

The Role of Media Selection in Predicting Trust: Evidence from the Global Trust Study

Michael Cacciatore, Alan VanderMolen, Edelman, Juan Meng, & Bryan H. Reber, University of Georgia

ABSTRACT

This study relies on data from the 2013 Edelman Trust Barometer survey to explore how media selection impacts public trust in business, government, and NGOs. We found trust levels to vary across the organizations noted above, but found overall stable relationships between media selection and trust within the specific countries analyzed.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- RQ1: What media do target countries rely on most for business news?
- RQ2: Which media use patterns correlate with trust in business?
- RQ3: Which media use patterns correlate with trust in government?
- RQ4: Which media use patterns correlate with trust in nongovernmental organizations?
- RQ5: Does the relationship between media use and trust differ between big and small businesses?
- RQ6: How does media use relate to trust in different countries of corporate origin?

RESEARCH METHOD

The 2013 Edelman Trust Barometer Annual Survey

- A representative online survey of adults in 26 countries
- Conducted between October 16, 2012, and November 29, 2012
- Final sample size: 26,000 respondents, ages 25-64
- Countries analyzed in this study: Western (Canada, Germany, U.K., and U.S.) and BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China)
- Analyzed data with series of ANCOVAs (controlling for basic demographics)

MAJOR FINDINGS

Table 1. Where do people turn first for general information about business?

Country	N	Social Media	Newspapers	TV	Radio/Etc.	Search Engines
USA	977	6.7%	3 20.0%	36.6% ¹	10.4%	26.3% ²
UK	964	5.9%	22.1%	35.6%	14.0%	22.3%
Germany	963	4.7%	24.8%	36.6%	19.7%	14.1%
Canada	967	4.5%	28.2%	34.8%	11.6%	21.0%
China	996	18.5%	6.5%	27.3%	9.6%	38.0%
India	990	9.7%	36.2%	26.3%	6.6%	21.3%
Russia	979	10.5%	5.1%	16.1%	14.1%	54.2%
Brazil	990	13.7%	21.8%	41.1%	13.5%	9.9%

Note: (1) Bolded values indicate the most popular first media choice of respondents.

- A preference for TV among respondents in Western nations
- Heavy reliance on search engines in both Russia and China likely illustrates a desire to move away from state-controlled media

higher
more
trust

Table 2. ANCOVA predicting trust in businesses to do what is right based on preferred media source.

Country	ANCOVA Sig.	Highest mean trust score	Next highest	Next highest	Next highest	Lowest mean trust score
USA	p < .01	Social media (5.84)	TV (5.77)	Search engines (5.36)	Radio/etc. (5.28)	Newspapers (5.28)
UK	p < .05	Newspapers (5.56)	TV (5.47)	Search engines (5.36)	Radio/etc. (5.13)	Social media (4.74)
Germany	n/s	Radio (5.21)	Newspapers (5.18)	Social media (5.17)	TV (5.15)	Search engines (5.01)
Canada	n/s	TV (5.70)	Newspapers (5.45)	Social media (5.45)	Search engines (5.41)	Radio (5.27)
China	p < .001	Social media (6.89)	Radio/etc. (6.29)	TV (6.19)	Newspapers (5.89)	Search engines (5.89)
India	n/s	Radio (6.71)	Newspapers (6.53)	TV (6.50)	Social media (6.25)	Search engines (6.22)
Russia	n/s	TV (5.14)	Radio (4.81)	Social media (4.79)	Newspapers (4.76)	Search engines (4.64)
Brazil	n/s	TV (6.02)	Newspapers (5.98)	Search engines (5.91)	Social media (5.89)	Radio (5.69)

Notes: (1) Values in parentheses are mean trust scores for respondents choosing that media source.

- Social media use as a primary news source strongly correlates with trust in the U.S. and China, and is negatively correlated with trust in the U.K.
- Similar patterns observed for trust in government and non-government organizations

Table 3. Mean trust scores (and standard deviations) for US- and China-headquartered companies.

Country	Mean trust in US-headquartered companies	Mean trust in China-headquartered companies
USA 4	6.41 (2.07)	3.64 (2.23)
UK	5.46 (2.08)	4.33 (2.07)
Germany	5.20 (2.07)	3.69 (2.03)
Canada	5.60 (2.05)	3.79 (2.01)
China 2	6.88 (1.71)	6.58 (2.03) 1
India 1	7.19 (1.82)	5.27 (2.41)
Russia	5.08 (2.36)	4.87 (2.22) 2
Brazil 3	6.43 (2.19)	5.37 (2.38) 2

CONCLUSIONS

- While there may not be a single media source respondents across countries prefer for business news information, there are, even after controlling for demographics, media use patterns that link to high trust across countries (e.g., social media as a predictor of organizational trust in the U.S. and China, and traditional media as a predictor of trust in the U.K.)
- There is no dominant Western-versus-BRIC dichotomy as it relates to the link between preferred media source and trust evaluations
- The dominant medium within a country is not always the medium that engenders or predicts trust (e.g., search engines most popular in China, but almost universally linked to low levels of trust)
- Search engine use linked to low levels of trust across several ANCOVAs
- There is evidence that social media users are trust opinion leaders in China and the U.S.
- Large gaps in the trustworthiness of USA- and China-headquartered companies across countries