



PRESS RELEASE

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Trust survey reveals it's not what is said but who said it that matters - External advocates more trusted than communications professionals

Trust in Communicators Study results launched today

- *External experts the most trusted by the general public*
- *Trust gap between journalists and PR/marketing people still exists but not as wide as expected and is closing*
- *Organisational leaders (executives) least trusted by general population*
- *General population have high level distrust of communication and public relations professionals*
- *Communication professionals in the UK trusted and recognised higher than in Germany and Italy*
- *Fuzzy perceptions about the goals and activities of public relations by the general population*
- *Communication professional overestimate the trust in them by the general population*

October 23, 2019 – A new report reveals that there are high levels of distrust in organisational spokespeople but that external experts are the most trusted advocates in the general population. External advocates for organisations are trusted more than top executives, public relations professionals and marketers by the public. A team of European researchers explored what this changing picture means for communications professionals and the organisational trust-building process.

The study was led by renowned researchers from Leipzig University, Leeds Beckett University, and IULM University Milan, and facilitated by Cision Insights and Fink & Fuchs. The researchers from Germany, the UK and Italy conducted representative polls in each of their respective countries. The polls aimed to investigate how much trust the public have in

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leaders of organisations, journalists, public relations (PR) and marketing professionals. They compared this with trust in other advocates speaking on behalf of organisations. The researchers also carried out a survey among communication professionals in the same countries. This survey aimed to understand how practitioners assess public trust in them as professionals.

The public poll highlighted that communication and PR professionals are trusted and recognised more highly in the UK than in Germany or Italy. However, the general public has a high-level of distrust in these professionals (see Figure 1). A trust gap was identified between communications and PR professionals and journalists, but it was not as wide as expected and is closing.

Information about organisations is often spread by people who are not acting in a professional communication role – i.e. organisational advocates such as supportive customers (fans, brand ambassadors), experts in the field (academics, consultants) or activists with overlapping interests. The polls found that external experts are the most trusted of these advocates, but all are trusted more highly than communication and PR professionals (see Figure 2). Efforts should be focussed on enabling these advocacy groups to promote the trust-building process.

The polls revealed that the general population has fuzzy perceptions about the goals and activities of PR professionals (see Figure 3). Whilst communication and PR professionals misperceive the public's opinion about them and overestimate public trust. These professionals also misjudge their role in the trust-building process and ignore public trust in external advocates.

Commenting on the new study, research leader Prof. Zerfass said: "This study has asked both the general public and organisational communicators about trust in companies. The results show clear divergence in trust perceptions. For those professionals working in the communications sector and representing organisations we urge them to take on board the implications of the study's findings and place greater importance on internal and external influencers to support the important organisational trust-building process."

About the study

The Trust in Communicators study is in two parts. Firstly, we have talked to organisational communicators through a quantitative study in three countries, Germany, Italy and the UK to understand communicators' trust perceptions. We have compared their opinions with the

Press release: How the general population trusts journalists, public relations professionals, marketers and other communicators: A comparative study in Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom trust perceptions of communication professionals in the same countries by the general population.

Based on former studies and existing literature on trust in communication professionals, a statement list was constructed to survey the amount of trust or distrust in all kinds of public communicators who can speak on behalf of an organisation as well as journalists when they report about organisations. Also, statements regarding public relations activities were outlined. The survey is based on a representative sample of adults aged 16 to 64 from Germany, Italy and the UK (interviewed via an internet omnibus in spring 2019 by Kantar TNS). In addition, communication professionals were surveyed as part of the annual European Communication Monitor in the same time (communicationmonitor.eu).

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Appendix

Figure 1. High level of distrust in communication and public relations professionals in the general population

High level of distrust in communication and public relations professionals in the general population

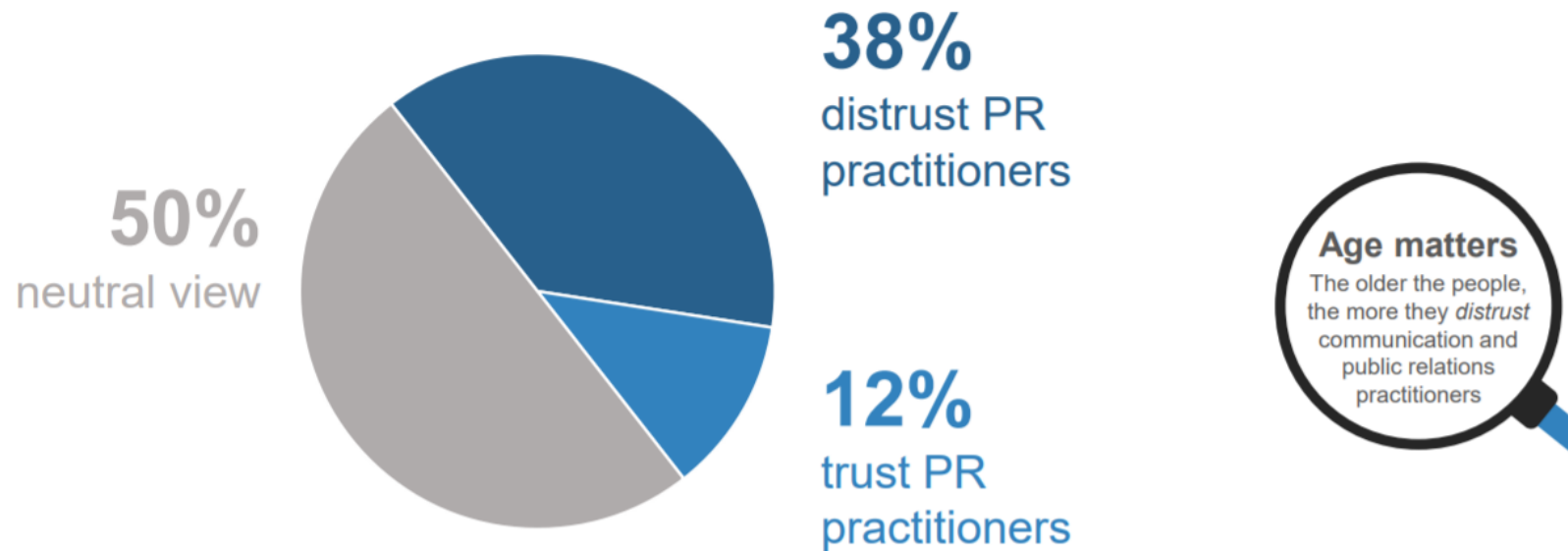


Figure 2. External experts are the most trusted advocates in the general population

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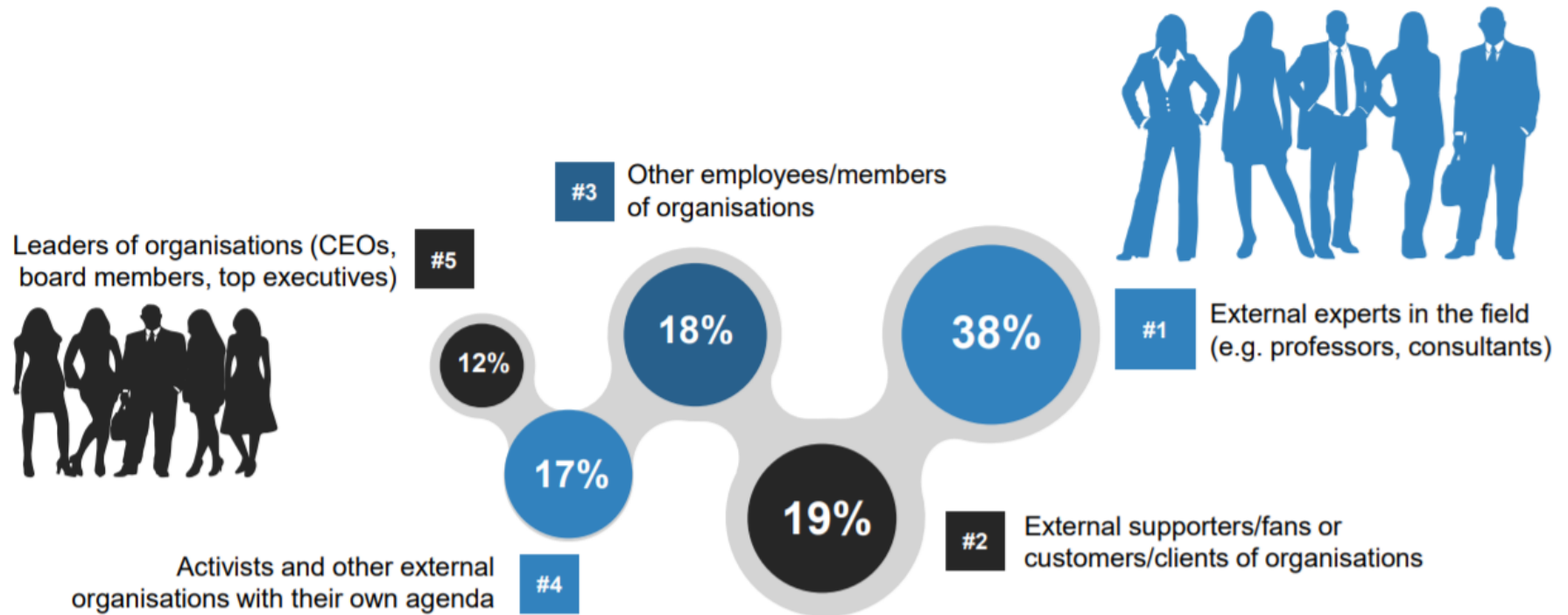


Figure 3. Fuzzy perceptions about the general goals and essence of PR activities by the general population

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