



Measuring the Concept of Trust

Abstract

Many organizations are viewing an incomplete picture when they monitor aspects of their brand's reputation. Monitoring and managing to individual brand reputation metrics such as Integrity, Reliability and Responsibility without also measuring the concept of Trust may produce an inaccurate gauge of the health of your organization's relationships with its constituents. The following briefing report discusses the value of tracking Trust as a brand metric alongside other individual brand reputation dimensions to deliver a more comprehensive snapshot of a brand's reputation.

A Question of Trust

As humans, we inherently understand the implications of trust. We want to trust our friends and family, the products and services we consume and the organizations and people with whom we conduct business. Trust may seem like a warm-hearted brand attribute, but savvy business leaders know that building perceptions of trust among their stakeholders can deliver cold, hard business results.

It is a commonly accepted truth that trust is the engine that powers a brand, and creating perceptions of trust can deliver tangible results. When customers trust organizations, customers purchase their products and services, recommend them to others, are often willing to pay more for them and may even invest in them. But what is trust? Is it a singular concept that an organization can brand?

Trust requires relationships. Organizations create trust by consistently delivering on what they say they will do, being honest and ethical in their business dealings and exhibiting integrity and caring through every touch point in their corporate ecosystems. Every interaction an organization has with various constituents (customers, employees, vendors, investors, advisors, etc.) across lines of business, geographies, job functions and audiences impacts the creation of trust in a brand. Trust is not a concept that can be branded. Trust is a perception that is earned through building relationships.

An Incomplete Picture

For brand leaders, “trust” is the word of the moment. In recent years, many organizations have increased their emphasis on tracking and managing their brand reputations. Audience perceptions of “Integrity” or “Trust,” each viewed on their own as important dimensions of brand reputation, are often individually tracked as in brand reputation monitoring and management efforts. However, in most cases, brands do not track both attributes separately. According to a 2011 study conducted by Cambia, organizations which track only one of the two attributes may see only part of the picture of how much their stakeholders trust their brands.

Cambia conducted its research among 300 opinion leaders across 11 brands in five industries (ranging from XX to XX). The organization asked participants to rate the various brands on their perceptions of those firms’ Integrity (is a firm that exhibits exceptional integrity) and Trust (is a company I can trust.) Additionally, participants performed a word association for each of the two concepts, Integrity and Trust, and provided open-ended feedback to describe how the two concepts are similar and different.

The results of the research surfaced several key findings for brand leaders. The results demonstrated that:

- While Integrity and Trust are related concepts, they are NOT one and the same.
- Trust is a complex concept that includes Integrity, and also Honesty, Truthfulness, Reliability, Caring and Transparency, among other attributes.
- Integrity is a singular concept, based almost exclusively on perceptions of

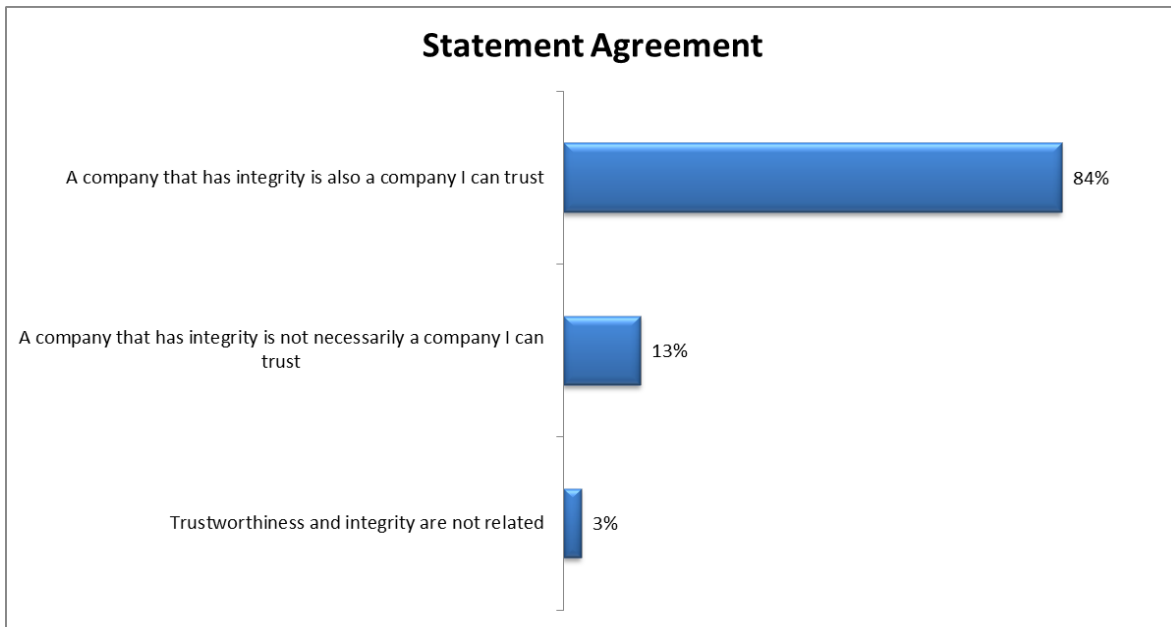
Honesty and Truthfulness.

- While Integrity can stand alone, it is a component or a key ingredient of Trust.
- Trust actually results from an organization’s delivery of not only Integrity but each of Trust’s component ingredients.

Constituents Speak

Not surprisingly, when asked directly about the relationship between Integrity and Trust, a large majority of participants indicated that Integrity and Trust are components of one another.

(See the chart below which depicts participants’ agreement with the statement: A company that has integrity is also a company that I can trust.)



Upon analysis of the free text open-ended responses to questions about the respective definitions of Integrity and Trust, the research team gained more clarity. This analysis yielded some marked differences in participants’ views of the two concepts.

The word clouds below depict the most frequently used words in those responses and display them as a random pattern with the more common words or tags appearing larger in the cloud. The word clouds illustrate these differences.

The first word cloud (Integrity, fig. #) demonstrates that participants largely associated Integrity with the concept of “Honesty”, a very singular and streamlined definition.

“INTEGRITY” WORD CLOUD



However, the Trust word cloud below (fig. #) suggests that Trust is a complex concept that has several additional ideas associated with it, including Honesty and Integrity, but also other less closely related notions such as reliability and dependability, loyalty and caring and responsibility and transparency.

“TRUST” WORD CLOUD



In summary, audiences strongly associated Integrity with Trust but did not view Trust and Integrity as equal and interchangeable concepts. While an organization cannot build and deliver Trust without demonstrating Integrity, Integrity is part of that more complex relationship constituents form with an organization.

Action Items for Leaders

Business leaders should never assume that constituents know empirically that they can trust your brand. These days, customers need to feel confident that they are making the right decision when they open their wallets and hand over money to purchase your organization's products or services. The more they trust your organization, the more likely they will be to vote for your organization with their money. While marketing messages can assist in building brand trust, corporate leaders should not rely solely upon marketing to reinforce the consistent delivery of the key components that are the drivers of Trust.

But you cannot change what you do not measure. Given the results of this research study, leaders and marketers should consider expanding the attributes they track in the measurement and management of their brand reputations. In tracking and measuring brand reputation, include Trust's component ingredients:

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Reliability
- Transparency
- Caring
- Responsibility
- Loyalty

Additionally, consider adding Trust as a metric that acts as tangible evidence of the strength of an organization or brand's relationships with its audiences.