

Trust in the Dark: An investigation of the development of trust in distributed blockchain environments.

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Abstract

Trust is central to the marketing of credence-based products, but technological advances can both reduce and undermine buyers' vulnerability to mistrust. This study examines how perceived control over interactions (PCoI) operates in decentralised environments using blockchain. Using a PCoI framework and a critical realist lens, we employ a mixed-method explanatory sequential design: sentiment analysis of open-source discussions (2015–2025) on PCoI antecedents and a multi-stage survey of clients of a digital marketing agency. Findings show that decentralisation reconfigures interpersonal trust cues: past experience, perceived risk and reputation become less salient, accountability and transparency increase, and dependence and communication are reshaped. We identify a structural shift in the burden of trust development towards B2B service providers through “forced proactivity” and introduce process-anchored trust and trust-based differentiation as key contributions.

Track: Business-To-Business Marketing & Supply Chain Management