6-2014

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Abstract

Only a match between user's motives and incentives enables an engaging online community. The purpose of this paper is to synthesize the literature on user motivation in online communities into a conceptual framework. The framework categorizes motivational factors along motives and potential incentives and integrates the three major motives need for power, need for achievement and need for affiliation as well as the perspective of outcome- and action-related motivation. Psychological models, which explain motivation as an interrelation between different personal motives and situational incentives, demonstrate that effective incentives have to address matching motives. This paper adds to the existing literature by proposing a conceptual framework, which transfers theory of motivation psychology to the context of engagement in online communities and helps to apply successful incentives.

Keywords: online communities, conceptual framework, motivation for user engagement, effective incentives

1 Introduction

In the past few years, interest in online communities has grown enormously. Their relevance for business can be explained by their capability to enhance customer relationships. Online communities do not only reduce todays' complexity of products and brands (Earls, 2003; Herrmann, Heitmann, & Polak, 2007; Kaul & Steinmann, 2008) but they may also improve the tolerance towards mistakes and increase satisfaction with products or services (Popp, 2011). However, the requirements to fully tap into the potential of online communities are engaged consumers.

From a research perspective, much attention has been devoted to understand, which sources of motivation encourage users to contribute in online communities (e.g. Adiele, 2011; Brzozowski, Sandholm, & Hogg, 2009; Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2009; Chen, Chang, & Liu, 2012; Garnefeld, Iseke, & Krebs, 2012; Huang, 2013; Resnick, Janney, Buis, & Richardson, 2010). However, none of those studies differentiated between person-oriented motives and situation-oriented potential incentives, whose interaction constitutes the current motivation. This differentiation is crucial to the understanding of the underlying psychological mechanisms of users' motivation to participate in online communities. Additionally, the differentiation is important in order to design and manage effective incentives to stimulate engagement in online communities. In the presented research, 'engagement' denotes user behaviour in online communities that helps communities to thrive. For example, reading others' posts (lurking), writing contributions (posting), or supporting other community members by liking their posts or helping them to get started in the community.

In order to fully understand users' motivation in online communities three relevant questions have to be answered first: (1) What personal motives drive users in online communities to engage? (2) How do those personal motives interact with incentives provided in online communities (3) In what type of motivation do they result and what kind of engagement is activated by what type of motivation? The paper addresses these questions and pursues following three objectives:

1) to provide an overview of the literature on motives, incentives and sources of engagement motivation in online communities,
2) to synthesize the existing literature with psychological theories into a conceptual framework, which distinguishes between motives and incentives, and
3) to derive propositions explaining motivation for users' engagement in online communities.

2 Theoretical Background

Although there is extensive literature on motivation in online communities (e.g. Chen et al., 2012; Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Klein Pearo, 2004; Huang, 2013; Leimeister, Huber, Bretschneider, & Krcmar, 2009; Morgan & Mor, 2007; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004), current research misses to investigate how motivation develops from a psychological perspective.

There are several different psychological approaches and models, which aim to explain what a person motivates to contribute in an online community. While Behaviourism, for example, explains how people can be conditioned by incentives (Pavlov, 1927), social influence approaches focus on influencing principles from a social context perspective

(Cialdini, 1984). Both theories explain behaviour outcomes by situational or contextual attributes and lack explanations of different individual characteristics.

The Basic Motivation Model (Rheinberg, 2008, p. 72) includes external as well as internal aspects, which can influence behaviour outcomes. The model thereby enables a more comprehensive explanation why people in online communities contribute or not. Therefore, the Basic Motivation Model is chosen as the basic framework for the research presented here.

2.1   The Basic Motivation Model

The Basic Motivation Model by Rheinberg (2008, p. 72) explains behaviour as a result of the current motivation (Figure 1). Motivation in turn results from an interaction between a person's values, goals and needs, termed "motives" and the perceived potential incentives in a current situation.
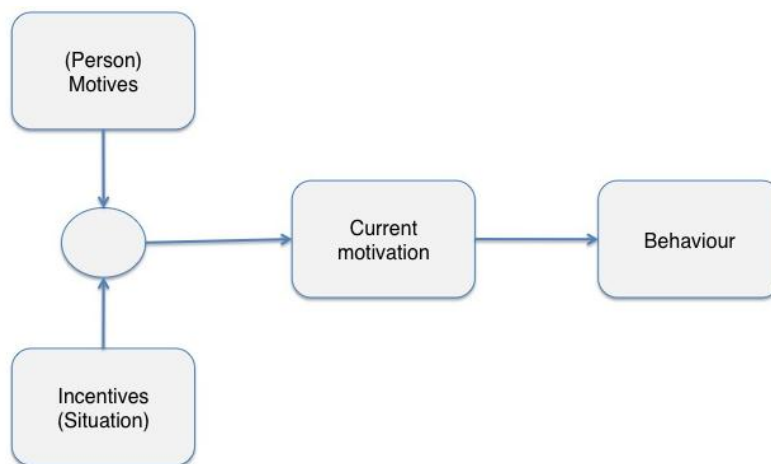

Figure 1: Basic Motivation Model (Rheinberg, 2008, p. 72)

While motives play an internal pushing role, incentives pull from outside (Cornelli & Von Rosenstiel, 1995; Rheinberg, 2002). The effectiveness of an incentive depends primarily on a person's motive. Hence, incentives activate motivation and behaviour only if they match personal motives (Rheinberg, 2008).

2.2   Motives

Motive in present context is understood as a "recurrent concern for a goal state based on a natural incentive – a concern that energizes, orients, and selects behaviour..." (McClelland, 1987, p. 590). Similarly Ryan and Deci propose that the "orientation of motivation concerns the underlying goals and attitudes that give rise to action – that is, it concerns the why of actions […]" (2000a, p. 54).

Motives, understood as traits of personality, explain why people act in certain situations with certain incentives as they do, and why people's behaviour differs (Scheffer & Heckhausen, 2010, p. 42). Motivation and a specific behaviour occur when motives, on the one hand, and incentives, on the other hand, match (Langens, Schmalt, & Sokolowski, 2005). There are several theories, which focus on human motives as traits (e.g. The Five-Factor Model (Big Five), Cattell's Trait Theory, Maslow's Hierarchical Model of Motive Classification or McClelland's Motive Theory) (Scheffer &

Heckhausen, 2010). These theories analyse the number of traits that differentiate between individuals.

McClelland's Basic Motives Theory distinguishes three basic motives: 1) *need for achievement*, (2) *need for power* and (3) *need* for affiliation (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953, pp. 114–116). This theory is well established and has been used to study motivation in the online context (e.g. Hsu, Huang, Ko, & Wang, 2014; Merrick & Shafi, 2011; Wigand, Benjamin, & Birkland, 2008). It is, therefore, chosen to differentiate the concept of motives in this study.

The need for achievement relates to a person's need to put their best efforts and to increase their own competence. The need for power is based on the need to dominate and influence others and to win recognition. The need for affiliation describes the need to establish trustworthy, supportive and pleasant social relationships (Rheinberg, 2011). Another relevant aspect is the differentiation between *action-* and *outcome-related motivation.* The former refers to the target goal state by carrying out a behaviour, while the latter refers to the behaviour outcome (Rheinberg, 2011). If the expected action »releases immediate well-being« it may lead to action-related motivation and the execution of a »selfinitiated, spontaneous action« (Rheinberg, 2011, p. 594). Whereas outcome oriented motivation refers to an action, which is executed because a positive perceived outcome is expected (Rheinberg, 2011).

While the need for achievement, the need for power and the need for affiliation ask for »outcome-related incentives (ergebnisbezogene Anreize)« (Rheinberg, 2011, p. 606), action-related motivation constitutes from individually different interests or mastery orientation (in contrast to performance orientation) (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2010; Rheinberg, 2010).

3 Research on Incentives, Motivation and Engagement in Online Contexts

Following the framework of the Basic Motivation Model (Rheinberg, 2008, p. 72), the present paper explores the research on incentives, unspecified sources of motivation and engagement in different online contexts. For the literature review different online contexts had been taken into account, which demand a user's engagement behaviour such as online communities (e.g. Online Forums for customers, Wikipedia, Web-based opinion-platforms etc.), social media (e.g. Youtube, Facebook etc.) as well as paid and unpaid crowdsourcing platforms. To the best of our knowledge, so far no research has included basic motives and their interaction with incentives in any online context.

3.1 Incentives

Empirically tested incentives in online contexts are *material and immaterial rewards* (Garnefeld et al., 2012; Resnick et al., 2010), *social validation* (e.g. Adiele, 2011) and *feedback* (Brzozowski et al., 2009; Burke et al., 2009). No research can be found on task characteristics, which mainly act on people who are motivated by the action itself. Such incentives are theoretically operationalized as *skill variety*, *task identity* and *task significance* (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980).

3.2   Engagement Behaviour

If individual motives and incentives match, motivation results, which subsequently leads to behaviour. Many scholars have already classified engagement behaviour in online communities. Main classifications distinguish between active participation such as *posting* (Kollock, 1999; Rheingold, 2000; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003, 2004; Wasko & Faraj, 2005) and *socialising* (Hsieh, Hsieh, & Tang, 2012) as well as passive participation such as *lurking* (Brazelton & Gorry, 2003; McKee, 2002; Preece, Nonnecke, & Andrews, 2004).

3.3   Sources of Motivation

There is considerable empirical evidence about people's sources of motivation to engage in online communities. Although the existing literature lacks differentiation between situational incentives and personal motives, and labels motivation sources differently, four general types of motivation sources can be identified.

A number of researchers investigated the influence of *social-oriented motivation sources*: Huang's (2013, p. 38) for example, found evidence that liking, sharing or commenting posts on a facebook community page is activated by »maintaining interpersonal connectivity« and »gaining social benefits«, Chen et al. (2012, p. 643) found the influential factor »relation motivation«, which influences knowledge sharing in a virtual community. On a more general level, social motives and social psychology are pointed out as crucial drivers of engagement motivation in online communities (Leimeister et al., 2009; Morgan & Mor, 2007; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2004).

Next to social-oriented motivation sources, there is also a body of literature about the constant *improvement of one's abilities*. Dholakia et al. (2004, p. 244; acc. to McKenna & Bargh, 1999) for example, found self-discovery, "understanding and deepening salient aspects of one's self through social interactions", as a driver for motivation. Several authors found evidence for learning as a source of motivation. While Leimeister et al. (2009, pp. 219–220) operationalized it as "knowledge of experts or mentors", Sundaram et al. (1998, online) described it as "advice seeking".

Another category refers to *status and image*. Chen, Chang and Liu (2012) found traction as a relevant source to engage in virtual communities. Towards the same direction but on a more general level, several authors pointed out status as an engagement driver (Dholakia et al., 2004; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2003; Zhao & Wang). Goh, Ang, Chua and Lee (2009, p. 201) conducted a diary study to understand the motivation behind mobile media sharing. Amongst others they found self-expression (sharing "one's view of the world") crucial.

Further extensive empirical evidence is found for *hedonic benefits*. Yang et al. (2010), Wang and Fesenmaier (2004) and Dholakia et al. (2004) refer to these drivers by pointing out entertainment as a relevant engagement motivation. Findings of Chen, Chang and Liu (2012) are similar. They operationalize hedonic benefits as "activity reward" (2012, p. 645).

The four types of motivation sources (social-oriented motivation, improvement of one's abilities, status and image, hedonic benefits), mentioned in this chapter, refer to the four basic motives or incentives and are differentiated in the following conceptual framework.

4   A Conceptual Framework and Propositions

The overview of previous research on contribution in online contexts reveals two major gaps in the literature: (1) Previous research does not investigate the process of motivation formation and the interaction between motives and incentives. (2) Prior literature does not include basic motives that are crucial to the formation of motivation.

The present paper attempts to close these gaps by proposing an integrative conceptual framework to explain motivation in online communities (Figure 2). Addressing Gap 1, we use the Basic Motivation Model by Rheinberg (2008, p. 72) to explain the basic interactions between motives, incentives, resulting in motivation and behavior. Additionally, we add the findings of the literature review to the model. Thus we add social system, rewards (cognitive, hedonic & material) as well as the more action-related task characteristics to potential incentives. Plus, different engagement behaviours are differentiated.

Attempting to close Gap 2, we include the three types of basic motives in our framework for engagement motivation in online communities (McClelland, 1987). Additionally, we integrate the perspective of action- and outcome-related motivation and add "personal actions which lead to hedonic benefits" as a personal motive (Rheinberg, 2011).
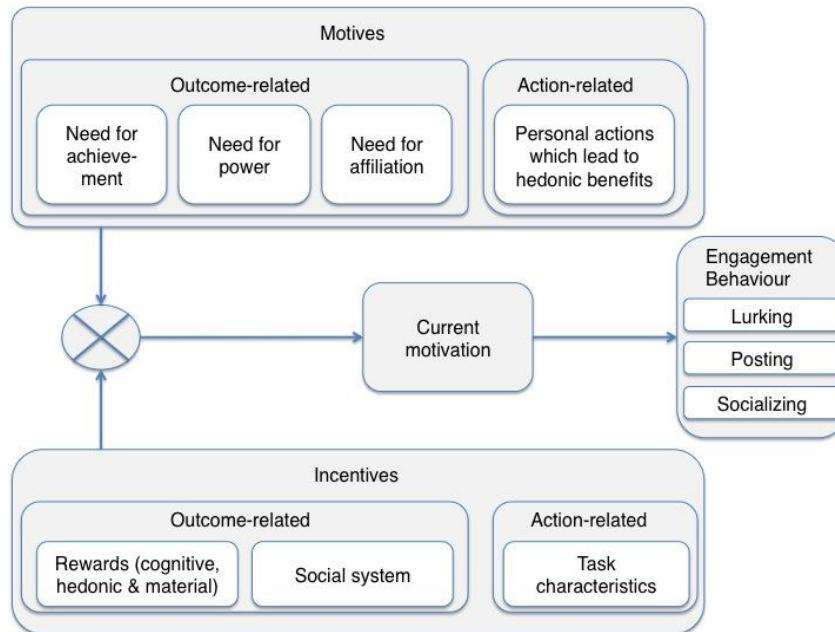

Figure 2: An integrative framework for engagement motivation in online communities

Based on the conceptual framework several research propositions can be derived:

1) Online-community users can be differentiated regarding their personal motives.
2) Motives are related to specific incentives.
3) Motives only result in motivation when they match incentives provided in online communities.
4) Specific engagement behaviour is related to specific types of motivation.

In order to test those propositions we plan to conduct a qualitative preliminary study investigating basic motives of online community users. Further, we aim to conduct a quantitative study to confirm the findings of the qualitative study and an experimental

study combined with a survey within three big Swiss company-owned online communities.

5 Discussion

The paper focuses on engagement motivation in online communities. A conceptual framework was developed which contributes to the theoretical discourse by explaining how engagement motivation in online communities emerges. This integrative conceptual framework helps to better understand motivation processes by distinguishing between situational incentives and personal motives. Moreover, it integrates McClleland et al.'s (1953) classification of basic needs for power, affiliation and achievement such as the action- and outcome-related perspective on motivation (Rheinberg, 2011). Thus, this paper contributes to existing research by structuring relevant determinantes of motivation. Particularly, with its structured background incentives can now be integrated within the three categories „Rewards", "Social system" or "Task characteristics". Furthermore, the framework identifies the need for further research regarding different motivational user typologies for different engagement types in online communities, such as lurker, poster and socializer. Due to its conceptual orientation, this paper does not claim to be complete. Its aim and contribution is to develop a psychologically founded conceptual framework of the aspects, which lead to engagement motivation in online communities.

From a managerial perspective, present framework helps practitioners to better understand how to design incentives in order to increase users' engagement motivation. The model provides a structure for social media managers to let their online community thrive. Overall, the framework enables researchers to better understand the psychological interrelation between motives and incentives, and helps practitioners to apply incentives more successfully in practice.

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