Managing parental communities on Facebook :
mixed methods research / Lilach Gal

Abstract

The addition of a new child to the family is an exciting event, but it can also be accompanied by a lot of stress. Parents are required to deal with many changes which can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression and stress. Virtual groups, such as Facebook communities, provide essential information and social support to parents at different stages of parenting and around diverse topics. Each community is managed by one or several community leaders who play a decisive role in leading and shaping the identity of the communities, and also work to create a sense of belonging among the members of the community.

Despite extensive exploration of user motivations on social media networks and community leaders' motivations across various domains, there exists a gap in literature concerning the motivations of community leaders in establishing and leading Facebook communities specifically designed to provide information and social support for parents.

The primary aim of this research is to delineate the characteristics of parent community leaders who oversee these significant and sensitive virtual spaces. The focus is on discerning the unique attributes that set these leaders apart, with the ultimate goal of comprehending their roles and responsibilities more deeply. This distinctive study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, guided by the "Uses and Gratifications" theoretical framework. The integration of both methods seeks to offer a more holistic understanding of the research inquiries. The chosen integrated methodology follows the Explanatory Sequential Design model, involving the initial collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by qualitative data analysis.

This study was conducted in three main phases. In the initial phase, a comparison was drawn between parent community leaders and community members. A quantitative analysis examined personality and demographic differences between the two groups (N = 553). The second phase

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focused solely on parent community leaders (N = 160), investigating traits related to motivation for establishing and leading such communities. In the final phase, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 leaders from a community of over 300,000 parents to delve into and validate the quantitative findings.

The initial phase of the research, conducted through survey questionnaires distributed to both study populations, highlighted distinct variations between the two groups in terms of narcissism, altruism, and self-control. Parent community leaders demonstrated higher levels of these traits. Furthermore, these leaders exhibited greater perseverance of effort (first grit factor), although there was no significant variance in the consistency of interest (second grit factor). Age and the number of children also exhibited notable disparities, with parent community leaders being older and having more children compared to community members. These findings collectively underline the distinctiveness of parent community leaders as a unique population with differing attributes from community members.

The second phase, involving a survey questionnaire directed at parent community leaders, utilized the "Uses and Gratifications" framework. The study found that time spent leading the community, narcissism, self-control, consistency of interest, and a sense of online community (sense of belonging and influence on the community) positively correlated with motivation to lead Facebook parent communities. Additionally, altruism was positively correlated with the level of motivation, while consistency of interest was negatively correlated.

The third phase encompassed in-depth interviews with 20 leaders, highlighting the multifaceted nature of managing parent communities on Facebook. The interviews revealed six overarching categories: (1) leading a community, (2) motivations, (3) self-perception, (4) a sense of community, (5) the community as an engine for personal-professional development, (6) the COVID-19 epidemic: transition to a new normal.

This study makes theoretical contributions to virtual leadership, information sciences, and personality research. It also offers practical implications by suggesting healthcare providers involve parent community leaders to disseminate evidence-based health information to parents.

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In summary, this study underscores the significant influence of parent community leaders in virtual communities, as they play a central role in shaping discussions, advancing crucial agendas, and positively impacting parents' lives. These leaders contribute to support, information sharing, collaboration, and knowledge exchange, benefiting both parents and themselves. The existence of parenting communities on social platforms, with leaders at the forefront, holds considerable importance in providing essential support throughout the parenting journey.

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