

# Chronological Analysis of Brand Trust: A Construct Proposition

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The purpose of this study is two-fold: 1) to identify the conceptual development of brand trust and 2) to propose the construct of brand trust. To help with this issue, more than twenty papers discussing the concepts of brand trust are selected and examined. The papers are chronologically analysed according to decades. A descriptive qualitative approach is used in this research. Through literature investigation it is found that although sources have various conceptualisations, they refer to the same or a similar feelings: confidence, belief, reliability, and security. However, further analysis suggests the conceptualisation of brand trust has been evolving chronologically and can be categorised into three phases: before 1990, between 1991 and 2010, and after 2011. This study contributes to the conceptualisation of brand trust through a historical (chronological) approach. It is evidence that a constructed conceptualisation of brand trust is a time-specific reflection.

**Key words:** *Brand Trust, Conceptualisation, Chronology.*

## Introduction

In this global market, building and maintaining relationships with customers are keys to successfully beating the competition (Alhaddad, 2015). Brand trust is the foundation to building these relationships (Chaudhari & Holbrook, 2001; Fischer & Gartner, 2015). Research on brand trust also suggests the importance of the factor. It has an impact on brand loyalty (Chaudhari & Holbrook 2001), purchase intention (Herbst, Hannah, and Allan, 2013), and customer commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Ballester 2000).

Research has been conducted on the issue (Hosmer, 1995) both theoretically and empirically (Fischer & Gartner, 2015). In conceptualising the term, there are different opinions (Hawass, 2013; Fischer & Gartner, 2015) as well as incomplete and inconsistent definitions (McKnight, 2002). The differences have to be analysed further since the differences could

make it difficult for researchers to compare research results (McKnight, Choudhury, and Kacmar, 2002), integrate different perspectives on trust and find agreement on its nature (Ballester, 2011).

Some scholars from different fields (psychology, sociology, economics, management, and marketing) have investigated on the concept of trust (Ballester, 2011). There are three approaches to trust conceptualisation. Personality psychologists assert trust is an individual characteristic, while social psychologists believe trust is an expectation of a specific transaction and the individual with whom someone is transacting. In contrast, economists and sociologists consider trust as uncertainty reduction in institutions. This leads to trust being associated with transaction (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995). In summation, different disciplines impact the concept of trust.

This study goes further by deepening the concept from different angle: chronological analysis. To make it more systematic, the research problem of this paper could be formulated as follows: 1) What is the development of brand trust conceptualisation from the 1970's until now? 2) What is the proposed construct of brand trust?

## **Literature Review**

### **1971-1980**

Trust is firstly defined as “the confidence that one will find what is desired from another, rather than what is feared (Deutsch, 1973).” This excerpt considers trust a belief that someone will receive what is expected. In an interaction, someone is always wondering what they will get from others. They always expect a benefit or positive impact from the interaction.

In line with Deutsch's conceptualisation, Worchel (1979) declares that trust is the confidence that someone will obtain something as expected. The expectation must cause a positive outcome, despite the possibility that it may cause a negative one. The possibility of a negative outcome is called risk. In this decade, trust is understood as a social interaction or individual relationship.

### **1981-1990**

Trust is essential in business and social interactions. Trust is defined as “confidence in the face of risk” (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). A broader definition is suggested by Schurr & Ozanne (1985): Brand trust is “a belief that an exchange partner is reliable and will fulfil the perceived obligations of the relationship”. Similar to Schurr & Ozanne, Costa & McCrae (1987) define brand trust as “willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has

confidence”. These last two definitions imply that trust should be mutual. Trust is the bonding of business interaction.

While the previous authors use partners in their definition, Anderson & Weitz (1989) refer to parties instead. Brand trust is defined as “one party’s belief that its needs would be fulfilled in the future by actions undertaken by the other party”. In line with that definition, Anderson & Narus (1990) define brand trust as “the firm's belief that another company will perform actions that will result in positive outcomes for the firm as well as not take unexpected actions that result in negative outcomes”. Brand trust refers to trust in a perceived outcome.

In this decade, brand trust is defined in a wider scope. If in the previous decade, brand trust refers to someone (a personal relationship), in this decade, brand trust is considered a mutual belief between partners or parties (an organisational relationship).

### **1991-2000**

Brand trust is defined as “a condition linking a certain optimistic opportunity about another’s intention with respect to oneself in risky state of affairs” (Boon & Holmes, 1991). Brand trust reflects the compared conditions of opportunities and threats as the consequence of interaction.

Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992) define brand trust as "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence”. This is in line with Moorman et al., and Morgan & Hunt’s (1994) definition of brand trust as one party’s confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity”. Both definitions of trust highlight the psychological aspect of confidence/reliability while integrity relates to attributes, such as consistency, commitment, fairness, responsibility, and honesty.

A less complicated definition is suggested by Hess (1995). Brand trust means “the consumer’s brand perceptions: altruism, honesty and potential performance of the product”. Brand trust is reflected by three dimensions; altruism, honesty and product performance.

Mayer, David, and Schoorman (1995) assert that brand trust means “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party”. Vulnerability refers to the uncertain conditions of the future called risks. Rousseau (1998) defines brand trust as “a psychosomatic state comprising the intention to recognise susceptibility based upon constructive prospect of the intentions or behaviour of another person”.

## **2001-2010**

Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) define brand trust as “willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function”. This definition stresses the concept of intentional behaviour and reliance. This definition also implies that trust compares brand performance and promised function. A stated function leads to consumers’ expectations. Consumers will trust a brand when the brand meets their expectations. Ballester & Aleman (2001) support this notion by defining brand trust as “a feeling of security that the brand will meet the consumers’ expectations”.

Brand trust does not only refer to the partnership relation between a product and consumers but also the relation between personal character and social interaction (Ballester & Aleman 2001). Ballester (2003) defines brand trust as “the confident expectations of the brand’s reliability and intentions”. Reliability refers to the belief that a brand will fulfil promised values. Intention is connected to the belief that a brand will respond to people’s interests when unexpected problems with product consumption arise.

Cristau (2006), as cited by Bouhleb, Hadji, and Slimane (2011), defines brand trust as “a feeling of security that is held by the consumer that the brand will meet their consumption expectations”. The feeling of security comes from prior experiences with the brand or other recommendations. This definition supports Ballester & Aleman’s definition.

Afzal, Khan, and Rehman (2010) define brand trust as “dependency on other parties at the level of risk with their own willingness”. Ruparelia, White, and Hughes (2010) believe that an awareness of brand attributes will positively impact businesses. By focussing on activities contributing to building and maintaining brand trust, marketing resources can be optimally and effectively used.

Brand trust correlates with two dimensions: 1) credibility and 2) performance satisfaction. Credibility reflects honesty and compliance among products, advertisement and other forms of communication. Performance satisfaction refers to product delivery (whether the product quality is as expected) (Reast, 2005).

## **2011-now**

Ballester (2011) defines brand trust as a “feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, that it is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer”. He further suggests two dimensions of brand trust: fiability and intentionality. Fiability reflects a technical dimension in nature. It concerns the perception that the brand can fulfil the consumers’ needs.

Intentionality refers to consumers' confidence that the brand will help with and care for problems that might arise in the future; the brand will not take advantage of consumer vulnerability.

Miao & Lee (2012) define brand trust as "a consumer psychological state of confidence and positive expectations from a brand". Brand trust can be seen as a factor of two dimensions: brand reliability (cognitive-based trust) and brand intentionality (emotion-based trust) (Hawas, 2013).

Ulfat, Sultana, Rafiq, and Sair (2015) define brand trust as "consumers' perceptions instead of consumers' behaviour, keeping in view all the items associated with this head". Brand trust is consumer perception; it relates to what people think.

### Approach/Method

This study adopts a descriptive, qualitative approach. The author investigates the literature from various reputable journals. Definitions proposed by scholars are analysed chronologically by decade to find out the concept development of brand trust. It is assumed that changes of definitions represent changes in the environment both in the academic world and the practical one.

### Discussion

In this part, definitions of brand trust are grouped by decade. Similarities and differences among them are analysed. From the analysis, a construct of brand trust will then be proposed.

The following table describes the development of brand trust definitions and their dimensions.

**Table 1:** Definitions of Brand Trust

Decades	Author, Year	Definition
Before 1990	Deutsch (1973)	The confidence that one will find what is desired from another, rather than what is feared.
	Worchel (1979)	Expectation, which may cause a positive outcome, despite the possibility that it may cause a negative outcome.
	Schurr & Ozanne (1985)	A belief that an exchange partner is reliable and will fulfil the perceived obligations of the relationship.

	Lewis & Weigert (1985).	Confidence in the face of risk, not a mere predictability.
	Costa & McCrae (1987)	Willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence.
	Anderson & Weitz (1989)	One party's belief that its needs would be fulfilled in the future by actions undertaken by the other party.
	Anderson & Narus (1990).	The firm's belief that another company will perform actions that will result in positive outcomes for the firm as well as not take unexpected actions that result in negative outcomes.
1991-2010	Boon & Holmes (1991)	A condition linking certain optimistic opportunity about another's intention with respect to oneself in risky state of affairs.
	Moorman, et al (1992)	A willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence.
	Morgan & Hunt (1994)	When one party had confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and an integrity.
	Barney & Hansen (1994)	The mutual confidence that no party to an exchange will exploit another vulnerability.
	Hess (1995)	The consumer's brand perceptions: altruism, honesty and potential performance of the product.
	Mayer, et al. (1995)	The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party.
	Rousseau (1998)	Psychosomatic state comprising the intention to recognise susceptibility based upon constructive prospect of the intentions or behaviour of another person.
	Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001)	Willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function.
	Ballester & Aleman (2001)	A feeling of security that the brand will meet consumption expectations.
	Ballester et al (2003)	The confident expectations of the brand's reliability and intentions.
Cristau (2006)	A feeling of security that is held by the consumer that the brand will meet their consumption expectations.	

	Afzal, et al. (2010)	Dependency on other parties at the level of risk with their own willingness.
After 2011	Ballester (2011)	Feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, that it is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer.
	Miao & Lee (2012)	A consumer psychological state of confidence and positive expectations from a brand.
	Ulfat et al. (2015)	Consumers perception instead of consumer behaviour, keeping in view all the items associated with this head.

From the above definitions, it can be clearly seen that although there are various conceptualisations, there are similar key words, such as confidence/confident (Deutsch, 1973; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Ballester, 2003), belief (Schurr & Ozanne, 1985; Anderson & Weitch, 1989), reliability (Costa & McCrae, 1998; Choudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), and feeling of security (Cristau, 2006; Ballester, 2011).

However, it is interesting to know that chronologically, the conceptual definition of brand trust can be divided into three phases: First, before 1990, brand trust refers to personal or social interaction (Deutsch, 1973; Schurr & Ozanne, 1985; Costa & McCrae, 1987; Anderson & Weitz, 1989). Second, between 1991 and 2010, some authors define brand trust as a personal relationship or relationship between parties (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Boon & Holmes, 1991; Moorman, et al., 1992). Some other scholars define brand trust as the relationship between consumers and products (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Ballester, 2003; Cristau, 2006). One author in this decade defines brand trust as the relationship between consumers and brands (Hess, 1995). Third, after 2011, brand trust is defined as the relationship between consumers and the brand (Ballester, 2011; Miao & Lee, 2012 and Ulfat et al., 2015).

## Conclusion

Drawing from the above discussion, it is evident that the definition is evolving from year to year. The development is supposed as the reflection of social and business changes both in the academic and empirical world. In the beginning (before 1990), trust is defined as a personal and social relationship. In the second phase (1991-2010), trust is considered the confident perception of parties about a product or brand. In the last phase (after 2011), trust refers to a belief between consumers and a brand.

Consistent with the above findings, the authors propose the construct of brand trust as consumers' belief or perceptions about the reliability of given products and integrity of



persons, parties or brands. The latter regards fulfilling expectations based on stated promises and confidence that a brand will care about problems that may arise.

This definition covers the previous conceptualisation of brand trust, which consists of three dimensions: psychological, cognitive and intentional. Belief or perception is emotion-based trust, which is quite personal and situational. Cognitive-based trust refers to the consideration of consumers in deciding whether a brand could meet their expectation. Intentional trust refers to a belief that a brand will not take advantage of consumers.



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