

Literature Review of Couchsurfing Research

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The Disclaimer

This is not a comprehensive review (although you're welcome to add more sources in comments or send me an email). This is also not a real scientific literature review. Some results are contradictory and it is up to you to judge who is right and who is wrong.

This is just a list of academic papers/theses/articles published on the topic of Couchsurfing. I used many of these papers when I was writing my thesis and articles on CS. I hope this little review will help you in your research.

The List

(Adamic, Lauterbach, Teng, & Ackerman, 2011) combines data analysis of ratings, a large-scale survey, and in-depth interviews trying to understand the **ratings** on CS. Many users tend to overrate other members being afraid that they may provide reciprocally **negative reference** or rating. Negative references are underrepresented (only 1 to 2500 positives). Authors propose rating design that would encourage more balanced feedback.

(Ayers-Greenidge, 2012) explores guest's **motivations** to use CS. Author finds that motivation to be a traveller (rather than tourist) is the most important, while initial motivation to save money when travelling is also popular. Author ties trust to the concept of **intimate tourism**. The similarity is an important factor in selecting possible host.

(Bialski & Batorski, 2010) tie concept of **trust** in CS to **familiarity**. Using an online survey of 3000 CS members, and 30 personal interviews, authors outline three stages of the CS experience when the trust emerges: pre-selection of users, website and profile navigation and offline contact. Familiarity plays crucial role in the formation of trust.

(Bialski, 2007) uses notion of **intimate mobility** to describe the **offline interactions** between CS users. People tend to be more open and revealing about their lives when speaking with CS members than during communication with closer friends. This is possible due to the brief nature of interactions and intimate setting (one's home).

(Bialski, 2012) explores the idea of **intimate mobility** in more detail, also touching other sharing services (like car-sharing). The way the interactions are initiated and unfold is discussed.

(Bradbury, 2013) talks about **barriers** to using CS, classifying them as outsider, internal and participation barriers. The thesis includes several examples of participation in CS limited to Texas, US.

(Cherney, 2014) looks into how trust is built, maintained, and depreciated on CS. The information provided "by the network" or by third users is more important than self-presentation. While some people would consider hosting a person with a single **negative reference**, those who have two are more a very unlikely to be hosted.

(Cook, Corten, Dakhllallah, Parigi, & State, 2009) list several preliminary findings of the research team partnered with CS.org. CS interactions exhibit less **homophily** than expected. Positive experiences on CS lead to more **trust**, while **negative experiences** inhibit trust. Users tend to have specialized roles: they are more often either hosts or guests than both. CS created strong **local communities** around the world.

(Germann Molz, 2013) looks at Couchsurfing in a broader context of the moral economy of **alternative tourism**. Using the concept of 'moral affordances', the analysis outlines the way Couchsurfing's technical

systems, software design, and search algorithms enable participants to engage in a moral economy based on the non-commodified provision of accommodation to strangers and personal relations of trust and intimacy. "Like many other alternative tourism initiatives, Couchsurfing is defined by a specific moral agenda, expressed in the project's mission".

(Liu, 2013) discusses the question of **authenticity** and importance of this concept in CS. Thesis constitutes of three independent manuscripts that examine CS users' experiences from various perspectives. Quantitative data analysis showed that the most important factors that influence the decision to visit or host another user are (in descending order): **negative references**, positive references, couch availability, personal description and pictures.

(Molz, 2007) discusses the underlying CS discourse and connects into to **cosmopolitanism** and the idea of "being at home in the world".

(Pultar & Raubal, 2009) Looks at CS as a **Location Based Social Network (LBSN)** built upon activities that combine virtual and physical location.

(Pultar, 2011) describes traveller behaviour using CS. The work is partially based on a quantitative survey of CS users. CS **trip planning** differs from travelling using other methods. Hosts are usually older, guests are usually younger, there are also more male than female active users.

(Ronzhyn & Kuznetsova, 2015) analysed 450 **references** left on CS. The references are highly descriptive with very frequent use of adjectives, the majority of the adjectives refer to the emotional evaluation of the experience the members had together, most common verbs used are connected to the process of sharing values and exchanging experiences. The discourse of sharing, the frequent use of the adjective "open" and its derivatives can be the evidence of users' adopting the language used by the official Couchsurfing. **Trust** is a frequent topic although rarely mentioned directly.

(Ronzhyn, 2015) confirms that there is connection between **trust** and CS experience. More experienced users are more trusting and CS users become more trusting as their experience increases. Only weak connection between CS and **tolerance** are found. CS users are generally more tolerant than general population, however this is likely the result of pre-selection. Some visualised results can be seen [here](#) and [here](#).

(Rosen, Lafontaine, & Hendrickson, 2011) explores sense of **belonging, connectedness, and trust** on Couchsurfing. Members who have not met face-to-face with other members have a lower sense of belonging to the community than those who have. Increased attendance to gatherings was positively related to sense of belonging to the community, and hosting had a positive relationship with trust in the community.

(Shapiro, 2012) is based on qualitative and quantitative research of CS. 1400 CS users are compared to the data from World Value Survey. Being CS user is the strongest predictor of **self-identification** as a global citizen. **Trust** is connected to the member's perception of **familiarity**. "As society changes and adapts to rapid globalization and technological advancements, Couchsurfing offers insights and implications for society."

(Skog, 2012) is a bachelor thesis on the perception of CS among those who have and have not used the service. Author presents a detailed overview of the network.

(Steylaerts & Dubhghaill, 2012) is a qualitative analysis of **authenticity** in CS from the perspective of CS users.

(Tran, 2010) tackles specifically the phenomenon of **interpersonal trust** in Couchsurfing. The concepts of trust and **risk** share a close relationship; in order to build trust, it is necessary to minimize the perceived risks. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 Couchsurfing members and 6 non-members. Study suggests that the community's social network acts as an informal method of social control to help foster and sustain trust amongst its members.

(Vaicekauskas, 2010) compared **generalised trust** on CS in Baltic and Nordic countries. The survey of 188 CS users from different countries revealed that the level of trust exhibited by the CS users generally corresponds to the level of trust in the general population (measured in European Social Survey 2008).

(Yannopoulou, 2013) analyses the **user-generated brands** in CS and Airbnb using discursive and visual analysis. Research confirms importance of inter-personal discourses and **authenticity** when constructing an image of CS user.

(Zhang, 2004) discusses the relation between **familiarity** and **trust** and proposes the way to calculate user's familiarity with the service.

(Zhu, 2010) explores **social capital** and **trust** in CS. The research is based on a quantitative survey. of those connections. Personal interaction is essential for gathering social capital in CS. The survey findings suggest that a large percentage of members have no hosting or surfing experience. **Negative references** are underrepresented and have very significant effect on users' decisions to host/visit. Two levels of trust can be outlined: one that concerns physical safety, other is about positive personal interaction.

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