

THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS ON HELPING BEHAVIOR IN VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

The objective of current study is to examine the influence of personal characteristics on helping behavior on the Internet. Three personal factors - Empathy, moral reasoning and altruistic personality are expected to have influence on individuals' attitude toward helping, which will in turn influence intention of helping. An online questionnaire survey was conducted and 198 valid samples were returned. Regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses. The results indicated all the personal factors are significant predictors of attitude toward helping, which significantly influence individuals' intention of helping. Thus, all the hypotheses were supported.

INTRODUCTION

The information was spread rapidly in virtual communities, which has become a place for people to share hobbies, build up relationships and even doing transactions [1]. In addition, prosocial behavior such as seeking for knowledge or asking for help was also a popular activity in virtual community. In Web 2.0, Koh and Kim [2] defines virtual community as a group of people who has the same interest and goal, exchanging information and knowledge in a virtual space. Plant [3] argues that community is a group of individuals and organizations, primarily interact through electronic media to share same interest or discuss questions. Basically, the geographical restriction was not a concern for providing help on the Internet. Even the disasters occurred in the remote district or foreign country, people can still gather the resources to help others by using the Internet. Although the rapid development of Internet makes the personal interactions become more and more frequently, it is not clear that what factors will influence people's willingness to help people on the Internet. Thus, the objective of study is to examine whether

the factors that influence helping behavior on the Internet the same with that in the real world. Will there are different factors affect people's helping behavior on the Internet because the Internet has its own specific characteristics (for example, anonymity, no spatial and time constraint).

METHOD AND RESULT

Three personal characteristics including empathy, moral reasoning and altruistic personality are independent variables, while helping intention is dependent variable and helping attitude is mediator. An online questionnaire was developed and a variety of virtual community members were invited to provide their responses. The online questionnaire was posted on three of the largest virtual communities in Taiwan in November and December, 2009. Two hundred and twenty four volunteers participate the survey and one hundred and ninety-eight responses were valid, with the effective response rate of 88.39%.

Regression analyses was used to test the relationship between the three personal factors and attitude. The result indicated that empathy ($\beta=0.201$, $p<0.001$), moral reasoning ($\beta=0.116$, $p<0.05$), altruistic personality($\beta=0.236$, $p<0.001$) are all significant indicators of attitude toward helping in virtual community. Another regression analysis was conducted to test the influence of attitude toward helping on helping intention in virtual community. The result indicated that attitude is a significant indicator of intention ($\beta=0.666$, $p<0.001$).

CONCLUSION

Current study mainly focus on how personal characteristics influence the helping behavior intention in virtual community. The results indicated that empathy, moral reasoning and altruistic personality are all significant indicators of people's attitude toward helping in virtual community. Thus, people who are higher in empathy would be more possible to understand other's feeling better and can lead to positive attitude toward helping. In addition, people who have higher standard in moral reasoning will possess more positive attitude toward helping others in virtual community. The altruistic personality reflects people's willingness to invest personal cost and effort to make other gain profit. The result in current study suggested that people who have strong altruistic personality revealed more positive attitude to help others in virtual community. Finally, the attitude toward helping had positive influence on intention to help others. Thus, online community members who possess the personal characteristics discussed in current study are more likely to help others.

REFERENCES

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