



# WHAT'S IN A NAME?

A study of how gender  
and title affect perceived  
credibility of media stories.



Every day, our clients appear in news stories in which they provide their expert point of view. We were curious: **Does a source's sex or title affect their credibility?** We conducted a study to find out.

## METHODOLOGY

We presented three real article excerpts from Fast Company to 1,868 people. The articles were: "Virtual Reality Isn't (Just) Playing Games," "Welcome to Privacy Hell, Also Known as the Internet of Things," and "Buying Your Food in Bulk is a Shocking Waste of Money."

All participants read the same excerpts, with only one variation—the sources. For example, all participants read the article below, but one group saw Peter Schluener quoted while the other group saw Ellen Schluener quoted.

Reorientation  
Beyond virtual meetings, companies are already using VR as a training tool. The devices help create, say, a virtual factory floor, so employees can practice virtually before they do it in real life.

"Oil platforms can't afford any downtime to train workers, so the risk of failure is very high; the threat of losing lives is very real," says Peter Schluener, president of WorldViz. "In these cases, virtual reality provides a sense of scale and a map of the environment—where they have to go, what they have to do. They can do it on a one-for-one scale, and in the real scenario, they are fully oriented because they have a real-world experience ingrained in their brain."

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"Virtual Reality Isn't Just Playing Games," Fast Company





We then tested how the below variations on a sources' title, sex and place of employment affected reader perceptions.

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#### VIRTUAL REALITY

**Peter Schlueer, President of WorldViz**

Peter Schlueer, Chief Innovation Officer of WorldViz

**Ellen Schlueer, President of WorldViz**

Ellen Schlueer, Chief Innovation Officer of WorldViz

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#### INTERNET OF THINGS

**Dr. Josh Corman**

Josh Corman

**Dr. Jen Corman**

Jen Corman

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#### BUYING IN BULK

**Victor Ligon, Researcher at Harvard University**

Victor Ligon, Researcher at the University of Arizona

**Victoria Ligon, Researcher at Harvard University**

Victoria Ligon, Researcher at the University of Arizona

After reading each article, study participants were asked for their opinions on the source's intelligence, trustworthiness and likelihood to take action. For example, after reading "Virtual Reality Isn't (Just) Playing Games," participants were asked how likely they'd be to invest in the source's company, WorldViz, which was described as "a quickly emerging company in virtual reality."

### OUR HYPOTHESIS

Most of us at Walker Sands who designed this study expected there to be at least some statistical evidence of bias, whether it was based on name, title or sex.





## FINDINGS

While we expected to see some bias in the variations, **we did not find anything of statistical significance**. As you'll see in the data below, no source variation in any of the article excerpts were outliers. That is to say, participants' responses were consistent for each article, and no evidence of bias based on titles, sex and places of employment emerged.

### "Virtual Reality Isn't (Just) Playing Games"

Participants were asked to read this article on new uses for virtual reality, including training for people on oil rigs. The quote examined was:

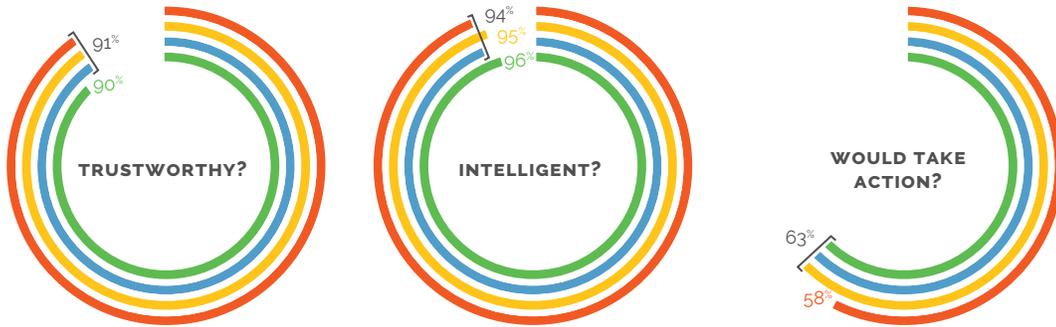
"Oil platforms can't afford any downtime to train employees. And the risk of failure is very high; the threat of losing lives is very high," says Peter Schlueer, president of WorldViz. "In these cases, virtual reality can give trainees a full sense of scale and a map of the environment—where they have to go, what they have to do. They can do it on a one-for-one scale, and when they go into the real scenario, they are fully oriented because they have a real memory ingrained in their brain."

After that, participants were asked three questions:

- 1 How **trustworthy** is the person quoted in this article?
- 2 How **intelligent** is the person quoted in this article?
- 3 Given the chance to invest in WorldViz, a quickly emerging company in virtual reality, how **likely are you to invest**?

The percentage of respondents answering in the affirmative of "somewhat" or "very" are listed below:

**READERS' PERCEPTIONS** Virtual Reality



**SOURCES**

- PETER SCHLUEER**  
PRESIDENT OF WORLDVIZ
- PETER SCHLUEER**  
CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER OF WORLDVIZ
- ELLEN SCHLUEER**  
PRESIDENT OF WORLDVIZ
- ELLEN SCHLUEER**  
CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER OF WORLDVIZ

“Welcome To Privacy Hell, Also Known As The Internet Of Things”

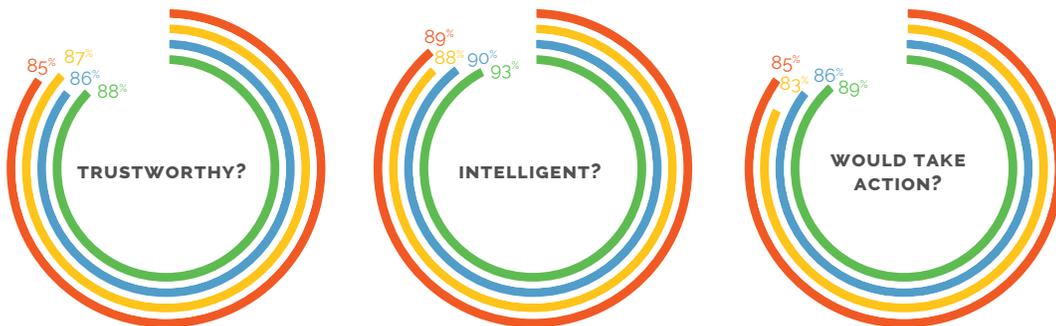
This article examined the potential risks of connected devices, including those in healthcare, being hacked by outside groups:

“There are more devices and more types of devices, so this just gives you more ways for people to track you or hurt you,” Corman, a long-time security expert and cofounder of I Am The Cavalry, says. “What we’ve done is blindly assume that [adding software and connectivity] is always good. And we’re making really horrible, horrible choices.”

Similar questions were then asked:

- 1 How **trustworthy** is the person quoted in this article?
- 2 How **intelligent** is the person quoted in this article?
- 3 After reading this article, how **concerned** are you about the threat of hacking medical devices?

**READERS' PERCEPTIONS** Internet of Things



**SOURCES**

- DR. JOSH CORMAN**
- DR. JEN CORMAN**
- JOSH CORMAN**
- JEN CORMAN**





## “Buying Your Food In Bulk Is A Shocking Waste of Money”

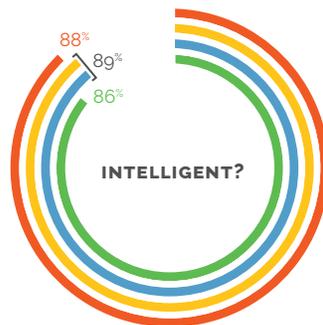
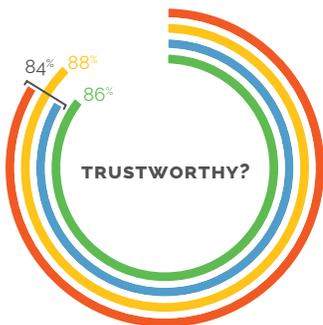
This article, the last of the three, turned the wisdom of buying food in bulk on its head:

Victor Ligon, a researcher at the University of Arizona, said to UA News that “People in this country [the U.S.] are very price sensitive at the grocery store, but tend to overlook the cost of discarded and unused food at home.” And even when we’re told about it, we don’t like it.

Questions were asked again:

- 1 How **trustworthy** is the person quoted in this article?
- 2 How **intelligent** is the person quoted in this article?
- 3 How **likely are you to follow the article’s advice**—stop buying food in bulk and make more frequent trips to the store?

### READERS’ PERCEPTIONS Buying in Bulk



#### SOURCES

**VICTOR LIGON**  
RESEARCHER AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

**VICTOR LIGON**  
RESEARCHER AT  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

**VICTORIA LIGON**  
RESEARCHER AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

**VICTORIA LIGON**  
RESEARCHER AT  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY





So what did we learn? In a quick read of an article excerpt, a source's sex, title and university affiliation do not have a statistically significant impact on perceived intelligence or trustworthiness.

We're relieved that we don't have to go back to our clients and tell them we can only quote, say, female innovation officers. In all cases, it appears that simply changing the sex or title of the person quoted didn't have an impact on the positive attributes of that quote.

We even isolated men and women to see if they were biased toward their own sex and found similar results. While we found men more likely to invest in virtual reality and women more convinced to stop buying in bulk, after reading these articles, neither differed in their assessment of the source's intelligence or trustworthiness.

**Readers perceive people quoted in the media as both intelligent and trustworthy—but there is a gap between the two.**

While consumers rated both intelligence and trustworthiness highly for sources in the media, there was a consistent gap of three to six percent between the two. On average, 95% of people found the "Virtual Reality" source intelligent, while 91% found them trustworthy. In "The Internet Of Things" article, the gap was 4% with an average of 90% believing the source was intelligent and an average of 86% believing them trustworthy. These numbers reveal a slight but real skepticism.

## **SUMMARY**

Consumers consider sources in the media to be intelligent and, to a slightly lesser extent, trustworthy. And there was no evidence that readers have biases for or against sources based on titles, sex or institution.

We believe additional studies are warranted to see if the lack of biases holds true in other media formats. As multi-media storytelling becomes more prevalent, we would like to test how perceptions might be affected when a person sees the spokesperson's picture, hears his or her voice, or sees him or her on video. For now, we'll happily accept that a prominent media publication like **Fast Company** can definitively make you appear both intelligent and trustworthy—whoever you are.

## **INTERESTED IN MORE RESEARCH?**

Give us a call at **(312) 267-0066** or check out some **examples** of how we've leveraged outside research to generate strong business results for our clients.