

Building Customer Trust Through Transparent Communication in Competitive Markets: A Comprehensive Review

Authors: Obianuju Gift Nwashili,¹ Adeniji Stephanie²

Affiliation: Independent Researcher^{1,2}

Email: Ujunwashili@gmail.com¹, oyindababe203@gmail.com²

Abstract

The level of trust customers place in brands has declined from previous years. With so many competitors claiming to offer the same great product and service, trust is now one of the few remaining intangible advantages that businesses can use to stand out from their competition. But how can companies build trust with their customers? Recent studies show that one of the most important (and fundamental) ways to build trust is through clear, honest communication. This review article delves into the psychology and relationship science behind transparency, breaks down its 3 pillars (disclosure, clarity, accuracy), and explains how transparency can increase customer loyalty, customer evangelism, company resilience, and much more. We'll also cover what can go wrong with radical transparency and how to avoid these pitfalls. If you've ever wondered why, it's important to be transparent with your customers, or how transparency can improve your bottom line, you'll find the answers in this article. Numerous studies have shown that being open and transparent with your customers is critical to your long-term success and profitability.

Keywords: Trust, Transparency, Corporate Communication, Customer Loyalty, Competitive Advantage, Brand Management

1. Introduction: The Trust Deficit in Competitive Landscapes

Markets today are awash with information asymmetry. Companies used to know more about what they were selling, how much they were charging, and what their business practices were than their customers did. But with technology empowering customers with real-time access to reviews, comparisons and investigative journalism like never before, blind trust in brands has become a “trust deficit” many are trying to overcome (Kimmel, 2018). Transparency has gone from being a nice-to-have public relations exercise to a business imperative. Transparent communication is the “open, timely and comprehensible sharing of information” and acts as an antidote for information asymmetry by fostering perceptions of honesty, integrity and customer empowerment (Rawlins, 2008).

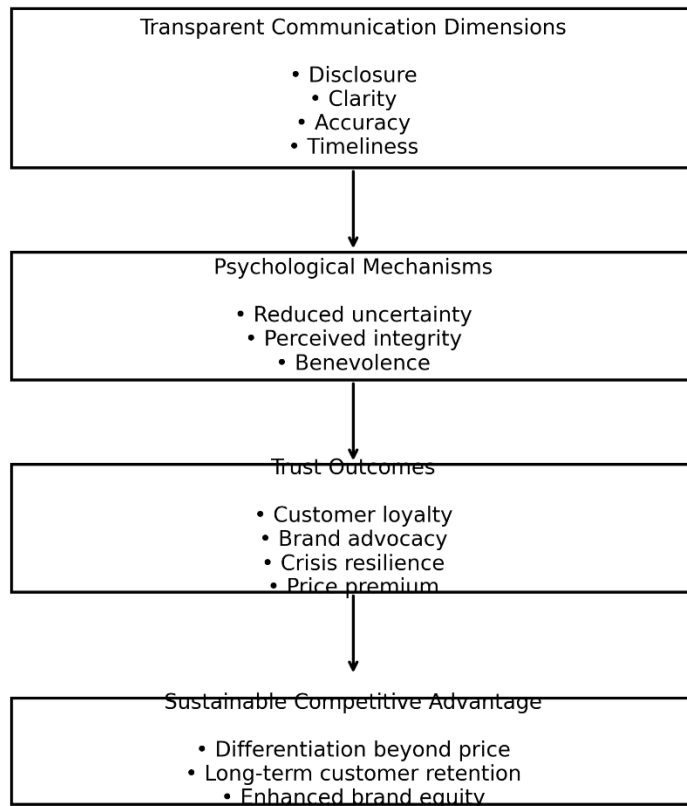


Figure 1. *Transparency–Trust–Competitive Advantage Framework.*

The figure illustrates how transparent communication practices through disclosure, clarity, accuracy, and timeliness activate key psychological mechanisms that foster customer trust. This trust, in turn, generates strategic outcomes such as loyalty, advocacy, crisis resilience, and price premiums, ultimately producing sustainable competitive advantage. In this article, we review literature to suggest that when companies compete in markets where functional advantages are easily copied, the trust earned through transparent communication becomes a source of sustainable competitive differentiation.

2. The Theoretical Underpinnings: Why Transparency Builds Trust

Trust has been described as many things as possible: perception, a mindset, a decision, a relationship, and a fuzzy concept. At its core, however, trust has been academically defined as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer, 1998). By buying something online or in-person, customers enter into a state of vulnerability: they are putting their money, their time, and sometimes their personal data at risk. Communication transparency alleviates these risks by engendering positive expectations in the mind of your customers. Here is how:

2.1 Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) and Information Asymmetry

URT was developed based on the works of Berger and Calabrese. (1975). The idea is that when we meet someone new, we are uncertain about them. To function better and know what to expect, we strive to reduce that uncertainty. Buyers are uncertain about sellers, and that uncertainty

creates perceived risk (Beldad et al., 2010). Information asymmetry is a classic source of uncertainty in buyer-seller relationships. One way to reduce uncertainty is through communication. In many ways, transparency in marketing and business can be thought of as a strategy to reduce uncertainty. Sharing information about why something costs what it does, where your ingredients are from, what you do with users' data, or where your clothes are made "uncover" your business operations and allows the customer to take mental shortcuts in judging risk. There is less ambiguity in your business when everything is laid out on the table, which makes you more predictable. Research on e-commerce has shown that reducing uncertainty about an online product (through detailed product descriptions, return policy clarity, and buyer reviews, all transparency!) leads to less perceived risk and higher intention to buy (Hong & Pavlou, 2014).

2.2 Signaling Theory

Signaling theory was developed in the field of economics to help explain how two parties (of asymmetrical knowledge) can overcome lemons and sell high quality goods in a market full of dishonest sellers (Spence, 1973). Transparency can help you stand out in a crowded market by being a signal of quality. Think about it: what you are communicating when you are transparent is information that could potentially dissuade a customer from buying from you. For example, why would you offer a cost breakdown when it means your product is more expensive than others? Why would you share photos of your factory floor if you weren't proud of it? Why would you voluntarily disclose that your profit margin is smaller than others, when you can afford to keep it a secret? Offering this kind of information is "costly" in terms of signaling theory. You would not share information that hurts you just to seem nice. Yet, you do it. And by doing so, you are proving to your customers that you are operating with integrity; that you are not a "lemon." The signal is costly, and that is what makes people believe it. You would not share "embarrassing" information just to fool people into buying from you. Since you are transparent about the less-than-perfect parts of your business, your customers can believe you when you say other positive things about your product/service. They will trust you (Branco & Rodrigues, 2006).

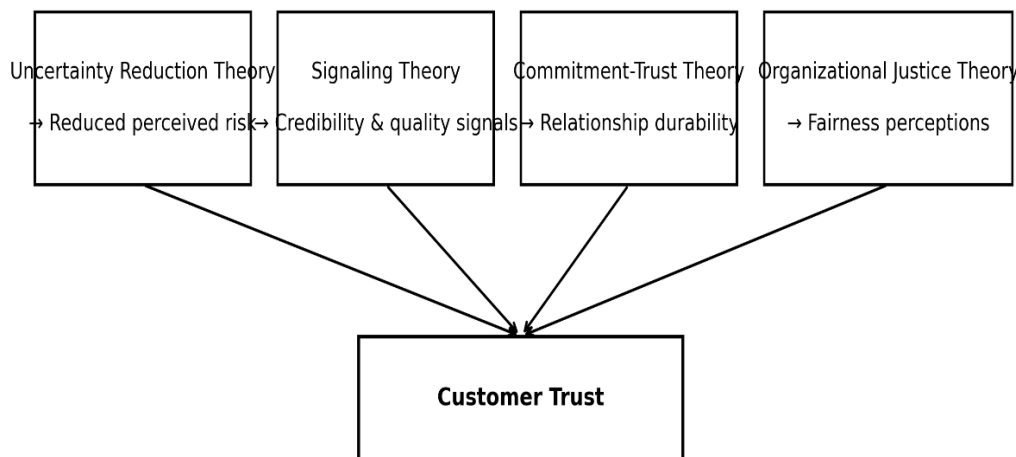


Figure 2. Theoretical Foundations Linking Transparency to Trust.

2.3 The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing

In what is considered by some to be the foundational article on relationship marketing, Morgan

and Hunt (1994) argued that trust was the key mediating variable between successful relational exchange and commitment, cooperation, and decreased likelihood to terminate the relationship. Transparency leads to trust by communicating to your customer that you care about them (benevolence) and you do what you say you will (integrity). When customers start to see your brand as something they have an relationship with rather than a series of discrete transactions, you lower transaction costs and the need to monitor and enforce contracts. Customers who feel like they are in a partnership with a brand are more likely to act cooperatively and become loyal in the long term (Doney & Cannon, 1997).

2.4 Organizational Justice Theory

The organizational justice theory becomes my primary framework whenever I need to convey messages after organizational failures or company crises. One of the elements of organizational justice is informational justice, which concerns the explanations given for decisions. Informational justice focuses on the truthfulness, timeliness, and detail level of explanations given (Greenberg, 1993). Say you bought a product from an online retailer, and it doesn't work. You want your money back. You contact customer service and explain your situation. If the customer service representative gives you a frank, prompt, and thorough explanation of why your request will or will not be honored, you will see that as fair. You entered that transaction with the belief that you could get your money back if the product was faulty, and the company honors that implicit agreement. If they give you the runaround or refuse to explain why they will not give you a refund, you will feel as if your "rights" were violated. Not only will you be less trusting in the company, but you will also be angry. In situations with your customers where something goes wrong, transparent communication (even if it is bad news) helps maintain trust by demonstrating care and procedural justice.

3 Dimensions of Transparent Communication: A Detailed Framework

Transparency is multi-faceted ("There's no on/off switch for transparency", n.d.). In addition to Rawlins' (2008) definition above, effective/distrust-avoiding transparency should be measured along four key dimensions. Each dimension outlined below contains unique action items.

Table 1. Dimensions of Transparent Communication and Practical

Dimension	Core Question	Business Practice Example	Trust Impact
Disclosure	What is shared?	Cost breakdown, sourcing	Reduces suspicion
Clarity	How is it explained?	Plain-language policies	Cognitive trust
Accuracy	Is it verifiable?	Third-party audits	Integrity trust
Timeliness	When is it shared?	Crisis updates	Emotional trust

3.1 Disclosure: The "What" of Transparency: "What" are you being transparent about?

Disclosure defines the information a company shares with its stakeholders. Share:

• Meaningful information. The provided information extends past marketing language to deliver actionable details useful in purchasing choices.

- **Ingredients:** Food/Fitness – full ingredient list, where ingredients are sourced from, carbon footprint, water footprint, where/conditions products are made under.
- **Price:** breakdown of costs (materials, labor, transportation, mark-up), no hidden fees ("drip pricing").

- **Data:** Detailed privacy policy, plain language explanation of what information is collected from customers and how it will be used, easy-to-use data portability tools
- **Corporate:** Who owns the company? Political donations, lobbying, number of hours spent on politics, sustainability metrics broken down to recognize GRI / SASB standards. A balance between positive and negative information. Trustworthy brands don't just share things that make them look good. Share appropriate negative information—what your product doesn't do or ingredients it lacks, service delays, sustainable goals you didn't meet.

3.2 Clarity (understandability): “How” is the information disclosed?

Information should be easy to find and understand by your target audience. Providing stakeholders with a deluge of information in a way that is difficult to understand does not inspire trust.

- Plain language. Information is not communicated in corporate, legal, or scientific jargon. Terms of Service written in plain English like many Fintech companies do.
- Infographics, icons, layered information (easily digest summary with “learn more” to dig deeper), and clear website formatting. Think Patagonia's interactive map for “Footprint Chronicles.”
- Provide context for why the information you're sharing matters. Don't just state “We reduced our emissions by 10%” but explain what that means in comparison to your industry's standard or science-based targets.

3.3 Accuracy: “Truthiness” of your message.

This dimension is non-negotiable. If you don't operate with integrity in this area, you should not be sharing information.

- Triple check your source. If you claim something to be “organic” or “natural” there should be certification to back that up. If you say you are “carbon neutral” there should be an audit process that customers can access.
- Allow for third-party verification of your information. Especially in financial space, allowing a third-party to audit your books is the strongest signal of quality and integrity your customers should trust you. Look to “Certifications” like fair trade, B Corp, or NGO conducted supply chain audits.
- Have you process for admitting to mistakes/sharing updates to previous information disclosed. If you post inaccurate information and don't correct it, customers will lose trust. How you handle this reveals your integrity.

3.4 Timeliness (Responsiveness): “When” do you choose to communicate?

Timing can be everything when building trust.

- Get ahead of the information your customers will want or need. Share information before they ask for it or before a crisis hits. Sends a message that you are in control and have nothing to hide. Launching your product? Have your cost and impact information available

- from day 1.
- Realtime tracking: If you provide a service that involves some waiting time (product delivery, software outage, etc.) give customers the ability to track progress. It seems simple but providing customers with realistic timelines and the ability to see updates reduces anxiety and increases trust.
 - Be quick to respond during a crisis. Research shows that in situations where a crisis has occurred, your initial response is everything (Coombs, 2007). Even if you don't have all the details, quickly share a statement that acknowledges what happened and you'll provide more transparency as soon as you have verified information. Don't say anything at all and customers will perceive your organization as guilty.

These are cumulative – Customers won't care about how accurate your information is if no one can understand what you're trying to say. Customers will notice if you share timely information that lacks any meaningful content. A strategic approach to transparent communication will focus on building all 4 pillars.

4. The Competitive Advantages of Trust Through Transparency: Empirical Evidence and Strategic Impact

Trustworthy communication is not just ethically superior; it gives you quantifiable and lasting advantages. This advantage defines your competitive edge and remains protected against fast replication by competitors because it stems from authentic human relationships.

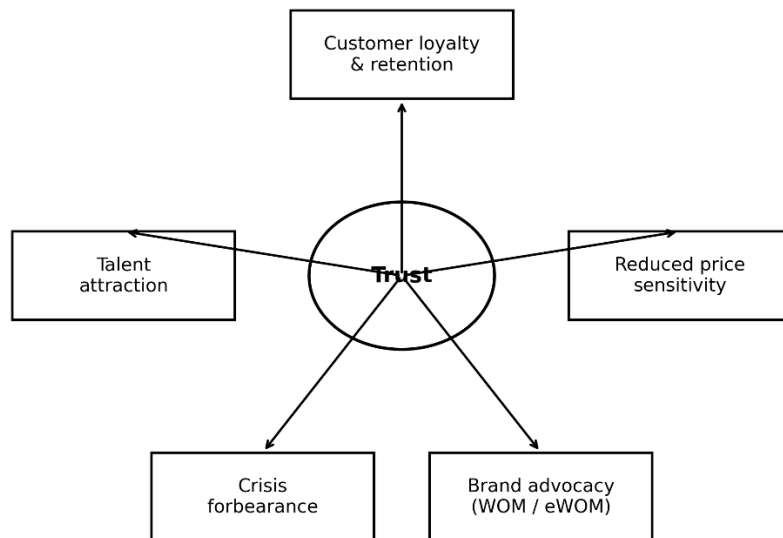


Figure 3. Outcomes of Transparency-Driven Trust.

4.1 Enhanced Customer Loyalty, Retention, and Reduced-Price Sensitivity

One benefit of transparency that has been shown repeatedly in academic studies is increased loyalty because of transparency-driven trust. Transparency impacts trust directly. Research conducted by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) found that brand trust has a significant impact on purchase loyalty (behavioral loyalty/repeat purchase) and attitudinal loyalty (psychological loyalty), with attitudinal loyalty showing an even stronger impact. Transparency feeds directly into brand trust. One study found that customers of financial service providers who believed their advisor was extremely transparent with them regarding fees and potential conflicts of interest were 35% more likely to stay with that financial professional over five years and were much less

likely to switch to a provider who offered marginally lower prices (Grayson et al., 2008). They were "stickier" because they trusted the company and did not feel as compelled to comparison shop. If a consumer trusts that you are not going to try and take advantage of them and that you have their long-term interests in mind, they are much less likely to feel swayed by another company's advertising/marketing. This impacts both CAC and CLV directly.

4.2 Price Premium Justification and Brand Equity Enhancement

Trust earned through transparency lets businesses operate above the commodity level. People will pay more money for goods and services from brands that they believe to be authentic, socially responsible, and trustworthy. Think of it as earning a "trust dividend". In one of the earliest experiments in truthful packaging, companies were able to successfully charge a 10-15% premium for products with traceable facts about their sourcing and breakdown of costs versus generic products that made typical brand promises (Eggert & Helm, 2003). After all, the product itself is no better quality than the generic - what customers are paying extra for are the credence attributes: facts about the product that they cannot determine until after purchase or have to take on faith like "fairly made" or "responsibly sourced". Transparent communication gives them that faith. That trust translates to stronger brand equity - the financial value of your brand accumulated through consumer perception. If your brand is more trustworthy, customers will see it as more credible and reputable, making your brand equity higher overall (Erdem & Swait, 2004).

4.3 Brand Advocacy and Co-Creation Networks

Trust turns customers into brand ambassadors. Transparency allows people to feel a sense of integrity and shared values with a brand, which aligns with social exchange theory by creating reciprocal obligations between people and the brand. Customers build trust and are more likely to participate in positive word-of-mouth (WOM) and electronic WOM (eWOM) to spread the good news about their trusted brand. Positive WOM and eWOM can turn your customers into unpaid brand advocates who will share their authentic, user-generated content about your company. In many ways, this type of engagement is more influential than traditional corporate marketing. Transparency can create brand loyalty so deeply that customers become vehement defenders of your brand. Outdoor apparel company Patagonia is transparent about their environmental activism and supply chain practices, which has allowed them to create an ultra-loyal customer base that will market the brand for them because it's part of their identity (Busser & Shulga, 2019).

This transparency can also allow for co-creation. When brands are open about their struggles (i.e. a software company making their product roadmap public), users are more likely to submit ideas and help identify bugs because they feel connected to your brand and want it to succeed. Not only do you receive free innovation, but you also create strong relational ties.

4.4 Crisis Resilience and Stakeholder Forbearance

Perhaps most important, however, is crisis buffering. Every organization experience failure, scandal, or negative market condition at some point. When an organization has built up an insurance policy of trust through a history of openness, they are better equipped to weather the storm. Stakeholders (such as consumers, investors, and regulators) will be far more likely to write off an incident as human error or a one-time lapse in judgment, versus a deliberate deception or repeat offense. Situational Crisis Communication Theory, as proposed by Coombs (2007), highlights an organization's past reputation (of which transparency is a major factor) as

one of the most important exacerbating factors when it comes to assigning crisis responsibility. If your brand has earned trust, you will be given more benefit of the doubt. You will have more time and goodwill to work with to correct the problem before your overall reputation suffers. If you have a history of opacity, stakeholders will question your every move, and your reputation will tank quickly.

4.5 Talent Attraction and Retention

The marketplace rewards transparent businesses similarly to how the labor market does. External transparency often goes hand in hand with internal transparency. Employees (think Millennials, Gen Z) are looking for work with companies who share their values and operate honestly. Happy customers also want to work at brands known for being open to customers. Employees want to work at companies who value transparency with customers. Companies recognized for transparency with customers will attract better talent. Millennial and Gen Z talent want to work for ethical companies who communicate externally in a transparent way. There is a cycle of transparency: Transparency leads to trustworthy, engaged employees. These employees lead to better customer experience. Better customer experience leads to happy customers who trust your brand (Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013). When your entire brand operates on a foundation of trust, you will enjoy a powerful competitive advantage.

5. Challenges, Risks, and Boundaries of Transparent Communication

Transparency brings advantages yet it remains a complex endeavor to manage. There are several inherent risks to consider when building your transparency strategy.

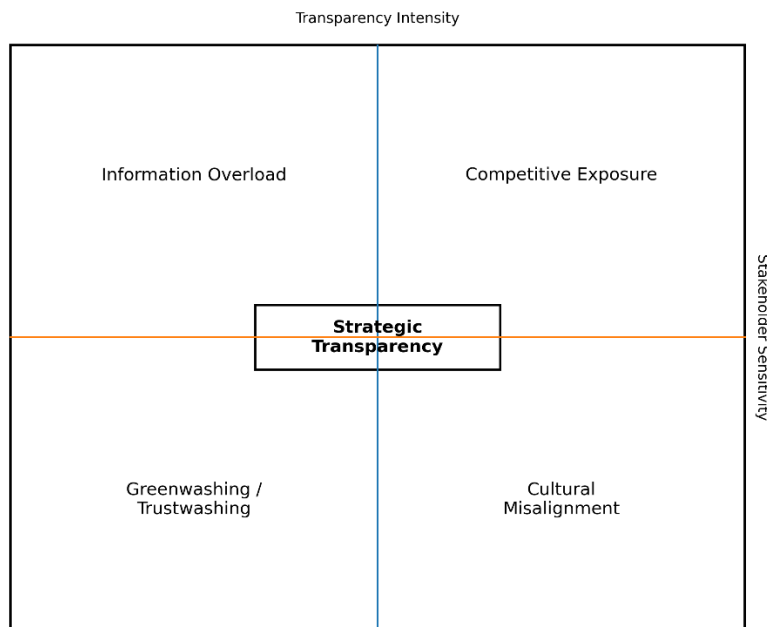


Figure 4. Risks and Boundaries of Transparent Communication.

5.1 The Paradox of Information Overload and Strategic Opacity

The need to share everything comes up against your customers’ ability to process everything. Information overload is the state of having too much information or information that’s too complex or delivered too quickly for you to comfortably process and make decisions (Jacoby, 1984). It results in choice paralysis, frustration, and avoidance of your brand or product. Imagine you land on a website that looks to hit all the Disclosure Doughnut’s

dimensions...but it does so by publishing every single technical report ever produced about each of their product offerings. Yikes. The place would be counterintuitively overwhelming and difficult to use. This is where strategic editing and layering comes into play. Share what matters. Be transparent about things that your stakeholder needs to know in order to make an informed decision about your product or service or to feel that they can trust you. But allow your customers to “dig deeper” if they want. This brings me to my next point. You don’t have to share everything. In fact, you can’t. While aspects of your business-like products and services, company culture, and pricing should all be transparent, you’ll naturally want to hold back your strategic roadmap for research and development, anything related to the manufacturing process that could compromise your product or brand, personnel issues, and competitive intelligence. Stakeholders won’t expect you to provide transparency in these areas. But you can be transparent about *why* you can’t. So, when a stakeholder asks, you aren’t backpedaling or dodging the question. You’re maintaining trust by setting the right expectations about your transparency.

5.2 Competitive and Operational Risks

Radical transparency can also give advantages to your competition. If you believe being transparent means publishing your list of suppliers, price points, or product roadmap, you may be severely hindering a competitive advantage you've worked hard to develop. Ask yourself if sharing this information really affects how your customers trust you to do business (ethics, product quality, usage of their data) or if you're just trying to keep information that benefits your operational advantage secret. Being transparent with employees about performance goals or decision making can backfire if employees try to game the system or causes conflict if your company culture doesn't support it.

5.3 The Perils of Inauthenticity: Greenwashing and "Trust washing"

The most damaging reputation risk is rooted in hypocrisy. When brands decide to approach transparency only as a PR or marketing gloss rather than the lived reality of how they do business they expose themselves to allegations of greenwashing (environmental claims) or just “trust washing” in general. Customers and activist NGOs alike are getting increasingly savvy to brands who broadcast a message of transparency but are incongruent with what they stand for. Say one brand promotes their new sustainable clothing line, but 80% of their supply chain doesn’t fall into that category; they are asking for (and will receive!) immense reputational harm. The repercussions of being called out for being “fake” or “dishonest” will hurt your brand far more than if you had never said anything at all. That’s because you’ve broken the first rule of being transparent: being authentic to who you are. If you are transparent on the outside, you need to ensure you are aligned on the inside.

5.4 Managing Expectations and the "Negative Transparency" Dilemma

Transparency can mean shining a light on bad news. Not everything is as "green" as you thought. Profits are robust while employee wages are not. You're deprecating a customer’s favorite. This sort of "negative transparency" raises an obvious question: Will full disclosure kill short term coolness? Research shows that while negative information can come with a short-term cost, the trust dividend more than offsets it. The key is framing the negative news in context. Telling customers candidly why "100% sustainability" isn't happening yet, what's being done to get there, and what the challenges are can help set expectations. Often trust means showing customers you're doing your best vs. guaranteeing you'll always be perfect.

5.5 The Cultural and Contextual Boundary

Expectations of transparency are not globalized. Different cultural values, like Hofstede's high Uncertainty Avoidance or high-Power Distance may affect stakeholders. In these cultures, stakeholders may view transparency as foolish, disrespectful, or unnecessarily exposing yourself to liability. When practicing transparency on a global scale, companies should evaluate how much information they release, as well as how they release it. They should never compromise their integrity by withholding what other countries would require them to disclose, but they should be aware that laying it all out there comes with risks too.

6. A Strategic Framework for Implementation: Operationalizing Transparency

Transitioning from a transparent ideal to actualized, embedded transparency is intentional work. Having a process will help you make transparency a part of your day-to-day business in a way that is sustained, genuine, and builds value. It also prevents transparency from becoming solely a crisis communications strategy deployed only when necessary. Here is a step-by-step process for you to follow:

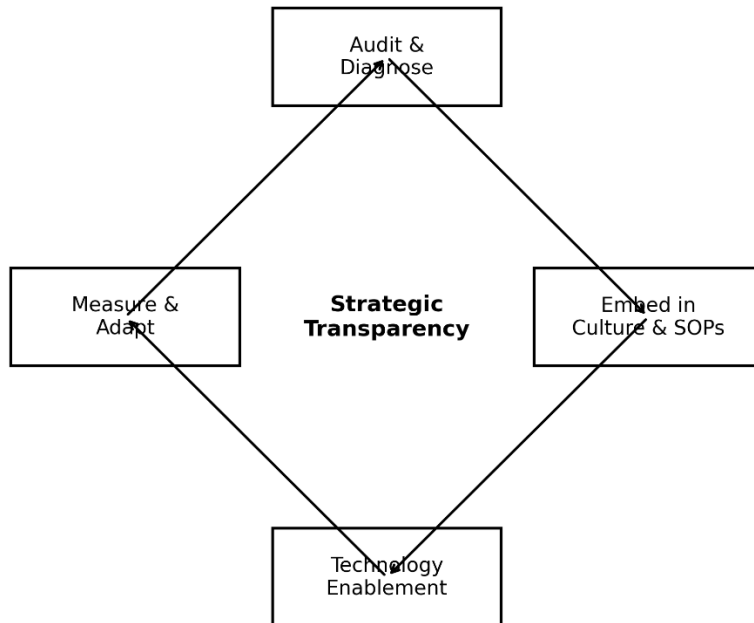


Figure 5. Strategic Transparency Implementation Cycle.

6.1 Phase One: Audit, Diagnose, and Prioritize

Examine your organization's current communication effectiveness across the four transparency dimensions through a cross-departmental assessment. Map out: **Transparency Gap Audit:** Gather a cross-functional team including marketing, legal, customer service, operations and executive leadership. List all major customer touchpoints: website, packaging, ads, sales scripts, customer agreements, social media, crisis communications, etc. Evaluate each one based on:

- What do we tell them? Is it meaningful or fluff?
- How do we tell them? Is it easy to understand or filled with legalese?
- Is it accurate? Can we back it up? What third party verification do we have?
- When do we tell them? Before they ask or only when we have to (aka crisis)?

Put your Stakeholders First: Certain information will matter more to your stakeholders than others. Engage your customers through surveys, focus groups, social media monitoring, etc. to determine what information gaps cause the most anxiety or distrust with your customers in particular. Ingredient sourcing may be vital information for a food brand, while data encryption and financial fees may be crucial transparency for a fintech. Focus your transparency efforts where they will matter most.

6.2 Phase Two: Embed in Organizational Culture and Structure
Transparency should extend beyond marketing and PR departments to become a widespread organizational value. It should be part of your company culture and documented in your operating procedures.

Culture: Leaders should set an example by rewarding honesty and leading candidly themselves. Yes, that means talking about what challenges your business is facing in all staff meetings, allowing your team to clear you to disclose related mistakes, and celebrating those who ownfully share bad news.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs): Putting transparency into process is equally important. Make sure you have a:

- Transparency Standard: What will we say, how will we say it, and how often will we communicate about x, y, and z?
- Crisis communications playbook: That requires timely, accurate, and honest language. Have individuals and decision makers preapproved so you don't risk speed vs. accuracy during a crisis.
- Compliance check: With your legal, regulations, and ethics teams. The last thing you want is your transparency efforts to backfire and open you up to lawsuits.

Education: Employees also need to feel empowered to speak transparently with your customers and stakeholders. Educate your customer-facing employees on transparency and empower them to do what is necessary to answer questions clearly and honestly (including escalating to leadership if the answer isn't readily available). Remember, internal communication transparency trickles down to how your employees communicate outside the company.

6.3 Phase Three: Leverage Technology as an Enablement Platform
Human involvement remains essential for transparency but technology enables organizations to connect with wider audiences more effectively.

• **Build your single source of truth:** Whether that's a section on your website or a standalone microsite, build a place where your customers can regularly go to find certain transparent information (impact reports, supplier maps, ingredients, etc.) that is easy to update and access.

• **Trackable and shareable:** Consider innovative tools that allow your stakeholders to see and interact with your transparent information for themselves. Some examples include:

- QR codes that allow customers to see where your product came from farm-to-table
- Live data tracking dashboards of your service rates, carbon emissions, hiring practices, etc.
- Interactive FAQs that allow customers to easily understand your policies

Social First: Don't use social media to just push out press releases. Use social as you would interact with your customers in real life. Own up to criticisms on your channels. Reply to customer questions in the comment section of posts. Let your employees be human on social media too.

6.4 Phase Four: Measure, Learn, and Adapt

To ensure transparency becomes strategic rather than aspirational you must be able to measure it. In addition to your typical marketing measurement tools:

- Track transparency-specific metrics such as:
 - **Perception:** Regularly testing Trust Score, NPS, and your Brand's BASF Authenticity scores.
 - **Action:** Measuring customer's CES on finding information you've made available, tracking retention/churn of customers who interact with your transparency efforts, monitoring UGC sentiment (both good and bad).
 - **Usage:** How many people are using your transparent tools? How many unique visitors to your supplier map? Downloads of your impact reports?

Listen: Continually solicit feedback from your customers and employees on how you're doing and where you can improve. This qualitative data can help you understand how your transparency efforts are (or aren't) being perceived as authentic. You can also use these opportunities to gather insight into what your customers want you to be transparent about.

- **Adapt:** Just like any other strategy, your transparency efforts should be fluid and adaptable. Review your analytics and feedback against your goals and KPIs on a regular basis and don't be afraid to pivot your language, roll out new transparency features, or move your prioritization around as expectations, competition, and world events change.

6.5 Navigating Boundaries: The Transparency Decision Matrix

This quick tool assists you in determining which information should remain transparent versus what should stay undisclosed. Take a stab at answering these two questions when deliberating on what information to disclose:

- Y-axis: Will my stakeholders care about this? Will it impact their trust in my brand, decision to buy from me, or safety? (Yes/ No)
- X-axis: Is this competitively sensitive or could it hurt my company? (Yes/ No)

The most important responses should appear within the top two quadrants. These are things your customers have a right to know like pricing, basic company policies, and product ingredients/sourcing. The bottom right quadrant requires a bit more nuance. Owning mistakes or problems that put people at risk (i.e. a vehicle recalls or workplace accident) will always require transparency with a plan to make it right. You'll have to use your best judgement on a case-by-case basis. Things that fall into the bottom left can be disclosed based on if you have the resources and if it strengthens your brand story (i.e. salaries of headquarters staff).

7. Conclusion: Transparency as the New Competitive Constant

The modern business landscape has forced trust into the lexicon of key business objectives. We live in a world where information is cheap, and power is shifting from corporations back to consumers. Building trust with your customers should no longer be thought of as a nice-to-have, it's a necessity. Through this literature review we've discovered that there is one sure fire way to build trust with your customers and that is through honest communication. Honest communication shouldn't be something you do just when a crisis occurs or when you need to sell something. It should be the foundation of how you do business. Being open with your customers shouldn't be thought of merely as a strategy, but rather a culture that weaves into every aspect of your company. People want to know what's going on. They want to know that what you're

telling them is fair and that you have their best interest at heart. Below are a few key takeaways from this literature review:

There will be growing pains as your company adjusts to life inside the sunlight. You'll have to learn what not to share, how to prevent information overload, and how to be transparent without being dishonest. But trust me when I say it's worth it.

Your competitive advantage will no longer be defined by who has the lowest prices. If you build genuine trust with your customers, you'll be able to weather the storm of a price war. Customers who trust you will be less price sensitive, and you'll be able to charge a "trust premium." Not only will your customers be less price sensitive, but they will also become your biggest brand advocates and collaborators. Building this kind of trust creates an emotional connection with your brand. And lastly, having a culture of trust will act as a buffer when crises do occur.

There will always be companies out there who swear by secrecy, but why join them? Operating with transparency is the new normal. Your competitors will soon catch on and join the movement or they'll be left in the dark. Don't get left behind.

Implementing transparency into your business won't happen overnight. It takes time to create a culture, provide your employees with the tools to succeed, and measure your progress. Just remember that every step you take towards transparency is a step towards a more profitable, equitable, and sustainable business.

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