

Encouraging the Give-and-Take Mentality: An Examination of Factors Influencing Reciprocity in Online Health Communities (An Abstract)

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Abstract One important challenge that managers of online communities face is to do with ensuring that members do not only benefit from contributions of others but that they also actively participate in providing support to those in need. This paper adopts the resource exchange theory to examine factors that influence reciprocity in online health communities. Data was gathered from 361 members of online health communities from Gauteng, South Africa, using a structured questionnaire. The findings show that willingness of online health community members to reciprocate favours depends on perceived level of social capital that individual members associate the online community with as well as their gratefulness towards the community and satisfaction with the community. Of the two emotional factors, satisfaction with online community was found to have stronger direct influence on willingness to reciprocate than gratefulness. The study helps isolate factors that managers of online health communities need to focus on in their efforts in stimulating reciprocity on their platforms.

Keywords Online health community • Reciprocity • Gratefulness • Satisfaction • Resource exchange theory

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