Towards A Framework for Web 2.0 Community Success: A Case of YouTube

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ABSTRACT

Although ample research has been conducted on the topic of community, there is still much research to be done on online communities. More specifically, there is a paucity of research on the topic of building successful Web 2.0 communities like YouTube—the top ranked Web 2.0 video sharing website. In this paper, a framework for Web 2.0 community success is proposed based on a theoretical review and an empirical study of YouTube using a dual approach consisting of content analysis and grounded theory interviews. The findings identify specific internal and external factors that are important for the success of YouTube as a Web 2.0 community. A framework of Web 2.0 community success is also proposed, which is useful in the planning and administration of Web 2.0 Communities.

Keywords: Business Strategy, Communication, Community, Internet, Marketing, Web 2.0, YouTube

INTRODUCTION

The advent of the Internet, in synergy with continually advancing information technology, has enabled people around the world to share information in an unprecedented scale. Leveraged by such technology, online video sharing website YouTube rose from its inception in 2005 to become the world’s most successful video sharing website in just a year. A report by Influx Branding (2006) suggests that YouTube’s ability to create an online “community” as one of the five main reasons for its success. While there has been ample research carried out on the topic of community (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997; Karp et al., 1977; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Rothaermela & Sugiyama, 2001; Szmagin et al., 2005), research in the more recent concept of Web 2.0 communities is still in its formative stages. More specifically, there is a paucity of research on the topic of building successful online communities, considering their unprecedented growth in popularity. This paper is expected to provide a catalyst for further research in this area.

This objective of this study is to address this by proposing a conceptual framework for online community success based on an amalgamation of theory and an empirical study of YouTube using a dual approach consisting of

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content analysis and grounded theory interviews. This paper will cover relevant concepts in a literature review, explain the rationale for its research methodology and then present its findings in a discussion that includes a conceptual model. YouTube was selected as the pre-eminent Web 2.0 online community for this study due to its ubiquity, success, and ranking by Web 2.0 magazine (“Top 100 Web 2.0 Websites”, 2007) as the number one Web 2.0 video sharing website. Additionally, YouTube was named Time magazine’s ‘2006 invention of the year’ (“Best Inventions”, 2006). Considering the apparent absence of frameworks that can be used to plan Web 2.0 communities, the conceptual framework presented is expected to provide a basis for structuring Web 2.0 communities for success, given their growing importance to E-commerce organizations and the broader online community. In this context of this study, ‘success’ is defined by the size of the community, determined by market share. YouTube’s competitor Dailymotion.com, which is substantially less successful (0.22% market share vs. YouTube’s 42.94%) (Hitwise, 2006), will be included in the discussion as to provide a comparative dimension.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Web 2.0

The definition of ‘Web 2.0’ has been subject to refinement over the years. O’Reilly (2006) in his refined definition of Web 2.0 states:

“Web 2.0 is the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform. Chief among those rules is this: Build applications that harness network effects and get better, the more people use them.”

Fundamental to this definition is that Web 2.0 sites become more effective as more user generated content is created. For example, YouTube becomes an increasingly effective video sharing site as more and more user generated content is uploaded and shared. If a video website did not allow users to upload and share content, but only allows the download of editor generated content, then it is deemed to be Web 1.0. In clarifying the difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, O’Reilly (2005) states that Encyclopedia Britannica’s website is Web 1.0 (because users cannot generate content to increase its effectiveness), while Wikipedia is Web 2.0 (because content is user generated).

Community

Rothaermela and Sugiyama (2001) describe communities as involving the regular sharing of a particular interest among people. Community was a prominent concern of great social theorists, scientists, and philosophers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Throughout the twentieth century the notion of community continued to widen (Wilson, 1990), due largely to new communication technologies’ ability to unite geographically dispersed individuals. With the advent of the Internet, the notion of community is no longer restricted by location or distance, enabling communities to be formed anywhere within the connected world via a screen-to-screen interface.

Since the emergence of the World Wide Web (WWW), communities are no longer defined by a delineated geographical space. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) state that mass media demonstrated that virtually all of the hallmarks of geographic community could be simulated, if not wholly or substantially replicated, in a mass-mediated world, and the changes in computer-mediated communication currently under way are no different in this regard. This advances the definition proposed by Karp et al. (1977) to define a community as being a ‘delineated geographical space’. According to Lawrence (1995), virtual communities, like all other communities, are social
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