and practitioners (Sangwan, 2005; Ma, 2005).

A significant amount of work has been done to investigate the factors which attract members to use virtual communities for information (or knowledge) sharing and adoption (e.g., Jarvenpaa

& Staples, 2000; Wasko et al., 2004; Wasko & Faraj, 2005; Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Zhang & Watts, 2003). Although attracting new members is the first step toward realizing virtual community success, the long-term sustainability of a virtual community depends on the extent to which it maintains its existing members. Butler (2001) claimed that "the efforts to attract new members are likely to be wasted if these social structures fail to maintain the membership necessary to provide valuable benefits over a longer term" (p. 347). To fill this research gap, this study investigates the antecedents of user intention to continue using virtual communities. A virtual community is useless if it is not being used for information adoption, regardless of content generation. For this reason, this study investigates specifically the continuance intention to use virtual communities for the purpose of information adoption.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section describes the IS continuance model and the information adoption model. Based on this theoretical background, the third section discusses the research model and hypotheses. The research design, data analysis and results, are then presented in the fourth and the fifth sections respectively. Finally, this paper concludes by reflecting on the key findings, theoretical and practical implications, and areas of further research.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

With the increasing popularity of virtual communities, research on them has become more and more important. In order to understand the sustainability of virtual communities in general, and user intention to continue using virtual communities for information adoption in particular, we provide a review on the literature of information system continuance and information adoption.

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