

Introduction to the Special Section on Trust in Electronic Commerce

Although trust is an essential component of all successful buyer-seller relationships, there is a renewed focus on trust when these relationships are conducted through electronic media. One broad definition of trust¹ is the willingness of a buyer to be vulnerable to a seller's non-desirable actions while expecting the seller to perform actions that are beneficial to the buyer without the buyer having to monitor these actions. Buyers look for signs from sellers that increase their trust, and sellers look at ways they can help build buyers' trust. Traditional trust building mechanisms include physical presence, past actions, and legal and regulatory frameworks.

The emergence of online businesses has brought about new challenges for building trust, in both B2B and B2C business environments. The evolution of new e-business models and the advances in information technology have raised more challenges than solutions for establishing and maintaining trust in the electronic marketplace. Both academicians and practitioners are looking for clearer answers to enhancers and suppressors of trust, constituents of trust, the extent to which trust plays a role in buyer-seller relationships, and the measurement of trust in online business contexts.

Information systems scholars are now devoting their research efforts to shed light on trust in an online business context. Recent IS research on trust includes development of a trust typology (McKnight and Chervany, 2001), measurement of trust (Bhattacharjee, 2002), critical factors influencing initial trust formation (McKnight et al., 1998), and the impact of familiarity (Gefen, 2000) and seller size and reputation on trust formation (Jarvenpaa et al., 2000). The following three papers are timely additions to the growing body of literature on trust and issues allied with trust in e-business contexts.

“Managing User Trust in B2C E-services” examines the role of social presence of websites in building consumer trust with e-services vendors. It is grounded in two theoretical frameworks, TAM and SPIR, and integrates these into a new framework within which to examine consumer trust in a Web setting.

The study asks 161 MBA students in a simulation experiment to assess a popular online travel agency. The authors use their findings to assess whether social presence affects consumer trust and whether that trust has a stronger effect on purchase intentions than TAM beliefs. Implications for e-services are discussed in terms of whether the benefits from adopting an IT depend more on website characteristics like usefulness and ease of use or on consumer trust in the vendor.

“E-commerce: The Roles of Trust, Security, and Type of E-commerce Involvement” examines the role of trust and security in different types of e-commerce relationship. It examines these factors in situations where there is a pre-existing relationship (e.g., as in EDI), and where there is not a pre-existing relationship (as in many Web shopping experiences). The roles of trust and security in both implementation and perceived success in each type of e-commerce relationship are

¹ Definition of trust adapted from (Mayer et al., 1995).

examined. The authors posit that the roles of trust and security are mediated by whether the purpose of the e-commerce relationship is primarily to provide information or to allow electronic purchases.

A survey is used to gather data from IS managers in 125 organizations about the importance they place on trust and security in conducting e-commerce. A longitudinal case study of four firms in different industries, using e-commerce under different circumstances, is also used to gather data about how firms progress in their management of trust and security in e-commerce relationships over time. The authors use the findings to propose a framework of the roles of trust and security in e-commerce that can be used in managing e-commerce and in future research.

“Consumer Trust in Electronic Channels: The Impact of Electronic Commerce Assurance on Consumers’ Purchasing Likelihood and Risk Perceptions” addresses types of assurance that e-commerce vendors offer customers about the security of their websites. A specific aspect of security – privacy – is the focus of the paper. The authors propose that some seals of assurance may promote a stronger perception of privacy than others. They also propose that there are other factors that influence perceptions of privacy such as how well known the vendor is and the type of product being purchased.

The paper examines a model in which four types of products, three levels of how well known the vendor is, and six types of assurance are examined for their impact on the likelihood of purchase and the likelihood that concerns about privacy prevent purchases. Likelihood of purchase is examined as a separate construct from the privacy construct in order to help determine whether the purchase decision is influenced by privacy concerns.

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