



# **Why Trust And Truth Will Be The Currencies Of 2022 And Beyond**

**Iretomiwa Akintunde-Johnson**



**Iretomiwa Akintunde-Johnson**  
**February 2022**

*Design layout by Elisha Ubiah (For ID Africa)*

*With thanks to the editors, designers and reviewers, including those who enabled the essay - Enitan Kehinde, Philip Ugbah, Prince Ehima, Joseph Elegbua, Tamilore Akintunde-Johnson, Oluwalonimi Onipede, and Mofeoluwa Tubo.*

# content

- 05     **INTRO**
- 08     **CONCERNS CONTINUE TO RISE RAPIDLY...**  
08         Can we trust these big companies?  
09         World governments could even be worse  
10         Nigeria? We are Kings of mistrust
- 12     **THE PROBLEM IS TOO APPARENT - TRUST!**
- 14     **CONNECTION BETWEEN TRUST, TRUTH AND REPUTATION**  
14         Trust and I  
15         Custodians of trust?!
- 16     **THE ONES AND THE TIME THAT WILL SCATTER IT ALL**
- 18     **ENDNOTES**
- 19     **ABOUT IRETOMIWA**

“

**Trust, more than ever,  
will play an integral role  
in government and business.  
Communication  
will be key to making  
that happen.**

”



# INTRODUCTION

*Trust, more than ever, will play an integral role in government and business. Communication will be key to making that happen.*

An annoyingly terrible year ended a little over a month and a half ago. The year 2021 appeared to have wave after wave of problems - natural disasters sweeping through the world leaving millions displaced and killed; COVID-19 cases reached over 281 million across the world (over 5.4 million deaths, sadly) as of December 28, 2021; it was the year of the variants; the population of refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Myanmar and Afghanistan swelled as heartbreaking stories of those searching for greener pastures swirled. It was heartbreaking in every ramification.

But it was also an interesting year of advancements in technology, human and women's rights movements, etc. For the first time in the 25 years of its existence, a woman became the head of the World Trade Organisation. Some of the world's biggest athletes stood their ground and showed us the power of speaking out - tennis star, Naomi Osaka, quit the French Open to protect her mental health, American gymnast, Simone Biles and other strong women revealed the abuse they faced at the hands of former USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar. It was the year the NFTs became mainstream. SpaceX, the first all-civilian crew reached space. We learned the first steps to surviving a pandemic.

Was the year 2021 as terrible as it was great? The answer may very well be subjective. Wherever you may stand on the divide, it is already apparent that 2022 will be just as eventful. Could it be the year the spread of the COVID-19 virus would be put under some form of control? Not likely.



Simone Biles, award winning athlete | Photograph: Mike Egerton/PA

But given the repeated emergence of interesting variants that seem to be playing a demented game of whack-a-mole with all of us on earth, no one can truly predict what happens next.

Vaccine hesitancy was and remains a pandemic of its own. Across the world, apathy towards receiving the COVID-19 vaccines is on the rise. In December 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) chief, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, warned against the dangers of vaccination apathy. UNICEF transported over 21 million COVID-19 vaccines to Kenya, yet in spite of its well-stocked vaccination centre in Garissa, the people gasping for air in the hospital's intensive care unit, there was still only a trickle of people getting vaccinated. The World Health Organisation deemed vaccine hesitancy as one of the top 10 threats to global health in 2019.

Vaccination has always been one of the most cost-effective ways of avoiding diseases - it generally saves 2-3 million lives per year - but it is still viewed with varying levels of suspicion worldwide

In 2020, a global study by Jeffrey Lazarus, Head of Health Systems Research at the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal), looked at potential COVID-19 vaccine acceptance rates in 19 countries across the world. Respondents from China had the highest number (89%) of positive responses when asked if they would take an effective vaccine, while respondents in Russia gave the lowest number (55%) of positive responses. In eight of the countries, including Canada, Singapore, Nigeria, and France, less than 70% of the population responded positively.

The World Economic Forum has given a two-pronged reason for the apathy. The first is that people “doubt the achievements of science and delay getting vaccinated themselves (even though many of them are not outright vaccine refusers).” The second major issue, WEF says, is that “many companies with worldwide operations have left it to governments and overwhelmed local healthcare systems to ensure the equitable distribution of vaccines.”

This means that a general lack of responsibility by the world and an increasing global mistrust in science, governments and amongst businesses may well lead to billions of deaths.

Over the last decade, there have been growing concerns about privacy, trust and misinformation as technology and especially social media continue to take on new dimensions. The decentralisation of media and communication from the traditional and relatively snail-paced confines of broadcast media to the breakneck speed of social media networks that we are now accustomed to, has led to the point of no return.

With speedy access to information, an increasingly aware world population that is becoming more interconnected with each innovation, and the rise in conflicts and political arguments, it has become imperative to identify and fix the gaps in trust.

How can we ensure that these trust deficit patterns are not repeated if and when the next pandemic or world crisis hits us? That we are not blindly divided by race, sex, economics or other factors that frankly will not solve the problem. Can we actually identify the antitrust patterns, recognise them and then hold ourselves accountable?



“

***Beyond tech companies, governments and people in authority have been lying through their teeth for decades, even centuries - and getting away with it.***

”

# CONCERNS CONTINUE TO RISE RAPIDLY...

Yes, I have heard the now broken mantra that contrary to conspiracy theories, the big tech companies are not spying on us, we are the ones actively feeding them our information and data. The algorithms we all willingly acquiesced to as we hurriedly clicked 'accept all' may very well be our undoing. Like the Yorubas will say, a ti gbọ - we have heard.

However, a greater responsibility lies on corporate brands to earn our trust given their precedent to get caught in webs of lies and deceit.

## *Can we trust these big companies?*

In 2017, the Tuskegee History Centre in the US marked its 20th anniversary reminding the world of the horrific disregard for compassion that had been uncovered over 40 years before. On July 25, 1972, the Associated Press broke the story of how a government medical experiment conducted in Tuskegee allowed hundreds of African-American men to remain untreated for syphilis to enable scientists to study the disease. And that even when penicillin was discovered and became widely available, it was not administered to these men unless they requested it. The study spanned 40 years!

In the 90s, Pfizer, one of the biggest pharmaceutical companies in the world, was accused of conducting a clinical trial on children in Kano, following one of the worst meningitis epidemics in Africa. An experimental oral antibiotic called 'Trovan' was administered to one hundred children and 'Ceftriaxone' was administered to another hundred. Five children died on Trovan and six on ceftriaxone. It was alleged that some children received lower dosages of the medicine leading to complications such as brain damage, paralysis or slurred speech.

These are instances that show the reasons certain communities may be very wary of multinationals and technological advancements.

In 2018, Heinz was fined \$2.25m for misleading marketing of snacks for toddlers. One of the food company's snacks was marketed as beneficial for children, while it was proven to have contained two-thirds sugar. The product was pulled off the shelves in 2016. In 2021, Kraft-Heinz agreed to pay \$62 million as part of a settlement with the American SEC. The company obtained kickbacks and improperly documented the agreements.

Wells Fargo, formerly one of America's biggest banks, agreed to pay a \$3 billion fine for opening millions of savings and checking accounts in the names of actual customers, without their knowledge or consent, in 2018. The company fired over 100 employees in 2020, who were alleged to have lied to gain access to COVID-19 relief funds. This was the same relief fund that caused JP Morgan Chase & Co., an investment bank, to terminate the employment of several employees for allegedly misusing funds earmarked for assisting ailing companies during the pandemic.

In 2021, Trevor Milton, CEO of electric trucking firm Nikola, resigned following claims that the company misrepresented its technology in attracting over \$2 billion from General Motors. Short-selling firm Hindenburg Research released a report in September 2021, that accused Milton of making numerous false claims about its truck tech, including the fact that a 2016 promo video was actually of a truck rolling downhill instead of being powered.

In October 2021, the world watched as Frances Haugen, an American data engineer and former product manager in Facebook's civic integrity department released thousands of pages of internal Facebook documents to US Congress and the country's Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). The documents alleged that Facebook was complicit in how various pieces of content were affecting millions of teenagers' mental health, promotion of vaccine misinformation and human trafficking, amongst other allegations. This is one of the many allegations against the company in recent times.

Facebook has denied all allegations. But can companies trust their employees to allow them to remedy a situation when problems occur before going to the press? Logically, the whistleblowing policy is built on the premise that people can rise to ensure that companies are held accountable. Perfect. But as with all concepts, there is a flipside where companies cannot trust employees either. It can also be used as a blackmail tactic!

### ***World governments could even be worse***

Beyond tech companies, governments and people in authority have been lying through their teeth for decades, even centuries - and getting away with it. However, the same apps being sued are giving millions access to this information immediately.

In October 2021, a group of journalists worldwide under the umbrella of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists began leaking almost 12 million documents - Pandora papers leak. These documents implicate over 300 politicians from 90 countries including Nigeria, UK,

Jordan, Azerbaijan, Czech. It shows how the leaders of the world used secret offshore companies to stash their ill-gotten wealth! Between \$5.6 trillion to \$32 trillion is estimated to have been hidden offshore.

Chechnya, a constituent republic of Russia situated in the North Caucasus in Eastern Europe, reportedly operates a fund, controlled by the head of the republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, into which the country's employees were forced to pay an unofficial tax each month. A fund that was allegedly used to pay for Kadyrov's birthday, an expensive boxing ring and the leader's many personal activities. Former Panamanian president, Ricardo Martinelli has violated privacy laws, been accused of embezzlement, abuse of authority among others.

The Gupta family allegedly took nearly \$7 billion in funds from the South African government. This included a 4.4 billion supply contract with the country's rail and port company. The family was also said to have hired and fired government ministers at will, while the president fired tax officials and intelligence chiefs to protect them.

Recently, photos showed that British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson and his staff partying it up at Downing Street in December 2020 - during one of the peak periods of the virus. This was despite an earlier vehement denial of the assertion. Earlier in the year, the UK administration's shaky reputation received another blow when Johnson was accused of secretly using the funds from a Conservative Party donor to augment the funds for redesigning his house!

## Nigeria? We are kings of mistrust

Well, in Nigeria like most parts of Africa, trust is a very broken construct. Was there ever trust to begin with? Some will argue that the country itself was built on mistrust. This deserves its own library of books dedicated to unearthing the devastating effects on the psyche of the average Nigerian. Poor us! However, we understand our key issue - entrenched corruption - and if we are not careful, it will persist for centuries to come.

Take the Maina pension scandal, for example. A witness revealed that they discovered 71,320 ghost pensioners on the government's payroll, while 73,000 accounts were opened for ghost pensioners by the various banks in the country. Over ₦2 billion is estimated to have been laundered.

Even within the highest echelons of government, accurate information is not guaranteed. Two years ago, Nigerian presidential spokesman, Garba Shehu, apologised on Twitter for spreading misinformation about the number of students kidnapped at the Government Science School in Kankara, Katsina State. The Governor of the State, Aminu Masaru, informed the world that over 300 students had been kidnapped. Shehu had disclosed earlier that only 10 were kidnapped.



Nigerians protesting | Photograph: Grace Ekpu

There was a slight blip in life-as-usual in October 2020, when young Nigerians decided enough was enough, especially in regards to police brutality. It was a cascade of multiple frustrations, really, but under an umbrella, we stood - END SARS. Nigerians went out en masse to protest and demand that lives be valued. Protests began across the country and on social media on October 11. After 10 days of mostly peaceful protests, soldiers opened fire at the Lekki Toll Gate Lagos, on the evening of Tuesday, October 20, 2020. Amnesty International confirms that at least 12 people died at the toll gate that night. Riots and looting ensued and that was the end of it. Questions were raised - who were the soldiers that shot? Who ordered the shooting?

One year after the finger-pointing waned; the fervour dipped, and there are still no concrete answers. There was an even more annoying outcome that heralded #ENDSARS' anniversary, thanks to the findings of the panel. Shameful, but did we really expect more? The panel led by Justice Doris Okuwobi accused the Nigerian Army officers of having "shot, injured and killed

unarmed helpless and defenceless protesters, without provocation or justification, while they were waving the Nigerian Flag and singing the national anthem..." Were discrepancies and loopholes intentionally added to the 309-page report, just so it could be discredited?

Rather than implement the report or call for an independent investigation the Lagos State Government proposed a 'Walk For Peace'. For many of the protesters that felt like adding insult to injury.

## CONCERNS CONTINUE TO RISE RAPIDLY...

The average Nigerian does not believe the statistics of COVID-19 cases released by the NCDC daily. Nobody trusts anyone. Nigerians will say, *na our way* (*pidgin translation for this is how we behave*). Even with a video, good Samaritans helping to rescue goods from a burning megastore in Abuja were easily mistaken for looters taking advantage of the unfortunate situation.

This is Nigeria, sadly, we trust no one!

# THE PROBLEM IS TOO APPARENT - TRUST!

“A large chunk of the world’s headache is this matter of trust.”



So you see, whether it is the constant issues in Sudan, the seeming *face-me-I-face-you* apathy (herd-mentality apathy that is feeding off widely-spread controversy theories) in Nigeria, the expensive wallpaper in Downing Street, the mounting issues that Metaverse’s gloss rebranding cannot wipe away, or the mounting taxes Elon Musk will have to pay, a large chunk of the world’s headache is this matter of trust.

Around six and seven in ten in the US, France, Spain, Italy, Chile and Brazil all believe that fewer people trust the government than they did twenty years ago, all of which is in line with trends in survey data in those countries. Results were pooled in from thousands of adults across the world in 23 countries and 34% deemed governments very untrustworthy, followed by the media (21%), banking companies (19%), oil and gas companies (18%).

34%

of adults deemed government untrustworthy<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>

21%

of adults deemed the media untrustworthy

“

***Trust is the foundation on  
which every boulder or  
platform on reputation  
building or management  
is laid.***

”



# CONNECTION BETWEEN TRUST, TRUTH AND REPUTATION

**B**ut, we must understand there is an even stronger connection between truth and trust on one hand as well as reputation on the other hand. I like how Dr. Leslie Gaines-Ross, a chief reputation strategist put it, “the bedrock of corporate reputation is trust. Trust is the oxygen that allows reputation to exist. Without it, reputations would suffer.”

Beyond corporate trust, this is a concept that the world - communicators, media, businesses, CEOs, governments and officials - needs to understand and relate on that basis. Trust is the foundation on which every boulder or platform on reputation building or management is laid. The same way you trust a child not to slap their siblings, or your company to be fair in remuneration and policy-making, or your country to uphold rights, is a direct correlation to who they are, what they stand for, who they have exhibited themselves to be to their stakeholders. Ipsos Thinks: Trust The Truth, a survey on trust, confidence and truth across the world, states that perceived level of integrity is tied to past actions, the frequency of people vouching for you, and whether actions match words - all of which are a measurement of reputation. It's why the world won't trust vaccines or a corrupt government even on the threat of death.

In the 2020 Nigeria PR Report, Enitan Kehinde, the general manager of BHM UK, delved into best PR practices for managing clients relationships. “*It is very important to build trust in every relationship. One of the quickest and most efficient ways to do so is by being transparent.*”

And quite frankly, it's a guide for managing any relationship - government officials vis-a-vis the public, CEO vis-a-vis employees, companies vis-a-vis customers.

A key aspect of that guide is transparency irrespective of the cost. It's the transparency, quality of work in whatever endeavour that will, in turn, build trust and form the facets of the reputation that can last for decades.

## *Trust and I*

For me, ten years ago, trust meant that I would study contract law in my second year at the Law department of the University of Lagos, UNILAG and get an A without having to do any 'extras'. Five years ago, it meant something completely different. Today, as a PR & comms professional and lawyer, trust occupies an even more integral part of my life and all that I do. But I am just one in over seven billion people around the world.

Yet a humbling part of this is that millions of young people around the world are not only seeking this, but they are also beginning to demand it. Soft murmurs began years ago and it has been increasing ever since. It will be demanded of governments, companies, corporations, brands, NGOs, schools and even families - soon, no one will be immune. What this means is that magnifying glasses will be thrust into areas that people and businesses seldom poke around in. There will be more whistleblowers in every facet. This also means there will be more scramblings to hide the truth. Well, let's see how well that works.

### *Custodians of Trust?!*

There will be an even increased burden on the media, public relations and communications industry who should be custodians of this trust. Even the governments and companies would not be left out. Beyond earning the trust of the populace, there is the need for trust amongst these entities themselves.


We may have recognised it on the periphery for centuries, but the last two years have shown us the sheer power of collaborations, whether among governments of countries, or world NGOs, companies, or even some of the world's most influential people. Over 9.22 billion vaccine doses have been administered worldwide. This would have been impossible without the various coalitions across the world - the race for a quick remedy was embraced by the world. Well, most of it. The advancements made in the past two years in respect of the vaccine is unprecedented! Due to their nature, vaccines usually take 11 to 15 years with over six phases required.

We have also gotten front-row tickets to see how catastrophic it is when governments or companies just can't agree and trust one another.

The number of times the world may have slipped into World War III mode, often brought on by a breach of trust, is evident enough. The fact that only 9.2 billion vaccine doses have been administered to a population of over 7 billion people is another prime example. It is grossly insufficient. Countries hoarded and are still hoarding vaccines, playing Russian roulette with the world's fate. Instead of truly collaborating, companies were competing against one another to press the buzzer.

It's the same cruel pattern for copyright infringement, passing off, and corporate espionage. The system of trust is severely deformed and unresolved issues continue to fester.

# THE ONES AND THE TIME THAT WILL SCATTER IT ALL

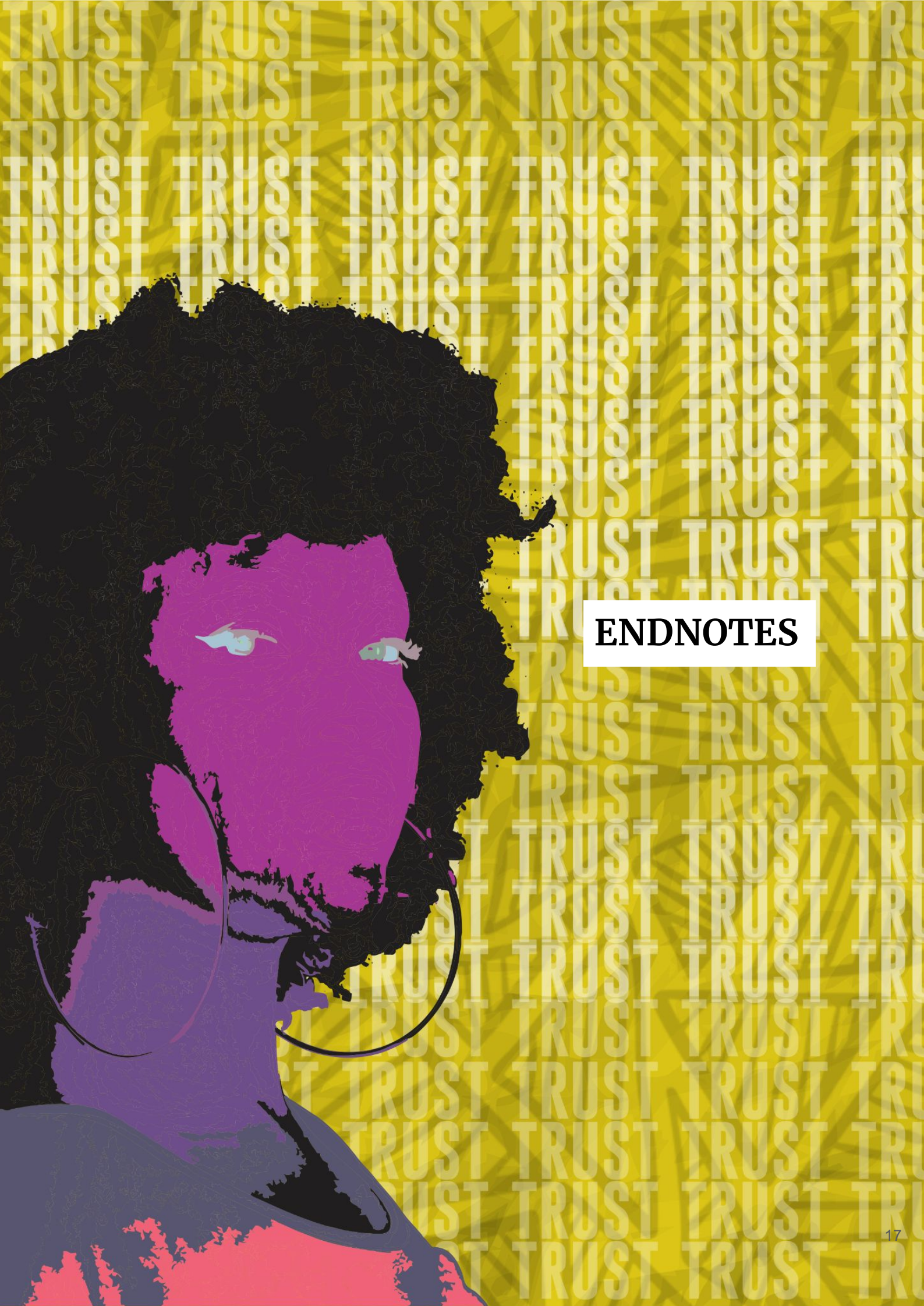


**“  
The disruptive generation  
will demand to be paid in a  
currency that the one-percenters  
might not be able to afford  
enough of - trust!  
”**

**B**ut these concerns about trust that have been bubbling under the surface for years will soon be under the jurisdiction of this younger, more radical generation - the curious ones who won't shut up and demand more from their families, their leaders, of the brands and products they use and everyone else. The disruptive generations; that's the real kicker.

The ones who will hold million-dollar corporations responsible; the ones who will make billionaires' stocks dive, are currently bopping their heads to FireBoy and Ed Sheeran's Peru. Some are currently building apps that will tear through algorithms and leak trillion-dollar secrets; most are just unsettled and want more. They will demand to be paid in a currency that the one-percenters might not be able to afford enough of - trust!

It will be an interesting couple of years!



**ENDNOTES**

# ENDNOTES

1. 'WHO' : Ten threats to global health in 2019:  
[www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/ten-threats-to-global-health-in-2019](http://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/ten-threats-to-global-health-in-2019)# 'World Economic Forum' : Achieving COVID-19 vaccine equity means overcoming hesitancy:  
[www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/01/achieving-covid19-vaccine-equity-means-overcoming-hesitancy/](http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/01/achieving-covid19-vaccine-equity-means-overcoming-hesitancy/)#
2. 'Heinz': 'Heinz fined \$2.25m for misleading marketing of snacks for toddlers':  
[www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/aug/24/heinz-fined-225m-for-misleading-marketing-of-snacks-for-toddlers](http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/aug/24/heinz-fined-225m-for-misleading-marketing-of-snacks-for-toddlers)# . The Guardian.
3. 'Kraft, execs to pay more than \$62 mln over U.S. accounting scheme charges' :  
[www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/kraft-pay-62-mln-settle-us-accounting-charges-sec-says-2021-09-03/](http://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/kraft-pay-62-mln-settle-us-accounting-charges-sec-says-2021-09-03/)#
4. 'Wells Fargo to pay \$3 billion over fake account scandal' :  
[www.nbcnews.com/news/all/wells-fargo-pay-3-billion-over-fake-account-scandal-n1140541](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/all/wells-fargo-pay-3-billion-over-fake-account-scandal-n1140541)#
5. 'Wells Fargo has fired more than 100 workers for lying in order to get COVID-19 relief funds' :  
[africa.businessinsider.com/markets/wells-fargo-has-fired-more-than-100-workers-for-lying-in-order-to-get-covid-19-relief/ezh7tgg#:~](http://africa.businessinsider.com/markets/wells-fargo-has-fired-more-than-100-workers-for-lying-in-order-to-get-covid-19-relief/ezh7tgg#:~)
6. 'Head of Nikola, a G.M. Electric Truck Partner, Quits Amid Fraud Claims' :  
[www.nytimes.com/2020/09/21/business/nikola-trevor-milton-resigns.html#:~](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/21/business/nikola-trevor-milton-resigns.html#:~)
7. 'Inside Frances Haugen's Decision to Take on Facebook' :  
<https://time.com/6121931/frances-haugen-facebook-whistleblower-profile/#:~>
8. 'Pandora Papers: A simple guide to the Pandora Papers leak' : [www.bbc.com/news/world-58780561](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-58780561)#:~
9. 'Maina uncovered monumental fraud as pension boss, witness tells court' :  
[www.vanguardngr.com/2021/03/maina-uncovered-monumental-fraud-as-pension-boss-witness-tells-court/#:~](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/03/maina-uncovered-monumental-fraud-as-pension-boss-witness-tells-court/#:~)  
Vanguard.
10. 'Drama as Acting NDDC MD faints, probe adjourned'  
:[www.vanguardngr.com/2020/07/breaking-drama-as-acting-nddc-md-faints-probe-adjourned/](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/07/breaking-drama-as-acting-nddc-md-faints-probe-adjourned/) #:~ Vanguard.
11. 'Garba Shehu apologises for false information on kidnapped Katsina schoolboys' :  
[www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/432037-garba-shehu-apologises-for-false-information-on-kidnapped-katsina-schoolboys.html#:~](http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/432037-garba-shehu-apologises-for-false-information-on-kidnapped-katsina-schoolboys.html#:~)
12. #ENDSARS MOVEMENT: FROM TWITTER TO NIGERIAN STREETS' :  
[www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2021/02/nigeria-end-impunity-for-police-violence-by-sars-endsars/#:~](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2021/02/nigeria-end-impunity-for-police-violence-by-sars-endsars/#:~)
13. 'The Relationship Between Reputation, Trust and Sustainable Business' :  
[www.triplepundit.com/story/2011/relationship-between-reputation-trust-and-sustainable-business/75546#:~](http://www.triplepundit.com/story/2011/relationship-between-reputation-trust-and-sustainable-business/75546#:~)
14. 'WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19)' : [https://covid19.who.int/#:~:text=WHO%20Coronavirus%20\(COVID%2D19\)](https://covid19.who.int/#:~:text=WHO%20Coronavirus%20(COVID%2D19))



## **ABOUT IRETOMIWA**

Iretomiwa Akintunde-Johnson is a lawyer and Lead PR & Comms. Adviser at ID Africa, a Pan-African communications advisory and execution firm and subsidiary of BHM Group.

Prior to joining ID Africa, Iretomiwa practiced law at the Lagos State Ministry of Justice and worked as an On-Air-Personality at Top Radio in Lagos. With a background in print journalism, she anchored a segment on a tv show on national television, and has written recreationally for over a decade.

Iretomiwa has worked on world class corporate brands such as Reckitt, Honeywell Group, Nigerian Breweries, MTN and Viacom to name a few. She has a B.L degree, from the University of Lagos, Akoka and a LL.B from the Nigerian Law School.

As a Lead PR & Comms. Adviser, Iretomiwa spearheads the development, communication and implementation of effective growth strategies and processes in the business including new communications and PR models, and in areas like product thinking and advocacy. She also provides day-to-day leadership and management to the team that mirrors the adopted mission and core values of the company.

# TRUST AND TRUTH

Companies, governments  
government personnel  
rough their teeth  
honest, it's been  
way with it.  
g sued

