

It's sound—Bristol Pound encourages community unity

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There is a rapidly growing momentum driving the development of mobile payment systems. New research has shown systems, such as the Bristol Pound, can have a positive effect on the local community by encouraging consumers to support and value their local businesses.

The paper, which will be presented at this month's ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing (ACM CSCW 2015) [14-18 March], looks at user interactions and practices around [mobile payment](#) systems.

The research, led by Dr Mark Perry at Brunel University London and visiting researcher at the University of Bristol in collaboration with Professor Sriram Subramanian from Bristol's Department of Computer Science, challenges the designers of mobile payment systems to consider financial transactions as opportunities for rich social interactions.

The design and marketing of mobile payment systems allows for faster, simpler, effortless and secure transactions, yet the research team found that by reducing transactional contact other important features around making payments are being overlooked.

The study, which is part of the 3DaRoC project, explored mobile payment systems to find out the effects of online, mobile, universal and tangible technologies on the consumer financial sector. Part of the project explored the way that the Bristol Pound operates. The Bristol Pound is one of the largest alternative currency to sterling in the UK and

enables consumers to pay for goods and services using TXT2PAY.

The research into the Bristol Pound focused on the interactions between people using mobile phone payments and its effects on social and community connectivity.

The study found the Bristol Pound has a beneficial effect on both social and community bonds by shaping interactions, feelings of trust and how users feel about the social and community bonds they hold with their co-users.

While these social and community bonds shape the kinds of interactions that become possible, they also promote social cohesion by encouraging consumers to support their [local businesses](#).

Sriram Subramanian, Professor of Human-Computer Interaction in the Bristol Interaction and Graphics (BIG) group, said: "TXT2PAY may not be the most fluid or robust mobile phone payment, yet our findings show TXT2PAY supports people in making connections to other people, to their communities, to the places they move through, to their environment and to what they spend. These interactions could have significant implications for the design of future payment systems."

Dr Mark Perry, Reader at Brunel University, added: "I think what's really interesting and unexpected in the data that we have is the way that the Bristol Pound is not just a currency that's used locally, it's also a means of building richer, deeper connections across local communities.

"There's so much this can tell us about how building financial technologies that aren't just platforms for consumerism, but which make our environments more sustainable, interesting and connected."

The near collapse of the UK and world financial sector have made

understanding and innovating new and more sustainable approaches to [financial services](#) a critical topic. Mobile multimedia technologies offer new platforms for offering financial services over the internet. These new forms of digital connectivity provide opportunities to do banking and payment in radically different ways.

While the impact of these new digital financial services is yet to be fully known, they have huge potential to transform financial services for ordinary users. So far, little is understood about how technical infrastructures impact on the ways that people make sense of the financial services that they use, or on how these might be designed more effectively.

More information: 'Spending Time with Money: from shared values to social connectivity' by Jennifer Ferreira, Mark Perry and Sriram Subramanian in Proceedings of the ACM CSCW '15.

Provided by University of Bristol

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