



**SOUL**  
**SEARCHING**  
**2021**

PART FOUR

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After 'Digital Is The New Mainstream', 'Lives Re-examined' and 'Bridging Distances', Red Lab brings to you the 4th report in its Google Trends 2021 series. Here we look at how in a more distrustful world, **Truth Has Become The New Holy Grail.**

## 4

## TRUTH SEEKERS



In 2021, the pandemic further exposed the dangerous consequences of misinformation, spurring governments across the region to enact “**fake news**” laws. With online misinformation and **data breaches** on the rise, consumers are **more sceptical** than ever. Wary of being misled and savvy about their choices, they're also more proactive about finding **trustworthy sources**, using Search to fact-check claims, scrutinize brand values and ensure **authenticity** from the brands they choose to engage with.

# AN ANXIOUS WORLD



# 80%

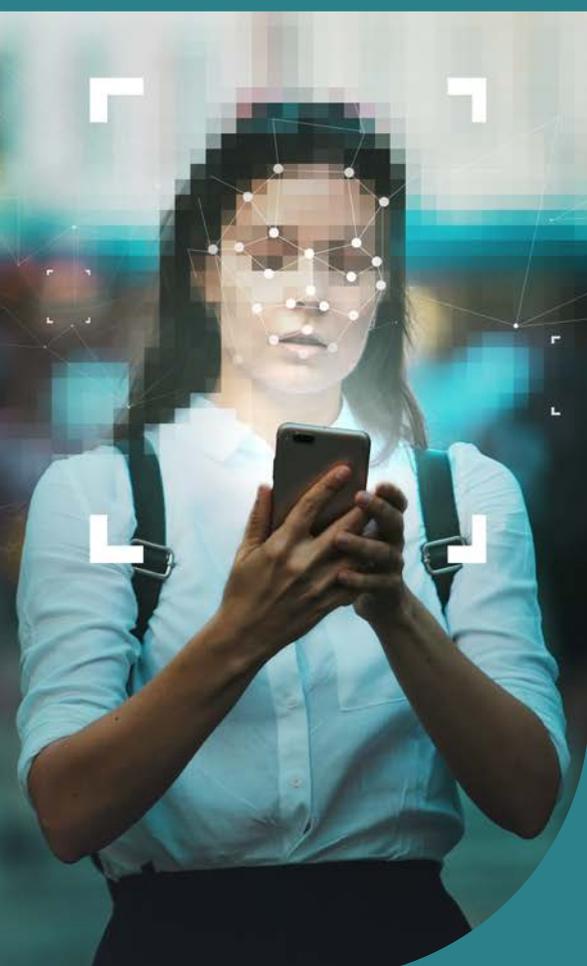
In a recent survey, 80% of Indian respondents said it is now more important to find a trusted source of information, compared with before COVID-19.<sup>22</sup> Consumers, especially Gen Zers, are now more conscious about the mix of both facts and misinformation that can be found online.<sup>23</sup> People are not only savvy about what they see on the internet, but are willing to proactively seek out accurate information on their own terms.

Searches reflect these growing anxieties, with consumers looking for ways to guard against the increasing pervasiveness of fraud and scams. As data breaches reached an all-time high in 2021,<sup>24</sup> searches related to privacy also continued to rise alongside people's growing concerns about their digital safety. 64% of Indians research products before making a purchase to ensure they get the right product or service that meets their needs.<sup>25</sup>



# 64%

# NOT-SO-GREAT EXPECTATIONS



Consumers today don't just check the list of ingredients on a label, they want brands to be accountable and transparent at every step of their value chain, including sourcing, production and corporate sustainability policies. Regardless of how much they trust a brand, consumers across all age groups will conduct extensive research prior to making their purchases.<sup>26</sup> Instead of simply hoping that brands will be true to their word, consumers now expect brands to take proactive steps towards earning and keeping their trust. The underlying theme of this all? Well clearly consumers don't necessarily expect their brands to be honest and trustworthy anymore.

The 3 sub-trends under this larger trend of Truth Seekers are as follows:

## 1. Fact-checking, fighting fraud and protecting privacy

Searches show consumers are increasingly concerned about misinformation and privacy, especially compared to pre-COVID times.<sup>27</sup> In 2021, 87% of APAC consumers say it is now more

+35%



important to find a trusted source of information, compared with before the pandemic.<sup>28</sup>

Searches about frauds and scams have grown by up to 35%.

+80%

is it true



In India, search interest related to misinformation, fact-checking and fake news, such as 'is it true' grew by 80%.

+27%

privacy



Search interest in privacy too grew by 27%.

+24%



## 2. Savvier value systems

As consumers grow more entrenched in their belief systems, they're making sure that the brands they choose also share the same higher purpose. Searches are continuing to rise for topics like sustainability and ethics, while more than half of APAC's consumers have stopped buying products or services that have a negative impact on the environment and society.<sup>29</sup> Conscious consumerism is on the rise in India too, with over 86% of consumers saying that buying sustainable products makes them happy.<sup>30</sup>

Search interest in sustainability grew by 24%.



Search interest in electric scooter grew by 230% as India's consumers, mindful about sustainability issues, are considering using electric vehicles.

+230%

### 3. Consumer demands for reassurance

Consumers today expect to be reassured along their shopping journeys. Authenticity is a key issue on marketplaces for 31% of shoppers surveyed,<sup>31</sup> and we see increasing searches for delivery tracking and official stores of popular brands. In India, 83% of shoppers are inspired to purchase from brands that provide trustworthy information.<sup>32</sup>



+80%

official



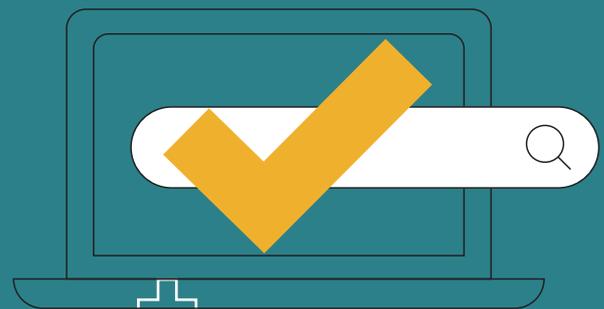
As demand for authenticity increases, there has been up to 80% growth in customers searching for a brand's official store in India.



+60%

With an increase in deliveries, delivery tracking has become more essential. In India, search interest in delivery tracking rose by 60%.

Search interest in trusted website grew by 38%.



+38%

# MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

## Trust as brand equity

Rising misinformation and record-breaking data breaches have put consumers on high alert. They are both sharpening their values and lowering their tolerance for anything misleading. As a result, trust is now a brand's most important asset. Customers expect proactive transparency and authenticity at a minimum.

Today brand trust perhaps matters more than brand love.

Some of the implications of this trend are:

- 1. Act intentionally and respectfully to protect people's privacy and earn trust**

When users have clear choice and control over their data, they're happy to share it with businesses they trust. However, just 30% of APAC marketers have a dedicated strategy to communicate with consumers about data privacy.<sup>33</sup> It's time to consider how you can prioritize your users' privacy concerns to earn their trust.



- a) Use first-party data responsibly and effectively to find the right balance between privacy and the personalized interactions that consumers prefer.
- b) Prepare your digital ads ecosystem for a future without third-party cookies.

Explore privacy-preserving strategies that fuel continued business growth by allowing companies to reach people with relevant ads and measure results without needing to track people across the web.

+68%



- c) Educate and empower your customers to protect themselves against misinformation, scams and fakes.

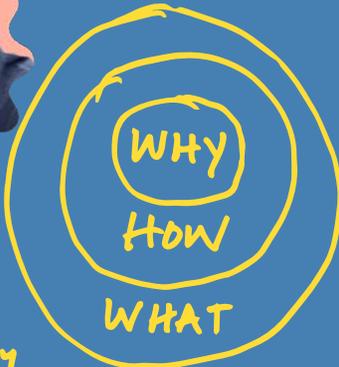
With 68% of online shoppers in Southeast Asia rating guarantee of product authenticity as very important,<sup>34</sup> consider ways you can offer them this needed reassurance.

## 2. Hold your whole business accountable and get ahead of the conversion

When it comes to building trust, brands cannot afford to cut corners. As consumers feel increasingly empowered to hold brands accountable to their claims, earning and keeping trust requires consistent, authentic, and proactive communication.



THE GOLDEN CIRCLE



by SIMON SINEK

Purpose, as a contributor to brand equity, is 10 times more important in India than any other country globally.<sup>35</sup> This proves Simon Sinek's theory of the Golden Circles that people do not buy what you sell but why you sell what you sell. Which in turn implies that defining your brand purpose with sincerity and adhering to it in all that you do as a brand with authenticity is of paramount importance.

A good case in point here is Asian Paints' safe home painting service which fulfils its promise to "operate in an ethical and transparent manner treating customers as we ourselves would like to be treated," by ensuring that its stringent safety protocols are fully met through careful supervision, so that customers can enjoy peace of mind and a hassle-free experience.



Veracity in the Time of Anxiety

Social media and the internet today has fuelled the adage of 'Believe nothing that you hear and only half of what you see!' Amidst this distrust-laden world, only one thing can protect your brand, and that is Veracity or a frankness to come across as transparent and open to scrutiny.





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