

RESEARCH REPORT FOR BRITISH TELECOM

TRUST AND THE YOUNG DIGITAL USER: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRUSTEE'S INTENTION, MOTIVATION AND THE GIFT EXCHANGE PROCESS

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Introduction

When making a trust-based assessment, a trustor (a person who is seeking whether to trust) makes a decision in relation to what s/he predicts the party-to-be-trusted will do. Bo Rothstein (2005, p. 160) argues that this prediction is coloured by the trustee's social context. Stout adds that trust is influenced by the signals a trustor receives regarding what the other party expects, needs or might do. Castelfranchi et al. (2003, p.92) describe when the assessment of the trustee's (the party-to-be-trusted) intentions results in the trustor feeling positive about the trustee's intention as the 'belief of unharmfulness'. This is when the trustor believes that the trustee will not work against the interests of the trustor and may even be motivated to work in the interests of the trustor.

This research investigates how a group of young people understand the effort (how much work or inconvenience a trustee has gone to) and intention (motivation of the trustee) in the digital space. These dimensions of understanding are central to people's decision-making processes. Nooteboom supports this understanding. He writes that it is not what happens in relations or interactions so much as how that is interpreted, and how people infer and attribute competencies and motives to people that matters in the formation or destruction of trust (Nooteboom 2000 p.3).

The research in this report was conducted by collecting the responses from three focus-group workshops with different selections of five young people, aged sixteen to twenty-four. Young people were the focus on this research because, as the next generation to enter the workforce and community, this group give an indication of how attitudes towards digital communication will shape in the future. Montgomery describes this demographic as 'the defining users of the digital media' (Montgomery 2001 p.4). Harmann's (2002, p.5) research describes this group as sceptical and critical in their behaviour and attitude towards technology. This current generation of young people are the first generation to grow up surrounded by digital technology. It can thus be expected that this generation may not be as amazed by technology as previous generations but view technology as an embedded part of life that can be comprehended and critiqued. According to our workshop participants, the collective memory this demographic holds of digital communication is determined by the type of experience a medium can facilitate.

More specifically, this research focuses on two key issues underlying trust. Firstly, as a trustee makes a decision in relation to what he/she believes the other party will do, does a sense of 'shared connection' between parties make a trustee more likely to trust? Secondly how does the exchange of gifts work within the trust-building process as a reflection of the trustee's intention and effort? How do trustors interpret the intention of a gift-giver? There is a further question; whether the form of the gift, digital (intangible) or non-digital (tangible) affects the trustor's interpretation?

Riegelsberger et al in their article 'Model for a Frameworks for Mechanics of Trust', provide a taxonomy of design heuristics for trust-supporting systems. The heuristics listed include the provision of a stable identity, traceability and accountability functions for a transaction, group membership, involvement in a social community and the recording of outcomes (Riegelsberger et al 2005 p.416). The exchange of objects could also be included within this taxonomy. This report will demonstrate that with the exchange of gifts, intent and effort can be expressed. Thus the exchange of objects in a relationship can signal trust and distrust.

This report will first describe the context of the demographic of the current generation of young people. This will be followed by a description of the methodology of the research and an explanation of the research questions.

Young people's perceptions of value and digital communications

As the 'early-adopters of technology', young people (16 -25 year olds) are defining how technology is understood in our society (Montgomery 2001 p.4). New ways of gathering, critiquing and retaining information are being established (Tapscott 1998, webpage). As a result, this demographic has recently become a focus of both academic and commercial research. Researchers are interested in how the 'web generation', the first generation to grow up digital, take on 'new technology'. This particular generation, on the transition from young to adult-hood are seen as exemplifying high levels of consumerism within the technology context (Hartmann 2002, p.3).

According to Hartmann (2002, p.18), this demographic is highly critical and sceptical about the communication they receive. This is supported by OFCOM's (Office of Communication, U.K Government) recently published report about 12-15year olds media literacy. (Media literacy is defined as the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts'). OFCOM reported that 43% of respondents believe that news reports (such as the 6 O'Clock news) only tell the truth some of the time (Curry 2006, p.23) . Most of the participants in our workshop belonged within this specific age-group at the time of the study.

These value systems regarding digital communication affect how the participants perceive trust, relationships and exchanges in the digital domain.

Methodology:

This research responds to the call of Nathan Shedroff, a seminal interactive designer writer, for designers to be on the look out for new methods to understand their designs and audiences, as conventional methods are not gathering the appropriate insights in this new era of rapidly changing developments. For example, in some contexts questionnaires could be too formal and produce inaccurate results because they are perceived by the user as a test of the user's own ability (Shedroff 2003, p. 155). Referring specifically to trust research, Rothstein's writings add to Shedroff's insight. He calls for 'methodological creativity' as studying trust is about looking at causal mechanisms and thus

involves studying data that is hard to capture (Rothstein 2005, p. 42).

Thus a project was designed where the participants were asked to participate in the development of a game. Three workshops were held with two small groups of young people. The young people were asked to write script lines for a game about trust. The game was completed to prototype stage and was presented to the young people. Two types of research data were gathered from the workshops. There was data from the script lines written for the game, which represent the young people's interpretation of trust concepts. There is also data from the anecdotes and comments provided by the young people about their understandings of the digital realm and trust.

Young people's perspectives on the affect of a shared connection on trust

According to Fukuyama (1995) we have more trust in those who share our values. Uslaner takes this further, referring to trust as 'moralistic' trust. Rather than our trust-based decisions being motivated by strategy, our decisions are shaped by the belief that people with the same morals as us will be interested in a positive outcome for their kind. 'Moralistic trust is the belief that other people share your moral values and therefore should be treated as you would wish to be treated' (Uslaner 2005, p.30). For Hardin (2003, p.7) trust is "encapsulated interest."

The workshop participants believed that having a connection with someone is a useful base for trust. For this research, a shared-connection is defined as two parties having something in common or that one party understands the other's desires or needs.

'If you think someone is like you, you think they have the same everything else as you. That they are just like yourself'. 'If someone who is a young person you are more likely to do it than if an older person asked you to do it. Because they are more like you. Humans they are scared of the unknown'.

'I knew this guy from school just a bit and he works at Music World and I saw him and I go - are u alright? And he said would you get me a sandwich and a coke and gave me 5 pounds. If I didn't know he was into music and I would had never ever had trusted him but I knew that he was I went out and brought him one. You wouldn't go up to a random person and go 'will u buy me a sandwich?' because there is mutual respect'.

One participant explained that something being a little out of the ordinary can provoke a situation that can lead to an interaction where two strangers explore what they have in common.

'Something in common is the way people start a conversation. I was on the bus going to work-experience and this old guy on the bus started asking me about work because I wasn't at school. We talked about work. It happens when something is a bit out of the ordinary it starts a conversation'.

However the participants revealed that if there is a perception that the connection has been contrived for some deliberate reason (for instance for a company to make money), people understand this quickly and this breeds mistrust. Recommender systems (on-line databases that recommend suggestions to a user based on the

user's past behaviour) seem to be a risky business.

'When you go on Amazon and you get a CD and then they (referring to Amazon) go 'if you like that then you must like these', and you think 'NO!' They just presume and there is no relevance and I don't want that.

'I buy a lot of music from I-tunes. I brought this band which are awesome and then I went on the other day and it goes (referring to I-Tunes), because you brought this, then you must like this crappy cheesy dance track. No I won't! I was quite insulted actually'.

Empathy

According to Nootboom (2004 p.5), before two parties can see themselves as having a shared connection there must be empathy; an understanding of how a partner feels and thinks. Empathy entails the ability to understand another's 'way of thinking', without sharing it (having mental models of other people's mental models), and identification entails that one 'thinks the same way' (having similar mental models). One needs to understand 'what makes others tick', without necessarily 'ticking in the same way'.

The participants described empathy in the following ways...

'Empathy is like sympathy but smarter - it is like being in someone else's shoes'.

'If you understand the emotion you can empathise no matter what it is
Empathy is connecting with the emotion because you have experienced it'.

'It is about innocence; you can't empathise if you are innocent. If nothing bad has ever happened to you then you can't empathise - you don't understand unless you have been there yourself'.

The participants described experiences common to young people today that are grounds for empathy. These includes having divorced parents, experience in first relationships, and lack of financial independence.

Divorced parents

'Like yr parents are divorced you can advise them and you would help but if you had not gone through with it would just be sympathy because you wouldn't understand – you have been there. My friend's parents are getting divorced and I told her not to blame herself. She talks to me when she is down'.

First relationships

'This boy broke up with his girlfriend and I didn't really understand and then I split up with mine and I understood'

Lack of financial independence

'I can empathise with someone when they have no money and I will buy them a bottle of coke coz I have had no money and someone has brought me a bottle of coke'

In the workshop, participants were asked what type of experience or script could be given to a character to promote empathy,

The responses included;

'My socks are wet'.

'He (the character) has parents who have died in the future and his parents were killed in floods. And then you (the player) find out that the parents were friends with your grandparents mate.

In summary, this section has shown how a shared connection and a sense of empathy can affect trust. The responses from the workshop participants supported industry research that indicates that a shared connection or empathy between parties promotes trust. However, if there is suspicion that the connection has been deliberately contrived by the trustee, then the trust is damaged. This report will now investigate the role of gifts as an indication of the trustee's intention or effort. Gifts can represent a shared connection between two parties.

Trust, gifts and the interpretation of effort and intention

As outlined by Bourdieu (1997), gift giving is an embedded part of society.

The value of a gift is determined by who sent it and the shared symbolic meaning held by the gift. Offering a gift to another reflects the identity of the giver (and the receiver). Thus a gift is a 'signalling device' of shared connection, intention, motivation and effort. Gift exchange and trust are intertwined. Gift exchange is 'a crucial practice for the accumulation of social and symbolic capital'. Trust can be maintained by 'the reciprocity of a social relation is confirmed by a perpetual process of exchanging gifts' (Fley and Florian in Alam, Hillebrandt and Schillo, 2005). The gift exchange process while expressing a trust relation is also a trust building device - "To refuse to give...just as to refuse to accept... is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality" (Mauss in Taylor and Harper 2003, p.11)

The workshop participants' responses to trust building and gifts reflect the theoretical concepts described above. Workshop participants were asked to design gifts from a game character to a player that would enhance the trust relationship with the character. All participants approached the task by considering the player's experience, and what the player needed or wanted to help their experience. These gift ideas are described below. When it was pointed out to the participants that they had come up with gifts that identified the needs of the players in order to build trust, the participants commented that they wanted to give the message of being supportive of the player's wants and needs.

'We have goodwill.' (What is good will?) 'When you see someone in need and you help them out. You can't see someone who can't cross the road or you see someone who is on a street corner and you buy them a sandwich'.

The gifts included:

Compass – 'So they find different places'

Salmon – 'player might be hungry, people like salmon can put them on a bbq, throw back it in sea'

Donut – ‘They might get hungry’
Ironing board – ‘multi-purpose Clothes get wrinkled. Stuck up a mountain, you can snow-board on it, hit someone over the head and sleep on it’.
Bean – ‘Lucky’
Guitar – ‘Make some money busking (but need a bucket hat)’
Wings – ‘Fly’
Roll – ‘You can eat it and it grows again, it is always yr companion, doubles as a Hoover’
Pokemon – ‘Can give you information about where you are in the game, sort out the time’
Toilet-roll – ‘If they want a crap they can use it, or if bored they can spread it around a tree’
Cardboard box – ‘You can do anything with one’
50 pounds – ‘They can buy anything they need’
key – ‘It opens anything’

Gifts, trust, and the financial domain

However as people are sensitive to the intentions of the party-to-be-trusted, interactions can also damage the trust-building process. Hartmann writes that the demographic of young people have a notable lack of trust of the internet and are particularly sceptical of e-commerce.

If a trustor senses that a trustee has motivations that are detrimental to the well-being of the trustor, for instance making money from the trustor, the trustor becomes critical or suspicious of the trustee. Dan Ariely’s research group, E-Rationality based at MIT, have studied how trust works in the digital financial domain. Friestad and Wright (1994) found that ‘*when a consumer begins to suspect that an agent is attempting an “illegitimate” persuasion, the interpretation of the information changes and consumers cease to trust the information “as is” and start interpreting the information more cautiously*’ (Friestad and Wright 1994 in Ariely 2006).

This process became apparent in this research when participants discussed ‘free gift with purchase’ scenarios.

‘I got a free Spiderman DVD when I brought a new television and that was pretty good. How did it make you feel? Well I have spent a lot of money of course I should get something.

‘Like when we brought our house we got a free wash-bag and we had spent x pounds and all we got was this wash-bag and was like right. The cheek that you spend x amount of pounds and get a five pound wash-bag’.

‘I would rather have nothing - that is just cheeky’.

Even gifts that have a clear use value are viewed with suspicion.

‘When I got my phone I got 6 pounds credit that was quite cool and it gave me 5 free texts which was worth x pounds. Then in a years time when I got used to 5 free texts a day that it cost me heaps’.

Tangible versus intangible gifts ; and a trust relationship

If gifts can affect a trust relationship, what types of gifts carry which sorts of

messages? Gifts can be tangible or intangible. For the purposes of this research, when an artefact or object can be touched by someone in the physical world it can be described as tangible. For example, a birthday card sent in an envelope by conventional post. On the other hand, a digital object is intangible, for instance a digital graphic containing a birthday greeting. In the following paragraphs how young people indicated that they had a preference for tangible objects over the intangible. The attitude can be summarised by one comment from one participant: '*I'd rather have the real thing*'. This finding is supported by the research by Hartmann (2002), "Contradicting the discourse of the young generation as boundary-pushing, most interviewees were rather sceptical of the more radical aspects of new technologies in terms of content. Thus in their use and their expectations (of technology) they were rather conservative, up to the point of being moralistic and normative"

Participants made comments that implied that tangible gifts are more valuable than intangible gifts:

'I like listening to a CD more if I have brought it rather than if it is a download even if it is through the same speakers'.

'I downloaded A CD off the internet I wouldn't b that excited about it but if I got it from a shop I wouldn't be able to wait to get home to listen to it'.

One participant pointed out that there is a certain pleasure and satisfaction associated with tangible objects.

'I think people like to hold things. I'm like that and so is she .Like when you go into bookshops and you can hold the book. Bubble-wrap and stuff...'It is nice to hold something in yr hand'.

Intention of the sender

There is an underlying logic that the workshop participants were applying when making a judgment about whether a tangible or intangible gift is appropriate. This logic is about the effort the sender has put into the process of sending the object. Intangible objects take less effort to send than tangible objects – but sometimes this is an appropriate form. For instance, if someone you don't know that well sends you a party invitation by post, it may seem odd that that the person went to all that effort to invite you. In this case 'odd' draws attention – why does this person want my attendance at the party? But if the invitation were to be sent by the email medium it would seem like a cordial invitation. This attitude is reflected by the participants' response as to whether different objects were more appropriate to send or receive by email or post.

As mentioned above, trustee's are sensitive to the intentions of the sender, and if a trustee feels that a connection has been contrived for some deliberate, mistrust results. Thus the nature of gifts in the financial realm is a delicate exchange.

The values systems associated with digital technology

The valuing of the tangible could be traced to the young peoples' understandings of what digital means and the internet as a delivery medium.

The internet as a medium without context

'There is no story with a download. Like you can't say I remember when I

went into town with so and so and we did this and that. Like a memory around a song. I remember when I and he listened to that CD'.

'It annoys me when people just like random songs, and download this one and that one. But then they don't have the rest of the album but they haven't even heard it. An album tells a story. And like everyone is listening to the same one download'.

The internet as a temporary medium

'So you can buy something from I -tunes for 8 quid or go into town and buy it for 10 quid but then you get the cover and the actual physical whatever it is. But nobody can take it away from you, well they could break it. But on the internet is just a temporary thing it could just crash or there could be a problem with it. Or you could accidentally delete or your stuff'

The aura of virtual has been tainted by illegal downloads.

'Brought the virtual rather real, I did that but now I don't have the box or the manual. It still cost 100 quid. Technically I've got the same thing as if I had gone and bought it but it doesn't feel the same. Because I could have done the same thing illegally but I chose to buy it'.

The tangible feels more like the object is theirs to own rather than a digital object.

'Sometimes you get a CD so that you can look at the cover. You prefer to get a CD over a download because you can hold it. You know it is yours'.

Opportunities for social interaction

However, for our participants there was one other main factor underlying the valuing of gifts. Our workshop participants understood digital technology in terms of what type of opportunities for social experience the object could evoke.

According to the participants, tangible objects offer more rewarding opportunities for social interaction and experience or social status. Wilson describes this function as 'situational relevance', where a new way of doing an activity makes sense within a user's concerns or interests and where the function is also taken up by the group with whom the user communicates.

'On the internet you can just copy it you can send it to anyone it doesn't matter there is no affect'.

'Say if you buy something over the internet it is different, because if you have it (the tangible thing) and someone says, can I borrow that and you can go yeah'.

'With a CD if someone wants to borrow your CD they have to communicate with you in person. You could post it but most of the time you hand it to them'.

'When you go to a wedding and they put all the photos up on the internet for you to work out which ones to buy it really annoys me. I'd prefer an album, even if I had to travel to look at it. Just going 'click' on the button is really boring. And you can't share it with a friend. (How about if a friend comes around to the computer to share with you?) Still not the same because someone is in charge of the computer. And you can't reminisce and look at them all at once.

More credibility amongst peers

'When you go round to peoples houses and there are all like copies - that don't count - shut up. It is like they are cheapskates'.

Tangible objects are seen as more personal and this is seen as beneficial quality.

'Post is always more personal. Like if you get an email and you see the cc and the massive list of all the people they sent it to. You don't really care. Bcc is genius.

'With post you know they made the effort and stuck the stamp on and sent it to you personally'.

'I like a printed photo coz you can hold it. I hate digital cameras. I'd prefer a proper set of pictures. More personal'.

One participant disagreed...

'Digital cameras you can save more. You can delete it and just take it another. Digital is better because you can take it into a shop and get them printed out and see what you want'.

The response was:

'But no one prints them off that's the thing ... Like my dad brought this digital camera he took about 500 pictures and printed off 2 but usually he would take his proper camera and take rolls and print them out and make an album. I'd its more personal. I'd much prefer a picture and go I remember that than some pictures on the computer'

Another respondent added to the comment that printed photos are more valuable than digital photos: 'You show someone a photo on the computer and they say it is boring and you think 'how can they say that if they were there?'

Participants were asked to decide whether they would prefer the following objects in tangible or intangible form:

Birthday card – email/virtual or post - **post**

'Email cards are for cheapskates'

'I find them offensive'

'I would prefer to get nothing than to get an email card'

'I don't read them'

Song – CD or email - **depends**

'Email - 1 track not worth a disk'

'Not worth to send one song because an album tells a story'

'The computer isn't the place to listen to some songs or to real'.

Health certificate – email or post - **post**

'Safer more secure. Post more formal. Older people are different to they worry that computers are going to crash'.

Party invitation – email or post – **depends**

'Post is always more personal. Like if you get an email and you see the cc and the massive list of all the people them. YOU don't really care. Bcc is genius'.

'Personal you know they made the effort and stuck the stamp on and sent it to you personally.'

Baby photo – email or post - **depends**

'Email – because it is easier for them - picture to lots of people. If they sent it to you by email you would think it was alright but if they sent it to you by post then you would think why did they go to all that hassle for one photo'.

Bank card - sim card - or list of numbers- **numbers**

'Definitely a sim card – I don't like numbers'.

Conclusion:

If a trustee makes a decision in relation to what he/she believes the other party will do, what factors can affect this perception? To investigate this area, we studied the responses of young people aged 16-25 because this group are defining users of digital technology. This group are the first to grow up in a digital world and consider digital technology to be part of life rather than a subject of awe. Our participants judge technology in terms of what type of social experience it can offer them.

This report found that a sense of 'shared connection' and also empathy between parties facilitates trust. According to Uslaner, a shared connection facilitates trust because people favour those who are like themselves (Uslaner 2005, p.30). However according to Nooteboom, only empathy (understanding 'what makes others tick', without necessarily 'ticking in the same way') is necessary (Nooteboom 2004 p.5). However, if there is a sense that the shared connection or empathy has been manufactured; the result is mistrust.

The exchange of gifts can also indicate the sender's intention and effort and thus affect the trust building process. On the whole, our participants valued tangible (non-digital) over intangible (digital) objects. However, intangible objects take less effort to send than tangible objects – but sometimes this is seen as appropriate depending on the context. The exchange of an object by an inappropriate form can result in mistrust. Thus as gifts are a means to affect trust, we believe that gifts could be included within Riegelsberger's taxonomy of design heuristics for trust-supporting systems (Riegelsberger et al 2005, p. 416).

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