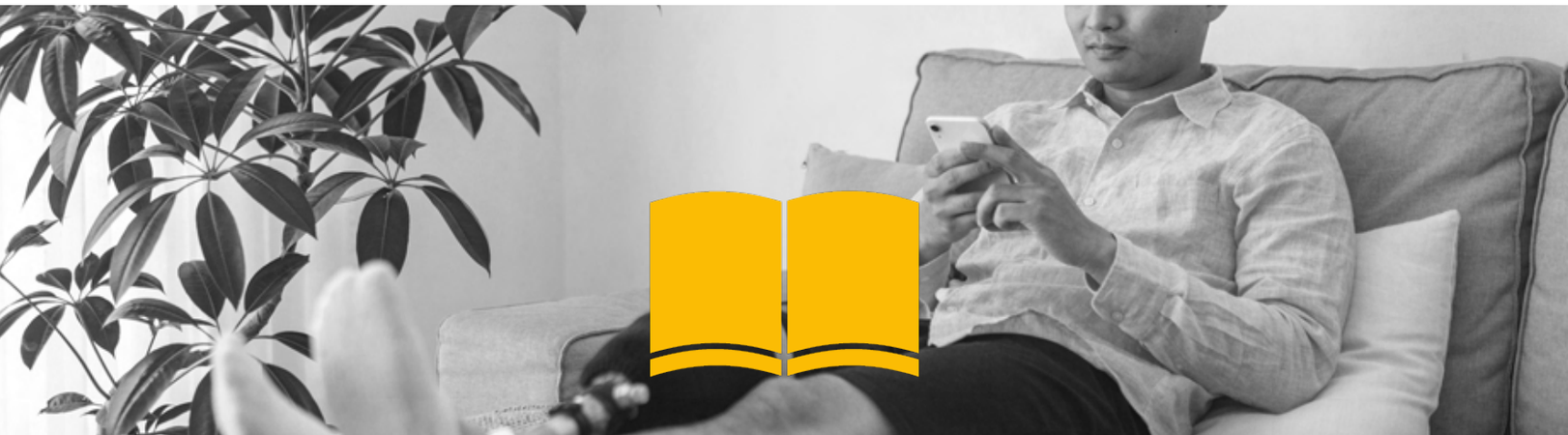
Truth seekers

4

With online misinformation and data breaches on the rise, Malaysian consumers are more skeptical than ever. Wary of being misled and savvier 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.

In 2021, the pandemic further exposed the dangerous consequences of misinformation. This spurred governments across the region to enact “fake news” laws, as close to 8 in 10 Malaysians reported receiving fake news on social media platforms.[5] Consumers, especially Gen Zers, are now more conscious about the mix of both facts and misinformation that can be found online. People are now savvier about what they see on the internet and 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, searches related to privacy also continued to rise alongside people's growing concerns about their digital safety.

Truth-seeking behaviors are becoming a consumer habit as shoppers spend more effort to ensure their choices align with their value systems. Rising searches for sustainable practices and ethical shopping reflect how consumers have a lower tolerance for being misled, and are holding brands closely accountable for any claims that they make.

Consumers today want brands to be transparent at every step of their value chain, including sourcing, production, and corporate sustainability policies. In Malaysia, 55% of consumers say that when considering a purchase, they value transparency and traceability of the product's origin.[6] Shoppers across all age groups will conduct extensive research prior to making their purchases, expecting brands to be proactive in earning and keeping their trust.

This means that for brands, getting ahead of transparency, focusing on authenticity, and ensuring two-way continuous communication with their customers has become more important than ever.

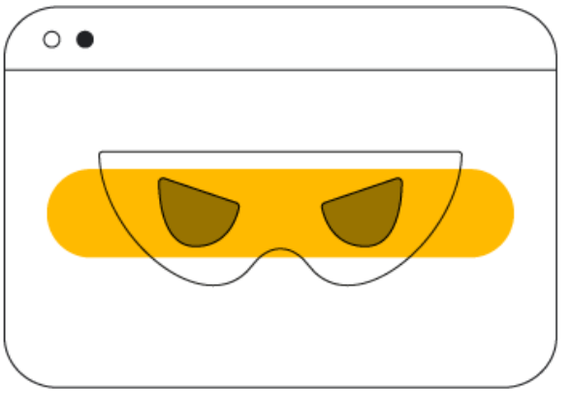
SEARCHES

Fact-checking, fighting fraud, and protecting privacy

Searches show consumers increasingly concerned about misinformation and privacy, especially compared to pre-COVID times. In 2021, 87% of APAC consumers say it is now more important to find a trusted source of information, compared with before the pandemic.

+50%

In Malaysia, search interests related to fact-checking and fake news has risen, with conspiracy seeing 5% growth and online lies increasing by 50%.



+25%

Searches about frauds and scams have grown by up to 25%.

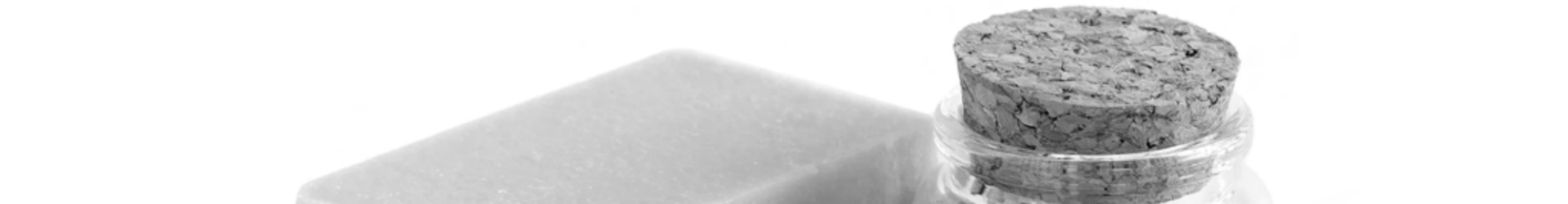
+40%

Search interest in Privasi (privacy) grew by more than 40%.

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 consumers have stopped buying products or services that have a negative impact on the environment and society.

In Malaysia, interest in sustainability continues to grow, with search interest in terbiodegradasi (biodegradable) increasing by more than 70% and kitar semula (recycling) rising by 50%.



Ethical practices are increasingly important to consumers too, with search interests in cruelty-free growing by up to 75% and fairtrade growing by 10%.

+30%

Search interests in electric bikes and electric cars grew by 30% and 10% respectively.

Consumer demands for reassurance

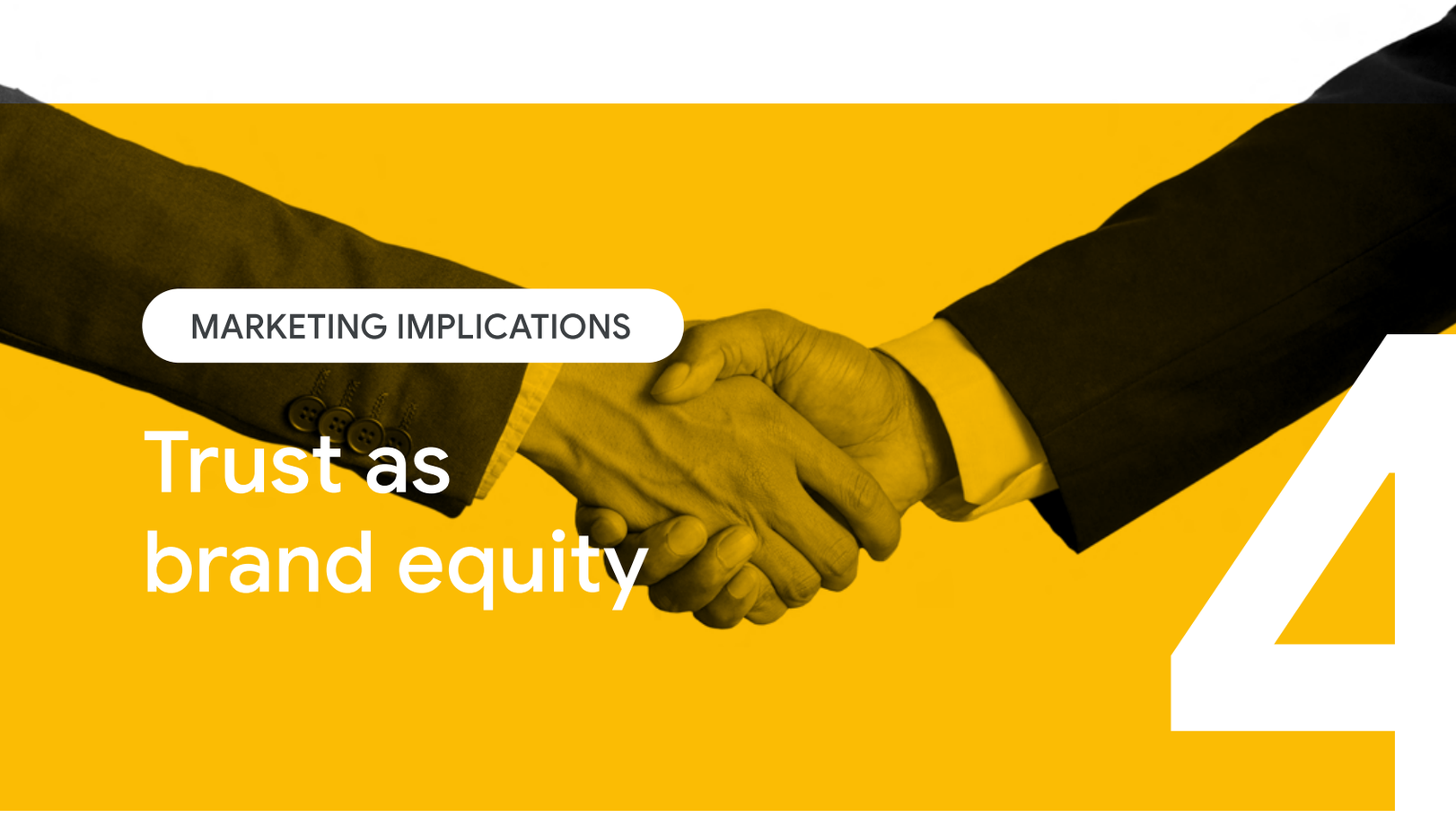
Consumers today expect to be reassured along their shopping journeys. Authenticity is a key issue on marketplaces for 31% of shoppers surveyed, and we see increasing searches for delivery tracking and official stores of popular brands.

Malaysia has the highest concentration of searches for delivery tracking in the world, with search interest in package tracking growing by 20%.

+20%

Along with rising demand for authenticity, there has been up to 35% growth in customers searching for a brand's official store in Malaysia.

Search interest in trusted online grew by over 55%.



MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

Trust as brand equity

4

Rising misinformation and record-breaking data breaches have put consumers on high alert, 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.

Edelman
Trust, the new brand equity

"Brands need to be for the people, and guided by the people. Why? Because brand trust ranks higher than brand love."

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. Today, more than half of Malaysians say that their trust in a brand is greatly impacted by whether it protects their personal data.[7] It's time to consider how you can prioritize your users' privacy concerns to earn their trust.

Use first-party data responsibly and effectively to find the right balance between privacy and the personalized interactions that consumers prefer.
Check out our marketer's playbook for privacy to deliver performance in a privacy-safe way and learn what industry leaders across APAC think about the region's key data privacy trends and how to create a privacy-first ecosystem.

2

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.

3

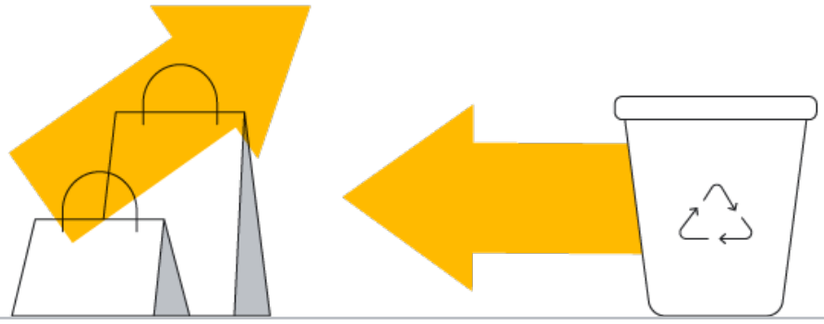
Educate and empower your customers to protect themselves against misinformation, scams, and fakes.
With 68% of online shoppers in Southeast Asia rating "guarantee of product authenticity" as very important, consider ways you can offer them this needed reassurance.

In 2021, Google launched the About This Result feature, which provides details about a website before users visit it, including whether the source is trusted and whether a user's connection to the site is secure. Google's Fact Check Explorer also helps counter falsehoods and reduce misinformation online.

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.

Consider the full implications of your company values on every part of your value chain.
Expand the definition of what it means to be sustainable by considering the carbon footprint of your digital actions. Through Google Cloud Carbon Footprint, you can take action to evaluate and reduce the footprint of your carbon workloads.



Fugeelah, a Malaysian social enterprise, embraced upcycling by releasing a collection of limited edition bags which were made from leftover fabrics that would otherwise have ended up in a landfill.

Sources:
All Google Search data points included in this report are from Google Trends, Sep 2019 - Aug 2020 vs. Sep 2020 - Aug 2021, unless otherwise indicated.

5. UCSI Poll Research Centre, MY, June 2021.
6. PwC, MY, Global Consumer Insights Pulse Survey, Dec. 2021.
7. PwC, MY, Global Consumer Insights Pulse Survey, Dec. 2021.