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It is T-time! The role and development of trust in virtual communities

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Structure

- Why to study trust in virtual communities?
- Key concepts
- Research gap and questions
- Findings and contribution

Why to study trust in virtual communities?

“Virtuality requires trust to make it work” (Handy, 1995)?

Growing interest towards different types and forms of trust in networked organizations

Growing interest towards virtual communities as a form of social organizing

Within any setting, online or offline, community is about **communication** and **knowledge sharing**

- trust is seen critical for achieving positive knowledge-sharing outcomes

Key concepts

- *Virtual community* is an online social network in which people who share an interest in a certain subject or practice interact repeatedly inside certain boundaries, relying on communication technologies at least to a certain degree
- Here, *trust* is seen as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer et al., 1995, 712)
- Respectively, *control* can be seen as "a regulatory process by which the elements of a system are made more predictable through the establishment of standards in the pursuit of some desired objective or state" (Leifer & Mills, 1996, 117)

Research gap and questions

- The role of trust remains a controversial issue – when is it needed, in which form, and what builds such trust?
- Prior research focusing specifically on virtual communities is scarce – reviewing what has been done and reflecting the findings with general literature on trust
- How trust develops in virtual communities?
- How trust affects knowledge sharing in virtual communities?

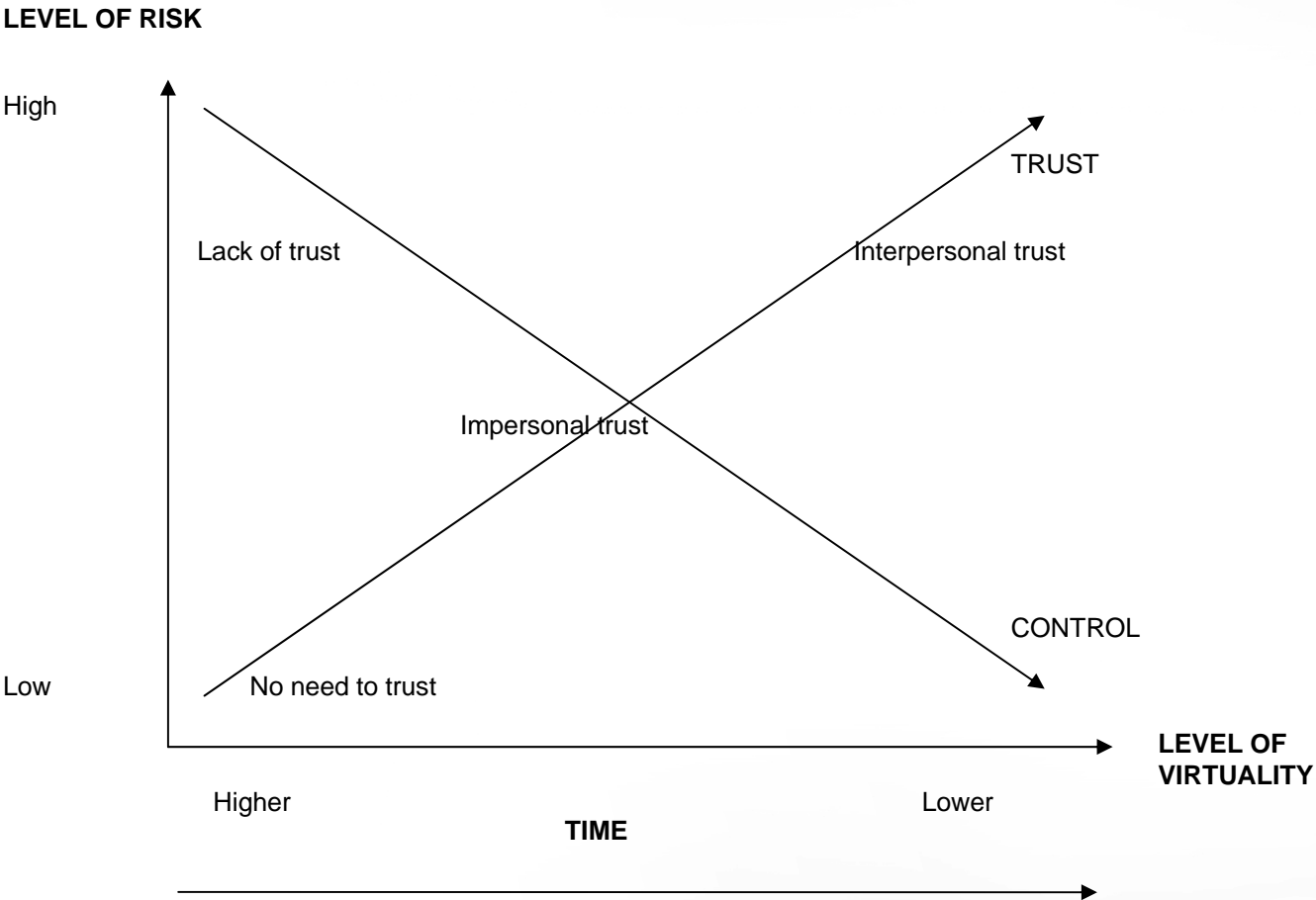
1: How trust develops in virtual communities

- Basically the answer is: as in traditional communities, but more slowly
- Proposition 1: over time, trust in virtual communities develops from impersonal forms towards more interpersonal forms
- Two research streams: if we only focus on the **virtual**, the development of trust seems challenging; if we add **community**, it is much less threatened
- Community context such as values and practices affects the types of trust – what is needed to achieve outcomes

2: The role of trust in knowledge sharing

- Generally, trust positively affects knowledge sharing in virtual communities; yet it is not the only issue to explain these outcomes – the role of shared norms and control particularly in community contexts that rely on purely online interactions
- Proposition 2: The essentiality of trust is contingent to the virtual community's degree of virtuality
- Trust in the ability, benevolence and integrity of other members
- Identification-based trust, shared episodes that convey mutual care and concern
- In the early stages, economy-based trust and information-based trust

Critical issues in balancing between trust and control



Expected contributions

- By reviewing the literature on trust in virtual communities, this work sets ground for
 - further examining the role of trust in knowledge sharing within VCs
 - understanding how the perceived risk, degree of virtuality and time play a role in balancing between trust and control



Thank you!

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