What AI Reveals About Trust in the World’s Largest Companies

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Introduction

Trust has long been a vital lubricant—and in some cases, the catalyst—of successful dealings between people and between businesses and their customers. But most business leaders are only just beginning to realize its true value in the digital age. As online interactions increasingly supplant face-to-face interactions, trust is becoming ever more essential for virtually every enterprise. At the macro level, it enables new disruptive products, services, and strategic moves; at the micro level, it smooths the way for smaller transactions at scale among a vastly greater number of buyers and sellers who have no prior relationship.

Companies are realizing that shareholder sentiment is no longer the sole driver of business value. Increasingly, the many different stakeholders' views on specific issues and their perceptions of companies' related practices and responses affect business value, as media (especially social media) make it easy for those voices to gain a wide hearing. In this shift to stakeholder capitalism, many others' perceptions of a company's trustworthiness can be as important as investors' perceptions. And the business value of trustworthiness is not just monetary: trust is becoming increasingly important to a company's success in recruiting talent; to its Net Promoter Score; to its environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance; and to its very license to operate.

Examining changes in a company's trust score against a timeline of major company events or external developments can help us discern important patterns.

The ability to gauge stakeholder trust in near real-time can be enormously useful in this changing environment, both proactively, for informing strategic decisions and priorities, and retrospectively, in helping leaders understand how their prior decisions have impacted stakeholder perceptions. Moreover, as trust becomes increasingly important to a company's success, a company's perceived trustworthiness could ultimately serve as a leading indicator of other vital business metrics.

Such is the purpose of BCG's Trust Index, a new metric that provides an outside-in measure of a company's perceived trustworthiness. Deploying artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing (NLP) to analyze massive multiyear online data sets, the Index reflects the dynamic evolution of trust sentiment at the company level.

In this report, we share the results of using BCG's Trust Index to generate perceived trustworthiness scores for more than 1,000 of the world's largest publicly traded companies (those with at least $20 billion in market capitalization) from 2018 to 2021.[1] (These companies account for 81% of the total value of publicly traded companies worldwide; see the Appendix, "Our Methodology," for further details.) At the most basic level, these scores enable us to identify the most and least trusted large companies and to extract lessons by contrasting their performance. But perhaps more significantly, examining changes in a company's trust score against a timeline of major company events (such as a merger or a scandal) or external developments (such as COVID-19) can help us discern important patterns—including relationships between trustworthiness and such metrics as total shareholder return (TSR), ESG, digital maturity, employee satisfaction, and innovation. Finally, by comparing emerging features of the most and least trusted companies in the sample and by analyzing what stakeholders say about those companies in real time (that is, why their trust level is high or low), we can distill valuable insights about the characteristics and practices that build and sustain—or destroy—trust.[2] With such insights in hand, companies will be better equipped to manage trust in a strategic way that considers the needs of multiple stakeholder groups.

1. These companies had at least $20 billion in market value as of December 31, 2020.

2. We refer to the themes as "emerging" because we did not hypothesize or predetermine them. Instead, they manifested themselves during the NLP engine analysis, and we subsequently confirmed them through manual searches.

What Is Trust, and Why Is It Hard to Measure?

First, we need to clarify what we mean by trust. In the academic literature, ***trust*** is defined as the willingness of a party (the trustor) to be vulnerable to the actions of another party (the trustee).[3] In other words, it is a predisposition to engage. In a business context, broadly speaking, stakeholders (trustors) put a certain level of trust in a company (trustee) to fulfill a promise—whether that promise takes the form of a value proposition (product or service) to customers, an intangible such as corporate purpose to employees, earnings guidance to investors, or some other commitment. In doing so, stakeholders put themselves in a vulnerable position, trusting that the business will act in a way that aligns with their own interests. You might trust your bank to safeguard your money, or a dermatologist-approved cosmetics company to keep allergens out of its products, or your employer to live up to its societal aims, or your Tier 1 supplier to honor its pledge to reduce its carbon footprint.

3. This follows the definition used by R. C. Mayer, J. Davis, and F. Schoorman in their seminal work, "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust," *Academy of Management Review*, 20 (1995): 709–734.

These definitions encompass a wide range of stakeholders that go beyond shareholders and customers—and the traditional boundaries of a firm. This broader group comprises what we refer to as a company's business network, or "business as a system."[4] As leaders shift from the traditional view of a company as an isolated entity with distinct boundaries, and toward the broader notion of business as a system, they recognize the need to engender broad stakeholder engagement in order to build trust across the system. We call the process of embedding trust into the design of a business network "systemic trust."

As a latent psychological state, trust can only be measured indirectly, through indicators such as transaction costs or via the attitudes and behaviors that people convey explicitly or implicitly in their communications and actions. Another challenge to measuring trust involves its dynamic nature. It fluctuates, as individuals reevaluate their perceptions on the basis of new information and changing circumstances. The most common technique for indirectly measuring trust is to survey stakeholders about the extent to which they trust a particular entity or set of entities. (For more on the complexities involved, see the sidebar "The Challenges of Measuring Trust.")

4. More specifically, "business as a system" refers to the constellation of relevant stakeholders organically connected to the company or business through trusting relationships (those that believe the promise to them is being fulfilled).

The Challenges of Measuring Trust

The ability to systemically measure trust transforms trust from an abstraction into a concrete metric that reflects how a company's stakeholders perceive the overall business as a system, extending beyond the traditional boundaries of the corporation to comprehend systemic trust. The trust metric can then inform not only tactical decisions but also complex, potentially transformational, interventions—the kind that increasingly require business leaders to factor in the perspectives and expectations of multiple stakeholders, such as in formulating a company's decarbonization strategies or its human rights record.

Most existing measurements of trust are based on surveys that probe trusting attitudes and past trusting behavior.[1] Although such assessments can be revealing, their metrics are not granular; instead, they typically examine generalized trust at the national, institutional, or industry level. Surveying is also a time- and labor-intensive process. It is important to be able to measure regularly, given that trust is not static: one product recall, environmental accident, employee protest, or C-suite scandal can quickly and severely damage an otherwise pristine record. Perhaps most importantly, most existing measurements do not provide much depth of insight into the reasons why trust levels are where they are.

1. Edward Glaeser, David Laibson, Jose Scheinkman, and Christine Soutter, "Measuring trust," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2000; 115(3): 811-846.

The business value of trust is more than monetary: it is becoming increasingly important to a company’s very license to operate.

BCG's Trust Index

BCG's Trust Index is a departure from traditional efforts to measure trust. Notably, it draws on real-time stakeholder communications, big data, NLP, and AI to quantify stakeholder perceptions. Constructing the Index involves scraping the internet (traditional news sources as well as Twitter) and combing through thousands of articles and posts on each company to identify instances in which the text mentions the company in the context of trust, based on a research-validated list of more than 200 trust-related keywords. Using an NLP engine, we then analyze the sentiment behind each mention to gauge whether the perception is positive, neutral, or negative.

To identify the mentions that relate specifically to trust (or distrust), we categorize keywords according to four dimensions of trust, which we identified in our past research:[5]

- **Competence**—whether the company can effectively accomplish a specific task at hand, or (in other words) whether it can deliver on its promise to stakeholders[6]

5. The four trust dimensions relate to academic research on ability, benevolence, and integrity (ABI), with transparency playing a relevant amplifying role in the way that these dimensions tend to be manifested. See Roger Mayer et al., "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust," in *The Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), July 1995, 709–734.

6. This definition is slightly updated from our earlier research and based roughly on Oliver Schilke and Karen Cook, "Sources of alliance partner trustworthiness: Integrating calculative and relational perspectives," in *Strategic Management Journal*, 36(2), 2015, 276–297.

- **Fairness**—how equitable and empathetic the company is in delivering on its promise
- **Transparency**—how open and unambiguous the company's decision making and actions are
- **Resilience**—how effectively the company avoids or recovers from challenges and crises

This approach enables us to analyze a company's trust score on both an overall level and an individual dimension level—for example, how its competence score has trended over time—so that we can more deeply understand its perceived trustworthiness. Dimensions also provide a window into context-specific reasons that encourage people to trust and into the multifaceted nature of trust, which traditional, generalized trust metrics do not do. Thus, we might notice that people trust a particular business for its competence in delivering its products and services to customers, but do not trust it as a corporate citizen.

Trust dimensions can help companies identify context-specific factors underlying trust, and they can yield insights into the multifaceted nature of trust itself.

In addition to counting how often a company is mentioned in the context of trust, we weight each mention by the number of "potential impressions" (website subscribers or Twitter account followers) to help gauge the relative impact of different mentions. After filtering out potential sources of noise and statistically irrelevant data, we obtain a ratio of positive-to-negative mentions across each trust dimension, and from this we derive a trust score scaled between –1.0 and +1.0 that reflects how well the company is perceived to be fulfilling its promise to stakeholders.

Beyond generating raw trust scores, we can assess the rationale underlying the scores, thanks to the NLP engine's ability to evaluate common themes in the trust-related mentions. By analyzing the influence of each of the four trust dimensions and examining the more granular themes associated with companies that earned high and low trust scores, we gain a useful reading of a company's trust "health," and we start to unpack the "why" behind that reading. For instance, competence may prove to be a given company's dominant trust dimension, and underlying that dimension may be many positive mentions of the company's financial strength, innovativeness, or product and service performance.

In addition to revealing the trust performance of individual companies, a standardized trust index offers us a macro view of the trust record across a full data set—in this case, 1,100 of the world's largest public companies. With that view, we can break down perceived company trustworthiness along different lines to discern trends that transcend individual companies: by the entire set of companies, the Top 100 (leaders), or the Bottom 100 (laggards); by region or sector; by a given point in time or an entire time period.

Exhibit 1 illustrates what the Index reveals, using as an example the individual trust score of one company in our data set. The graph on the left compares the company's trust score to its industry benchmark. The center graph shows that social media mentions had a powerful impact on the company's drop in perceived trustworthiness. The graph on the right shows that, despite the company's relatively high competence score, its overall trust score has been trending downward as a result of declining scores for fairness, transparency, and resilience.

Exhibit 1 - Example of a Trust Score Tracked Overall (Versus Industry Benchmark), by Source, and by Dimension

Source: BCG's Trust Index.

What the Index Reveals

A 50,000-Foot View

In addition to providing insights regarding individual companies, the Trust Index offers a way to better understand the dynamics and patterns that govern how trust in businesses is built, maintained, and destroyed. We analyzed the level of trust in companies around the world—by industry sector and region, and over time—to obtain a view of relative performance. From these lists, we probed a wide range of questions, such as the following:

- Does perceived trustworthiness correlate with value creation?
- How have trust dynamics evolved before and during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What patterns surfaced regarding building, destroying, and maintaining trust?

Do the most trusted companies generate more value? We discerned a clear relationship between perceived trustworthiness and value creation. From January 2019 through January 2022, the Top 100 most trusted companies each year enjoyed above-average TSR, faster recovery during the height of the pandemic, and better post-crisis performance than three other sets of companies we considered—MSCI's flagship global equity index, the S&P 500, and the Bottom 100 companies in our data set. The CAGR of the Top 100 was 15 percentage points higher than the CAGR of the MSCI, a difference that translates into 2.5 times as much value generated. (See Exhibit 2.) The greatest difference in value creation emerged in 2020, during the peak of the pandemic, when the Top 100 enjoyed a CAGR of 61%, compared with the MSCI's 14%. The Top 100 also showed consistently higher ESGC scores (by 13 percentage points) than the Index average, indicating that the most trusted companies are also those with superior across-the-board performance.[7]

The Top 100 most trusted companies each year achieved above-average TSR, faster recovery during the height of the pandemic, and better post-crisis performance.

When we looked more deeply into financials, we discovered that high-trust companies had significantly higher price-to-earnings (P/E) multiples (47% on average) than the entire data set. Although this finding is somewhat intuitive, it conveys the idea that stakeholders would expect high-trust companies to have an even higher value in the future. Low-trust companies saw a 13% discount in average P/E multiple compared to the entire data set.

Interestingly, a significant portion of the largest companies received consistently lower trust scores, although this may simply be a function of their greater visibility. The fact that they attract many more mentions than smaller, lesser-known companies subjects them to increased scrutiny, particularly in industries that are likely to be under the ESG microscope. Still, the implication is that larger companies need to be even more vigilant than others about monitoring and managing trust, because their visibility and size draw more attention from stakeholders.

Where and in what industries are the most trusted companies found? According to the 2021 Trust Index results (which reflect mentions from January 2021 through December 2021), 90 of the 100 most trusted companies are based in the US (40 companies), Europe (30), China (10), Japan (6), and South Korea (4).[8] (See Exhibit 3.) The remaining 10 companies are based in India, the Middle East, Canada, and Brazil. European companies accounted for 23% of the full data set of 1,100 companies in 2021, but they represented 30% of the Top 100 for that year—a 7-percentage-point overrepresentation. US companies captured 40 of the spots in the Top 100, but they accounted for 45% of the full data set, yielding a net underrepresentation by 5 percentage points. By industry, Technology, Media, and Telecommunications (TMT), Industrial Goods (IG), and Health Care (HC) dominated the Top 100 rankings; all were overrepresented against the baseline.[9] Interestingly, IG was also disproportionately represented among the least-trusted companies.

Exhibit 3 depicts the geographical and sector representation of companies in the Top 100 in 2021. But this map does not necessarily reflect the overall trustworthiness of any given industry across the full set of companies. For instance, although Insurance is not represented in the Top 100, the Index reflects the fact that it is one of the most trusted sectors.

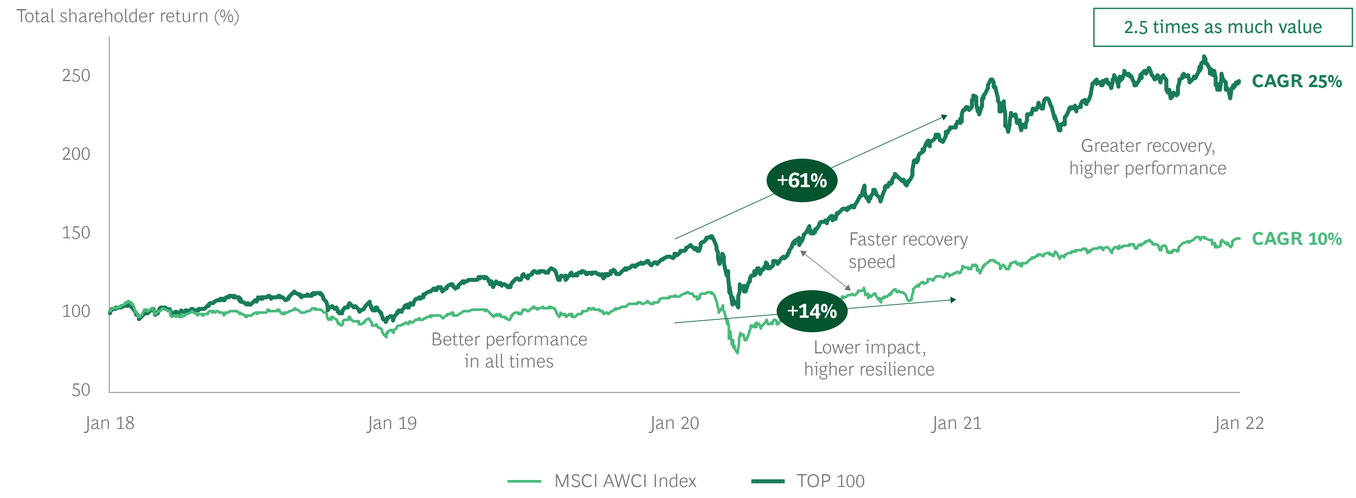
How steadfast is trust among the most trusted? Because trust is a dynamic phenomenon, the Top 100 roster can change considerably over time. (See Exhibit 4.) During the four-year period that we analyzed, year-to-year churn among members of the Top 100 list was at least 50% and as high as 64% (from 2020 to 2021, during the height of the pandemic). Turnover among companies at the bottom of the Index was even greater, peaking at 70% during the 2020–2021 period. Such volatility reflects the dynamic nature of trust and underscores the importance of tracking it closely. Despite this volatility, some companies consistently ranked among the most trusted: 20% of the Top 100 maintained their high trust scores throughout the four-year study period; 18% made the list in three of the four years, and almost 28% made it in two of the four years. By industry, TMT, Health Care, and IG companies accounted for 19 of the 20 most consistently trusted companies. By geography, 18 of the 20 most consistently trusted companies were in the US, Europe, and China.

7. ESGC stands for "environmental, social, governance, and controversies." Financial metrics provider Refinitiv can create a controversies score to reflect the impact of ESG-related controversies (such as environmental accidents, strikes, accounting irregularities, and human rights violations) in a given period on a company's overall ESG score. The combined score is called the ESGC score.

8. Although many of these companies are multinationals, the geographic analysis categorizes companies on the basis of their current headquarters location.

9. Using the GICS system, we defined 11 industry sectors, which we grouped, for simplicity's sake, into seven broad sectors: Consumer (Consumer Discretionary and Consumer Staples); Energy (Energy and Utilities); Financials (excluding Insurance); Health Care; Industrial Goods (Industrials, Materials, Real Estate); Insurance; and Technology, Media, and Telecommunications (TMT), which includes Information Technology and Communication Services.

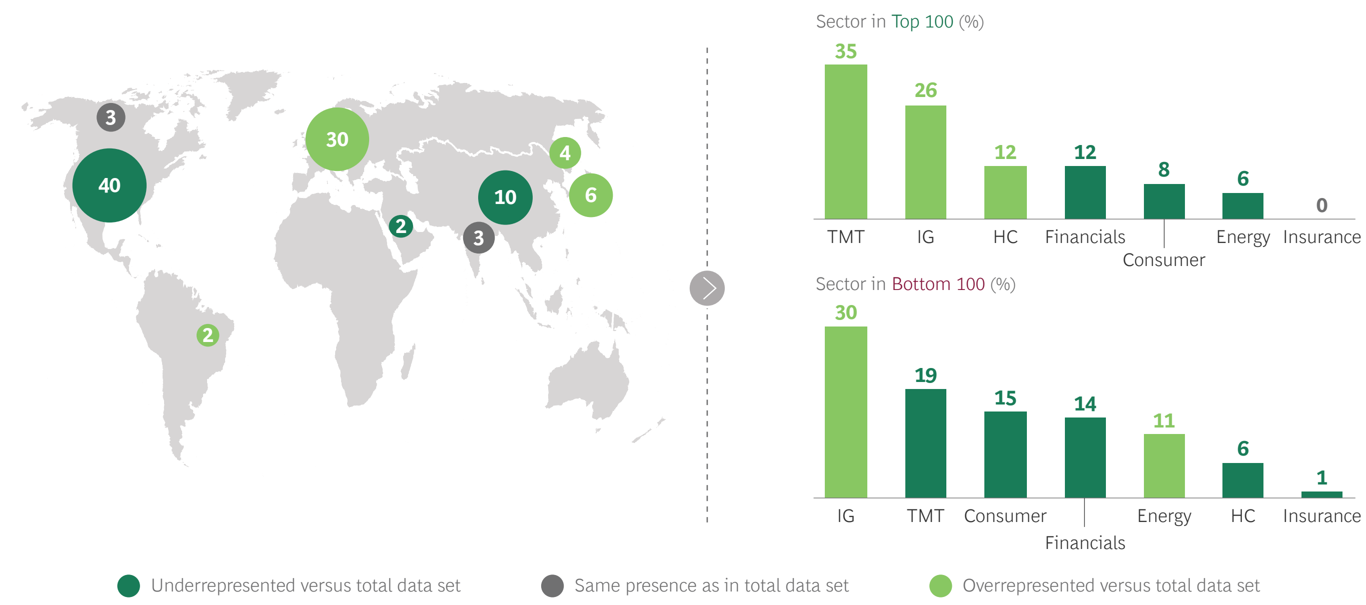
Exhibit 2 - Total Shareholder Return for Top 100 Versus the Market



Sources: BCG's Trust Index; Refinitiv.

Note: The Top 100 is an equally weighted index comprising the 100 most-trusted companies in that year.

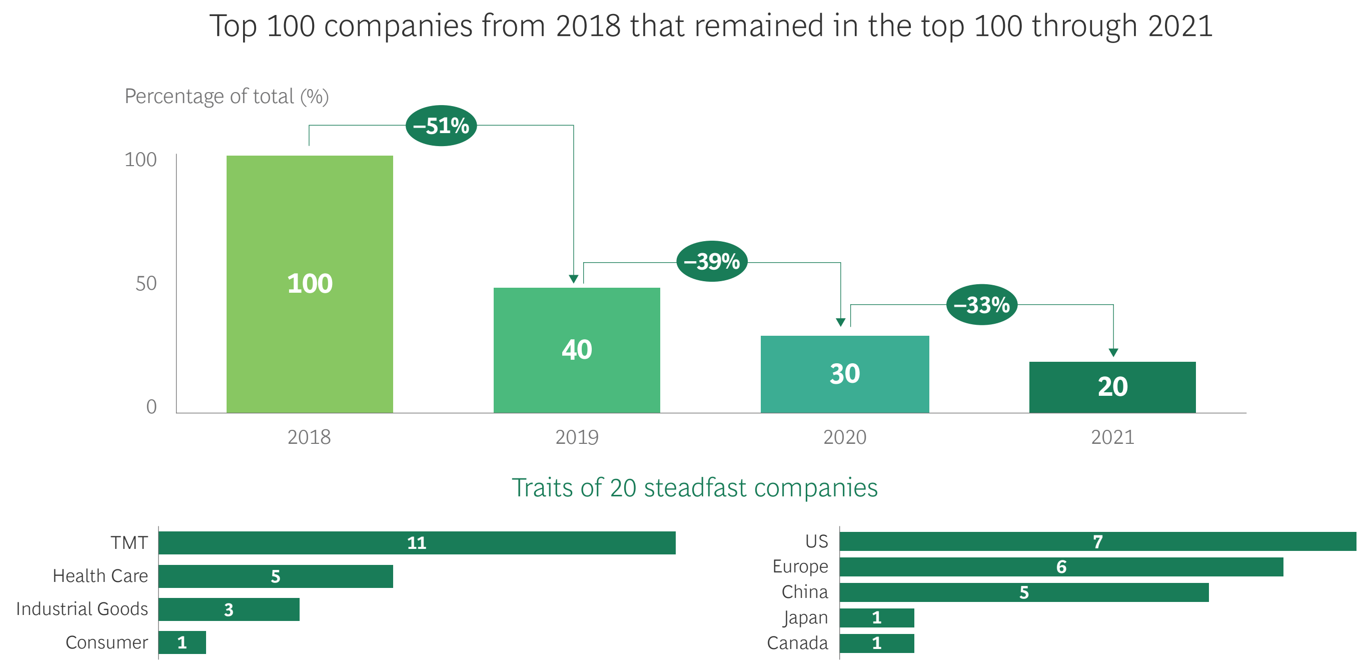
Exhibit 3 - Overrepresentation or Underrepresentation by Region and Sector Among the 100 Most Trusted Companies in 2021



Source: BCG's Trust Index, annual scores.

Note: HC = Health Care; IG = Industrial Goods; TMT = Technology, Media, and Telecommunications. The data used for this initial analysis was limited to English-language mentions. For companies that, on average, elicit significantly different levels of trust in English-language mentions versus those in other languages, inclusion of the other languages in the analysis could materially change their trust scores.

Exhibit 4 - Year-over-Year Turnover Among the Top 100



Source: BCG's Trust Index, annual scores.

Note: TMT = Technology, Media, and Telecommunications. The data used for this initial analysis was limited to English-language mentions. For companies that, on average, elicit significantly different levels of trust in English-language mentions versus those in other languages, inclusion of the other languages in the analysis could materially change their trust scores.

How has trust evolved over the past four years—before the pandemic and during the pandemic? From Q2 2018 through Q4 2021, trust levels varied markedly between the Top 100 companies and the Bottom 100 companies.[10] (See Exhibit 5.) Pre-pandemic, trust in top businesses had been decreasing, but in 2020 it started to rise. Among companies in the full data set, average trust levels grew during the four-year period for all but the Bottom 100.

A look at average growth in overall trust levels in each of the three groups (the Top 100, the Bottom 100, and the full data set) reveals some interesting differences:

- The most-trusted companies showed modest growth in trust each year (1% annually), likely because of their already high levels of trust (average trust scores of +0.9 out of a maximum of +1.0).
- Overall trust among companies in the full data set grew by 2% annually during the four years.
- The least-trusted companies saw trust erode the most, by 10% a year.

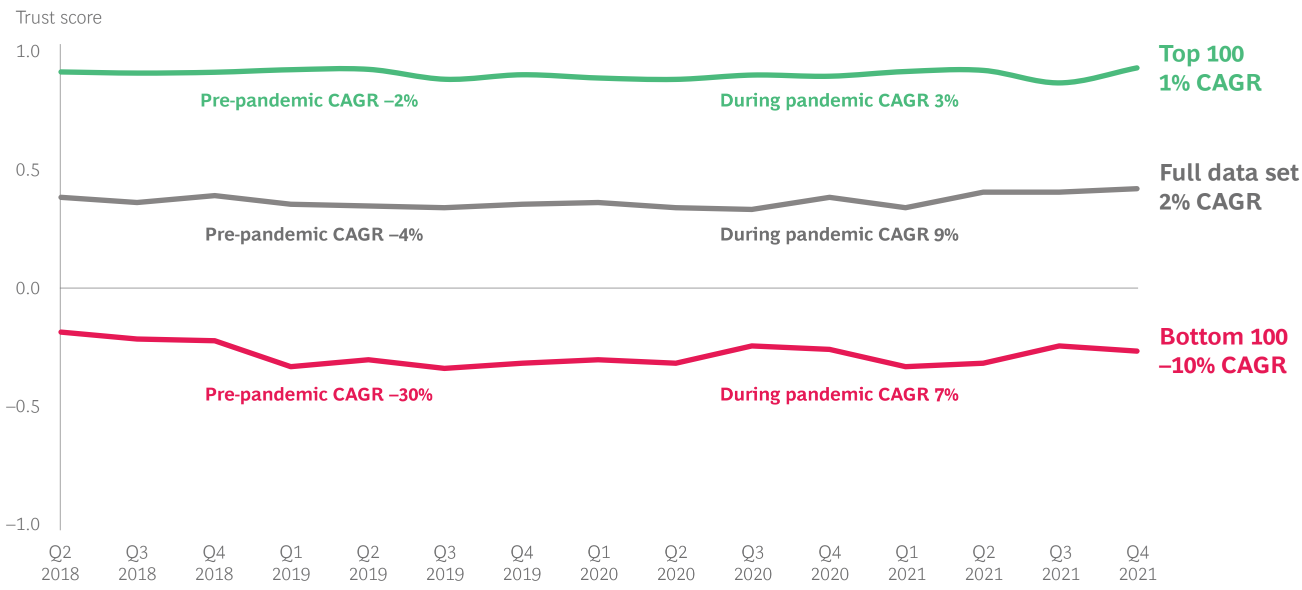
How has COVID-19 affected trust? COVID-19 has put many companies' crisis response and adaptability to the test. It has also proved to be a litmus test for trustworthiness, revealing companies' ability to deliver on their promise and to demonstrate their resilience by rallying during the crisis to meet stakeholders' and, more broadly, society's needs.

During the two years before the pandemic (2018–2019), companies based in Europe and Japan outperformed the world average score for trustworthiness by a wide margin. Companies based in Europe scored 11 percentage points higher than the world average, as did companies based in Japan. Although their trust levels took a hit during the pandemic, companies in the two regions retained their global lead. Meanwhile, US- and China-based companies had the lowest trust levels in the two-year pre-pandemic period but moved in opposite directions during the pandemic. US-based companies scored 4 percentage points below the world average in 2018–2019, but they improved to 1 percentage point below the world average during COVID-19; China-based companies scored 6 percentage points below the world average prior to the pandemic, but they dropped to 9 percentage points below during the next two years. (See Exhibit 6.)[11]

10. For technical reasons, Q1 2018 data was unavailable.

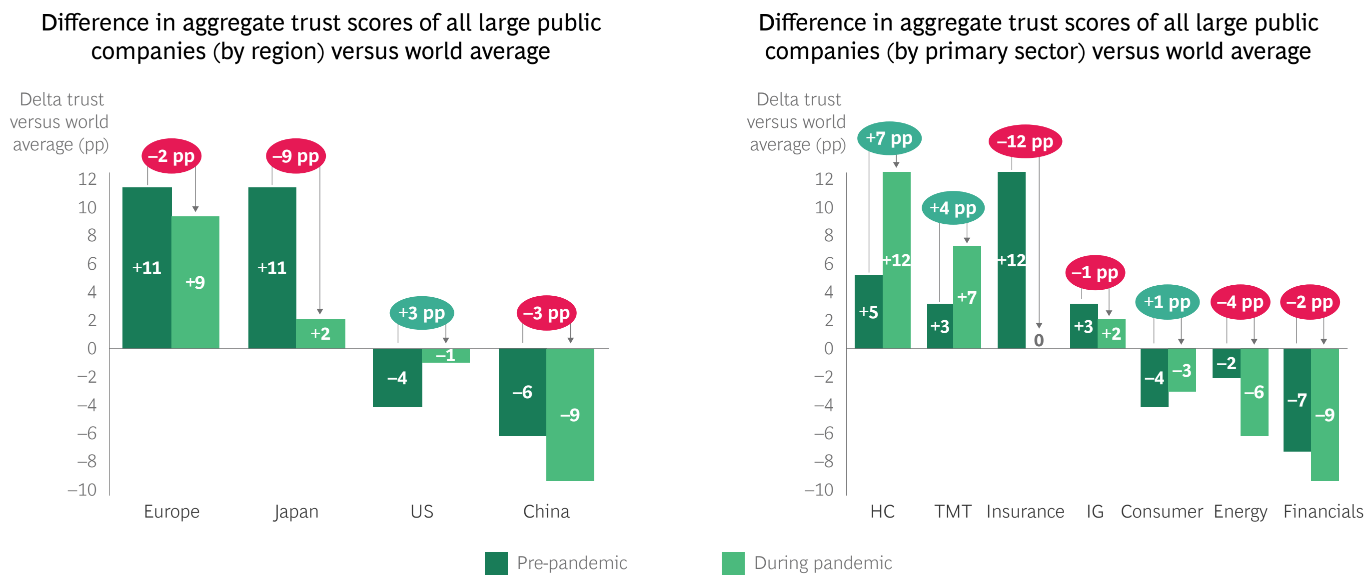
11. The data used for this initial analysis was limited to English-language mentions. For companies that elicit significantly different levels of trust, on average, in English-language mentions versus mentions in other languages, inclusion of other languages in the analysis could materially change their trust scores.

Exhibit 5 - Trust Score CAGR over Time for the Top 100, the Bottom 100, and the Full Data Set



Source: BCG's Trust Index quarterly scores.

Exhibit 6 - Trust Score Differential, Pre-pandemic Versus During Pandemic



Source: BCG's Trust Index, quarterly scores.

Note: Region indicates location of company headquarters. Scores were calculated using simple average across quarterly scores. HC = Health Care; IG = Industrial Goods; TMT = Technology, Media, and Telecommunications; pp = percentage-point difference. The data used for this initial analysis was limited to English-language mentions. For companies that, on average, elicit significantly different levels of trust in English-language mentions versus those in other languages, inclusion of the other languages in the analysis could materially change their trust scores.

Regional and Sector Highlights

Individual company trust scores can fluctuate considerably within a short period, but aggregate trust levels at the regional and sector levels do not vary dramatically from year to year. This is chiefly owing to the leveling effect of averages. During the research period, regional and sector changes amounted, at most, to one place in rankings from year to year. (See Exhibit 7.)

Exhibit 7 - Evolution of Relative Trustworthiness Rankings over Time

Rankings based on full data set[1]

By region of company headquarters

	2018	2019	2020	2021	Ranking over time
Japan	1	1	2	2	1
Europe	2	2	1	1	2
China	3	3	3	4	3
United States	4	4	4	3	4

By company's primary sector

	2018	2019	2020	2021	Ranking over time
Insurance	1	1	2	3	1
Health Care	2	2	1	1	2
TMT	3	4	3	2	3
Industrial Goods	4	3	4	4	4
Energy	5	5	5	6	5
Consumer	7	6	6	5	6
Financials	6	7	7	7	7

Source: BCG's Trust Index, annual scores.

Note: TMT = Technology, Media, and Telecommunications. The data used for this initial analysis was limited to English-language mentions. For companies that, on average, elicit significantly different levels of trust in English-language mentions versus those in other languages, inclusion of the other languages in the analysis could materially change their trust scores.

[1] Full data set consisted of more than 1,000 companies.

European and Japanese companies dominated the Global 100 list throughout the four-year period, occupying the top two spots. In 2021, European and US companies gained ground. Insurance, Health Care, and TMT were the most trusted sectors throughout the four-year period, taking turns in the top position—and Health Care and TMT have achieved even higher trust levels while navigating the pandemic.[12] Pre-pandemic, the Financial, Energy, and Consumer sectors registered the lowest levels of trust. Of these, Consumer was the only one to see its trust score improve during the pandemic; Energy and Financials fell substantially. The Consumer sector's minor gains in 2021 allowed it to overtake the Energy sector for the year, although Energy ranked higher in perceived trustworthiness over the full period.[13]

Some business leaders may wonder why they should care about their industry's or region's aggregate trust scores. The data shows, however, that while there is certainly an opportunity for a company to stand out across an industry, broader industry or regional trust-related actions often impact the scores of individual companies, even if those actions objectively have nothing to do with the individual company. For instance, several scandals and controversies related to a commercial services company affected not just the broader industry score, but its top competitor's score as well. That impact wasn't as drastic, but the competitor's score did drop, although it recovered significantly faster than the sector as a whole did. This pattern demonstrates how industry and regional aggregate scores can serve as a useful benchmark for a company's broader strategic decision making.

12. TMT achieved high trust levels despite low scores in the Media subsector, which includes technology companies in the media space.

13. The Energy sector's trust scores are heavily depressed by the Oil & Gas industry's low trust scores, which are due mainly to their poor ESG performance. (The Utilities industry's 2021 trust score was similar to the world average.)

Breaking the 2021 sector scores down further, we found that the most trustworthy subsectors are Software and Services, Semiconductors, and Pharma, while the least trustworthy subsectors are Transportation, Energy, and Media and Entertainment (driven in part by large technology companies in the media space).[14] By delving into specific sectors, we can pinpoint interesting differences between the trust profiles of the subsectors. For example, within TMT, the Telco subsector's transparency score is 8% above the world average, but its resilience score falls 61% below. The competence and resilience scores of the Software and Services subsector are well above the world averages (by 14 percentage points and 28 percentage points, respectively), while the competence score of Semiconductors is 8 percentage points below the world average and its resilience score is 7 percentage points above.

Turning now to the four dimensions of trust, we see that all of them—but especially competence and resilience—contributed to European companies' top ranking. In contrast, a low score on transparency significantly depressed the overall trust level of Chinese companies. (See Exhibit 8.) In the sector rankings, high scores for fairness and resilience contributed considerably to Health Care's strong overall trust score. Conversely, the Consumer sector's low resilience scores— likely attributable to the sector's pandemic-induced supply chain challenges—depressed its overall ranking.

Exhibit 8 - Relative 2021 Trust Levels by Dimension Versus World Averages

By region of company headquarters (percentage points)

	Overall	Competence	Fairness	Transparency	Resilience
Europe	+7	+13	+6	+5	+10
Japan	+2	+1	0	+2	+2
US	–1	–4	+1	0	–4
China	–7	–6	–18	–14	–3

By company's primary sector (percentage points)

	Overall	Competence	Fairness	Transparency	Resilience
Health Care	+10	+5	+13	+4	+9
TMT	+7	+1	+6	+12	+4
Insurance	0	+10	0	+5	+9
Industrial Goods	0	+2	0	–5	+3
Consumer	–5	–1	–7	–3	–14
Energy	–7	–13	–12	–10	–3
Finance	–7	+4	–3	+2	–5

Source: BCG's Trust Index, annual scores.

Note: Calculated as the percentage-point difference from the world average for each category. TMT = Technology, Media, and Telecommunications. The data used for this initial analysis was limited to English-language mentions. For companies that, on average, elicit significantly different levels of trust in English-language mentions versus those in other languages, inclusion of the other languages in the analysis could materially change their trust scores.

14. "Energy" here refers to the Energy subsector. Unlike the broader Energy sector as defined in this report, the subsector does not include Utilities.

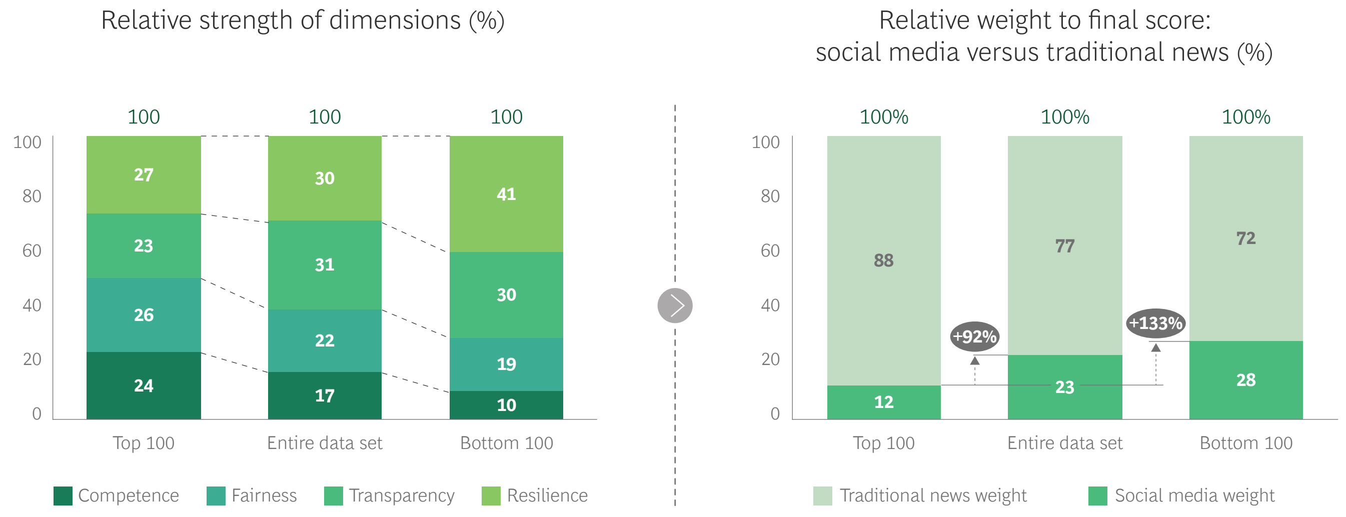
What Makes a Company Most—or Least—Trusted

The factors driving trust are many, but understanding how they contribute to building—or wrecking—trust requires answering some key questions.

Which of the trust dimensions matter most? The answer depends on your starting position. For the full set of companies in the Trust Index, transparency (at 31%) and resilience (30%) were the biggest contributors to the trust score, followed by fairness (22%) and competence (17%). (See Exhibit 9.) For companies in the Top 100, the four dimensions contributed fairly evenly. For the Bottom 100, however, the dimensions' weighting differed substantially. Resilience (or lack thereof) carried the most weight, accounting for 41% of their trust score. Transparency was a clear second, at 30%, and competence was surprisingly low, accounting for only 10% of their trust score.

> **For all companies, transparency and resilience contributed most to their trust score.**

Exhibit 9 - Relative Strength of Trust Dimensions and Data Source for the Top 100 and the Bottom 100 Versus the Full Data Set



Source: BCG's Trust Index, annual scores.

In other words, people evaluate the most trusted companies by how well they deliver on their aggregate promises to stakeholders, how equitable they are in their dealings, how openly they operate, and how effectively they respond to challenges and crises. People assess the least trusted companies more heavily by their relatively weak overall reputation or poor resilience in handling crises. But until a breach or transgression occurs, stakeholders evaluate a company relatively equally across the four subdimensions. Having demonstrated that they are less trustworthy through some action or inaction, Bottom 100 companies need to double down on improving their resilience in order to rebuild the fabric of trust.

Another important difference involves the relative weight of social media and traditional media in the trust scores of most- and least-trusted companies. We found that the lower the trust score, the greater the weight of social media: for companies in the Bottom 100, social media accounted for 28% of the trust score, on average, as opposed to only 12% of the score for Top 100 companies. This is likely because social media is the main channel that stakeholders use to vent their dissatisfaction and distrust of companies. Indeed, overall, social media mentions are 33% more negative in their trust assessment than traditional news, according to our calculations. Nevertheless, for every industry except Media and Entertainment, traditional news played a more important role in shaping trust levels than social media did.

Interestingly, traditional news experienced a minor dip in importance at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, but in 2021, its importance grew by 8% for the year across all industries. For the full data set, traditional news items garner significantly more readers than social media mentions: the average ratio is 91% traditional news impressions to 9% social media impressions. Traditional media's importance in the trust score may reflect the qualitative difference between an 800- to 1,200-word article (which often contains more than one mention of a company or sector) and a 280-character tweet. In addition, our initial social media data set was limited to Twitter, while the news data set was more comprehensive.

Does trust correlate with other business metrics? In examining this question, we uncovered a few interesting correlations. For instance, the perceived level of corruption in a country, as tracked by Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, corresponded markedly with the businesses' Trust Index—that is, with the average score of companies in that country—over the four-year study period. The relationship between corruption and a country's trust score waned in 2021, however, perhaps owing to other factors that exerted a greater influence on fostering trust through the pandemic.

Trust foundations—table stakes for building trust—can push trust scores up or down substantially.

The connection between trust and company ratings (using Glassdoor, which tracks employee-provided reviews of salary levels, work environment, employment policies, and the like) was limited overall, but it was strong within B2C subsectors—notably retail, telcos, and insurance. This may be because happy customer-facing employees make for happy customers, thus increasing their company's perceived trustworthiness.

Finally, a few subsectors—real estate, consumer staples, and IT—showed a fairly strong correlation between trust and corporate purpose, as measured by the BrightHouse Living Purpose Index, which assesses companies by how well they fulfill their commitment to their purpose in relation to five types of stakeholders.

What common sentiment drives high and low trust scores? From the four broad dimensions that factor into trust, we drilled down further, using NLP to analyze written mentions of high- and low-trust companies, in order to identify what most often triggered expressions of trust or distrust and to ascertain why a particular company is trusted or distrusted. In our study, themes emerged from the archival data spontaneously and bottom-up, without our having imposed any preconceptions or existing framework for examining them. Common emerging themes for high-trust companies include satisfaction with product quality, strong company expertise, customer service, and innovation. On the flipside, low-trust companies experienced stakeholder disappointment in such areas as climate change inaction, corruption, lawsuits, and lobbying.

Exhibit 10 presents a "word cloud" visualization of this analysis, showing the most commonly used words and phrases for both high- and low-trust companies. The font size of the word or phrase corresponds to its relative frequency, and the color corresponds to whether, as a whole, the sentiment associated with the mention was positive (green) or negative (red). Note the centrality of the word ***deliver*** (on the trust promise) in the word cloud for high-trust companies.

This qualitative analysis helps us identify themes that distinguish high-trust companies from low-trust ones, which in turn enables us to extract more specific (and changing) lessons about what drives trust over the longer term. Ten such themes surfaced, some more obvious than others. Together they account for roughly 75% of the trust mentions of our sample companies, while the remaining 25% of mentions extend across other topics with no overarching consistency.

The ten themes fall into three categories: trust destroyers, which erode or break trust; trust foundations, which are essential for establishing and maintaining trust; and trust enhancers, which deepen trust and allow a company to distinguish itself. (See Exhibit 11.) The distribution of the themes is as follows:

- **Trust Destroyers.** Arguably the most attention grabbing of the distinguishing themes, trust destroyers include corruption, fraud, and scandals (for example, bribery, regulatory violations, and ethical breaches) and catastrophic events such as natural disasters and human-caused debacles (for example, oil spills, debt defaults, and bankruptcies).

- **Trust Foundations.** These themes include financial position (as reflected in revenues, margins, and dividend payouts); governance and workforce (for example, company culture, employee benefits, and treatment of employees); and product and service performance (product quality and level of customer support). These fundamental themes can push scores up or down substantially. As table stakes for trust, they represent the dividing line between high- and low-trust companies.

- **Trust Enhancers.** The most prominent of these themes are strategic collaboration and investment (including ecosystem relationships, strategic partnerships, joint ventures, and M&A); and innovation (as reflected in patents, R&D, research grants, and coverage of innovative products or processes). Other identifiable categories of trust enhancers include digital capabilities (for example, cyber infrastructure, digital transformation, and digital security); social responsibility (such as social justice, corporate social responsibility, and philanthropy); and environment and sustainability (for example, climate action and carbon transition).

Exhibit 11 indicates the degree of impact—either primary or secondary, depending on the strength of correlation—that each of the ten themes has on the four key trust dimensions. Discussions of corruption, fraud, and scandals seem to have influenced resilience (primarily) and transparency (secondarily) most powerfully. Mentions of strategic collaboration had the greatest bearing on perceptions of fairness (first) and resilience (second). In the exhibit, trust foundations (financial position, governance and workforce, and product and service performance) are clearly linked to companies' competence in delivering on their promise to their main stakeholders.

Exhibit 10 - Sentiment in Trust-Related Mentions for High- and Low-Trust Companies

High-trust companies

Low-trust companies

Sources: NetbaseQuid; BCG's Center for Growth and Innovation Analytics.

Note: Word clouds were derived by combining trust-related conversations of 25 high-trust companies and 25 low-trust companies, respectively. The size of each term denotes its relative volume; color denotes sentiment (red = negative, green = positive). Words that are typically positive (or negative) in everyday speech may be coded oppositely if they commonly appear in the context of negative (or positive) mentions.

Exhibit 11 - Mapping Themes to Trust Dimensions

	Theme	Competence	Fairness	Transparency	Resilience
Trust destroyers	Corruption, fraud, scandals			Secondary	Primary
	Catastrophic events		Secondary		Primary
Trust foundations	Financial position	Primary			Secondary
	Governance and workforce	Secondary			Primary
	Product and service performance	Primary	Secondary		
Trust enhancers	Strategic collaboration and investment		Primary		Secondary
	Innovation	Primary		Secondary	
	Digital capabilities		Secondary		Primary
	Social responsibility		Primary	Primary	
	Environment and sustainability	Primary			Secondary

Primary   Secondary

Source: BCG's Center for Growth and Innovation Analytics.

Note: Mapping was determined by ranking theme scores from correlation and regression analysis and then averaging the rankings to determine importance; that is, the dimension with the top regression and correlation score was deemed "primary," and the dimension with the second-highest score was deemed "secondary."

How Perceptions of High- and Low-Trust Companies Differ

Using regression analysis and trust scores for each distinguishing feature, we sought to further validate and identify patterns between the high- and low-trust companies.

What we observed about trust destroyers. Corruption, fraud, and scandals tend to rapidly affect trust scores, chiefly eroding a company's standing on the fairness and resilience dimensions of trust. Not surprisingly, recovering trust afterward takes considerable time and effort. For example, in the Media subsector (which includes large digital and social media companies), there is significant negative sentiment around misinformation and defamation.

Obviously, catastrophic events (such as company accidents and disasters) can damage trust, particularly when caused or exacerbated by neglect or recklessness. But catastrophic events can damage low-trust companies' trust scores more deeply than they do high-trust companies'—and more deeply than the other trust dimensions and themes can. For low-trust companies, few positive mentions surround these themes (for example, mentions about steps taken to resolve a scandal or a company's above-and-beyond efforts in disaster recovery). Most sentiments that appear in media communications about them are extremely negative. In the Energy sector, for example, a utilities company was accused of ignoring systemic issues that resulted in property damage and business interruptions. The negative attention caused the company's trust score to plummet, and the company landed in the Bottom 100.

Although high-trust companies are not immune to the effects of crises, people perceive them as handling these challenges more effectively.

For high-trust companies that visibly strive to avert or mitigate a crisis, mentions of an event tend to have a much less significant impact on their overall trust rating. This is most likely a reflection of the company's ability to cope resiliently with crises. High-trust companies are not immune to the effects of crises, but people perceive them as handling these challenges more effectively, thanks to their stronger trust foundations (such as sound governance). The "trust capital" that they have built up helps protect them to a great extent in times of crisis. In fact, potentially damaging externalities can become trust building opportunities for high-trust companies (as the Health Care sector's COVID-19 response showed). For example, large-scale power grid failures caused costly downtime for one capital goods company. The company made substantial investments to better handle such grid failures as well as to minimize unscheduled downtimes—and those moves helped propel it into the Top 100.

Insights about trust foundations. By definition, high-trust companies demonstrate strength across all three foundational themes (financial position, governance and workforce, and product and service performance). Although mentions of financial position rarely cite future risks or stock fluctuations associated with activities such as acquisitions, divestitures, and asset sales, they sometimes do. For instance, stakeholders of a high-trust TMT company that we analyzed praised its ability to manage risk and increase efficiency, which led to greater profits. Across the high-trust companies we examined, the average trust score was 0.79 for financial positioning (trust scores range from –1.0 to 1.0), with an 18% share of trust conversations. Yet mentions of financial position were negative for three-quarters of low-trust companies, especially in connection with divestitures and stock performance. For example, conversations about a low-trust IG company centered on missed bond deadlines and a deepening debt crisis.

Governance and employee treatment represent a clear dividing line between high- and low-trust companies. High-trust companies received praise for attracting top talent, offering employees flexibility and skills training, and planning clear transformation journeys. But governance also correlates powerfully with low trust, probably because sound governance is crucial to successfully managing a crisis, and the lack of it can aggravate trust destroyers. Low-trust companies faced criticism for their poor treatment of employees (such as not providing basic medical benefits), potential violations of labor laws, and anticompetitive practices. Furthermore, turbulence in the executive ranks, along with employee grievances and incidents, can generate unwanted buzz (and rumors) that may inhibit trust building. A high-trust TMT company won widespread praise for its efforts to attract and invest in top talent, while a low-trust consumer company drew numerous mentions accusing it of taking advantage of gig-economy workers.

Product and service performance is a company's main promise to customers, so they play a predictably critical role in trust and arguably constitute the most visible trust foundation to external stakeholders. The average trust score (within the range from –1.0 to 1.0) for the high-trust companies we analyzed was 0.92 for product and service performance, with a 27% share of trust conversations. Without solid product and service performance, trust cannot take root or last. For one high-trust TMT company, conversations focused on its efforts to improve service by expanding network coverage, speed, and reliability.

What trust enhancers revealed. Strategic collaboration and investment are evident in both high- and low-trust companies, but they are more salient in high-trust companies, where they generate strong positive sentiment. Strategic alliances can foster stakeholder trust because observers view them as an important means of improving overall performance, developing new technology, and boosting innovation prowess (especially in the tech sector). In low-trust companies, however, their beneficial effect is limited if trust destroyers remain unaddressed. In TMT, for example, companies with markedly different trust scores participated in partnerships to expand manufacturing, leverage state-of-the-art technology, and improve sustainability. Among high-trust companies, which logged an average trust score of 0.94 for this theme, 25% of the trust conversations focused on strategic alliances. But among low-trust companies, which had a trust score of 0.30 for this theme, only 5% of the conversations focused on strategic alliances.

Although rarely mentioned in the context of low-trust companies, innovation is a critical trust builder. New product releases and technological breakthroughs generate a high volume of positive mentions for a company, especially in the Information Technology sector. In Health Care, clinical research studies and advances in coronavirus test development accounted for a significant portion of innovation-related mentions. R&D efforts and grants also tend to garner frequent mentions among the most trusted companies.

How Businesses Can Improve Their Trust Position

Before it can manage and improve its perceived trustworthiness, a company must determine its starting position.

How high-trust companies stay that way. The year-on-year churn rate in the Top 100 exceeds 50%—ample evidence that companies cannot rest on their laurels. To stay at the top, high-trust companies must continue to invest in trust builders (such as strategic collaboration, innovation, and growth) and in trust foundations that deliver the staying power necessary to weather occasional shocks.

The high level of turnover in the ranks of Top 100 most trusted companies from one year to the next underscores the importance of ongoing efforts to build and maintain trust.

Take a leading European health care and technology company that was one of just 20 companies to rank in the Top 100 every year from 2018 through 2021. The company generated consistently strong positive sentiment and earned high trust scores, overall and on individual dimensions. Its trust foundations were well established, and its product and service performance, in particular, captured a significant volume of positive mentions. Most impressive, though, were its strong trust builder scores, especially in strategic collaboration and innovation. More than 70% of the company's trust-related mentions took the form of predominantly positive references to new collaborations and innovations involving vaccines and new products. Interestingly, most of these positive mentions came from the company's numerous partners—a clear sign of its standing as a trusted collaborator.

Companies in the middle should secure trust foundations while they prioritize enhancers.

When a high-trust company suffers a trust-destroying event, it must act quickly, demonstrating transparency and fairness as it moves to rectify the breach. Consider the experience of a leading technology company. Throughout most of our four-year study period, the company enjoyed high positive trust sentiment in all distinguishing themes, including trust destroyers. Despite a class-action lawsuit related to a data breach, the company swiftly recovered its high-trust status in 2021. Throughout this typically trust-destroying event, the company was transparent in its communications as it sought to demonstrate its data protection measures. The company also invested heavily in product and service performance, digital capabilities, and strategic collaborations, notably in its partnerships during COVID-19, helping clients navigate pandemic-related uncertainties free of charge.

How middle-of-the-pack companies can ascend to high-trust status. Companies whose trustworthiness levels fall near the world's average need to orchestrate their investments to improve trust around a broader set of themes. While ensuring that their trust foundations remain strong, they should also begin prioritizing their trust enhancement efforts.

Consider the case of a multinational conglomerate that successfully moved from the middle of the pack in terms of trust score to becoming one of the most trusted companies worldwide. In 2018 and 2019, the company's trust scores were in the 68th percentile, a respectable position well above the world average. The company strove to improve its trust foundations (product quality, financial position, and governance), thereby increasing its trust score. In addition, its frequent announcements of new products and innovative projects enhanced its standing on trust builders. In combination, these efforts catapulted the company into the top quartile in 2020 and into the Top 100 in 2021.

What low-trust companies can do to restore trust. Low-trust companies usually find themselves in this position because of their unsatisfactory handling of negative externalities and crises, which is often a function of poor governance. Their first priority must be to improve resilience in the face of crisis. It is not enough to focus on trust foundations or trust enhancers; indeed, these companies' failure to appropriately address trust destroyers signals their unreadiness to address catastrophic events effectively. Conversely, effective responses to externalities such as changes in operating context, a rapidly evolving political environment, and even natural disasters can be a positive driver of trust.

Besides struggling with trust destroyers, almost all low-trust companies are hampered by weak financials, poor governance, flawed treatment of the workforce, and a failure to fulfill their product or service promises. Once they've addressed their resilience issues, low-trust companies should begin strengthening their governance, bolstering the quality of their products or services, boosting support for their workforce, and addressing balance sheet improvements. To attain a higher level of trustworthiness, they require a multiple-lever transformation. Earning trust takes time, but companies that remain vigilant about resilience will find that improvements do materialize and are well worth the investment.

Earning trust takes time. But currently low-trust companies that focus on improving their resilience will see a payoff.

Consider how a major health care company dealt with a product-related scandal that it inherited through an acquisition. Health complications linked to one of its acquired products had triggered multiple lawsuits, which drove the company into the Bottom 100 list that same year. But the company invested heavily in managing this trust-destroying crisis. It was transparent about its actions, issuing frequent updates on the status of the litigation and reporting even-handedly on its settlements as well as on rulings that were favorable to it. By investing in improved crisis management capabilities and then focusing on the trust foundations (including its digital capabilities), the company shored up its resilience and improved its trust ranking, rising from the 7th percentile to the 26th percentile within one year. The company continued its positive trajectory in 2021, as it began focusing on trust builders (innovation, collaborations, and sustainability initiatives). These efforts enabled the company to reach the 39th percentile. In 2022, the company appears to be on pace to regain or even exceed its pre-crisis trust levels.

An action list for strengthening trustworthiness. In addition to suggesting areas that leaders should focus on, given their current trustworthiness level, we have identified key mindset shifts and actions that leaders can take to improve their company's trust position:

- **Think beyond the boundaries of your company.** Expand your notion of your business to encompass a broader "business as a system" that considers all of your diverse external stakeholders.

- **Identify your promise to stakeholders.** What promises are you making to your different stakeholders? Are the promises implied or explicit (formally articulated)? Is the company living up to them? Do external stakeholders perceive the situation accordingly?

- **Monitor your ability to deliver on your promises.** Decode trust by developing insights into how your stakeholders perceive you and what characteristics (trust dimensions and themes) influence your perceived trustworthiness.

- **Set a direction.** Articulate a clear vision of how you want to be perceived, vis-à-vis your explicit promise, and devise a strategy to get there—one that makes trust an integral part of how you manage your business as a system.

- **Launch surgical interventions.** Having determined your starting position, design orchestrated moves across the three categories of themes (trust destroyers, trust foundations, and trust enhancers).

- **Create an adaptive strategy.** Recognize that trust is dynamic. How are stakeholders' implied or explicit expectations shifting? What unmet stakeholder expectations are gaining prominence or resonance? Track external forces, and anticipate trust's defining moments. Measure, learn, and adapt accordingly.

A Call for Trust Consciousness

Trust in companies is a dynamic phenomenon, which means that being trusted today is no guarantee of being trusted tomorrow. Although 20 companies earned spots on our Top 100 list during each of the four years we analyzed, the rate of turnover on the list exceeded 50% every year.

Although often treated as a mere sentiment, trust has economic value—and in the digital era, its relevance continues to grow. People tend to think that trust rises or falls more or less spontaneously in response to dramatic developments such as the announcement of a new executive or the exposure of a corporate scandal. But as we have shown, trust reflects the influence of myriad inputs and levers, such as innovation and partnerships. Our previous research indicates that trust is essential in today's organizations and that companies can forge and manage systemic trust in business and socioeconomic systems. But companies must acknowledge the importance of trust and incorporate it into their strategic considerations.

Generally, companies must pay close attention to stakeholders' perceptions and constantly monitor how well each stakeholder group perceives them to be delivering on their promise. Companies can build trust in their overall business as a system by ensuring that it operates competently, fairly, and transparently, without losing sight of their role as corporate citizens in an ever more complex environment.

> **By monitoring trust, executives will be able to better understand their company's perceived performance—not just in midcrisis, but also during performance-shaping events and actions.**

By embedding trust into their executive dashboards, leaders can add external stakeholders to their decision-making process without having to consult them frequently. Doing so will enable executives to better understand their company's perceived performance—not just in midcrisis, but also during new strategy rollouts, following quarterly earnings reports, or amid other performance-shaping events and actions. They can also share trust scores and insights with boards to create a common baseline and to facilitate dialogue on the best path forward.

Knowing broadly how trusted you are as a company is certainly valuable, but you also need to know how you are performing on the four key dimensions of trust and, more specifically, which trust-building, trust-destroying, and trust-foundational themes are driving the sentiment that underlies those numbers. A trust score, despite being a proxy, can be a key metric that provides feedback and information on decisions, actions, and initiatives by showing how different stakeholders perceive a company in distinct channels relative to peers and competitors.

An index like the one introduced in this report is only the beginning—but it is a crucial first step, nonetheless. Applying it diligently can foster the necessary awareness and yield key insights for decoding trust and transforming businesses into high-trust organizations, leading to high value creation for multiple stakeholders.

Appendix

Our Methodology

To analyze trust sentiment, BCG's Trust Index scrapes a large archive of internet data, encompassing both major traditional media (including leading wire services, newspapers, and journals) and social media (Twitter) that collectively amount to more than 100,000 sources worldwide.[15]

Because this approach involves scraping the web at a global level rather than conducting a survey, it avoids some of the scale issues that are inherent in a resource-intensive model. Teams can conduct their analysis at any level of granularity (by region, sector, company, business unit, product line, and so on) and frequency (annually, quarterly, monthly, or weekly) for which there is a critical mass of data (that is, mentions). Results are not influenced by market assumptions or other external inputs. Because it relies on real-time data, the analysis can take place at any desired interval to accurately reflect trends in trust sentiment as they unfold. And because of the data's sheer volume and richness (natural sentences versus answers framed on a scale of 1 to 10, for example), the analysis can dig deeper, probing not only whether people perceive a company to be trustworthy, but also why.

2. We used Twitter because of its immense volume of discussions. The vast majority of the Twitter traffic we analyzed related to companies' specific actions or products rather than to repostings.

The Index assesses a company's trustworthiness (defined as delivering on its promise to stakeholders) on the basis of four dimensions of trust that we identified in our previous research: competence, fairness, transparency, and resilience. We use a list of more than 200 words derived from the academic literature and associated, positively or negatively, with these dimensions. For example, keywords related to competence include *credibility, capability, expertise, reliability, delivery, aptitude, achievement*, and *renown*, along with their antonyms. Keywords related to fairness include *concern, commitment, principle, respect*, and *values* (and their antonyms). Those linked to transparency include *forthrightness, accuracy, overt, monitoring, honesty, candor*, and *communication* (and their related opposites). And those associated with resilience include *confidence, collaboration, control, fiduciary, risk management* (and their opposites, such as *corruption, lawsuits, mistrust, malicious*, and *scandals*).

After filtering for company mentions that include the trust dimensions, the NLP engine analyzes each mention to determine whether the trust word is used in a positive, neutral, or negative context. (The engine discounts neutral mentions because they neither hurt nor improve a company's perceived trustworthiness.) The algorithm subtracts the total number of negative mentions from the total number of positive mentions and then divides by the total number of positive and negative mentions to calculate trust scores for each source (news and social).

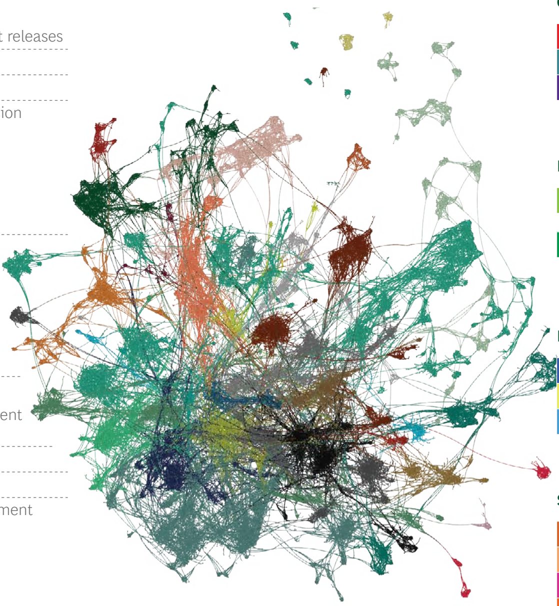
To calculate the overall trust score and the various subdimension (trust dimension) scores, we weight these trust scores for each source by potential impressions (total "eyeballs") and mentions (sentences). That is, we multiply the number of sentences by the number of eyeballs to obtain a "strength" score for each source. We do not adjust the trust score to introduce other factors (such as industry sentiment or company performance metrics), in order to provide an accurate reflection of the company's perceived trustworthiness.

After extracting the trust mentions from the text, they are analyzed using a sophisticated AI/NLP engine called Quid in order to surface key themes and topics inherent in the underlying trust conversations. The engine then generates a Quid graph as a visualization aid for the company, with individual nodes representing trust mentions. (See the exhibit.) Links are formed between nodes where common terms crop up; clusters and colors represent common features and themes. The proximity and strength of a given tie reflect the similarity of the nodes; for example, a shorter distance between clusters indicates a large number of interrelated trust mentions covering similar themes. Centrally located nodes and clusters are fundamental to the overall network, indicating major topics that bridge ideas. The result is a big-picture view that permits viewers to zoom in to see details that reveal key trust themes and insights.

The semantics underlying the Quid graph are crucial for producing a critical element that most trust metrics lack: a view of the rationale underlying high and low levels of trust—or in other words, an answer to the question, why is trust high, low, or moving?

Although we strongly believe the Trust Index is an extremely powerful and differentiated offering, we would be remiss not to highlight its limitations. First and foremost, the Trust Index measures trusting sentiment, a proxy for trust, which is itself a latent psychological state. Many people perceive things about a company, but unless they tangibly express those observations in the form of documentation in a traditional news or social media source, we cannot incorporate the observations into a measurement. At the same time, using news and social media as data sources may introduce biases related to the overrepresentation of some voices at the expense of others or the overrepresentation of some newsworthy topics over other topics. In our view, we can reduce some of these biases by filtering for trust-related mentions and by using the Trust Index primarily as a relative metric, rather than as an absolute one.

Key Themes Related to High Trust Include Innovation and Growth, Digitization Efforts, and Governance Topics



Innovation and growth (26.8%)
- 18.7% Product innovation and new product releases
- 3.8% Patenting activity/research grants
- 3.3% Clinical research studies and results
- 1.0% Supply chain innovation and expansion

Digital (20.2%)
- 12.9% Digital enablement and transformation/automation
- 4.1% Cybersecurity
- 3.3% Cloud security and data privacy

Governance and workforce (15.7%)
- 4.9% Diversity and inclusion efforts
- 2.7% Employee well
- 2.5% Leadership and executive management movements/appointments
- 1.9% Employee recruitment and benefits
- 1.9% Employee
- 1.8% Ethics compliance and risk management

Financial position (8.1%)
- 4.1% Investments and M&A
- 1.5% Wealth/asset management approach
- 1.0% Financing and capital management
- 0.7% New capital asset projects and construction
- 0.6% Sales forecasts and
- 0.2% Analyst ratings

Collaboration (7.6%)
- 4.4% Strategic collaborations and partnerships
- 2.8% Industry collaboration and knowledge sharing
- 0.5% Contract awards

Environment and sustainability (7.2%)
- 3.8% Emissions reductions and climate change mitigation efforts
- 3.4% Renewable energy initiatives and investments

Product/service performance (6.5%)
- 5.0% User/customer experience
- 1.1% Product/service safety and efficacy
- 0.5% Regulatory authorization and scrutiny

Social responsibility (5.2%)
- 2.7% Student training/education donations
- 1.6% Corporate support for COVID
- 1.0% Community/societal stewardship
- 0.1% Political donations and endorsements

Corruption, fraud, and scandals (2.5%)
- 2.5% Lawsuits and court cases

Each node represents one cluster of news articles/tweets, colored by cluster and sized by degree (representativeness)

Sources: NetbaseQuid; BCG Center for Growth & Innovation Analytics; BCG analysis.

Note: Analysis based on ~13,200 clusters of similar news articles and twitter posts related to select high-trust companies. Because of rounding the percentage totals given do not add up to exactly 100%.

Second, this report is based on data drawn exclusively from English-language conversations, and the only social media source we used was Twitter. Thus, for certain companies, our approach excludes insights from a large portion of conversations. Owing to limitations in segregating the origin of each potential impression, we aggregated trust scores at a global level, rather than by region, and we were unable to completely filter out company-generated mentions or to segregate mentions produced locally from those produced globally. We conducted offline data processing for each of the high-trust and low-trust samples included in the qualitative deep dives, but we were unable to do so at scale. We did our best to select high- and low-trust samples representative of the broader Top 100 and Bottom 100, but in some cases we had to make tradeoffs in order to prioritize a sample with a higher number of mentions to ensure that we were capturing the full breadth of the trust conversations.

Finally, there are inherent technological limitations in the ability of AI/NLP-driven semantic analysis to determine whether a particular post truly relates to trust and, if so, whether it is positive or negative.[16]

3. See *Measuring Trust: A Prerequisite to Unlocking Growth*, Edelman DXI, November 2021.

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