

# THE EFFECT OF CONFLICT IN VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

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## ABSTRACT

Virtual communities have existed for nearly three decades in different forms (Hara and Hew, 2007; Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze, 2002). In the last ten years, the growth of virtual communities has accelerated due to widespread use of the Internet, mobile computing devices, and other advanced communication technologies (Leimeister, et. al, 2008; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muñiz and Schau, 2005, 2006). Although the definition of what constitutes a virtual community can vary widely, the typical virtual community, “living” on its chosen platform for communication, has three characteristics: (1) There is a group of users; (2) these users have like values; and (3) the users’ values are similar enough to create a group identity for them (Romm, Pliskin, and Clarke, 1997). For the purposes of this study, we defined a virtual community as a group of people connected to one another using an Internet-based communication platform. A survey was conducted to investigate the factors that affect conflicts in virtual communities, and how conflicts affect user’s level of engagement.

**Keyword:** Virtual Communities, Conflict, Internet, e-Commerce