

MAKING SENSE OF TRUST, TRUTH & AUTHENTICITY

A Selbey Labs Series.



STAY ALERT
TO
TRUTH
TWISTERS

Stay Alert Truth Twisters
By Dani Molyneux

SELBEY LABS – OVERVIEW

The world is increasingly complex, and Selbey Labs helps clients make sense of it with practical, useful and effective strategies to adapt, evolve and thrive.

We look at macro trends, key sector and market trends and in-depth audience insights to make sense of a changing world.

Using a dynamic blend of data, behaviour, culture and brand insights, Selbey Labs delivers a deep identification and understanding of emerging opportunities and threats, giving clients more time to prepare and/or react.

To do this, Selbey Labs takes a holistic approach, beginning with machine and human learning to unearth deeper truths about audiences, culture, markets and brands before moving to hypotheses that can be tested and verified in our lab environment. This allows us to generate valuable and useful ideas.

Ultimately, our goal is to bring clarity to inform future strategies, campaigns, products and services. ensuring that our clients remain resilient and successful.

These brief 'discussion guides' are intended as an introduction to our thinking and approach. We welcome feedback and would love to discuss them with you!

For more information, contact us at

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www.selbeylabs.io

Bestselling Business Books



These series of reports are intended as an introduction to our thinking and approach. They've been written by Sean Pillot de Chenecey, whose first book *'The Post-Truth Business'* focused on authenticity, empathy and ethics. It reached No.1 in the business best-seller charts. His second book *'Influencers & Revolutionaries'* illuminates leading-edge/multi-sector innovation, and was shortlisted for the 2021 'Business Book of the Year' Awards. He discusses these subjects in his podcast *'The New Abnormal'* (which has over 100,000 downloads) alongside a range of other cultural/social/business issues.

Please note that we welcome feedback to these reports, which are intended to illuminate our specialist approach to innovation. Our team would naturally be keen to discuss them with you and outline how our ideation sessions, workshops and mixture of cutting-edge qualitative and quantitative tools could be of assistance regarding your requirements.

SELBEY LABS 'MAKING SENSE OF...' SERIES:

Innovation and Catalytic Thinkers

→ **TRUST, TRUTH & AUTHENTICITY**

Future Cities

Wellness Economy

Mobility

Hospitality

Future of Work

Future of Retail

Future of Entertainment

Future of Food & Drink

Fintech & Insurtech

TRUST

According to The Economist “trust is the basis of all brand values and they therefore have an immense incentive to retain it”. Yet businesses are faced with a serious challenge when so much of modern life is defined by mistrust.

On a societal level, the importance of trust is almost impossible to overstate, being an intrinsic foundation of our lives. It’s a key element of every relationship we have, every agreement we make and every endeavour we take.

Indeed, societies with low levels of trust function much more erratically than ones where the levels are high, hence the effects in communist or authoritarian states (where community-cohesion and trust are deliberately weakened) versus the situation in liberal democracies where they tend to be far stronger. The results clearly link to individual happiness, social harmony and economic performance.

“Our propensity to trust has evolved to make our lives predictable and society functional” explains Alice Sherwood in her book ‘Reclaiming reality in a counterfeit culture’. She continues “evolution favours reciprocity and likeability, whilst progress is made easier via consistency and consensus”. This mirrors a well-known industry quote from Jack Ma, Alibaba’s co-founder “once you have trust, everything is easy – it’s when you don’t have trust where things get difficult”.

Meanwhile, and according to a recent study conducted by Reddit “we’re in the midst of an evolution of trust that has gone from top-down to lateral”. A concept that sociologists define as having been institutionally based (these gatekeepers being centralised, opaque and often biased) then moved into a realm of influencer-based trust, noted for being familiar, local and relatable. (This stage was crucial, for as shown by

research from Gallup, trust in institutions and their leaders have long been in decline).

But those stages are now witnessing a new evolution, that of ‘distributed’ trust (or ‘many to many’) which is collective and creates a communal answer. Hence the way in which so many of us default to consumer-recommendations (or warnings) as opposed to relying on brand-claims. The use of real-time (or contextual ‘just-in-time’) product reviews are a prime example, hence the integrity of these being so crucial.

“DISTRUST IS NOW SOCIETY’S DEFAULT EMOTION.”

Edelman Trust barometer



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Another major new survey into the subject was carried out by Salesforce. Their findings indicate that while trust has always been an essential part of any business transaction, it's becoming more important than ever in an era when the norms of commerce, work and everyday life have been turned upside down. The survey, of over 13,000 consumers in nearly thirty countries, found that nearly 90% of consumers believe trust is more important in a time of change, and over 70% said they switched brands in the last year. Fast Company's verdict on the report was unequivocal "brands take note: your customers aren't afraid to dump you if they lose trust".

What those people are referencing in their decision-making process is what Selbey Labs refers to as '**Reputation Capital**'. This is when the difference between brands links to perceptions of trustworthiness, competence and reliability; as opposed to the exaggerated claims made by so many brands that prove false when scrutinised.

The issue has a different impact across industries and sectors of course. Indeed, it's no surprise that areas including health, financial services, food & beverage, and technology require the highest levels of trust. Hence, according to research c/o Morning Consult, the most trusted brands globally include Band-Aid, Alipay, Google, PayPal, and Samsung. Elsewhere, the 2022 Newsweek BrandSpark International report highlighted manufacturers such as Proctor & Gamble, Unilever,

and Johnson & Johnson in their study into the most trusted product and service brands, based on metrics such as pricing, quality and transparency.

Their findings dovetail with the viewpoints outlined in a recent Kantar report which points out that trust both delivers reassurance and simplifies brand choice. It stated that "brands perceived to be among the world's most trusted and responsible shared three crucial factors that proved particularly important for building trust and confidence. These are 'honesty & openness, respect & inclusion, identifying with & caring for customers'. Brands developing these associations more strongly tend to outperform their competitors in defending and growing their brand value".

As for trust in people, on a professional level our trust in nurses, pharmacists and doctors remains sky-high, according to the findings from the Ipsos Veracity Index. At the other end of scale, despite their ever-dubious reputations, politicians and estate agents continue to thank those in advertising for ensuring they haven't quite taken the shameful last place, regarding the types of people whom we generally expect to tell the truth.

"A BRAND IS SIMPLY TRUST."

Steve Jobs





TRUTH

And the subject of truth is, of course, closely entwined with trust. But with truth being so consistently under attack, it's vital for us to understand why, and indeed to look for the causes.

In her book 'The Death of Truth' Michiko Kakutani, a renowned cultural analyst (and former books editor of the New York Times) describes how "the trends for truth becoming an endangered species in the West originated on both the right and the left. They combined to elevate subjectivity over factuality, science and common values. The wisdom of the crowd has usurped research and expertise, and we're left clinging to the beliefs that best confirm our biases".


The point about confirmation bias is one where social media has turbocharged so-called filter bubbles and echo chambers, where people seek out, favour and promote information that matches their personal beliefs. When done 'without reflection' this can lead to misinformation being shared, but when done as a deliberate (and sometimes sinister) act, it becomes disinformation.

"WITHOUT TRUST A BRAND IS JUST A PRODUCT AND IT'S ADVERTISING IS JUST NOISE."

The Advertising Association

From a political standpoint, the problem is compounded on a global basis regarding a media landscape where the truth is deliberately manipulated, trust has been catastrophically devalued and organised misinformation is a growth business.

As the saying goes 'a statement is true if reality confirms it'. Hence the famous outcry over the claimed size of the crowd at Donald Trump's inauguration and his 'alternative facts' explanation. Seen through the eyes of Orwell's 1984, that stance connects us immediately to the Ingsoc regime in the superstate of Oceania, regarding Trump's consistent use of lies and falsehood in his crusade against liberal democracy. In her book 'Reputation' Alice Sherwood referenced how the Washington Post kept a running tally of the 45th President's lies, calculating he told 30,573 untruths over the course of his presidency i.e. over twenty a day.



The issue was recently illuminated in the court case against Alex Jones (of the infamous Infowars) when the judge admonished him, saying **“beliefs do not make something true”**. As reported by The Times “he sits near the apex of the fake news ecosystem. But online disinformation is less about liars than it is about believers, who don’t want the truth. They want something to cling to in an age where you can, with a minimum of effort, choose to believe almost anything. But the judge’s wonderful words represent the hard stop of a society which has finally had enough”.

The worrying lack of trust in news media that this issue reflects was underscored by, for example, recent research conducted in nearly 50 countries by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, at the University of Oxford. The results indicated that trust in news has fallen in almost half of the countries surveyed and had risen in only seven. Facebook remains the most-used social network for news, while TikTok is the fastest growing, and they’re also increasingly accessing news in video or audio on networks like Instagram, YouTube or Spotify. As for access, the smartphone has become the dominant way in which most people first connect with news in the morning.

The report notes how the challenges faced by this sector are compounded by the fraying connection that journalism and news media have with much of the public in many countries. More people are disconnected, interest in news is down, selective news avoidance is up, and trust is far from a given.

It’s important to highlight the conclusion of that report, which highlights that “the world feels increasingly uncertain, with war in Europe and a major refugee crisis adding to the impact of the pandemic, not to mention the looming threat of climate change. **The need for reliable information, careful context, and considered debate has rarely been greater, but so too has the desire for stories that inspire and give hope of a better tomorrow”**.

AUTHENTICITY

Meanwhile, organisations often request assistance on the actions to be taken when brand reputation (a story based on experience and/or perception) is directly linked to notions of what many consider to be the Holy Grail of branding: authenticity.

An indication of what this means today is given by Sandra Sucher & Shalene Gupta in their book 'The Power of Trust' where they explain that "brand trust is built from the inside out. It emerges from a company being the 'real deal' creating products and services that work, having good intentions, treating people fairly, and taking responsibility for all the impacts an organisation creates, whether intended or not".

Their stance on authenticity, that it comes 'from within' neatly links to philosophical perspectives that can be traced back to the teachings of Aristotle. He proposed that an authentic act was based on being able to understand the context of a situation, decide on the correct course of behaviour and then carry out that act. Alternatively, he thought we might decline to act 'authentically' due to basing our final decision not

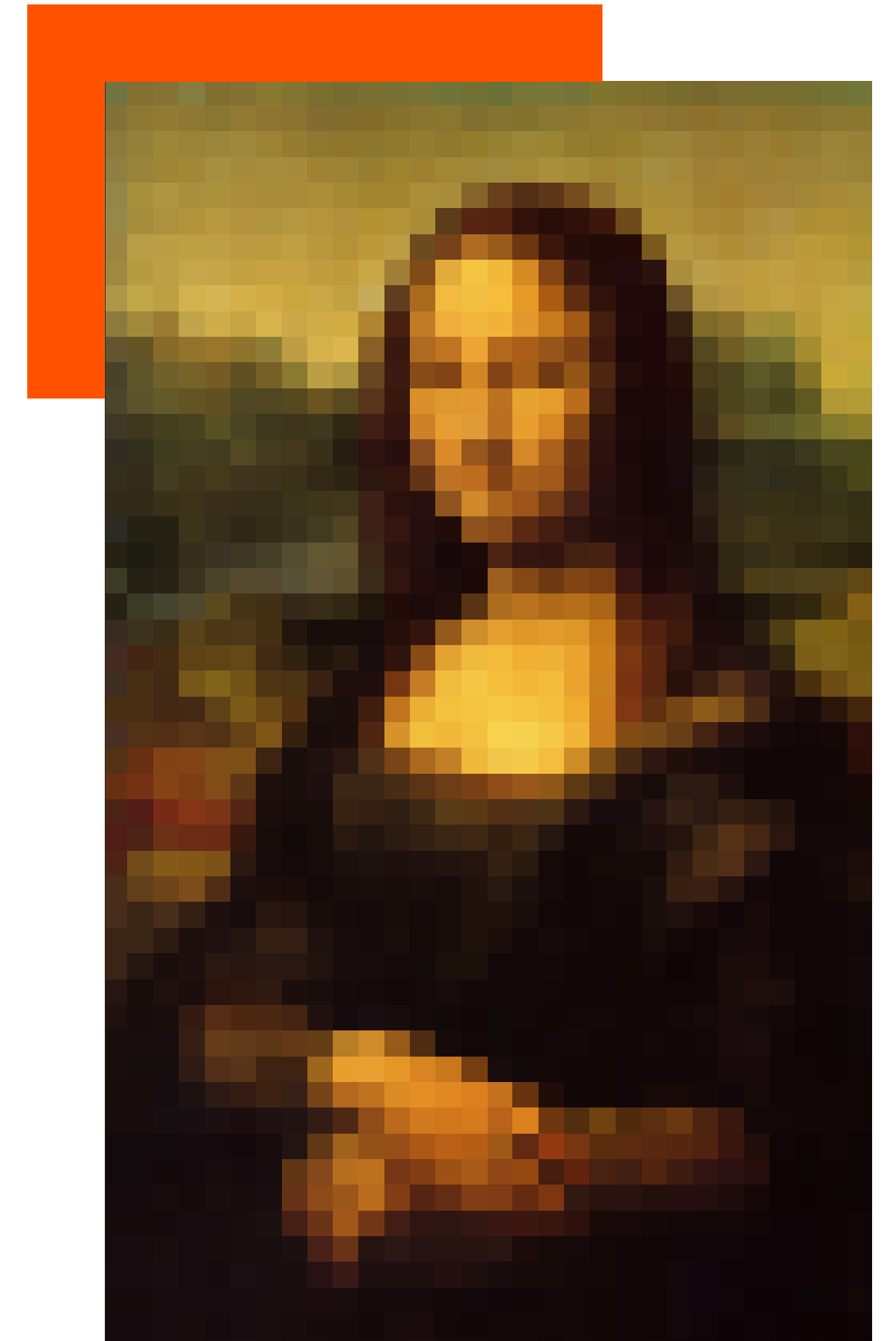
on feeling it's the right thing to do, but because we presume it might impress other people. In that instance, he asked us to question the reasoning behind our actions. Hence, he's often quoted in this regard for his view that "the virtuous citizen does virtuous things for virtuous reasons" and not for an ulterior motive.

This interpretation essentially says that it's all about how you (or perhaps a brand) relate to the actions performed. Are you really 'the origin of your actions' or is your real aim motivated by gaining praise i.e. an act intended to be seen through the eyes of others? A cynical tactic, frequently used, is to reflect in the glory of others via simply jumping on the nearest passing bandwagon. Other typical examples, in business terms, include green-washing and implementing 'pseudo' brand purpose. Meanwhile, many brands seek added authenticity by leveraging culture. **However, we live in a world where there is more and more branding of culture, but less and less genuine cultural connection.** Brand managers may think that most cultural marketing produces stronger connections between people and brands, but only too often, the opposite occurs.

Brands get it right when they utilise authentic cultural links and relevant icons, which enables them to talk (increasingly literally) in the voice of the consumer. Getting as close as possible to the core of the cultural issue in question enables authentic storytelling, which raises 'brand relevance' and increases the possibility of impact, connection and recall. But to do so, they must act in a respectful manner that entails the brand adding to culture, rather than taking from it.

"SUCCESSFUL BRANDS MUST BE ETHICALLY ROBUST AND ENVIRONMENTALLY PURE."

The Economist



COMMUNITY

Closely linked to this ethos, aiming to play an active community role via linking with customers, partners and suppliers has become a bedrock of modern branding. Rather than being a transient 'on-trend' piece of additional brand engagement, an increasing number of companies are realising it's a core element of brand building that's here to stay. This clearly links to a situation where more and more people want to feel morally good about the things they consume. For companies who wish to future-proof their businesses, it's therefore key that they think deeply about their social mission and the implications of the resulting activities from the perspective of the 'common good'.

Genuine 'social purpose' is of key importance for an emerging cohort of young people, who are attracted by mission-based brands; valued for their social commitment and enlightened business behaviour. This all goes towards building their 'social capital' in addition to the standard issues by which companies are valued, with 'value' of course being interpreted by the majority of consumers as 'value for money'.

With consumers being ever more demanding yet also relaxed about brand-switching when an enticing offer beckons (particularly in a recessionary environment) marketers must be ever aware that brand-loyalty is often tenuous.

But acting with integrity and a community mindset (alongside an innovative approach to product development) goes a long way to creating as strong a consumer-brand relationship as can be realistically achieved.

To clarify this point, and as highlighted in the Edelman 'Trust Barometer' (the leading global survey into trust, which takes in over 36,000 respondents in 28 countries) "across every single issue, by a huge margin, people want more business engagement, not less. The role and expectation for business have never been clearer, and business must recognise that its societal role is here to stay".



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TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

A fundamental element of this brand reality is the leveraging of transparency to gain and retain consumer trust. And it's here that technology is proving to be the 'means to an answer' that consumers and brands desire, for transparent information goes a long way in enabling consumers to make informed decisions.

In turn, these 'informed consumers' are in far more control of the brand-consumer relationship; this being a huge step forward for consumer power, ethical and sustainable production, and thus social good.

The opposite stance is shown (in political terms) when authoritarian states demand 'transparent citizens' as opposed to liberal democracies where citizens demand 'transparent Government'.

This issue obviously links to the enormous and ongoing debates over the lack of data privacy and endless intrusions into civil liberties in many countries. Hence for instance, outcries over tracking technology and other forms of surveillance capitalism.

In purely business terms, this continues to pose a problem for brands when consumers actively reject giving access to their data but also desire levels of personalisation that are provided by brands having access to...their data.

Increasing interest in, and demands for, accountability are also vital to note, regarding corporations acting in a trustworthy manner and acknowledging both their legal and moral obligations regarding the working practices and outputs of their activity.

While we recognise the changing situation around 'accountable capitalism' it's fascinating to understand how modern management theory has shifted away from the one apparently set in stone by the economist Milton Friedman, for whom the responsibility of business was purely to increase its profits. This means that a deeply meaningful realignment of the 'Overton Window' has taken place in corporate terms.





SUMMARY

Brands that act with honesty, integrity and reliability demonstrate the way forward in our Post-Truth world.

Yet the reality for the marketing industry is that not only is there a trust disconnect amongst many consumers & brands, but also between agencies & brand owners, and media owners & advertisers.

Hence, while society needs to reconnect liberty to equality and accountability; business needs to highlight its connection to trust, truth and authenticity.

The team at Selbey Labs firmly believe that more and more consumers are attracted to brands in which they can genuinely trust and that reflect some of their relevant personal values. When consumers find a brand that matches their beliefs and expectations, or indeed fails to match them, then they increasingly tell others about it, with word of mouth (as ever) being the most trusted form of endorsement, or indeed warning.

TRUST + COMPETENCE + RELIABILITY = REPUTATION CAPITAL

It all comes down to a straightforward issue: many of us are fortunate enough to live in a time of extraordinary choices. And when choice is available, if a brand isn't trustworthy, it's often easy to reject it in favour of one that is.

Hence, in a distrusting world, the need for brands and organisations to focus on their 'reputation capital' where being trustworthy, reliable and competent is an equation for ongoing success.

SELBEY ANDERSON OVERVIEW

The UK's fastest growing integrated marketing group, Selbey Anderson is an integrated marketing and communications network that finds and unlocks hidden value for people, agencies and brands.

selbeyanderson.com



SELBEY ANDERSON GROUP

DIGITAL RADISH

Breaks new ground in brand and ABM for high-growth technology businesses.

 digitalradish.co.uk

GREENTARGET PR

Helps the world's leading financial services firms tell their stories with purpose and credibility.

 greentarget.co.uk

ORCKID

Creative Digital Development Agency builds tailor-made digital products, platforms and websites.

 orckid.com

SHARPER B2B MARKETING

Focused on giving B2B tech brands and their marketers fresh ideas and firepower.

 sharperb2b.com

BURN

Creates rewarding relationships – attracting quality customers, keeping them and your own employees engaged.

 burnmarketing.com

IGNIFI

Sparks and sustains successful brands in healthcare, wellbeing and active lifestyle.

 ignifi.co.uk

LAW CREATIVE

Offers clients advertising, content, film, strategy and digital all under one roof.

 lawcreative.co.uk

UNITY

Full-service creative consultancy helping brands grow with purpose.

 hellounity.com

AML

Award winning creative advertising agency in London.

 aml-group.com