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Research on Community Operation Models: A Case Study of Internet Healthcare (Postprint)

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Date: 2023-03-24T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

The power of community economy has gradually expanded with the development of the Internet. Various industries have discovered the potential and value that can be derived from fan operations within communities and have successively invested in them. Based on existing research, this study takes internet healthcare as its research object, employing text analysis methods and engaging in participatory observation of community learning to understand the mechanisms of community construction, operation, and fission. It aims to explain the behaviors and significance of internet healthcare in community operation processes, while also structuring the entire workflow from community establishment to expansion, as well as the subsequent platform support required, thereby constituting a complete business closed loop.

Full Text

Research on Community Operation Models: A Case Study of Internet Healthcare

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Keywords: Community; Operation; Community Economy

Abstract

The power of the community economy has grown steadily alongside internet development, leading industries across sectors to recognize the potential and value that fan operations within communities can generate. Building on existing research, this paper examines internet healthcare as a case study, employing text analysis and participant observation to investigate community construction, operation, and fission mechanisms. It explains the behaviors and significance of internet healthcare in community operations while structuring the entire process

from community establishment to expansion, along with the necessary platform support to form a complete commercial closed loop. Influenced by policy factors and COVID-19, healthcare remains a lucrative market. This study aims to explore the community operation model of a one-stop intelligent medical promotion platform. Communities consist of groups with shared interests or similarities. As the internet has evolved, new media and platforms have emerged in various forms, bringing significant traffic dividends to channels. Community economy, community marketing, and community ecology have become the most frequent new terms in the industry, with communities serving as another important channel for individuals and enterprises seeking development. Community marketing also represents a crucial method for platform entrepreneurship in the digital economy era to develop customers, close deals, and build teams.

1. Community and Community Marketing

Community economy represents a new economic form born in the internet age. Community aggregation no longer relies simply on kinship or geographic connections; rather, netizens with common goals and values gather to form communities [1]. However, communities have life cycles—many start highly active but eventually devolve into advertising groups, mutual assistance groups, and ultimately dormant groups. If a community cannot satisfy user needs, it holds no value for consumers. Therefore, maximizing community value constitutes a critical consideration for successful community management. To conduct community marketing effectively, one must first select the appropriate platform for one's products or services, then establish clear objectives and create compelling content while responding promptly to customer inquiries.

2. Community Operation

2.1 Creating Group Chats

Building effective groups forms the foundation of community marketing. Different themed communities should be established based on various customer attributes. Group size should be determined according to actual circumstances, though large groups are generally avoided, with approximately 200 members being optimal. Clear positioning is essential—both group functions and names must be explicit to enable precise targeting of community members. Internet healthcare communities are organized by medical department, such as neurology, sleep disorders, surgery, and obstetrics/gynecology groups, each containing 300 to 500 members. These members share the common characteristic of being medical professionals from the same department. Upon joining, they are encouraged to use real names, comply with community norms, and identify themselves by name and hospital affiliation. This practice coordinates member activities, defines roles and responsibilities, and facilitates information collection and management, thereby enhancing community value while attracting relevant netizens to join and converting them into private traffic.

2.2 Activating Members

The most critical action in community operation involves activating group members through emotional engagement, value delivery, and other methods. Communities form interaction rituals through emotional connections, gaining emotional energy and thereby strengthening community cohesion [2]. Specific strategies must align with member characteristics, regularly sharing content such as images, short videos, copywriting, and courses. By increasing perceived information value and strengthening brand attachment through professional services, sustainable brand relationships can be maintained [3], ultimately achieving high levels of trust and dependence among members. Daily updates and sharing occur through knowledge cards derived from relevant academic papers, which many community members read carefully and even discuss. When members demonstrate high activity levels or strong 求知欲, they may request the original articles from community assistants, demonstrating that these knowledge cards genuinely assist doctors. This knowledge sharing also fosters a sense of identity among members, who perceive the community as valuable, identity-appropriate, and capable of fulfilling their social needs.

2.3 Community Management

Bogner's cultivation theory posits that the symbolic reality presented by mass media exerts tremendous influence on how people perceive and understand the real world. Due to certain media biases, a significant deviation emerges between the subjective reality people construct in their minds and the actual objective reality. Moreover, this influence operates as a long-term, subtle, and cultivating process that unconsciously constrains people's worldview. For society to exist and develop as a unified whole, members must share a consensus that provides behavioral benchmarks and coordinates social life. Because mass media possesses inherent biases, the reality it presents often substantially deviates from actual conditions, and audiences frequently cannot distinguish between them. This represents a gradual, imperceptible cultivation process that unconsciously shapes people's perceptions of reality. Within such a biased micro-society, members are unconsciously "cultivated" over time.

Selecting appropriate group administrators proves equally important. Although groups represent loose organizations, effective administrators provide numerous benefits. Administrators must possess strong social skills, particularly the ability to manage acquaintances and semi-acquaintances while transforming strangers into acquaintances. They should also demonstrate personal charisma. Such individuals are termed "new opinion leaders"—spontaneously influential active members who gradually emerge within communities. These opinion leaders have become increasingly important in fresh agricultural product communities, facilitating community development, influencing member attitudes, driving the formation of consumer habits, and playing a significant role in improving member-community relationships and enhancing loyalty [4]. Community operation, including content production, involves not only administrators but also numer-

ous “water armies” who speak at designated times to activate other members. For instance, they may pose questions in specific communities to spark discussion, solicit member suggestions, and thereby “revitalize” both the community and its members. New opinion leaders represent an evolution from traditional opinion leaders, transformed by new media technologies that enable them to routinely express viewpoints instantly and wield powerful social mobilization across various societal activities. They constitute a new power layer on the internet—information processing trustees who hide within communities, trigger user-generated content, and thereby highlight community value.

In the formation of these new opinion leaders, they serve as information sources and disseminators within the communication process. Source credibility comprises two dimensions: the communicator’s reputation (including honesty, objectivity, and fairness) and professional authority (whether the communicator has the right and qualification to speak on specific issues). These two factors constitute the foundation of credibility—the higher the source credibility, the greater the persuasive effect, and vice versa. For communicators, establishing a positive image and earning audience trust represent prerequisites for improving communication effectiveness. Current community management is typically handled by specialized operators who standardize content and rules, including welcome messages and promotional copy. Staff also reinforce memory and belonging by using names that strongly echo their brand.

2.4 User Fission

Leveraging community value requires not only effective group management but also activating the value of seed users to generate greater marketing propagation fission and create increased value. The Six Degrees of Separation theory proves relevant here. In the 1960s, Harvard social psychologist Milgram discovered through a chain letter experiment that “no more than six people separate any two strangers,” thereby proposing the Six Degrees of Separation theory. This reveals the ubiquitous “weak ties” in society and provides direction for understanding the interpersonal networks that connect people and communities, as well as for conducting interpersonal communication.

During community member acquisition, incentive rewards are employed to motivate existing members to invite doctors they know to register on the proprietary platform, complete their information, and convert into new community members. This incentive mechanism is low-cost yet highly effective, enabling direct acquisition of relevant doctor information for targeted persuasion and cooperation through one-on-one phone calls. Beyond material rewards, community members also voluntarily share the community with friends through strong ties and interpersonal communication for collaborative learning.

3. The Commercial Closed Loop of Community Marketing

Only through the fission process does the commercial closed loop of a community and its marketing become apparent. Forming such a closed loop depends on three components: mini-programs as the platform, official accounts for content production, and communities for answering questions and retaining users. Users remain because those who join the community must be doctors from relevant departments who enter through links in WeChat official account articles, becoming indispensable active factors within the community. Furthermore, these doctors can exchange experiences and obtain clinical knowledge within the group, which requires that the commercial closed loop itself provides relevant value to members.

In the “Internet+” era, community marketing that integrates User-Generated Content (UGC), Professional User-Generated Content (PUGC), interactive communication, and social sharing features precision, rapid propagation, and high efficiency [5]. Examining the successful case of Pagoda, a fruit store chain that turned losses into profits during the pandemic despite bleak prospects for physical fruit shops, the company now operates 4,800+ offline stores with 70 million online and offline members. Estimating based on one offline store managing 2-3 WeChat groups with approximately 300 people per group, Pagoda possesses nearly 5 million private community users nationwide, along with 1.3 million Douyin members and 13.6 million WeChat official account followers. Pagoda uses its stores as entry points to invite consumers to register as members, achieving digital user management. Through the WeChat ecosystem, the company obtains user information and captures user profiles based on shopping behavior to enable tagged operations.

With user profiles established, stores can implement a commercial closed loop comprising offline stores, communities, mini-programs, and official accounts. Stores primarily provide offline experiences and customer acquisition channels. Communities increase fan engagement through activities while delivering continuous products and services. Store owners (community administrators) can recommend new products, activities, and promotions based on community needs to drive repeat purchases from existing customers. Building upon mini-programs and communities, WeChat Video Channel and official accounts can be used for content seeding, which is then shared within communities to drive monetization and fission among existing users. Monetization occurs when existing users make purchases through content seeding, while fission happens when they share content within their social networks, unlocking social relationship chains. In practice, many physical stores use coupons and other incentives to guide consumers into communities, converting them into private traffic.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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