



# Brand integrity

The new frontier  
for marketing

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# 01

## Introduction



# How much do consumers care about a brand's honesty?

It's a big question because concerns about topics like diversity and the environment have deepened over the pandemic period and consumers have been active participants.

Brands have reflected this growing concern about the big issues of the day by adopting ethical stances. But do the actions of these brands match their words?

Brands have again and again been caught with statements on subjects like diversity or the environment that are contradicted by their behavior.

There seem to be risks to those brands that are dishonest and rewards for those who walk the talk. We wanted to explore whether honesty is an essential component of a brand.

Our research suggests that it is. But more than that, for a significant group of consumers, a brand's honesty trumps the fundamental attributes of the product or service, like its quality.

This is a revelation.

In September 2021, we surveyed a demographically representative sample of almost 15,000 people in the UK, US, Australia, Sweden, France, Germany, and Italy who bought electronic and tech products, fashion, home and garden items, or financial products over the past year.

We explored how they feel about brands adopting an ethical stance or purpose and how they feel about honesty in marketing. The survey results are valuable to any business interested in behaving more ethically. The results give brands a roadmap using honesty to appeal to the growing number of consumers who want political, environmental, or sociological issues taken seriously.



# Brand purpose

Brands with purpose are focused on ethical, environmental, political, or other stances which go beyond traditional concerns about profit. The purpose may or may not relate directly to the brand — it could be a strong connection or support for a charity — but it should be in line with the values and aims of the business, and thus, its customers.

Alternatively, purpose could also be an approach which is more intrinsic to the brand itself, such as fair-trade products.



02

# Purpose: the fifth P



## A brand's stance is important to 50% more consumers than those who say it's unimportant

How many people genuinely take account of a brand's purpose?

Focusing on our core audience — those who consider a brand's social, political, and environmental stance to be important — we found that this represented almost half (47%) of total consumers and more than half in the US (51.8%) and Italy (53.4%). For comparison, only three in ten found purpose to be unimportant.

Put another way, there are 50% more consumers who consider purpose to be 'important' compared to those who believe it to be 'unimportant' (47% vs 31%).

That half of consumers find purpose important is significant. Many have asserted in the past that purpose should be the fifth P to sit alongside Product (or service), Price, Place and Promotion. This research proves it.

Extremely unimportant

7.2%

Very unimportant

9.7%

Somewhat unimportant

13.9%

Neither important or unimportant

21.5%

Somewhat important

27.1%

Very important

13.5%

Extremely important

6.8%

**Net important: 47%, unimportant: 31%**

*How important to you is a brand's stance on social, political and environmental issues when buying products or services?  
Base: Total Respondents (14928)*

## Honesty is overwhelmingly important.

When we then ask this group what they feel about brand honesty, that a brand's actions match its words, more than nine in ten (93%) say honesty is important.

This is a staggering statistic. It shows brands cannot afford to exaggerate, greenwash, or lie. They need to walk the talk of brand purpose.

Extremely  
Unimportant

0.4%

Very  
unimportant

0.7%

Somewhat unimportant

1.4%

Neither important or  
unimportant

3.8%

Somewhat important

25.0%

Very important

40.2%

Extremely important

28.3%

**Net important: 93.6%, net unimportant 2.5%**

*How important to you is a brand's honesty and transparency when buying products or services?*

*Base: Total Respondents (6999)*



Slowly but surely, as businesses adopt purpose in their overall strategy, it must feed through to wider communications, including marketing.

Of this cohort, 40% say honesty and transparency are 'very important,' with another 28% saying 'extremely important.' An honest brand would be one that not only matches its rhetoric with action but is open and honest about doing so. An expectation of brand honesty and transparency is universal, with relatively little variation on that 93%, with Sweden recording the lowest on 91% and Italy the highest on 97%.

Interest in ethical behavior and honesty is not restricted to consumers. There are wider economic trends at play that require brands to be honest about their social, political, or environmental impact.

Business also drives this move towards honesty about purpose, with the world's biggest investor, BlackRock, pledging to narrow its focus and only invest in companies that are environmentally and socially conscious.

This means that slowly but surely, as businesses adopt purpose in their overall strategy, it must feed through to wider communications, including marketing.

CMOs must understand that purpose is pervasive and important. It's also another lens through which consumers view brands.

But this clear direction comes with a warning.

For those who cannot match their credentials to their claims, consumers are unforgiving. Governments are catching up, with new guidelines for making ethical claims recently drawn-up in the UK.

# 03

## Honesty: a powerful motivator



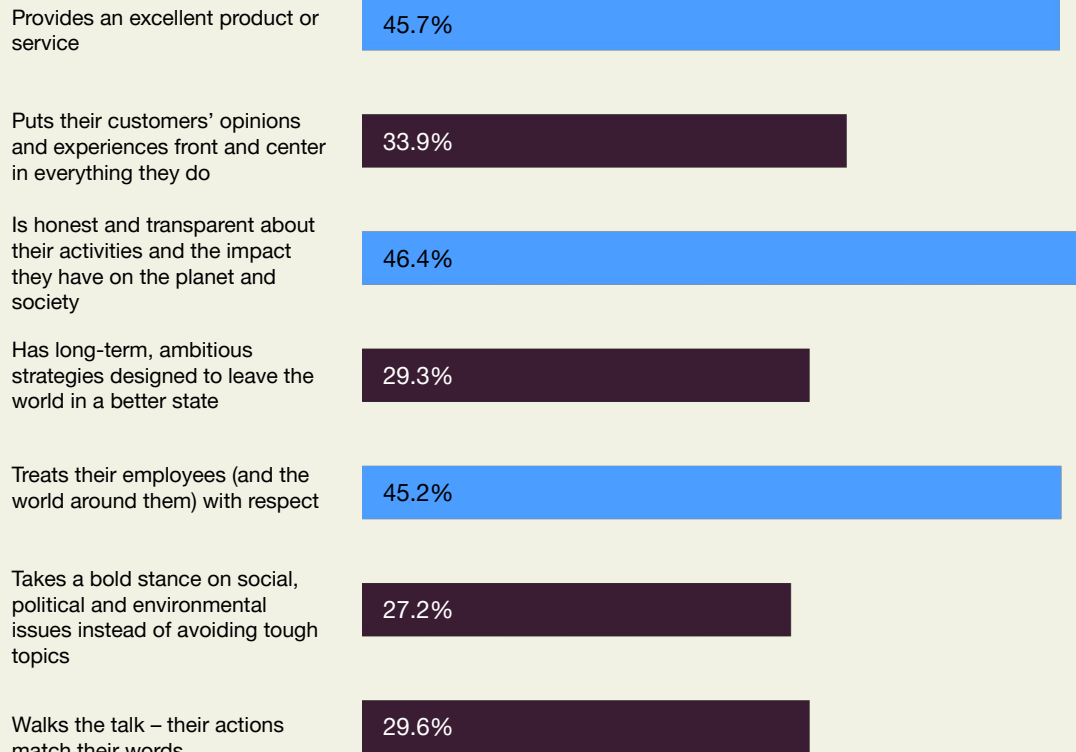
# The biggest reason to buy is transparency about impact on society and the planet

Usually, brands find that quality and price are some of the most important attributes of their product or service.

According to our research — not any longer.

This result cannot be overstated. That a brand's honesty about its environmental or societal impact trumps its quality is an astonishing result. Honesty of brand purpose is a powerfully motivating factor for this group.

In Sweden and Germany, the treatment of employees is the most important single factor, with honesty and transparency second, pushing the product or service into third place.



*From the following statements about the ways in which companies operate, please pick three which would make you likely to BUY from a company or brand.  
Base: Total Respondents (6999)*

## When recommending a product or service, quality is the most important factor

When this group moves to recommend something to another person, the product or service pushes to the front, but treatment of employees and honesty and transparency remain the next two most important factors.

Provides an excellent product or service

49.6%

Puts their customers' opinions and experiences front and center in everything they do

34.7%

Is honest and transparent about their activities and the impact they have on the planet and society

42.5%

Has long-term, ambitious strategies designed to leave the world in a better state

29.1%

Treats their employees (and the world around them) with respect

41.1%

Takes a bold stance on social, political and environmental issues instead of avoiding tough topics

27.0%

Walks the talk – their actions match their words

29.7%

*From the following statements about the ways in which companies operate, please pick three which would make you likely to RECOMMEND a company or brand to family or friends. Base: Total Respondents (6999)*

## Businesses perceived as dishonest or harmful will lose customers

If we look at products and services the other way around and ask this group to consider what would make them less likely to buy a product or service:

- The top response, for 51.9%, is adopting harmful practices towards employees and suppliers
- Second, for 47.1%, is boastful or dishonest marketing
- Third is to ignore feedback, for 44.2%
- Fourth is hiding or being contradictory about impact on the planet for 40%

Two of the top four concerns relate to honesty, either through omission or outright dishonesty. The top pick relates to brand purpose and behavior.

Ignores its customers' experiences and feedback

44.2%

Appears to hide, or is contradictory about its impact on society and the planet

40.0%

Has a short-term approach to its impact on society and the planet

25.2%

Adopts unfair or harmful practices when it comes to their employees and suppliers

51.9%

Doesn't speak-up on social or political issues and shies away from tough topics

19.7%

Appears to be dishonest or boastful in their marketing (e.g. 'green-washing')

47.1%

Supports social, political and environmental issues that don't align with my own views

25.2%

*Please pick three from the following statements that would make you LESS LIKELY to buy from a business or brand.  
Base: Total Respondents (6999)*



# 04

Information:  
the most  
trusted sources



## Consumers look for information in easy-to-access ways

When looking for information about products or services, this group of conscientious consumers opts for those that are the easiest to access — digital channels, with the brand's website the overwhelming favorite, followed by social channels and digital advertising.

Fourth are traditional media channels like TV or newspaper advertising, which remain significant sources.

Given that two of the top three channels are passive — social media and digital advertising — this would seem to be a sensible place for brands to lay out their purpose.

Advertising in newspapers, outdoors or on TV

29%

Annual report

15%

Brochures

17%

Digital advertising (including social media, websites, etc.)

40%

Social channels (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)

48%

Website

62%

None

8%

Other

1%

*When considering a purchase, which of the following communication channels used by brands to promote their products and services do you check when evaluating the company's ethics? Base: Total Respondents (4999) UK, US, AU, SE, FR (DE, IT OMITTED)*

## Consumers value the opinions of others

When looking at independent sources of news, three sources dominate, all relying on the opinions of others:

Personal recommendations from friends and family, social media, and user-generated sites such as Trustpilot, each on 44%.

Expert review sites and mainstream media sources remain significant, but pale compared to the opinions of others, whether friends or online reviewers. Again, social media remains an important channel, but this could be a double-edged sword, as bad news travels quickly on this channel — another warning for dishonest brands.

Amazon

29%

Expert Review Sites  
(such as TechRadar, Expert  
Reviews, etc.)

32%

Friends and family

44%

Mainstream media  
(TV, radio, newspapers,  
magazines)

30%

Social media

44%

User-generated review sites  
(such as Trustpilot,  
TripAdvisor, Google  
Reviews, etc.)

44%

*When considering buying a product or service, which of these independent sources do you check to evaluate a brand's ethics? (TOTAL) Base: Total Respondents (4000)*

# 05

## Conclusion



## Three stats jump out of this research:

- 1 A brand's purpose is important for 47% of all consumers.
- 2 Of this 47%, 93% of them say brand honesty is important to them.
- 3 Honesty and transparency about a brand's impact on society or the environment trumps traditional considerations for a product or service.



Purpose is as important a part of a brand as quality, challenging the traditional considerations marketers make when building communication strategies.

Living in a digital world, consumers gravitate towards digital channels for their information. Because ease of access is so significant to this group, it offers an opportunity to those brands who want to talk about purpose in their marketing, but only if they can do so honestly.

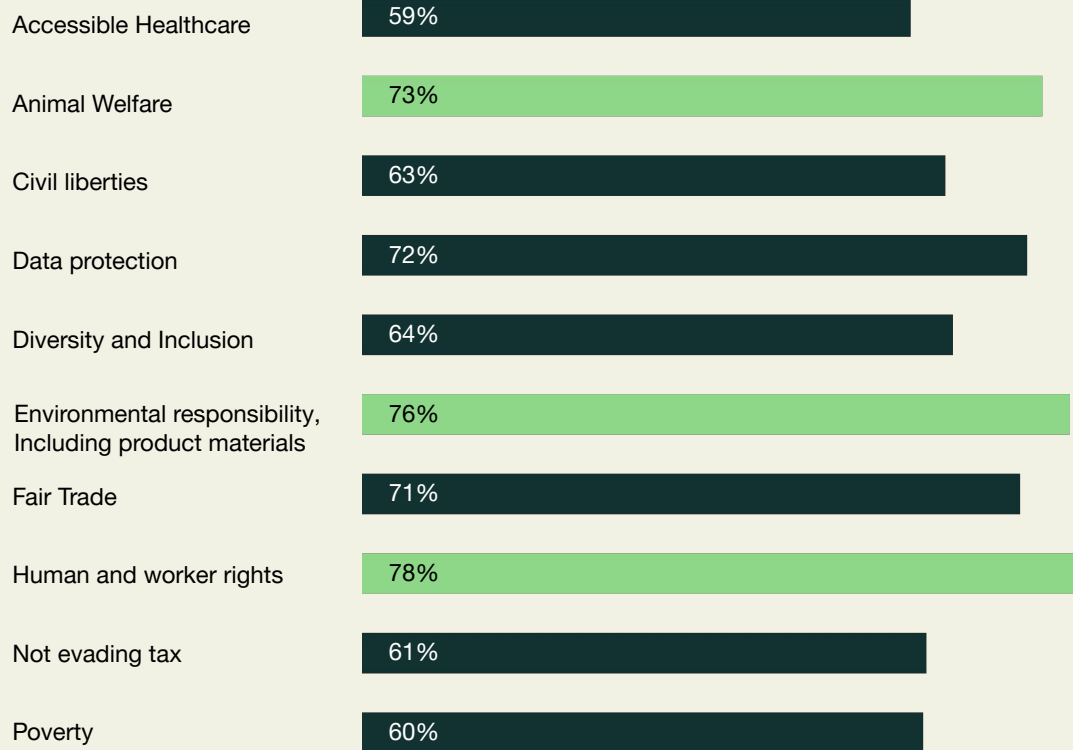
This ease of access works both ways. Consumers also have an appetite to contribute and to hold companies to account and comment on their performance, good or bad.



## Consumers have a significant appetite to rate brands on their ethical performance

Consumers want to comment, particularly on animal welfare, environmental responsibility, and human and worker rights. But the overall appetite is high, with an average of 67% saying they want to comment, rising to 78% in Italy.

Those that wear the clothes of purpose, without adopting the purpose itself, run real risks in the court of public opinion. And because of the influence of personal recommendations, or even public comment, word can spread quickly if that purpose is illusory, not genuine, or poorly thought through. Consumers will punish careless brands.



*Of the products you buy, would you like the ability to rate the brand's attitudes and actions on each of the following.  
Base: Total Respondents (6999)*

Consumers have a clear appetite for purpose.

Brands have an opportunity to satisfy that appetite by adopting purpose in their marketing.



06

# Research methodology



Over September 2021 we surveyed a demographically representative sample of 14,928 people in the UK, US, Australia, Sweden, France, Germany and Italy.

Respondents had bought electronic and tech products, fashion, home and garden items, and/or financial products over the past year.

Responses were collected and collated using the Attest consumer research platform.





# About Trustpilot

Trustpilot was founded in 2007 with a vision to create an independent currency of trust.

A digital platform that brings businesses and consumers together to foster trust and inspire collaboration. We are free to use, open to everybody, and built on transparency.

Trustpilot hosts reviews to help consumers shop with confidence and deliver rich insights to help businesses improve the experience they offer. The more consumers use our platform and share their own opinions, the richer the insights we offer businesses, and the more opportunities they have to earn the trust of consumers, from all around the world.

Over 144 million consumer reviews of businesses and products of over 626,000 domains have been posted on Trustpilot, and those numbers are growing by more than one review per second.

Trustpilot has over 750 employees and is headquartered in Copenhagen, with operations in London, Edinburgh, New York, Denver, Melbourne, Berlin, Vilnius, Milan, and Amsterdam.

[Trustpilot.com](https://www.trustpilot.com)



## About Grist

Grist is a thought leadership agency.

We work with some of the world's leading B2B brands (including PwC, DLA Piper, Mercer, Virgin Money, Cisco and Google), to fuel our clients' sales pipeline by creating research-driven thought leadership programmes that add to the conversation rather than to the noise.

We believe in the power of thought leadership. When it's done well, thought leadership is original, authoritative and insightful. It differentiates your brand and helps your clients, leading to mutually beneficial commercial opportunities.

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