The mediating role of trust and commitment on members' continuous knowledge sharing intention: A commitment-trust theory perspective

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ABSTRACT

Although continuous knowledge sharing behaviour is acknowledged as important by scholars, the understanding of what influence this continuous behaviour remains limited. Thus, this paper fills the gap by examining the mediating role of identification trust and affective commitment on members' continuous knowledge sharing intention within business online communities. 220 experienced online community members participated in the web survey. Structural equation modelling technique is used to analyze the data together with Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediating analysis procedure. The research findings reveal that, besides user's level of satisfaction, continuous knowledge sharing intention is partially mediated by affective commitment and identification trust. This paper ends by providing some insights on how to encourage continuous knowledge sharing intention within business online communities from the perspective of commitment-trust theory. Understanding the determinants of this behaviour is important as it helps to build an active community and also provides the opportunities for consumers to channel their ideas and suggestions in co-creating the products in which they are interested in.

1. Introduction

The advancement of information communication technology has led to exponential development of new forms of online community (Jin, Zhou, Lee, & Cheung, 2014; Li, 2011). Throughout the decades many online communities have emerged ranging from public to organizational online communities. Online communities have gained its popularity as an important tool used by organizations and the public to share and acquire knowledge (Ardichvili, 2008; Habibi, Laroche, & Richard, 2014; Jin et al., 2014; Yu, Hao, Dong, & Khalifa, 2013). An online community without rich knowledge will limit its value (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006). Encouraging continuous knowledge sharing can help community have a greater likelihood of retaining members who are willing to contribute their knowledge or experience; and also help businesses obtain relevant and useful knowledge through their discussions (Habibi et al., 2014; Jin et al., 2014).

Based on knowledge sharing literature, continuous knowledge sharing has been acknowledged as one of the important factors to ensure online community sustainability (Chen, 2007; Chiu, Wang, Shih, & Fan, 2011; Jin, Cheung, Lee, & Chen, 2007; Lin, Hung, & Chen, 2009; Zhang, Fang, Wei, & Chen, 2010). Sustainability of an online community relies on its members ability to continuously regenerate ideas or knowledge within the community (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014; Wenger, Liu, Schneider, Prasarnphanich, & Chen, 2009). Online community sustainability refers to the community's ability to maintain active participation and encourage members' willingness to stay and continuously contribute knowledge to the community (Cheung & Lee, 2009).

Within the knowledge sharing literature, continuous knowledge sharing refers to individual repeated act of sharing knowledge when using a knowledge based information system (i.e., online community). Previous studies have conceptualized knowledge sharing as individual acceptance behaviour when using a knowledge based information system; while continuous knowledge sharing refers to post acceptance behaviour (He & Wei, 2009). Furthermore, most previous studies that examined post acceptance behaviour adopted Bhattacherjee's information systems continuous use model (Bhattacherjee, 2001) as their underlying theory. Thus, it can be concluded that continuous knowledge is a form of user's post adoption behaviour when using a knowledge based information system (i.e., online community).

Based on the information systems continuous use model, an individual's feeling of satisfaction is the key determinant factor that drives individual's continuous use behaviour. Past studies have

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shown satisfaction motivates individual's continuous knowledge sharing behaviour. However, using satisfaction alone as a motive to examine continuous knowledge sharing is likely to produce an incomplete causal model, as it is unable to understand the effect of third variables such as mediators. This is because relying only on satisfaction to predict continuous use behaviour is not sufficient as it is not able to explain why there are some users who discontinue using an information system although they have initially expressed positive feelings (i.e., satisfaction) towards the system (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Hsu, Chiu, & Fu, 2004).

According to commitment-trust theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) to ensure on-going relational exchange, trust and commitment plays an important role in mediating the relationship. Trust and commitment mediates a relational exchange by developing a cooperative environment between parties involved in a relationship; helping to resist attractive short term alternatives; and viewing potentially high risk actions as being prudent. Continuous knowledge sharing behaviour is also considered as a form of relational exchange as it requires willingness from both parties (e.g., knowledge seeker and knowledge contributor) to give and accept knowledge. Without mutual understanding between the two parties, knowledge is not shared. Strong relationship plays an important role in stimulating knowledge sharing exchange among community members (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014).

Thus, based on the above discussions examining the mediating role of trust and commitment can help extend the current understanding of continuous knowledge sharing determinants beyond the influence of satisfaction. By examining the mediating role of trust and commitment it can give additional insights to why users discontinue sharing their knowledge although they have established positive expectations earlier within the community.

In order to examine the role of trust and commitment on member's continuous knowledge sharing this study integrates two theoretical lenses – information systems continuous use model and commitment trust theory. Rather than using trust and commitment in general, this study examines the effect of identification trust and affective commitment on the satisfaction-continuous knowledge sharing relationship. These two constructs are selected because they have been identified to influence continuous behaviour.

2. Theoretical discussions

2.1. Information systems continuous use model (ISCM)

ISCM has received growing empirical support as a useful framework to examine IS continuous use behaviour. This model has been used to predict users' continuous use of a wide range of IS applications such as online banking (Bhattacherjee, 2001), e-learning (Chiu et al., 2011; Chiu, Sun, Sun, & Ju, 2007; Lee, 2010), and knowledge management system (He & Wei, 2009). The use of ISCM to examine members' continuous knowledge sharing intention has also been identified (Cheung & Lee, 2007b; Jin et al., 2007). ISCM posits satisfaction as the most important factor influencing continuous use intention (Bhattacherjee, 2001). Satisfaction refers to users' transactional experiences with the system which influenced their intentions to continuously use the system (Bhattacherjee, Perols, & Sanford, 2008). In other words, satisfaction is a construct used to capture a user's feeling of positive or negative emotion towards the use of IS (Bhattacherjee, 2001).

Within knowledge sharing context, previous studies have shown that satisfaction influences members decision to continuously share their knowledge (Cheung & Lee, 2007a; Jin, Lee, & Cheung, 2010). For instance, online community members are more likely to share their knowledge if they have positive level of satisfaction using the online communities (Cheung & Lee, 2007a). Members

with high level of satisfaction are also more likely to be involved in activities within the community by continuously facilitating or taking part in knowledge-sharing activities (Chuo, Min, & Lin, 2010; Ma & Agarwal, 2007). Therefore this study predicts that members' continuous knowledge sharing intention is influenced by their level of satisfaction towards the online community platform to support their knowledge sharing activities. Hence, this study hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 1. *Members' continuous knowledge sharing intention is influenced by their level of satisfaction*

Satisfaction and trust play a dynamic role in explaining how ongoing relationships evolve (Selnes, 1998). According to this author, trust and satisfaction are two key variables in explaining relationship that exist between two parties. Both concepts are viewed as similar because they represent overall evaluation, feeling or attitude about individuals involved in a relationship (Selnes, 1998). However, in maintaining an on-going relationship, satisfaction is more likely to be used as a source to determine trust. This is because trust is viewed as acceptable expectancy of how others will behave in the future. In order to develop trust (i.e., acceptable expectations) individual should be able to behave and form positive experiences with others (i.e., satisfaction) first (Selnes, 1998). Thus based on the above discussion, this study conceptualized trust as an after effect of satisfaction rather than being a determining factor.

2.2. Commitment-trust theory (CTT)

The role of trust within an online community has received substantial attention by previous IS researchers (Chiu et al., 2006; Jarvenpaa, Knoll, & Leidner, 1998; Ridings, Gefen, & Arinze, 2002). Within an online community, there are no specific rules provided to manage the relationship between members; trust is considered as a subjective substitute to rules so that a more open relationship atmosphere can be created (Ridings et al., 2002). Within an online community context, trust can be used to control "unscrupulous members who might flame or ridicule post or provide members information to external organizations without permission" (Ridings et al., 2002, p. 275). Therefore, trust is important in shaping reliable and socially accepted behaviour within a situation where there is an absence of workable rules.

The extant online knowledge sharing literature shows that trust conceptualization depends upon the situation in which it is being considered (Rotter, 1971). Different sub-dimensions of trust are required to influence different stages of knowledge sharing (Chiu et al., 2006; Hsu, Ju, Yen, & Chang, 2007). Hsu et al. (2007) explained that economic and knowledge-based trust are developed at the early stage of knowledge sharing; while identification-based trust is suggested to facilitate knowledge sharing in the next stage (continuous knowledge sharing stage). Identification trust refers to trust that develop due to emotional interactions among members that leads to a point that one's can effectively act for other (Hsu et al., 2007). Identification trust usually leads to emotional investments in trusting a relationship, express care for others and create collective strength. Strong identification trust can helps to reduce member's individualistic intention (i.e., lurking).

Within online community setting, satisfied individuals will decide either to continue their participation within the online platform after they have observed how others behave within the community (e.g., trustworthiness, fairness) (Hsu, Liu, & Lee, 2010). Online community members will be reluctant to continue using the online community platform, if they believe others are being opportunistic and not being able to keep promises (Yen, 2009). Through strong identification trust, members are willing to put efforts to invest in emotional interactions with others and will be more likely to maintain the community by continuously interact