Abstract

Online user forums for technical support are widely adopted by software firms to supplement traditional support tools. They are predominantly populated by user-generated content. Our communication with several forum managers indicates that they try to elicit high levels of contributions from participants. Contribution is typically defined as the resolution of questions posted on the forums. We also polled several participants in these forums for their motivation to contribute who seem to mostly seek personal recognition rather than explicit monetary rewards. Different techniques have been adopted to recognize the contributions made by a participant, ranging from displaying the number of posts she has made, to a peer rating scheme. In this paper, we measure the “productivity” of answerers in providing solution posts. We use the prosocial behavior and social comparison theories to explore the drivers of sustainable peer-to-peer productivity. To this end, we mine data from technical support forums and analyze the content using text-mining to investigate the impact of different types of recognition mechanisms on user contribution. Our analysis indicates that although the community recognition is important, such recognition is not uniformly effective across user forums but is rather contingent on the scoring mechanism adopted by the firm.