

Trust in a changing world

Area of research interest: [Behaviour and perception](#)

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Conducted by: ICF Consulting, Community Research and 2CV

Context

To be effective and influential, regulatory bodies cannot take public trust for granted, otherwise they will struggle with stakeholder acceptance of communications, co-operation, and public health may be put at risk.

Objective

Identify what indicates trustworthiness to consumers in the food industry and food regulator and make recommendations on how to meet these expectations.

Main findings

Rapid Evidence Assessment

- Many different trust concepts, terms and definitions were identified in the literature. These include generalised trust, social trust, political trust, distributed trust and consumer confidence. There is an important distinction between low trust and distrust.
- All these concepts are relevant to food in some way, although determining what might drive or prevent trust in food will also be dependent on: the nature of the food industry and regulator; who holds the most power in the system; and what consumers are most concerned about in the food system.
- At a more general level, trust was found to be influenced by: media coverage and crises; endorsement of others; confirmation bias; perceptions of complexity; familiarity; honesty; consistency; independence; ability; and good intentions.

Deliberative Forums

- Trust is a complex social necessity. There are 3 core steps in understanding trust decisions: Context; 'Social Trust' (Intention); 'Cognitive Trust' (Delivery).
- Loss of social trust is most damaging, while cognitive trust is more resilient.
- The context for food sector decisions makes trust easier for the public. The food sector also has major advantages in both the social and cognitive trust spheres.
- The current high levels of trust in FSA do not seem to be based on detailed understanding of FSA performance. As the public learn more about the food sector, this can increase concern. However, learning more about the FSA's role increases trust in FSA.
- Overall the public want a visible, powerful FSA protecting their interests in the food system while maintaining proactive consumer communications that help the public empower themselves.

Research reports

Research report

England, Northern Ireland and Wales

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