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Trust in E-Business: A Cross-Disciplinary Analysis of the Literature

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Abstract

This research collects, synthesizes, and analyzes 193 articles on a variety of topics closely related to trust in E-Business published over a five-year period (2004-2008) in ten leading Marketing and ten top Information Systems (IS) academic journals. Over the five year period, the level of activity generally increased. A focus on exploratory research methodologies was utilized. Several methodologies were either underrepresented or absent from the pool of trust research. Therefore, several subject areas were identified that need further exploration from both Marketing and IS researchers.

Keywords: trust, E-Business, E-Commerce, literature review, content analysis

INTRODUCTION

Early forecasters believed Internet sales would soar due to advantages new technologies offered consumers; however online sales in 2007 equaled only 3.2% of total sales (2010 Statistical Abstract, Census Bureau). Academics and practitioners alike have been attempting to understand why online sales have not spiked as once expected. Is it as simple as a slow adoption of technology, or are consumers more concerned about relationships with companies (Palvia 2009)? Additional research examining online behavior and decision-making has been suggested by researchers (Darley, Blankson & Luethge, 2010).

At an online retailer, a similar shopping process exists as at the traditional bricks-and-mortar store. The primary difference can be argued that the consumer has little or no ability to interact with a person if need assistance during the transaction. Successful firms realize establishing, developing, and maintaining relationships are critical components of a business philosophy. Relationships offer exchange partners benefits in the form of creating and delivering value (Achrol 1997; Anderson, Hakansson & Johanson, 1994), and depend on several factors such as commitment and trust (Morgan & Hunt 1994). The purpose of this paper is to review the literature of E-commerce over a five-year period (2004-2008) to better understand what role the relationship variable trust plays in online behavior and decision-making.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) introduced trust as a mediating variable to buyer-seller relationships. Trust is an exchange partner's willingness to rely on the other partner with confidence to perform role responsibilities in the face of risk (Doney & Cannon 1997; Morgan & Hunt 1994; Anderson & Narus 1990). Positive outcomes of trust have been identified such as a positive influence on future transactions (Ba 2001), increased commitment to the relationship (McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002) and reduced uncertainty (Gefen, Karahanna & Straub, 2003). Studies built on this research, however, have identified fear and lack of trust about personal privacy as a common impediment to purchasing online (Hoffman, Novak & Peralta, 1999; Cho 2006; Dinev & Hart 2006).

The following sections of the paper will examine the current literature to determine what is known about the concept of trust within the domain of E-Business. In addition to trust's role in E-Commerce, trust is involved in various aspects of E-Business including knowledge management (Akgun, Keskin, Byrne & Imamoglu, 2007), online collaboration (Carver & Turoff 2007), and supply chains (Charki & Josserand 2008). The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: a description of the approach to the analysis of the trust research is presented; followed by the results; and finally, the research is summarized with a discussion of the limitations of this project and suggestions for future research.

RESEARCH STUDY

The purpose of this research study was to examine the number and distribution of articles published in leading Information Systems (IS) and Marketing journals pertaining to trust and the Internet. In addition, the methodologies employed in this research stream, and the topics being addressed were analyzed. The analysis identifies gaps in the research allowing for a discussion on a research agenda that will facilitate the progression of trust research (Webster & Watson 2002). The hope is to paint a representative landscape of the current trust literature base in order to influence the direction of future research efforts in this important field.

In order to examine the current state of research on trust, a literature review and analysis is conducted in three phases. First, a representative pool of articles is accumulated, then the articles are classified by research strategy, and finally the articles by research topic are determined. This methodology is borrowed from a similar process used to analyze the literature for Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) (Cumbie, Jourdan, Peachey, Dugo & Craighead, 2005) and Business Intelligence (BI) (Jourdan, Rainer & Marshall, 2008).

Accumulation of Article Pool

Trust research (as it relates to E-Business) is typically published in both IS and Marketing journals. Therefore, the top ten journals from each discipline were searched over a five year period (2004-2008). The top journals were identified by using four recent rankings of IS journals (Rainer & Miller 2005; Lowry, Romans & Curtis, 2004; Katerattanakul, Han & Hong, 2003; Peffers & Ya 2003) and the two most popular rankings of Marketing journals (Hult, Neese & Bashaw, 1997; Baumgartner & Pieters 2003). The rankings of the top journals produced a list totaling twenty journals. Journals devoted to practitioner research were deliberately not selected because the focus of this paper is academic research articles.

The Business Source Premier Database was utilized to search for research articles by identifying titles and abstracts of each of the twenty journals using “trust” as a search term. Book reviews and editorials were eliminated from the results.

Classification by Research Strategy

Once the articles were identified, the research strategy was examined and categorized. Due to the subjective nature of method classification, a content analysis of the articles was performed. Figure 1 (Appendix A) shows the process followed, which was adapted from Neuendorf (2002). First, the research method categories were defined utilizing those presented in Scandura and Williams (2000), who extended the research strategies initially described by McGrath (1982). Specifically, nine categories of research strategies were used: Formal theory/literature reviews, sample survey, laboratory experiment, experimental simulation, field study - primary data, field study - secondary data, field experiment, judgment task, and computer simulation. To guard against the threats to reliability (Neuendorf 2002), a pilot on unused articles was performed, the results discussed and the definitions refined.

Each research strategy is defined by a specific design approach and associated with certain tradeoffs that researchers must make when designing a study. These tradeoffs are inherent flaws that limit the conclusions that can be drawn from a particular research strategy. These tradeoffs vary depending on the research strategy employed. These variable aspects include: generalizability from the sample to the target population (external validity); precision in measurement and control of behavioral variables (internal and construct validity); and the issue of realism of context (Scandura & Williams 2000).

Cook and Campbell (1976) stated that a study has generalizability when the study has external validity across times, settings, and individuals. Formal theory/literature reviews and sample surveys have a high degree of generalizability by establishing the relationship between two constructs and illustrating external validity. A research strategy that has low external validity but high internal validity is the laboratory experiment. In the laboratory experiment, where the degree of precision of measurement is high, cause and effect relationships may be

determined, but these relationships may not be generalizable over different times, settings, and/or populations. While the formal theory/literature reviews and sample surveys have a high degree of generalizability and the laboratory experiment has a high degree of precision of measurement, these strategies have low degree of realism in context. The only two strategies that maximize degree of realism are field studies using either primary or secondary data collected in an organizational setting (Scandura & Williams 2000).

The other four strategies do not maximize any of the three variabilities: generalizability, precision in measurement, nor degree of realism in context. This point illustrates the futility of using only one strategy when conducting trust research. Because no single strategy can maximize all types of validity, it is best for researchers to use a variety of research strategies. Table 1 (Appendix A) contains an overview of the nine strategies and their ranking on the three strategy tradeoffs (Scandura & Williams 2000).

Two coders independently reviewed and classified according to research strategy. Only a few articles were reviewed at one sitting to minimize coder fatigue and thus protect intercoder reliability (Neuendorf 2002). Upon completion of the independent classification, a tabulation of agreements and disagreements were computed, intercoder crude agreement (percent of agreement) was determined, and intercoder reliability using Cohen's Kappa (Cohen 1960) was calculated. The latter two calculations were well within the acceptable ranges for intercoder crude agreement and intercoder reliability (Neuendorf 2002). The reliability measures were calculated prior to discussing disagreements as mandated by Weber (1990). If initial reviewers did not agree on how a particular article was coded, an additional reviewer arbitrated the discussion of how the disputed article was to be coded. This process resolved the disputes in all cases.

Classification by Trust Research Topic

To classify articles by research topic, we held several brainstorming and discussion sessions where we attempted to identify trust topics with the intent to categorize the diverse body of literature. In these discussion sessions, we sought to synthesize the literature and provide a better understanding of the current state of trust research.

Once we established the category definitions, we independently placed each article in one trust category. As before, we placed only a few articles at a time to minimize coder fatigue and thus protect intercoder reliability (Neuendorf 2002). Upon completion of the classification process, we tabulated agreements and disagreements, intercoder crude agreement (percent of agreement), and intercoder reliability using Cohen's Kappa (Cohen 1960) for each category. Again, the latter two calculations were well within the acceptable ranges (Neuendorf 2002). We again calculated the reliability measures prior to discussing disagreements as mandated by Weber (1999). If two reviewers did not agree on how a particular article was coded, a third reviewer arbitrated the discussion of how the disputed article was to be coded. This process also resolved the disputes in all cases.

RESULTS

Using the described search criteria within the selected journals, we collected a total of 193 articles (see Table 2 in Appendix A). (For the complete list of articles in the sample, see Appendix B.) The articles were also analyzed by year of publication and author productivity.

In addition, Table 3 (Appendix A) shows a steady stream of trust research in each year of the literature sampled, and fairly equal between the two disciplines. A particularly large number of research articles in any given year could be caused by either an abundance of special issues published on the topic. On the other hand, a declining trend would show that the topic was very popular for a brief time, but interest in the topic has subsided.

Productivity of authors who published in this line of research was analyzed by assigning scores based upon an author's share of the article. Because most articles in our sample were projects with multiple authors, we decided that each co-author would be given an equal share of the credit. For example, an author who published an article alone was assigned a score of 1.0; two authors earned a score of .500 each; a three author article earned each author a score of .333; and so on. The scores for each author were totaled, the authors were sorted from highest to lowest scores, and the results of the top twenty authors are displayed in Table 4 (Appendix A). Authorship order was not calculated into this formula. This system rewards both quantity of research and ownership of research. While the author ranked first had the highest score and the highest number of co-authorships, our fourth ranked author had two solo articles to place them in top five.

Analysis of Research Strategies in Trust Research

The categorization of the 193 articles according to the nine research strategies produced the following results (Table 5 in Appendix A). 100 articles (52%) were classified as Sample Survey making it the most prevalent research strategy. Other categories, in decreasing order, are Field Study-Primary Data (17%), Formal Theory/Literature Review (15%), Lab Experiment (10%), and Experimental Simulation (4%). Two articles were classified as Field Study-Secondary Data. Judgment Task and Computer Simulation yielded only one article each. No articles were classified as Field Experiment.

Analysis of the research strategies over the five year period from 2004 to 2008 illustrates that Sample Survey, Field Study-Primary Data, Formal Theory/Literature Review, and Lab Experiment are represented in almost every year of the time frame. These four strategies are exploratory in nature and indicate the beginnings of a body of research (Scandura & Williams 2000).

Analysis of Trust Research Topics

The articles were analyzed and five relatively distinct research topics emerged (Table 6 in Appendix A). The Adoption topic consists of five articles that explored the role of trust in innovation diffusion and adoption (Rogers 1983). Consumer Response focuses on trust's role in brand image and the effectiveness of advertising. Trust is a component in customers' online purchasing decisions and the E-Commerce topic contains articles investigating various aspects of that complex process. The Collaboration topic focuses on trust's role in relationship development in a virtual setting as it relates to business partners, suppliers, and other team members. The articles placed in the Psychological Constructs topic concentrate on research exploring relationships, communities, leadership, and other social phenomena where trust is a component.

As indicated by the diversity of research topics, trust in E-Business is a varied collection of research including such seemingly unrelated topics as website quality (Everard & Galletta 2006), consumer risk perception (Thompson 2005), the adoption of T-Commerce (Yu, Ha, Choi

& Rho, 2005), and the effectiveness of online marketing communications (Wang 2006). To organize the diverse body of trust research, the trust literature was categorized into five research topics. In Table 5, the research topics are listed along with key concepts that define each topic.

Trust Research Topics vs. Research Strategy

An examination of trust topic versus research strategy (Table 7 in Appendix A) identifies the research strategies used in articles on the various trust topics. By the fact that the formal Theory/Literature review being only the fourth most popular research strategy used to investigate the research topics, it is possible that the body of trust research is moving from the exploratory to the confirmatory stage. Higher numbers of sample surveys, lab experiments, and field studies may be a sign that the theories surrounding the concepts relating to trust in E-Business may have moved from the exploratory theory development stages characterized by formal theory development and literature review research. The use of field studies, lab experiments, and sample survey indicate that these theories are being tested (Scandura & Williams 2000). The way to explore the progress of a body of knowledge is to see whether new theories are still being developed or theories are being tested for the research stream (Webster & Watson 2002).

It is possible that the trust in E-Business research stream is more mature than this literature review indicates. An inherent problem with business research is that some of these research strategies are very difficult to execute. While some of the blame for relatively low numbers for some strategies rests with the researchers, some of it falls on the business community. Organizations are often less likely to commit to certain strategies (i.e., primary and secondary field studies and field experiments) because these strategies are more expensive for the organizations. These types of research strategies provide the richest and most generalizable data, but these strategies are very labor intensive to the organization being studied because records will need to be examined, personnel will need to be interviewed, and senior managers will be required to devote large amounts of their time to help facilitate the research project. Sample surveys may be more popular with researchers simply because organizations are more open to this research strategy due to the smaller time investment involved.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research review examined trust research published in both Marketing and IS research outlets. As results indicate, both IS and Marketing disciplines have contributed to the examination of trust and e-Business. Marketing research accounts for 60% of the studies over this time period, but the most prolific authors come from both disciplines (i.e., 10 each in the top 20 authors). When a topic involves two or more business disciplines, only cross-disciplinary literature reviews will allow the research stream to be investigated properly. Teams of researchers can and should investigate topics within their given research stream, but eventually, this literature base will need to be looked at from a more broad perspective. This literature review process, over time, will allow trust to develop into a mature topic complete with tested theories. The authors encourage other researchers to examine other bodies of business research not from the lens of their respective discipline but from a holistic, cross-disciplinary approach.

Future literature reviews could search a broader range of time or larger domain of research outlets. Further, future trust studies should consider the research gaps that we have identified in light of generalizability, precision of measure, and realism of context. Future efforts

should also explore the gaps identified in the five trust research topics with respect to the research strategies. For researchers to continue to address important questions about trust, future studies need to employ a wider variety of research strategies. Table 4 indicated some research designs could be utilized more to help create a better understanding. This particular body of research offers opportunities for experiments, even field experiments, and the results in this study indicate a decreasing number in recent years.

Scandura and Williams (2000) stated that looking at research strategies employed over time by triangulation in a given subject area can provide useful insights into how theories are developing. In addition to the lack of variety in research strategy, very little triangulation has occurred during the timeframe used to conduct this literature review. This absence of coordinated theory development causes the research in trust to appear haphazard and unfocused. However, the good news is that many of the categories and research strategies in this body of trust research are open for future research efforts. This research analysis, hopefully, has laid the foundation for such efforts that will enhance the Marketing and IS body of knowledge and theoretical progression relative to this concept of trust.

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Figure 1. Overview of Literature Analysis

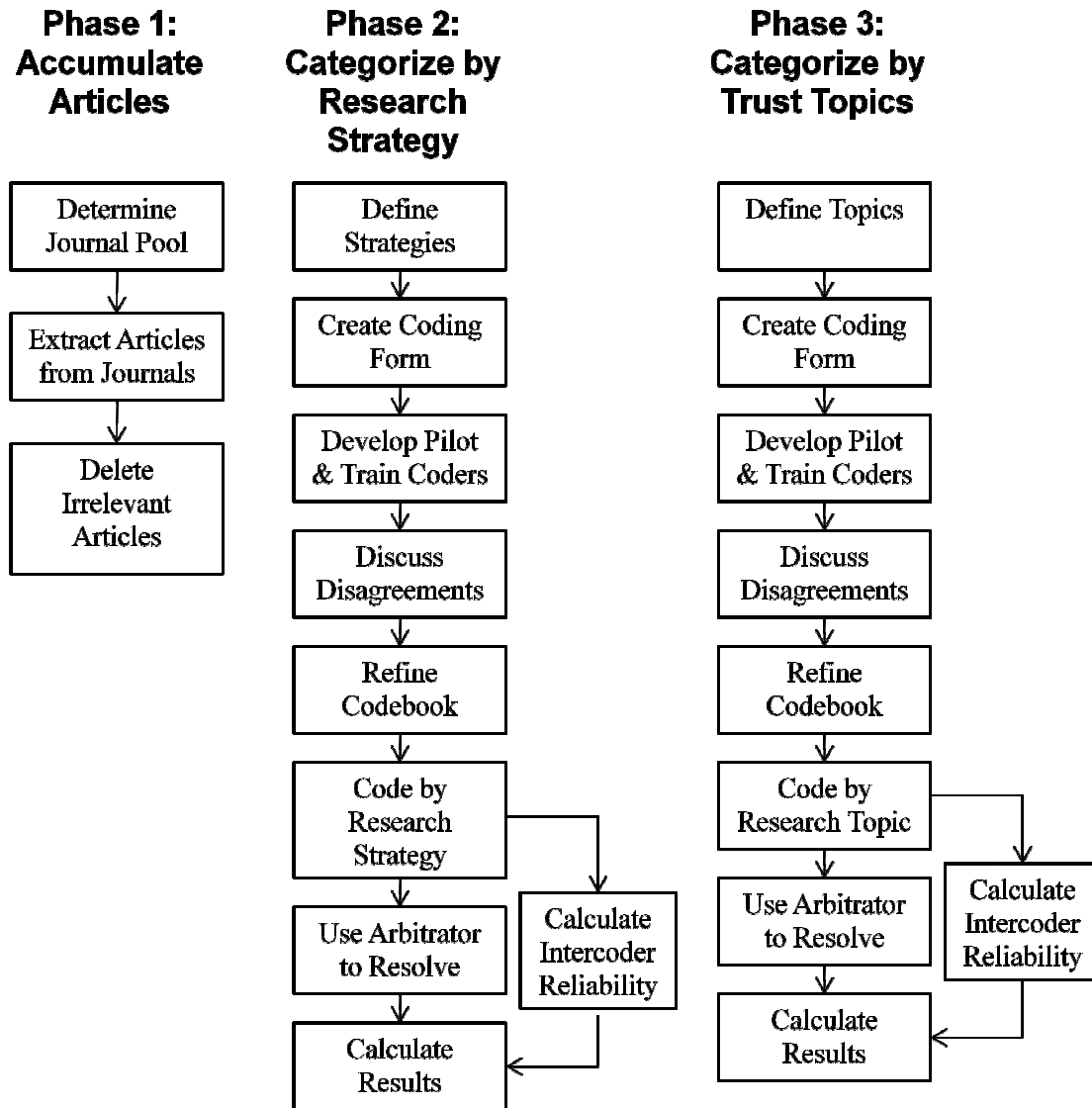


Table 1. Research Strategies*

Research Strategy	Description	Strategy Tradeoffs		
		Degree of Precision Measurement	Degree of Realism of Context	Generalizability to Target Population
Formal Theory/Literature Reviews	Summarization of the literature in an area of research in order to conceptualize models for empirical testing.	Low	Low	Maximizes
Sample Survey	The investigator tries to neutralize context by asking for behaviors that are unrelated to the context in which they are elicited.	Low	Low	Maximizes
Laboratory Experiment	Participants are brought into an artificial setting, usually one that will not significantly impact the results.	Maximizes	Low	Low
Experimental Simulation	A situation contrived by a researcher in which there is an attempt to retain some realism of context through use of simulated situations or scenarios.	Moderate	Moderate	Low
Field Study: Primary data	Investigates behavior in its natural setting. Involves collection of data by researchers.	Low	Maximizes	Low
Field Study: Secondary data	Involves studies that use secondary data (data collected by a person, agency, or organization other than the researchers).	Low	Maximizes	Low
Field Experiment	Collecting data in a field setting but manipulating behavior variables.	Moderately High	Moderately High	Low
Judgment Task	Participants judge or rate behaviors. Sampling is systematic vs. representative, and the setting is contrived.	Moderately High	Low	Moderately High
Computer Simulation	Involves artificial data creation or simulation of a process.	Low	Moderately High	Moderately High

* Source (Scandura & Williams 2000)

Table 2: Articles by Journal

Information Systems Journals	#	Marketing Journals	#
Communications of the ACM	14	Advances in Consumer Research	5
European Journal of Info. Sys.	6	Industrial Marketing Management	45
Harvard Business Review	0	Journal of Advertising	3
Information & Management	26	Journal of Advertising Research	6
Information Systems Research	5	Journal of Business Research	23
Journal of the ACM	1	Journal of Consumer Research	2
Journal of Management Info. Sys.	17	Journal of Marketing	10
MIS Quarterly	6	Journal of Marketing Research	3
Management Science	8	Journal of Retailing	5
IEEE Transactions on Software Eng.	0	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Sci.	8
	83		110

Table 3. Articles per Year by Discipline

Year	Marketing Trust Articles	Information Systems Trust Articles	Total	%
2004	8	16	24	12.4%
2005	24	15	39	20.2%
2006	28	19	47	24.4%
2007	21	13	34	17.6%
2008	29	20	49	25.4%
Total	110	83	193	100.0%
%	57.0%	43.0%	100.0%	

Table 4. The Top 20 Authors in Trust Research

Rank	Author	#	Score	Discipline
1	Benbasat, I.	7	3.083	Information Systems
2	Gefen, D.	4	2.166	Information Systems
3	Palmatier, R.	5	2.083	Marketing
4	Ekici, A.	2	2.000	Marketing
5	Pavlou, P.	4	1.833	Information Systems
6	Leonidou, L.	3	1.666	Marketing
7	Ivens, B. S.	2	1.500	Marketing
8	Kim, D.	2	1.500	Information Systems
9	Lin, H.	2	1.500	Information Systems
10	Ramstrom, J.	2	1.333	Marketing
11	Wang, C.L.	2	1.333	Marketing
12	Wang, W.	2	1.000	Information Systems
13	Yu, C.	3	0.833	Information Systems
14	Ghauri, P.	2	0.833	Marketing
15	Yilmaz, C.	2	0.833	Marketing
16	Ho, T.	2	0.750	Information Systems
17	Barnes, B.R.	2	0.666	Marketing
18	Dinev, T.	2	0.666	Information Systems
19	Hart, P.	2	0.666	Information Systems
20	Talias, M.A.	2	0.666	Marketing

Table 5. Research Strategy vs. Year

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
Formal Theory/Lit. Review	4	8	5	6	6	29
Sample Survey	14	14	26	17	29	100
Lab Experiment	2	5	9	1	3	20
Experimental Simulation	1		5		2	8
Field Study - Primary	3	11	2	8	8	32
Field Study - Secondary				2		2
Field Experiment						0
Judgment Task		1				1
Computer Simulation					1	1
	24	39	47	34	49	193

Table 6. Trust Topics

<i>Trust Research Topics</i>	<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Key Concepts</i>	Marketing Trust Articles	Information Systems Trust Articles	Total
Adoption	A	Innovation Diffusion & Adoption		5	5
Collaboration	C	Trust as a component of collaboration	49	33	82
Consumer response	CR	Trust's role in brand image and advertising's effectiveness	19		19
E-Commerce	EC	Trust in E-Commerce (online purchasing, etailing, etc.)	16	45	61
Psychological constructs	P	Trust as a component of relationships and other social phenomena	26		26
Total			110	83	193

Table 7. Trust Topic vs. Research Strategy

	A	C	CR	EC	P	Total	%
Formal Theory/Lit. Review	1	11		11	6	29	15.0%
Sample Survey	3	34	13	26	24	100	51.8%
Lab Experiment	1	1	4	12	2	20	10.4%
Experimental Simulation			2	5	1	8	4.1%
Field Study - Primary		19		5	8	32	16.6%
Field Study - Secondary				1	1	2	1.0%
Field Experiment							0.0%
Judgment Task		1				1	0.5%
Computer Simulation				1		1	0.5%
Total	5	66	19	61	42	193	100.0%
Percentage	2.6%	34.2%	9.8%	31.6%	21.8%	100.0%	

Appendix B. Complete List of Analyzed Articles.

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