Is Trust on the Wane? It May Depend on Where You Live.

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The purpose of the present study was to replicate, with a different population, an earlier investigation that posed a series of trust dilemmas to subjects. The trust dilemmas were structured in such a way as to elicit the trust conceptions, or mental models, used by individuals when deciding whom or what to trust. In this paper, I compare the results of the previous study, which included a sample of affluent subjects residing in a suburb near Philadelphia, with the results of the present study, which consisted of a sample of high school students attending an inner city public high school in Boston. I identify similarities between the two groups of subjects, including the proclivity to trust individuals with a recognized professional status, such as a journalist employed by a reputable newspaper. I also note a number of differences between the two groups, including higher levels of trust in celebrities among the high school students in Boston compared to the young adults living near Philadelphia. A number of the mental models of trust identified in the previous study also emerged in the present study. However, several new ones were identified, such as the "newsy-ness" model, which involves subjects' reliance on specific elements of format and presentation that act as signalers of trust.

Introduction

According to the 1999 World Values Survey (2005), only 35.9% of Americans believe that people can generally be trusted, down from 49.5% in 1990. When asked about major democratic institutions, Americans' trust is even lower. Only 26.3% have confidence in the press, and only 22.4% have confidence in political parties. These statistics document a dearth of trust in our society, and the situation is getting worse, not better.

The importance of trust has been described by theorists of human development. Erikson (1964) believed that trust was the foundation of human development. He claimed that trust first emerges between mother and infant and is eventually extended to other individuals in the developing child's social sphere. According to Erikson, trust is the first positive ego quality to develop. Others, such as autonomy, initiative, identity, and intimacy, cannot develop satisfactorily until the conflict between basic trust and basic mistrust has been resolved. Therefore, according to Erikson, an individual's healthy development depends crucially on the nature of the trust that he or she develops as an infant.

Trust is critical to societies as well as to individuals. Fukuyama (1995) has argued that trust is essential to a nation's economic and social wellbeing. According to Fukuyama, economic activity is predominantly carried out on the level of organizations, and as such it requires a high level of social cooperation. Trust is essential for social cooperation. Fukuyama claims that trust develops on a societal level when individual members of a society voluntarily associate with one another and form shared values and norms of behavior. Societies that enjoy high levels of trust are more socially stable and economically prosperous than low-trust societies.

The importance of trust to individuals and nations, on the one hand, and its apparent decline in society, on the other, is highly problematic. Noting this lamentable situation, Gardner and his team at the GoodWork Project conducted two studies to examine the nature of trust in contemporary society (Gardner, 2005; Pettingill, 2005). Although small in scale, the studies revealed some interesting and initially paradoxical trends. First, there was a general consensus that trust is declining in our society, and most respondents felt that the media were largely to blame. However, when asked to name trusted individuals, respondents frequently cited specific media personalities, such as Oprah Winfrey and *The Daily Show's* Jon Stewart. Politicians and celebrities were also felt to merit little trust. Paradoxically, respondents claimed to rely on the media, politicians, and celebrities as sources of information, although they usually preferred to turn to family or friends first. The reliance on family and friends, however, begs the question, "From where do these individuals get their information, if not from the media, politicians, or celebrities?"

In light of the contradictions embedded in these responses, Gardner and his colleagues launched a third study in the summer of 2005 to explore the underlying 'mental models' of trust that individuals draw on to decide whom or what to trust (for details see Benjamin, 2005). The subjects in this study constituted a convenience sample drawn from a suburb near Philadelphia. Consistent with the first two studies, Benjamin's study revealed low levels of trust in the media and celebrities and a high level of trust in friends and family. The study also revealed distinct conceptualizations of trust, which included a high regard for recognized professionals, a somewhat reflexive trust in first impressions, and an avowed commitment to gather information from a wide variety of sources before arriving at the truth.

The purpose of the present study was to replicate the format of Benjamin's study with a demographically different sample. My colleagues and I wanted to determine whether the underlying mental models of trust held by high school students attending a public high school in South Boston were comparable to those held by youth living in an affluent area in the Philadelphia region. Mental models refer to the underlying conceptions, based on past experiences and social interactions, that individuals use to shape their worldview and make their daily decisions. Mental models of trust involve underlying conceptions that individuals use to decide whom or what to trust. In our studies on trust, my colleagues and I distinguish between two types of mental models. Emic models can be identified directly in the explicit statements that subjects make about trust. Etic models derive from the inferences we, as researchers, draw from subjects' statements.

Methods

Sample

The sample of participants consisted of 27 individuals (10 male, 17 female) ranging in age from 14 to 19 years. Participants were drawn from the Junior ROTC program in a public high school that is located in a low socioeconomic area of Boston. Like the school itself, the sample is ethnically diverse. Nearly half (48%) are African American, 26% are Hispanic, 19% are White, and the remaining 7% are Asian.

It should be noted that this sample is a convenience sample only. Through personal connections in the Boston Public School system, I was granted permission to draw a sample of students from the Junior ROTC program in a high school in South Boston. To participate in the study, students were required to be eighteen or to have written consent from a parent. Therefore,

the sample includes only those students who participate in Junior ROTC, were able to meet the necessary eligibility requirements, and were willing to be pulled out of class during school hours. Because this isn't a random sample, it will not be possible to generalize the results to the population from which it was drawn.

Materials

The interviews used in both studies were designed to probe individuals' underlying models of trust. Subjects were posed trust dilemmas with which they had to grapple and eventually come to a decision (see the Appendix). The trust dilemmas were structured in such a way as to elicit the conceptions of trust that individuals use when deciding whom or what to trust.

The trust dilemmas were grouped into three categories according to the sources of information that were pitted against one another. The Media-Person (MP) category featured conflicting accounts from a media source (e.g. a newspaper) and a person (e.g. a close friend or family member). The Person-Person (PP) category set up a conflict between two different people, such as a best friend and a knowledgeable stranger. The Media-Media (MM) category featured conflicting accounts from two different media sources, such as a national and a local newspaper.

The dilemmas used in the present study followed those used in the Philadelphia study as closely as possible. However, minor alterations in wording were made and one PP question was omitted in an attempt to make the dilemmas more relevant to the personal context of high school students living in South Boston.

In addition to the trust dilemmas, the present study included four general questions at the end of the interview that were not included in Benjamin's study. These questions were included in order to probe respondents' broader conceptions of trust and truth and to get them explicitly to compare the trustworthiness of different sources of information.

Procedure

During a voice-recorded interview that lasted approximately twenty-five minutes, each participant was asked to respond to six trust dilemmas and four general questions. Two dilemmas were drawn from each of the three categories (MP, PP, and MM, respectively), which required a rotation among the fourteen total dilemmas. Consequently, not all participants responded to the same set of trust dilemmas. Efforts were made, however, to ensure that an equal number of responses were obtained for each of the fourteen dilemmas. All participants were asked to respond to the four general questions at the end of the interview.

Results

The present study, like Benjamin's study, revealed several trends within and across categories, as well as a number of distinct conceptualizations, or mental models, of trust. I present these findings in a format consistent with Benjamin's study in order to highlight notable similarities and differences.

General Distrust of Media and Celebrities

The participants in Benjamin's study expressed a strong distrust of both celebrities and media of all kinds, including newspapers, television, and the Internet (Benjamin, 2005). The

participants in the present study also commented on their distrust of the good intentions of celebrities and the reliability of the media. However, many of their responses suggested that their distrust is by no means unequivocal.

Throughout the interviews, participants expressed inconsistent opinions of the media. Statements such as, "Sometimes the newspaper puts more words to [a story] to get more money from people," were commonly followed by comments like, "[I trust television news and newspaper stories] because they need to go through a process, they need to investigate."

In general, the participants in the present study expressed more trust in the credibility of celebrities than did the participants in Benjamin's study. For instance, 70% of the participants agreed that a celebrity's endorsement of a pair of shoes would raise their interest in buying the shoes. Similarly, 82% of the participants said that they would be more likely to support a poverty campaign spearheaded by celebrities, as opposed to one led by university professors or other recognized experts.

Culling as an Information-Gathering Technique

Benjamin found that many participants favored the use of several media sources to gather the most reliable information (Benjamin, 2005). These participants suspected all media to be at least somewhat biased. This situation caused them to seek multiple sources of information in order to piece together the actual facts. According to participants, they were more likely to trust facts when the stories of more than one medium source overlapped.

The participants in the present study also support the idea of seeking multiple sources in order to construct a reliable account of a particular event. As one participant stated, "If multiple sources say the same thing, then it's most likely true." Another participant said, "You put

together the facts. You decide what you think." While participants believe that it is prudent to obtain information from more than one media source, many of their responses suggested that they rarely, if ever, use this technique. Two-thirds of participants said that they get most of their information about current events from watching television. The same proportion claimed that they very rarely use the Internet, and when they do it is usually for a school research project.

Independent Thinking

Like Benjamin's study, the present study revealed that most participants value independent thinking in themselves and others (Benjamin, 2005). When participants were asked about the various sources of information that they would rely on to decide which movie to rent or which cell phone to buy, many expressed their desire to avoid relying on the opinions of others. Instead, they preferred to consider a wide variety of sources and then use their own judgment to determine the best fit for their particular needs. As one girl said, "I don't really watch or do things because somebody said it was good. I do it on my own."

Participants also admired independent thinking in others. This attitude was evident from the responses to a question involving a fellow classmate who had been arrested for protesting a political cause. All participants expressed respect for any individual who stood up for his or her beliefs, and all but one participant said that this respect would not diminish if the arrested classmate had different beliefs from their own. One girl explained, "We always have to respect [other people's] opinions."

Ambivalence towards Crime and Unethical Behavior

Benjamin found a surprising degree of ambivalence towards crime and unethical behavior among the participants in her study. Many participants were willing to pardon certain criminal and unethical behavior, such as embezzlement, cheating, and lying, if it did not cause physical harm to a person. The participants in the present study also showed signs of ambivalence, but they justified such behavior somewhat differently. When asked if they would shop at a superstore that conducted unethical business practices, all but one participant said that they would still shop there. Their justifications focused, not on the absence of physical harm, but on practical considerations, such as accessibility and monetary savings. According to one boy, "A store is a store. You still need things, you have to go buy [them] where you can." Another boy defended his decision by saying, "I would still shop there if they gave me a bargain."

In the area of criminal behavior, participants were unwilling to condone criminality, but most of them were willing to forgive it. Their explanations centered on the belief that people can change and learn from their mistakes. "Just because [someone who was arrested] did something [bad] doesn't change him. You got to give him a second chance."

One area where the participants were not at all ambivalent was the issue of plagiarism. All participants felt strongly that plagiarism should be avoided at all costs. One boy stated emphatically, "I have never cheated in my life, and I never will." In view of the well-documented rise in cheating, this finding is very surprising. It is possible that this response is related to specific qualities of the sample, which consisted solely of Junior ROTC students. Perhaps the Junior ROTC teachers emphasize the gravity of plagiarism more than other teachers in the high school.

Within Categories

Within the MP category, Benjamin's study revealed a strong proclivity towards trusting a friend over a media source (Benjamin, 2005). The participants in the present study were more evenly divided over this issue. For instance, when deciding on a movie to rent, 47% said they would listen to their friend's advice, and 53% said they would be more likely to consider reviews by media critics.

Within the PP category, Benjamin found that participants were evenly split in their trust of a relative stranger. She found that 48% would ask a relatively unknown neighbor to look after their dog for a weekend, whereas 52% would opt for putting their dog in a kennel. When asked the same question, the participants in the present study were initially divided as well, with 43% trusting their dog with a neighbor and 57% preferring to use a kennel. However, when participants were told that their neighbor had been fired from his previous job for embezzlement, only 14% said they would trust him with their dog. One girl explained her reasoning as follows, "Once you have sticky fingers [in one area], you have sticky fingers everywhere." The participants in the present study did not appear to see a difference between stealing company money and stealing personal property, whereas the participants in Benjamin's study did make a distinction.

Within the MM category, when choosing to buy a particular cell phone, the participants in Benjamin's study were split. Some favored trusting a single reliable medium, while others favored the consensus of a broad range of sources. None of the participants in the present study felt comfortable relying solely on one reliable source. Instead, they were more likely to seek a

consensus among many sources, and many said they would go to a dealer and try out the phone for themselves.

The MM category also revealed consistencies across the two studies. Both studies found that few participants had heard of or read a web log, known as a blog. However, whereas many of the participants in Benjamin's study said they used the Internet frequently, only one third of the participants in the present study claimed to use the Internet on a daily basis.

Another consistency emerged within the MM category. Participants in both studies tended to trust coverage of a local issue by a local newspaper more than a national newspaper. However, this tendency was even more pronounced in the present study, with 91% of the participants saying they would trust a local newspaper over a national newspaper. Participants typically justified their decisions by claiming that local newspapers have more knowledge of the particular area in which they are located. National newspapers, on the other hand, have a much broader focus, and therefore they have less firsthand knowledge of local affairs. According to one girl, "You can only speak for one place, not just a whole nation."

Individual Differences

Benjamin's study (2005) compared the responses of liberals and conservatives, religious and non-religious participants, and "young" (ages 15-19) and "old" (ages 20-25) participants. The present study does not make these comparisons because data were not collected on political or religious affiliation, and the study involved only "young" participants.

Mental Models

Benjamin identified several distinct conceptualizations of trust that emerged from participants' responses (Benjamin, 2005). She grouped these "mental models" into three broad categories: knowledge-based, person-centered, and other. I found strong evidence of some, but not all, of these mental models in the present study. I discuss Benjamin's mental models below, as well as the four additional models that I identified in my own interviews. I have marked these four new mental models with an asterisk.

1. Knowledge-based

a. Professionalism

According to Benjamin (2005), "Participants of this mindset trust organizations, publications, and individuals based solely on the fact that they are either well-recognized in the public sphere or are seen as authorities on certain issues" (p.9). This mindset was expressed in the present study through comments such as the following, "The critics who [rate and review] the movies know more than anybody else." Another participant said, "I would want to trust somebody who's a professional [journalist, as opposed to an amateur blogger]."

*b. "Newsy-ness"

This mindset is related to the professionalism mindset, but it focuses on media content rather than media personalities. Several participants claimed that they pay attention to the physical presentation of information when determining what to trust. Some of the qualities that they look for to determine the trustworthiness of a source include the presence of direct quotes, the sheer number of details, and whether or not the source "sounds scientific."

c. Elective Ignorance

I found little evidence for an explicitly stated elective ignorance mindset, which Benjamin defined as including those who deliberately avoid the media (Benjamin, 2005). The majority of participants in the present study expressed a belief in the importance of keeping up-to-date and well informed about local, national, and global issues currently in the news. However, several comments throughout the interviews suggest that most participants do not actually do what they espouse. Many participants explained that they did not have time to read newspapers, and when they did, it usually involved a cursory glance at the *Metro*, Boston's free commuter newspaper. Most of the news they were exposed to came from local television news programs, but it was not clear that they watched such programs with any degree of regularity.

d. Information-seeker

According to Benjamin (2005), "information-seekers base their trust on the information they have gathered from a variety of sources; this information allows them to make an educated decision" (p.10). A boy in the present study explained, "I generally don't read [just] one newspaper, because each newspaper has a different agenda. You put together the facts and then you decide what you think." Participants with this mindset like to be exposed to multiple perspectives of a single issue, even when those perspectives conflict with each other. They feel that the combination of disparate perspectives and their own commonsense and intuition is the best way to arrive at the truth.

*e. More is Always Better

Closely related to the information-seeker mindset is one that looks for a majority to establish truth. This mindset was reflected in questions that involved choosing a movie to rent, researching an unfamiliar issue in the news, or deciding which cell phone to buy. When responding to these questions, participants routinely expressed an increased confidence in a wide variety of sources that said the same thing. Whereas the information-seeker parses information from contradictory sources, those that subscribe to the "more is always better" mindset are more interested in seeking a consensus among sources.

2. Person-centered

*a. Pragmatic Self-promotion

Benjamin identified a self-promotion mindset, which she defined as follows: "One who has a self-promoting concept of trust will put faith in something only if it works towards advancing one's own interests," (Benjamin, 2005, p.10). I have qualified this definition somewhat by adding the word "pragmatic." This semantic move reduces the impression of selfishness and emphasizes the sense of responsibility that many participants in the present study felt towards making the most out of opportunities for socioeconomic advancement.

Many of the participants in Benjamin's study said that they were willing to overlook their coach's ethical transgressions in order to protect and promote their own athletic careers. The participants in the present study were also willing to overlook their coach's ethical transgressions, but they were far less concerned about their athletic careers and more concerned with their educational and financial situations. They said they would still attend a college and play on the sports team of an unethical coach if the financial aid package and academic courses offered were more attractive than those at other colleges. These participants said that, in this

particular case, it was more important for them to secure a good education than to take a moral stand.

b. Neutral

Benjamin defines the neutral mindset in opposition to the self-promoting mindset. The participants in Benjamin's study who displayed a neutral mindset related the hypothetical dilemmas to their own lives "in order to better understand the situation rather than to advance their own interests," (Benjamin, 2005, p.10). A number of participants in the present study displayed the same pattern of thinking. For instance, when asked to imagine working with a classmate who had been arrested, several participants said that they knew of students in their school who had been arrested. They used this firsthand experience to help them think through what they would do if they were assigned to work with one of those students.

3. Other

a. Primacy

A number of participants in Benjamin's study claimed they were strongly influenced by first impressions and that they tended to trust the information that reached them first. I did not find strong evidence for this "primacy" mindset, but the responses to one question in particular suggest that primacy may indeed be present in this sample of participants as well. One of the MP questions presented a scenario in which participants were told to imagine that their friend had been arrested and put in jail. Before listening to their friend's version of what happened, 6 out of 11 (55%) said they would believe the newspaper's story. After hearing a different version from their friend, 3 out of those 6 (50%) would continue to believe the newspaper's story. While other

explanations, such as a blind trust in the media, cannot be ruled out, this finding is at least suggestive of the primacy mindset. Primacy appears also to be related to the above-mentioned "newsy-ness" mindset, as they both involve a reliance on a degree of automaticity in decision-making.

*b. Seeing is Believing

This was a popular mindset among the high school students interviewed in South Boston. Participants of this mindset say they trust the images that they see on the television or in the newspaper. One of the participants said he would be more likely to trust a newspaper article that was accompanied by a photograph than one that consisted solely of text. One girl explained, "[I believe something when] I see it with my own eyes." Many participants offered this explanation for why they trust television news. They claim that cameras cannot lie, so if a reporter is shown on television at the scene of an event, then his or her story must be true. Another boy simply stated, "You make me a believer if I see it."

c. Contextualization

The present study revealed some evidence for the contextualizing mindset. Benjamin (2005) included in this mindset those participants who "[base their] opinions on contingencies and never really [take] a firm stance on the issues presented in the trust scenarios" (p.11). When participants in the present study were asked if they would trust a classmate who had been arrested, a number of participants said that it would depend on why he or she had been arrested. One girl said that she would not trust a classmate who had been arrested for robbery, but she would probably trust someone who had been arrested for fighting.

Just as Benjamin found in her study, these mental models were by no means mutually exclusive (Benjamin, 2005). All participants displayed some combination of two or more mindsets that they used to reason about issues of trust. For instance, the "professionalism" and the "newsy-ness" mindsets were often used to answer the same question. Sometimes the use of multiple mindsets led to inconsistencies within individual interviews, as when a participant drew on the "elective ignorance" mindset to answer one question, only to use the "information-seeker" mindset to answer a later question.

Discussion

Limitations

As my sample was more racially and ethnically diverse than Benjamin's, it provided an interesting socioeconomic contrast to Benjamin's more affluent sample (Benjamin, 2005). Nevertheless, the present study was limited in many of the same ways as Benjamin's study. First, participants were not randomly selected, but rather chosen out of convenience from eligible students enrolled in the high school's Junior ROTC program. Second, while the materials and procedures were chosen intentionally to maintain consistency with Benjamin's study, they were limited in several respects. For instance, the study would have been strengthened if the interview protocol had been standardized for all participants. It would also have been useful to determine what participants actually do, rather than what they say they do, when seeking and judging information sources. If we were to observe how participants make actual decisions about whom or what to trust, we would be able to determine whether their emic mental models, those that they explicitly identify in their discussions about trust, relate to their actions, or whether the etic

mental models that we infer as researchers are aligned more closely with participants' actual trust decisions. This determination would have required additional methods of inquiry.

Future questions

Many of the participants offered responses to questions that seemed to contradict their responses to other questions. These contradictions, and the differences identified between this sample and Benjamin's sample, raise interesting questions for future studies. Why do participants say they value independent thought in themselves and others, but base their decisions about whom and what to trust on popular opinion? How can participants claim to be wary of the capitalist agendas of newspapers and television, but trust by default that which is printed by a recognized professional and anything that is depicted by a video camera? Why does this sample of high school students seem to hold celebrities in higher regard compared to the participants in Benjamin's study? These are just some of the questions that could serve as the basis for future studies of trust.

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Appendix

Trust Scenarios

MEDIA-PERSON (M-P)

1. It's been a few years since you've seen one of your childhood friends. You and he were good friends during elementary and middle school but since he moved to a different neighborhood you've lost touch a bit since high school started. You talk on and off to your friend through email and occasional phone calls. Everything seems to be going well until one day you read in the newspaper that your friend has been thrown in jail for armed robbery.

Without talking to your friend, has your opinion of him changed? If so, how? If not, why?

How would you feel about the difference between what he's been saying to you over email and what the newspaper is saying? Would you feel conflicted? Confused? Why or why not?

What would you do to resolve this conflict?

You decide to visit your friend in jail, and he gives you another version of the story. Which version do you trust?

Would you feel differently about the situation had your friend told you about his problems before they were revealed to you? Does the fact that you've shared so many memories together influence your feelings about the situation?

2. You decide to rent a movie one night. You drive to the video store and narrow your choices down to two movies. You just can't seem to make up your mind, however, so you call one of your friends to help you decide. You tell your friend the choices and she tells you to definitely go with Movie A because she loved it so much. You remember, though, that Movie A was panned by critics. Movie B, on the other hand, was critically acclaimed, but your friend hated it. You're not sure if you and your friend have similar tastes in movies, only that you have completely different tastes in music. Which movie do you pick? Why? What do you say to your friend when she asks you which movie you choose? **(probe for what trumps what)**

3. You have just turned eighteen and are excited to vote for the first time. Your state is holding a referendum on legalizing stem-cell research, which seems to be a pretty important issue, though you don't feel adequately informed about the topic. You talk to a close friend who says that he isn't going to vote affirmatively because his parents are not. You know that his parents are respected scientists who deal with these types of issues. You decide to do some research in newspapers and online and find that cures for certain diseases may are likely to be discovered if stem-cell research is allowed. You are quite close to your friend's parents. What do you decide to do and why? Under would circumstances would you change your decision?

4. Imagine that you are a high school athlete hoping to compete in college. You have been a standout player since your freshman year and several colleges have expressed interest in having

you attend their college and play for their team. You have narrowed your list down to two schools but have not yet made a final decision. Your coaches have always served as mentors/role models, so it is very important that your college coach do the same. The coaches of both schools seem to be kind andare welcoming, but you particularly like coach XXX, who comes from a family situation similar to yours, and you feel like you connect more with him much better than the other coach. You hear on the nightly news and read in the newspaper that a scandal broke at coach XXX's school- the coach is trying to 'win' players to his school by inviting them to parties, promising them 'easy' classes, and generally trying to be their friends.

Would the news aeffect your opinion of the coach of XXX ? Why or why not? Under what circumstances would you choose to attend coach XXXX's school?

5. You want to buy a new pair of shoes and see your favorite celebrity/sports star modeling them in an advertisement. You know these are the shoes that he/she wears, and in the ad they express how much they like the shoes and how well the shoes work for them. Would you buy the product? Why or why not?

A few days later, you see / hear about serious accusations of misconduct by the celebrity from various sources in the news. Would you still by the product? Why or why not? Do you think that this person should still be promoting such products? Why or why not? (probe for statements referring to celebrity, type of transgression, status as role model, etc)

PERSON-PERSON (P-P)

1. It's late at night and you're up writing an English paper that's due in the morning. You're starting to become very tired and don't know how much longer you can stay awake. Just then a friend IMs you to ask how the paper is going. You tell him that you are nervous because you haven't finished and it's so late. The friend offers to send you some ideasa detailed outline about the book you are writing the paper on. You are tempted to take the ideas, but remember that your friend has been suspended for plagiarizing before and are not sure if his ideas are original or not. Do you take his offer? (**probe here for 's/he's my friend- s/he would not lie to me'**)

2. You and your family are going away for a weekend and need someone to feed your dog. You just moved in to your apartment complex and don't know anyone except for your neighbor, but you don't know him very well, either. You've spoken to him a couple of times when you meet in the hallway. Although you don't know him well, it costs $50/night to put your dog in a kennel. Do you ask your neighbor to feed your dog?

Just before you make your decision, you learn overhear gossip that your neighbor was forced to leave his last job because of a scandal that involved stealing company money. Do you trust him to be alone in your apartment while you are away? (**probe for professional/personal divide, degree of transgression, confirmation of rumor/fact**)

3. Your teacher asks you to present a report of a recent national issue with which you are only vaguely familiar. You know that your neighbor, with whom you are friends, is an expert in the area you are supposed to research, but you also know that she has strong opinions on the issue and has taken public stands defending her side. You've had trouble finding other sources, though, and are running close to the due date. Would you seek your neighbor's counsel on the issue? Why or why not? **Under what circumstances would you do so?** If you decide to seek her expert advice, how would you present it to your teacher? **(probe to see if 'bias' of source comes into play, trust in friendship, or assignment deadline)**

4. It's your first week in a new class and so far you know very little about your classmates. It gets around to you, however, that one of them in particular has been arrested before. You are assigned to work on a project together.

Do you trust your classmate to be honest and accurate in her work? Is there anything that would lead you to be more trusting of her?

You soon learn that your classmate has been arrested for protesting a political cause. Does this change your opinion of her?

You then learn that his political opinions differ from yours. Does this change your opinion of her?

MEDIA –MEDIA (M-M)

1. You have heard that a Superstore is to be built in your hometown. You have read a lot of complaints **in a well-known, nationally-syndicated newspaper** that the Superstore does not compensate workers fairly and is not a good company. You decide to investigate the issue and discover that your local paper has devoted an entire section to an investigative story on the Superstore. The paper concludes that the Superstore is a very good company and brings jobs to each of the communities in which it is located. What do you think of the **conflicting** conclusions of the **two news sources? Which do you trust? Why?**

A few days later, your local news channel reports that the Superstore promised to donate the newspaper $20,000. Would this change your opinion of the newspaper? (Would you continue to read the newspaper?) Would this change your opinion of the Superstore? (Would you shop at the Superstore?)

2. You are in the market to buy a new phone. You browse through your favorite technology magazine, one that has always been reliable for you in the past, and you find the phone that they say is the 'best buy'. When you cross-check this review with other reputable sources, such as other technology magazines and online review cites, the particular phone in question is given low ratings. Which source do you trust AND WHY? Do you rely solely on these sources or do you go elsewhere?

3. While watching TV, you see an announcement for a show on XYZ about outsourcing US jobs to China. You decide to watch the show, and soon realize that the show features no one who is critical of outsourcing. The next night, you see learran that an XYZ program will be aired about another issue that interests you. Would you watch the program the next night? Do you think that the channel will give both sides of the issue? Does this affect your opinion of channel XYZ? **Would you consider channel XYZ to be a reliable news source? (probe for journalistic ethics vs market)**

4. You pride yourself in staying up-to-date on the latest national issues, so when one comes up [specific one can be mentioned] you try to gather as much information as you can. You find two sources - a prominent internet blog and a prominent national newspaper - both of which have different opinions on the issue. You know that the internet blog is not written by a 'professional' in the field, but it is very informed and seems to have a popular following. On the other hand, the newspaper article is authored by a recognized professional although you have no idea how popular it is amongst the public. Would you use/trust one source more than another in forming your opinion? What would get you to change your mind? Why?

5. You recently saw a special about poverty in Africa, and decided that you wanted to become more active in the global fight against poverty. You decided to join a number of mailing lists and have visited a number of web sites, but are a bit overwhelmed. You have no idea where to start. While watching TV one night, you see a commercial featuring a well known Democrat, such as former President Clinton, and a well known Republican, such as former President Bush, spearheading a poverty relief campaign. They announce a website where you can find more information about their campaign. Would you visit the website? Would you be more willing to support this campaign than the others you have heard about? Why or why not? What do you think of the celebrities- would this change your opinion of them? (probe for celebrity status- are the celebrities knowledgeable sources? More accessible than academics? More believable?)

General

1. From where do you get your current information? Do you go to different sources for different information?

2. Rank order the following, the first you would trust the most, the last you would trust the least:

Internet news website, Internet blog, local TV news, national TV news, local newspaper, national newspaper, friends, family, teachers

3. What does trust mean to you?

4. What does it mean for something to be true? How do you know when a piece of information is true?