

Unlocking the “Trust Premium”: A Canadian News Effectiveness Study

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Overview of Study

In 2024, one of Plus Company's media agencies, Cossette Media, partnered with Think Tank, Vox Pop Labs and the Google News Initiative to field a study to examine the effects of Trust on advertising effectiveness in Canada. The study was conducted in French and English, with the aim of examining whether and to what extent advertiser brands are impacted as a result of the information contexts in which they are observed. This study contributes novel empirical evidence as to the business benefits of advertising within high quality content including News and Local News. There will be a second phase of this research fielded in 2025 to further explore the "Trust Effects" that were uncovered in this first phase of research.

Who is Vox Pop Labs?

Vox Pop Labs is a certified social enterprise founded and operated by academics since 2010. Best known for developing Vote Compass, Vox Pop Labs maintains one of the largest, most diverse respondent panels in Canada and provides research services for governments, civil society organisations, and academics. For more information visit www.voxpoplabs.com

What is the Google News Initiative?

The Google News Initiative works with publishers and journalists to fight misinformation, share resources and build a diverse and innovative news ecosystem. For more information visit <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com>

Who is Cosette Media?

Cossette Media is a media agency within the Plus Company network with a mission to Make Media Matter. Cossette Media is committed to making lasting change in the Canadian media marketplace. Make Media Matter builds a sustainable future through three pillars: our people, our clients and our industry. For more information visit www.cossette.com

Overview of Findings

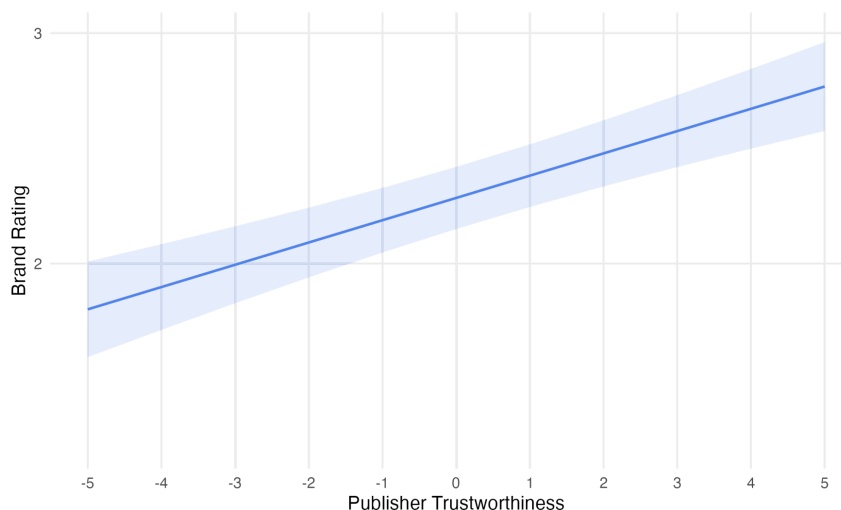
One of the central features that motivates news audiences is trust. People implicitly or explicitly assess new information that they encounter based on their level of trust in the source. In this collaboration between the Google News Initiative, Cossette Media and Vox Pop Labs, the influence of trust and its impact on advertiser brand perception is quantified. This report presents findings from a pan-Canadian, bilingual study that was conducted in 2024. The report's goal is to examine whether and to what extent advertiser brands are impacted as a result of the contexts in which they are observed.

The findings from the study suggest the existence of a phenomenon we call “The Trust Premium”, wherein the perception of advertiser brands whose ads were displayed by trustworthy publishers received a demonstrable boost. Trusted publishers appear to exhibit a halo effect that extends to commercial brands that advertise within their properties.

Key Findings

The key findings that led to the observation of “The Trust Premium” are as follows:

1. Trust is fundamental to creating brand affinity: the more trusted a publisher, the higher the observed brand rating.
2. Trustworthy environments lead to a 25% lift in brand rating: ads associated with trusted publishers inherit publisher credibility and in turn boost brand trust.
3. News publishers in aggregate are seen as 35% above the baseline level of trust across information environments. Local news publishers see an additional 16% gain in perceived trustworthiness among local audiences and this effect is particularly pronounced in Quebec.
4. Hard news has strong positive brand ratings that are statistically equivalent to soft news (e.g.: entertainment). Intuition that soft news is preferable to hard news in terms of brand impact is unsupported by study findings. Hard news and soft news produce the same outcomes for brand rating.
5. Ideological slant of a publication does not influence brand perception, even when the stance was different from the reader's personal beliefs



Finding # 1: Trust & Brand Affinity

Trust is fundamental to creating brand affinity

The more **trusted** a publisher, the **higher** the observed **brand rating**

The most consistent and prominent finding in the analysis of the data was the strength of the relationship between brand rating and publisher trust. Brand rating increases by 58% as we move from one end of the scale to the other. This leads us to infer that there is a trust premium that brands glean from the credibility associated with the publisher in which their ads are featured.

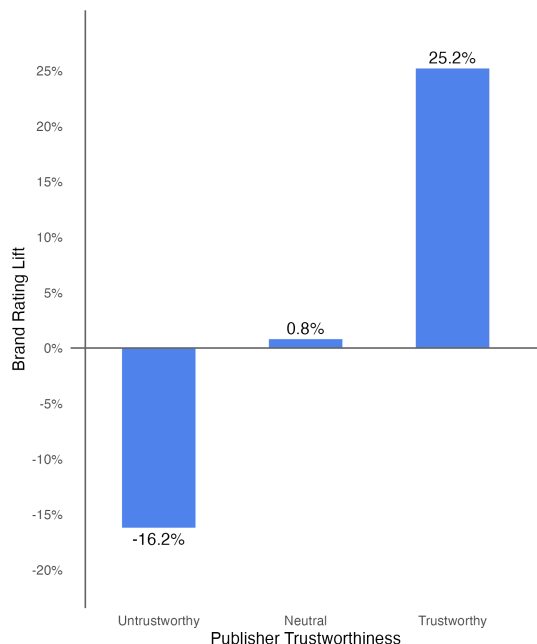
Takeaway for Advertisers

Trust is what makes advertising influential. Engaging topics, high quality content environments, and effective advertising creative generates greater contribution for advertisers. This is where media planners and buyers can help you be present in environments that are both congruent with your brand values and will help you benefit from a halo of trust the publication has with its readers. Advertisers and agencies can leverage the concept of the trust premium and structured experimentation to maximize campaign ROI within current measurement frameworks.

Finding # 2: Trustworthy environments lift brand rating

Trustworthy environments lead to a 25% lift in brand rating

Ads associated with trusted publishers inherit publisher credibility and in turn boost brand trust



Ads that are featured alongside sites that are seen as neutral on trustworthiness do not exhibit a statistically significant shift from the baseline ad rating. Finally, ads that appear in untrustworthy sites actually see brands take a hit of 16% below the baseline. Again, these findings further substantiate the idea that the trustworthiness of the publication in which an ad is placed has an effect on brand affinity.

So what we're saying is that there is a halo effect, which is fundamental to all branding activities that transfers to the brand and is correlated to the degree of trust in the publication.

Takeaway for Advertisers

Given the impact both positive and negative of trust in a platform or publication, brands should ask their media planning agencies to consider this dimension in campaign planning, activation and optimization. Questions to consider for your campaigns: 1) are certain environments driving negative implications for specific audiences? 2) do we have the right guardrails in place to avoid untrustworthy environments 3) are we measuring impact of our campaigns with this in mind?

Finding #3: Local news is highly trusted, especially in Quebec

Local news is trusted news

News publishers in aggregate are seen as **35%** above the baseline level of **trust** across information environments. Local news publishers see an **additional 16%** gain in perceived **trustworthiness** among local audiences

In Quebec, trust in news is more robust than the rest of Canada

Average trust ratings are higher in Quebec than in English Canada for all publications. However, distrust of social media sources is more pronounced in Quebec vs the rest of Canada. Regionality has an effect on local Quebec audiences that manifests as the trust premium, irrespective of whether or not the publication is located in the reader's community



Takeaway for Advertisers

Know the role of each element in your plan. Balance reach and relevance. Some channels are about mass and reaching as many people as possible. Those are usually about cost-efficiency and scale. Other channels are about relevance. We look to reach a smaller, more leaned in and captive audience. While the scale is smaller, impact can be immense and well worth the premium. Keep in mind the specific role of each channel in your media symphony and consider the value of contribution. If the trust premium can allow you to achieve a 10x ROI on your end conversion goal, it may be worth the 30% premium on the CPM.

Finding #4: hard news produces the same positive brand ratings as soft news

Hard News has strong positive brand ratings that are equal to **soft news**

Intuition that soft news is preferable to hard news in terms of brand impact is unsupported by study findings. Hard news and soft news produce the same outcomes for brand rating.

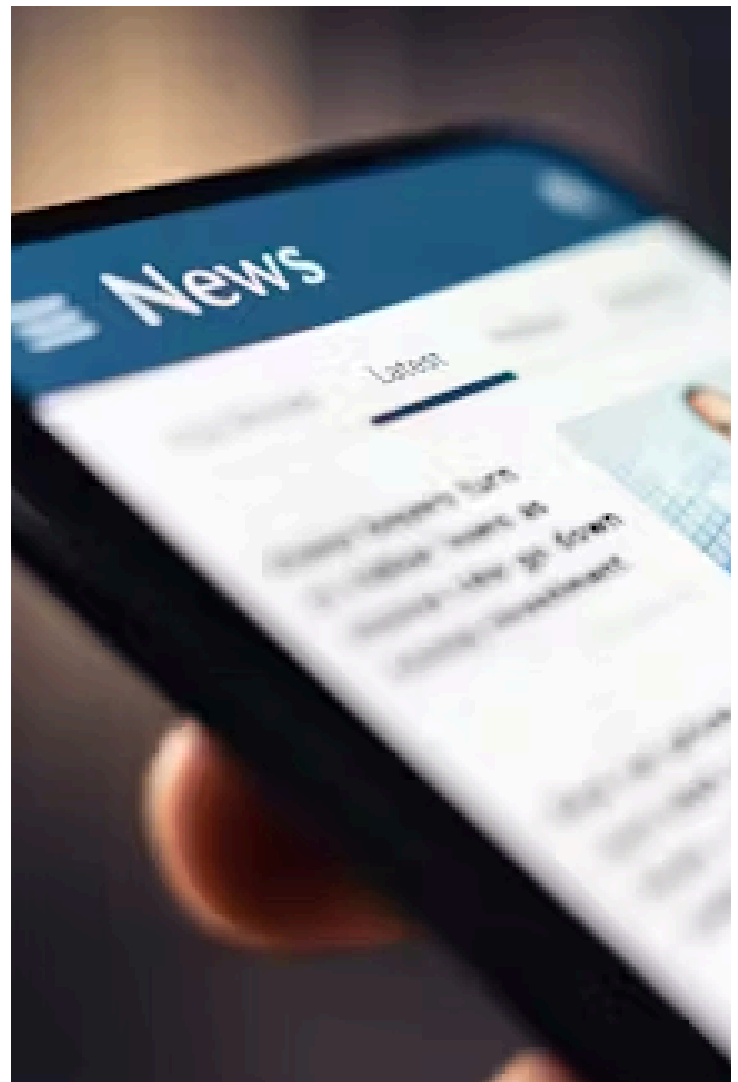
Finding #5: Political trust overpowers ideology

Political trust overpowers ideological slant

There are no systematic differences in brand perception if ads are shown by publishers next to politically charged content. The positive effects of trust prevail in news contexts.

Takeaway for Advertisers

Understand the opportunity and ensure your brand safety controls are aligned with your risk tolerance and ROI goals. This should be adapting in real time with cultural responses and news stories. Even if your brand is comfortable with hard news, or politically charged content there may be certain issues or keywords you don't want



to be around. When you are making brand safety choices, ensure you ask your agency to evaluate the ROI impact, and ensure you are not optimizing your investments away from high quality and influential environments.

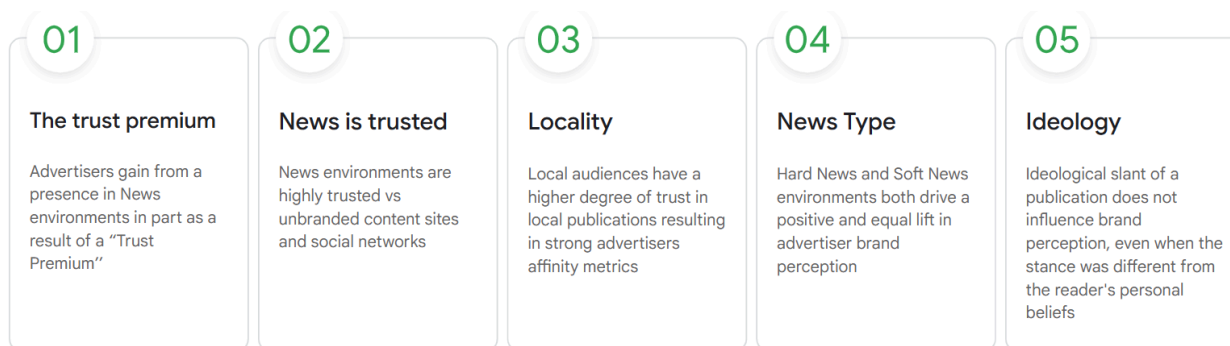
Ask your programmatic buying teams to closely examine their approach to brand safety and ensure that they are:

1. Not applying a one-size-fits-all strategy for all content - as editorial and premium content is very different than the open web content,
2. Relying on higher quality publisher data wherever possible, and
3. Not unnecessarily overfiltering audiences, using broad blocking techniques

Implementing an effective brand safety strategy can significantly increase your ROI.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates there is a clear and measurable lift in brand affinity when advertising is placed within trusted news environments. This "Trust Premium" is a powerful force that can be leveraged by advertisers to enhance brand perception and build stronger connections with consumers. As trust becomes increasingly important in today's media landscape, partnering with reputable news publishers is a valuable opportunity for brands to benefit from the halo effect and establish greater credibility with their target audiences.



The full technical report can be found [here](#).

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