

MEDIACOM

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4% on trust KPIs

RESEARCH

Magazine and Social Media Branding in a Post-Truth World

MANCHESTER

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The rise of fake news has led to the current environment being described as a 'post-truth' world. MediaCom recently teamed up with Magnetic to carry out a study around trust in the media. Ffion Turner from our Business Intelligence team tells us about this research.

Brexit, Trump, fake news, post-truth world: four sayings that meant little or nothing to most people only a few years ago. How times have changed. Social media gives everyone who wants one a platform, but this does not necessarily mean it will be used for the good. An individual user with no track record or reputation can in some cases reach as many readers as the BBC or any other national outlet.

This was the case in the recent US Presidential Election, with the most popular fake news stories being more widely shared than mainstream media articles. This may seem obvious, as fake news can often be more emotionally engaging, enticing people into sharing – so what is the issue? Well, a survey conducted by Ipsos MORI reveals that during the 2016 US elections, 75% of American adults who were familiar with a fake news headline viewed the story as accurate. The rise of fake news has led to the current environment being described as a ‘post-truth’ world.

The term ‘post-truth’ originates in its current meaning from the late Serbian-American playwright Steve Tesich, who used it to reflect on the Iran-Contra scandal and the Persian Gulf War. The word has become at the forefront of communication and marketing, with it being named Oxford Dictionaries’ Word of the Year 2016. The impact of this mindset in society is not one that businesses, particularly marketing departments, should ignore, political campaigns that polarise populations are not completed in isolation. The consequences of the rise of the post-truth world that has risen from Brexit and the US Election means that everything needs to adapt.

It is understandable that many in the world of marketing will look at what is happening in the world of politics with a pinch of salt, assuming it will have no effect. Yet, Edelman’s 2018 Trust Barometer found that in the UK, trust fell in businesses to 43 per cent, while government, media and NGOs saw no change at all. Interestingly, even with politics and Brexit dominating the news, it was trust in businesses that was eroded the most.

It’s likely that high-profile news stories such as United Airlines removing a passenger from a plane, or the pulled Pepsi advert that related to the Black Lives Matter campaign, as well as the Volkswagen emissions scandal all contributed towards this decreasing trust in brands. For marketing agencies and departments, advert placement matters.

In the context of all of this, the recent research, “A matter of Trust”, that we did on behalf of Magnetic has some key out takes for marketing teams. When we were approached by Magnetic with this brief, we were conscious of three important considerations

1- Trust not easily defined by a word let alone a single metric. A study designed to measure it would need to incorporate a number of angles

2- It's a relative concept, better understood specifically in relation to a category rather than generically, therefore the context in which trust is evaluated is critical

3- It's important to be realistic, brand trust is rooted in direct experience, media can only do so much, its' contribution strictly speaking is to move perceptions of trust/ trustworthiness

'A matter of trust was a multi-layered research methodology encompassing group workshop with planners and both explicit and implicit consumer trust metrics. It was important for us from the start to try and unpick what 'trust' means outside of our media.

The research found that explicit trust levels for magazine brands is over twice as high (70%) compared with social media (30%), therefore businesses need to be aware about where their marketing material is appearing. For me, the T-score really helps us understand those nuances of trust. There are six key elements that make up trust; relevancy and meaning, reliability and ethics, expertise and objectivity, transparency, viewpoint diversity, and reputation and fame. The first three factors make up the bulk of the reasons to determine trust (78%), and this is where magazines perform particularly well. Although social media achieves higher levels of viewpoint diversity, reputation and fame than magazine brands, these factors play a less significant role for determining trust. It's not to say that these aren't important factors for brands to consider, but more so for awareness based campaigns. But, with the rise of the digital native generation, some may assume the trust in the modern platform would become more important, however, they would be mistaken.

Among the digital native generation (adults under 35), trust in magazine brands was at 62%, almost twice as much as social media (30%). The reason for this is the same as with the overall sample, magazine brands achieve greater success in the three factors mentioned above that matter most to determining trust. So, having marketing material placed on a platform with large reputation and fame, does not necessarily mean it will be trusted more than content placed on a smaller outlet. When thinking about trust related metrics, then we need to ensure that we are relevant to the consumer.

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