

# A Survey on Trust in Autonomous Systems

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**Abstract.** As a result of the exponential growth in technology and computing in the past couple of decades, autonomous systems are becoming more relevant in our daily lives. As these autonomous systems evolve and become more complex, the concept of trust in such systems becomes a major challenge that affects the performance, and reliability of such systems. Many prior studies have indicated that currently, humans have a very low trust-level in the fully autonomous robots. Similarly, trust between autonomous systems plays a major role in their performance. In this meta-analysis, we will explore various research and trust models in order to show why trust management is a very challenging aspect of future AI technologies.

**Keywords:** Trust Function, Reputation Systems, Autonomous Systems, Multi-Agent Systems

## 1 Introduction

The rapid growth in technology has resulted in the automation of many day to day tasks that humans had to perform themselves just decades ago. From ATMs (Automated Telling machines) to industrial robots used in factories, automation continues to aid humans with repetitive, difficult, and monotonous tasks. This technological advancement introduces newer and more complex robotic concepts, and automated systems in different areas of our lives including our homes, daily commute, workspace, military, and many other areas every day.

As these automated systems evolve, their levels of complexity increase over-time, and their involvement in various aspects of human life introduces the concept of human-robot trust. Studies have indicated that one of the most important challenges for successful integration of advanced autonomous systems and AI technology in human civilization, will be the management and the development of this mutual trust [4].

In this paper, we will provide a step by step, comprehensive analysis and explore various concepts and related studies, as well as experimental techniques proposed by researchers in this field, in order to understand how the human-robot trust management works, and how we can improve it. Additionally, we will explore the trust between autonomous systems (Agents) in section 3.

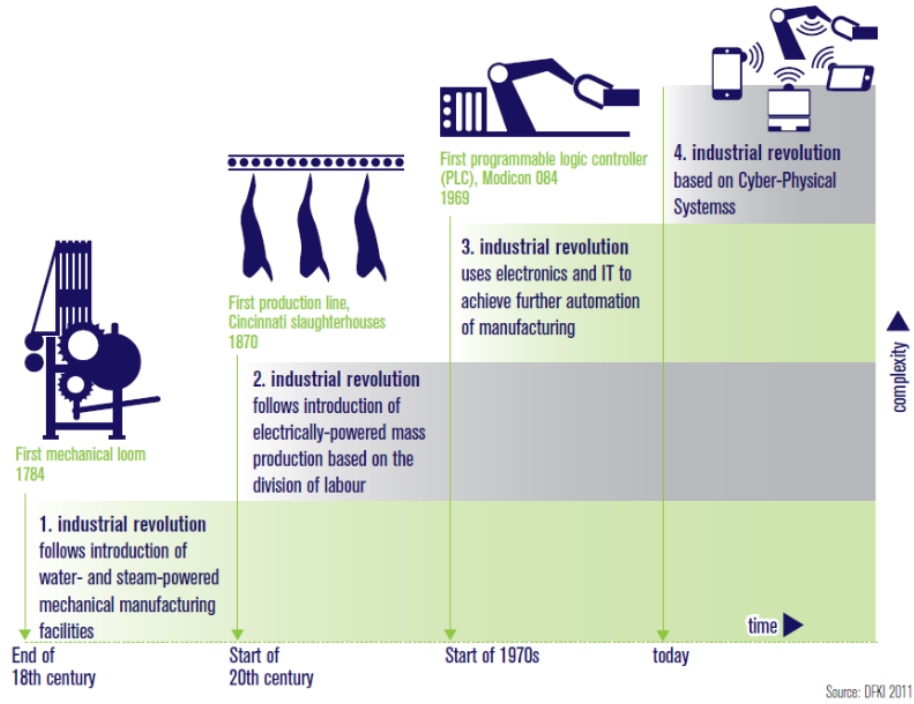
## 2 Definitions

### 2.1 What is an Autonomous System?

First, an autonomous system needs to be defined. This definition keeps changing everyday as the related technology grows exponentially [24].

Merriam Webster dictionary defines ‘autonomy’ as “The quality or state of being self-governing; especially: the right of self-government”. The concept of Autonomy has existed for thousands of years, in many different areas including philosophy, sociology, politics, and technology. In fact, the second part of the term Autonomous, *nomos*, means ‘law’ in Greek. An autonomous entity “creates its own laws”. [3].

We need to narrow down this definition, as this it is very broad and applies to many different areas and concepts. Perhaps the term that we are looking for is ‘autonomous robots’. Autonomous robots are defined as, “intelligent machines capable of performing tasks in the world by themselves, without explicit human control.” [5]



**Fig. 1.** Evolution of Automation [15]

Although automation was introduced to human civilization many years ago, and widely used after industrial revolution in early 1800s [23], Autonomous sys-

tems, and Industrial Robots are relatively new terms that were introduced merely decades ago, and their definitions are evolving everyday, as technology advances. In this paper, our main focus will be on Autonomous Robots and Autonomous Agents which are a highly advanced form of automated machines that have a high degree of self-awareness, and are capable of independently performing tasks which were previously done by humans.

## 2.2 What is Trust?

‘trust’ is a concept that has many different definitions in various contexts such as psychology, sociology, and Economics. Currently, there is no uniform definition of ‘trust’ in the context of psychology, or other areas [1]. Prior research indicates that there are over 300 definitions in various research areas, and in the context of Human-Robot relationships, which is our focus in this paper, there are more than 30 definitions. These definitions include ‘human interpersonal trust’, ‘automation trust’, ‘trust in software agents’, and many others [24].

Although there are complex definitions of trust documented based on the area of the research, we shall focus on the simplest, domain-agnostic definition. A very simple, generic definition of ‘trust’ would be: “A firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something” [27]. If we consider this simple definition, then, in our research context, the definition of trust would be: “A strong human belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of an autonomous system”. The ‘Autonomous system’ in this case could be any kind of a self aware machine that has a high degree of autonomy. Some concrete examples would be human trust in self driving cars (SDC), autonomous planes, battlefield robots, rescue robots, autonomous software agents, and so on.

## 3 Review of Literature: Trust in Autonomous Systems

In this section, we will review, and categorize previous studies that are in the domain of human-robot trust relationship.

### 3.1 Trust Between Humans and Autonomous Systems

**3.1.1 Human-Robots** As previously stated, many studies have shown that currently, the level of trust between humans and autonomous systems is very low. That means in serious situations, humans tend to not let fully autonomous systems take control. A study that explores the low level of human-robot trust, is done by Daniel Stormont (2008) [26]. In this study, the factors that affect the trust between humans and robotic systems are analyzed. The study concluded that it is not just ‘trust’ that determines the usability, but ‘confidence’ also plays a significant role. One of the reasons the level of confidence in autonomous systems is very low is due to their low level of reliability. As cited in this paper, “A 2004 study of commercially available ruggedized robots operating in field conditions showed a mean-time-between-failures (MTBF) of 12.26 hours and an

availability rate of 37%” [7]. This means, that if the robotic systems reduce their failure rate, their reliability will increase, thus, the human confidence and trust in them will increase. Of course this study was done in 2004. It is clear that due to recent advancements in robotic systems, the MTBF should be definitely less than 37%. For example, when the first fatal car accident was reported for Tesla self driving cars, it became a topic of discussion in the media. Although these accidents are rare, companies like Tesla and Google learn the nature of the accident, and work on reducing the failure rate in the future models. [25]

In his research, Mr. Stormont (2008) also believes that another factor affecting the trust between humans and fully autonomous systems would be their unpredictability. It is known that in various hazardous circumstances such as battlefields and rescue missions, the unpredictability of robots becomes a critical problem for human supervisors. It has been argued that the autonomous nature of robots, and their decisions making could be a positive trait, since they could react faster to certain dangers compared to humans, but the problem arises when life and death of humans will depend on the choices of a robot; Questions such as “should life and death decisions be made by an autonomous system?” will emerge. In the 2008 study, a simulation of robots assisting firefighters in a hazardous fire situation was discussed. It was concluded that even though firefighters did not initially trust these helper robots, as the mission went on, and they got tired, their reliance and trust in the robots increased, as they helped them extinguish the fire.



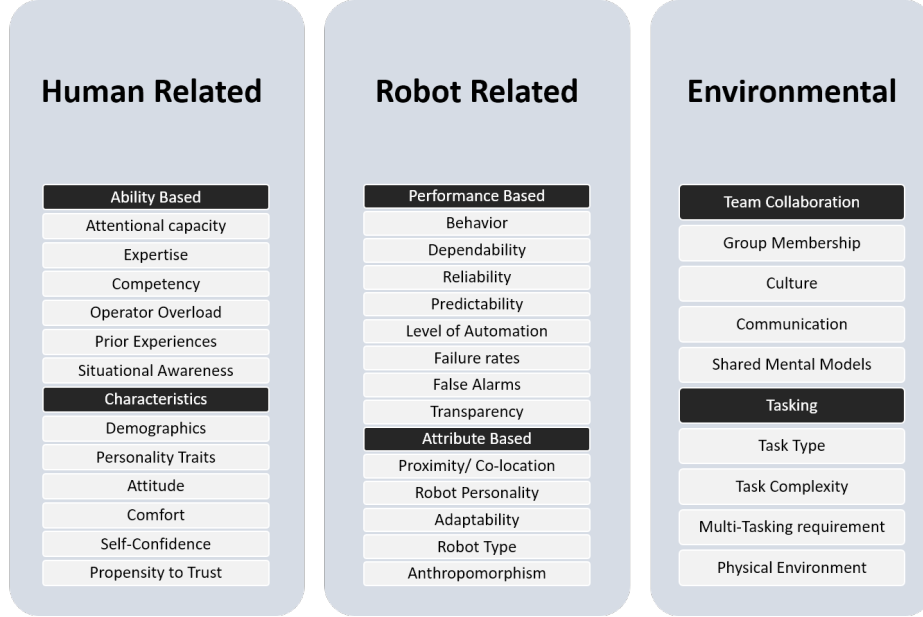
**Fig. 2.** Example of autonomous and semi-autonomous robots used in military [2]

Another study conducted by Mr. Babak Esfandiari and his colleague, Mr. Sanjay Chandrasekharan [10] thoroughly examined and proposed “simple mechanisms for trust acquisition based on a very basic and general definition of trust.” According to this study, the majority of views on the definition of trust are divided into two groups: Cognitive views, and mathematical views. Mr. Esfandiari argues that both of these views have something in common: both of them see ‘trust’ as a variable, that also has a threshold for an action. This action is called cooperation. The mathematical definition of ‘trust’ provided by this study

is: “Trust is a function  $T$  between any two agents of a set  $A$  of agents”. These agents can be humans, or robots, or autonomous systems, and so on. This study also provides a concept called ‘Trust Acquisition’. Given an example of previously defined mathematical function:  $T(\text{Alice}, \text{Bob})$  (Trust between Alice and Bob), Trust Acquisition is described as “the process or mechanism that allows the calculation and update of  $T$ . In our definition, acquisition is not necessarily an ‘increase’ of  $T$ .”. This study provides various methods of Trust Acquisition:

1. Trust Acquisition by Observation  
Mr. Esfandiari argues that Trust Acquisition can be obtained by performing ‘Bayesian Learning’. This means that agents observe, and consider that past actions of other agents, and decide whether to perform an action or not. This paper provides an example of two agents, RoboCop robots John and Mary. John has the ball, and is deciding whether or not pass the ball to Mary, or just shoot the ball himself. If John is able to review the past performances of Mary, and compares them with his own performance, and performs a statistical analysis, he will be able to make a decision.
2. Trust Acquisition by Interaction  
In Trust Acquisition by Interactions protocol, agent 1 asks a bunch of pre-determined questions from agent 2. Agent 1 already knows the answer, thus, the trust will be acquired based on the the number of correct answers provided by agent 2.
3. Trust Acquisition Using Institutions This study provides an example of humans trusting police officers wearing uniforms. If a person sees another person equipped with a gun who is wearing a uniform, he will automatically trust that person, because the trust is already established by the institution. However, if he sees a person not wearing a uniform and carrying a gun, he needs to make more calculations to trust this person.

In a 2011 paper, Peter A. Hancock et al. provided a comprehensive analysis of factors affecting trust in “Human-Robot Interaction (HRI)” [12]. This study categorizes factors that affect the trust in HRI into three different categories: human related, Robot related, and environmental variables, and each category has sub categories. Human related factors include training, expertise, situational awareness, demographics etc. Similarly, robot-related factors are behavior, dependability, reliability, level of automation, failure rates, false alarms, and transparency, and attribute based factors such as location, personality, adaptability, robot type, and Anthropomorphism (having human traits). Environmental factors include team work, culture, communication, shared mental models, task type, task complexity, multi-tasking, physical environment. This paper discovered that robot performance has the biggest impact on trust in the context of HRI, and tweaking the robot performance has a direct impact on trust. For example, if an autonomous robot improves its performance, the value of trust will increase.



**Fig. 3.** Trust factors identified by Hancock [12]

Jacques Penders and his co-workers investigated HRI in ‘no-visibility’ conditions [21]. No visibility condition in this context means that the human user might be visually impaired, or completely blind, therefore, they would have to completely trust the robot. This study also takes a look at the attributes in the design of robots that affect the ethical behavior of them. Additionally, this study analyzes the interaction of visually impaired person and their guide dog, and examines the variables that could be implemented in the design and behavior of robots to improve the human confidence in them. These variables include human dominance, cooperation overtime, and accountability.

In [18], Stephanie Merritt at the University of Missouri examined the importance of taking differences in human behavior into consideration in the context of HRI. Ms. Merritt completed this empirical study by providing an experiment related to X-ray screening. Subjects were asked to use a simulation software to detect dangerous items such as weapons, in different luggage. They given the options of scanning the x-ray image manually, and flagging it if they spot a suspicious item, or have a fictional autonomous system called Automatic Weapons Detector(AWD) scan the image, and report any issues. This study concluded that the individual differences in subjects affects the value of trust in autonomous systems, even if the characteristics of the autonomous system is ‘constant’. Thus, this study suggests that future researchers in the field of HRI and trust should take human characteristics into consideration.

Raja Parasuraman and Christopher Miller investigated the concept of trust and etiquette in the domain of HRI [20]. Given the fact that in many human-to-human social interaction scenarios, respect and etiquette highly influence the level of trust. Mr. Parasuraman and Mr. Miller argued that they also influence the perception of autonomous robots in humans. In this paper, etiquette is described as: “the set of prescribed and proscribed behaviors that permits meaning and intent to be ascribed to actions.”. This study also provides an experiment related to the role of etiquette in HRI. In order to assess the influence of etiquette, test subjects used a flight simulator software called Multi-Attribute Task (MAT), and communicated with the autonomous system using different communication styles such as interrupting the user, being impatient, etc. The empirical evidence obtained by this experiment indicated that etiquette definitely influences the human trust, and reliability of autonomous robots.

A research conducted by Ms. Rosemarie Yagoda and her research partner, Mr. Douglas Gillan, provided a mechanism for measuring the value of trust in the context of HRI [31]. This measurement is based on multiple factors, including team configuration, team processes, context, task, and system. This trust scale measuring mechanism is based on two studies in this research. In this first study, subject matter experts, and previous studies were used to construct a ‘content validity assessment’. The second study examines the trust scales obtained from the first study. The results of these two studies were combined to create the ‘HRI Trust Measuring Tool’.

In a 2014 paper, Yue Wang and partners investigated the human-robot trust in the context of underwater semi-autonomous robots [29]. In order for the underwater robot to have a good performance, the person who is operating the robot needs to trust its autonomous capabilities. This study proposed a trust model that mainly deals with recording the robot’s past performance, the human performance, and the fault rates of humans and robots. The semi-autonomous robot ‘YSI EcoMapper AUV’ was investigated in this study specifically. Furthermore, MATLAB simulations indicate the effectiveness of this trust model.

In 1987, Bonnie Muir at the department of Psychology at University of Toronto, provided an analysis on the human-machine trust from a Psychological perspective [19]. This paper talks about “Decision Support Systems” (DSSs), and how trust is involved in the use of such systems. DSSs are computer programs that assist an individual, or an organization make decisions. These decisions include ranking important documents, buying and selling stocks quickly, choosing a target market, and many other important decisions [22]. Since DSSs have a high impact on some critical decisions, the user’s trust in such systems becomes a very important factor when designing Decision Support Systems. Muir initially analyzed the Psychological trust models between humans, and used these models to provide a human-machine trust model. In this model, the concept of “Trust calibration” is introduced, in which, the user’s have the responsibility of calibrating their trust based on the reliability of the DSS they are using. Muir suggests that when designing DSSs, there are certain factors and design goals that could contribute to better trust calibration. These factors are:

1. **Aiming to improve the user’s perception of trustworthiness of the DSS.** This would require the user to completely understand how a DSS works, and become familiar with the predictability of the system’s decisions. Muir suggest that this can be achieved by putting the user on a trial period of using a DSS, in order to improve the user’s perception. A recommended technique is the use of a simulation environment so the user can freely explore the DSS without the fear of it making bad, or dangerous decisions.
2. **Modifying the DSS’s “Criterion of Trustworthiness”** In order to achieve this, the DSS has to provide a history of efficiency and good performance. It is recommended that users see statistical data such as “System Performance”.
3. **Continuous identification and fixing the causes of poor trust calibration** In order to improve the trust between humans and the machines, the system (or developers) should be able to identify the root causes of bad trust calibrations, and fix them. This study indicates that some causes of low trust might be incorrect expectation of the users, therefore, the calibration training for the users is very important

**3.1.2 Human-Self Driving Cars (SDCs)** Autonomous driving has been advancing exponentially in the recent years due to technological advancements in AI, mechanics and advanced sensor systems. Car manufacturers such as Google, Tesla, Mercedes-Benz, Ford, and many others have already created commercially available semi-autonomous cars, and fully autonomous prototypes, and they expect mass production of self driving cars (SDCs) in the early 2020s [9]. One major challenge in popularizing SDS in the US and the world would be the high level of distrust of average consumers in fully automated vehicles.

Daniel Howard at UC Berkeley (2013) [14] explores the factors affecting the trust between humans and SDCs, and attempts to examine the attitude of average consumers towards SDCs in Berkeley, California. Mr. Howard’s research indicates that most consumers have positive feelings toward the ease of use that comes with SDCs. In a fully autonomous vehicle, they wouldn’t have to feel frustrated when driving in heavy traffic, or finding parking in a busy area due to the benefit of multitasking. One can imagine that at some time in the near future, commuters will be able to take naps, or watch movies while the SDC drives them to wherever they desire. Mr. Howard’s also discovered that most individuals have concerns regarding the cost, liability, and the potential loss of control of SDCs. This study also indicated that factors such as level of income and gender affect the consumer’s concerns. For example, subjects with higher levels of income were more concerned about liability as opposed to subjects with lower levels of income that were more concerned about the control of SDCs.

Michelle Carlson and her team, in a 2014 paper, provided a statistical analysis in the domain of autonomous vehicles and autonomous diagnostic systems [8]. Their goal was to identify the major factors that impact level of trust in self driving cars and autonomous medical systems. In this study an online survey was performed in which subjects were asked about various scenarios related to



self driving cars. They were also asked about the use of IBM Watson in critical medical situations (e.g determining types of cancer). It was discovered that most test subjects were having concerns regarding the past performance of the car, reliability, errors, software/hardware failure, and the liability manufacturer of the car (e.g Google, or a lesser-known company). Similarly, it was discovered that the top factors that affect the trust in the use of IBM Watson in critical medical situations are the accuracy and past performance among many other factors. This indicates that regardless of the domain, most people tend to prioritize safety, accuracy, and failure rate when trusting an autonomous system.

In a similar study [17], Miltos Kyriakidis and his team created an international questionnaire related to the public opinion of automated driving. Questions included concerns, acceptance, and willingness to buy the car. Among the 5000 responders from 109 countries, most subjects agreed that fully automated self driving cars have the potential to be very popular among consumers by 2050. It was discovered that most subjects were concerned about safety, malicious activities/hacking, and legal issues related to autonomous driving. Mr. Kyriakidis also discovered that most of the subjects that were more educated, had more income, and were located in developed countries, were mostly uncomfortable about the self driving car transmitting data to external sources, and were concerned about the misuse of the transmitted data.

A 2015 study by Michael Wagner and Philip Koopman explored the possibilities of developing trust in Self Driving Cars using tools and techniques that are currently available [28]. This study argues that fully autonomous Driving Cars aim to make our lives easier, and reduce the number of accidents. However, in many situations such as unpredictable hazards, and intense weather situations, the human driver's reactions are superior. This is one of the major factors that affects the human trust in Self Driving Cars. It is stated that testing is a critical aspect of determining if the car is trustworthy enough to be on the road, or has the potential to develop its trust over time. This paper also claims that these cars use Machine Learning and Image Processing to provide some functions, like detecting pedestrians. It was argued, however, that Self Driving Cars need a very high accuracy in their algorithms (close to 100%), but Machine Learning algorithms are not capable of producing such accurate results. Mr. Wagner and Mr. Koopman bring to light a new software testing philosophy based on philosopher, Karl Popper's concept of 'Falsification'. Falsification means: "For any hypothesis to have credence, it must be inherently disprovable before it can become accepted as a scientific hypothesis or theory." [11]. Falsifiability helps testing because it causes testers to discover more flaws and vulnerabilities in Self Driving Cars. Thus, by improving, and reliability, the trust in them will increase over time.

Tove Helldin and colleagues at the University of Skvde in Sweden conducted a study related to the ability of SDCs in snow conditions [13]. In this study, 59 drivers were chosen to sit in an autonomous simulator cockpit. One group of drivers were given information about the risks and uncertainties of the SDCs when driving in heavy snow conditions, and the other group of drivers, were

not given any information regarding the ability of the SDC. This experiment indicated that the group of drivers that were provided with the information about the risks and uncertainties did not trust the SDC, and preferred to override the system to manually drive the car. The other group, however, were not as prepared to override the autonomous system to drive the car manually, and had more trust in the system.

**3.1.3 Human-Autopilot Modes** Scott Winter and colleagues [30] explored this low level of trust in the context of humans trusting autonomous aircraft. Subjects were asked if they preferred to be on a commercial plane with two pilots (a pilot and a copilot), a plane with a pilot in the cockpit and the copilot remotely working, or a plane with both pilots remotely controlling the aircraft. Mr. Winter and colleagues discovered that the subjects express a high degree of discomfort if they were on a fully autonomous commercial plane with both pilots just overseeing the movements and controlling the airplane remotely. They also discovered that subjects also expressed a low level of trust when only one pilot is in the cockpit and another one controlling the aircraft remotely. In this study, it was also concluded that the level of trust between humans and autonomous aircrafts is potentially related to the culture of humans. For example, it was discovered that test subjects from India feel more comfortable if they were on a fully autonomous aircraft, as opposed to subjects from the United States. Mr. Winter and colleagues found out that this difference could be due to the collectivist Indian culture, as opposed to the Individualist American culture.

Vadim Butakov and his colleague, Petros Ioannou, in [6] suggest that the level of comfort and trust of users will increase if the design and dynamics of autopilot systems in cars are closer to what they are used to in regular cars. In this study, Mr. Butakov and Mr. Ioannou analyze and present a methodology that allows custom modification of autopilot modes such as Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC) and automatic lane change systems based on individual preferences. They also support their proposed methodology by collecting data from an experimental vehicle.

At the The European Organization for the Safety of Air Navigation ([16]), a study was conducted on the human trust in air traffic management systems (ATMs), and provides guidelines and strategies to improve this trust over time. This paper argues that currently, air traffic control operators use many automated and semi-automated computer tools, and it is expected that the use of automation in this context will rise in the near future. Thus, operators will have to trust highly autonomous (or fully autonomous) ATMs such as radar systems and communication tools. The procedure to improve the mentioned trust is broken down in multiple “development phases”:

- Developing ATMS using experienced air traffic controllers
- Providing high quality simulations
- Providing training for the controllers
- Transitioning period for the controllers
- Keeping the old technology in case failure

## 4 Summary

List of Studies				
Category	Study	Summary	Technology	Focus
Human - Robots	[26]	Confidence plays an important role as well as trust, and The unpredictability of the robot affects trust	Computer simulation based on a firefighting scenario	Military, Hazardous environments
	[10]	Mathematical definition for trust, where trust is a variable T. Trust acquisition is the process or mechanism that allows the calculation and update of 'T'	trust propagation model	Math-based trust propagation. Trust acquisition
	[12]	The performance of the robot has the biggest impact on trust in the context of HRI	N/A (meta-analysis)	HRI
	[21]	In order to enhance trust in HRI, a number of design choices need to be made	visually impaired person and a guide dog	Improving trust in HRI
	[18]	Different people have different levels of trust toward robot despite its constancy	X-ray screening simulation	User perceptions of trust
	[20]	Etiquette affects human trust and the reliability of autonomous robots	Flight simulator	Impact of etiquette on trust
	[31]	Created the HRI 'Trust Measuring Tool'	Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)	Trust measurement
	[29]	If the human trusts the robot, its performance increases	YSI EcoMapper autonomous underwater robot	Semi-autonomous mutual trust
Human SDC	[14]	Most consumers like SDC's. Different people have different trust issues	Survey based on a 10 minute video	Perception of user's trust in SDCs

	[8]	Most people tend to prioritize safety, accuracy, and failure rates when trusting an autonomous system	Surveys using Survey Monkey and Amazons Mechanical Turk	Trust in Automated Cars and Medical Diagnosis Systems
	[17]	The geographic positioning and education of consumers affects the premises of their trust	Internet-based survey	User willingness to buy SDCs
	[28]	Users testing; relying and improving will increase their trust in the robot	N/A (survey of existing methods)	Safety for SDC software based on 'falsificationism'
	[13]	If people know about the problems of a robot, they will probably override it to avoid them	Driving Simulator by Volvo	The uncertainty of SDCs in various scenarios
Human-Autopilot Modes	[30]	Culture affects trust	Internet based survey	Trust in autonomous and semi-autonomous auto pilot systems
	[6]	People have an easier time trusting familiar things.	Data collection from an experimental SDC	Autopilot personalization

## 5 Open Problems, Future Directions and Concluding remarks

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