Building Trust in a Post-Truth Tribal World

Steps to Restoring Consumer Trust

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HELPING TODAY’S FOOD SYSTEM EARN CONSUMER TRUST

THE CENTER FOR FOOD INTEGRITY℠
Today’s Topics

• How did trust in food and ag become compromised?
• What we’ve learned about building trust
• Building trust in a post-truth tribal world
How did trust in food become compromised?
Today’s Food System

Safer  More available  More affordable

Consumers are more skeptical and concerned.

How did that happen?
1968

THE YEAR THAT SHAPED A GENERATION.

SAFE FOOD CALIFORNIA

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1968 Assassinations
1968 Democratic Convention
Vietnam
1968 First Photo of Earth from Space
1972 – Watergate Break-In
’70s–’80s Events

IRAN CONTRA - 1986

THREE MILE ISLAND - 1979

EXXON VALDEZ - 1989

JIMMY SWAGGERT - 1988

JIM BAKKER - 1987

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2000s - Events

Oath Betrayed
America's Torture Doctors

ABU GHRAIB - 2004

JOHN EDWARDS - 2008

ELIOT SPITZER - 2008

TIGER WOODS - 2009

SAFE FOOD CALIFORNIA

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Mortgage fraud flourished in an environment of collapsing lending standards amid lax regulation.

- Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission
2010s – More Events

BP’S HAYWARD APOLOGIZES: “I’D LIKE MY LIFE BACK”

BP OIL SPILL - 2010

BILLIONAIRE POLLUTERS

PENN STATE - 2011

BLACK LIVES MATTER

#MeToo

I CAN’T BREATHE

SAFE FOOD CALIFORNIA

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The Decline of Trust

The frequency and visibility of violations of public trust have been consistent enough to breed public skepticism about whether government, businesses and other institutions are worthy of trust.
Very Interesting Charlie, but what does this have to do with ag and food?
Consolidation, Integration and Industrialization
Historical Perspective on the Decline of Trust

THEN

Authority is granted primarily by office
Broad social consensus driven by WASP males
Communication is formal, indirect (mass communication)
Progress is inevitable
“Big” is respected

NOW

Authority is granted primarily by relationship
No single social consensus, great diversity, many voices
Communication is informal, direct (masses of communicators)
Progress is possible
“Big” is bad
Big is Bad

FARMS
BIG IS BAD

Just over 1 in 5 strongly believe small farms will put their interests ahead of public interest.

While nearly HALF strongly believe large farms will.
Big is Bad

Just over 1 in 4 strongly believe small food companies will put their interests ahead of public interest.

Just OVER HALF strongly believe large food companies will.

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Traditional Communications are Less Effective Today

Traditional Communication Model

- Consumer
- Consumer
- Consumer
- Expert

Tribal/Network Communication Model

- Online Friends
- Family
- Neighbor
- Friend
- Family
- Online Friends
- Family
- Blogs
The “Mom Tribe” Consumer Panel

What information sources have you used to come to your conclusions that GMOs are dangerous?

Heidi: “I’m part of a moms group. When there is a big consensus, I think ‘there’s something here.’ You don’t need doctors or scientists confirming it when you have hundreds of moms.”
Communicating Science

Why the hostility toward science?
“I think it's at least partly a communication issue. **Trust** is really important, because ... we [don't] have the time in our ordinary lives to get up to speed on ... nanoscience or quantum mechanics...

Science and the public have separated so much that many people in the public consider science just another opinion.”

- Alan Alda
No, onions do not absorb bacteria. The idea that a vegetable would attract and suck into itself bacteria from the air is not even logical. The onion may turn black because it would eventually rot from both cell breakdown events and bacterial contamination if you left it out, not because it absorbs germs.

- Ruth MacDonald, PhD, RD, Chair and Professor of the Department of Food Science & Human Nutrition at Iowa State University

Total thumbs down on this article. Old wives tales endure centuries for a reason. I started leaving a cut onion on the counter when my son was 12 and neither of us had as much as a cold throughout until his graduation. Science doesn't have to "prove" anything to make me believe it works.

- Cindy Gable
Cycle of Continuous Influence

Regulators

Your Company

Branded Food & Beverage Companies

Consumer Influencers
Trust to Ensure Safe Food Vs. Hold Responsible

**TRUST TO ENSURE SAFE FOOD**
1. Family
2. Family Doctor
3. Farmers
4. Dietitians
5. Nutrition Advocacy Groups
6. University Scientists
7. Grocery Store
8. Federal Regulatory Agencies
9. State Regulatory Agencies
10. Restaurants
11. Food Companies

**HOLD RESPONSIBLE TO ENSURE SAFE FOOD**
1. Federal Regulatory Agencies
2. Food Companies
3. Farmers
4. State Regulatory Agencies
5. Family
6. Grocery Stores
7. Family Doctor
8. Restaurants
9. Nutrition Advocacy Groups
10. University Scientists
11. Dietitians
What We’ve Learned about Building Trust
Trust Model (Sapp/Look East)

The privilege of operating with minimal formalized restrictions based on maintaining public trust

The ability to do what you do best with minimal outside interference

SOCIAL LICENSE

FREEDOM TO OPERATE

Trust research was published in the *Journal of Rural Sociology*
Social License Challenge: Contaminated Produce

Strawberries are contaminated with pesticides, poisonous gases

Listeria Recall: Green Beans

Romaine Lettuce Suspected in US E. coli Outbreak
DANNON Commits to Transparency and Non-GMO Feed for All Its Cows

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Social License Challenge: Public Health

Eating Red, Processed Meat Raises Your Risk of Early Death

HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Powerful ideas for a healthier world

SAFE FOOD CALIFORNIA

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Cost of Losing Social License

- Cost of future regulations +
- Cost of assets lost +
- Cost of lost sales +
- Reduced stock price +
- Loss of consumer confidence +
- Increased operating cost +
- Loss of reputation +
- Reduced employee satisfaction

**Total cost of social license lost**
Trust Model  (Sapp/Look East)

- CONFIDENCE
- VALUE SIMILARITY
- COMPETENCE
- INFLUENTIAL OTHERS
- TRUST
- SOCIAL LICENSE
- FREEDOM TO OPERATE
Shared values are 3-5x more important to building trust than sharing facts or demonstrating technical skills/expertise
Sustainable Balance

Economically Viable
- ROI
- Demand
- Cost Control
- Productivity
- Efficiency

Profitability

Knowledge

Scientifically Verified
- Data Driven
- Repeatable
- Measurable
- Specific

Objectivity

Knowledge

Ethically Grounded

Compassion
- Responsibility
- Respect
- Fairness
- Truth

Value
- Similarity

Feelings
- Belief

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Science Question</th>
<th>Ethical Question</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CAN</strong></td>
<td><strong>SHOULD</strong></td>
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Don’t abandon science and facts

Lead with Shared Values to Build Trust
Connecting with Consumers in a Post-Truth Tribal World
What Makes Information Credible?

Download Research Summary at FoodIntegrity.org
The Belief Spectrum

People’s assessment of what makes food information credible is shaped by their relationship to the truth.
The Belief Spectrum

On the left of the spectrum are people who understand truth as objective: a knowable fact that can be best observed through the scientific method.

On the right of the spectrum are people for whom ‘truth’ is subjectively determined (regardless of whether they realize it). For them, what makes information credible is more about what “feels true for me” based on deeply held beliefs.

In the middle are people for whom truth is both objectively and subjectively determined. These consumers are often confused by the amount and the often contradictory nature of information, so they seek guidance from others to determine credibility.
Food news is symbolic of...

**Scientific**
They love it, because they know nothing is simple or black and white.

**Philosopher**
Ethical rationality: Seeing rational arguments in ethics, and what they consider being morally right – their opinion positions them on the “right” side of morality.

**Follower**
Confusion: It causes stress and anxiety and threatens one’s sense of being and self.

**Wishful Thinker**
Underlying aspirations: It confirms their dreams and hopes, and makes an objective seem attainable – e.g. Ongoing happiness.

**Existentialist**
The ideological battlefield: It either prepares them when it confirms their ideas, or threatens them when it opposes.
Scientifics are the technical information pioneers in food news. They drive the standard of scientific claims that others evaluate. They are technical pioneers, but not the culture creators. Their lack of clarity and inability to simplify conversations limits their influence to Philosophers.

Philosophers represent the culture creator in the category.
Philosophers assess evidence through a simple, clear ethical lens. This influences the Follower.

Followers fear doing the wrong thing, and jeopardizing the health of their families. They look towards Philosophers, and other Followers, for advice that’s simple to understand, and that *feels* right – because it’s ethically or morally the right thing to do.
Strategic Opportunities

• Inputs: Guide Our Strategy
  – Approach: Ethical rationality.
  – Opportunity to leverage other parents, farmers, wives and husbands to deliver ethically rational arguments.
    (Academics who are relatable have the advantage of credible expertise – not a company or trade association – and the ability to connect.)
Strategic Opportunities

• Outputs: What We Deliver
  – Simple and easy to understand.
  – Visualizable arguments.
  – How-to or what-to-do.

Most important: You’re giving Followers the comfort of knowing that they are doing the right thing.

Permission to believe
Three-Step Formula for Evolving Beliefs

1. The messenger needs to be an expert Followers trust.
   (Relatability = shared values + competency)

2. The message should be unambiguous and deliver a simple solution.

3. The message should address a specific vulnerability of the Follower. Followers fear they will miss something or do the wrong thing, thereby jeopardizing the health of their families or themselves.
Consumer Needs

Social

Rational

Emotional
Consumer Trends
Reshaping the Market
Consumers Continue to Evolve

- Technology enabled
- Experience focused
- Vocal
- Trust and ethics
- Urbanised
- Time poor
- Diverse
- Transparency
- Health conscious
- Savvy
- Ageing
- Authenticity
Transition of Power From Seller to Customer

**AGE OF THE SELLER**

- **Seller Controls**: Pre 2010
- **Customer Controls**: Product or Service, Buying Decision, Word of Mouth

**AGE OF THE CUSTOMER**

- **Seller Controls**: Pre 2010
- **Customer Controls**: Product or Service, User generated content, Buying Decision

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"Competitive Strategy in the Age of the Customer", Forrester Research, October 2013

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Today You Must Compete For...
Implications for You

• **Who you are is as important as what you know**
  – Communicating shared values makes technical information more relevant and accessible

• **Embrace skepticism – It’s not personal, it’s a social condition**
  – Skepticism is the fuel for scientific discovery

• **The public wants information from academics but not academic information**
  – Learn to speak the language of social media

• **Transparency is no longer optional**
  – Authentic transparency is the path to building trust in food in the 21st century
Three Things You Can Do

1. Begin your public engagement using shared values
   – “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”
     T. Roosevelt

2. Open the digital door to today’s food system
   – Find ways to make what you do transparent to illustrate your commitment to do
     “what’s right”

3. Commit to engaging early, often and consistently
   – Your voice, your knowledge and your credibility matter. You can make a difference in
     building public trust, but you have to learn how to play by new rules
Shameless Self-Promotion

Despite food being safer, more affordable and more available than at any time in human history, consumers are increasingly skeptical and critical of today’s food system. In Size Matters, Charlie Arnot provides thought provoking insight into how the food system lost consumer trust, what can be done to restore it, and the remarkable changes taking place on farms and in food companies, supermarkets and restaurants every day as technology and consumer demand drive radical change.

Print and digital editions available on Amazon
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