

Bridging the gap

 By [Kevin Welman](#)

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Corporate behaviour matters as much as products and customer benefits in influencing perceptions of companies and driving buying decisions, according to global research on corporate reputation...

Our signature Authenticity Gap Study explores the gap between what consumers experience from companies and what they expect of them. The results were sobering: for every one of the 150 brands studied, a gap exists between peoples' expectations and their actual experiences.

Companies can no longer succeed if they fail to align their behaviours and their messages with the expectations of their stakeholders.

In a world where companies and management are under increasing scrutiny, understanding and addressing the expectations and experiences of those we are trying to have a relationship with is fundamental.

This research identifies the behaviours consumers most associate with authentic companies - and where organisations can make changes to improve their reputation in the minds of consumers. While most existing reputation studies focused only on the experiences of consumers, the Authenticity Gap Study looked to measure these experiences against their expectations.



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By closing the gaps between expectations and experience, companies can create true relationships with their audiences - real authentic engagement - that drives progress and opportunity. This research provides companies with very clear insights into where they need to make changes and investments to remain top of mind for consumers.

In the study, FleishmanHillard and London based research partner, Lepere Analytics, focused on the growing struggle companies face in closing the gap between the brand they project and the reputation and perceptions they actually hold in the minds of their audiences.

Although the research didn't include South Africa, this is a great tool that helps clients actively manage for harmony between the experience the brand delivers, and what consumers expect that experience to be. The bigger the harmony, the smaller the Authenticity Gap.

The Authenticity Gap research studied 150 brands across 20 industry categories in the United States, Germany and China, using expert consumers who have a high level of interest, knowledge, engagement and influence in the specific industries they were questioned about in the survey.

The key findings included:

For every brand studied, there is an "authenticity gap" - a gap between people's expectations of the industry category and their actual experiences of the company or brand. When asked about the behaviours of authentic companies, consumers identified nine drivers that can be grouped in three essential strands: management behaviour, customer benefits and society outcomes. The research showed that for consumers, attributes related to corporate behaviour (management behaviour and impact on society) matter as much as those associated with customer care.

There is no such thing as a global market: Consumer expectations in virtually every one of the 20 categories studied differ from country to country.

FleishmanHillard has been awarded Best Large Public Relations Consultancy for two years in a row.

ABOUT KEVIN WELMAN

Kevin is a co-founder and director of ByDesign Communications, with over twenty years' experience in corporate communication strategy, media strategy, social media strategy and crisis counselling...

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