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Political ideology, media-source preferences, and messaging strategies: A global perspective on trust building

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A B S T R A C T

Using global survey data based on the 2013 Edelman Trust Barometer annual survey, this paper looks at predictors of business trust in the top five countries based on GDP ranking – the United States, China, Japan, Germany, and France. Demographics emerged as significant predictors of trust across countries, while political ideology was a key driver of trust in the U.S. Political ideology also interacted with preferred media choice in predicting trust. Theoretical and practical implications for effective public relations practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Research has confirmed the critical role of political ideology in structuring consumer choice and behavior in various decision-making situations (Crockett & Wallendorf, 2004). The political trust literature also suggests that the effects of political trust on government-related decisions and behavior also vary across individuals based on their ideological interests (Rudolph, 2009; Rudolph & Evans, 2005). Despite its widespread impact in consumer behavior and political trust research, political ideology has received scant attention in media source credibility research and trust-relationship research in public relations. Given the critical role of different media channels in helping publics obtain organization-related information and in fostering trust between publics and business organizations, it is important to look into the function of political ideology as a driving force in media source selection and as a factor influencing how mediated content is processed in trust evaluations toward business organizations.

Therefore, in this study, we test the effectiveness of media source preference in predicting public trust in business. We also explore the consistency of demographic characteristics and political ideology in predicting trust. Our research focuses on how political ideology at the individual level can be used as a foundation to explain the unique media sources that publics select to get business information, and the corresponding trust in business that develops from that source selection. In doing so, we relied on data from the 2013 Edelman Trust Barometer annual survey. Specifically, we tailored our analysis to the top five global economies (i.e., the United States, China, Japan, Germany, and France) based on GDP ranking as released by the World Bank in 2013. GDP measures the total output of goods and services for a given country and has been used as

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a comprehensive and consistent indicator of economic growth, economic sustainability, and overall market activity (The World Bank, 2013).

Through our analysis, we found several consistent results, including (1) certain demographic indictors significantly affected publics' trust in business organizations; (2) political ideology at the individual level affected publics' trust in business organizations in certain countries; (3) public attention to public affairs had an influence on their trust in business organizations; and (4) political ideology and media preference had an interactive effect on public trust in business organizations. The interactive relationship between media source and political ideology is particularly striking as the results contribute largely to existing knowledge of trust research in public relations. The practical implications for public relations, audience segmentation, and messaging strategies are discussed along with theoretical implications for public relations theory development and future trust research.

2. Literature review

2.1. The commitment-trust theory of business relationships

Scholars of business relationships and relationship marketing have paid growing attention to issues of trust and its role in the process of relationship building and maintenance, as exemplified by work in a variety of disciplines, including sociology, psychology and marketing (e.g., Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer, & Kumar, 1996; Moorman, Deshpande, & Zaltman, 1993; Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992). This work has provided useful insights concerning the central role of trust in fostering business relationships, including the importance of commitment in such relationships. Commitment refers to a customer's long-term orientation toward a business relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This orientation is said to be based on an emotional bond between a consumer and organization (Moorman et al., 1992, 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Like other types of committed relationships, it also carries with it an expectation of increased benefits the longer one remains part of the relationship (Geyskens et al., 1996). Consequently, committed customers see themselves as having a closer relationship with an organization, which in turn, enhances overall feelings of customer loyalty and trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Public relations researchers have long agreed about the impacts of elevated public trust levels on the relationship management process. Specifically, high levels of public trust tend to correlate positively with a number of relationship management variables, including relationship strength, which help to explain how an organization can better manage its relationships with its various publics (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). Organization-public relationship scholarship is one of the most frequently relied upon conceptual frameworks in all of public relations research (Ki & Shin, 2006; Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru, & Jones, 2003). The framework is used to address the importance of recognizing the relational perspectives of communication outcomes for evaluating the effectiveness of public relations activities (e.g., Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ki & Hon, 2007a, 2007b; Bruning & Ledingham, 1998). Hon and Grunig (1999), in an attempt to address the importance of viewing public relations as a relationship-management process that uses communication strategically, have suggested the following six dimensions to properly understand how members of the public perceive of their relationship with an organization: *trust, control mutuality, commitment, satisfaction, communal relationship,* and *exchange relationship.*

Hon and Grunig (1999) further proposed three sub-dimensions of trust—integrity, dependability, and competence—in an attempt to clarify the role of trust in perceptions of relationship quality. These sub-dimensions have been included in relationship quality indices, which have been tested and verified in terms of their reliability and validity across various organizational and cross-cultural settings (e.g., Huang, 2001; Hung, 2004, 2005; Lee & Jun, 2013), including work in marketing and consumer relations, media relations, issues management, public affairs, and crisis and reputation management (see Ki & Shin, 2006). More recently, scholars have expanded the scope of work around this framework by exploring the attitudinal and behavioral consequences of trust and its related dimensions and sub-dimensions (e.g., Ki & Hon, 2007a, 2007b). Perhaps not surprisingly, trust, among other key relational features, has emerged as a critical relationship indicator, even in cross-cultural settings, which further confirms the importance of the concept as an effective measure for organization-public relationships (Ki & Hon, 2007b). In short, trust represents the essence of quality relationships between an organization and its various publics.

2.2. Media platform credibility and trust

Previous public relations scholarship investigating trust as a predictor of quality relationships has focused largely on the perceptual and behavioral outcomes of the organization-public relationship. Unfortunately, the roles of specific or preferred media platforms as predictors of trust have not been carefully investigated across diverse groups of stakeholders and organizations. Of course, we should not consider the absence of work in this area as a comment on the importance of the relationship between media source preference and larger trust evaluations. Since at least the 1950s, perceptions of source competence, attractiveness, and expertise, among other characteristics, have been demonstrated to impact the credibility and persuasiveness of communication content (e.g., Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Research in the domain of traditional media (for example, offline newspapers and magazines) has confirmed that features such as perceived objectivity, fairness and a lack of bias can increase the overall trustworthiness ascribed to these media platforms (e.g., Zhu & Zhou, 2002). The perceived credibility of a medium enhances its authority, usefulness and readership, which should impact the persuasiveness of its content.

In the digital space, Jarvenpaa, Knoll, and Leidner (1998) found that how willing users were to share information in online communities (and the quality of that information being shared) served to increase perceptions of credibility assigned to the platform. Further, assessments of credibility have been found to predict online behavioral outcomes, with increased perceptions of trust and platform credibility leading to increased levels of engagement with online communities and more positive intentions to follow the suggestions of other users' in the community (e.g., Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). In addition, our own work has found that different media formats, both traditional and online, play a critical role in fostering trust in organization-public relationships (VanderMolen, Cacciatore, Meng, & Reber, 2015).

2.3. Political ideological differences and trust behaviors

Previous research has identified that public differences in political ideology can influence attitudes toward many social and public affairs issues (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). Jost (2006) defines political ideology as the set of attitudes that explains how society should function in order to achieve social justice and social order. Such attitudes contain cognitive, affective, and motivational components to influence behavior (Jost, 2006). Jost, Kruglanski, Glaser, and Sulloway (2003) suggest seeing liberal and conservative orientations as generalized personality orientations. They argue that this overall differentiation is the most parsimonious and useful way to characterize political views and that it is applicable across a variety of cultural contexts.

Research also suggests that employing this left-right distinction is valid for predicting individuals' behavior (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). For example, Graham et al. (2009) found that conservatives strongly favor in-group loyalty, conformity, authority, and purity. Conversely, liberals are more focused on individual rights, welfare, caring, and fairness. From a psychological perspective, Jost et al. (2003) utilized 88 samples from a dozen countries to identify key predictors of one's political ideology. They found key patterns in their data, even across countries. For instance, conservatives reported higher death anxiety, dogmatism, fear of threat and loss, need for order, structure, and closure, whereas liberals showed higher openness to experience, integrative complexity, and self-esteem. At the behavioral level, marketing research on consumer political leanings also indicated that political ideology has effects on the types of products consumers purchase and the ways they dispose of products (Lee & Aaker, 2004). Many aspects of consumers' decision making are influenced by the ideological differences, including the activities one engages in, the friendships and social ties one makes, the types of things one cares about, and the associations and organizations with which one affiliates (Feldman & Stenner, 2008).

Given the sharp divide in attitudes and behaviors based on political ideology, it is important for us to understand public differences in political ideology and how such differences influence the selection and processing of media for business information. Would a media source or platform targeted to liberals or conservatives generate different impacts on trust evaluations of business? Political communication work has established that people are not necessarily objective in the processing of information. For instance, partisans tend to scrutinize information that runs counter to their pre-existing opinions and values to a greater extent than they do congenial information (Taber & Lodge, 2006). Moreover, we often self-select into information that we believe will confirm what we already know, while at the same time, placing greater weight on such attitudinally consistent information during the opinion formation process (Yeo, Cacciatore & Scheufele, 2015). If this is indeed the case in the context of business trust evaluations, what messaging strategies should be developed to be congruent with different political outlooks in order to increase audience trust in business? Based on the literature, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How, if at all, is trust in business affected by demographic characteristics?
RQ2: How, if at all, is trust in business affected by political ideology?
RQ3: How, if at all, is trust in business affected by attention to public affairs information?
RQ4: What, if any, interactions are there between political ideology and trust in mass medium on trust in business?

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Data

To answer our research questions, we relied on the global data from the Edelman Trust Barometer annual survey, a representative online survey of adults in 26 countries (Edelman, 2013). The survey consisted of 20-min online interviews conducted between October and November of 2012. The 2013 version of the survey sampled 26,000 general population respondents with an oversample of 5800 informed publics, ages 25–64. For the purposes of this paper and analysis, we relied on data from five (i.e., the U.S., China, Japan, Germany and France) of those 26 countries, focusing specifically on those countries leading the way in business in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (The World Bank, 2013). In addition, as we are interested in generalizing our findings to the larger populations of interest in our five countries, we excluded all those informed publics who were part of the oversample (but, importantly, not all "informed publics altogether as many were simply part of the initial random sample and not the oversample effort).

3.2. Independent variables

Age, gender, education and income served as the primary control variables in our analysis. *Age* was measured as an ordinal variable with 11 categories (*Median* = 7, *SD* = 3.0). *Gender* was a dichotomous variable with female coded as '1' and male coded as "0" (49.6% females). *Education* was measured as an ordinal variable with seven categories anchored at "Grade school or less (Grades 1–8)" and "Post-graduate degree (e.g., MA, MBA, LLD, PhD)" (*Median* = 5, *SD* = 1.6). Given differences in earning potential and currency values across countries, *Income* was measured on a unique scale in each of the countries of interest. However, to ensure comparability across countries we standardized the income items for each country and combined them into a single measure. This left us with a measure of income that was mean-centered at zero, and ranging from −2.98 to 2.01, where higher values indicate higher income levels.

Political ideology was measured by a single survey item that asked respondents to indicate whether, and to what degree, they consider themselves to be conservative, moderate, or liberal. Response ranged from "Very conservative" (coded as "1") to "Very liberal" (coded as "5") (*M* = 3.1, *Median* = 3, *SD* = 1.0).

Attention to public affairs was measured by asking respondents to report how often they follow public policy matters in the news. Response categories ranged from "I do not follow public policy matters" (coded as "1") to "Nearly everyday" (coded as "4") (*M* = 3.3, *Median* = 4, *SD* = 0.9).

Our media measures looked at trust in a variety of different sources for information about a business or company. *Trust in social media* was assessed by asking respondents to report their levels of trust, using a four-point scale anchored at "Not at all" (coded as "1") and "A great deal" (coded as "4"), in each of the following different media sources: "Social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, LiveJournal, Meebo, Orkut, Qzone, Mixi etc.," "Content-sharing sites, such as YouTube," "Microblogging sites, such as Twitter," and "Blogs." Responses were combined together to form an index with scores ranging from "1" to "4" (*r* = 0.89, *M* = 2.4, *SD* = 0.8). *Trust in traditional media* was assessed with the same scale by asking respondents to report their levels of trust in each of the following different media sources: "Newspapers," "Television or television news," and "Radio or radio news." Once again, responses were combined together to form an index with scores ranging from "1" to "4" (*r* = 0.82, *M* = 3.0, *SD* = 0.6). *Trust in corporate communications* was assessed with the same four-point scale by asking respondents to report their levels of trust in each of the following different media sources: "Corporate or product advertising," "Corporate communications, such as press releases, reports, and emails," and "Trade publications or professional magazines." Again, responses were combined together to form an index with scores ranging from "1" to "4" (*r* = 0.69, *M* = 2.8, *SD* = 0.6). Finally, *Trust in search engines* was assessed using the same four-point scale by asking respondents to report their levels of trust in "Online search engines, such as Google" (*M* = 2.9, *SD* = 0.8).

3.3. Dependent variables

The dependent variable of interest in this study is a measure of trust in business. The dependent variable was measured with a single-item that asked respondents to report how much they trust businesses to do what is right. The measure used a nine-point scale ("1" = "Do not trust them at all" and "9" = "Trust them a great deal") (*M* = 5.4, *SD* = 1.8).

3.4. Methodological notes

We answered research questions using hierarchical ordinary least squares regression models (Cohen & Cohen, 1983), entering independent variables into the regression based on their assumed causal order (demographics, followed by political ideology, attention to public affairs, and media source trust). The final block across each of the regressions consisted of the interaction terms, which were created by multiplying the standardized values of the main effects variables in order to avoid multicollinearity between the interaction term and its component parts (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). This analysis yielded a total of four two-way interactions between political ideology and each of the four media source trust variables.

4. Results

RQ1: How, if at all, is trust in business affected by demographic characteristics?

The results of the final models of the regressions predicting business trust in the U.S., China, Japan, Germany, and France can be found in Table 1. While we are primarily interested in the impacts of political ideology, media trust and attention to public affairs, we also briefly discuss the role that our demographic controls played in our regression models. As can be seen, demographics played a relatively small role in impacting trust in business across the five countries, although a few patterns did emerge across the different countries. First, in both the U.S. (β = −0.08, $p < 0.05$) and France (β = −0.11, $p < 0.01$), age was negatively related to business trust. In other words, older respondents in these two countries were less trusting of business to do the right thing. Sticking with age, the opposite pattern was found in both China (β = 0.08, $p < 0.01$) and Japan (β = 0.08, $p < 0.05$), where older respondents were more likely to report high levels of trust in business. In Germany, age was not significantly related to business trust.

Turning attention to our remaining demographic predictors, females were less trusting of business in both Japan (β = −0.09, $p < 0.05$) and Germany (β = −0.08, $p < 0.05$). Gender, however, did not emerge as significant across the other countries of interest. Education was significantly related to business trust in only China (β = 0.06, $p < 0.05$), with more educated

Table 1
Final regression models predicting trust in businesses to do what is right in the USA, China, Japan, Germany, and France.

	USA	China	Japan	Germany	France
Block 1: Demographics					
Age	−0.08*	0.08**	0.08*	−0.06	−0.11**
Gender (female coded high)	−0.01	0.01	−0.09*	−0.08*	−0.05
Education	−0.02	.06*	−0.02	0.02	0.06
Income	0.02	−0.01	0.02	0.09*	0.07*
Inc. R^2 (%)	1.8**	2.9***	2.5**	2.2**	2.8***
–					
Block 2: Value Predispositions					
Ideology (liberal = high)	−0.06*	0.02	−0.05	−0.03	0.04
Inc. R^2 (%)	0.6*	0.4*	0.1	0.6*	0.0
–					
Block 3: Informed					
Attn. to public affairs	0.07*	0.07*	0.18***	0.00	0.09*
Inc. R^2 (%)	0.5*	1.5***	3.4***	0.2	1.0**
–					
Block 4: Trust in Media					
Social media trust	−0.02	0.24***	−0.07	0.07	0.01
Traditional media trust	0.04	0.17***	0.18***	0.14***	0.20***
Corporate communications trust	0.32***	0.29***	0.26***	0.26***	0.21***
Search engine trust	0.09*	−0.02	0.03	0.08*	−0.02
Inc. R^2 (%)	13.8***	27.4***	14.6***	18.5***	12.0***
–					
Block 5: Interactions					
Ideology × Social media trust	0.08*	−0.00	−0.06	0.00	0.09*
Ideology × Trad. media trust	0.08*	0.06*	−0.06	−0.03	0.06
Ideology × Corporate comm. trust	0.06	0.07*	−0.08*	−0.02	0.10**
Ideology × Search engine trust	0.05	−0.06	−0.05	−0.02	0.12**
Inc. R^2 (%)	0.8	1.1**	0.6	0.1	1.6**
–					
Total R^2 (%)	17.4	33.2	21.2	21.5	17.4

respondents reporting higher levels of trust. Income emerged as significant in predicting business trust in both Germany ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.05$) and France ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$), with wealthier respondents more likely to express high levels of business trust.

RQ2: How, if at all, is trust in business affected by political ideology?

RQ3: How, if at all, is trust in business affected by attention to public affairs information?

Political ideology failed to achieve significance into the final regression models predicting business trust in each of China, Japan, Germany, and France. However, political ideology did predict trust in the U.S. ($\beta = −0.06$, $p < 0.05$), with conservatives typically showing higher levels of trust in business than did liberals. More consistent were the impacts of public affairs attention on business trust. Attention to public affairs positively predicted business trust in each of the U.S. ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$), China ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$), Japan ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$), and France ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.05$), only failing to achieve significance in Germany.

RQ4: What, if any, interactions are there between political ideology and trust in mass medium on trust in business?

Our media trust measures were almost universal in their effects across countries, with increased levels of trust in the various media sources correlating with higher levels of business trust. In fact, the before-entry betas (not shown here) suggest the lack of significance for some of our media trust variables can better be explained by instances of collinearity between those measures rather than reflecting a truly non-significant relationship with our dependent variables.

However, we were much more interested in understanding how *different groups within the population* might be using media sources to arrive at trust judgments, rather than the direct effects of medium choice on trust evaluations. Specifically, we examined interactions between our media trust variables and political ideology in order to examine if media impacts were consistent across different ideological groups. In the U.S. our analysis revealed two significant interactions. Fig. 1 depicts the interaction between political ideology and trust in social media. As this figure shows, the more trusting that conservatives are in social media, the lower their levels of trust in business. Conversely, liberals increase in their business trust as their trust in social media increases. Fig. 2 shows the significant interaction between political ideology and traditional media use, again among American respondents. The results of this interaction suggest that conservatives are much more stable in their business trust evaluations, regardless of their trust in traditional media sources. Liberals, however, experience a pronounced increase in business trust as they become more trusting of traditional media sources.

In China two interactions also emerged as significant, each following the same general pattern. Fig. 3 illustrates the interaction between political ideology and trust in traditional media, while Fig. 4 illustrates the interaction between political ideology and corporate communications. Across each of the figures, liberals experience a steeper increase in business trust than do conservatives as their trust in the communication source moves from low to high.
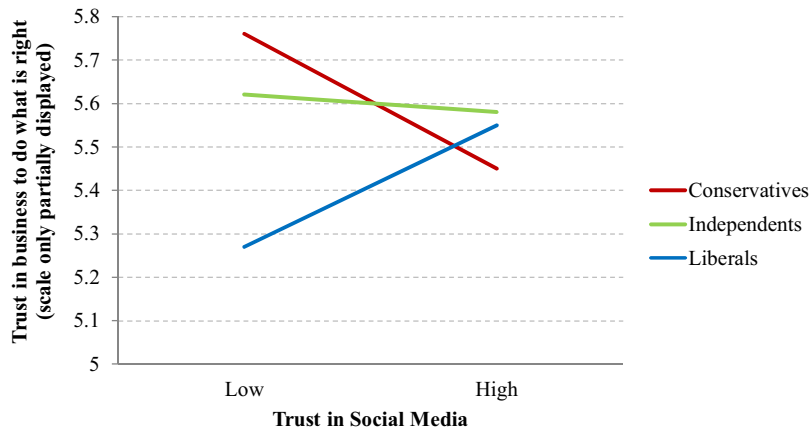
Fig. 1. The interaction between political ideology and trust in social media on business trust in the U.S.
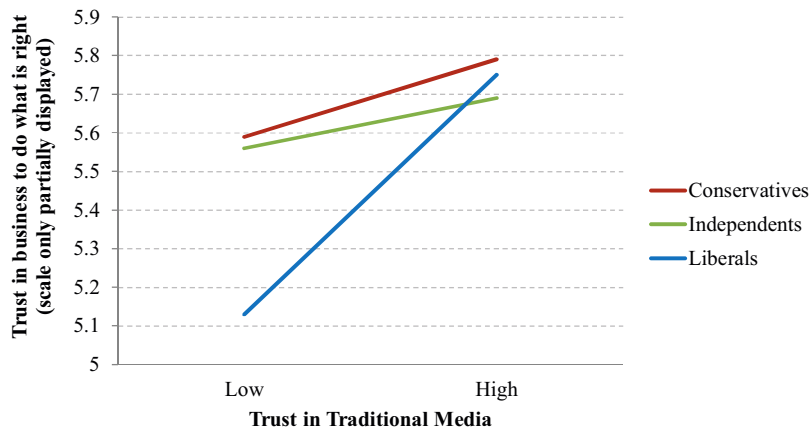

Fig. 2. The interaction between political ideology and trust in traditional media on business trust in the U.S.
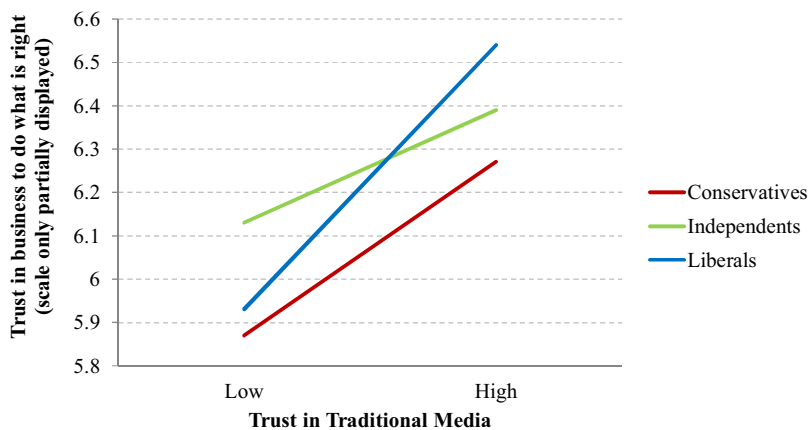

Fig. 3. The interaction between political ideology and trust in traditional media on business trust in China.

In Japan, only the interaction between political ideology and trust in corporate communications emerged as significant. Fig. 5 depicts this significant interaction, and as can be seen, the results are quite different than the interactions outlined previously. Specifically, conservatives experience the largest increase in business trust as their trust in corporate communications moves from low to high. Liberals, on the other hand, experience a much smaller increase in business trust as their trust in corporate communications increases.
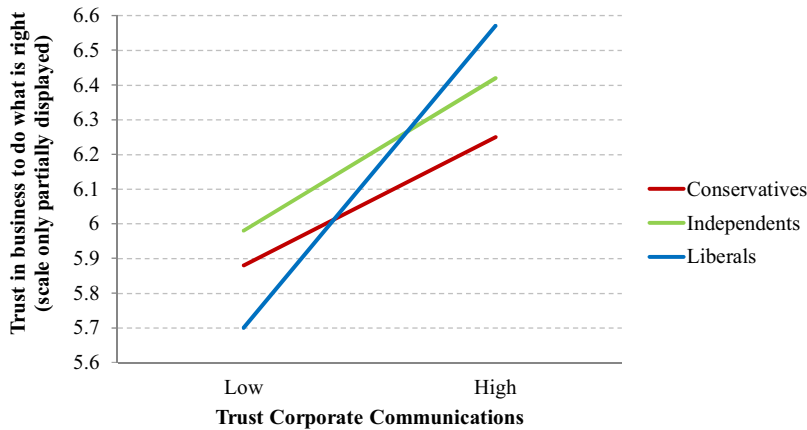
Fig. 4. The interaction between political ideology and trust in corporate communications on business trust in China.
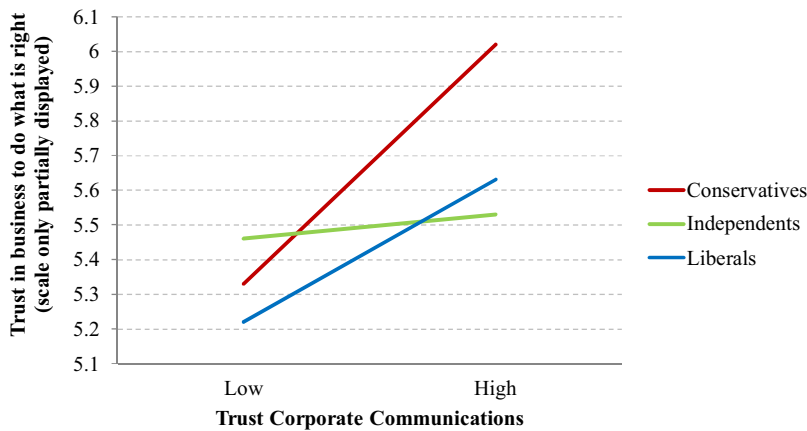

Fig. 5. The interaction between political ideology and trust in corporate communications on business trust in Japan.
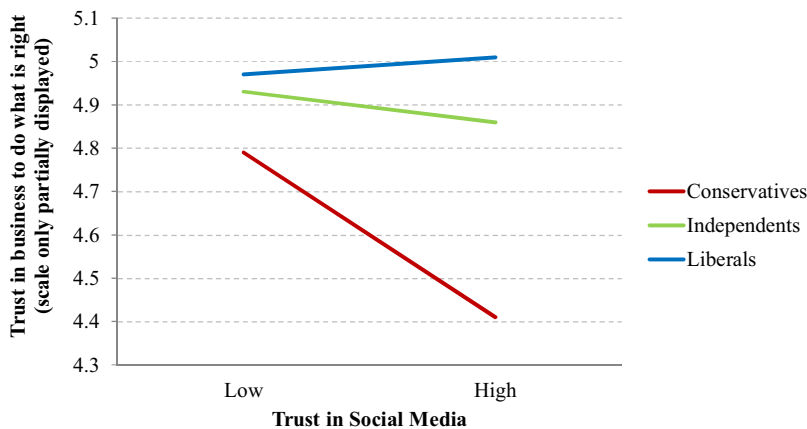

Fig. 6. The interaction between political ideology and trust in social media on business trust in the France.

Finally, while there were no significant interaction effects among respondents in Germany, three interactions were found to be significant in our analysis of French respondents. Two of these interactions appear to be quite similar. Fig. 6 shows the interaction between political ideology and trust in social media. The results illustrate rather high and stable levels of trust in business among self-identified liberals, and a pattern whereby conservatives become much less trusting in businesses as their trust in social media increases. Fig. 7 illustrates essentially the same pattern for the interaction between political ideology and trust in search engines. Meanwhile, Fig. 8 depicts the interaction between political ideology and trust in
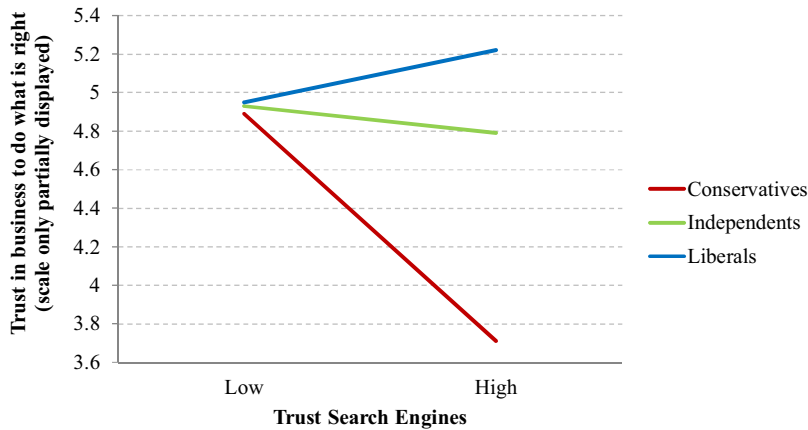
Fig. 7. The interaction between political ideology and trust in search engines on business trust in the France.
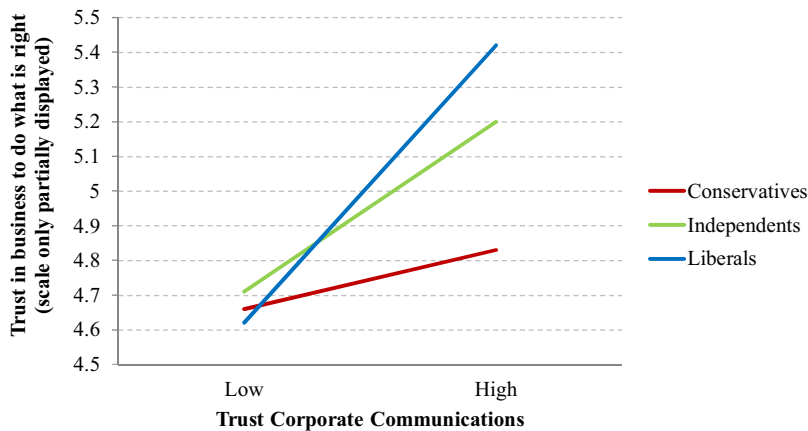

Fig. 8. The interaction between political ideology and t rust in corporate communications on business trust in the France.

corporate communications. Here we find that as liberals' trust in corporate communications increases their trust in business to do the right thing increases as well. Conservatives also report higher levels of business trust at higher levels of corporate communications trust, but this increase is overall less pronounced.

5. Discussion

There were two primary goals of this research. The first was to give public relations practitioners new tools with which to more precisely segment publics. The segmentation may be affected by demographic characteristics, by media preference for business news, or by political characteristics (i.e., ideology and attention to public affairs). The second goal was to contribute to theory building related to trust and public relations. Some specific implications of this research are discussed below.

5.1. Implications

Theoretical contributions of this research include extending the vocabulary of trust. Past research has focused on what organizational characteristics lead to increased trust (e.g., integrity, dependability and competence (Hon & Grunig 1999)). This research turns the table and looks at how to predict trust in an organization based on an individual's characteristics (e.g., age, gender, media use, ideology). A second theoretical contribution is looking at trust in business through a political lens.

This research also makes methodological contributions to the public relations literature. In linking trust in a source of information to trust in an organization this study lays a foundation for examination of other media/target public interactions. While this study looked at trust in media for business information and its link to trust in business generally, one can imagine examining trust in media and its relationship to trust in nonprofits or leaders or government.

Because we examined trust in business in the world's economic powerhouses as defined by GDP, we suspect that people in those countries may be somewhat more business savvy. Because the countries are spread across the globe, it is also possible

to infer some cultural outcomes that would be impossible if we looked at trust in only one country or region. For example, in France and the U.S. older people are less trusting of business compared to younger people, but in China and Japan older people are more trusting of business. This East/West dichotomy is less evident when looking at other demographics. Women were less trusting of business than men in Japan and Germany. Only in China was education linked to trust in business (i.e., higher education predicts higher trust). In Germany and France, income was a predictor of trust in business. Perhaps not surprisingly, those with higher incomes were more trusting of business than those with lower incomes.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) noted that commitment and trust are based on emotional bonds. So is political ideology. Political ideology was only predictive of trust in business in the United States where conservatives exhibited higher trust than did liberals. The discussion of an ideological divide in the U.S. is so frequently examined in the mass media that it has almost become cliché. There is ample evidence that conservatives and liberals are different in not only political ideology but also in product consumption habits, religious and social values, and geography (i.e., rural vs. urban) (Meckler & Chinni, 2014). So, the fact that significant differences were present as parsed by political ideologies in the U.S. is not surprising. But the U.S. is hardly alone when it comes to ideological divides. As Jost et al. (2003) reported, the simple classification of liberal versus conservative can be an appropriate way to differentiate political views across cultures. So the fact that such differences were not present in other countries is somewhat surprising.

Used as a surrogate for political involvement, attention to public affairs was predictive of trust in business in all but one of the countries in this study. Public affairs knowledge has been linked to trust from an organization-public relationship perspective (Ki & Shin, 2006). In China, France, Japan and the U.S. if a person paid more attention to public affairs, they had significantly higher trust in business than those who paid less attention. This suggests that while partisan ideological differences do not directly predict trust in business (except in the U.S.), interest in public policy (a product of political activity) does.

While political ideology alone did not significantly predict directions in trust in business, when linked to media use some interesting issues played out. This reinforces the findings of Jo (2005) that media types and media source credibility affect credibility of and trust in organizations. In France and the U.S., the more conservatives trust social media as a source of business information, the less they trust business. In the U.S. the inverse was true for liberals – more social media use predicted more trust in business. In France, high use of search engines as a business news source led to a decrease in trust in business. In China and the U.S., the more liberals trust traditional media as a source of business news, the more they trust business.

Trust in corporate communications as an information source and its link to increased trust in business generally crosses not only borders but also ideologies. In China and France, as liberals' trust in corporate communications increased, so did their trust in business generally. In Japan, as conservatives' trust in corporate communications increased, their trust in business increased.

The interactions between media preferences, political ideology and trust in business illustrate and bring together concepts from diverse theory and literature. Hovland and his colleagues (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland et al., 1953) noted that competence, expertise and trustworthiness are critical characteristics of sources. Zhu and Zhou (2002) found that perceived credibility of a medium increases its authority. Dholakia et al. (2004) noted that online engagement is enhanced when trust and credibility are present. Lee and Aaker (2004) noted the role of political ideology on product preference while Feldman and Stenner (2008) identified its effects on organizational affinity. These linkages were confirmed in this project. While they are not universal, they are there. When use of a particular medium for business information (which suggests the respondent's belief of the credibility of the medium) increases or decreases and political ideology increases or decreases they can interact to have an effect on the respondent's trust in business.

Although the present research does not necessarily allow us to pinpoint the precise reasons for these interaction effects, a few hypotheses are worth noting. On the one hand, liberals and conservatives may be turning to different media content through the channels outlined here by turning into different television networks, following different groups via social media, etc. In this respect, our findings may be partly explained by differences in selective exposure between the two groups. At the same time, it may be that liberals and conservatives evaluate even the same information differently depending on how well that information fits with their predispositional outlooks or beliefs. That is, it may be a product of differential information processing between the two groups. This might mean information about corporate social responsibility being given greater weight by liberals than conservatives given the liberal propensity to value things like welfare and caring (Graham et al., 2009). Conversely, conservatives may place greater emphasis on issues related to the stability of an organization than do their liberal counterparts given the conservative preference for structure and order (Graham et al., 2009). Most likely, the findings can be explained by a combination of the two processes noted above.

5.2. Limitations

The major limitations of this work concern the measurement of key variables. First, several of our variables consisted of single-item measures, including our dependent measure. As a result, it is impossible to control for random measurement error. Of course, it is reasonable to assume that any potential random error in our single-item measures would actually serve to weaken the relationships that we demonstrate in our regression models. In other words, our findings would likely have been amplified had we been able to employ a multi-item index for our dependent variable. Second, our measure of social media trust involved combining responses to trust evaluations across several forms of social media content and

platforms. As a result, it is impossible to pinpoint the specific social media applications that might be driving any of our findings. As social media use continues to grow and evolve researchers will need to take more nuanced looks into how specific platforms are being utilized, and the types of attitudes that are associated with such use. Finally, it is important to note that any findings related to our measure of political ideology must be interpreted in terms of the political environment of the specific country being analyzed. While Jost et al. (2003) have suggested that the simple classification of liberal versus conservative values can be a useful way to differentiate between political views across cultures, the terms can also be expected to have different meanings across countries, and meanings that may have evolved differently since that 2003 publication. Any attempts, therefore, to apply a strictly American interpretation of these terms to a non-American context would be misguided. Nevertheless, this does not negate any of the findings reported here; rather, it forces audiences to be careful in how they interpret such findings, and indeed, points to the need for further research on this topic.

6. Conclusion

Data from the study reveal several things that can be used to develop public relations scholarship and contribute to strategic planning of public relations campaigns and messages. From a theoretical perspective, trust has primarily been examined in the public relations literature by identifying and testing the characteristics of a trustworthy organization. This study looks at what drives trust in an organization from the public perspective. By turning the dominant trust paradigm on its head, this research opens the way for a new stream of research. Findings in this study suggest there are significant predictors of trust as measured at the individual level.

From a methodological perspective, this study is the first to examine whether media preference and political ideology interact to predict trust in businesses. Because media platforms are so varied and the channels within those platforms are varied, and often partisan, future research should examine how the interactions of media and ideology affect attitudes toward organizations, whether they are businesses, nonprofits or government.

Finally, the findings of this research points to strategic takeaways for global public relations. The findings suggest media selection when wanting to build trust in an organization. For example, we found that social media does not work to build trust within a politically conservative public in France and the U.S., but it does contribute to trust within a liberal public in the United States. Traditional media are still useful in building trust within liberal publics in China and the United States. Corporate communications are linked to trust in business among liberals in China and France and among conservatives in Japan. There also are findings to contribute to message placement strategies linked to demographics by country.

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