

Book review

The Review of *Social Media and Trust: A Multinational Study of University Students* by Joanna Palisziewicz and Alex Koohang, Informing Science Press, Santa Rosa, CA 2016

Reviewed by Keith Harman*

The book focuses on the linkage between social media and trust. The authors achieve their goal. The book is organized in a manner consistent with its goal. The first part of the book presents the theoretical constructs underlying the concept of trust within the milieu of social media (which are also fully explained in their various derivatives). The second part of the book presents the research design for the study as well as the results and the implications of the research. The research design is covered in detail including validation of the study instrumentation, the selection and the application of the statistical treatment, and the steps taken to ensure an appropriate balance between alpha and beta error (a critical yet often overlooked aspect of any research study).

The authors also achieve their goal by incorporating related, recent, literature in each chapter. The literature is discussed in a skillful manner and avoids the malady of “cognitive capture” by offering an optimal blend of literature emphasizing theory and practice that is effectively and accurately reviewed.

The authors further achieve their goal by incorporating a global dimension via the sampling strategy. The study respondents include social media users from four countries. The authors readily admit that the sample is one of convenience, but in this case, that is not a serious issue. Social media are platforms that support social networks – phenomena that by definition are based on a type of convenience – “relatedness” (which the authors cover in detail).

Some readers may take exception that Facebook was the social media platform in which the linkage between trust and usage were explored. But logic dictates that Facebook is the optimal milieu because of the sheer number and variety of its users.

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Each chapter contains a concise and well-crafted summary. This makes the book especially valuable because the book is nearly 200 pages long and the authors (to their credit) discuss their research design, their findings, and the implications of the study findings in great detail. The book, therefore, is also an excellent handbook on research in general, if not at least an excellent model which can inform aspiring and experienced researchers (a “bonus” feature, one could assert).

A highlight of the book is the well-organized and clearly written discussion of trust. The authors deftly move the logical flow from generic or seminal considerations of the construct of trust to a focus on trust as a construct within the context of social media. It is my opinion that the discussion on trust alone could be expanded and become the basis for a book in its own right, if not a major essay worthy of publication in a peer-reviewed journal. Indeed I would recommend that the authors consider a companion text that eschews the research study portion of the book for a full-blown discussion of the construct of trust and social media and its implications (a timely topic given the role of social media in the development and promulgation of a “24/7/365 news cycle”).

The book does include some dense readings. However, if the authors avoided highly detailed discussion, then some readers might question the substance of the study. I will take the easy way out and assert that it is up to each reader to draw their own conclusion. But I offer for additional consideration this caveat: the authors are to be commended for considering this issue in advance. They demonstrate their prescience by using extensive clearly-captioned headings at every heading level, a solid index, a useful and detailed table of contents, and an exceptionally written preface accompanied by two superb prefaces. (To use a silly analogy, the porridge may be too cold for some of us or too hot for some of us but we all know where to find the porridge and we all know where to find the spoons and the bowls. I will refrain from a smiley emoticon as a means to validate my clumsy attempt at humor – but alas some wield a scalpel while I wield an axe. Facebook “likes” are respectfully declined by yours truly.)

Chapter five is the linchpin or inflection point of the book. The authors flesh out there the theoretical and operational (*in situ*) components of trust: benevolence, integrity, and competence. How those variables impact user-relatedness and user satisfaction are explored in the remainder of the book. More specifically, the study drills to the core issue of the study thesis by following a line of reasoning that considers the extent to which, if at all, that Facebook meets users’ standards for relatedness and subsequent satisfaction because as a social media platform Facebook is generally or sufficiently: (1) receptive to its users and acting in their best interests (benevolence), (2) honest in its dealings with its users and keeps its commitments to its users (integrity), and (3) a competent service provider to its users (competence).

A book review of an academic book ultimately must answer two questions, “Is this book a necessary addition to the literature?” and “Is the book a possible catalyst for additional study?” It is my opinion that the answer is a definitive “Yes.” I conducted a very cursory search at amazon.com and found only a few books that address the issue and none (in my opinion) that meet or exceed the depth and the scope of scholarly rigor in Social Media and Trust: A Multinational Study of University Students. I thus wholeheartedly recommend this book for scholars exploring the linkage between trust and social media usage.

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