

Study Day | Department of Marketing | WU Vienna

Gal Oestreicher-Singer, Tel-Aviv University (Israel)

May 31st, 2016 | AD.0.090

"Your Action is Needed": The Effect of Website-Initiated Participation on User Contributions to Content Websites"

Abstract: The success of contemporary content websites relies on users' active participation and contribution in the form of both social participation and payments. Recent research on website strategy and sustainability has found a link between users' social participation and users' willingness to pay for content-related services. However, website owners still find it challenging to elicit participation and payment behavior.

While previous research focused only on implicit encouragement to participate, we present website-initiated participation: the use of "Calls to Action" by the website that requires the user to perform participatory actions in order to consume content. We study the relation between website-initiated participation and users' willingness to contribute both effort and monetary funds. This approach is motivated by studies outside the context of online communities that suggest a link between short-term exogenously-initiated engagement and the resultant higher economic evaluation of the experience. We present a series of web experiments in a website called VideoBook that provides high-quality video content. While watching videos, users are presented with various prompts issued at different points in time, and their site behavior before and after exposure to these prompts is recorded.

Our first study shows that users who are given Calls to Action donate more money to the website compared with users who are not exposed to such prompts. We also show that even one prompt is enough to increase users' likelihood of voluntarily engaging with the website and to increase the number of contributions. The prompts do not affect users' enjoyment or willingness to continue

using the website. Our second study, motivated by research on incremental engagement, shows that the sequence of participatory activities is also crucial; when the tasks that users are prompted to engage are presented in increasing order of effort level, users tend to donate and participate more than when tasks are not ordered. We extend our results by presenting a heterogeneity analysis that shows connection between the number of videos watched by the user and its susceptibility to website-initiated participation.

(This is joint work with Lior Zalmanson).