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How to Build Trust in Market Research Relationships: A Case Study of a Mid-Size  
Market Research Company in China

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Business Administration

in

Management

by

Huiting Tang

March 2014

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Jorge Silva-Risso, Chairperson

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The Thesis of Huiting Tang is approved:

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

How to Build Trust in Market Research Relationships: A Case Study of a Mid-Size  
Market Research Company in China

by

Huiting Tang

Master of Business Administration, Graduate Program in Management  
University of California, Riverside, March 2014  
Dr. Jorge Silva-Risso, Chairperson

Building trust in market research relationships between users and researchers is vital for a market research company's business to thrive. How to build trust is key to success for market research companies, especially for mid-size companies that need to compete with top companies in the industry.

This thesis firstly set up the research constructs by recognizing that trust is a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence and that trust serves as a central determinant in relationships. By applying Moorman et al.'s 1993 theoretical framework about factors affecting trust, this thesis then conducts an analysis based on the case study of Consumer Search Group, a growing midsize market research companies in China, and aims to 1) find out the factors that are important for a midsize market research company's business to grow, 2) explore the rationale behind, and 3) discuss how to build trust from those factors.

Research results indicate that interpersonal factors, especially willingness to reduce research uncertainties, integrity, collective orientation, and expertise, are the most predictive of trust. To build relationships from these factors, “actively seek out users’ research needs”, “being honest and offer solutions to problems”, “exhibit flexibility”, and “show expertise” are suggested ways to build trust accordingly.

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## Introduction

Trust is important to market research relationships for many reasons. Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992) find that trust influences the perceived quality of user-researcher interactions, the level of researcher involvement, the level of user commitment to the relationship, the level of market research utilization, and most importantly, the level of reliance on market research to design and evaluate marketing strategies<sup>1</sup>. In addition, compared to traditional industries, market research industry offers users data supports and consulting services which require extra human efforts. As Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1993) suggest, “being able to trust researchers to ensure quality and to interpret implications correctly for the firm is critical to the user’s reliance on research in decision making”<sup>2</sup>.

The importance of trust stands more prominent in mid-size market research companies. Unlike top market research companies, mid-size market research companies have relatively low brand recognition. This perception may impede business growth due to users’ bias towards research outputs generated by mid-size companies, which could further jeopardize those companies’ brand value and profits.

Current academic research has defined trust and document empirically the factors that affect trust in marketing relationships. For example, Moorman, Zaltman, and

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<sup>1</sup> Moorman, Christine, Rohit Deshpande, and Gerald Zaltman. "Relationships between Providers and Users of Market Research: The Dynamics of Trust within and Between Organizations." *Journal of Marketing Research* XXIX, no. August (1992): 314-28.

<sup>2</sup> Moorman, Christine, Rohit Deshpande, and Gerald Zaltman. "Factors Affecting Trust in Market Research Relationships." *Journal of Marketing* 57, no. January (1993): 81-101.

Deshpande in 1993 developed a theoretical framework elaborating factors that determine users' trust in their researchers. However, scholarly inquiry on the topic of how to build trust is rare. While it is crucial to understand the factors that affect trust, it is also important to explore ways of building trust in market research relationships between users and researchers as such exploration is vital for a market research company's business to thrive. More importantly, knowing how to build trust may lead to success for market research companies, especially for mid-size companies that need to compete with top companies in the industry.

Applying Moorman et al.'s 1993 theoretical framework about factors affecting trust, this thesis employs a qualitative research method. By examining the case of a growing mid-size market research company Consumer Search Group (thereafter known as CSG) in China, this thesis aims to 1) discover what factors are vital for a mid-size market research company when developing users' trust, 2) find out why those factors matter, and 3) discusses how this selected market research company builds trust with users from those factors. After analyzing the research results, this thesis will provide insights into managing a mid-size market research company and discuss limitations of the research scope.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Concept of Trust**

Trust has been studied under a wide variety of social and psychological contexts and, accordingly, conceptualized in different ways. For example, trust in society is

defined as a collective attribute based on the relationships in a social system (Lewis and Weigert, 1985); in interpersonal relations as the willingness of one person to increase his or her vulnerability to the actions of another person (Zand, 1972); and in social exchange literature as a behavior signaling interest in, and commitment to relationships (Blau, 1964)<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, the marketing literature has been inspired by these social-psychological works to construct the definition of trust. In the relationship marketing literature, which refers to studies regarding all activities intended to establishing, developing and maintaining exchange relationships with clients, Morgan and Hunt (1994) identify trust as a key variable mediating effective relational exchange<sup>4</sup>.

A review of the literature examining trust points to an important issue relevant to the discussion. As suggested by Hosmer (1995), trust consists of two components: structural and behavioral. The former refers to trust fostered by mutual “hostages” and the complementarity contributed by the partners. The latter in exchange relationships highlight the importance of confidence and reliability<sup>5</sup>. Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992) suggested that trust is defined as “a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence”. They suggest that an expectation of trustworthiness results from an exchange partner’s expertise, reliability, or intentionality.

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<sup>3</sup> Beamish, Paul W. , and J. Peter Killing. "Trust and Performance in Cross-Border Marketing Relationships." In *Cooperative Strategies: North American Perspectives*, 163-193. Washington D.C.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Massey, Graham R., and Elias Kyriazis. "Interpersonal Trust between Marketing and R&D during New Product Development Project." *European Journal of Marketing* 41, no. 9/10 (2007): 1146-1172.

<sup>5</sup> Hosmer, L.T.. "Trust: the Connecting Link between Organizational Theory and Philosophical Ethics." *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 2 (1995): 379-403.

They further propose that both “belief and behavioral intention components must be present for trust to exist”. And “for trust to be established, one party must be vulnerable to another party”<sup>6</sup>.

Although the literature has not come to an agreement on the definition about how to measure trust, they all consider trust existing between two parties, either between individuals or between organizations. Following Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992), this thesis focuses on the behavioral dimension and adopts their view that “a person who believes that a partner is trustworthy and yet is unwilling to rely on that partner has only limited trust”<sup>7</sup>.

### **The Role of Trust in Relationships**

Like the study of defining the concept of trust, existing research about the role of trust in relationships is diverse and multidisciplinary. As summarized by Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992), recent works on the role of trust have been dominated by two different trends. The first tendency suggests that trust be conceptualized as a feature or an aspect of relationship. McAllister (1995) proposes that this is based on both knowledge (cognition-based trust) and feelings or emotions (affect-based trust) that the trustor has in dealing with trustee<sup>8</sup>. Regarding the second tendency, researchers holds that

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<sup>6</sup> Moorman, Christine, Rohit Deshpande, and Gerald Zaltman. "Relationships between Providers and Users of Market Research: The Dynamics of Trust within and Between Organizations." *Journal of Marketing Research* XXIX, no. August (1992): 314-28.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> McAllister. "Affect - and Cognition - Based trust as foundations for interpersonal Cooperation in Organizations." *Academy of Management Journal* 38, no. 1 (1995): 24-59.

trust be conceptualized as a determinant of relationship. For example, Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) viewed that perceived trustworthiness and trusting behavior are, respectively, a determinant and a consequence of trust<sup>9</sup>.

In the context of market research relationships, Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992, 1993) define that such service providers refer to knowledge providers that include marketing researchers within a user's own firm and those external to the firm, and such respective clients refers to knowledge users that include marketing and nonmarketing managers<sup>10</sup>.

Adopting the view that trust is a central determinant of relationships, Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992) develop a set of hypotheses examining the relationships between trust and relationship processes and between trust and research utilization outcomes, aiming to find out the effect a user's trust in researchers have on his or her utilization of market research. Their research results provide empirical support that trust does serve as a critical variable in their proposed model.

### **Factors Affecting Trust**

Recognizing that trust is a determinant rather than a component in relationships and proving that trust has effects on utilization of market research information, Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande, in 1993, conducted a questionnaire survey which consisted of 779 respondents to test a comprehensive theory about the factors affecting

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<sup>9</sup> Mayer, R.C., J.H. Davis, and F.D. Schoorman. "An Integration Model of Organizational Trust." *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995): 709-734.

<sup>10</sup> In this case study, providers are mainly the selected case company (CSG)'s researchers, while users could vary from marketing to nonmarketing managers.

trust in market research relationships. This thesis employs their theoretical framework to examine CSG's case. A review of this model is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande's Theoretical Framework (1993)**

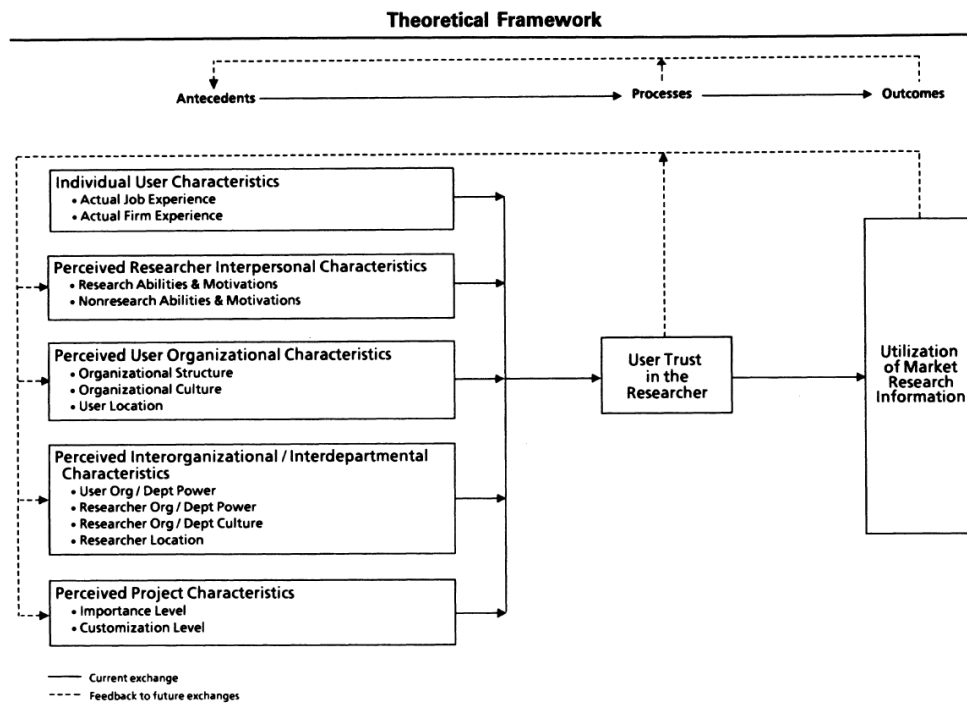



Figure 1 shows a variety factors that affect trust. These factors include individual, interpersonal, organizational, interdepartmental/interorganizational, and project factors. Trust, then, influences a number of relationship processes such as quality of user-researcher interaction (detailed processes are not shown in the figure, only trust is shown). These research processes, in turn, affect the utilization of market research information. Trust and research utilization then can feed back to affect users' trust in researchers.

Moorman et al.'s research results indicate that interpersonal factors stands more prominent in trust. Among the perceived interpersonal factors, a researcher's perceived

integrity is found to be the most important factor that affects trust. Following integrity, in order of importance, the researcher's perceived willingness to reduce research uncertainty, researcher confidentiality, expertise, tactfulness, sincerity, congeniality, and timeliness are most strongly associated with trust. Moreover, perceived dependability and collective orientation are found to be less associated with trust. A table that summarizes these interpersonal factors and their respective definitions is demonstrated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2 Important Interpersonal Factors and Definitions<sup>11</sup>**

Interpersonal factors that are strongly associated with trust	Definition	Level of Importance
Integrity	Is the researcher's perceived unwillingness to sacrifice ethical standards to achieve individual or organizational objectives.	
Willingness to reduce research uncertainty	Is a researcher's perceived motivation to interpret ambiguous research findings.	
Researcher confidentiality	Is the researcher's perceived willingness to keep proprietary research findings safe from the user's competitors.	
Expertise	Is a researcher's perceived knowledge and technical competence.	
Tactfulness	Is the level of etiquette a researcher displays during exchanges with users.	
Sincerity	Is the extent to which a researcher is perceived to be honest and to be someone who makes promises with the intention of fulfilling them.	
Congeniality	The extent to which a researcher is perceived to be friendly, courteous, and positively disposed towards the user.	
Timeliness	Is the researcher's perceived efficiency in responding to user needs.	
Interpersonal factors that are less associated with trust	Definition	Level of Importance
Dependability	Is a researcher's perceived predictability.	N/A
Collective orientation	Is a researcher's perceived willingness to cooperate with users.	N/A

<sup>11</sup> Moorman, Christine, Rohit Deshpande, and Gerald Zaltman. "Factors Affecting Trust in Market Research Relationships." *Journal of Marketing* 57, no. January (1993): 81-101.

## **Method**

### **Case Study Company: CSG**

CSG is a growing mid-size market research company in China, headquartered in Hong Kong with 201-500 employees. Originally, the company focused its business on Hong Kong and Southeast Asian area and was rated one of the top ten market research companies in Hong Kong. After Mainland China started the economic reform in the 80-90' last century, the company extended its business to mainland China and opened offices in major mainland China cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Over the past two decades, the company developed an extensive data-collection network covering more than 300 cities across the country<sup>12</sup>.

In 2010, the company hit its turning point. To develop its business, CSG initiated rebranding and attracted a partnership with Envirosell, a market research company that is specialized in shopper behaviors and based in New York. The company's brand transition injects vitality to the company's business accounts development and allows it to compete with other top international market research companies in China, such as AC Nilsen, Ipsos, and etc.. Since 2010, CSG's sales revenue grew at a rate of at least 100% per year in mainland China. It is now one of the large-scale market research companies in the Asian-Pacific Region<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> CSG's credential material and the company's official website <http://ww2.csg-worldwide.com/cn/aboutus.aspx>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



In view of the above mentioned facts, CSG is selected as the research object of this thesis.

### **Techniques**

Two research techniques are performed. One is observation, observing the company through internet data mining. Resources include the company's official website, Linkedin, and other website's interviews about the company. The main purpose of using this research technique is to collect the company's information in order to understand its culture, business philosophy and etc. that may affect the way of how the company builds trust with its clients.

The other one is in-depth interview. Since this research is exploratory, aiming to find out ways how mid-size market research companies build trust with clients, hence in-depth interview is the best way to systematically record and document interviewees' responses to probe for deeper meaning and understanding.

### **Interviewee Sample Selection**

Four interviews are conducted. Interviewees include one top management personnel who runs CSG Greater China Region's business and three mid-level management personnel (Figure 3).

**Figure 3 Interviewee's Title at CSG**



Raymond Liang, as the Managing Director of CSG's Greater China Region, is the initiator of CSG's rebranding. The interviewee is selected due to the fact that he serves as the key leader of the company and makes strategies for the company's business development. Hence, Raymond is expected to provide deep insights into how to manage a mid-size market research company by building trust with clients.

The other three mid-level managers are the executors of the company's strategy. They put company's strategy into practice, which include developing business accounts by building trust in market research relationships. The three managers are selected not only because of the titles they have, but also because of different responsibilities they undertake. Weiwei Zhang serves as the leader of CSG quantitative research team and is responsible for dealing with clients who need to quantify any hypothesis. Ally Zhao and Cathy Tan are in charge of the company's qualitative research business. Each of them leads a qualitative team. The former, Ally, is skillful in bringing new FMCG (Fast-Moving Consumer Goods) accounts that are in need of product innovation research. The latter, Cathy, focuses on developing overseas accounts and is good at building long-time client relationships. Each of the three interviewees performs its own functions with respect to building trustful relationships with users. Therefore, they are selected and expected to offer detailed stories in term of how to build trust with users. These stories may contribute to the study purpose of this thesis.

### **Procedure**

The four interviewees are interviewed separately by telephone. Prior to interviewing them, an invitation that describes the purpose of this study and an interview

guideline that outlines four general questions regarding this study were sent to interviewees via email. The purpose of doing so is to help them understand the topic they will talk about and to ensure the validity of the results.

The interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese and the interview guideline was written in English and orally translated in Chinese. Before heading straight to talk about the topic, each interviewee was asked if he/she would allow to be recorded during the interview. Hence, each interview was audio recorded with interviewee's consent and last about 45 minutes.

## **Results**

The notion that trust can facilitate market research relationships is recognized by each interviewees. This is undoubted especially for a midsize market research company because of two reasons. First, in the market research industry, uncertainties exist during the research processes. These uncertainties include users unable to verify the quality of information, or unable to interpret research findings. Under the circumstances, trust becomes especially important as users must rely on information provided by researchers or count on researchers' experience to interpret research implications. Second, the first time when users and researchers collaborate, users could hold bias towards researchers from a midsize market research company and thus may devalue the services provided by the company. Such attitudes are more pronounced when researchers present the research findings to users. This phenomenon happens partly because users lack the ability to assess research implications and partly because users lack trust in their researchers. As

CSG's Research Director Ally Zhao put: *"(Without trust) Clients will look at the research outputs with a critical eye. This could affect the research processes and relationships with clients"*.

Several factors that affect trust are mentioned by interviewees after the importance of trust is being recognized. These factors are mostly interpersonal factors, which are consistent with what Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande' have found in their 1993's research. These factors include willingness to reduce research uncertainty, timeliness, integrity, sincerity, expertise, and collective orientation. Among them, willingness to reduce research uncertainty, integrity, collective orientation, and expertise are mentioned frequently and are considered more important than other mentioned factors.

Frist of all, the importance of willingness to reduce research uncertainty is emphasized by every interviewee. To them, willingness is the key word to direct CSG's researchers when communicating with the company's users as the word indicates active communication. Active communication is believed to not only deliver an enterprising spirit to users, but also require researchers have a broad understanding of the marketplace and share their knowledge with users. Although Moorman et al. (1993) propose that the factor refers to researcher's perceived motivation to interpret ambiguous research findings and relates to the end of research processes<sup>14</sup>, the factor is found, by

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<sup>14</sup> Moorman, Christine, Rohit Deshpande, and Gerald Zaltman. "Factors Affecting Trust in Market Research Relationships." *Journal of Marketing* 57, no. January (1993): 81-101.

interviewees, to be more important when getting touch with users for the first time. As noted and shared by Raymond Liang, the Managing Director of CSG,

*“Sometimes in the beginning of a research project, the client, who is not in charge of the commissioned project but merely plays a role of the contact person, is not fully understand the research objectives. For CSG to develop trust with such an account, we need to actively help the client sort out what his or her company wants to understand from the marketplace. We once took a project from LIBY group<sup>15</sup>. It was the first time for both parties to cooperate. The contact person showed little knowledge about the project so we showed our efforts to reduce research ambiguity at the beginning by requesting to directly communicate with the project’s director.”*

Secondly, integrity is considered an important predictor of trust by interviewees. The result is also consistent with the findings of Moorman et al.’s research in 1993, where integrity is perceived the most important predictor of trust. As Moorman et al. (1993) point out, researcher integrity suggests that users expect researchers to follow high standards and to maintain objectivity throughout the research process; and research integrity can be reflected in an array of behaviors over the research cycle<sup>16</sup>. Such behaviors mentioned by interviewees include reporting to users the fieldwork execution constraints (e.g. cannot accomplish sample selection within a limited timeframe and

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<sup>15</sup> The leading FMCG enterprise in China, headquartered in Guangzhou which is the third largest city in China.

<sup>16</sup> Moorman, Christine, Rohit Deshpande, and Gerald Zaltman. "Factors Affecting Trust in Market Research Relationships." *Journal of Marketing* 57, no. January (1993): 81-101.

budget, or discover invalid samples) from the outset or in the middle of the research process.

For researchers from a midsize market research company like CSG, these integrity behaviors can certainly have a positive impact on users' trust in researchers but not enough to foster long-lasting trustful relationships. A high integrity behavior that can increase users' trust in researchers, observed by Weiwei Zhang, is to offer actionable solutions to solve problems that are found during research processes. For example, *"Once we discover any invalid samples during the phase of fieldwork execution or even after the research is finished, the first thing to do is to be open with our client about the situation and propose a deadline to make up such mistakes by replacing with valid samples."* shared by Weiwei.

Thirdly, collective orientation is worth mentioning because it is perceived as a significant factor by interviewees but found to be less associated with trust by Moorman et al.'s. In addition to the definition given by Moorman et al "a researcher's willingness to cooperate with users", collective orientation is referred "as a flexibility that partners allow one another in relationships"<sup>17</sup>. Cathy Tan and Ally Zhao advocate such notions for the following two reasons.

First, at a certain degree collective orientation signals whether a market research company is patient enough to provide good quality of service. Consequently, researchers

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<sup>17</sup> Moorman, Christine, Rohit Deshpande, and Gerald Zaltman. "Factors Affecting Trust in Market Research Relationships." *Journal of Marketing* 57, no. January (1993): 81-101.

who demonstrate collective orientation are likely to be trusted because users always expect researchers to adhere to providing high standard service quality. As Cathy shared,

*“One clear illustration of this is the fact that users may ask researchers to revise a proposal 20 times. Such a situation happens not because of bad communications but because of higher standard pursued by users. Every time when a researcher finishes revising the research proposal, the new version proposal could in turn inspire the user to come up with new ideas. (If we can fulfill such requests then) Trustful relationships is built during such research processes.”*

Second, collective orientation involves in the ability to respond to users’ request flexibly and promptly. Such an ability affects user satisfaction with and trust in researchers. The ability is perceived to be more prominent in a midsize market research companies than in a large market research companies. Cathy gave this finding an explanation and shared an example to support the explanation,

*“Large market research companies do respond slower than midsize market research companies to flexible request. Because of the nature of the comprehensive organizational structure a large market research company has, the response rate will be decreased by lengthy approval procedures.*

*We once conducted an anthropography research for HP China and we were requested to change research samples within a short timeframe. This request involved in financial approval procedures in our company. As the procedures were not complex, we then were able to successfully perform the request in time and therefore started to gain*

*trustworthiness from HP. (This is demonstrated by the fact that) we continue to receive cooperation invitation from the company (HP). ”*

At last, interestingly, expertise is recognized as a key predictor of trust but not regarded as important as the abovementioned factors for a midsize market research companies. Reasons given by the interviewees are as follow. First, the importance of expertise to trust is diminished due to research technology development. Nowadays, the use of mainstream research methods and technologies does not exhibit significant differences between large market research companies and midsize market research companies.

Second, under the context of the first reason, researchers from midsize market research companies are instead perceived as more trustworthy and expert than researchers from large market research companies. This is because in a midsize company such as CSG, researchers who are responsible for communicating with users are experienced and skillful experts. The skillset possessed by such researchers allows them to better understand users' needs and therefore provide more tailored-fit research solutions. This in turn encourages trusting relationships due to service satisfactions offered by these skillful researchers. Furthermore, large market research companies tend to use standardized research solutions and sell models that may not necessarily tackle users' problems. This, thus, decreases users' trust in researchers from large market research companies.



## **Discussion and Limitations**

There are top market research companies providing market research and consulting services to fortune 500 companies. To develop business, what are ways to build trust in market research relationships when managing a mid-size market research company that need to compete with such large companies? Are there any differences between top-level managers and mid-level managers in building such relationships with users? Answers to the above two questions are the most significant managerial implications after studying CSG's case.

The previous section actually touches on the surface of how to build trust in market research relationships for a midsize company. Based on the background information of CSG and the research results, ways to build trust are discussed and elaborated as follow, in the order of reflecting the aforementioned factors affecting trust.

First, actively seek out users' research needs is the proposed way to build trust when considering the factor "willingness to reduce uncertainty". This way helps lay out the ground for trust to be built, especially from the early stage of research. In the beginning of a market research project, it is common to receive unclear research requests sent from users. The unclearness results either from the fact that the contact person does not fully understand higher-level management's research decisions or from the fact that decision makers lack the knowledge of how to translate managerial problems to research objectives. Therefore, assisting users to identify their research needs not only displays researchers' willingness to reduce requests ambiguity, but also build up trust from the outset.

This way of building trust requires effective communication, which can facilitate the proposed method throughout the research cycle. The communication technique is supported by an array of actions such as thinking from users' perspectives by exhibiting the willingness to build up a long-lasting partnership during the research processes, displaying attitudes of helping users' develop business, and presenting researchers' broad understanding of the marketplace and research insights to construct a research proposal.

Second, being honest and offer solutions to problems is the way to build trust with respect to the factor "integrity". This entails high ethical performance of researchers. Such performance includes no double standards, discover and reveal any research constraints (time, budget, sample selection, and etc.), refusal to interpret invalid data, and etc. While being honest with any possible problems occurred during research processes, researchers are more trusted by users if they are able to present a set of solutions to solve those problems. This can increase users' trust in researchers because 1) it reflects whether a research company has a good research quality control system, and 2) it partly demonstrates the level of experience that researchers possess; both can help build up researchers' reliability and therefore promote trustful relationships.

Third, exhibit flexibility is the way to build trust when thinking about the factor "collective orientation". This is regarded as an advantage or a shortcut that a midsize market research company can utilize due to the fact that large market research companies, restricted by their comprehensive organization structures, are comparatively rigid in handling flexible situations. Furthermore, this way of building trust makes users feel valued, which sometimes users can't obtain from large market research companies that

deal with several accounts at the same time. Actions to exhibit flexibility include, but not limited to, responding to users' request promptly and fulfilling the request by actual deeds, listening to users' requirements however insisting on offering sophisticated research knowledge if those requirements are not sensible, and etc..

At last, show expertise. Even though researchers' perceived expertise is not a major concern for midsize companies when building trust with users (as demonstrated in previous section), it is still a fundamental way to build trustful relationships and should be emphasized. A good example provided by the CSG's case to show expertise to users is that CSG invites users to attend the company's regular employee training. Such a gesture not only delivers users the company's confidence in its researchers' skills, but also provides a good way for researchers to interact with users in a non-official work setting.

There is no perceived distinction between top-level managers and mid-level managers in regard to building relationships with users. On the contrary, they seem to achieve consensus and exhibit similar perceptions towards the research topic. This may largely due to the company's recent rebranding initiative. Originally, in order to encourage business growth, the rebranding decision was made to rebuild the company's brand image in the industry, from an old and conservative "Consumer Search Group" to a new and inspired "Creativity, Solution, Growth" image. Unexpectedly, the rebranding action strengthens employees' dedication to the company.

Achieving employees' dedication suggests two managerial implications with respect to building trust in market research relationships. First, the fact that employees (such as the interviewed mid-level managers at CSG) recognize their company's

positioning (brought by rebranding in this case) encourages them to put the company's business philosophy into practice via building trust with users. For example, Weiwei mentioned that to build trust CSG should "*grow together with our clients by insisting the company's core business philosophy (Growth, as the rebranding action indicates)*". This resonates with what Raymond suggested "*Think from clients perspectives to let them know we are willing to help them grow business (not just to conduct a research project)*." Second, a company with a good business philosophy can excite the work enthusiasms of employees and encourage employees' morale to build trustful relationships with users. As a result, this could in turn bring about business growth of the company.

Limitations of this research mostly exist in the nature of a case study despite the fact that the CSG case can help understand the rationale behind factors affecting trust and explore ways of building trust in market research relationships, and the fact that all interviewees who have working experience in the world second largest market research company (TNS, formerly known as Taylor Nelson Sofres) can provide insight into how to manage a midsize market research company by offering comparisons.

These limitations can serve as sources of future research directions. First, because the case study focuses on a single company in a single country, the issue of generalizability and representativeness looms larger than with other types of qualitative research. Future research may assess more research samples to make comparisons. It will be interesting to select research samples that spread in the western cities and to see if there are significant differences between the east and west world with respect to building trust. Second, this study only explores way of building trust from researchers'

perspectives. What ways would users like researchers to approach them to build trust could be another research question for future studies. At last, this study assumes that all factors affecting trust can happen throughout the research processes. However, a comprehensive study can be designed to explore how to build trust in market research relationships in a separate four stages: 1) early contacting phase while researchers propose research design based on users' request, 2) a stage when researchers collect data in the middle of the research processes, 3) a stage when researchers interpret research implications to users in the end of the ongoing research project, and 4) a post-research stage when an ongoing research project is closed, researchers still maintain contact with users to answer any questions that may lead to future research requests. The purpose of separately studying how to build trust in these four stages is to discover a deep understanding of how trust actually develops, help a market research company better manage its business, and ultimately benefit from such understandings.

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## Appendix

### Interview Guideline

- 1) Explore interviewees' attitudes towards trust in building market research relationships
  - A research shows that trust is critical in facilitating market research relationships with clients. What do you think?
- 2) Discover factors that determine CSG clients' trust in its researchers
  - What factors do you think determine CSG clients' trust in its researchers?
    - Explore interviewees' answers
    - At least mention 5 factors
  - Could you rank the factors that you mentioned in order of importance when CSG develops market research relationships with clients? And why?
    - For each factor, explore the rationale behind such a ranking
- 3) Explore ways to build trust
  - You just mentioned that \_\_\_\_\_ is the most important factor in building market research relationships with CSG's clients. Could you give me an example (examples) to support that?
    - Repeat: You just mentioned that \_\_\_\_\_ is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most important factor in building market research relationships with CSG's clients.  
Could you give me an example (examples) to support that?
  - If there is no example to support a factor, then ask: What will you do to build relationships with clients based on such a factor?