

Trust in brands

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Trust may well be a desirable characteristic, but what exactly does it mean?

Trust is commonly understood as having confidence in or reliance on some person or quality.

Sociologists describe the degree to which one person trusts another as a *belief* in the honesty, benevolence and competence of that other person.

No wonder this relationship of trust is what many brands desire with their consumers.

Trusted by one in four

When given a choice of 24 words with which to describe the character of a brand (BRANDZ™ Study 2007), on average a quarter are classified as 'trustworthy'.

This does not necessarily imply that the other three-quarters cannot be trusted, but rather they can be described in some other way.

Highly trusted brands

The top third of brands in terms of trust tend to be endorsed more on (in rank order):

- In control
- Wise
- Caring
- Straightforward
- Friendly
- Desirable
- Assertive
- Kind
- Generous
- Innocent

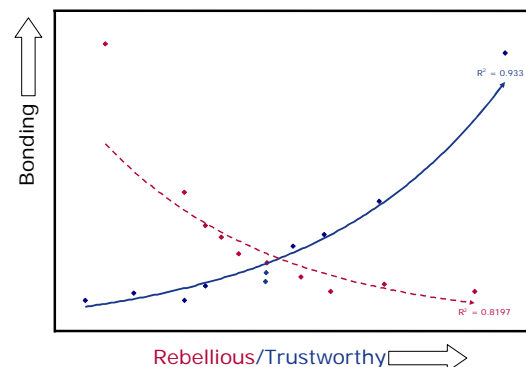
What trusted brands are not

The bottom third of brands that are not associated with being trustworthy are much more described as:

- Rebellious
- Playful
- Fun
- Adventurous
- Sexy
- Different
- Idealistic
- Creative
- Brave

Many successful brands might well be delighted to exchange an image of trust for that of the more dynamic qualities above.

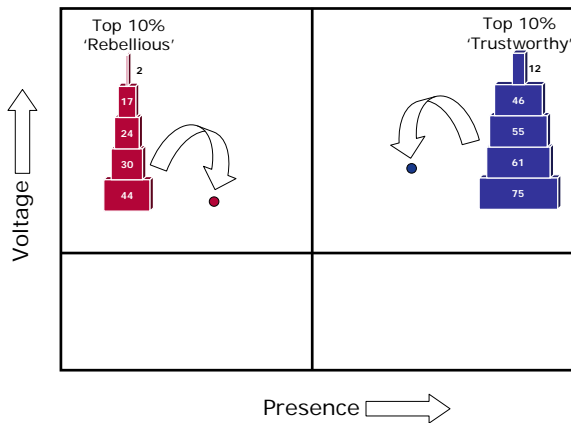
But if we look at the correlation of being thought of as 'rebellious', for example, and brand 'Bonding' we see that it is brands that have lower bonding that are more rebellious – in contrast to brands that are trusted that have high Bonding:



(3,168 brands in 2007 arranged in deciles)

So the more trusted a brand is the greater its Bonding and the more a brand is seen as being rebellious, the greater likelihood it is a smaller brand with consequent lower Bonding.

So being 'rebellious' is not a negative. It suggests a challenger brand – not so well known and therefore not as trusted – but still a strong brand:



But trustworthy manifests itself in many ways as we can see by looking across countries at brands that have a high association with trustworthiness. It is quickly apparent that 'trust' is felt in many different ways:

USA

Microsoft
Wrangler
Folgers

Strong on

In Control
Brave
Straightforward

UK

Chanel
Colgate
Co-operative

Sexy
Caring
Innocent

RUSSIA

Nokia
Adidas
Auchan

Assertive
Adventurous
Generous

INDIA

Nokia
Monginis
Toyota

Friendly
Idealistic
Wise

CHINA

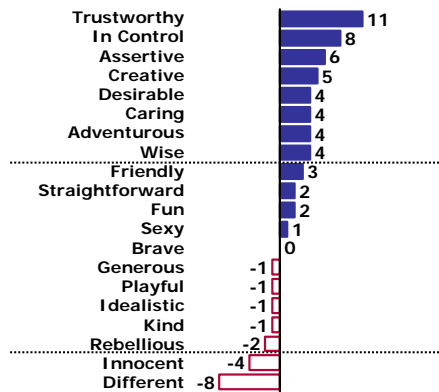
Nike
BMW
Motorola

Creative
Different
Desirable

Trustworthy brands might not be so 'rebellious', but this does not mean that they are undifferentiated or indistinctive.

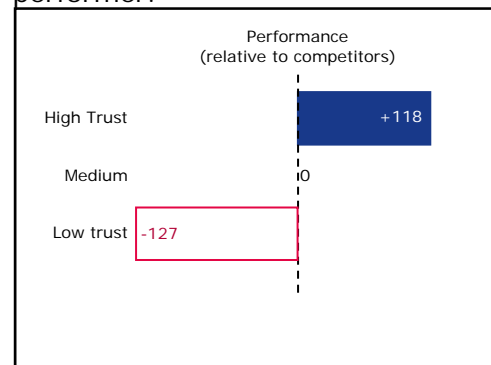
In fact the most differentiated and strongest of brands (the Olympics) share these characteristics. They are not rebellious because they are the standard that others follow:

Olympic brands – average profile



Living up to the promise

Trust is delivering an experience that actually lives up to the brand promise – because the penalty for not doing so is to be condemned as a poor performer:



Trust is not a generic characteristic. It is a positive manifestation of what the brand stands for – which is why brands need to stand for something, and ideally something that is distinctive.