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Exploring Trust in Media Brands today: Definition, Dimensions and cross-national Differences

Define Media Brand and Media Brand Trust

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1. Introduction

Due to the attention economy and an ongoing growth of media choices, media brands and consumers in today's world are affected by massive competition and the challenge to decide (Nelson-Field, 2020). Consumers in this environment not only choose which media to engage with, but actively shape the public perception of each brand through their own actions (Holt, 2004). Media digitization and media convergence further influence the media environment through the increasing extent of co-created content produced by companies and consumers distributed through the same channels (Malmelin & Villi, 2017). This convergence is characterized by the establishment of media conglomerates integrating content and brands across many channels and consumers taking media in their own hands (Moisander et al., 2012). Additionally, even brands traditionally operating in non-media related businesses establish their own media functions and search for ways to manage this area (Baetzgen & Tropp, 2015). This reality, shaping the process of consumers deciding for one and against another media brand, is influenced by conscious and unconscious factors that need to be evaluated by media brands in terms of developing and achieving strategic goals (Santoso et al., 2017).

In this environment, media managers are facing the growing need for valid parameters measuring media brand success to provide an attractive offering (Siegert, 2015). As research has shown, a positive perception of the media environment not only influences the media brands themselves but also the advertising industry (Kwon et al., 2018). Among other things, this is due to the halo effect describing the impact of the media environment on advertising effectiveness (Liu-Thompkins, 2019).

Given the differences between brands and media brands for example presented by Malthouse & Calder (2018) and the existing media definitions largely dating back to an offline-media world, fundamental research is required to develop a substantive and timely definition of the term 'media brand' and the multidimensional structure of MBT distinguished from available trust models.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Brand and Media Brand Definitions

Media brands and brand trust measurements are a momentous topic in marketing literature with numerous articles published in the past (e.g. Malmelin & Moisander, 2014; Sung & Kim, 2010; Xie & Peng, 2009). However, while brands in general have been at the core of (trust) research for several decades, this focus has not been directed towards media brands in particular. Nevertheless, this focus is of major importance due to the special role of brand trust in the media sector. It is based on the interplay between media and society that can be described as a circular model of media representation and societal influence (Hodkinson, 2016). Trust in media brands thus not only has an impact on the brands themselves, but also on social environments and (democratic) society as a whole (Ariely, 2015; Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2022).

When approaching this topic and observing brands in general and media brands in specific, several significant differences are noticeable that require a precise differentiation. While brands in general operate in a persuasive manner, exploiting media channels mostly for the communication of products and services available to the market (Malthouse & Calder, 2018). In contrast, media brands can rather be characterized as 'social shells', resulting in a business operation that is distinguished through owned media content, user-generated content and advertising distributed through the same channels (Ots & Hartman, 2015). While traditionally media brands operated in a one-directional environment, creating and distributing content mostly through their own channels, in this digital age of media everybody can be a creator and content is available through various channels and often in close proximity to content produced by consumers and competitors (Hess, 2014). This operation today can be characterized as a two-sided market, providing content to consumers and reselling their attention to advertisers simultaneously (Anderson & Jullien, 2015). Furthermore, business processes connected to media brands are rather based on engagement with consumers' attention as the main success factors (Malthouse & Calder, 2018). Additionally, while media brands depend on advertising to fund their business, brands in general rather rely on selling their goods and services to consumers (Eisend & Knoll, 2012). Finally, differences between trust in brands in general and media brands do not only play a role to

the media brands themselves, but especially need to be observed based on the stronger impact of media on consumer's perception of social reality (Shrum, 2009).

Analyzing media and media brands, various studies from different perspectives are available. Evaluating these publications allowed us to provide an overview on the current media (brand) research. Aggregating several approaches, media (brands) can be characterized as consumption categories (Chan-Olmsted, 2011), as external business functions (Malmelin & Moisander, 2014), as intrinsic functions of the company (Voci et al., 2019), based on their cultural relevance as platforms (Ots & Hartmann, 2015), and as communicative approaches (Hess, 2014). While those publications focus on several areas of the market such as media in general and media organizations, research on media brands in specific and a definition to specify which brands are 'media brands' has not been published yet. Extracting the elements relevant for media brands is of major importance to present a theoretically sound definition applicable in today's media landscape. Additionally, the definitions were developed from a theoretical and practical point of view and did not specifically take consumers' perception into account. However, as media brands largely rely on their audience' consumption, only by understanding consumers' definition of an area, managers can distinguish between competitors and other players in the market and adapt their strategy and communication accordingly (Punj & Moon, 2002). The main challenge for the determination of such a valid definition is the rapid evolution of business processes and distribution channels that has been ongoing for several decades (Scolari, 2013). Therefore, combining available theoretical publications with consumer's perception is of major relevance in terms of developing a timely and substantive definition of media brands.

Resulting from this requirement, our first two research questions are:

RQ1: How can brand categories be separated into 'media' and 'non-media' from a consumer's perspective?

RQ2: What is a timely, user-centric definition of 'media brands'?

2.2. Trust Constructs and Trust Measurement

Significantly driving perception and usage of media, understanding and measuring trust relevant to media brands and the advertising industry (Strömbäck et al., 2020). Advertised brands benefit from trust in a chosen media environment due to its significant impact on 'consumer behavior intentions' (Enehasse & Sağlam, 2020). Trust plays this key role through its impact on commercial exchange relationships by creating a competitive advantage and promoting marketing success (Wottrich et al., 2016). This way, trust is not only influential for consumers' cognitive and emotional decisions, but subsequently also drives consumer-brand relationships (Ozdemir et al., 2020; Punyatoya, 2019). While media brands in today's world are confronted with trust issues, for example presented in the area of news media by Park et al. (2020), media managers require a better understanding on why trust is established and how it can be improved.

Approaching this topic of measuring trust in media brands, the analysis of available brand trust scales regarding relevant dimensions is essential as the foundation of a trust model specifically addressing media brands. However, due to an ever-evolving media landscape and the essential differences between brands in general and media brands in specific, it demands the supplementary analysis of consumer perceptions to determine a comprehensive set of elements underlying MBT. While various trust scales have been developed focusing on different brand- and non-brand-related concepts (e.g. Gurviez & Korchia, 2003; Munuera-Aleman et al., 2003), no research has been focused on transferring these findings to the specific analysis of trust in media brands. By analyzing the available literature on (brand) trust, we determined several elements and dimensions that were introduced in terms of the development of a multidimensional (brand) trust scheme. The main dimensions presented to measure trust as a formative construct are (1) Competence, describing the organizational ability to realize promises based on available expertise, skills and leadership (e.g. Hegner & Jevons, 2016; Mal et al., 2018; Xie & Peng, 2009); (2) Credibility, characterized as the ability to meet a consumer's expected performance (e.g. Fisher, 2016; Gurviez & Korchia, 2003; Palmatier et al., 2006); (3) Intentionality, representing consumers' perception of the brand as being 'responsible and caring despite the vicissitudes of future problematic situations' (Munuera-Aleman et al., 2003); (4) Transparency, describing the availability of information on a company's internal processes and open communication about content production (Kang & Hustvedt, 2013; Mal et al., 2018); and (5) Integrity, describing the

belief that a brand is consistent, honest and responsible (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005; Mal et al., 2018). While the publications defining those elements as underlying trust focused on organizations or brands, it is necessary to conduct additional research on the importance of each dimension and possible additions required in terms of MBT. This expansion demands particular attention on cognitive and emotional responses, as media consumption has significant influences on both areas (Potter & Bolls, 2012). Shaping brand image, those emotional and cognitive factors should be a significant part of media brands' strategic operations (Syed Alwi & Kitchen, 2014). Furthermore, as trust is an important factor for the consumption of and decision for certain media brands, defining this concept is especially relevant (Schranz et al., 2018).

Based on qualitative data we generated through focus group interviews (FGIs) we conducted an explorative approach that permits the determination of new dimensions. In line with the categorization of brands, this approach allows for the amplification of theoretical definitions through consumers' perceptions. By conducting the FGIs we generated a broad dataset which we used to evaluate established dimensions and provide content for the inductive development of new elements (Wilkinson, 1998). As MBT plays a role on an international level, by conducting FGIs in multiple countries we were able to analyze similarities and differences in terms of the MBT. Combining available publications with the data generated through the FGIs we aim for the definition of a structure underlying MBT. Therefore, our third and fourth research questions are the following:

RQ3: Which dimensions constitute trust in media brands?

RQ4: Are there country-based specifics concerning media brand trust?

3. Methodology

Based on the diverse nature of our research questions we decided to apply a mixed-method design. We chose this process due to the advantage of mixed-method studies in the analysis of social realities, providing different types of data to the analysis of complex circumstances (Dellinger & Leech, 2007). We organized three types of surveys to generate data allowing for the development of the valid definition of 'media brands' and the connected MBT scheme. First, we conducted a quantitative media classification online survey in Germany, the US, and South Korea, collecting empirical data on the categorization of (media) brands. The decision for those markets was based on the different media systems (US - private, South Korea - public, Germany - mixed), but also on the objective to generate a culturally diverse dataset. Second, we performed FGIs in the three countries to gather qualitative insights into the perception of and interaction with media brands. Third, we interviewed experts from media research and practice to evaluate our findings and to challenge the developed area of construct. Tapping into the expertise of our interview partners, this process provided feedback on the validity of the consumer-based media brand categorization and allowed for the revision of the proposed structure of MBT and the definition of each dimension.

3.1.   Collecting quantitative data

First, we conducted an online quantitative media classification survey using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to generate data on the perception of brands as 'media' and 'non-media'. By evaluating this data we were aiming for the establishment of a consumer-based categorization of brands into 'media' and 'non-media'. To ensure validity we provided 100 participants from Germany, the US and South Korea (n = 300) with a list of local and global brands to be categorized according to the scheme 'media', 'non-media', and 'I don't know this brand'. Besides the country-specific recruitment of participants and a required level of survey expertise (> 50 completed surveys; response-approval > 90%), we did not implement additional demographic criteria. During the process of brand selection we followed a thorough process aiming for the establishment of a comprehensive foundation. First, we generated an extensive list of brand categories that could be perceived as media by consumers (e.g. Social Media, Print Publishers, Influencers). Second, we collected brands for each category on a local and global level to generate a substantive representation of each category. This process resulted

in the creation of 29 brand categories consisting of 387 brands in total. Taking care of cross-country equivalence incorporating differences between locally and globally operating brands, the list of brands varied slightly with 127 brands included in Germany, 139 brands in the US, and 121 brands in South Korea. By analyzing the data gathered for all brands included in the survey, we were then able to quantitatively differentiate between brand categories perceived as 'media' and 'non-media' as perceived from a consumer perspective.

3.2. Collecting qualitative data

Following the quantitative approach we conducted qualitative surveys in the form of semi-structured FGIs in the same markets (Germany, US, South Korea), allowing for the international observation of consumer interactions with and the perception of media brands and MBT. We decided to collect the data through FGIs due to the explorative nature of RQ3, which is suitable to the in-depth survey nature best applied to topics about which little is known (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). By interviewing participants in a group we were able to generate a comprehensive understanding by gathering insights into norms, beliefs and values that are common in the lives of all interviewees (Bloor, 2001).

As the study aims at media users in general, besides the goal of using a maximum variation sampling allowing the identification of patterns across different cases and cultures, no specific additional qualification criteria for participation were required (Hoepfl, 1997). Focus groups were organized based on homogeneity within groups and heterogeneity between groups, aligning with the focus group methodological principles (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). Since we conducted interviews in three countries it was important to ensure comparability regarding participants and survey execution (van Bezouw et al., 2019). Therefore, participants in all countries were either enrolled in undergraduate or graduate studies or working as research assistants. In the end, we recruited 55 participants (19 in Germany, 16 in the US, and 20 in South Korea). The number of participants per interview was determined based on the saturation principle and ranged from four to eight participants per group (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Each participant was rewarded with a 25€ voucher. All interviews were conducted digitally and lasted about 60 minutes. We recorded the interviews via audio recordings which were transcribed and anonymized subsequently. In line with the research questions

addressed in this study, we developed the interview guide focusing on the establishment of an understanding of media brand definitions and usage, as well as the definition of MBT and relevant dimensions underlying the construct.

After conducting the interviews we deductively developed a category system. We defined thematic categories based on the available literature on media (brands) (e.g. Malmelin & Moisander, 2014; Voci et al., 2019) and brand trust (e.g. Mal et al., 2018; Munuera-Aleman et al., 2003). Additionally, we incorporated results from Chan-Olmsted & Kim (2022) who conducted interviews aimed at the determination of dimensions underlying MBT. Emerging from the literature review, we developed a set of eleven dimensions as relevant to consumers trusting media brands. Based on this initial set of categories, we defined coding rules and category definitions underlying the process of data analysis.

Next, by analyzing and interpreting one interview per country we were able to compare initial findings to the category set we developed deductively. Through hermeneutical and interpretive reading of the interviews, we inductively expanded the set of relevant categories by another twelve explorative codes. The detailed list of categories and subcategories resulting from this deductive and inductive approach can be found in Table 1.

Category	Trust Dimensions	Explorative Codes
Subcategory	Relevancy Integrity Transparency Likeness Experience Benevolence Credibility Competence Halo Time Commercialism	Daily Media Usage Media Usage Times Media Brand Definition Media Usage Reason Media Categories Trust Definition Media Brand Trust Reason Impact of Trust Reasons to Distrust Media Values Emotions & Media Traditional & Modern Media

Table 1: Structure of the Focus Group Analysis

Based on this coding scheme we established the analysis guide to be used in the subsequent examination of all nine interviews. By reading through all transcripts again we determined the final coding guide which we used in the coding and analysis process.

During the coding phase conducted with MAXQDA, two researchers read through and coded all interview transcripts in line with the coding guide. By aggregating and validating both coders' results we generated a final set of coded segments and validated this outcome through inter-coder agreement. Subsequently, we created summaries of the different codes and categories which were instrumental to the final phase of analysis.

Concluding the phase of qualitative analysis we followed the process of thematic preparation and analysis (Kuckartz, 2014). First, we prepared thematic matrices with quotes and summaries, as well as case-based summaries of the different categories. Based on this foundation we conducted thematic analysis by observing the data in line with categories, the relationship between categories and sub-categories, and the connections between different sub-categories.

3.3. Expert Interviews

Finally we challenged our results with a series of expert interviews. Specifically, we wanted experts to revise our selection of brands for the MTurk task and discuss the classification results. Further, we wanted them to review the dimensions underlying MBT obtained from the FGIs. We conducted the expert interviews in a 'theory generating' manner, aiming for the analytic reconstruction and communicative clarification of subjective perceptions of the experts' knowledge (Bogner & Menz, 2009). This process enabled us to pose open questions and ask for personal opinions and insights in terms of tapping into the perception of experts from theoretical and practical backgrounds.

To recruit the experts, we reached out to eligible media researchers and practitioners at a global scale. Nine experts working in media research as well as three practitioners from media business practice agreed to take part in our interviews. Interviews were conducted with experts from six countries (e.g. Germany, Australia, the US). All interviews were conducted via Zoom or Microsoft Teams and were systematically documented.

4. Results

4.1. Media Classification Online Survey

Based on the comprehensive set of categories analyzed in the multi-national survey, we were able to establish a distinct categorization of (media) brand categories. In line with RQ1, by aggregating all responses and categorizing each brand according to the brand category scheme, we developed a distinct categorization of brands into 'media' and 'non-media' (excluding all 'I don't know this brand' responses). We further aggregated brands attributed to the same area into groups which allowed for the establishment of an empirical classification. This added the differentiation between brand categories perceived as 'media' and 'non-media' to our results. We decided to define brand categories as 'media brand category' if the brand-aggregated rating yields more than 50% agreement. Table 2 provides the resulting classification.

Media Brand Categories (> 50%)	Non-Media Brand Categories (≤ 50%)
Television Channel	Gaming (Platform)
Television Network	Gaming (Hardware)
Radio Station	Gaming (Software)
Radio Programme	Gaming (Mobile)
News (Online)	Hardware Provider
News (Offline)	Software Provider
News (Agency)	Dating Platform
Film Studio (Parent)	Event
Film Studio (Major)	Network Provider
Music Label	Online Retailer
Streaming Provider (Music)	Global Tech Brands
Streaming Provider (Video)	Influencers
Social Media	
Print Publisher	
Outdoor Advertiser	
Text Messenger Service	
Video Chat Service	

Table 2: Categorization of Media and Non-Media Brands

Not surprisingly, we see that all traditional media categories such as TV, radio and news in general are still strongly perceived as media. Further, digital entertainment brands such as streaming (e.g. Netflix, Spotify) and social media (e.g. Facebook, TikTok) were clearly classified as media. However, it is important to note that brands with a broad set of sub brands focusing on different areas (e.g. Amazon, Apple) need to be differentiated by the specific sub brands. For example, this resulted in the umbrella

brands (Amazon, Apple) not being perceived as media, while sub brands like Amazon Prime Video or Apple Music were clearly rated as media brands by the participants. Brands focusing on the provision of technology required for media distribution such as hardware (e.g. Xbox, Huawei), software (e.g. Microsoft, Ubuntu) and network providers (e.g. AT&T, T-Mobile) were not part of the consumer's media perception. This categorization is supporting the development of a user-driven definition of media brands in the next step.

4.2. International Focus Group Interviews

Following the process of qualitative content analysis described in chapter 3.2.1, we examined the FGIs by categorizing statements according to the analysis structure developed deductively and inductively. With this approach we aimed for the development of a consumer-based media brand definition and the establishment of a reliable structure of dimensions underlying MBT. Coding was conducted by two researchers separately, generating different datasets to be aligned subsequently. Based on the aggregation and validation of both coders' results we generated a set of 881 coded segments which were marked with an inter-coder agreement of 96%. The inductive definition of explorative codes as listed in Table 2 enabled us to dive deeper into consumers' perceptions of media brands.

First, we conducted our development on the basis of the media brand categorization presented in chapter 3.1.2. and statements recorded by participants of the FGIs. This thematic analysis was based on 64 statements recorded from all three markets. When thinking about how to define media, the main narrative reported by FGI participants revolved around the means of communication, as well as the distribution and consumption of information. Responses showed that media is used to share own messages, but also to engage with content produced by brands and other consumers. The main statements on different sub themes of trust can be found in Table 3. All statements from Germany and Korea were translated by two native speaking researchers.

Subthemes	Examples	Quantitative Results
Media Categories	*"In the past, there were some media that we thought were limited. If it's a newspaper, there's a medium called a newspaper, and if it's a movie, there's a movie theater platform. If it's a television, there's a platform called television. And I think they're getting better and better so that we can communicate more interactively through the development of online and computers or something like this. And I think the development of the platform was also important in that."* (KOR - Int.1 - Transl.) *"Because I mean, when you said media, I immediately thought, you know, news outlets"* (US - Int.2) *"I see this more for what purpose I use the media, that is, for example, information media, such as news channels, news apps or entertainment media such as Netflix or communication media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, etc."* (DE - Int.1 - Transl.)	n=24 GER: n=10 US: n=4 KOR: n=10
Media Definitions	*"Because the term media itself is derived from the term connection. So I think it's the media that people with information communicate with each other, exchange things, or deliver things in one direction. I think it's the media that can communicate and connect with each other in our daily lives"* (KOR - Int.1 - Transl.) *"I think media is just any kind of app or way of communication with someone sharing their ideas. So like radio, obviously media, TVs, media, the apps like CNN is media or snapshots of media, just ways that people can share ideas with each other"* (US - Int.3) *"In the past, I would have said that media is the journalistic field, so to speak. So television, newspapers and so on. And now it's just become much more. Because you can stream everything, because we have different social media channels. I would call all of that media. Facebook and Instagram are also media. They are also means of transmission, yes, things that facilitate exchange between people. So spreading information, exchanging opinions"* (DE - Int.3 - Transl.)	n=40 GER: n=17 US: n=11 KOR: n=12

Table 3: Subthemes of Media Brand Definitions

By combining the quantitative data generated through the surveys presented in chapter 3.1. with the results from the FGIs we were able to find support for the notion that traditional areas such as print media, radio and TV are top of mind when thinking about

media brands. Regarding more recent technologies, especially video and chat messaging services, as well as social media, were frequently mentioned media brand categories. This process resulted in the development of the following media brand definition:

A media brand is a differentiated product/service that provides the means for the creation and distribution of self- and externally-produced audio and visual content as well as for the communication through various channels with the objective to inform or entertain the receiver.

In line with RQ2, this definition allows for the differentiation between brands and media brands necessary for managers and advertisers alike. Based on the development of the definition in a multi-national approach, it is applicable in an international environment. Due to the diverging perception of brands and media brands and the varying impact of the nature of trust, this differentiation is essential to take substantiated strategic decisions. Based on this foundation, we approached the development of the comprehensive structure of MBT as based on the international FGIs.

Analyzing available publications on brand trust, it is reasonable to develop the MBT model as a multidimensional construct, embracing a broad set of influences on consumer-media brand connections and the cognitive and emotional aspects of such interactions (e.g. Munuera-Aleman et al., 2003; Potter & Bolls, 2012). By aggregating codes and creating summaries of the coded segments we created a set of 249 statements that were connected to the dimensions defined based on our literature review and preceding studies. While those sections can be linked to the elements underlying our initial proposition of the construct MBT, the inductive definition of explorative codes as listed in Table 1 enabled us to dive deeper into consumers' perceptions of media brands, as well as the impact of MBT on their interactions. The resulting scheme clearly shows the dimensionality of media brand trust as all those dimensions were mentioned independently and connected to why consumers trust a media brand or not. The main statements on each dimension of MBT are presented in Table 4.

Dimension	Examples	Quantitative Results
Relevancy	*"I think I'm picking some media depending on what information I personally want to get." (KOR - Int.3 - Transl.)* *"[...] is this something that I even want to listen to or watch or read?" (US - Int.1)* *"So the newspapers I consume are valuable to me because I feel they [...] inform me about what I want to know." (DE - Int.3 - Transl.)*	n=9 GER: n=1 US: n=4 KOR: n=4
Integrity	*"Trusting the media gives me [...] information that is as unbiased as possible" (KOR - Int.3 - Transl.)* *"I think trust to me, is knowing that I can go to the source, and they'll give me all of the facts, and that they will give it to me in a way that's not biased" (US - Int.3)* *"Maximum objectivity and diversity. So different views on the same subject from different authors and yes, very independent" (DE - Int.3 - Transl.)*	n=45 GER: n=14 US: n=15 KOR: n=16
Transparency	*"They subtly explained what they were trying to say. Looking at it, I realized through the newspaper that depending on how they see the same facts, how they report, what pictures they use, and what pages they put them in, there could be many different results." (KOR - Int.3 - Transl.)* *"[...] for me, [...] emotional trust is just a matter of private and [...] media trust is more a matter for facts and transparency" (DE - Int.2 - Transl.)*	n=23 GER: n=8 US: n=4 KOR: n=11
Likeness	*"I think I tend to trust sources that have the same views as me" (US - Int.3)* *"So you have experience with [... a media brand] and that fits with your own attitude. And the more one trusts, the more one also reads that and then at some point you no longer read anything else" (DE - Int.3 - Transl.)*	n=10 GER: n=2 US: n=8 KOR: n=0

Experience	*"[...] trust goes up the more you use it" (KOR - Int.1 – Transl.)* *"[...] it's like a relationship. And [...] if you break that trust, then I lose it. So, just building the [...] foundation over time of being consistent and truthful" (US - Int.2)* *"So I think trust for me only builds over time [...]. If something is said, done and that is in line with what was said before and that happens more often, no negative examples happen, then I would say that trust then builds up" (DE - Int.3 - Transl.)*	n=30 GER: n=4 US: n=17 KOR: n=9
Benevolence	*"That's why traditional media has a sense of justification and responsibility, and social media is much less like that, so I think traditional media [I tend] to trust more than social media" (KOR - Int.3 - Transl.)* *"So trust is [...] the absence of mistrust, that is, of the fear of being affected in some way. [...] So to be afraid that someone is working against one's own interests" (DE - Int.3 - Transl.)*	n=6 GER: n=3 US: n=1 KOR: n=2
Credibility	*"I think it'll be less reliable if there's a lack of credibility" (KOR - Int.2 - Transl.)* *"When I think of trust, I tend to look mostly for reliable sources that support the main argument presented. [...] I look for evidence that is supporting that argument mostly" (US - Int.3)* *"Trust in the media is all about ensuring that the information is correct" (DE - Int.1 - Transl.)*	n=32 GER: n=11 US: n=12 KOR: n=9
Competence	*"I've experienced that I can't trust the media because I've seen people who are considered experts on the same topic talk about completely different things" - (KOR - Int.1 - Transl.)* *"I can trust someone if they're an expert in their field. And [even if] I don't really agree with what they're saying. I still trust what they're saying" (US - Int.2)* *"Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung simply [is] very trustworthy, because the texts are very, very high quality and long. And because I usually know within the text what they have decided on. Why? How was the drafting? The numbers are a bit more accurate. For me, for example, that would be one where I would trust more, because I get even more info" (DE - Int.1 - Transl.)*	n=19 GER: n=4 US: n=6 KOR: n=9

Halo	*"I don't trust advertisements from the media that I can't trust"* (KOR - Int.3 - Transl.) *"Unfortunately, when I see the news on Instagram, I trust it a little less than the news on TV, even though it's totally stupid and I actually know that the same people are checking it. But because I always have in the back of my mind, oh, it's just Instagram"* (DE - Int1 - Transl.)	n=7 GER: n=1 US: n=3 KOR: n=3
Commercialism	*"I think advertising is necessary, but I think it's better not to advertise behind the scenes, that deceives consumers"* (KOR - Int.2 - Transl.) *"I would basically say that it depends on whether I have paid for the medium or not. Because if I've already paid for the medium and advertising is still shown, that's questionable, because then it couldn't finance itself purely from the aspect of what they deliver to me as a benefit, so to speak"* (DE - Int.2 - Transl.)	n=49 GER: n=20 US: n=13 KOR: n=16
Time	*"So, the media brands that I trust, are the ones that I've trusted for the longest. And the reason I trust them is they haven't given me a reason not to"* (KOR - Int.1 - Transl.) *"I think about the ones for me that have been around a really long time. The ones that I've seen my whole life"* (US - Int.2) *"The [...] reason why I watch the Tagesschau [...] and think that what is reported there is important, is because I used to see that with my parents, too, that they always watched it"* (DE - Int.1 - Transl.)	n=20 GER: n=7 US: n=10 KOR: n=3

Table 4: Thematic Analysis of the Dimensions of Media Brand Trust

Visualizing the frequency each dimension was mentioned in total and per country, figure 1 provides additional insights into the survey outcomes. Responses are separated into records from Germany (black), the US (gray) and Korea (light gray). It highlights the importance of Integrity and Commercialism to consumers on an international scale. While other dimensions were mentioned less frequently, we recorded statements (with one exception, i.e. 'Likeness') for all dimensions in all countries. Comparing the frequency of mentions per country it can be noted that consumers in Germany and Korea are highly focused on a media brand's 'Commercialism' and 'Integrity', while in the US especially the 'Experience' with a media brand is relevant for the establishment of trust in the brand.
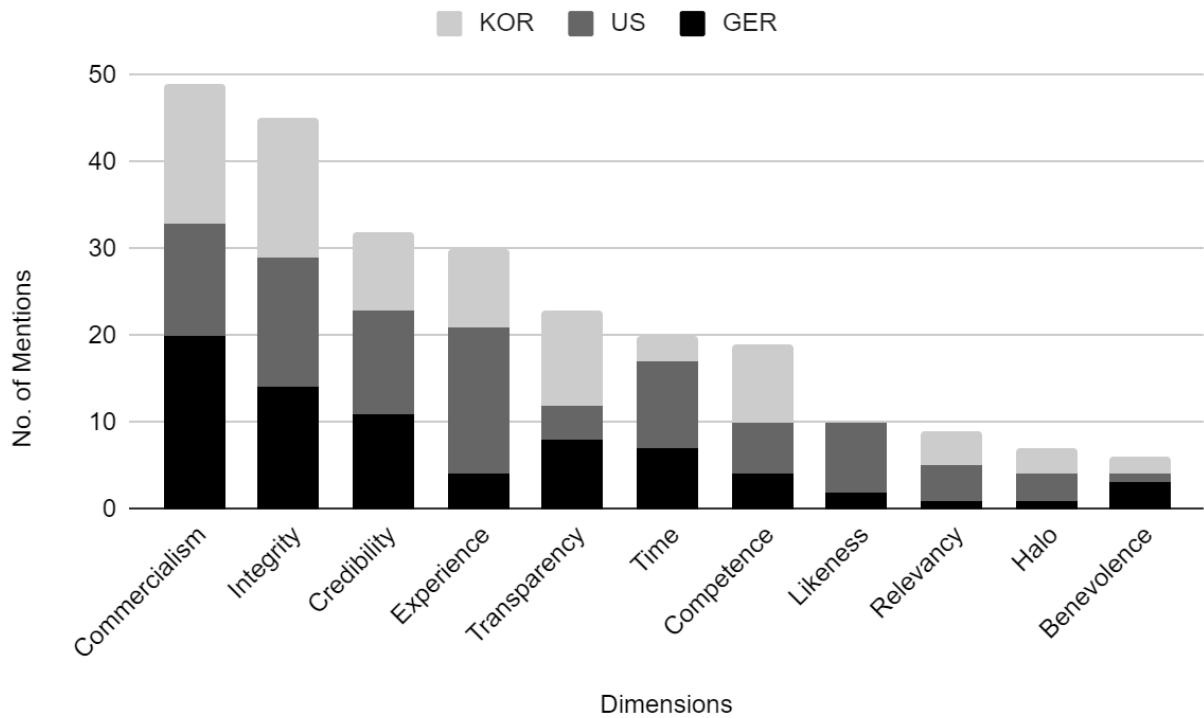
Figure 1: Frequency and Distribution of Statements per Dimension

Diving deeper into the analysis, Figure 2 displays the proximity of codes connected to the different dimensions, as well as to those codes initially defined as explorative elements. Elements included are the MBT dimensions (black), explorative codes (gray), as well as the connections between the elements displaying the number of codes with close proximity, i.e. the recording of different codes in the same statement made by a participant. To ensure visual clarity, we decided to set the threshold of connections to be shown at minimum ten interactions.
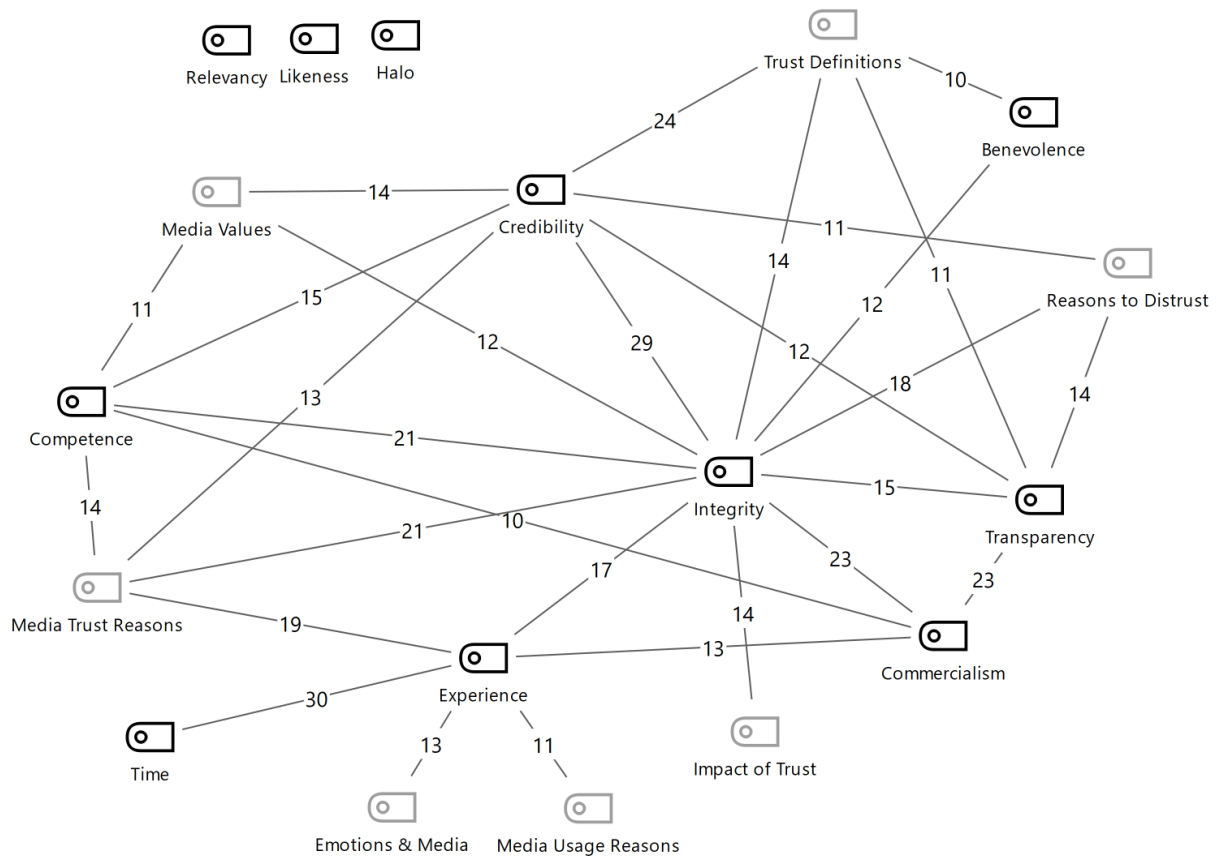
Figure 2: Code-Relations-Model of Trust Dimensions

Interpreting the connections visualized by the code-relations-model helps understanding the internal structure and interactions between MBT dimensions.

First, the dimension of 'Integrity' is shown to be connected to most dimensions and appears to be crucial for the emergence of trust in media brands. The dimensions mentioned most frequently in close proximity were 'Competence', 'Credibility', and 'Commercialism'. While the first two dimensions highlight the importance of a brands integer operation to gain a professional perception amongst consumers, a media brand's commercial appearance might shape its perceived levels of integrity. 'Commercialism' is only related to four dimensions with 'Integrity' and 'Transparency' showing the strongest connection. This highlights the importance of independent media production and consistent advertisement placements, as well as the need for transparent disclosure of external influences and advertisements/sponsorships. This is further supported by the strong connection between 'Reasons to Distrust' and 'Transparency' which highlight the negative impact of low transparency on MBT.

Second, the explorative code of 'Trust Definition' was coded with the closest connection to 'Credibility'. This finding might provide an argument for conceptualizing trust (or trustworthiness) as a dimension of credibility as claimed in past publications (e.g. Erdem et al., 2006). However, based on the research presented by Ganesan & Hess (1997) and Wu et al. (2013), as well as our own FGIs, we argue the other way that rather credibility constitutes just one - albeit very important - dimension of a multi-dimensional MBT construct.

Third, while most dimensions show various connections to other dimensions and explorative codes, 'Likeness', 'Relevancy', and 'Halo' do not show a close proximity to other elements. However, this does not render those dimensions irrelevant, as they might focus on an aspect of MBT neglected by the rest of the scheme. This notion is based on the importance of all elements for trust in brands reported in the literature. First, including relevancy of the source was shown to refine formal and computational trust models (Paglieri & Castelfranchi, 2012). Second, likeness (or the similarity between receiver and source) was also demonstrated to have a significant impact on trust in information. Besides congruence between the receivers' and senders' attitude towards the specific topic referred to in the transmitted content, even likeness regarding other areas was proven to positively influence trust in the source (Meijnders et al., 2009). Lastly, the halo effect has been repeatedly shown to be of significant influence for the perception of diverse (media) contents and advertisements consumed in close proximity, and can thus be of major relevance for consumer's trust towards media brands (Liu-Thompkins, 2019).

Finally, in line with research on the cognitive and emotional interaction of consumers with media brands, our set of evolved dimensions incorporates both. While dimensions such as 'Relevancy' (Henderson et al., 2009) and 'Credibility' (Stacks & Salwen, 2014) reflect the cognitive perspective on media brands, 'Likeness' (Fournier, 1998) and 'Experience' (Shahid et al., 2022) signal the role emotions play in using media brands.

Besides observing the multi-national results described above, significant differences between the three surveyed markets Germany, USA and South Korea were found in response to RQ4. First, participants of the quantitative survey in Germany displayed the broadest understanding of media brands (62%) as compared to consumers from the US (58%) and South Korea (45%). This resulted in 'Music Labels', 'Podcasts', and

'Print Publishers' rated as media only in Germany and the US. Additionally, almost all categories connected to gaming (i.e. Hardware, Software, Mobile) were perceived as media only in Germany. The only exception from this finding are 'Gaming Platforms' which were also rated as media in the US. However, for most categories included in our analysis, similar results were reported.

While most MBT dimensions were mentioned in all three countries, there were regional differences in the importance of dimensions. For example, Table 4 shows that 'Likeness' is highly relevant to consumers in the US (7 mentions) while its importance appears to be of much lower significance in South Korea (no mentions at all). The dimension of 'Experience' was found to be the most important in the US while it seems to be the least important dimension in Germany. 'Commercialism' was recorded most frequently in Germany, participants from South Korea mentioned 'Commercialism' and 'Integrity' most often. These findings highlight the importance of approaching the development of a valid media brand definition and a MBT framework against an international background.

4.3. Expert Interviews

Resulting from the expert interviews we were able to generate several important aspects of media brands and MBT that further enhance the definition and dimensions developed in this paper.

First, it was highlighted that media brands regularly take political stands and change the way you think. This is rather uncommon for brands in general. Additionally, brands can check their product to gain consumer feedback before distributing it. In contrast, due to the fast moving media sector, media brands can hardly gather feedback before distribution and need to rely on the quality of production itself. This notion supports our approach of clearly separating brands and media brands.

Second, it was noted that even though all media brands can be described by the definition, it is important to separate media brands into different subcategories as done in study 1. This allows for the establishment of a broad definition as presented in this paper, while it leaves space for different areas to be observed in specific. Due to these characteristics it is important to observe differences between entertaining and informing media brands in the analysis.

Third, due to the digitalization of the media sector, it is relevant to make sure how online-only and offline-only sub brands of the same company are handled (e.g. Zeit & Zeit online, Amazon & Amazon Prime Video). Based on the results generated in the FGIs we decided they should be perceived as separate entities.

Fourth, the set of dimensions emerging from our FGI analysis was supported by all experts from theory and practice, adding the cue of future quantitative studies substantiating this model.

Finally, experts agreed that trust might play a role in the decision for or against the consumption of certain media brands. However, due to the attention economy and the excessive availability of content today, the effect should be further analyzed in the future.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

This research is the first to specifically establish a definition of 'media brands' and the practical application of this definition to brand categories. Additionally, it is the first research addressing the development of a trust model particularly focused on media brands. Using a mixed-methods approach consisting of quantitative surveys, qualitative FGIs and expert interviews conducted in multiple countries, the research collected data from consumers, media managers and scientific media experts in terms of a valid MBT model. Based on the analysis, we defined 17 brand categories as media and developed a comprehensive structure of eleven dimensions underlying MBT. While developing this model and definition, we were able to approach the research questions raised above.

First, brands and media brands share a common core based on their creation of products, services, and content and the need for consumption of their supply. However, when it comes to consumer trust and its impact, brands and media brands show significant differences. While brands operate on a transaction-based approach which is connected to a need for consumer persuasion, media brands rely on a continuing development of trust, as their business model is based on the ongoing engagement with the brand. Hence, we developed a quantitative differentiation between 'media brand categories' and 'non-media brand categories'. While previous studies on the definition of media organizations or certain areas of the media landscape set the basis, they are not

sufficient to establish the foundation for the development of the fundamental MBT model as it is not possible to precisely draw the line between brands and media brands. Through quantitative analysis of consumers' brand perceptions, connected to the statements collected through FGIs, we presented a scheme of 17 media and 12 non-media categories that can be applied in the process of media brand selection. Through combining the theoretical approach with the practical exploration we developed the means to categorize (media) brands based on our research. This result is connected to RQ1 and provides us with the means to differentiate between brands and media brands on a scientific basis. This is essential for media brands and advertisers alike, due to the different nature of trust in brands and media brands and the significant impact of trust on consumer perception and advertising effectiveness.

Second, the fundamental differences between brands and media brands already described by Malthouse & Calder (2018) was supported by the findings generated through the multi-national FGIs. Participants reported various reasons for and impacts of MBT that had not been described in past research focused on brands in general. Based on these findings we developed a timely, user-centric definition of the term 'media brand'. By combining available literature with the media brand classification and the statements recorded by participants of the FGIs, this definition incorporates all brands that are perceived as media by consumers and thus represents a 'democratized' definition as aimed for by RQ2.

Third, by analyzing available brand trust concepts and comparing those findings through results generated from FGIs in line with RQ3 we were able to develop a trust model specifically focused on media brands. While almost all dimensions incorporated in (brand) trust scales and schemes such as the ones presented by Gurviez & Korchia (2003), Mal et al. (2018), and Munuera-Aleman et al. (2003) (e.g. Competence, Integrity, Credibility) also have an impact on MBT, additional dimensions are required in terms of this measurement. By conducting FGIs in three countries and evaluating the proposed structure in expert interviews, we presented a set of dimensions underlying MBT as inquired in RQ3. In addition to the dimensions introduced in past publications, we expanded this foundation by dimensions that were either neglected or not relevant for the measurement of trust in brands in general. By adding elements such as 'Halo', describing the bidirectional impact of the trust in content and environment on each other, 'Time', characterized as the period a media brand is known for, or 'Likeness',

observing the similarity between consumers' and brands' attitudes and perceptions of the world, we were able to approach the development of a trust scale specifically focused on the complex domain of media brands.

Fourth, by analyzing the qualitative and quantitative results on national and international scale, we were able to observe differences in the perception of media brands and the dimensions underlying MBT from different perspectives. This analysis resulted in specific observations such as the definition of gaming brands as media only in Germany and the generally narrow perception of media brands in South Korea. Additionally, this research highlighted the fundamental similarity of MBT dimensions on an international basis with only some exceptions such as 'Likeness' only reported in two out of the three countries examined (Germany and US). Approaching RQ4, we were thus able to highlight consistencies and discrepancies from a multi-country perspective, further consolidating the overall findings presented in this paper.

Resulting from these findings, several implications emerge. First, our research provides evidence about the higher complexity of MBT in comparison to trust in brands in general. This finding was supported by the additional number of elements mentioned by participants of the FGIs, but can also be connected to the higher importance of trust for media brands due to their business model based on two-sided markets. Second, in connection to this importance, media brand managers need to be aware of the relevance of trust to the perception and consumption of media content. This was also shown by the comments resulting in the dimension of 'Experience', which were characterized by the notion that diminished trust is hard to regain. Third, the halo effect describing the mutual interaction of content and environment appears to hold when it comes to MBT. Participants in the FGIs noted that the channel they consume media brands through has a significant impact on trust, while trust in content on a platform can also drive trust in the platform itself. This is of major importance for advertisers and media brands distributing their content through third-party channels. Finally, MBT is characterized through cognitive and emotional traits. While previous research provides evidence for this structure of media perception (Potter & Bolls, 2012), our findings support this notion and highlight the importance of including dimensions focused on both areas into a reliable scale. Besides the measurement of MBT, media managers need to follow different approaches in terms of the establishment of a holistic trust perception amongst consumers.

5.1. Managerial Implications

Our findings have several implications for managers from media brands and advertisers. First, the definition of what a media brand is (and is not) defined from a consumer's perspective allows for the establishment of a better understanding of the own companies perception in the market. This understanding is fundamental for the evaluation of factors relevant to development of a successful communication with consumers.

Second, based on our results, media brand managers can determine which factors are beneficial and detrimental for the trust in their brand not only from a top-level perspective but also on a more detailed basis. By evaluating the different dimensions individually, managers get a foundation for strategic decisions specifically focused on certain areas with the final outcome of increased trust in the brand.

Third, due to the halo effect, the insights on the perception of each different trust dimension for different media brands is also relevant to advertisers. They can determine and manage their distribution based on those dimensions. By analyzing customer's perception of the different dimensions of MBT for certain media environments, the determination of advertising strategies and distribution can be aligned with their own specific goals.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research

Our research provides fundamental insights into the nature of media brand trust and offers an explorative basis for the definition of media brands. The qualitative nature of the chosen methodology, while essential for the fundamental nature of the questions examined in this research, has some limitations which need to be addressed. While the general importance of all elements defined in this research was documented, the specific structure of the construct and the nature of each underlying element need further analysis through quantitative surveys. Only through this empirical analysis, the definition of each element as either dimension or antecedent and the relevance of each of those elements for MBT can be confirmed. While this is of major importance to the overall development of a Media Brand Trust Scale (MBTS) succeeding this research, especially the elements of 'Relevancy' and 'Likeness' need specific analysis due to the missing connections to other dimensions as shown in Figure 2.

Another limitation of the study is the selection of participants of the FGIs. During the organization of the interviews we took care of all necessary measures to be taken in terms of the generation of valid qualitative data. In line with established focus group methodological principles (Morgan & Krueger, 1998), the interviewees were either enrolled as undergraduate or graduate or even held an academic degree. While this is not an issue for the validity of the generated data in general, perceptions of consumers outside this academic environment have not been considered in the development of the MBT structure. Therefore, it is necessary to take care of national representative populations participating in the quantitative surveys to be conducted in the subsequent development of the MBTS.

Finally, based on the qualitative data generated in the FGIs we found initial evidence for the different impact of MBT on informing and entertaining media brands. Future research should therefore consider either including information about the area of media brand operation or even ask survey participants about their reasons to use certain media brands. By following this distinction, further insights on the differing perception of entertaining and informing media brands and the varying impact of MBT can be provided.

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