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# Community Functionality, Regulatory Focus, and Community Commitments

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# Community Functionality, Regulatory Focus, and Community Commitments

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## ABSTRACT

With the continuing widespread adoption of the Internet, online communities now provide a cyberspace where millions of people meet online to chat, to debate topical issues, to play games, to find support, or to give and ask for information. Online communities provide unprecedented opportunities for people to participate in interactions with others even when no previous social ties exist.

One of the typical features of online communities is that people in online communities have the option to join or leave the community as they please. Therefore, the success of online communities is determined by participants' willingness to invest their time and effort to join, participate in, and support online communities. Previous studies have examined why people choose to become and remain an active participant in the community. These studies have often focused on individuals' self-interest and helping motivations. Within this extant research, some explain that different types of psychological bonds, which are referred to as community commitment, influence user behaviors in online communities. While community commitment has been presented as an explanation for differing user behaviors, there is little research on how community members' commitment develops.

The present study attempts to address this knowledge gap by posing the following research questions: First, "How do community members form their commitment toward a particular community?" And second, "What attributes of online communities influence community members' motivations, which in turn result in different community commitments?" In answering these questions, we draw on self-regulatory focus theory and develop a theoretical framework to explain the relationships of community attributes, community members' motivations, and community commitments in online communities. In doing so, we propose that the functional attributes of online communities (performance- and reliability-related attributes) and the regulatory-focus motivations of community

members (promotion- and prevention-focus) influence members' commitments toward a community (affective, normative, and continuance commitments).

Our proposed methodology for this research-in-progress study is a survey methodology. Data will be analyzed using Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis.

This project has three intended contributions to theory and practice. First, from a theoretical perspective, this paper augments extant research regarding community commitments. Research on community commitment has developed somewhat independently from research on motivation. By explicitly modeling community members' motivational process for community commitments in online communities, we bring these two areas together and develop theoretical insights from the synthesis. Second, from a human-computer interaction perspective, our proposed model emphasizes the role of community functionality on community members' motivations and commitments. In particular, the functionalities of online communities can be controlled by community managers. We therefore believe that the outcomes of this study will be of interest to managers of online communities. Third and finally, this study contributes to practice by helping community managers improve their community membership bases, thus enhancing the competitive advantage of their online communities.

## KEYWORDS

Online communities, community commitments, community functionality, self-regulatory focus theory

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