

EMERGE SMARTER

eBOOK INSIGHTS



14 COMMON ISSUES THAT PLAGUE BRAND HEALTH TRACKERS

Whether you're embarking on your very first wave of brand health tracking or looking to refine an existing program, we're giving you a peek into our best-in-class strategies for optimizing your tracking program to ensure you make smart decisions about what comes next for your brand.

Lisa Bloxson
Vice President,
Quantitative Research





Brand health is essentially measured by how effective your brand is in helping you to achieve your goals. That effectiveness can be measured using a number of metrics such as brand awareness, consideration, satisfaction, imagery, etc.

Brand **Reputation** is one of the elements that falls under the brand health umbrella and refers to public opinion and sentiment regarding the brand. Reputation attributes often include community building, corporate culture, trust, respect, credibility, legitimacy, policy, job creation, and citizenship.

Brand reputation and overall brand health are intricately linked but not synonymous. For example, in some cases, a strong brand can overcome reputation problems (e.g., Amazon, where a strong convenience proposition can override allegations of worker exploitation) while, in other cases, a reputation problem can damage a strong brand (e.g., BP following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill).

At C+R Research, we have an especially **robust background in brand health tracking research**, spanning over 30 years. We recognize **common pitfalls** of standard brand health tracking approaches and have honed several **best practices** to prevent them. For example, our tracking experience helps us provide thought leadership and sidestep common shortcomings, such as:

1. **APPROACHING BRAND HEALTH TOO NARROWLY**

We've developed a **framework** that ensures a holistic read of brand health that includes motivation and momentum and considers additional brand health 'pillars' that impact your brand's long-term value and health. We aim to measure ALL the ways your brand can grow:

a. **The Head: Persuasion**

To what degree is the brand considered superior to its competition? Is the brand truly better and different from others? Is it perceived as having greater features, benefits, and overall competencies than the rest of the marketplace?

b. **The Heart: Commitment**

Even when the product is considered on par with competitors, does the brand mean more to its customers? Does the brand say something about people associated with it? Is the brand personally relevant? How loyal are the brand's consumers? Would they recommend it? What is the brand's personality?

c. **The Gut: Momentum**

To what degree is the brand on consumers' radar? Do consumers have a sense that the brand is being talked about? Do they believe it is a brand that is improving? Do they perceive it as a brand that others will follow?

d. **The Wallet: Motivation**

To what degree would consumers consider the brand if they were looking for that product/service? Would they include it in their information search? To what degree would they recommend the brand to a friend who was looking?

We can deliver a composite metric that provides a **trackable Brand Power Score** through a customized roll-up of these brand health pillars. This can help simplify the comparison process to provide a quick and easy bird's-eye view of how things are evolving.



2. MISSING THE BIG PICTURE

There is often a difference between what people **say** and what they **do**. We believe that understanding these disparities is vital to making sound strategy decisions, and often employ a variety of different advanced analytics when synthesizing the results of brand health trackers to uncover motivations that are verifiably correlated with behavior. For example:

- **REGRESSION ANALYSIS** can identify the key drivers of usage, satisfaction, switching and/or affinity. It helps uncover motivations that are verifiably correlated with behavior and can be run on individual attributes and/or factors (identified via **factor analysis**) to convey the big picture.
- **LADDERING MODELS OF CONSIDERATION and CHOICE** can reveal why a brand ends up in the consideration set, and then why it is chosen from that set. It can uncover the qualities that compel consumers to opt for various brands across products/categories.
- **PENALTY ANALYSIS** can reveal how better satisfying certain needs can impact an interest in your brand. It's a "what if" analysis that can identify how to maximize consumers' attitudes or behaviors towards a product/service by classifying performance characteristics along a spectrum from low to high *risk* and low to high *reward*.

3. REDUNDANT REPORTS THAT LACK NEW NEWS

Few executives are pleased to spend time reading reports that don't have much to say. Therefore, many of our clients have greatly benefited from a hybrid tracking approach where we maintain **a core set of standard measures that are trendable over time**, while also

integrating some **new survey content each wave to keep the results interesting**. This way, we can ensure a consistent supply of fresh news and take advantage of important customer/prospect touchpoints by asking pertinent follow-ups to address any lingering questions from prior waves.

4. LACK OF ACTIONABLE FINDINGS

We understand that actionability is contingent on evaluating metrics in the context of your company's business goals so that results speak to your decision-makers' needs in their own language. We aspire to work as an extension of your team—understanding shared success metrics, demonstrating how key findings relate to key strategic decisions, and linking reputational equity and risk to current business plans to drive relevance. Every project that comes through our doors gets senior-level attention every step of the way; it's what delivers the insights that drive intelligent and informed decision-making by our clients.

5. STATIC METRICS THAT DON'T EVOLVE WITH BUSINESS NEEDS

Measurement instruments will necessarily evolve, as refreshed business plans require the company to understand its health/reputation in new ways. There is a change in answer to what a company needs its image/reputation to do for it in the coming year. Companies with the most effective measurement programs avoid simply trending last year's metrics nostalgically instead of allowing them to evolve to match their goals. Doing so is tricky, however when it sacrifices trendability. Our experience with numerous transitions has shown us what works and what doesn't—from parallel paths to pilot/bridge waves, we can provide sound guidance on how to navigate transitions as needs arise.

6. LEARNINGS THAT ONLY LOOK BACKWARDS—NOT AHEAD

We believe in actionable research that goes beyond explaining recent events that **builds foresight as well**. For example, we can leverage advanced analytics that reveal the underlying factors that most impact your brand's value and viability, providing prioritization and strategic direction around improving your position in the market. We do this through the appropriate application of **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)** to reveal the multiple synergistic factors impacting brand health.

Essentially, SEM allows the natural tendencies of your survey data to dictate **which factors in a set cluster together to actually drive brand health**. We have found SEM to be an effective means of providing our clients

with more complete views of the dynamics of brand health in their categories, as well as suggestions for holistic approaches to **improving their place in the market**. Further, we have found it to be a valuable tool in identifying which underlying factors most impact your brand's value and viability, providing prioritization and direction for future research and analytic direction. SEM Analysis allows you to:

- Optimally combine brand health triggers providing leverage to grow your brand
- Directly measure how combinations of factors impact overall brand health and business results
- Dimensionalize the relationship of varied elements
- Create a roadmap of how changes in different equity elements impact your definition of brand health

7. SHARING IMPRECISE, MISLEADING OR PRESUMED METRICS

Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a widely adopted management tool that can be used to gauge customer loyalty, but did you know that NPS is a **high variance measure**? The variance of NPS is **FOUR times** that of the likelihood to recommend scale it depends on. This means it's very sensitive to low sample sizes and hard to accurately detect significant differences between scores (across competitors or over time).

We firmly believe in contextualizing results and full disclosure of the information being provided: how it was captured, what it does and doesn't reveal, and how it should (and shouldn't) be used. You won't hear us promote any black box solutions. Instead, we take pride in ensuring that the metrics we share are expertly applied and rigorously vetted. Part of this also entails ensuring we reflect on and validate that the metrics we're sharing are providing the information they're intended to deliver. For example, our definition of Brand Reputation aligns with consumers' attitudes and is grounded in data-driven rationale rather than



8. POORLY TIMED OR CONTEXTUALIZED DELIVERABLES

Sharing brand health tracking results too often can leave audiences overwhelmed, and sharing them too infrequently risks outdated/irrelevant/overlooked results. To strike an optimal balance, we often consult with clients to understand what cadence would be most useful for their team and curate deliverables across a mix of formats such as:

- **Quarterly Scorecards** for an easy, at-a-glance sense of how brand health is doing
- **Semi-Annual Reports** that integrate competitive insights among key customer segments
- **Full Annual Reports** that further integrate category insights and drivers (which are less volatile)

We also seek to integrate media spend and other syndicated data sources as available/appropriate to contextualize the results regardless of format.

9. MISSING THE WHY

We continuously monitor results and check in with you when a potentially concerning shift is observed to discuss potential causes and stay ahead of developments. We may also periodically suggest incorporating qualitative elements to dig deeper into emerging trends and uncover the attitudes/motivations behind them. We have a host of options for doing so, falling along the full spectrum from quick and easy (e.g., optional video uploading at the end of the survey) to more in-depth,



10. GENERIC SUCCESS CRITERIA

Because no brand is created equal, we believe that each brand must define its own criteria for success. This is dependent on the category you play in, where you are in the product life cycle (a nascent brand's success will be different than an established brand's) and competitive factors. Because we are a custom insights agency, we work with each client to define their key success criteria. And, we don't recommend relying on only one metric; our experience tells us that different metrics play different roles in understanding the consumer. That is, the motivations/drivers for people to become interested in your brand are different from those that compel your customers. The factors that keep people loyal are different as well.

11. DEFINING KEY AUDIENCES TOO NARROWLY/LOOSELY

The appropriate audience for brand health tracking depends on the category/topic and the research goals.

- Looking to understand brand health in a new or emerging/evolving category? **Early adopters** or influencers may paint a better picture of what the future may look like.
- Want to understand a brand with a **loyal** group of customers who represent a majority of sales? That group will probably be more influential in terms of the brand's health in some areas. But, to grow that group, understanding the consumers on the **periphery**/not yet in the loyal customer group is also important.
- Have a nascent brand that you need to understand? The small group who are **aware** are going to drive metrics, as well as those more engaged in the category. However, to understand that brand in the context of its competitive set, it's important to include those who are **not yet aware** of the brand.

In general, we recommend including customers (or purchasers) and non-customers (or non-purchasers) to assess brand health—but keep the sample frame limited to consumers in that category. And, for brands with limited geography, we usually recommend limiting the scope to the footprint where the brand is available.

Undoubtedly, no matter whether the target audience is an early adopter or a non-customer, media spending is likely geared toward a demographic group. And, when it comes to demographic groups, the needs depend on the goals/initiatives within the brand. At a minimum, we need to make sure our sample mix is representative (for example, with race/ethnicity, we would make sure that those who enter the survey are representative of census proportions). However, if you have initiatives focused on a particular group, we need to ensure we have a large enough sample size to read them—and that consumers within that group are representative. For example, if you have a Hispanic target, it's not enough just to ensure you have a large enough sample size to analyze—but also that they're a representative group of Hispanics—in terms of demographics, origin, acculturation, etc.



12. DEFINING THE COMPETITIVE SET TOO NARROWLY/LOOSELY

Prior to the brand health study being conducted, a thorough competitive analysis should be done to determine direct and indirect competitors. Some are likely obvious, but others may be more difficult to identify. Tactics such as qualitative research, social listening, and keyword research are good ways to identify indirect competitors, and keep a pulse on changes in the marketplace. *Accurately scoping the key competitive set is critical, since it will have a profound impact on the learnings gleaned from the brand health tracking results and how applicable they are to various business decisions.* Often the competitive set helps define the category boundaries, influencing who is eligible to participate in the research, the benchmarks against which your brand is evaluated, and the resulting learnings (e.g., *Key Drivers/Regression Analysis* can help surface the critical factors in the category that either drive or inhibit brand choice—but the results will be influenced by which competitors are considered in/out of scope).

13. UNDERESTIMATING HOW MUCH NATURAL SAMPLE FLUCTUATIONS FRUSTRATE KEY AUDIENCES

Inconsistent/contradictory results and endless shifts can frustrate decision-makers who seek clear and actionable findings—especially when reports are shared frequently. If there aren't plausible hypotheses around why things changed, it can breed distrust of the results.



We build in measures that assess not just your brand but also other entities to help decision-makers understand whether shifts are isolated to your brand or more global/general (and therefore more indicative of natural sample fluctuations).

We also consider the volatility of the attitudes/behaviors of interest and give careful thought to the ideal interview cadence. We lean towards more frequent waves for industries with aggressive/new competitors, constant product innovation/changing technology, strong seasonality, prominent marketing campaigns, etc. For highly stable industries/categories, we recommend much less frequent reads to mitigate this issue.

Additionally, we recognize that data integrity is of particular importance when it comes to brand health trackers, and have taken unique steps to ensure that the data we report is authentic and accurate. [Sentinal™](#) is our proprietary system of processes, partnerships, and solutions that work together to ensure the accuracy of the data we collect and deliver to our clients. Moreover, our data collection department is constantly innovating the respondent experience to maximize engagement among those who want to provide honest opinions, leading to a higher quality dataset.

14. GETTING DISTRACTED BY SHINY NEW OBJECTS

From big data to beacons, facial coding to virtual reality, prediction markets to System I, there is an endless supply of new platforms and approaches that promise to unlock insights and growth opportunities that were previously inaccessible. We are constantly exploring and vetting new tools with the potential to improve the insights and recommendations we deliver to our clients, but we are extremely mindful of how we integrate them. When it comes to brand health tracking, the right tools can deliver incremental value, but require expertise to marry the ‘new’ with the ‘old’ methods so that we can take the best aspects of each and still deliver a cohesive, sensible, and reliable story.

C+R has been in business for over 60 years, and we’re pros at blending traditional and emerging methods. We use the latest techniques, partner with numerous innovative technology companies (we’re not limited to a single platform), and are constantly adding new tools to our arsenal. *Most importantly, we always lead with our clients’ objectives and pursue the best possible research approach with those objectives in mind.*

The marketplace where brands play is consistently changing, and consumers’ opinions can change even faster. Understanding what has changed, why it changed, and most importantly, **what to do about it** is critical. Ensuring your measurement instruments are finely tuned, versatile, dynamic, and multidimensional can help you make smarter decisions about what comes next for your brand.

Want to know more?
Visit crrresearch.com to learn more on this subject and more information on our research offerings.



Lisa Bloxson
Vice President, Quantitative Research

Lisa has spent over ten years designing research to address her clients’ most pressing business issues and translating the findings into strategic insights that support business development. She has extensive experience with custom research methods including segmentation, brand equity/positioning, concept optimization, new product/communications development, shopper journey, and barrier/opportunity analysis. Her experience spans numerous industries, including CPG, retail, restaurant, financial services, health/pharma, entertainment, telecommunications, and home improvement.

Lisa specializes in quantitative research and multi-phase hybrid initiatives. She is skilled in identifying the category, consumer, and shopper insights that drive corporate marketing decisions, and bringing those insights to life via top-notch data visualizations and infographics.

Lisa is a Summa Cum Laude graduate of the University of Michigan, where she started her career assisting with research at the U of M Institute for Social Research and Cognitive Neuroscience Lab. She has served as a member of the AMA (Chicago Chapter) Market Research Committee, helping to educate members on the latest and greatest marketing research technologies and strategies.



Contact us at:

crrresearch.com
info@crrresearch.com
312.828.9200