Reading Trust and Distrust in Shared Documents: Film Professionals Review Film Reviews

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Abstract

This research explores how one group of users perceives trustworthiness and reliability, as a form of professional judgment, when viewing text based information that is shared and distributed publically. In particular, this research explores how trust works in the domain of film exhibition and curating. A group of film professionals were studied to explore how they navigate published information that the film industry produces. The trust at stake in this context seems to be the credibility and the authenticity of the information. Participants were sensitive to the interplay between what could be described as 'factual material' and its representation by different writers. Each participant had developed somewhat different heuristics over the span of their professional practice. We find that once more basic strategies to inform trust are considered, the design of trust becomes complex and contradictory. This finding can be extrapolated to other groups who share documents professionally.

Keywords: Trustworthiness, Trust-enablement and Performing Trust

1 Introduction

Our paper explores from an interactive design perspective how one group of users perceives trustworthiness and reliability, as a form of professional judgment, when viewing text based information that is shared and distributed publically. We investigate how trust works in the specific context of film exhibition and curating, however, we argue that our conclusions can be extended into other contexts. Open and distributed platforms share several characteristics that designers of these systems have to work with. There is a wealth of information available to users, however the designer of this type of system may have little control over what users do with the information. Publically-accessible databases allow users to innovate with content in ways not possible before. For instance, users of a film institution website may take images from a site and create their own narratives. Power hierarchies between 'owners' and 'users' of content are disrupted. These aspects of distributed systems affect the trust relationships between users, the system, and the system owner. Our research investigates one piece of this complex puzzle: how film professionals demonstrate trust, as judged by other experts.

Trust can be loosely and informally described as a relationship within which a trustor is confident that another party (the trustee), to whom a trustor is in a position of vulnerability, will respond in the trustor's interests [5]. Trust in a technical environment permits a categorical, taxonomic approach to analysis. For instance, practitioners make judgments about the trustworthiness of a computer system that can be assured through technical means. They also assess the trustworthiness of the provenance of information. Critically, they also assess trustworthiness based on the nature of the information itself. As the internet is increasingly becoming an uncombed pool of information, this last type of trustworthiness is becoming more prominent, and is sometimes the only means of assessment a trustor has at hand. Trust,

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in this case, is always an 'idiosyncratic achievement': a transient view that an individual has acquired at a particular point in time regarding a unique set of information [15]. Thus, in our context, trust is a willingess of the reader to act upon the text in recognition of the author's trustworthiness. We found each of the participants in our study had a somewhat personalised set of techniques that they had developed as professionals to analyse trust in a document. There were similarities between the techniques; for example, attention was given to how the words in a document influence a reader. However, they differed in how they interpreted the use of words and how they prioritised different outcomes and messages. From this we conclude that trust is difficult to re-engineer into a design, as individuals draw idiosyncratic interpretations that are bound to context. A solution is to use information about how users approach trust to create basic structures in a design and then allow users to configure the design to meet their individual nuances.

This research is relevant to wider studies of trust, for instance, investigations from software engineering perspectives, because trust is complex, the nature of the concept is contested and there is a lot at stake. Problems of this nature require investigation from many different perspectives [12]. Blevis and Stolterman (2009) [2] describe the spectrum between those who work in the area of visual/interaction design (social scientists) versus those who work in software design and the traditional sciences. At the social end of the spectrum, researchers often explore the impact of culture on a design, while software designers focus on 'performance, correctness and function'. Programmers develop skills in processes while visual and interaction designers develop knowledge about idea generation. Thus there is a gap of understanding between the social scientists and programmers that makes transference of ideas difficult.

According to Krohn (2008, p. 375) [13], rather than attempting to eradicate the tension between the arts and science, a valuable strategy is to 'coordinate the tension'. He argues that the solution is 'expert learning', when cases of data collection are used as demonstrations of how the typical or general case can differ from each other.

Thus, rather than different disciplines arguing which position is correct, the expert learning approach allows space for robust scientific learning and insights into the nuances of culture. In this paper, we set out a case study that provides detail into how trust is contingent on cultural understandings.

2 Background Research

To explore the issue of how trust is negotiated between users in open and distributed environments, this paper studies the trusting (and distrusting) practices and rationales of film industry professionals, experts in their field. Such a user necessarily has well-developed processes to analyse material and is rehearsed at articulating those methods. Consequently, such a user can illuminate much about how users negotiate trust in digital environments. However, the notion of a professional needs to be approached with caution, and it is sometimes difficult to draw distinctions between 'expert' and 'non-expert' [16]. The authority of the expert is challenged by the nature of distributed systems. Different users can distribute opinions and knowledge without the endorsement of institutions.

Some research within the software engineering area has already studied how experts view trust in order to inform the design of systems. Amatrinain *et al.* (2009) [1], for instance, have studied film experts in order to improve an algorithm. They define an expert as 'an individual that we can trust to have produced thoughtful, consistent and reliable evaluations (ratings) of items in a given domain.' The use of experts to generate trusted predictions in a recommender system has been explored by Cho *et al.* (2008) [4]. Their approach, however, is focused on identifying expert users from within a closed community of users, by deriving a 'domain authority' reputation-like score for each user in the data set. Our research instead approaches the exploration from an interactive design perspective and studies how users who are experts interpret the trust evidence produced by other experts in the field.

Previous research has also explored how trust is interpreted by all categories of users in digital environments. A considerable amount of this research has the agenda of encouraging trust in the interest of business. Many researchers since Fukuyama (1995) [9] have asserted that trust can 'grease the wheels' of business, reducing transaction costs and facilitating further transactions. An example is the Reina Trust Building Institute, which can be hired by organisations to promote trust [3]. The Reina Institute uses quantitative scales as a means of measuring trust, positing a 'betrayal continuum' that needs to be overcome by employees in order to achieve a healthy organisational culture. This paper is not concerned with the merits of such approaches, however the objective-quantitative approach offers an illuminating contrast with our methods here.

Following the logic that trust is positive, trust researchers working in the area of technology design have developed heuristics to promote the appearance of trust. Egger (2003) [7] is one who provides guidelines on how to promote such an appearance. He argues for an adherence to traditional models of professional visual and interface design. For instance, the name of the business should be clear as well as should its core selling points. The site should be easy to use and provide guidance to the user. Fogg (2001) [8] adds that errors in professional presentation, such as spelling mistakes and technical problems can reduce trust and credibility. Investigating how trust and loyalty can be developed in the context of social networking, Mäntymäki and Salo (2010) [14] suggest that designers of shared online spaces create visible representation of individual users' presence as this technique will help promote a safer environment.

Riegelsberger *et al.* (2003) [15] problematise the application of a 'one-size fits all' approach to designing for trust in websites. They claim that the use of photographs of people in order to boost the trustworthiness may produce mixed results and is highly dependent on how the user interprets the presentation. For instance, drawing on Nielsen, Riegelsberger *et al.* (2003) [15] explore how the inclusion of images of 'perfect people' on a company website can destroy trust and credibility as it is obvious that these people are not really employees of the company. Users are beginning to distrust the façade. Recently, there has been publicity regarding highly professional looking websites that are illegitimate and have convinced users to part with their money [14]. Perhaps as users become aware of such cases, 'professional' looking websites will not automatically be deemed trustworthy. The appearance of trust is a 'moving target', changing as those who want to appear trustworthy adopt and present certain evidence, and are then revealed to be untrustworthy.

Our research differs from these previous studies because it focuses on how professional users, who are considered experts, interpret the trust evidence presented by other professionals. Rather than a commercial agenda, which may assume trust is a positive quality to be acquired, our approach attempts to explore the idiosyncratic and complex nature of both trusting and distrusting interactions.

3 Methodological Issues

Six participants were recruited via email request. All participants are film professionals – curators at a large-scale, public film institution, where one of the writers of this paper worked. Participants were given an open-ended task: 'Please select a document or resource used in your everyday work. Where in these pages are the indications to trust, as you define trust? Please mark-up the instances on the page and explain them to me at your convenience.' This activity asks participants to iterate and simultaneously explain an activity that is an essential element of their daily work, researching a film in order to ascertain whether the film should be included in a programme in their institution. The term trust, not trustworthiness, was used in the instructions for users in order to not to de-limit the understanding participants would bring to the data-gathering task. Participants were not asked to define what trust meant to them. We found in a test implementation of the study, that participants found the task of defining trust to be

difficult, tiresome, and an unwanted interruption to their work day. This was not a problem to our study as our interest is in how trust works as a practical accomplishment, not how trust is defined.

During a pre-arranged ten-minute session, participants then explained the notes to the researcher. The notes written by the participants on the documents worked as a springboard for further discussion with the researcher. The activity had some structure but allowed the participants to apply their expertise. The nature of the approach also meant that participants could bring their own working definition of trust to create a context. Their comments were transcribed, and those transcripts heavily inform the analysis in this paper.

The participants chose from the following documents to use: *The Melbourne Film Festival Guide 2009*, *Cannes Festival Guide 2009*, *Sydney Festival Guide 2009*, *British Film Institute Newsletter* and a website, *www.aintitcool.com*. These are documents and resources this group routinely uses to research new developments within the film industry. The text content in these documents usually includes 'facts' about a film (for instance, director, producer and distributor) and a synopsis describing the film. It is worthy of note that none of our participants choose a crowd-sourced website. Instead, participants tended towards analysis presented by one institution of individual as an example of a document used in everyday work.

Our approach is a form of cultural probe. In broad terms, a cultural probe is a data-gathering tool by which participants are prompted so as to collect data about themselves [10]. The process is inherently qualitative in its orientation. It aims to seek in-depth insights from a small group rather than the broad stroke impressions gathered from surveys. Cultural probes are a form of research intervention. They typically suit situations when observation is not possible, which is often the case with questions of trust and distrust. In their contributions to our research, by opening up how trust is defined, the participants were able to demonstrate how they work with trust and bring an 'everyday' artifact into the discussion as a working example of what trust can mean 'on the job.'

Importantly, we did not ask participants to articulate their definitions of trust, although it is clear that some inferred our latent interest in this question. During piloting of this cultural probe it was found that defining trust is a demanding task and takes a participant's focus away from exploring how trust is manifested. Exploring practices of trust and distrust is difficult enough, without the compounding problem of definitions, because it is an embedded and everyday process, so often taken for granted. That is why we undertook this study via a cultural probe.

4 Analysis

This section explores the insights our cultural probe brought into view.. In general, to decide whether or not to trust, our participants moved between two modes. Participants seemed to shift focus between analysing facts and then reviewing how the facts were presented and who was presenting them. Even the simple inclusion of facts by a writer of a resource is regarded as significant. The trust question most acutely at stake in this context seems to be how seriously to take the opinions of others: the credibility and the authenticity of the information and interpretation they provide.

4.1 Drawing inferences

Like anyone undergoing a familiar activity, the participants have certain personalised processes that they apply to the reading of a film data. The participants use processes and prior knowledge to filter 'facts' about a certain film and to form interpretations. Reputation and credibility of certain players in the industry plays a role. When reviewing a festival guide for the first time, one participant said that she draws heavily on the 'facts' about the film, rather than the content of the film, 'Sometimes

the less I know about what happens in a film the happier I am when I see it.' The facts that are being weighed include, 'Who is in it, who made it, who distributed it?' The participant gave an example of one distribution company and said 'usually I see everything they own.' What festivals it has been shown at also seems to matter. Some festivals are weighted heavily. Others are seen as less important. Availability also plays a part in this 'first pass' decision making of a film guide. Conditions include; will the film receive a distribution outside the festival and whether there will be another opportunity for viewing. One participant described this as 'Don't need to see now, can do later.' Films chosen to be seen are marked with an 'A' for 'first choice film.'

One participant believes that the provision of factual material in a film document indicates certain qualities about the writer of the document:

It is collegiate to do this. Their message is that they are providing this for you and you don't need to do this work for yourself when you might want to use this film at a later point. It also gives a sense of the layers behind a film by bringing up the focus on the director and other people involved.

This participant appreciates it when she is offered research material by the writer of a festival guide and interprets the offering as a sign of trust.

4.2 Original as well as authentic information is valued

One principle noted by a participant was the necessity for original text content in a film festival guide. She argued that it is easy to spot when text has been lifted from a press release by a film's maker or copied from another source. 'It comes across as lazy and you wonder why the festival could not be bothered to write their own content,' she explained. Another participant explained that a combination of professional knowledge and personal background information can explain the motivation of the writer and provide insight for the reader. The participant believed this style of text content assists in the propagation of trust. He comments:

It tells a story and where the writer is coming from because you also get a sense of the writer's passion for the material. It's also a way to tell if the information is authentic and not planted by a marketing company. It takes care to write this text.

For this participant, access to the writer's motivation can provide proof of authenticity. The posting of bogus messages on sites by some distribution companies is a common practice. The provision of background explanation is a means to be able to filter for authenticity in order to guard against this.

4.3 Individual prioritisation of trust

Each participant had her or his own style, including a personalised emphasis on what trust information is valued. For instance, one participant emphasised 'authentic information' as most valuable; in particular, whether the writer was from a marketing company and the text was generated for an advertisement or whether the text was someone's genuine opinion. Another participant was sensitive to the claims being made by a text and whether the claims seemed exaggerated. On the other hand, the manager of the film unit viewed the information in terms of how the general public might perceive the information:

It is about, 'What is the grabber?' And this is the key image first and then the title of the film. The key image is to work as a tonal reference for the film. It needs to be a true indicator for the film and this is true for the Cannes catalogue.

How publicity material is understood by members of the general public is a primary concern for this participant. He wonders what first catches their attention.

4.4 Synopsis under scrutiny

Participants seemed to shift focus between the two modes of analysing facts and then reviewing how the facts were presented and who was presenting them. When the focus moves to how facts are presented, attention is given to how the words are used to convince or inform. Often the synopsis of the film comes under attention because this is where the use of text is the richest. There are many ways to write a synopsis — from stripping the text back to the bare essentials that describe the plot, to writing the synopsis in an evocative and perhaps convincing fashion. The reflections of the participants demonstrate the complexity behind the design of text, context and trust. Different participants had varying preferences.

The renowned Cannes festival was provided as an example of a festival that provides a stripped down synopsis. A participant explains why: it is because this festival does not need to convince, they can bank on their reputation and assume prior knowledge on the part of the reader. Their synopses are 'unclouded', there is no sell and the audience is left to make up their own mind. The same participant believes that the reputation of the festival has affected the style of communication used in its festival guide. There is little attempt to try to sell a film to the reader, and the text does not contain persuasive content. However, another participant thought that this approach might let a festival down:

Sometimes as a reader you are wavering and you need to be tipped over, one way or another. It's not about which film is better but what mood do I want to be in. You may also be looking for a particular mood or tone for a particular audience. You need to know what gravitas the film is.

This participant points out that in some situations the reader wants to be persuaded and influenced. Another participant gave an example of an evocative synopsis that worked well for her. She reflected:

It makes the reader excited. In a nutshell you know what it is about. I know it will be a bit sad, a bit funny. You also get a sense of the director and you can read about what else they've done. You are convinced that you should see it. When a convincing synopsis like this is not presented for a good film the it's cruel because people miss out on seeing the film.

A convincing synopsis should tell the reader about what a film is about, and provide a sense of the director and his/her previous work, according to this participant. She believes that it is the duty of a writer to advocate for a good film. Other readers might look at the claims made by writers and distrust statements that are too ambitious, are not possible, or are trying too hard to persuade. One reader gave specific examples. On her document she highlighted words that are used to convince a reader, which in this example were mostly adverbs and adjectives. She explained:

This is not directly about making me trust or not trust, but the points where a claim has been laid, and I need to be able to see or judge for myself. A qualifier has been made that I don't need.

This participant points out that when a claim and qualifier are made by a writer, she would prefer to be able to make up her own mind. The adjectives this participant highlighted include 'a thrilling plot,' 'mind-blowing film-making,' and 'amazing soundtrack.' Verbs and adverbs that denoted a sense of quality were also problematic, such as 'honouring,' 'best-loved' and 'acclaimed.' The same participant commented:

Perhaps these claims could be overstatements, for instance in the case of the use of the word 'reflect'. Perhaps the film does not do this, and this claim is an exaggeration. Maybe the film only presents rather than reflects.

Sometimes claims by writers might be exaggerations, as one participant pointed out. She drew attention to the words 'enjoy so much more' in the introduction of the text. 'How do they know that I will or won't?' the participant commented. She also highlighted the text lines 'Be among the first' and 'spaces are limited' and commented, 'These lines make you wonder what they are trying to convince you of.' In other words, claims by some writers raise suspicions about what they are trying to convince the reader of. In his work, 'Professional vision,' Goodwin (1994) [11] argues that the demonstration of professional expertise is not necessarily a property of seeing or thinking. Expertise instead is closely connected to discursive practice, which is how professionals in a certain domain shape different occurrences or 'objects of interest' to fit professional scrutiny. This includes the scrutiny of other professionals, especially those within the same community of practice. Different opinions can exist within this system, understood as varying perceptual frameworks.

5 Application

In this section, we discuss the implications of the above analysis for the interactive design of content and its presentation in distributed systems: how might such insights inform the subjective and complex problem of trust-enabling design [6]? Clearly, each participant had developed distinctive heuristics over a career of professional practice to weigh up information and look for different indications about trustworthiness. For our group as a whole, trust developed in relatively structured ways, but participants each had personalised techniques informed by what qualities were the most important to them.

There are some straightforward and 'common sense' recommendations for those considering the design of trust, which is evident in the 'vision' of these professionals. For instance, the provision of background information is considered collegial. Authentic information, written with personal opinion rather than disguised marketing, is also valued in the consideration of trust. Readers prefer to be informed than to be subjected to advertising. However, beyond these 'common-sense' recommendations, the means to enable trust becomes complicated with no clear path forward that will work for every user, and is highly dependent on the conditions of those participating in the interaction. Some film professionals prefer a document only to include 'factual information,' and distrust a writer's attempts to make a claim beyond the objective. However, other film professionals see a need for evocative and convincing text and believe it can contribute to trust. It is clear that designing for trust is not conducive to easy solutions that can suit all users.

All participants differentiated between facts and the presentation of these facts. They read 'in between the lines' of what the presentation was saying about the authenticity of the material and also the motivation of the material's writer. While trust is complicated and highly idiosyncratic, then, this paper demonstrates that it can evolve in relatively structured ways, with the final analysis left to the discretion and idiosyncrasies of the trustee. Our participants approached the activity of finding trust with similar processes; and yet they had different interpretations, perspectives and preferences that determined their trust judgments. For instance, one participant's perspective was based on whether a film was adequately represented. She described it as 'cruel' when people miss out on seeing a good film because its written synopsis is not appropriate, perhaps because it is not convincing enough. Another participant examined at considerable length the interplay between, on the one hand, 'facts,' and on the other, evocative and convincing writing. In this case, though, the participant was suspicious of claims and did not want the writing to seek to persuade her. She said, 'I need to be able to see or judge for myself. A qualifier has

been made that I don't need'.

How can this insight be applied to the design of distributed information systems? Trust is a complex judgment shaped by subjective interpretations. It is inherently idiosyncratic to some extent. Some might argue that capturing just one segment of a user group is a strategy worth pursuing. However, this paper indicates it is difficult to anticipate how an audience might interpret the more subtle elements of a presentation. Our research also highlights how sensitive users are to what content is presented and how. A solution is not to attempt to contrive trust but to attempt to engage with audiences about what type of information they may wish to seek in order to make trust judgments. As Urban (2005) [17] argues, users appreciate it when a company presents all the possible information that a trustor might need, does not attempt to close users down and push them into a pre-determined option. A motorcar showroom owned by one car manufacturer that demonstrates other models of cars might be a comparable example.

6 Conclusion

With the benefit of a qualitative lens, we can clearly see the intersection of interactive design, trust and distributed systems as complex. A distributed system raises the equally complex scenario of a mass audience group with little opportunity to gauge how audiences value trust. In response, this paper studies how users perceive trust when examining the content of mass distributed documents. In particular, we explore how trust works in the domain of professional judgment in the area of film exhibition and curating was the subject of this paper. We asked a group of film professionals participate in a cultural probe. The participants each chose a document that they use in their everyday work and marked on it the points in the text where questions of trust and distrust became an issue for them. Trust, as broadly defined by the participants, is how to weigh the value of information as represented in written documents by other film professionals. Credibility and authenticity play an important role.

Our research suggests that some commonsense strategies can inform the design of trust-enabling environments. For instance, the provision of relevant factual information in a film guide, which is often time-consuming to source, expresses a collegial and respectful attitude towards other film professionals. Once explorations move past these more obvious shared elements of trust, however, reasons to trust and to distrust become rather idiosyncratic. Professionals each have a set of techniques to evaluate trustworthiness in the information they are receive, which they acquire and overhaul throughout their personal professional development. As our research has shown, there is an important interplay between the facts in a document and their representation that is filtered by a professional to reach a judgment. Attention is given to how the words are used to convince or inform.

At the same time, professionals differ in how they prioritise different values and interpret the intricacies of trust. Clearly, some participants preferred text that minimised its agenda for persuasion; others were of the opinion that a text needs to convince a reader. And yet, on the other hand, while the various participants had a range of perspectives and priorities when considering trust, they used fairly similar processes to arrive at trust judgments. From this we conclude that the professional ideologies underpinning judgments of trust and distrust manifest themselves in relatively structured ways.

This research is an argument for systems that enable some automation of trust information, but allow the user to configure the system to meet their nuanced understanding of trust. The complex and subjective concept of trust is extremely difficult to contrive in a design. Individuals draw idiosyncratic interpretations about content and how it is presented. As we see it, the most promising way through this impasse is to use interactive design, to engage with the types of trust evidence that users want in order to make their trust-oriented decisions on their own terms. At the opening of this paper we discussed how open and distributed systems allow users to innovate with content. The design of these systems can also be utilised to allow users to innovate with how they view and negotiate trust.

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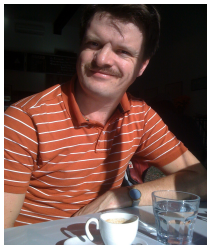

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