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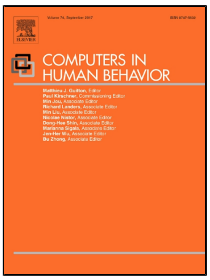

Knowledge sharing motivations in online health communities: A comparative study of health professionals and normal users

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PII:	S0747-5632(17)30398-9
DOI:	10.1016/j.chb.2017.06.028
Reference:	CHB 5039
To appear in:	*Computers in Human Behavior*
Received Date:	30 March 2016
Revised Date:	12 May 2017
Accepted Date:	18 June 2017

Please cite this article as: Xing Zhang, Shan Liu, Zhaohua Deng, Xing Chen, Knowledge sharing motivations in online health communities: A comparative study of health professionals and normal users, *Computers in Human Behavior* (2017), doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2017.06.028

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Abstract

The effect of motivations on knowledge sharing behavior has been extensively investigated in various online communities. However, this topic is rarely examined in the context of online health communities (OHCs). Furthermore, the difference in the motivations of sharing knowledge between two types of members in OHCs − health professionals and normal users, is never examined. The present study models and examines both the extrinsic (reputation and reciprocity) and intrinsic (knowledge self-efficacy, altruism, and empathy) motivations of health professionals and normal users. The hypotheses derived from the research model were empirically validated using an online survey of 443 members of three famous online health communities in China. Results show that reciprocity and altruism positively affect the knowledge sharing intention of both health professionals and normal users. Moreover, reputation and knowledge self-efficacy have a greater influence on the knowledge sharing intentions of health professionals than normal users; whereas reciprocity, altruism, and empathy have a greater influence on the knowledge sharing intentions of normal users than health professionals. These new findings expand our understanding on the motivations that may affect knowledge sharing intentions in the context of OHCs.

Keywords Online health community; knowledge sharing; motivation theory; health professionals; normal users

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