

Knowledge Contribution in Online Patient to Patient Healthcare Communities

Benjamin Kuo
kuobenja@gmail.com

Ranganathan Chandrasekaran
ranga@uic.edu

OVERVIEW

Online health communities have emerged as an alternative source of information for individuals seeking medical information. The continued growth of these communities is highly dependent on the willingness of their members to contribute their knowledge to the community. While knowledge contribution has been analyzed from the general online community context the addition of health information adds another level of complexity. The goal of this research is to replicate the work of Ma & Agarwal on perceived identity verification in the online health community context to ascertain if their model remains applicable.

ONLINE HEALTH COMMUNITIES

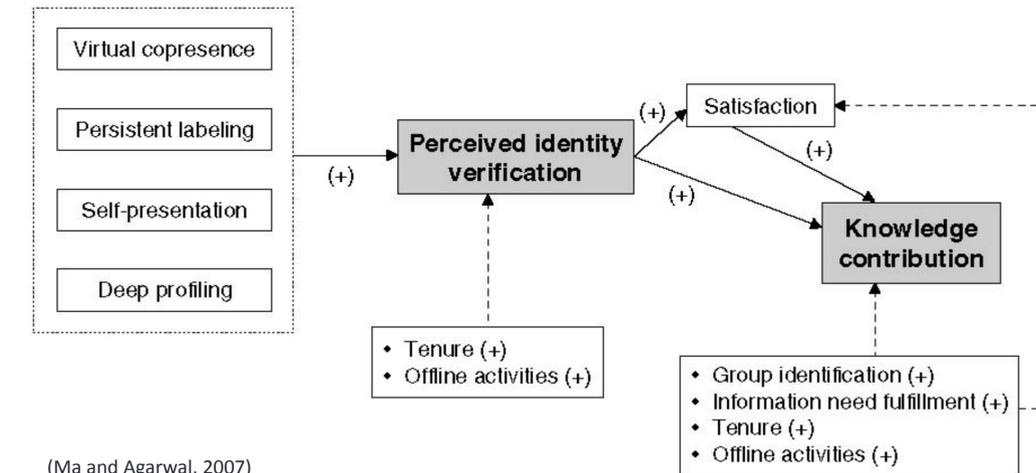
- Multi-Purpose: Information Exchange / Emotional Support
- User Types: Patients / Physicians
- Modes of Communication: Forum / Blogging / Data-Centric
- Increased privacy concerns due to the sensitive nature of medical information
- Examples
 - PatientsLikeMe.com – 690,000 visitors/month
 - MedHelp.org – 2.6 Million visitors/month
 - MDJunction.com – 220,000 visitors/month

PERCEIVED IDENTITY VERIFICATION

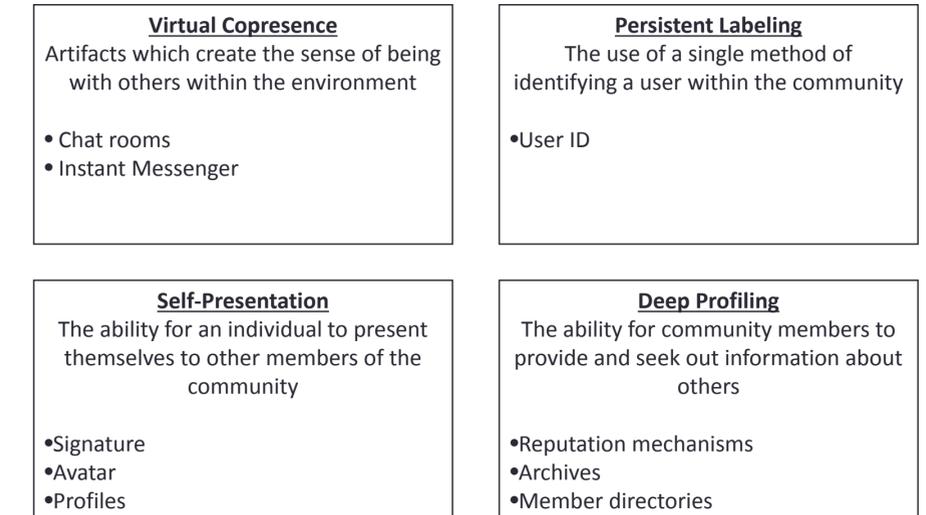
- Ma & Agarwal propose that when an individual feels that their identity is adequately communicated to the community their likelihood of knowledge contribution increases. Their study shows this to hold true for the communities they examined however their results suggest context could play an important role.
- With the level of concern regarding privacy surrounding medical information logic would suggest that decreasing the level of anonymity would reduce the likelihood of knowledge contribution from users, contrary to the findings of Ma & Agarwal

RESEARCH MODEL

Use of community artifacts supporting identity communication



(Ma and Agarwal, 2007)



PLANNED STUDY

- The original instrument developed by Ma & Agarwal will be utilized since it was written to be context free
- Communities selected based on size, user base, and features
- Large communities for increased sample size
- Patient-to-Patient communities to control for variance in user motivations
- Communities which provided features to enable identity verification
- Expected Results
- Perceived identity verification will play a less significant role in predicting knowledge contribution in online health communities

DISCUSSION

- Although perceived identity verification is expected to reduce intentions to contribute knowledge as a result of a loss of anonymity, that loss occurs across all members of the community. Other research has shown that concerns over the privacy of health information are influenced by recipient of the information. As such, the cost of reducing anonymity might be mitigated by the benefit of transparency.
- The healthcare context adds a unique dimension to online communities which warrants additional study
- Other factors which might influence knowledge contribution in online health communities such as the type of information being shared and with whom it is being shared

REFERENCES

Ma, M., and R. Agarwal. 2007. "Through a Glass Darkly: Information Technology Design, Identity Verification, and Knowledge Contribution in Online Communities." Information Systems Research (18:1), pp. 42.



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