

Evaluating and Sharing Information in Online Communities

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The Purpose of the Research is to Examine the assessment of information and the willingness to share information by users in online communities.

Information is considered to be a building block of virtual communities and an essential component of their existence. Computer Mediated Communication theories suggests that users can develop high level of relationships similar to face-to-face interaction. Social Exchange theories suggests that people, in turn, will try to reward those who benefit them and by doing so create norms of reciprocity of information exchange. In order to share information users in online communities evaluate the information provided by others and the potential benefit of sharing information with the community. Evaluating information and the willingness to share it can be related to a) individual motives; b) existing norms within the community; c) degree of closeness to users; d) shared purpose with users; e) trust in users; and f) degree of reciprocity in the community.

Two research settings are used in the research: 1) A Survey which examines respondents' perceptions regarding evaluation and sharing of information in online community; 2) Experiment which examines the tendency of users in online communities to share information in response to different levels of closeness and reciprocity.

The Research will contribute to better understanding of the factors influencing sharing of information in online communities. This understanding can, in turn, be applied for the construction of tools which online communities can use in order to increase information exchange and their sustainability.