UNDERSTANDING THE FORMATION OF COMMITMENT IN VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT
Beyond the resource-based view of virtual communities, this study proposes a conceptual model based on commitment theory with extended antecedent variables (relationship benefits, relationship termination costs, share values, communication and opportunistic behavior) to examine the impact of virtual communities' assets on membership commitments. It seeks to theorize the antecedents of commitments in the VCs and identify how commitment theory can be adapted in a knowledge sharing environment. Data collected form 363 members of one professional virtual community provide support for the proposed model. The results help in identifying the decomposed commitment in virtual communities.

KEYWORDS
Affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment, virtual communities,

1. INTRODUCTION
Virtual communities (VCs) often report their membership to be as high as the hundreds of thousands. However, Internet makes participant relatively easy to switch for one VC to another VC that provides similar content or services. Participation may lead to relationship development, it dose not guarantee the formation of relationship, not to mention strong relationship. If bad experience is encountered during participation and interaction with the others, relationship will not be developed. Why individuals continue to participate in a virtual community? Most prior research has shown that individual participate to communities largely based on resource based perspective (Butler, 2001; Wasko and Faraj, 2000; Kankanahalli et al., 2005; Kim, 2000), trust perspective (Chiu et al., 2006; Hsu et al., 2007; Chowdhury 2005), social feelings perspective (Gupta and Kim., 2007; Hiltz and Wellman, 1997) and commitment perspective (Bateman et al., 1997) and commitment perspective (Bateman et al., 2006). Several studies (Wang and Datta, 2006; Bateman et al., 2006; Gruen et al., 2000) have noted that three type of membership commitments (affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment), little research has been done on the antecedents to those commitments.

Beyond the resource-based view of virtual communities, this study proposes a conceptual model based on Commitment-Trust theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) with extended antecedent variables (relationship benefits, relationship termination costs, share values, communication and opportunistic behavior) to examine the impact of virtual communities' assets on membership commitments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Three Type of Membership Commitment
Commitment to a relationship explains an individual’s positive attitude toward a social or exchange knowledge relationship and his motivation to remain in the relationship. This is important because VC is a kind of online social networks in which people with common interests, goals, or practices interact to share