

More than Shared Ethnicity: Shared Identity's Role in Transnational Newcomers' Trust in Local Consumer-to-Consumer E-commerce

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ABSTRACT

Transnational newcomers, i.e., foreign-born populations who move to a new country, rely on consumer-to-consumer electronic commerce (C2C e-commerce) to access local resources for adaptation. However, with low trust among transnational newcomers who enter a new country, they often face difficulties in the adaptation process, and little is known about which determinants affect their trust in C2C e-commerce. Because social identity is often complicated in transnational newcomers' adaptation process, our work focuses on unpacking *shared identity*, a key *trust* antecedent in C2C e-commerce. We interviewed 12 transnational newcomers in the United States to identify the determinants of their shared identity in C2C e-commerce. Our preliminary results suggest that shared identity determinants include geographic proximity, ethnic background, life stage, and socio-economic status. We also uncovered ways that shared identity determinants influence transnational newcomers' trust in local C2C e-commerce. Our work contributes two research implications to future studies on transnational newcomers' technology use.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing**; • **Social and professional topics** → *Race and ethnicity*.

KEYWORDS

Transnational Newcomers, Shared Identity, Trust, C2C E-commerce

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1 INTRODUCTION

Social technologies such as social network sites and instant messenger applications play an important role in transnational newcomers' adaptation¹. Transnational newcomers utilize social technologies to exchange information for adaptation needs with other newcomers [5, 10, 20]. This use of social technologies allows transnational newcomers to gain information about the legal documentation process and local cultural knowledge to live in the destination country. In addition to information-seeking, transnational newcomers participate in *local consumer-to-consumer (C2C) e-commerce* to seek adaptation resources, such as items and services, in the destination country. These newcomers depend on C2C e-commerce platforms such as Craigslist, neighborhood Facebook groups, or local community WhatsApp groups, to trade resources and network with other people in their local area [16].

An essential element of C2C e-commerce is *trust*, i.e., a person's confidence in depending on another party [30]. However, transnational newcomers need time to develop trust as they adapt to the destination country [6, 7]. The uncertainty and potential risks of online activities can hinder these newcomers' use of online platforms to access local resources [12, 15, 16]. Thus, our study investigated transnational newcomers' *trust in local C2C e-commerce*. Specifically, our work focused on *shared identity*, a critical trust determinant in C2C e-commerce [3, 21, 24, 25]. Shared identity refers to the similar personal attributes shared among individuals. Past work suggests that *shared ethnic background* is one shared identity determinant of transnational newcomers' choices of social applications for networking and resource-seeking [16], but it is unclear whether other shared identity determinants affect this population's trust in local C2C e-commerce. Our work dug deeper to unpack what shared identity means to transnational newcomers' participation in local C2C e-commerce, and how shared identity influences their trust in local C2C e-commerce. We aimed to answer the following research questions in the present work:

- What are the determinants of transnational newcomers' shared identity in local C2C e-commerce?
- How do the shared identity determinants affect transnational newcomers' trust in local C2C e-commerce?

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 transnational newcomers in the United States (US) in November and December 2020. Our results suggest that, to transnational newcomers,

¹We use *transnational newcomers* to refer to populations that are born outside of a country and migrate to a new country in their adulthood regardless of their legal status. This definition covers, but is not limited to, permanent immigrants, foreign employers, and international students. We chose the word "newcomer" to emphasize that their duration in the destination country is relatively short.

shared identity is determined by close geographic proximity, similar life stages, shared ethnicity, and similar socio-economic status when they participate in local C2C e-commerce. We also found that transnational newcomers' experience in local C2C e-commerce varies across different types of platforms. We conclude our work by providing research recommendations for future work on transnational newcomers' technology use and trust development in local C2C e-commerce.

2 RELATED WORK

In this section, we review prior literature on 1) transnational newcomers' technology use for adaptation and 2) shared identity in C2C e-commerce to frame our research scope.

2.1 Transnational Newcomers' Technology Use for Adaptation

Trading items, services, and information within local communities is common for transnational newcomers to access resources and develop social connections even without using online platforms [27, 31]. These transactions allow transnational newcomers to receive needed information and resources for adapting to a country and expose them to networking opportunities within local communities [27, 31]. With the development of the Internet, social media have become a channel supporting people under life transitions [13], including transnational newcomers [5, 10, 11, 20]. For example, Dekker and Elgram conducted a series of in-depth interviews with 90 immigrants in the Netherlands to understand how social media applications influenced their migration decisions and processes [5]. The researchers found that social media applications allowed immigrants to develop networks with people who had a shared ethnic background in the destination country. Using social media applications for networking facilitated newcomers' adaptation by exposing them to local resources such as information and services. In another study, Erdem interviewed 30 immigrants in California, U.S., and found that their use of social media applications, especially Facebook groups for local communities, exposed them to intercultural contact with local populations [10]. Erdem argued that social technologies can boost transnational newcomers' adaptation by exposing them to language resources and news of the destination country.

Recent HCI studies have explored technology design opportunities to address the needs of transnational newcomers, or immigrants in general, in domains such as parenting and education [1, 4, 32, 33], resource-seeking [16, 26], online security and privacy [12], and identity transition [8, 23, 28]. Among these studies, trust has been found to be a critical factor of transnational newcomers' online activities in the destination country, and shared ethnicity was a key antecedent of this population's trust [12, 16]. While these studies shed light on transnational newcomers' needs and ways that technology design can help, a deeper look into their trust development is missing. Our work contributes to this literature by studying transnational newcomers' trust development in the context of local C2C e-commerce, with a focus on the role of shared identity.

2.2 Shared Identity in C2C E-commerce

The shared identity among platform users is one key trust determinant in C2C e-commerce [21, 24, 25]. In past C2C e-commerce research, shared identity has referred to the similar personal attributes shared among platform users. Lu et al. conducted an online survey to examine how similarities such as goals, interests, and values affect trust among users of C2C e-commerce [24]. Their results suggest that these high-level similarities among users positively affect a user's trust in other users' integrity and benevolence on a platform. Recent qualitative studies unpacked the determinants of shared identity among different populations in C2C e-commerce. Moser et al. studied Facebook groups for buying-and-selling second-hand goods among mothers who lived in the same geographic area [25]. This study found that the shared identity of motherhood fosters members' trust in the community on these groups. This study found that living in neighborhoods nearby and the shared identity as a mother supported members' trust in these groups. In another study, Lampinen et al. deployed a local C2C e-commerce platform for single parents in California [21] and found that the shared identity as single parents supported participants' long-term interpersonal trust in other members. Participants' trust based on shared identity helped them feel safe to make risky transactions, such as childcare services or carpools to school for their children, with other members on the platform.

This prior literature acknowledges how shared identity fosters two populations' trust in local C2C e-commerce. This research implies it is necessary to understand different populations' shared identities and associated needs in C2C e-commerce. Past HCI work on transnational newcomers' online resource-seeking touched on their shared identity [16], suggesting that a shared ethnic background is a key determinant. Our work extends this literature by digging deeper into what determines transnational newcomers' shared identity in local C2C e-commerce, and how these shared identity determinants affect their trust in this context.

3 METHODS

Participant Recruitment. Our recruitment spanned from October to December 2020. We defined transnational newcomers as those who were 1) foreign-born and had lived in the U.S. for ten or fewer years, and 2) 18 years or older when they moved to the U.S. We did not sample for other demographic factors (e.g., age, education, or race).

We first advertised our study with a screening survey on public social platforms, such as Craigslist's volunteer sections and neighborhood Facebook groups in over ten U.S. cities. The survey asked about a respondent's country of birth, year of migration, most recent experience in local C2C e-commerce, and contact information. We recruited six (N=6) eligible participants through online advertisements. Because the recruitment through public advertisements went slowly, we employed the second recruitment strategy by recruiting through professional survey panels. We deployed the screening survey on Prolific², which had predefined screening criteria for us to target foreign-born populations living in the U.S.

²Prolific (<https://prolific.co>) is an online survey platform that allows researchers to purchase a panel to recruit survey participants. Each panelist was paid 0.32 USD for completing our screening survey.

Table 1: Participant details.

ID	Pseudonym	Home Country	Duration in the U.S.	Gender	Age	Race
P1	Emily	Venezuela	10 yrs	W	47	White
P2	Ann	South Korea	< 1 yr	W	29	Asian
P3	Shakir	Egypt	8 yrs	M	28	White
P4	Aparna	India	3 yrs	W	34	Asian
P5	Hang	Vietnam	5 yrs	W	23	Asian
P6	Reth	Kenya	3 yrs	M	20	Black
P7	Mert	Turkey	2 yrs	M	30	White
P8	Sara	North Macedonia	9 yrs	W	34	White
P9	Komla	Ghana	3 yrs	M	26	Black
P10	Kristina	Russia	4 yrs	W	28	White
P11	Juliana	Brazil	3 yrs	W	23	White
P12	Maduka	Nigeria	9 yrs	M	28	Black

We received 200 responses from Prolific, but only 16 respondents were newcomers with local C2C e-commerce experience. After we reached out to these 16 respondents, six (N=6) of them participated in the study.

Study Procedure. The present work is a part of an umbrella project to understand transnational newcomers' trust in online resource-seeking. We developed our interview protocol by adapting questions from past studies on trust in local C2C e-commerce to our context (mostly survey studies) [17, 18, 22, 25]. The interviewer started by asking participants to recall their most recent local C2C e-commerce transaction. Based on participants' experience, the interviewer then probed with questions that were focused on trust regarding their use of the platform. The interviewer then asked whether and how shared identity influenced their trust in local C2C e-commerce with the question: "Have you found yourself to be similar or dissimilar with other members on the platform? Why did you feel so?" The interviewer then followed up with the question: "How does the feeling of being similar (dissimilar) influence your use of the platform?" We also asked: "Compared to the time when you were new in the U.S, has your use of the platform changed?" to capture whether their local C2C e-commerce experiences evolved as they adapted to the U.S. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Besides shared identity, we also explored other trust determinants in C2C e-commerce in the interview, such as *perceived social presence* and *social support* [18], which we leave for future work. Participants were asked to respond to a closing survey to report their detailed demographic information after the interview. All the interviews were conducted remotely through Zoom between November and December 2020. Our study was approved as an exempt study by our institutional review board (IRB). All the materials used in the study, including the recruitment post, surveys, and interview protocols, were designed in English. Participants received a 30 USD electronic gift card as compensation, which they were able to choose from Amazon, Target, or Walmart.

Participant Overview. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic information. We had more women participants (N=7) than men (N=5). Participants' average age was 29, and their duration living in the U.S. was 5 years on average. Half of the participants' race was White (N=6); the other half consisted of Black (N=3) and Asian (N=3). All except two participants had a bachelor's degree; the other two participants reported their educational background

as some college. Four participants (N=4) migrated to the U.S. as a family member or spouse of a U.S. citizen or permanent immigrant; four (N=4) participants moved as an international student; the other participants migrated because they or their spouse got a job in the U.S. (N=3), and because they won the U.S. green card lottery³ (N=1).

Data Analysis. The interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed, and we used *Atlas.ti*⁴ to analyze the transcriptions. In the first round of coding, the first author reviewed the data line-by-line and adopted *structural coding* to identify quotes associated with shared identity and trust in participants' local C2C e-commerce experience [29]. The first author then gathered the highlighted quotes to generate themes as a codebook.

4 RESULTS

Our study aimed to identify the determinants of transnational newcomers' shared identity in local C2C e-commerce, and how these determinants affect their trust in local C2C e-commerce. We first found that participants' experience in local C2C e-commerce varied based on the type of platforms they used. We observed that platforms that supported other online activities beyond C2C transactions, such as neighborhood Facebook groups or NextDoor, provided opportunities for participants to engage in local communities. In these cases, newcomers' offline trust in their neighborhoods and trust in users on a platform mutually fostered each side. On the other hand, participants who relied on the other platforms that were pure online marketplaces for local C2C e-commerce, such as Craigslist, Facebook Marketplace, or OfferUp, used these platforms only when they had material needs or looked for income opportunities, such as local gigs or paid research studies. These platforms had limited to no spaces for casual interactions among platform users. In these cases, participants' trust was limited to trust in users on a platform but did not convert to trust in their offline communities.

Our results suggest that shared identity is multifaceted and that each aspect of shared identity influences participants' trust in local C2C e-commerce in a different way. Participants' trust was affected by the following aspects of shared identity: close geographic proximity, a similar life stage, a similar ethnic background, and similar socio-economic status. We present the results regarding each determinant in the rest of this section.

4.1 Close Geographic Proximity

Being in close geographic proximity was the top shared identity determinant stated by participants. Being in a close geographic area with other users in C2C e-commerce allowed transnational newcomers to develop trust by 1) converting trust in neighborhoods to trust in local C2C e-commerce, 2) maintaining control of offline locations to meet, and 3) developing a sense of belonging through online activities.

4.1.1 Converting Trust in Neighborhoods to Trust in Local C2C E-commerce. Being in the same geographic areas allowed participants to convert their offline trust in their neighborhoods to an online

³The U.S. green card lottery, or the diversity immigrant visa program, is a visa program to improve immigrant diversity in the U.S. The program grants 50,000 applicants an immigrant visa annually by randomly drawing applicants from countries that had a low rate of immigration in the previous 5 years.

⁴Atlas.ti is a qualitative analysis tool.

trust in the user community on a platform. Five participants (P1, P2, P4, P7, P9) stated that they were familiar with their neighborhoods, so they trusted these users who were also local. For example, Emily (P1), who migrated to the U.S. because she won a green card lottery, and her family needed to move to a different state every few years because of her husband's job. Emily described how living in the same neighborhood with other users on Craigslist fostered her trust: *"Let's say I find something in Craigslist that is posted and it happens to be a neighbor of mine. I will probably go there by myself because I know the neighborhood. So it was like, what kind of risks am I taking with the amount that I'm going to save by buying something here in the neighborhood. But if the same item was next town where I don't know anyone, I probably wouldn't go by myself."*

Not only did newcomers' offline trust in neighborhoods convert to online trust in C2C e-commerce, but their distrust did also. Ann (P2), who married a U.S. citizen and migrated to the U.S. in 2020, stated that she knew some unsafe neighborhoods in her area, so she avoided transactions in those areas on Craigslist. Mert (P7), who was an international student and moved to the U.S. in 2018, had an experience buying a second-hand bike from, as he described, an insecure neighborhood, through Craigslist: *"It wasn't a very secure neighborhood, I would say. I felt I wasn't really trusting the guy [seller] in the first place, but I really liked the item, the bike... Eventually, I came home and then I saw some problems with the bike... There are some neighborhoods, you feel secure... But there are some neighborhoods that you don't. So it was kind of one of those neighborhoods, I guess."*

4.1.2 Maintaining Control of Offline Locations to Meet. All participants mentioned that they negotiated the location to meet offline for the transaction with another party. Two participants (P3, P9) stated that being able to select locations to meet made them feel safe. Shakir (P3) stated that having control of the offline location to meet mitigated his perceived risks and improved his trust in a transaction: *"It's actually like this person [seller] was trustworthy, because they just told me that, for example, like me, that a certain parking lot to take the tools [to sell]. And it was close to me, it wasn't very far from me... I felt like this person was doing their best to make a very good experience, and a safe experience."*

When the buyer or seller involved in a transaction invited a newcomer to visit their home, participants also developed trust in the buyer/seller. Two participants (P1, P8) had this type of experience and described their trust development as a mutual process. Being invited to someone's house suggested to them that the buyer/seller trusted the participants, and thus the participants developed trust in the buyer/seller. Sara (P8), who moved to the U.S. as a family-reunion migrant in 2011, described her experience using NextDoor to find a parking lot to rent in her neighborhood. Sara described her feeling when a person who was willing to lease the parking lot to her invited her to their house: *"[The parking lot owners] said, 'Okay, we would like to meet you first.' Because they wanted to see they can trust us as well. So we went over their house one night after work. And we have a discussion for the background, what we do, where we live... So I think that was a very trusting moment that they invited us to their home."*

4.1.3 Developing a Sense of Belonging through Online Interactions. The online interactions on local C2C e-commerce platforms also

fostered participants' trust in the user community. Platforms such as neighborhood Facebook groups and NextDoor offered online spaces for casual conversations such as sharing daily news and local information among group members. By soaking in this information and familiarizing themselves with the neighborhood's social norms, two participants (P5, P8) developed trust. Hang (P5) moved to the U.S. to start college in 2015, and she was a member of a Facebook group for her neighborhood. In addition to having C2C transactions within the group, she often observed members' discussions about local news and events. As she lived in the area longer, Hang was able to understand the inside jokes regarding the neighborhood in the group. Familiarizing herself with the neighborhood's culture fostered Hang's identity as a local community member, which increased her trust: *"Because sometimes the people [in the Facebook group] have inside jokes that only people in our neighborhood can understand. And it makes me feel closer. It makes me feel like the community is just a few more nice people... So just acts of kindness and just community jokes that people have inside a group that makes me feel closer and better as part of the group."*

4.2 Similar Life Stage

Being in a similar life stage fostered participants' trust in another user and in a user community. One shared life stage stated by two participants (P4, P11) was being a transnational newcomer to the U.S. Juliana (P11), who was an international student, described that she looked for a roommate through a Facebook trading group consisting of students from her college. Juliana said that she decided to live with her current roommate because they shared the same identity as an international student. However, the two participants (P4, P11) also stated that their engagement in these platforms decreased after they transitioned from a newcomer to an established migrant. Aparna (P4), who migrated to the U.S. in 2017 because her husband got a job in the U.S., joined multiple WhatsApp groups for Indian women in her local area. These groups were for buy-and-sell within local Indian women communities, and the members also exchanged information for adaptation in these groups. Aparna described how her use of these groups decreased as her duration living in the U.S. increased: *"When I was a newcomer, I was a frequent user [of the WhatsApp groups]. I used to frequently, I used to keep on checking my phone. I was frequently asking questions, I was regularly seeking out certain members of the group whom I thought were very similar to me and I was making a lot of efforts to get to know them and I used to go and meet out. And I was making a lot of efforts in making new relations. Now that I do not need any of that, I'm just a mere spectator unless I need something."* Juliana (P11) also stated that *"I think that when I was a freshman, I used to use it [the Facebook group] way more than what I use right now."* This suggests that 1 year could be sufficient for transnational newcomers to become established and reduce their dependence on local C2C e-commerce.

In addition to their shared identity as a newcomer to the U.S., the marriage and family status as a shared identity influenced participants' trust (P1, P4, P8, P10) in local C2C e-commerce. Emily (P1) was the mother of two kids. Emily believed that other members on Craigslist were also local families with similar needs, so C2C transactions could be a reliable way for mutual assistance: *"The things that I'm looking for, household things, are families like my*

family. They have kids like I have, they need things like I need. They need to get rid of stuff like I do when kids grow. I mean, there's the same thing. They are going through the same things that we are, in some way."

4.3 Shared Ethnicity

A shared ethnicity refers to the same or similar cultural background. Notably, we did not find a salient association between participants' trust and common cultural background. Although a participant (Aparna [P4]) described that the shared cultural background with other Indian women in WhatsApp groups helped her find needed information for immigration documentation and international travelling, her experience did not suggest an association between a shared ethnicity and trust.

However, the shared ethnicity could improve a newcomer's trust in local C2C e-commerce by providing access to *latent ties* within an ethnic community. Latent ties are existing social ties that are not activated, such as people who work for the same company but do not know each other [14]. Latent ties among an ethnic community were cited by Maduka (P12) as a safety mechanism that reduced his perceived risks of C2C transactions. Maduka moved to the U.S. as an international student from Nigeria in 2011. Maduka preferred to have local C2C transactions with people from his home country on Craigslist, because the latent ties allowed him to have more control over his transactions: "I like [relying on] people that come from the same country I come from because they're more... Let me say that we have some connections. I can easily track them. I can easily get my item. I can track my item easily."

4.4 Similar Socio-economic Status

The last determinant of shared identity we found was a similar socio-economic status. Although other users' socio-economic status is not public information, participants utilized posts on a platform to assess other users' socio-economic status. Kristina migrated because she got a job in the U.S. in 2016, and she used a few Facebook groups for local C2C e-commerce. Kristina described that by seeing items that other members traded, and sometimes their Facebook profiles, she was able to assess a person's socio-economic status. Kristina believed that most of the same group users were in a similar socio-economic status and had similar needs. Kristina believed that C2C transactions provided a way to help one another address needs in common: "You feel like there exist people on the same level as you. I think because if I would be of higher income I would buy toys [for kids] by myself. I would not ask for yours... Yes, it's encouraged me to use more and I also feel more confident because I know that in case if I really need something and really don't have something, I have resources who can help."

Another example was stated by Ann (P2), who had a medical doctoral degree from South Korea. Besides the transactions for items on Craigslist, Ann often browsed posts that recruited research participants. Ann took these posts as a signal to suggest that other users were similar to her in terms of profession: "I can see there are researchers and scientists and there are some good causes and purposes that people are using Craigslist for... And I could see that they were real business and real people like myself, so they were similar to me... It increases my use, because I feel more comfortable."

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our work presents a preliminary study to unpack what shared identity means to transnational newcomers in their participation in local C2C e-commerce, and how each aspect of shared identity affects their trust. We identified the following shared identity determinants: geographic proximity, similar life stages, shared ethnicity, and similar socio-economic status. The geographic proximity was the top shared identity determinant among our participants. For newcomers who have less knowledge about their area, participating in local C2C e-commerce could increase their trust and engagement in their local communities. This finding provides an explanation to past research that found a positive correlation between newcomers' adaptation level and their use of neighborhood-based social applications [11].

Although past research suggested that shared ethnicity is a key trust determinant of transnational newcomers' technology use [12, 16], we found that shared ethnicity has a limited effect. An explanation of this discrepancy could result from the different contexts between our work and past work. Past works studied newcomers' online networking and general social activities, whereas our work focused on their participation in C2C e-commerce. Our results suggest that shared ethnicity has limited influence on newcomers' trust when their online behaviors are merely commercial and material.

Our results suggest two implications for our next steps and future research. First, future research should narrow the scope of transnational newcomers to focus on the adaptation process. Our work used a 10-year duration as a screening criterion to cover a wider range of newcomers to explore how long their newcomer identity recognition lasted in the context of online resource-seeking. Our results suggest that participants' newcomer identity recognition in this context lasted much shorter than ten years and was even shorter than the 5-year duration used in past research (e.g., [2, 9, 19]). Future research aims to explore transnational "newcomers" should narrow down to populations with an even shorter duration in the host country (e.g., 1 year) as their technology uses also adapt to the host country as they become established, such as Aparna (P4) and Juliana's (P11) examples in Subsec. 4.2. Our second research implication, which resulted from our limitations in screening platforms used by this populations, suggests that researchers should distinguish types of C2C e-commerce platforms in future research. We observed participants' deeper engagement in platforms that supported casual interactions among users, such as Facebook groups, NextDoor, or WhatsApp groups. In contrast, platforms that were designed for pure C2C transactions, such as Craigslist, Facebook Marketplace, and OfferUp, were used to address the material needs of our participants. Future research on local C2C e-commerce platforms should distinguish platforms by accounting for the online activities that these platforms support.

Moving forward, we plan to incorporate the research implications to continue discovering transnational newcomers' trust in local C2C e-commerce. As we described in Methods, our interview protocol covered other trust determinants such as perceived social presence and social support. Our next steps will look into these other trust determinants and also how the shared identity determinants collectively affect this population's trust in local C2C

e-commerce. We also plan to further unpack different forms of transnational newcomers' trust in local C2C e-commerce.

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