

TRUSTED ONLINE COMMUNITIES:

SIGNS
OF A BRIGHTER
FUTURE

Chronos & BlaBlaCar
December 5th 2012



**“ Trust.
The superpower
in us all ”**

BlaBlaCar now matches over 500,000 travellers a month across Europe. A phenomenon. But the question remains, how are these people able to trust one another enough to share their journeys?

Building trust in our community, which now numbers over 2.5 million members, is our single most important mission. Every BlaBlaCar member introduces themselves to the community through an online trust profile, with verified contact information, a photo, a description, and a number of in-car preferences about things like smoking, pets and music. Members even indicate their chat preference, choosing whether they are Bla, Bla Bla, or Bla Bla Bla, hence the name BlaBlaCar. And then, after every car share, travellers leave member-to-member ratings. These peer-reviews allow the community to share the relationships they've built and the trust created.

We have commissioned a survey on this subject, a subject at the very heart of our activity: online trust. The results are overwhelmingly positive, indicating that members with a complete online profile are trusted more than a neighbour, and almost as much as a friend or a family member! In fact, the results are inspiring. In many ways they hold the promise of a better future for us all...

Trust is among the most constructive attitudes we can have towards fellow citizens, containing the infinite possibility of collaboration and co-operation, to the benefit of all.

To embody this hope, we decided that we needed a superhero: Trustman was born (follow him on Twitter @betrustman). The source of his superpower is, of course, trust profiles on peer-to-peer websites of all types, from co-working to crowdsourcing. The same profiles have allowed car sharing to become a new, people-powered transport network in its own right, efficiently connecting cities all over Europe. The same profiles are making it possible for people connected everywhere to buy, sell, swap, share and collaborate, to be free to enrich their lives, creating value for themselves and for society.

We hope this new study will contribute to an increased understanding of the evolution of trust in online communities, and **we invite you to share our vision of a collaborative future,** built on ever-stronger community trust.

Frédéric Mazzella,
Founder of BlaBlaCar

Introduction

The striking success of BlaBlaCar, first in France, and now in 9 countries across Europe, is attested to by numbers: the community now counts over 2.5 million members. But the emergence of a trusted third party is, perhaps, an even more meaningful measure of success. Trust is the prerequisite to any shared service, even more so for one in which members meet via intermediation. The author, Bruno Marzloff, and Frédéric Mazzella, founder of BlaBlaCar, share **the hypothesis that trust is the foundation of any collective enterprise**, so we explored what the members of the BlaBlaCar community thought, seeking to discover what creates trust in the community.

631 answers were collected from a questionnaire accessible on the homepage of the website. The profile of the respondents is close to the average BlaBlaCar member: the great majority below 35 years (72%), slightly more male than female (54%). But regardless of the respondent's profile, the answers are highly convergent.

Bruno Marzloff,
Sociologist, founder of Chronos

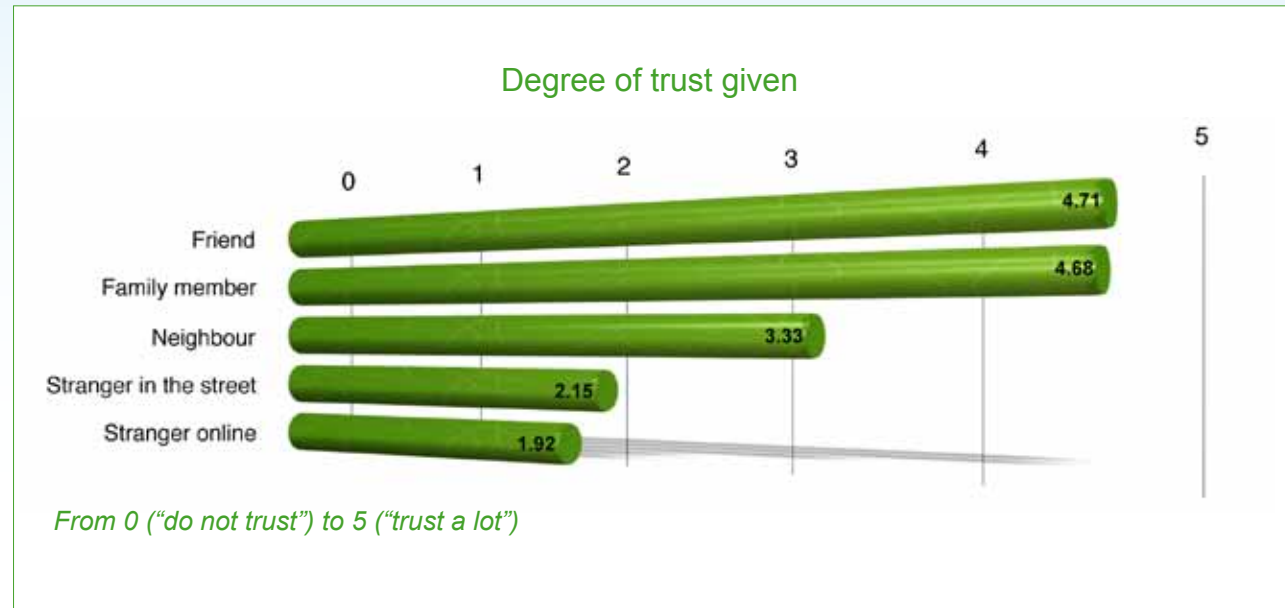
A member profile on BlaBlaCar

The screenshot displays a member profile for 'John' (32 years old). On the left, under 'My verifications', it lists 'Phone number verified', 'Email verified', and '1056 friends', each with a green checkmark. Below this is 'My car', featuring a photo of a black Nissan Qashqai with a three-star rating, and text indicating 'Colour: black' and 'Comfort: luxury'. To the right of the profile picture, it shows 'John (32 years old)', an 'Average rating' of five stars, and 'My preferences' with icons for music, a dog, and a no-smoking sign. A blue box contains the text: 'I travel from London to Weymouth about every month to go sailing. I enjoy some company in the car!'. At the bottom, two reviews are shown. The first is from Patrick L, dated Friday 14 December 2012 - 15:25, with a 5/5 rating and the text: 'Really enjoyed my trip with John, interesting guy, with great stories to tell. and a reliable driver. Thanks!'. The second is from Sofia P, dated Thursday 23 August 2012 - 01:35, with a 5/5 rating and the text: 'John was great, really appreciated the detour he made to drop me off straight at home. Five star driver and lots of space for luggage.'

The context of trust

In order to create a relative context, we first asked participants to rate the degree of trust given to close friends and family on one hand, and strangers on the other.

As expected, close friends and family are most trusted, with an indicator of 4.7 on a scale of 0 to 5. On the other end of the spectrum, **a stranger online is given 1.9, whilst strangers in the street are placed at 2.2 (seeing a face helps, no doubt).**



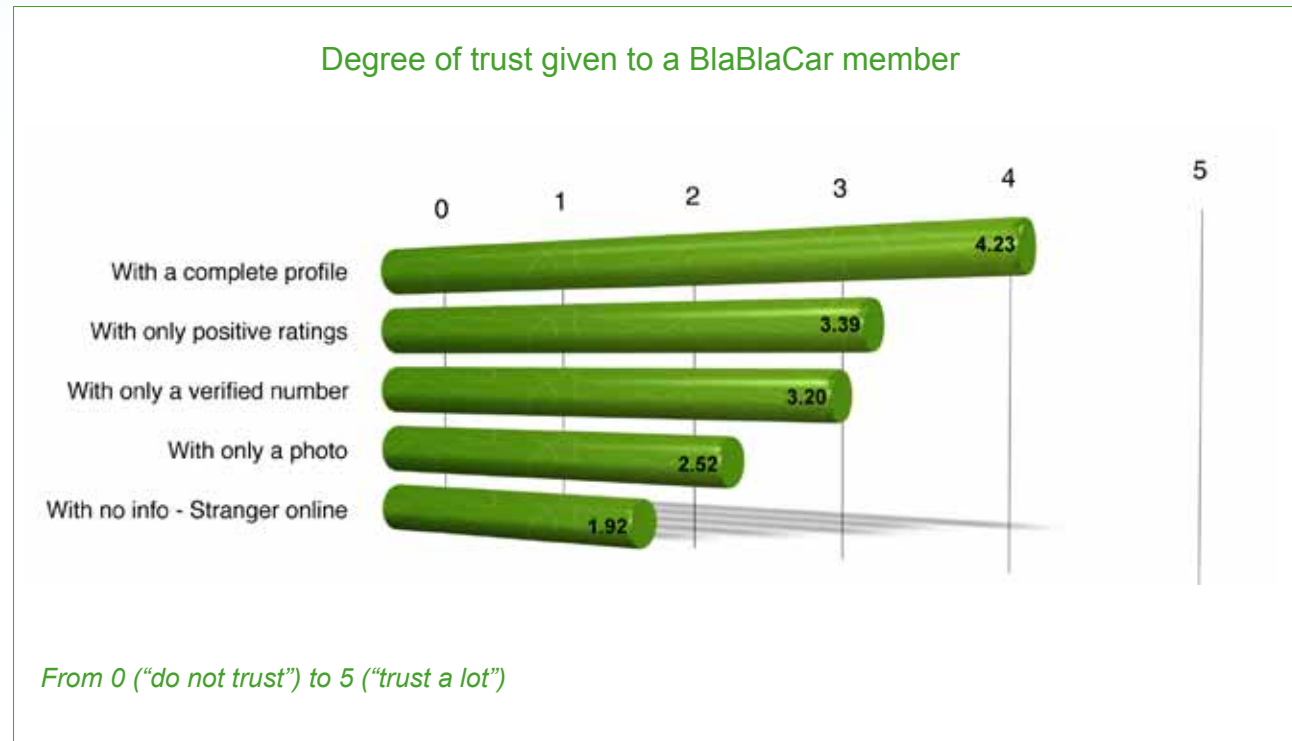
Seeing a face heightens trust

Trust in an online community

Next, our survey sought to find out to what level trust is present in the BlaBlaCar community. As suggested by previous results, having a photo (“seeing” a face), increases trust levels to 2.5. Verified contact information has an even larger impact on trust levels, pushing them up to 3.2. However, positive ratings are the factor with the most impact on trust levels, causing an increase in the degree of trust given to a member to 3.4.

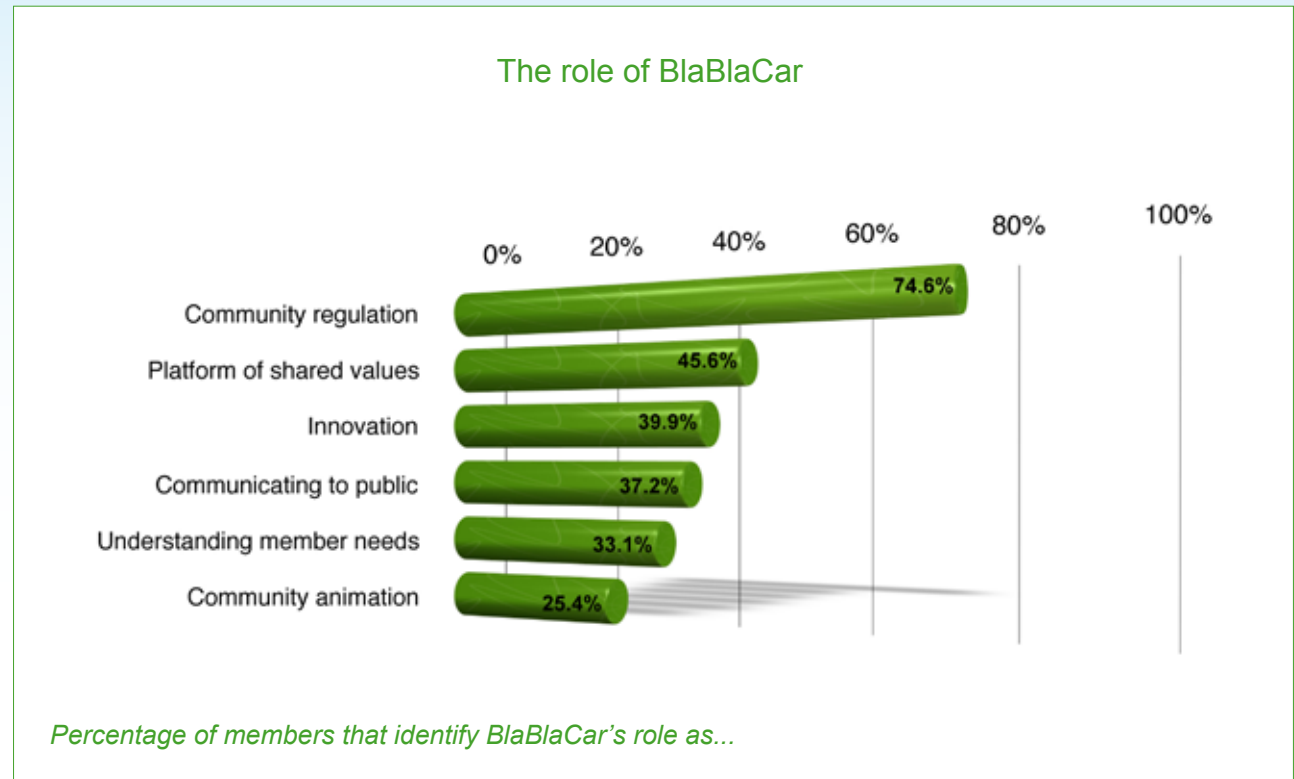
Finally, we looked at the trust given to a member with a complete profile (including all of the above)... **With a photo, a verified number and positive reviews, trust levels are at 4.2—very close to that of a friend (4.7)!** By allowing members to provide detailed information and peer reviews, BlaBlaCar has effectively recreated the conditions of trust.

Members with complete profiles are trusted almost as much as friends



Where does trust come from?

But what are the ingredients of trust in an online community such as BlaBlaCar? What services define BlaBlaCar's role? Three out of four respondents (75%) say that, for them, BlaBlaCar's role is regulation of the community—as a trusted third party. Just under half (46%) believe that the role of BlaBlaCar is to be a platform for shared values. Indeed, **the website is both the embodiment and the manager of trust in the community.**

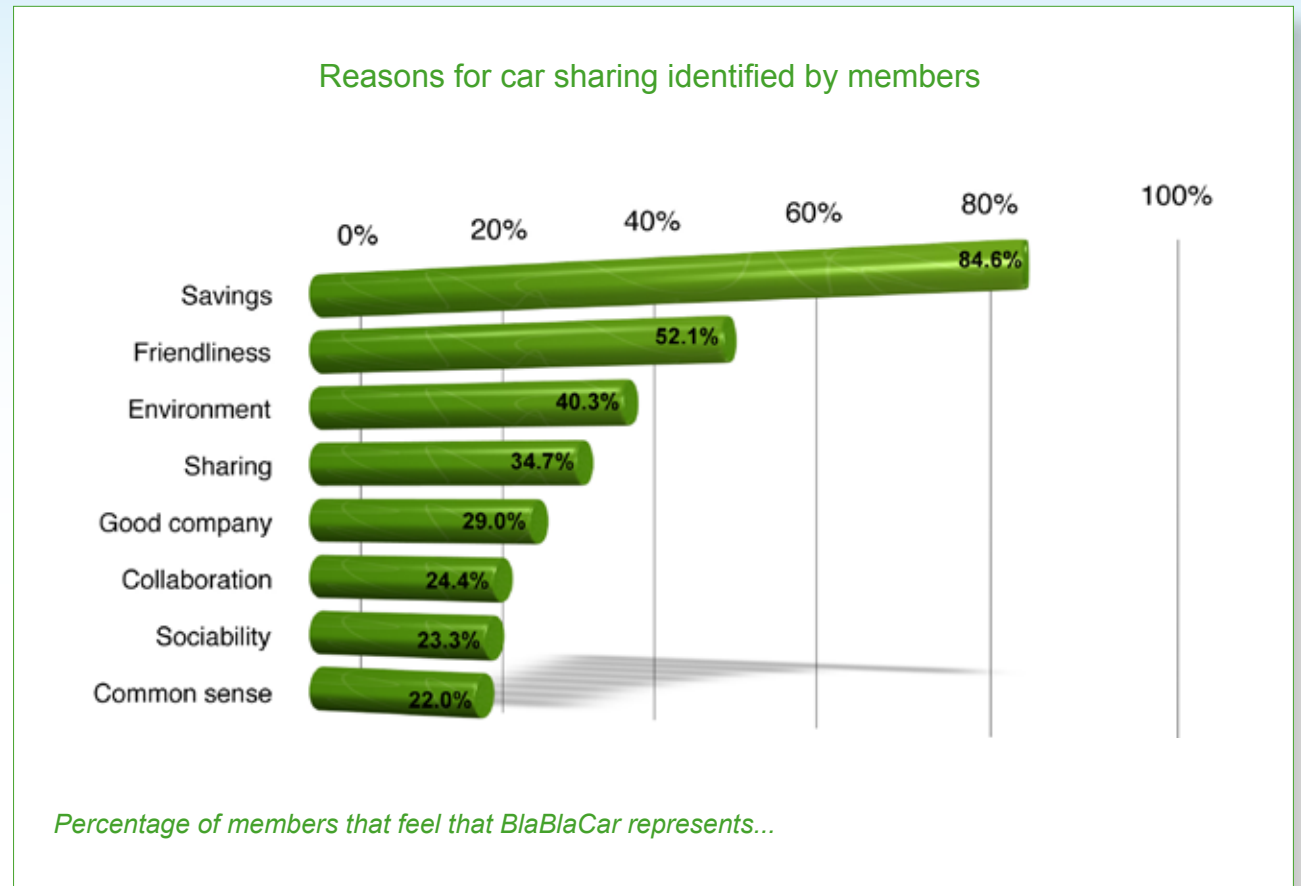


Third party regulation of online communities enables trust

Why do we share?

Our survey also looked at a more general analysis of car sharing, asking members "what are the 3 words that best represent car sharing to you?".

"Savings" is the most commonly cited idea, at 85%, even more so amongst passengers (92%) and under 25s (90%). This said, car sharing is also a social activity for our respondents: 52% answered "friendliness", and 29%, "good company". "The environment" (40%) and "sharing" (35%) are identified by over a third of people surveyed, followed by "collaboration" and "common sense" for one in five respondents.

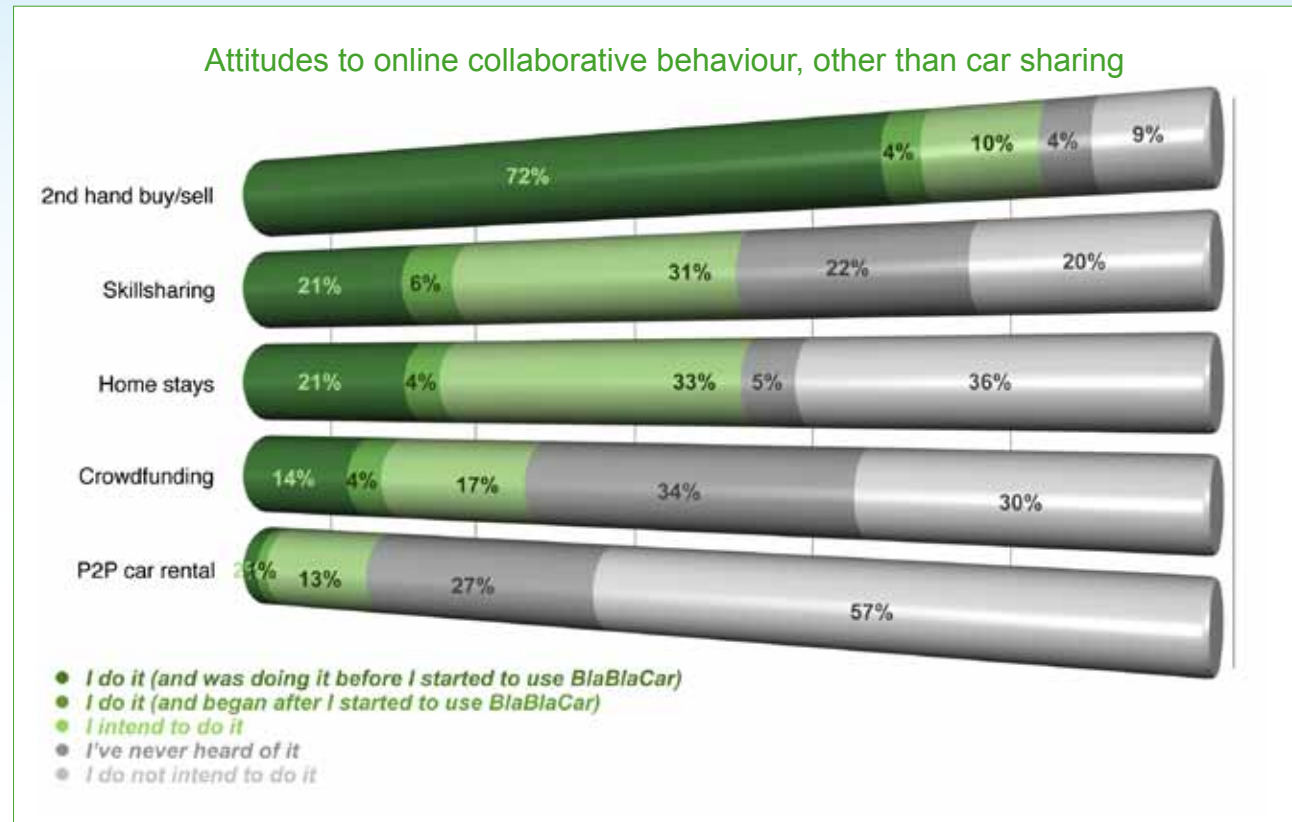


Top 3 motivations to share:
economic, social, environmental

Online collaborative behaviour

BlaBlaCar is part of a larger movement, namely the collaborative economy (also known as the sharing economy or collaborative consumption), which includes different types of collaborative behaviour enabled by technology and new online trust mechanisms. To conclude our study, we asked respondents to tell us about their awareness, intent and practise of five other kinds of collaborative behaviour.

A massive 76% of the BlaBlaCar community use second-hand marketplaces to buy and resell goods online and a further 10% intend to do so. 27% of respondents skillshare, and 31% intend to do so. Very similar results appear for Homestaying, with 25% who declare already doing homestays and 33% who intend to do so. Less popular is crowdfunding: only 18% use crowdfunding platforms, while 17% intend to do so. Lastly, P2P car rental is the least practised of online collaborative behaviours, with only 3% of respondents declaring that they do it, and 13% saying that they intend to.



We note that, even though car sharing is a recent activity for most, a good number of respondents (as many as 6%) began another type of online collaborative behaviour after starting to use BlaBlaCar, confirming our belief that **car sharing is, for many, an easy first step into collaborative behaviour.**

These findings invite a longitudinal study to trace the evolution of behaviour and attitudes over time. From our knowledge of the behaviour and growth of the BlaBlaCar community over the last years, **we expect awareness, intent and practise of other collaborative online behaviours to continue to grow rapidly.**

Conclusion

The success of BlaBlaCar and the growth of other collaborative communities point to the emergence of collaboration as a behaviour and value of renewed importance in today's society.

However, the future of these new socio-economic behaviours clearly depends on the degree to which community trust is successfully embodied and ensured by third parties such as BlaBlaCar.

We thank our members who answered this survey, helping us better understand trust in the BlaBlaCar community.

This survey was conducted in November 2012 on 631 members of the BlaBlaCar community.

The survey was created on Google docs and made available on a page of the site Covoiturage.fr (the French name of BlaBlaCar). The results were analysed by Bruno Marzloff, sociologist, founder of Chronos, a consultancy and prospective agency whose work focuses on four main themes: mobility, urban and territorial studies, digital services and time.

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