THE INFLUENCE OF OPINION LEADER'S EXPERTISE OF VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES ON COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, INFORMATION TRUST AND SHARING OF MEMBERS

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Abstract- At present, the network users virtually join various virtual communities and engage in daily network activities, including browsing, participating in discussions, transmitting and sharing their interested community information to their communities. This phenomenon shows that it can help the practitioners of e-commerce to obtain long-term key benefits, if the product information promotion can be done by virtue of proper and effective information sharing of members of virtual communities. However, there is little research on the information sharing among the existing virtual communities, and there are few levels of roles in the organizations of the virtual communities to explore the influence relationship of operational roles in both-side or multi-side organizations on information sharing in communities. However, this research has proposed the relationship structure of community involvement, information trust and sharing, and community information sharing based on the opinion leader's professional degree in the virtual community. Finally, according to the results of this research, the management implications, research limitations and future research recommendations are presented.

Keywords- Virtual Community, Opinion Leader, Expertise, Community Involvement, Information Trust, Information Sharing

I. INTRIDCUTION

One of the most commonly used online activities for today's network users is to browse, discuss, transmit and share the community information they are interested in to the members of other communities by virtual communities, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The sharing behavior of community information in the virtual community is a new type of product information exposure behavior, and compared to the using expenditure of the traditional advertising media, it will be able to more quickly convey the product information to the target consumers and significantly decrease the advertising expenditures of goods. In addition, the community information in virtual community environment is transmitted to send through the Internet network linking, and the virtual community has Web2.0- a real-time communication capability, so that compared to one-way advertising communication of products in the physical world, the members of virtual communities, namely the customers, can quickly search and compare the online good price, and instantly ask other people's good service experience and assessment as the consideration information in the decision-making process of purchasing goods.

So far, most of the researches related to information sharing in virtual communities discuss influence factors of information sharing behaviors of communities by single individual level of community members or information contents mainly discussed or involved by community organizations; however, this research uses the professional degree opinion of opinion leaders in virtual communities to discuss the influence process and relation effects of community involvement, trust of community information and final information sharing of members and individuals in virtual community environment; on that account, the research hopes to make up for the deficiencies of information sharing-a single level in the virtual community in the past.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Virtual Community

The term "virtual community" first appeared in 1993, in Virtual Communities published by Howard Rheingold, it points that the members of virtual communities construct complex social aggregation and communicate with other community members online through computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the specific network "cyberspace", that is "virtual community" (Rheingold, 1993). The primary purpose of the virtual community is to provide community members with an online mutual participation space to carry out social contact, connection and information sharing and attract and promote online use ethnic groups with common interests and ideas to join in the same visual community, in which they can discuss with each other and share the information they need or are interested in.

2.2 Opinion Leader

In the process of accepting product information, the customers are often affected by the opinion leaders, and change their original product attitudes and purchase decision-making (Araujo et al., 2016); in the virtual community environment, the opinion leaders are more likely to influence the community information acceptance contents and judgment in decision of the members; however, the main features

of opinion leaders in virtual community include accepting external or internal community information with a higher frequency, compared with other community members, transmitting mass media information to social members as media roles of mass media in community and having a high community level status and class (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944).

2.3 Expertise

In the early stage, an early research on persuasive communication theory pointed out that message recipients are affected message factors, including three items: the source of the message, the message content and the receiver, and the source of the message includes Sender's Expertise-a main influencing factor (Hovland et al., 1953); for daily consumer behavior and decision-making process, the customers always refers to the product information provided by experts, to help themselves to assess and judge product purchase decision-making; and the reference message contents transmitted by message providers with a higher professional degree have a high effect and degree on purchase decision-making of the customers.

2.4 Community Involvement

The concept of "involvement" was first used in the field of social psychology research. It originated from the social judgment theory (SJT) published by American social psychologist Sherif and Cantril in 1947. The concept of "ego involvement" points that the attitude of individual on the social events can be affected by his attitude to the event and then affects the continuous investment degree on this event (Sherif & Cantril, 1947).

Taking consumer behaviors as example, when the customers have higher interest degrees on the importance of the products, they will have higher product involvement behaviors and attitudes (Engel et al., 2006), and the product involvement degree, cognition significance and purchase intention of the customers have positive influence relation (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007); and the attitudes and behavior of the members of the virtual community in the treatment of community information are different, so that when the members of the communities have a higher trust degree on community information, they will have more sharing behaviors on browsing, participating in discussions, and forwarding and sharing of community information.

2.5 Information Trust

With the integrative model of organizational trust, it is pointed out that when the organization members present a high trust to others, their interaction and development can be further improved (Mayer et al., 1995); meanwhile, the interaction and development of members in virtual community may be affected by the trust among the members; the "disposition to trust" of community members to community information shows the disposition and trust of community members to community information (Catherine et al., 2002). So the more the members trust the information, the more they are willing to give and share the community information to other members, thus the interaction and trust among the members can be improved (Gefen, 2000b); correspondingly, when the passer of community information presents a higher or more close professional knowledge, the information trust degree will be also improved (Ridings et al., 2002).

2.6 Information Sharing

We can divide community information as giving information and getting information according to the community members' behavior of sharing information (Ridings et al., 2002). In the getting information, the members do not participate in the informative discussion and sharing process, and just read the community information simply based on the ongoing conversation between other members. But giving information is a kind of community information from the members' posting conversation including discussion post to respond other members or a personal simply starting discussion theme (Ridings et al., 2002); what's more, the members can develop a closer friendship with other members through the information sharing in the community (Dholakia et al, 2004).

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROPOSITIONS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A research on organization trust published by Mayer and other scholars in 1995 has appointed out that the perception of person being trusted in organization may be affected by personal ability, kindness and integrity (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995); as people may seek and reference the opinions, experience and ideas of professionals actively for their uncomprehending or deficient information, because they believe the information provided by the professionals is believable and referable (Gefen, 2000); meanwhile, the members select to join the community as, excepting they are interested in the theme discussed and referred in the community, they hope to gain their required and deficient information whereby (Bristor, 1990); similarly, if the opinion leader of the community presents a high professional degree for the theme discussed and involved in the community, the members will be more willing to forward and share the information of the leader, and highly trust the information; according to the deduction above, this research hereon proposes the following propositions:

Proposition 1: Opinion leader's expertise may affect the community involvement of members positively.

Proposition 2: Opinion leader's expertise may affect the information trust of members positively.

Social exchange theory points out that the reason people select to pay out is that they believe that they will get the equal return after paying, so all people have some certain benefit exchange trust for their paid social activity and behavior (Blau, 1964); for the customers, if they trust that they can obtain their required product benefits and assistance after buying and using the product, then they will present a high buying motive and involvement to understand the product information; the reason the members join the virtual community is that, except they are interested in the activity theme discussed in the community to a certain extent, they believe that they can obtain their required benefits to a certain extent by joining the community, discussing and forwarding the information; so according to the deduction above, this research hereon proposes the following propositions:

Proposition 3: Community involvement may affect the members' trust on information positively.

Proposition 4:Community involvement may affect the members' information sharing positively.

The members of virtual community usually handle the community information in two ways, browsing passively and proposing a discussion topic actively, in order to get their required and interested information contents; a former research on virtual community indicates that the more the members trust the information published or discussed in the community, the more they are willing to reply and propose their opinions and ideas on this information (Catherine et al., 2002).

The above phenomenon also proves the trust of members of virtual communities on community information may affect the personal action and willing to share the information; besides, the members of virtual communities can improve their own interpersonal relationship in the community by replying and proposing community information (Ridings and Gefen, 2004); according to the discussion of this scholar, this research deducts and proposes the following proposition:

Proposition 5: Information trust may affect the information sharing of members positively.

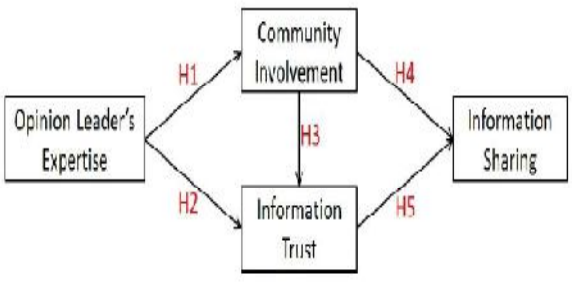


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Managerial Implications

This research proposes five research propositions and conceptual architectural pattern by clearing up and analyzing the related literatures affecting the information sharing in virtual community; the research results show that the professional degree of opinion leader, community involvement of members and information reliability all influence the information sharing in community positively; so it is an important academic research topic and marketing strategy practice that how to build a virtual community website on line to attract the Internet users to operate and use it, and assist the electronic operators to transmit the product information to the target-consumers through the community information sharing in the members, in order to gain the long-term and stable market profits.

4.2 Limitations and future research

This research just supports and verifies the deduced research proposition development by collecting and concluding the required literatures; additionally, with the rapid development of network technology, the related influencing factors in virtual community will generate constantly and persistently. Based on the research limitations above, in the future, this research will trace it steadily, and clear up the relevant factors and context development affecting the information sharing in the longitudinal research method; meanwhile, it is a hope that in the follow-up management circle including e-commerce, Internet marketing and organizational management, the related topic of virtual communities can be further researched and discussed.

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