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# Trust is other people

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**Abstract**

A renewed interest in the concept of sharing emerges from a community that drifts apart and lives next to each other instead of with each other. Technology offers interesting possibilities to support sharing activities not only in small neighbourhoods, but also in highly populated areas. However, the Internet is often experienced as a place of anonymity, and people are scared of the 'figurative creep' lurking behind every dark corner. This view on online environments can be a reason for potential sharers not to use sharing platforms. To explore how people view such issues, we conducted an open-ended survey asking for perceived risks of using sharing technology. The findings point to very general risks concerning the quality of things being shared, technical issues with the sharing service, and unexpected costs arising through sharing. However, the main area of risks that was identified was risks concerning the interaction with strangers through the platform. Putting trust in an online sharing community seems to be the biggest obstacle that influences whether people draw away rather than move closer together and start collaborating in the sharing community. Here, we report on the main issues involving other participants in the hope to find appropriate ways to create trustful sharing environments that reassure potential participants rather than play into their fears.

### Author Keywords

trust, sharing services, reciprocity, community

### Position Statement

The idea of sharing is very present in our current media landscape, and hence gets a lot of attention. This attention is not fully positive, but also represents views that voice concerns from bad experiences with sharing platforms to the influence of the sharing economy on the economy at large. These worst case scenarios can be especially influential in if and how potential participants approach a sharing technology.

To explore this we asked a number of 65 young potential (15) and current (50) users of sharing technology, what they perceived as risks in joining the sharing community. The survey was conducted online with open-ended questions. Participants were asked to describe risks they perceived when generally thinking about sharing technology. The survey did not state certain sharing platforms, but asked for users to state the context of their answer, e.g., car sharing services - car2go.com, flat sharing - couchsurfing.com and so on. Furthermore, after stating their concerns, participants were asked to go online and look for reports on experiences of other users of sharing services and link them to their answers. 144 unique experience reports were assembled that way, largely from a sharing economy context with monetary compensation involved, few from services purely based on reciprocity.

Since each participant mentioned more than one risk in answering the survey questions, the first step of the analysis was to separating the descriptions in the collected data into 401 unique entries of risks. Consequently, these entries were coded and information extracted into a table. Interesting information was for example the sharing

service category, the mentioned risk in detail (as mentioned by the participants) and generalised (as categorised by the researchers), and whom the risk would impact, provider (278 entries) of the shared goods, receiver (74 entries) of the shared goods, or both (49 entries). Of the total 401 unique entries, 269 dealt with issues arising because of other participants of the sharing service which will be discussed in this paper. A detailed breakdown of the amount of entries for each category can be seen in Table 1. The other general categories were *impact on health, quality of goods and services, platform service and unexpected costs*.

Risk	Amount of unique entries
criminal intent	160
getting along	35
inconveniences	32
dependency	15
Broken contracts	12
privacy	9
accountability	6

**Table 1:** This table shows how many unique entries of each risk category we received.

One of the biggest concerns identified by participants was **criminal intent** such as fraud, theft, online attacks, vandalism, unlawful behaviour, and last but not least bodily harm. This main concern seems to be based on a general mistrust in the intentions of other people using sharing platforms and trying to capitalise on the trust of their participants. The mistrust might be grounded in bad media coverage that seems to focus on things going wrong rather than painting a picture of a nicely collaborating community. The wording of the survey question asking for *risks* might also have influenced this outcome.

Concerns were also voiced about the issues of not **getting along** with other participants on the platform. This was mostly mentioned in the context of sharing services where people actually meet and get in closer contact with other people, such as Couchsurfing<sup>1</sup>. Many participants were reserved about sharing their time with strangers, only to find out that they might not be the people they would usually choose to spend their time with.

The risk of being inconvenienced because of using a sharing service was also often mentioned. These **inconveniences** can arise during any exchange. Examples mentioned were for example time delays due to other peoples' tardiness in Lyft<sup>2</sup>, losing access to ones own shared property, or the need for a last minute change of plans. A lot of the inconveniences arise out of being dependent on other participants, and **dependency** creates a deeper necessity for trust among the sharing community.

People showed signs of being reluctant to use sharing services, because of the fear of coming to agreements with strangers but not being sure these agreements will be met. **Broken contracts** can show in a change of the terms such as a change in the drop-off location when using a ride-sharing service like BlaBlaCar<sup>3</sup>, or in a complete cancellation of the agreement which was mentioned in the context of AirBnB<sup>4</sup>.

Some participants of the study feared an invasion of their **privacy**. This was mentioned in relation to both online and offline contexts. Online, people want to be sure that they have control of their data, know who sees what and have the ability to share things with certain people, but

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<sup>1</sup>couchsurfing.com

<sup>2</sup>lyft.com

<sup>3</sup>blablacar.in

<sup>4</sup>airbnb.com

not with others. Offline examples were largely concerned with letting strangers enter private spaces, such as flats, cars and so on.

Worries were also evident around the topic of **accountability**. On the one hand, these were addressed from the perspective of the provider of shared goods and them being accountable for possible problems with the goods. On the other hand, participants took the view of the receiver of a good and mentioned problems such as being made responsible for damages that previous users caused, e.g. when using car-sharing services such as Car2Go<sup>5</sup>, or having to deal with issues caused by the previous user that were not reported or fixed, e.g., when using community bikes<sup>6</sup>.

Previous work also connects trust issues to some of the here mentioned risks. From a human centered point of view, Cheshire et al. [2] explain that there is uncertainty in every exchange and found that the level of trust is mirrored by the level of cooperation between two participants. Along the same lines, Lampinen et al. [4] suggest personal meetings as a way to create a trusting relationship in sharing services and mention that taking small risks increases the willingness to commit to higher risk interactions in the future. Shih et al. [6] mention issues such as lack of trust or inconveniences as hindrances to using a sharing service.

Technology is the second important pillar to build trust on. Cheshire [1] reflects that trust depends on the context and that the Internet is not the ideal place to create trust. Dillahunt et al. [3] state that trust in the technology is necessary to entrust information such as personal data to

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<sup>5</sup>car2go.com

<sup>6</sup>citybikewien.at

a sharing service. Cheshire [1] also questions the help of additional security measures towards a more trusting online environment, a view which is supported by Schor et al. [5].

Concluding, we need to find ways to create sharing technology that caters to the necessity of an open, trusting and cooperative community and at the same time supports the individuals with a feeling of safety and control.

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