ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

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Consumers' brand trust makes brands more powerful. Moreover, whereas trust is part of good relationships, trust relationships often involve vulnerability. Further, trust is inherently asymmetrical, suggesting profound consequences for its ethical communication. By approaching discussions on trust and brands philosophically, we expand approaches to, and investigations into, trust's modes, manifestations, and mappings that offer potentially productive insights for consumer research. Past years' Philosophy and Consumption roundtables have focused on 1) issues of materiality and 2) epistemological and ontological foundations and inspirations for consumer research. In this year's roundtable, discussions continue with a focus on "Trust and Brands".

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Philosophy and Consumption: Discussions on Trust and Brands

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Consumers' brand trust makes brands more powerful. Moreover, whereas trust is part of good relationships, trust relationships often involve vulnerability. Further, trust is inherently asymmetrical, suggesting profound consequences for its ethical communication. By approaching discussions on trust and brands philosophically, we expanded approaches to, and investigations into, trust's modes, manifestations, and mappings that offer potentially productive insights for consumer research. Past years' Philosophy and Consumption roundtables have focused on 1) issues of materiality and 2) epistemological and ontological foundations and inspirations for consumer research. In this year's roundtable, discussions continued with a focus on "Trust and Brands".

Trust is one of the crucial components creating meaning in consumer-brand relationships, and thus in the branding process (see e.g. Fournier 1998; Holt 2002). From a philosophical viewpoint, trust can be seen as "reliance" on another's "good will". This definition suggests that there is an uncertainty resting in the other, as one cannot know for sure whether the other is dependable. Further, one party may have to trust more than the other in a trust relationship (Baier 1994). Thus, one party may rely more heavily on the other party's willingness to treat her justly. In other words, trust is inherently asymmetrical, and this has profound consequences for the ways in which it can be communicated ethically (Gustafsson 2005). Moreover, trust in brands has raised questions of ethical considerations partially in response to a basic consumer reality: Consumers rarely see what is going on behind the surface of the brand (see Holt 2002). For instance, brands can use visual representation to create an image of trust. For example, bank advertisements often make visual reference to stability and history by the use of design and pictures that feature e.g. heavy pillars and ancient looking designs (see Schroeder 2002). From a corporate perspective on trust relationships, Grayson, Johnson, and Chen (2008) suggest that corporations have to develop individual trust relationships with customers no matter how much customers trust the business context of the firm. These findings have important implications for corporate communication of trust, and bring to the fore the question of what actually constitutes trust in business. Philosophical considerations allow epistemological and ontological assumptions and concerns to emerge, encouraging reflective discussion that incites recognition of integral intersections, including those between consumer research, the ethics of consumers' brand relationships and corporate social responsibility.

The most prominent discussion point was the meaning of the concept of trust, especially in relation to brands and in relation to consumer research on brand trust relationships. As researchers, we all have different ideas about what trust is; this is a constant question and there has been a constant controversy about it. Do we, as consumer researchers, need a common definition of trust and brand trust or can we all have different definitions? Looking at brand trust from the legal side, goodwill is a key word and the brand can be seen as an embodiment of trust starting with the trade mark. When trust becomes separated from the brand and built in its own right, agency becomes a related issue to brand trust. In other words, consumers' capacity to act in the world impacts on notions of relationships and materiality (Borgeson 2005), and intersects with brand trust as brands are not necessarily trustworthy. Looking at global brands with outsourced production, they have become increasingly questioned from a trust perspective over the last few years, critics suggesting that the only thing that is there for consumers to trust is a relatively empty logo (c.f. Holt 2002; Klein 2000), implying ethically dubious consequences of brand trust. Participants largely agreed that there are different qualities of trust, making it possible for different consumers to trust the same brand to do completely different things for them. In addition, brand trust in each brand is dependent on the consumers' personal history with that particular brand, several roundtable participants argued.

The interpersonal dimension is really what makes trust relevant and interesting to the social sciences, and it is an integral part of the trust concept, several participants argued. The consumer-seller relationship is crucial to brand trust. Starting from that relationship, we can unpack the concept of trust to explore what brand trust means. This could firstly entail deciding whether we are talking about trust as a verb (trusting behavior) or an adjective (trustworthy) because these two constantly get intermingled. Trust may be about exposing oneself to risks, making oneself vulnerable to others (Levinas 1985). The salience of risk to the concept of trust should be explored further. However, for certain, consumers do not always calculate risk. Further, when there is a large risk involved, people actually pay more rather than less for brands. To look at the foundations of trust we could look at trust from a historical perspective and at how different trust is in different countries. Moreover, when only one supplier is available, the trust in that one supplier surprisingly tends to be very strong. In addition, often trust seems to become apparent or to come into existence only when it is tested. Thus, the brand trust becomes apparent, grows, or breaks, with *use* rather than at the time of purchase. Perhaps uncertainty is a better word than risk to describe an important

antecedent of trust. Then trust becomes an outcome of dealing with uncertainty. As discussions centered on trust and brands, the aim of this roundtable remained to open further philosophically aware investigations into the concepts and practices of trust and brands within consumer research.

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Roundtable
Internet Tracking and Clickstream Data: Methodological Issues

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The theme of this year's ACR conference was building bridges. Our roundtable was in a unique position to build such bridges by fostering discussion and collaboration among industry and academics from two different disciplines (marketing and information systems) at all levels of the professoriate. Session participants communicated via email and through the ACR Knowledge Exchange Forum before the conference and some were able to meet for informal discussion before our scheduled session. In addition, participants indicated their interest in furthering the discussion after the conference by posting to the Knowledge Exchange.

We began by discussing the different types of navigational and tracking data that could and/or should be collected and noted that researchers and practitioners now are focusing more closely on clickstream rather than only Web log data. Sen, Dacin and Pattichis (2006) note the remarkable growth rate in the market for web analytics, but they also assert that most firms underutilize clickstream data because of a) data problems, including incomplete, messy and very large files; and b) too many analytic methodologies, including web-based, marketing metric, navigational and traffic methodologies. Our group agreed that both absolute data (e.g., number of pages visited) and relative data (e.g., comparison of the proportions of pages visited across sites) are useful, and that invariably second-order measures must be calculated from first-order data such as time per page or number of revisits. Some participants expressed interest in examining successful task completion of either information gathering or actual purchase whereas others were more interested in sequences of behavior (Hilbert and Redmiles 2000). We also discussed the usefulness of second-order measures of "linearity" or "lostness" (Smith 1994) in helping to understand individual's navigational styles and the desirability of linking mouse clicks with eye-tracking. The group noted the difficulties posed by tabbed-browsing, and were informed that the new version of FireFox will have a session id built into the history file. New methods of tracking use client-side logging to the server. In addition, the difficulty in recording the exit of a page has now been addressed with an auto PING feature that will allow the browser to send a final event to the server.

Next, we considered the best methods for analyzing this non-normal count and proportion data and determined that logistic regression, generalized linear models, cluster analysis and Bayesian methods should be used as appropriate for the particular metric (Bapna, Goes, Gopal and Marsden 2006). We also discussed the need to understand rather than simply describe online behavior. Various tactics are being used to produce this deeper understanding, including the linking of tracking data to that which pertain to individual differences in cognitive styles, Internet and topic expertise; video capture; and the collection of think-aloud protocols or interviews to try to determine if individuals are engaging in cycles of search or are hitting "dead ends".

We spoke about methods for linking various data sources, and how this could be best accomplished while respecting participants' privacy. Session cookies are of limited value in that they do not permit the collection of data pertaining to an individual over an extended period of time. However, the assignment of a unique participant ID and the development of individuals' profiles over time could compromise their privacy. Even with large scale search log data bases, the potential exists for identifying individuals if the search parameters are idiosyncratic, as the AOL fiasco in the summer of 2006 demonstrated (Barbaro and Zeller 2006; Hansell 2006; Zeller, Jr. 2006). Academics, industry analysts and privacy advocates also have raised concerns about the vast amount of data that is collected using passive devices, such as adware, cookies, spyware and Web viruses, to record online behavior (Marshall and Swartwout 2006). Such calls for privacy protection are warranted. One participant pointed out that data could be made anonymous if a random number generator were used to introduce "noise".

We briefly touched on methods for distributing incentives to remote participants. Draws for gift certificates or other cash prizes were found to work well. In addition, a professional Mass Pay account can be set up so that participants can be remunerated through PayPal. Short HITs (Human Intelligence Tasks) also can be set up on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (http://www.mturk.com/mturk/welcome).

We concluded our session by speaking about opportunities for further contact between academics in marketing and information systems with practitioners and consultants. The ACM World Wide Web conference (W3C) (www.2008.org) was recommended as a conference with substantial practitioner presence. The General Online Research (GOR) forum (http://forum.questionpro.com/jforum/forums/show/2.page) also may provide a point of contact for academics and practitioners. Finally, the group indicated that they were most interested in applying their findings in the spirit of transformative consumer research by, for example, helping consumers to navigate more efficiently, read and understand privacy policies, and make better use of online decision-making aids.