Roundtable  Trust in Consumer Behavior Research  
Nancy R. Buchan, University of Wisconsin-Madison

[to cite]:  

[url]:  
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/8869/volumes/v31/NA-31

[copyright notice]:  
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
The roundtable produced a lively discussion among 28 consumer researchers who have an active interest in trust and/or who hoped to learn more about it. We began by reference to a literature search conducted using the key words “trust” and “consumer” which resulted in a list of just six articles in the top marketing journals, only one of which appeared in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. Given this dearth of published research on trust and consumers, the first question was “what is the role of trust in consumer behavior?”

However, it was proposed that before we can suggest avenues within consumer behavior for the study of trust, we as a field need to first define what we mean by the term. Currently, there exists no agreed-upon definition of trust, and those that exist can be classified into (at least) four categories: trust as a belief, an expectation, an intention, and a behavior. Furthermore, it was suggested that as a field, we need to define trust and be explicit in its usage and measurement, if we are to advance our knowledge of the concept. For example, one researcher discussed that, although definitions of terms in economics may seem limiting and oversimplified, it is because of the parsimony of definition and the consensus in the field as to its usage, that research and understanding of core constructs advances. This is in contrast to the current state in marketing in which we are in a situation of finding conflicting results concerning trust, depending on the definition of trust employed. The perception among some of those assembled was that unless we are able to agree on what we mean by trust, research in this area will keep moving in circles—with collections of disparate definitions and results, rather than achieving a deeper level of insight.

However, this view was countered by other participants who believed that to decide on a single definition of trust would be a gross error of oversimplification because trust inherently takes on different meanings depending on the length, context, and relationship participants involved.

The discussion then moved to the multifaceted characteristic of trust, and its role in different stages of relationships. For example, whereas trust may be weighted more on Williamson-like expectations early on in a relationship, in the later stages of relationships between marketers and clients or consumers, the bond of trust possibly becomes a key aspect in “commercial friendships.” Furthermore, it was proposed that the propensity for consumers to believe advertisements may be related to general trust tendencies. Finally, we discussed whether the standard definition of trust used within the channels literature—that of “a belief in one’s honesty or benevolence”—is applicable in consumer contexts, and furthermore, whether the two conditions often described as necessary for the existence of trust—risk and interdependence—always exist in interactions with consumers—which often occur between consumers and an anonymous entity, company, or brand.