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An Empirical Analysis of Usability-Sociability Design for Sustaining Virtual Communities

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how the usability and sociability design of virtual communities could encourage members' continuous participation in the communities. A theoretical model is proposed to explain the effects of usability and sociability design on continuous participation through members' perceived usefulness, enjoyment and sense of belonging. Data is collected from members of five popular leisure oriented virtual communities in China. The results show that both perceived usefulness and enjoyment have impacts on members' continuous participation intention. Among the usability and sociability design factors, we find that personalized service is the most critical mechanism that encourages members to continuously participate in virtual communities, while community infrastructure, friend connection and event organization also have positive effects on members' continuous participation intention through individual motivations. However, it is surprising to find out that leaders' involvement has no influence on members' continuous participation intention. Both theoretical and practical implications of this study are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Usability-sociability design, Virtual community, Continuous participation.