

Additional Case Studies

Chapter 10

Searching for Trust in Entrepreneurs' Marketing Activities

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In this case study, an entrepreneurship researcher talks about his experience in researching the issue of trust, including the methods selected to conduct the study.

Our research question was simple enough; we wanted to know how entrepreneurs make use of trust. We felt that this was an important issue because so much of what entrepreneurs actually do is referred to in terms of establishing credibility (something which existing organizations have but which new ones usually do not).

However finding trust was more difficult than it would first seem. The problem with trust is that like the consumption of alcohol or gambling or sexual performance it is a sensitive subject. People may be prone to telling the research what they think the researcher wants to hear or even what they think makes them look good. Trust can also be hard to explain and it can be hard for people to pin down.

As a result we took an approach that did not involve our respondents (entrepreneurs) having to 'find' or define trust for themselves. We focused on the trust between the entrepreneur and their initial customers. Instead of telling us whether or not trust was used and/or whether it was important, all they had to do was explain what methods they used to attract customers and why they thought such methods were effective.

This approach addressed two problems. First of all the entrepreneurs could talk about whatever they wanted to talk about and there was less likelihood that their answers would be prejudiced by our research interests. The latter was quite an important issue in terms of research methods. What we did not want to do was have people focus on trust in their marketing activities because they felt that this is what we were interested in. By simply talking about how they attracted customers and why they used those methods, entrepreneurs could refer to methods which we understood would involve the use of trust, but at the same time they could also refer to methods that did not involve trust at all.

This approach also meant that underpinning this research was a theoretical framework, but its existence did not mean that we were necessarily simply testing theory. Our approach meant that we could assess how the reality of entrepreneurs marketing experiences matched existing theory, but also how it deviated from it and more importantly *why*.

This approach allowed us to link trust to specific aspects of customer buyer behaviour. We could identify trust being useful where customers perceived risk in terms of what they were buying, but less relevant when there were other constructs affecting buyers' behaviour, for example inertia.