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“I DON’T CONVERSATE WITH THOSE I DON’T KNOW”: THE ROLE OF TRUST/DISTRUST IN ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

Martha J. Hoff

Abstract: *Digital spaces are populated by youth who navigate, consume, create, and distribute information through their participation as designers, contributors, respondents, and distributors. A key prerequisite to collaboration, participation and distributed knowledge is trust. The literature informs us that the creation of trust involves several variables: the individual, their experiences, familiarity, and the environment (online, offline, context). Little is known about how low SES youth navigate within and across on- and offline spaces. This paper draws on sociological theories of generalized trust to examine the impact that trust/distrust had on the digital space engagement of six, low income, urban youth, 16-18 years of age, who self-identified as active users of mobile technology. Participants were observed, interviewed, kept journals, and had remote monitoring software installed on their devices. The importance of trust as a precursor to active engagement in online spaces was evident across the data set. This paper argues that trust as a continuum (high-low) develops in relation to one’s experiences and varies with context/environment. Secondly I suggest that distrust is a separate and distinct construct from trust. These bifurcations of trust have different implications for the engagement and collaborative practices in both on- and offline spaces.*

Keywords: trust, distrust, adolescence, digital media, collaborative, participatory behaviours, mobile technology

Introduction

Meet Da’von, Cris, Rian, Leigh, Shan, and Niesha. These six urban high school students, on a typical day, can be spotted with their mobile phones either in their hand or on their body (pocket, backpack, or purse). In school they can be seen checking their phones in the halls, between classes, or on their way up the stairs before school, and on the sidewalk as they wait for the bus home. They smile, laugh, sing, share, engage, stop midstride, ponder, sigh, and interact with those in their immediate space and on their mobile devices. Where do they go, whom do they seek, and how do they choose to engage with those who are available but not physically present? American teens, aged 13-18 have adopted the smartphone as their digital tool of choice with 88% owning or having access to either a cell phone or smartphone (Lenhart & Page, 2015). Recent studies by Pew Research found that 90% of those teens exchange text messages with a typical rate of 30 texts received per day. Free texting apps such as Kik, Pinger, and WhatsApp have made texting more readily accessible and are most likely to be used by African-American (47%) and Hispanic (46%) youth compared with 24% of white teens (Lenhart & Page, 2015). In terms of Internet access 92% of teens go online daily with 56% going online several times a day (Lenhart & Page, 2015). It is well documented that teens are enthusiastic users of social media and current findings suggest that 89% of all teens report using at least one social media site with 71% reporting the use of two or more (Lenhart & Page, 2015). Seventy-seven per cent of urban youth use Facebook compared to 67% of suburban teens (Lenhart & Page, 2015). Quantitative data such as this can inform on where and how frequently they seek out these spaces, but what does their interaction look like and why

some places and not others? Does this technology with its easy access to others, known either in person or in online communities, impact whom they trust with their thoughts, ideas, and emotions?

In this article I explore how issues of trust have influenced one group of young peoples’ interaction and engagement within and across online places and spaces. I report on findings from an analysis of six youth, ages 16-18 who engaged daily in at least one digital space via mobile technology. Participants were interviewed, observed, maintained journals and had remote monitoring software installed on their mobile devices. The findings reported here represent one key theme that emerged from a study that sought to better understand the impact of mobile technology on literacy practices of low socio-economic status urban youth. In the discussion section I address the importance of acknowledging and better understanding the impact that trust and distrust have on engagement and in particular online collaboration and participation.

Theoretical Framework

Trust is a complex phenomenon around which there are many definitions and theories. There is no common understanding of what trust means and the concept has not been clearly defined within and across disciplines (Brownlie & Howson, 2005; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007). Trust plays a critical role in the sharing of information as it is seemingly based on an implicit set of beliefs that others will behave in a dependable manner and not take advantage of the individual or situation (Hsu, Lu, Yen, & Chang, 2007). A central problem in building trust is in the initial information about the intentions or behaviours of others. In this regard trust refers to the attitudes, disposition or beliefs that we have about others whom we hope will be trustworthy. Trustworthiness refers to a property, personality trait, or characteristic of an individual whom we may trust (Cook, 2009). Trustworthiness is a precursor to trust. Trust is a critical component in the sharing of information/knowledge and the concept of trust in social relations within diverse societies becomes more complex and more difficult to define as we move from face-to-face to online spaces. Online/virtual communities are implicitly designed to motivate individuals to engage. But Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze (2002) suggest that in these spaces member identity is invisible and communities do not/cannot guarantee that others will behave as they might be expected to. Hence, trust becomes a “crucial factor to sustain the continuity of the virtual community” (Hsu et al., 2007, p. 154). However, trust is not only critical for sustainability but is imperative, at a foundational level, for individuals to be open and willing to enter into an unknown space.

Conceptualizing trust

Trust functions as a way to reduce complexity within societies and is a social construct that is the result of communication within and between social systems. Trust helps to simplify our decisions to act (Luhmann, 1979; Pearson, Mont, & Crane, 2005) and influences our expectations about another’s motives/actions with respect to oneself and affects behaviours in interdependent situations (Messick & Kramer, 2001; Rutte, & Messick, 1995).

To theorize trust, I turn to work in sociology that aims to understand how trust facilitates cooperative behaviour within societies. Here trust is defined as an expectation that arises “within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of the members of that community” (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 2). Glanville and Paxton (2007) adopt a social learning perspective of trust, which suggests that people “extrapolate from localized experiences to produce estimates of generalized trust...[developing] different levels of trust across different domains of interaction” (p. 232). Their data suggest that trust generalizes from social interactions and that network density (localized domains such as family and friends) is positively associated

with trusting of unknown individuals (Glanville & Paxton, 2007). Trust can be affected by changes in the social environment and is not pre-determined by past socialization or innate characteristics. Experiences throughout life influence the level and scope of trust an individual has. Glanville, Anderson, and Paxton (2013) found that informal, close, and/or context-specific social interactions enhance one's estimate of the general trustworthiness of other persons, but they do not address how generalized trust transitions into online perspectives. I posit that in addition to access and passion, a more basic human condition, trust, may be a less visible but highly critical prerequisite for seeking out and engaging with others online.

Types of trust: Generalized and Particular. Particular trust functions in small face-to-face communities where people know each other and interact closely. In this type of trust social controls are strong (Gambetta, 1988). General trust occurs in association with unfamiliar others and is a critical component in the functioning of complex societies that involve numerous daily interactions with unfamiliar others (Delhey, Newton, & Welzel, 2011). Encounters with persons who do not share one's social demographic characteristics could be particularly important in gauging how much people do trust in general (Nepal, Sherchan, & Paris, 2012). General trust refers to an individual's default expectations about the trustworthiness of others in the absence of a specific context (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). General trust is viewed as a rough accumulation of attitudes and beliefs in multiple contexts, developed over time through experiences, and extends beyond face-to-face bounded interactions and personalized settings.

Trust plays an important role in cooperative behaviours and practices. Stolle (2002) found that individuals who highly trust not only engage in mutually beneficial relations more frequently but they are also more socially active and engaged. Social connections, both formal and informal, are thought to contribute and/or encourage the development of generalized trust (Glanville, Anderson, & Paxton, 2013; Glanville & Paxton, 2007). "Without trust in place, members may not wish to share their knowledge or experience with other community members due to the fear of their information and identities being misused" (Nepal, Sherchan, & Paris, 2012, p. 245). Despite its imprecise nature general trust is consistently and strongly correlated with a variety of other cooperative and trusting behaviours.

From a strategic sense trust is premised on the calculation of future cooperation. Strategic trust, from an interpersonal perspective, is warranted when it is accepted that the gain from placing one's self at risk to another is positive (Stolle, 2002). The decision to take that risk implies the presence of trust. Mathy, Kerr, and Haydin (2003) add that an individual trusts when one has adequate reason to believe that it will be in the other person's best interest to be trustworthy. In this strategic perspective two scenarios are known and for which the level of trust is defined: (1) the person is known and trust is determined by previous experiences with that individual (2) person is not known, and trust is generalized from their experience with others (Mathy, Kerr, & Haydin, 2003). Decremer, Snyder, and Dewitte (2001) suggest that trust is not a single point but a continuum. In looking at high and low trust they found that low trustors do not have initial positive expectations that others will reciprocate collaborative behaviours and require additional motive to increase their willingness to be vulnerable to others. High trustors have had positive experiences and believe that their own interests will not be harmed by the uncooperative behaviours of others (Decremer, Snyder, & Dewitte, 2001). This suggests that positive experiences, support and scaffolding can be used to move one's level of trust from low to high.

Identity/group based trust is premised on the conception that individuals, to some degree, are defined by various categories/groups. Stolle (2002) and Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest that people trust those they feel closest to, whom they believe to be

similar, and with whom they are familiar. A causal mechanism is at work in this regard in that people trust those with whom they share and recognize a common group identity (Messick & Kramer, 2001). This in-group trust can evolve into a depersonalized trust that is solely based on membership (Brewer, 1981). Social categorization enhances perceived similarities amongst members within a bounded category. This in turn enhances the consensus and understanding that others perceive/understand/practice things in similar ways. For trust to develop within and across groups, boundaries defining the group must be clear and salient.

Trust and virtual communities. In online spaces trust is conflated with related terms such as credibility, security, surety, and reliability and this has led to a surplus of complex conceptual models at the expense of clarity in the use of the term trust (Cheshire, Antin, Churchill, & Cook, 2010). For online communities to function/survive there is a need for trust to exist between members/participants, suggesting that solid boundaries of trust are needed (Feng, Lazar, & Preece, 2004). Cheshire et al. (2010) suggest that there is a clear link between general dispositions to trust others in interpersonal interactions and to trust interactions with web-based information systems at the positive end of the online engagement spectrum. They also found that the experience of one or more adverse events online was significantly associated with a decrease in trust in websites in general. Chai and Kim (2010) posit that in online environments trust in the Internet as well as others is an initial condition for users to engage in trusting relationships in which they transfer and exchange information. Trust is generally discussed as one of the most critical and positive influential factors in online users decisions to share information (Hsu et al., 2007; Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2007). Chai and Kim's study of what makes bloggers share information confirmed that trust was a considerable antecedent to sharing knowledge. In online communities each participant has the ability to evaluate the quality of content before accepting the information and engaging. Trust plays a role in successful social interaction for content sharing and dissemination in social media-sharing communities (Kim & Ahmad, 2013).

In understanding trust it is imperative that we consider what the object of the trust is. In doing so I limit the scope of this article and focus on how trust is used by individuals to make those initial and sustained participative forays into online places and spaces. In this regard I do not look at how trust develops towards a specific transactional or informational website nor do I attempt to address trust relationships in regards to the use of specific technology(ies). In attempting to better understand the divergent experiences of the participants in this study, this paper looks at how generalized and interpersonal trust contribute to the participants' unique online experiences. Figure 1 illustrates how the literature, as briefly discussed within this section, informs us that that the creation of trust involves a variety of variables. The degree of trust, whether it be high trust, low trust, or distrust influences an individual's behaviour as well as where and how they chose to communicate and interact.

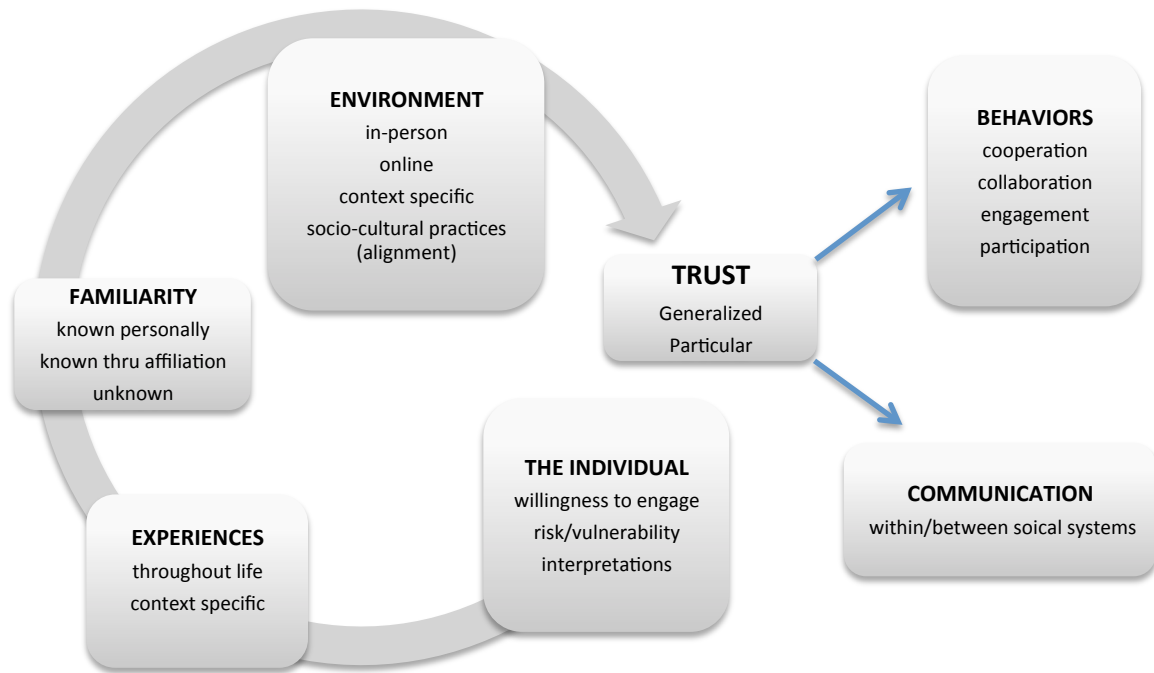


Figure 1. Variables in the creation of trust

Digital Practices

Mobile technology, easy access, the evolving Internet, and online spaces have given rise to practices associated with knowledge, production, communication, and self-representation that are increasingly more social, participatory, and collaborative (Ito et al., 2010; Jenkins, Clinton, Puroshatma, Robson, & Weigel, 2009). Additionally, knowledge is more easily and readily distributed and dispersed (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, 2011). The logic behind this new ethos is that with more readers reading and editing, content will improve through exposure to a greater number of perspectives. The end result being content that will be better, more user friendly, reliable, and accountable (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, 2011). A significant body of literature addresses how digital spaces are largely populated by youth who push the boundaries of communication and representation; they navigate, consume, and also help create these spaces through their participation as designers, contributors, and respondents (Alvermann, 2002; Black, 2009a, 2009b; boyd, 2008; Ito et al., 2010; Steinkuehler, 2010). Gee's (2009, 2015) work in affinity spaces highlights this collaborative and participatory mindset in which individuals are drawn into a specifically designed space (physical or virtual) that is constructed for the sole purpose of affiliating with others who seek to share, gain, and/or distribute knowledge without requiring community membership: a collaborative intelligence. Engagement in such spaces requires participation, and Jenkins (2006, 2009) identifies five characteristics inherent in these participatory cultures: low barrier to expression, strong support for sharing work/knowledge, informal mentorship, feeling socially connected, and a belief that contributions matter. Additionally, Ito and her colleagues (2010) add that both friendship-driven and interest-driven genres of participation encourage youth to hang out, mess around, and geek out in digital media practices. The key prerequisites underlying this mindset of collaboration, participation, and distributed knowledge is trust. However, to enter into those practices, an individual must trust not only the space but also those within the space. Understanding how and why youth chose to engage/not engage in on- and offline spaces can enlighten and support educators' use of online spaces and digital technology in more effective and relevant ways for the students within their classrooms (Green, 2003). Additionally, this understanding can enhance and strengthen those after-

school and community based programs that exist to connect marginalized youth (e.g. Austin, Ehrlich, Puckett, & Singleton, 2011) and foster technical expertise (e.g. Kafai & Fields, 2013). Understanding and acknowledging how the construct of trust informs the informal ways in which individuals gain access to new texts and practices in their everyday lives can lead to insights into the effective skills and strategies that learners use and that can be built upon in formal instructional settings (Perry, 2012).

Current Study

The collective body of literature suggests that to engage with others, whether in an online or face-to-face space requires a degree of trust. Trust is the main attribute in the formation of relationships, promoting effective knowledge creation, and sharing of personal networks. In the online environment individuals must navigate trust in the Internet as well as in others as an initial condition to participate in trusting relationships in which information is transferred, shared, created, and distributed (Czerwinski, 2002). When trust relationships are established individuals are more willing to participate in cooperative actions. Little is known about how youth, particularly low SES urban youth, navigate their movement between online interactions between those they know in a face-to-face environment to those who are only known online. To address this gap in the literature I sought to address the following research question: How does the construct of trust influence how youth engage, participate and collaborate online spaces?

Methodology

This case study drew upon a connective ethnography methodology and sought to understand the digital practices of low socio-economic youth residing in the north eastern United States as they engaged with mobile communication technologies. Access to students at North High School constituted a convenience sample that was subsequently narrowed by a specific criterion: possession and daily engagement with mobile technology. Mobile technology was defined as mobile phones, smart phones, laptop computers, and tablets. Participants were six youth, 16 -18 years of age, who attended an urban high school, and self-identified as regular users of mobile technology. The sample comprised 2 females and 4 males: two participants were Hispanic, three were African-American, and one was White. These demographics are representative of the North High School population. In Phase 1 all six participants partook in three interviews; the initial interview explored their personal experiences with mobile technology and online spaces. The second and third interviews were conducted during a two-week period in which participants were observed and had remote monitoring software (WebWatcher[®]) installed on their mobile phones/laptops. Additionally participants were asked to maintain journals for a two-week period. At the conclusion of each two-week period, the remote monitoring software was removed from each participant’s device. In Phase 2 a focus group was conducted with 10 students. Table 1 highlights the extent of the data collection. While 5 themesⁱ (Hoff, 2014) were originally identified, only the role of trust/distrust and its influence on engagement with and participation in online communities will be discussed in this paper.

Table 1. Extent and volume of data collection

Data Type	Volume
Interview transcripts	15- 40 minute interviews
Observations	30 school days
Field notes	40 entries
Journals	6 journals (48 entries)
Text messages	5563
Facebook interactions	1248 postings/2593 searches
Internet searches	7111 (112 sites)
Photographs	725
Videos	36 segments

Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Two general types of qualitative content analysis, *conventional* and *summative* were utilized (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Conventional qualitative content analysis examines data that is the product of open-ended data collection techniques aimed at detail and depth (Forman & Damschroder, 2008) and then seeks to classify large amounts of data into an efficient number of categories through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Inference validity is ensured through a systematic coding process (Forman & Damschroder, 2008).

The summative approach to qualitative content analysis was specifically used with the WebWatcher data. Data analysis began with searches for occurrences of words such as Google, YouTube, World Star Hip Hop, or images such as emoticons. This approach is an unobtrusive and unbiased way to study the phenomenon of interest (Forman & Damschroder, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). While this approach seems quantitative in the early stages its goal is to explore the usage of the words/indicators in an inductive manner and as such fits into a qualitative analysis approach (Forman & Damschroder, 2008).

Findings

While the data collected via WebWatcher suggests that these participants were active in their use of social networking sites, search engines, and websites, comments such as “I don’t conversate with people I don’t know” (Niesha), “I never joined an online group or shared idea or writing or music...I’m not that kind of person” (Focus group), and “I just watch” (Cris), suggest that something deeper impacted their engagement and participation. These participants owned the technology, found ways to work around access (free text messaging, free wifi, free apps), and a wide range of interests, but the data indicates that something else impacted where they went as well as the manner in which they engaged. Participants engaged in solitary endeavours, sought out information but purposefully did not engage with others not known to them in the physical world.

Social Networking

WebWatcher data revealed that participants preferred Facebook as their social network site, representing 31.2% of their Internet searches and 99.6% of their Social Network Sites visits (Hoff, 2014). Participants stated that while they did not post daily to their network (Table 2) they were accessing the social network site. “I don’t really post that much on Facebook...I just like to look at other people’s statuses. I might post...but it’s not very much,” was a sentiment voiced by Shan but corroborated by all other participants (Hoff, 2014). Members of the focus group confirmed that they were “on”

Facebook but they were not posting on Facebook. “I’m like on Facebook for like three hours. I’m on it just to check to see what others are doin” (Focus group). This supports the pattern of looking (2593 searches) as opposed to posting (1248) as is indicated in Table 1.

Whom they interacted with and what they posted was related to the degree to which they felt the others could be trusted to not misinterpret nor use their posts in a negative manner.

A: I like lookin at other people’s pictures. On Facebook I go through other people’s pictures...ones I know... you can look at other peoples pictures but you can’t write to them...You can’t write to nobody on there...There is no privacy...

B: People say stuff...change what you mean...can’t trust nobody (Focus group)

None of the participants accepted a friend request if they had not actually interacted with the individual. “I only contact people I know, people I met...I just don’t really conversate with people that I don’t know. It’s nice to meet new people but...at the same time...you have to be safe” (Niesha). Niesha’s decision to discontinue her Facebook account after the study was premised on “too much drama”. That decision reflected her belief that drama was rampant on all networking sites, not just Facebook: “Facebook drama follows it to Twitter drama...Twitter drama follows it to Facebook drama” (Niesha). After twice having her Facebook page hacked by friends, Leigh chose to further limit her Friends, “I only use it to communicate with my cousins or my aunts...or like someone that is very close to me...people I trust.” Focus group members affirmed this practice of meeting people in-person first, then deciding whether or not to add them as a Facebook friend.

Table 2. Facebook posting

Posting	Shan	Leigh	Cris	Rian	Niesha	Da’von
Posts/day	0-1	0-5	0-5	0-1	0-1	0-2

While they checked on their Facebook pages several times a day, posting of statuses, comments, photos, and links was not a daily practice (Table 2). These youth expressed concern over who their audiences were and how they were received or were seen as fitting into the discourse (Hoff, 2014). Niesha found that something as simple and innocent as ‘liking’ something on another Friend’s wall could be misinterpreted, citing even if you “put up another’s picture and another boy might *Like* it...and then people say ooohhh...he *Liked* it...and then go tell my boyfriend.” Trust, the ability to put something out there without fear, did not exist for these participants. One focus group member stated “I take pictures here and there but I don’t really put em up on Facebook cuz I know that Facebook is the website that whatever you put up on there everybody can see it and make comments and I’m cautious on what I put on there.” Experiences, whether their own or those close to them had informed their Facebook practices; they were suspicious and wary of others intentions. Without trust in others, their interest in posting, participating, and collaborating was limited: they were not willing to depend on or become vulnerable to the intentions of others.

Text messaging

Participants’ password-protected mobile phones were deemed to be a safe, secure, and private device. Privacy was important and valued. By not sharing sensitive or highly personal materials they controlled and reduced the level of potential drama or problems that could arise if materials were shared or distributed to others.

Through texting, participating youth sought to connect within a small group in which they felt comfortable in expressing a wide variety of thoughts and ideas. In general, of the over 5000 text messages studied, participants sent the majority of their texts to only a few individuals (one to four) (Table 3). Individuals in romantic relationships sent the majority of texts to partners as evidenced through Shan (8 – 166 messages) and Niesha’s (1 – 57 messages) relationships. On average, Rian sent considerably more text messages (1 - 183 messages) than the other participants. As student counsel president and being actively engaged in school clubs, Rian used texting to arrange and confirm meetings and activities beyond those within his inner circle of friends and family. These messages dealt with facts and arrangements, nothing personal.

Table 3. Text messaging activity

	Rian	Cris	Niesha	Leigh	Da’von	Shan
# Text messaging contacts	20	12	12	6	4	2
# Contacts texted regularly	4	3	3	2	2	1
Messages sent/day (mean)	1 – 183 (48.9)	0 – 30 (6.36)	5 – 57 (20.44)	0 – 20 (9.07)	0 – 17 (8.27)	8 – 166 (76)
Messages received/day (mean)	0 – 131 (42.3)	1 – 37 (7.36)	4 – 105 (31.56)	1 – 18 (8.13)	1 – 20 (6.14)	7 – 178 (79.33)

Text messaging as a practice was a more bound and intimate form of communication for participants than Facebook. Intimate communications occurred “when someone is close to me” (Leigh), between close friends, when there was a history of maintaining private and confidential information (Da’von, Focus group). “I try to keep in touch with them...people I know or people I’ve met. I don’t just talk to random people that I don’t know cuz they could be doing something that I’m not aware of and then get caught up in it” (Shan). Those whom they texted represented the most trusted, or intimate group of friends.

Connections made through text messaging covered a range of topics: greetings, check-ins, hanging out, relationships, and sexual banter/teasing among a small group of contacts. While some text messages were brief and superfluous others dealt with emotional struggles.

“If you need to talk I’m here for you” (Rian)

“Why is my live so lonely? Seems like everybody I love or get close to leaves me. Who cares about the quiet girl back here?” (Leigh)

“I attempted something so awful, I not even comfortable sayin it...just know I failed at it “(Cris)

“You don’t know what it’s like to be betrayed by EVERYBODY” (Shan)

While participants spoke about the level of drama on Facebook and how that impacted their use and interaction with that medium, participants voiced no such experience with texting. They suggested that text messaging was a good medium for interpersonal messages because it allowed one to reflect while composing as well as responding to messages (Focus group). While acknowledging the possibility of sharing screens with an unintended audience all participants confirmed that messages constructed for a particular audience were private. They implicitly trusted their inner circle of contacts.

It was only in the texting space, within that small bounded group, that feelings, emotions, and detailed thoughts were expressed. Feeling of love, loneliness, frustration, joy, and caring were found across the data set. Text messaging was not just about finding out where someone was or what they were doing at that point in time, it provided both a place and space to "talk" about issues of great importance to them. In online social networks their engagement was framed by perceived drama, worry, fear, concern, deception, and distrust. Texting was the place where participants held an expectation that the content provided was generally and consistently reliable and of high quality. They were aware of the potential risk in misinterpretation and uncontrolled sharing, but the risk was seen as low; they trusted the others would not intentionally harm them.

Online communities

Searching for new information online starts at the level of a search engine and then transitions to specific sites once the user verifies that the specific site has the right feel, useful information, and type of interaction that is of interest to the user (forum, blog, online sharing...). Google was the second most accessed online space after Facebook and the most widely used of the search engines, representing 85.63% of all search engine traffic (Table 4). Google was the place participants initiated their searches: "I don't go to any special websites...Google is my best friend" (Focus group). Shan suggested that he "always turns to Google...it can answer any question." The ease of use, and the seemingly endless ability to answer any question made Google the reliable, go-to search engine. Participants accessed Google an average of 13 times each day and the focus group confirmed that when they have a question, they "go to Google."

Table 4. Volume of online searches

Order	Website	Total searches
1.	Facebook.com	2587
2.	Google.com	1130
3.	Bgclive.com	586
4.	YouTube.com	543
5.	Lusciousness.net	404
6.	World Star Hip-Hop.com	368
7.	NetFlix.com	321
8.	Collegeboard.org	286
9.	ed.gov	109

Internet searches have the potential to bring the information seeker closer to knowledge that might not otherwise be accessible within his/her physical space and community. Shan and Cris wanted to hear and learn from first person accounts, yet were reluctant to engage with those they did not know, preferring to "just watch" the conversation or flow of information online (Shan). Google and YouTube were often used in tandem to support learning. Shan had an interest in cars, especially affordable ones that he could be work on, which led him to search for information regarding windshield wiper replacements: "I just wanted to learn how to do it, to see if I could do it. It was somewhat helpful" (Shan). Whether it was learning how to tie a bowtie (Rian), tying moccasins (Shan), creating a website (Cris), doing hair and nails (Niesha), video editing (Cris), or more directly self-improvement focused such as Cris's inquiries about fitness or Leigh's desire to learn how to do better flip turns, all sought out Google and YouTube as informational starting points. They sought out information, read, watched, evaluated,

added to their own knowledge, and then moved on, silently: a non-public participation. “The other day I was searching fitness tips and so I’ll go to where people blogged about their different experiences...but I won’t really contribute to the conversation but I kinda... You know...just watch it...and see what other people have to say” (Cris). While a few participants reported accessing DIY-related sites (such as Fanfiction) they tended to look around but not interact or participate in any discussion. Repeatedly, the youth in this study stated they “never post anything” (Rian); “I’m not that type of person...” (Niesha); and “I just watch” (Cris). The youth in this study did not seek to actively engage in or collaborate with online communities to discuss new ideas, gain knowledge/understanding, or distribute their work/thoughts.

Cognizance of various online knowledge communities or spaces was not the issue, as all participants reported knowing of online interest-based communities. Rian seconded this by saying, “I’ve never posted anything I’ve written or anything like that...um...I have taken a look at some websites...and things like that...things that my friends are on...but I’ve never myself gone on to post anything.” Da’von, who enjoyed writing poetry and stories, was aware of and had visited fanfiction sites (FIM FIC) and had read others’ work but had neither posted comments nor his own work stating, “I don’t post my work.” While participants liked to visit interest-based sites, visits were about observing, not exposing themselves to others they did not know: “I just don’t conversate with people that I don’t know”. Non-public participationⁱⁱ outside their physical realm was a common trend; engagement in online communities was not something they saw as part of their practice: “I never joined an online group to share ideas or writing or music with. I am not that kind of person”; “it’s not interesting to me” (Focus group). These youth were interested in knowing, they sought information on their own, they shared it with friends they knew but they did not seek to actively engage in or collaborate in either friendship or interest-based pursuits beyond those of their immediate physical community.

Cris voiced and demonstrated an interest in establishing a YouTube channel highlighting school events and happenings: “What I’m trying to evolve it into is I wanted to be something like a place where people go...like...things happen in Dwight...and more importantly at North” (Cris). He understood from his personal experience with YouTube that to attract visitors to the site, he needed visually pleasing, informative video segments. Cris thought he “could set up a website in a couple of seconds” but quickly realized “I don’t have an understanding of how it works.” When he experienced difficulty advancing his concept, Cris did not seek online for advice or assistance, he sought to find “somebody I really know...”, someone that he could “trust”. When asked how he would go about finding information on how to edit and improve his videos, Cris replied, “I haven’t really talked to people online about how I would do it...I Googled it.” When no such individual was found among friends, interest in the website idea diminished. While Cris visited other YouTube channels hosting similar material, he chose to not seek information and clarification from those sites because they represented the unknown to him and that was a boundary he, like other participants, repeatedly chose not to cross. Anonymity was not seen as an assurance against their wariness and suspicion about the intent of others.

Trust, for these participants, was critical for collaborative interaction. Without a known physical presence they chose to not trust and thus declined to engage with others online even when engagement could have been beneficial to the development of their own personal interests and desires. Engagement and interaction within this group of urban youth was heavily premised on trust and while their interactions may have moved to online spaces they were initiated and developed in a physical space first.

Discussion

Trust was a theme within the lives of these youth and was observed throughout the entire data set. Trust was a major factor in participants’ use of social network sites, and as a result of lack of trust, they limited their engagements. Even though they were able to limit their *Friends* on Facebook, they did not place much trust in what was said, how things were stated, and how things were interpreted. While Niesha and Leigh experienced what they referred to as “too much drama” on Facebook, male participants had not personally experienced such things but were aware that some friends had experienced problems. Trust directly impacted who participants chose to *hang out* with, thus impacting their engagement within friendship-based genres.

Issues of trust also impacted the ways in which these youth engaged in online spaces. Ito et al. (2010) described interest-based participatory genres of *messing around* and *geeking out* and suggested that the key to participation includes access to technology, high-speed Internet, time, space, autonomy, and desire. The sheer volume of participants’ searches demonstrated desire, interest, motivation, and self-directed learning. While they actively and frequently sought information from the Internet, it was their style of engagement that provided a new perspective. There is a significant body of research that documents how youth actively engage with others in online spaces, seeking out others and communities based on shared interests (Black, 2009a, 2009b; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Gee, 2009; Jacobs, 2008; Steinkuehler, 2010). Participants in this study engaged in solitary endeavours, seeking information but purposefully not engaging with others not previously known in the physical world: “I just don’t conversate with people that I don’t know” (Niesha); “I never joined an online group or shared ideas or writing or music... am not that kind of person” (Focus group); “I just watch” (Cris); “can’t trust nobody” (Focus group). Participants’ hesitancy and inability to trust those unknown and outside their community and culture created a barrier that effectively restricted their ability to move forward in the development of their interests and desires.

Ito et al. (2010) suggest that *lurking* or silent participation, to read but not participate in the discussion, even when anonymous, is a common practice. Participants concurred with Ito et al. and Nonnecke and Preece (2003) that reading or observing what transpires within online interest-based communities was sufficient engagement (Focus group). Participants’ no-posting philosophy however was not premised on shyness or feelings of having nothing to offer, as suggested by Nonnecke et al. (2004). The issue was founded on their sense of community and trust. The culture within this group of urban youth was heavily premised on trust, engagement, and interaction with known individuals, known in a physical, not an online space. Interactions may have moved to online spaces but were formulated and developed in a physical space first. Friendship, whether as an informal acquaintance or more personalized friendship, was for these participants a precursor to interactions facilitated by their mobile technology.

The findings from this study offer insight into the role of trust in seeking out and engaging with others online. All participants expressed concern regarding interaction with unknown others in online spaces and communities. Trust was not implicit and their willingness to trust was premised on their personal experiences, familiarity and the environment (Figure 1). These findings align with previous research that trust is important in fostering relationships and collaborative exploits (Chang & Fang, 2013). “The key to ongoing social experience is producing trust” (Glanville, Anderson, & Paxton, 2013). It is trust within a community that creates an environment in which people are inspired to share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences in an open and honest way (Nepal, Sherchan, & Paris, 2012). Repeatedly, participants addressed the critical importance that knowing someone, face-to-face, and developing a level of trust were critical for them to engage with those individuals in online spaces. In the absence of trust, participants’ behaviours were limited to not entering into, communicating or engaging with others in

online spaces, even when they had a vested interest in the knowledge and experience that were accessible within that community or space. In some scenarios where trust was low, they would watch but not engage. The reasons given for such behaviours included not trusting those they didn't know, unwillingness to "converse" with those unknown to them in a physical sense, or sharing in a group where they knew no one. Yamagishi refers to this as "default expectations of people's trustworthiness" (2011, p. 28). I propose that trust as a continuum, from high to low, develops in direct relation to one's prior experiences and can and does vary with the environment. Secondly, I support the concept put forth by (Chang & Fang, 2013; Kim & Ahmad, 2013) that distrust is a distinct and separate construct with a significantly stronger emotional aspect. Low trust and distrust, bifurcations of trust, have different implications for the engagement and collaborative processes in both on and offline spaces.

The underlying concept of friendship and/or connecting with others, particularly in online spaces, is that friendship is transitive. We often assume that another's friends can be ours as well based purely on association, which is an underlying principle of social networks. While that may be true for many, there are individuals to whom this trust by association does not work. Without some level of trust in place, members/individuals are not likely to share their knowledge or experience within participatory cultures due to their fear that their information and identity may be misused (Nepal, Sherchan, & Paris, 2013). And while online communities can work towards developing trusting communities where individuals can feel safe, those who have a low level of trust may be willing to try; those who distrust will not, the risk for them is too great. Cris in his desire to develop and construct a website to host videos and information to distribute within his community could not take that leap of asking unknown others for help with video production and website development. The wariness of what others might say about him or his work, possible misdirection, and poor information were sufficient reasons to distrust, mitigating any potential risk. Decremer, Snyder, and Dewitte (2001) suggest that low trustors have low expectations that others will reciprocate cooperative behaviour and need additional motive to engage such as social pressure. Sociologists see trust as cooperative conduct and distrust as non-cooperative conduct (Decremer, Snyder, & Dewitte, 2001) but I am arguing that trust (high or low) and distrust are different constructs that can and do impact collaborative behaviour differently, and in particular how and where one chooses to engage in online spaces. By bifurcating these terms I am suggesting that trust and distrust are different constructs: improving trust does not eliminate distrust. If trust is a reflection of one's general willingness to depend on or become vulnerable to others then distrust is an unwillingness to depend on or become vulnerable. Chang and Fang (2013) put forth that online trust is a positive expectation characterized by reliance, confidence, and assurance. They describe distrust as negative expectations characterized by suspicion, wariness and fear. These latter elements are evident in participants' narratives as they consistently talk about the need to be careful who they communicate and interact with, both online and in-person. They are guarded in how much they are willing to expose of themselves based not only their own experiences but those closest to them as well. Wariness and lack of trust have a direct impact regarding whom individuals engage with, where they engage, the manner in which they engage, and the language and channels used to interact with others.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the small convenience sample and time spent with each participant. One week was spent observing participant's daily existence, coupled with two weeks of remotely monitoring their mobile technology-based activities. These are relatively short time periods in the context of a student's life and there is the potential that participants knowingly modified behaviours and use of technologies. An accounting for

this was incorporated into the study’s design by including and incorporating remote monitoring (WebWatcher), which allowed participants to be monitored without the researcher’s physical presence. In addition to this method, multiple interviews, member checks, and journaling were incorporated to more accurately reflect participants’ experiences. The inclusion of a focus group served to ensure the study’s data and its subsequent interpretation were reflective of participants’ experiences at this particular point in time.

Conclusion

In online participatory spaces trust in the Internet as well as others is an initial condition for users to participate in trusting relationships in which they consume and distribute information (Czerwinski, 2002; Hsu et al., 2007). There is clear evidence that when trust relationships are established, people in those relationships are more willing to participate in cooperative interactions. This speaks to a trust continuum in which one’s level of trust and subsequent interaction can move along that continuum. But when a boundary exists that prohibits the individual from entering into a space because they cannot and do not trust those within it; their behaviour then is fundamentally different. The data suggests that more exposure does not move them into a trusting position. The emotions that are limiting their engagement are specific to both the individual and the particular space and are not likely to be affected by positive statements from others. Distrust is subjective and based on direct experience (Kim & Ahmad, 2013). McKnight and Chervany (2001) argue that distrust is based on different emotions than trust. Distrust represents strong negative feelings and insecurity about a user’s motivation, intention, and behaviour; the user is not willing to expose him/her self to or depend on others with any sense of confidence. This is in stark contrast with trust, which they suggest is constructed from a safe, secure, and comfortable feeling, and a general willingness to depend on others.

People attempt to understand the world around them through a variety of ways, including personal experience, their social connections, and inferences made on the basis of real and imagined features of physical spaces. Trust and distrust, as evidenced by Shan, Cris, Leigh, Rian, Niesha, and Da’von, are constructs that are clearly impacted and determined by experience and one’s interpretation and processing of events and experiences within their lives and community. Their experiences directly impacted their ability to engage, participate, collaborate, and disperse knowledge. When distrust is present, this new ethos is undermined. Deeper insight regarding the role that generalized trust potentially plays in whether youth continue their digital media pursuits beyond dabbling in an initial interest, or “hanging out” (Ito et al., 2010), could inform the design and implementation of digital media production programs both in school and out, and lead to more participation, collaboration, “messaging around” and “geeking out” amongst youth. Understanding why and where an individual’s trust/distrust is situated is important to understanding how and why they choose to engage in online spaces.

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ⁱ (1) Technology choices, (2) creation of meaning, (3) communication hierarchy, (4) impact of trust (5) tinkering bounded by technology, distrust, and non-public participation

ⁱⁱ Participatory behaviour that does not involve the public expression of a person's opinion (Andrews & Nonnecke, 2003), at times referred to as 'lurking' (Ito et al., 2010), may also be known as vicarious learning (Cox, McKendree, Tobin, & Lees, 1999).