UNDERSTANDING USER INTENTION TO SHARE INFORMATION IN ONLINE SOCIAL SHOPPING COMMUNITIES: THE MODERATING EFFECT OF COMMUNITY EQUITY

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Abstract

Online social shopping community has substantially changed the way organizations, communities, and individuals communicate. The advance of online social shopping communities facilitates individuals to share and exchange consumption related information. In this study, we attempt to address the question of why individuals intend to share information in social shopping communities. Despite the growing popularity of social shopping communities, theoretical understanding of information sharing in this new form of social media remains unknown. We extend prior knowledge sharing literature into the context of online social shopping communities, and to examine the impacts of psychological motivations on user intention to share information. In addition, we explore the moderating role of community equity in the relationship between psychological motivations and user intention to share information. Analyses of survey data of 1089 users from an online social shopping community confirm our hypotheses. This study not only enriches our theoretical understanding of information sharing in this new social media, but also provides guidelines for online social shopping community administrators to better design their community features.

Keywords: User intention to share information; Social media; Online social shopping communities; Community equity; Psychological motivations
1 INTRODUCTION

Online social shopping community has substantially changed the way organizations, communities, and individuals communicate. The advance of online social shopping communities facilitates individuals to share and exchange consumption related information. Traditionally, a purchase ends after the transaction is finished. The emergence of online shopping communities extend the purchase, and have offered fertile ground for individuals to communicate their opinions and exchange product information, before and after purchase. These sharing information encourages individuals’ further purchase behaviour. According to Hitwise data released in April 2012, social shopping communities like Meilishuo.com and Mogujie.com are gaining popularity and about a quarter of downstream visits go to Taobao.com (over 17%). Therefore, the user generated content becomes valuable resources for communities’ growth and sustainability. Despite the growing popularity of this new form of social media, the role of online social shopping communities in users’ information sharing remains new and underexplored in the IS literature.

There is a long line of research on information sharing in the IS literature. The existing studies mostly explored the impacts of psychological motivations on information sharing in the organizational setting (Kankanahalli et al., 2005; Moon & Sproull, 2008; Wasko & Faraj, 2005). While less is known about the information sharing behaviour in the social shopping communities. To fill this research gap, we intend to extend the traditional information sharing studies into this context, and to identify the psychological motivations to encourage individuals’ information sharing behaviour in the social shopping communities.

In addition of psychological motivations, some studies also proposed that contextual forces, e.g., organizational climate, can influence individuals’ knowledge contribution behaviour (Bock et al., 2005). This implies that the community climate should also be paid attention to when understanding individuals’ information sharing behaviour in the online social shopping communities. Among various climate studied before, equity is one of the most important climates which helps with trust building between individuals and organizations/communities. We thus expect to explore the effect of community equity in the information sharing behaviour in the online social shopping communities. The social cognitive theory proposes individuals’ behaviours are depended on both individuals’ psychological factors and environmental factors, implying the possible interaction between individuals and around environment. In this regard, we explore the moderating role of community equity in the relationship between psychological motivations and users’ sharing behaviour.

Generally, we aim at answering the following two questions in this study:

**RQ1:** Why are users willing to share information in online social shopping communities?

**RQ2:** How does community equity influence relationship between psychological motivations and information sharing in online social shopping communities?

To summarize, two key differences distinguish this paper from the existing IS work on knowledge contribution. First, prior work primarily focuses on information sharing in traditional online communities. Our paper examines users’ sharing information in a new form of social media, online social shopping communities. Second, we take the community equity into account, and examine how community equity affects relationships between psychological motivations and user information sharing behaviour.

We organize the rest of this paper as follows. First, we present the theoretical background and a conceptual model of users’ information sharing in social shopping communities. After describing our data source, we explain our empirical strategy and present the results of our data analysis. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the implications for theory and practice.
2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

According to prior knowledge management literature, information sharing or knowledge contribution is viewed as a public-good phenomenon (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). A public good is characterized as “a shared resource from which every member of a group may benefit, regardless of whether or not they personally contribute to its provision, and whose availability does not diminish with use” (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002, p.693). The fundamental problem of a public good is that any individual may consume a public good without contributing to a group. In the context of social media, anyone can access and consume information/knowledge without making a direct contribution back to it. It is very likely that individuals will free-ride which will damage the sustainability of social media (Bock et al., 2005; Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Kankanhalli et al., 2005). Therefore, motivating users’ information sharing is critical for any social media.

Numerous studies in the IS discipline have sought to understand the factors affecting information sharing (Cheung & Lee, 2012; Chiu et al., 2006; Ma & Agarwal, 2007; Sun et al., 2012; Wasko & Faraj, 2005). The majority of studies have focused on the psychological factors affecting information sharing. The understanding of psychological factors is explored form several perspectives. For example, Wasko and Faraj (2005) adopted the social capital perspective to explain the amount and quality of knowledge contribution among professional members in electronic networks of practice. Sun et al. (2012) distinguished psychological motivations with personal motives and social motives. Kankanhalli et al. (2005) focused on how extrinsic benefits and intrinsic benefits affected knowledge contribution to electronic knowledge repositories in organizations. This study bases on the classification of Kankanhalli et al. (2005) and explores the effects of extrinsic benefits and intrinsic benefits on users’ information sharing intention in the social shopping communities. Specifically, we focus on two major extrinsic benefits – anticipated extrinsic rewards and anticipated reciprocal relationships, and two major intrinsic benefits – knowledge self-efficacy and enjoyment in helping others.

In addition of psychological forces, the contextual forces should also play a critical role to determine individuals’ behaviours as indicated by the social cognitive theory and some prior studies (A. Bandura, 1977; Bock et al., 2005; Yoo & Torrey, 2002). However, our review of the IS literature reveals only a few studies consider how the contextual forces (i.e., organizational climate) affect information sharing (Bock et al., 2005). The climate is an important contextual force discussed before. Hence, it is critical for IS researchers to better understand users’ information sharing behaviour in online social shopping communities from its community climate, equity in particular in the current study. Equity in online social shopping communities refers to the extent to which users perceive that the community practices are equitable for them. As implied by social cognitive theory, individuals’ behaviour is determined by the interaction between individuals and the environment, indicating that community climate may exert a motivating effect on relationships between individuals’ psychological motivations and their behaviours.

Based on above discusses, we build our research mode as depicted in the Figure 1. We theorize that users’ intention to share information is motivated by both extrinsic benefits and intrinsic benefits. These relationships will be much stronger for communities within which users perceive of high equity.

2.1 Extrinsic Benefits

According to the prior literature, there are two major extrinsic benefits of information sharing or knowledge contribution, including anticipated extrinsic rewards and anticipated reciprocal relationships (Bock et al., 2005; Kankanhalli et al., 2005). Social exchange theory has been adopted to explain the action for the public good. Individuals try to look for returns (e.g. pay, prizes, reputation, and promotion) by maximizing their benefits during information exchange process with others (Bock et al., 2005). Wasko and Faraj (2005) indicated that individuals share and contribute their knowledge because they want to gain informal recognition and establish their reputation. Thus, anticipated extrinsic rewards are
posited to encourage users’ sharing intention, leading to the following hypothesis:

**H1: Users who have greater anticipated extrinsic rewards will intend to share more information in online social shopping communities**

Blau (1964) defined reciprocity as “actions that are contingent on rewarding reactions from others and that cease when these expected reactions are not forthcoming”. The social exchange theory suggests that individuals in virtual communities expect reciprocity to justify their efforts of information sharing. According to Organ and Konovsky (1989), the reciprocal relationship is a major determinant of their attitudes when two individuals are influenced by their social context. Previous research shows that intention to share information is facilitated by individuals’ anticipated reciprocal relationships (Bock et al., 2005). Therefore, we have the following hypothesis:

**H2: Users who have greater anticipated reciprocal relationships will intend to share more information in online social shopping communities**

![Figure 1. Research Model.](image)

### 2.2 Intrinsic Benefits

Individuals may receive intrinsic benefits from sharing information. Self-evaluation is an important intrinsic motivation that drives engagement in activities, rather than external rewards (Albert Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy refers to a personal judgement of one’s capability to execute actions required for designated types of performances. According to social cognitive theory, self-efficacy influences individuals’ intention and behaviour (Albert Bandura, 1986). Individuals are more likely to engage in the behaviour that they have higher knowledge self-efficacy. Previous studies have already identified the importance of knowledge self-efficacy on people’s intention to contribute knowledge (Bock et al., 2005; Cheung & Lee, 2012). Based on this argument, we have the following hypothesis:

**H3: Users who have higher knowledge self-efficacy will intend to share more information in online social shopping communities.**

Individuals who feel good when they help other people are more willing to share information online
without expecting direct rewards in return. Wasko and Faraj (2005) suggested that individuals are motivated intrinsically to share information with others because they enjoyed in helping others. This enjoyment of helping has been adopted in online social space as an intrinsic motivation that explains individuals’ willingness to share knowledge (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Kankanhalli et al., 2005). Based on this line of research, we expect that if a user enjoys helping other users, s/he will be more intending to share information.

\( H4: \) Users who enjoy helping others will intend to share more information in online social shopping communities.

2.3 Community Equity

Equity refers to fairness or justice. Since the days of Aristotle equity was recognized and discussed in social psychology area. Falk et al. (1993) defined equity as “a belief that there are some things which people should have, that there are basic needs that should be fulfilled, that burdens and rewards should not be spread too divergently across the community, and that policy should be directed with impartiality, fairness and justice towards these ends” (page 2). Equity theory (Adams, 1965) draws form exchange and social comparison theories in making prediction about how individuals’ perceptions of fair treatment affect individuals’ motivations in social exchanges. Individuals’ perceptions of fair treatment can affect their motivations, attitudes, and behaviours. According to Adams (1965), input is regarded as what an individual perceives to be contribution to an exchange, for expected return. Previous studies on equity theory suggest that an individual will feel distress if his/her own inputs are greater than the benefits achieved (Oliver, 1980; Pritchard, 1969). Equity theory has been adopted in consumer behaviour research as an antecedent of satisfaction (Oliver & Swan, 1989).

A major feature of social shopping communities is equity. Equity in online social shopping communities refers to the extent to which users perceive the community practices are equitable for them. The equity results in trust building between members associated with a social shopping community, which implies that it is likely to play a pivotal role in users’ sharing decisions. Equity should feature more prominently in users’ sharing behaviour, because equity provides the fit between their personal motivations (i.e., intrinsic benefits and extrinsic benefits) and the prospect of sharing behaviour. Therefore, we expect that users who perceive more equity are likely exhibit relatively stronger relationships from their motivations to their information sharing intention. This leads to the following hypotheses:

\( H5a: \) Community equity positively moderates the relationship between anticipated extrinsic rewards and user information sharing intention in online social shopping communities.

\( H5b: \) Community equity positively moderates the relationship between anticipated reciprocal relationships and user information sharing intention in online social shopping communities.

\( H6a: \) Community equity positively moderates the relationship between knowledge self-efficacy and user information sharing intention in online social shopping communities.

\( H6b: \) Community equity positively moderates the relationship between enjoy helping others and user information sharing intention in online social shopping communities.

3 METHOD

In this study, an online survey was conducted to test the proposed research model. The unit of analysis was the individual user of an online social shopping community. The sections below describe the details of the data collection procedure and the measurement.

3.1 Data Collection Procedure

The target respondents of this study were current Meilishuo.com users. Meilishuo.com is one of the
most popular online social shopping platforms in mainland China and currently has more than 15 million members. It is an online shopping service that connects consumers and lets them discover, share, recommend, rate, and purchase products. In contrast to traditional online communities, Meilishuo.com additionally offers user-generated social shopping features and potential interaction so as simplify purchase decisions. Users can also choose to follow other users in the community. We conducted an online survey among users from Meilishuo.com. A total of 1089 completed and valid responses were obtained.

3.2 Measurement

The measures of the constructs in this study were adapted from the existing scales that prior literature has shown to be reliable and valid. All items with minor wording modifications were applied to fit the research context. All constructs were measured using multi-item perceptual scales and were carried out by a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Partial Least Squares (PLS) was used to perform the statistical analysis in this study. PLS is a widely used structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques in IS research. PLS has no restriction on data distribution (Chin, 1998). Therefore, PLS was used to perform data analysis. The analysis involved two stages. The measurement model was first examined, and then the structural model was evaluated. The rationale of this approach is to ensure that structural relationship conclusions are drawn from a set of measurements with desirable psychometric properties. The sections below describe the details of the sample characteristics, measurement model, structure model, and common method variance.

4.1 Sample Characteristics

The respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire based on their experiences with Meilishuo.com. A total of 1089 usable questionnaires were collected in this study. Among the 1089 respondents, 92.6% was female and 7.4% was male. A majority of our respondents (87.3%) were aged between 20 and 29. 76.2% of our respondents had an education level of the university or above.

4.2 Measurement Model

Reliability and validity tests were conducted for measurement model verification. The reliability was tested using Cronbach’s $\alpha$ and composite reliability (CR). Cronbach’s $\alpha$ and CR should be at least 0.700. It implies that a construct retains internal consistency. Results are shown in Table 1. All two conditions of reliability were satisfied in data sample by having the CRs ranging from 0.886 to 0.943, and the Cronbach’s $\alpha$ from 0.809 to 0.909.

The convergent validity and discriminant validity of the constructs in the model were examined. Convergent validity was tested using three criteria of all constructs: (1) the composite reliability (CR) should be at least 0.700 (Chin, 1998), (2) the average variance extracted (AVE) should be at least 0.500 (C. Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and (3) all item loadings should be greater than 0.700. Results of analysis are shown in Table 1. All three conditions of convergent validity were satisfied in data sample by having the CRs ranging from 0.886 to 0.943, and the AVEs from 0.723 to 0.877. The item loadings were all higher than the 0.700 benchmark.
### Table 1. Reliability and Convergent Validity.

Discriminant validity is the degree to which the measures of two constructs were empirically distinct. Discriminant validity between constructs can be verified if the square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than the correlation between constructs (Claes Fornell & Larcker, 1987). As shown in Table 2, the square root of AVE for each construct was greater than the correlations between the constructs and all other constructs. Therefore, the results suggested adequate discriminant validity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Item Loading</th>
<th>Cronbach's $\alpha$</th>
<th>Composite Reliability (CR)</th>
<th>Average Variance Extracted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated Extrinsic Rewards (AER)</td>
<td>AER1 0.916</td>
<td>0.835</td>
<td>0.923</td>
<td>0.858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AER2 0.936</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated Reciprocal Relationship (ARR)</td>
<td>ARR1 0.812</td>
<td>0.809</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>0.723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ARR2 0.866</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ARR3 0.871</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Self-Efficacy (KSE)</td>
<td>KSE1 0.932</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>0.877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KSE2 0.942</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment in Helping Others (EH)</td>
<td>EH1 0.921</td>
<td>0.909</td>
<td>0.943</td>
<td>0.846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EH2 0.920</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EH3 0.919</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Equity (EQU)</td>
<td>EQU1 0.857</td>
<td>0.908</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>0.783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EQU2 0.906</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EQU3 0.894</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EQU4 0.883</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to Share Information (ISI)</td>
<td>ISI1 0.886</td>
<td>0.902</td>
<td>0.931</td>
<td>0.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ISI2 0.878</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ISI3 0.879</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ISI4 0.872</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2. Discriminant Validity (Diagonal elements are square roots of the average variance extracted).

Further, several inter-construct correlations are over the 0.600 criteria, indicating that multicollinearity may be present (Grewal et al., 2004). This potential problem may create instability in the matrix inversion required in SEM (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) were used to examine multicollinearity. The tolerance of each construct as well as its respective VIFs were calculated and reported in Table 3. The tolerance values were well above the 0.100 cut-off and the VIF scores were less than 10.0 (Mason & Perreault, 1991). The results suggested that there was no significant linear relationship between the constructs. Therefore, multicollinearity was not present.
For self-report data, there is a potential for suffering common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Following Podsakoff et al. (2003) and Liang et al. (2007), we examine the common method bias by including an unmeasured latent method factor into the model and calculating the variances explained by both the substantive constructs and the common method factor. As shown in Table 4, the average variance explained by substantive constructs is 0.807, while the average variance explained by the common method factor is only 0.010 which is much smaller, suggesting the common method bias is not a major concern in this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Substantive Factor Loading (R1)</th>
<th>R1²</th>
<th>Method Factor Loading (R2)</th>
<th>R2²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated Extrinsic Rewards (AER)</td>
<td>AER1</td>
<td>0.969</td>
<td>0.940</td>
<td>-0.064</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AER2</td>
<td>0.883</td>
<td>0.780</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated Reciprocal Relationship (ARR)</td>
<td>ARR1</td>
<td>0.490</td>
<td>0.241</td>
<td>0.337</td>
<td>0.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ARR2</td>
<td>1.025</td>
<td>1.052</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ARR3</td>
<td>0.992</td>
<td>0.983</td>
<td>-0.117</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Self-Efficacy (KSE)</td>
<td>KSE1</td>
<td>0.885</td>
<td>0.783</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KSE2</td>
<td>0.988</td>
<td>0.977</td>
<td>-0.068</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment in Helping Others (EH)</td>
<td>EH1</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EH2</td>
<td>0.944</td>
<td>0.890</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EH3</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>0.887</td>
<td>-0.024</td>
<td>0.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equity (EQU)</td>
<td>EQU1</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td>0.661</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EQU2</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>0.837</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EQU3</td>
<td>0.924</td>
<td>0.854</td>
<td>-0.032</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EQU4</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>0.784</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to Share Information (ISI)</td>
<td>ISI1</td>
<td>0.895</td>
<td>0.800</td>
<td>-0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ISI2</td>
<td>0.870</td>
<td>0.758</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ISI3</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td>0.803</td>
<td>-0.020</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ISI4</td>
<td>0.854</td>
<td>0.730</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.807</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Common Method Bias.
4.4 Structural Model

4.4.1 Main Effects

Figure 2 presented the PLS results of the structural model with only main effects of four motivators, with the estimations of the overall explanatory power, path coefficients (significant paths are indicated with asterisks), and associated t-value of the paths. The results indicate that two extrinsic motivators – anticipated extrinsic rewards and anticipated reciprocal relationship – have significant impacts on intention to share information, with path coefficients of 0.148 (at 0.001 significant level) and 0.120 (at 0.01 significant level). Therefore, H1 and H2 were supported. Similarly, two intrinsic motivators – knowledge self-efficacy and enjoyment in helping others – have also been found to positively related to intention to share information, with path coefficients of 0.302 (at 0.001 significant level) and 0.186 (at 0.001 significant level), supporting H3 and H4. These four motivators explained 38.3\% of the variance in intention to share information.

![Figure 2. Results of PLS Analysis.](image)

4.4.2 Moderating Effects

The moderating effects of equity were also tested with PLS-SEM. The results summarized in table 5 suggested that equity was found to be significant as a moderator between motivators and intention to share information. Specifically, equity strengthened the relationships between extrinsic motivators and intention to share information with coefficients 0.141 (at 0.05 significant level) and 0.181 (at 0.01 significant level), supporting H5a and H5b. Furthermore, equity was found to also strengthen relationships between intrinsic motivators and intention to share information with coefficients 0.188 (at 0.01 significant level) and 0.167 (at 0.05 significant level). Therefore, H6a and H6b were also supported.
Figure 3 – 6 illustrated moderating effects of equity on these four relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>Supported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated Extrinsic Reward*Equity (H5a)</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>2.019</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated Reciprocal Relationship*Equity (H5b)</td>
<td>0.176</td>
<td>2.243</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Self-Efficacy*Equity (H6a)</td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td>2.647</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment in Helping Others*Equity (H6b)</td>
<td>0.164</td>
<td>2.073</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Moderating Effects of Equity.

Figure 3. Interaction Effect of Anticipated Extrinsic Rewards and Equity.

Figure 4. Interaction Effect of Anticipated Reciprocal Relationship and Equity.
The main purpose of this study is to explore the factors driving user intention to share information in online social shopping communities. We identified the psychological motivations (i.e., intrinsic and extrinsic benefits) as the key direct antecedents. We also explored the moderating role of contextual force (i.e., community equity) on the relationships between psychological benefits and user intention to share information. We empirically tested our research model and hypotheses with 1089 users of a popular online social shopping community in China. The results generally supported our research model and hypotheses.

5.1 General Discussion

Our results provided strong evidence that user intention to share information in online social shopping communities is largely driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. Consistent with prior studies,
which emphasized psychological motivations had strong impacts on user intention to share information, our results also show that community equity is an important moderator that influences the relationships between psychological motivations and user information sharing intention in online social shopping communities. Users who perceive the community with high equity are more likely to fit the community, their information sharing intention will be influenced more by the psychological motivations.

5.2 Limitations

Several limitations of this study warrant mentioning. First, given that our data was collected from a social shopping community, our respondents were primarily female. Thus, a gender bias will certainly exist. Future study could test our model with a data sample that is gender neutral or primarily male. Second, as the data are cross-sectional and not longitudinal, the posited casual relationships could only be inferred rather than proven. Future study could empirically illustrate the influence of the psychological motivations and community climate in a longitudinal study. In addition, future study should include actual information sharing behaviour.

5.3 Research Implications

As mentioned before, this study contributes to the IS literature in two key ways.

First, the existing information sharing studies focused mostly on traditional online communities. This study enriches the existing literature by examining information sharing in a new form of social media, online social shopping communities. Extending prior extrinsic/intrinsic framework into this study, we demonstrate that the information sharing intention in the online social shopping communities is also driven by both extrinsic benefits and intrinsic benefits. This further confirms the applicability of prior theoretical underpinning in this new context.

Second, information sharing is complex and involves a variety of underlying mechanisms. Though numerous psychological factors have been identified as the antecedents of information sharing, prior studies ignore the role of contextual forces which are also considered as critical factors to drive individuals’ behaviour. In this study, we take the community equity into consideration as a key contextual force and explain how it moderates the relationships between psychological motivations and user intention to share information. Our results indicate that the effects of those psychological motivations on information sharing intention are much stronger for a community which has been perceived of high equity by its users. This advances the understanding of both psychological forces and contextual forces in prior information sharing literature.

5.4 Managerial Implications

Online social shopping communities represent a new type of social media platform. Many community administrators are still finding ways to improve their community features so as to attract and retain members. The results of the current study could provide several guidelines for community administrators. First, community designers should develop strategies that encourage interaction and the development of strong relationships among customers to enhance the reciprocal relationships. For instance, they may simplify the feedback system so as to encourage more customer feedbacks. Second, to promote knowledge self-efficacy, community designers should improve publicly visible cues such as length of membership and membership status in social shopping communities. This will enhance members’ knowledge self-efficacy and encourage them to contribute more in the community. Finally, community designers need to create an equity climate that fosters long-lived and trusting relationships. For instance, they may integrate and host both online and offline events with existing members.
References


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