Professor Andrew Stephen

Consumer Perspectives on Brand Safety

Mobile Marketing Association, London

13 May 2019

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Why should we care about brand safety?

GROWTH

Under threat?

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Proliferation of user-generated content



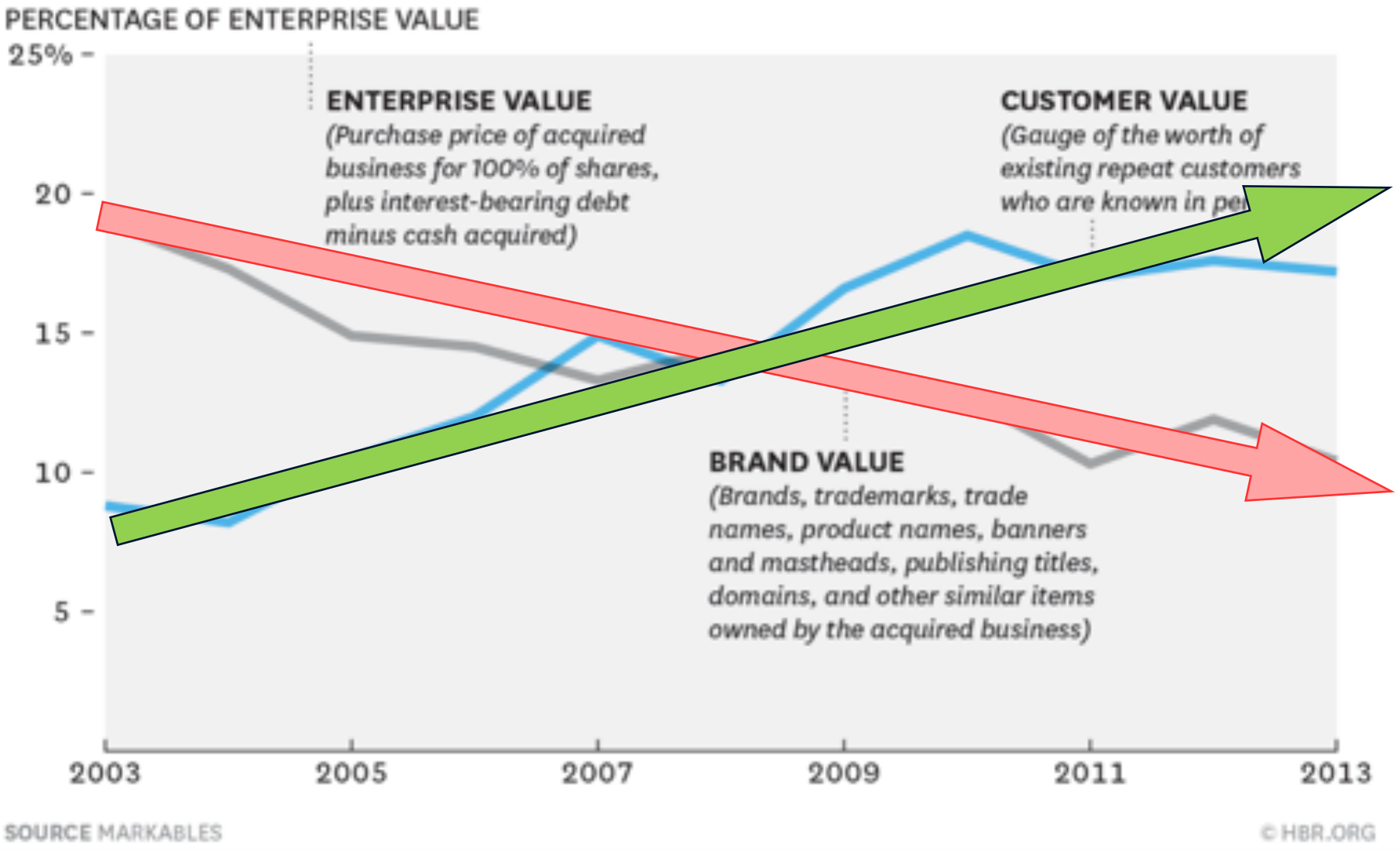
Automation, AI, and digital complexity

Risk of Bad Stuff Happening

Potential damage to key marketing assets

- Brand
- Customer Relationships

The Declining Value of Brands (and the Rise of Customer Relationships)



Data: 6000+ M&A transactions 2003-2013

From Binder & Hanssens 2015 HBR



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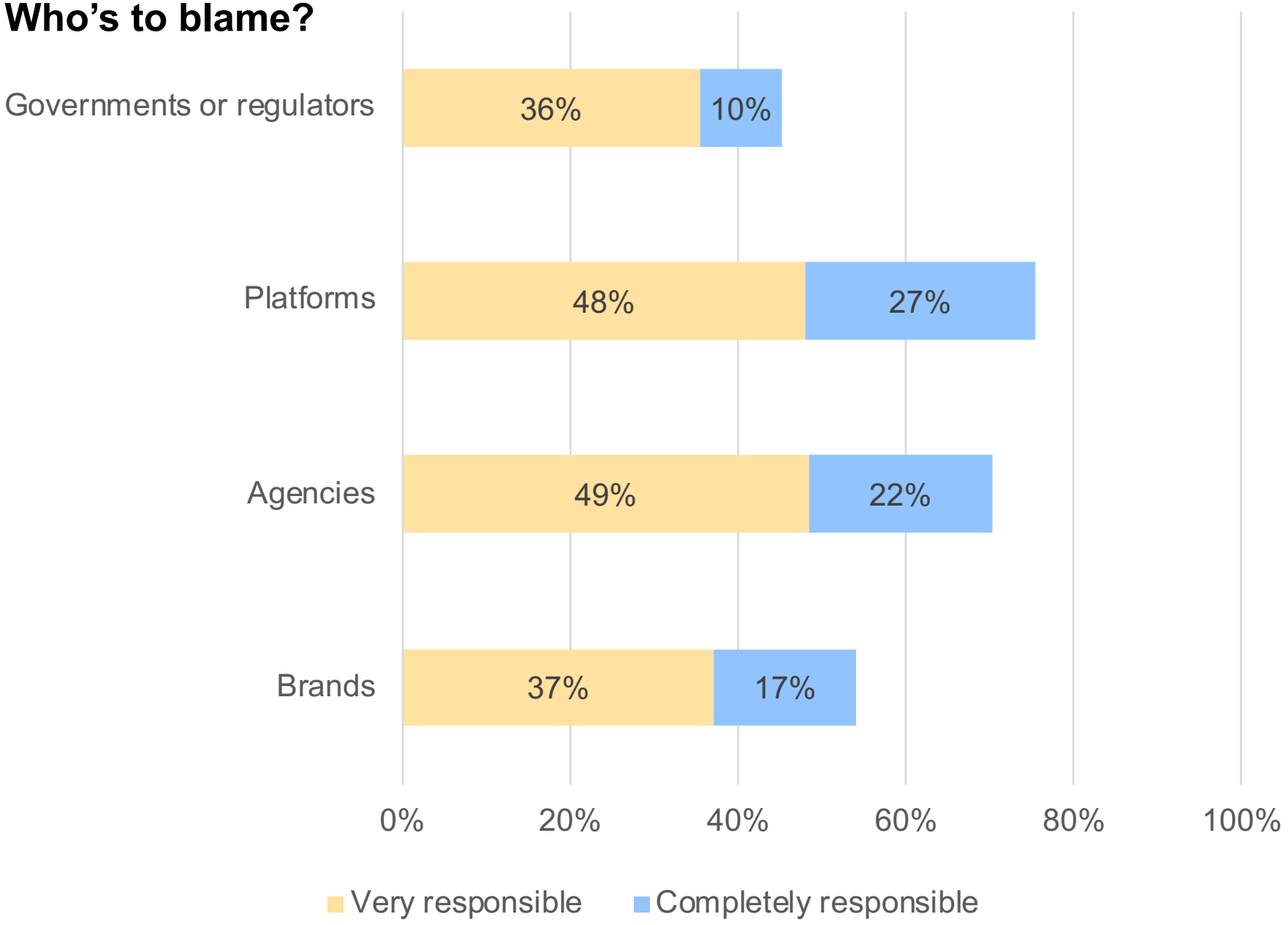
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UK Consumer Survey
May 2019

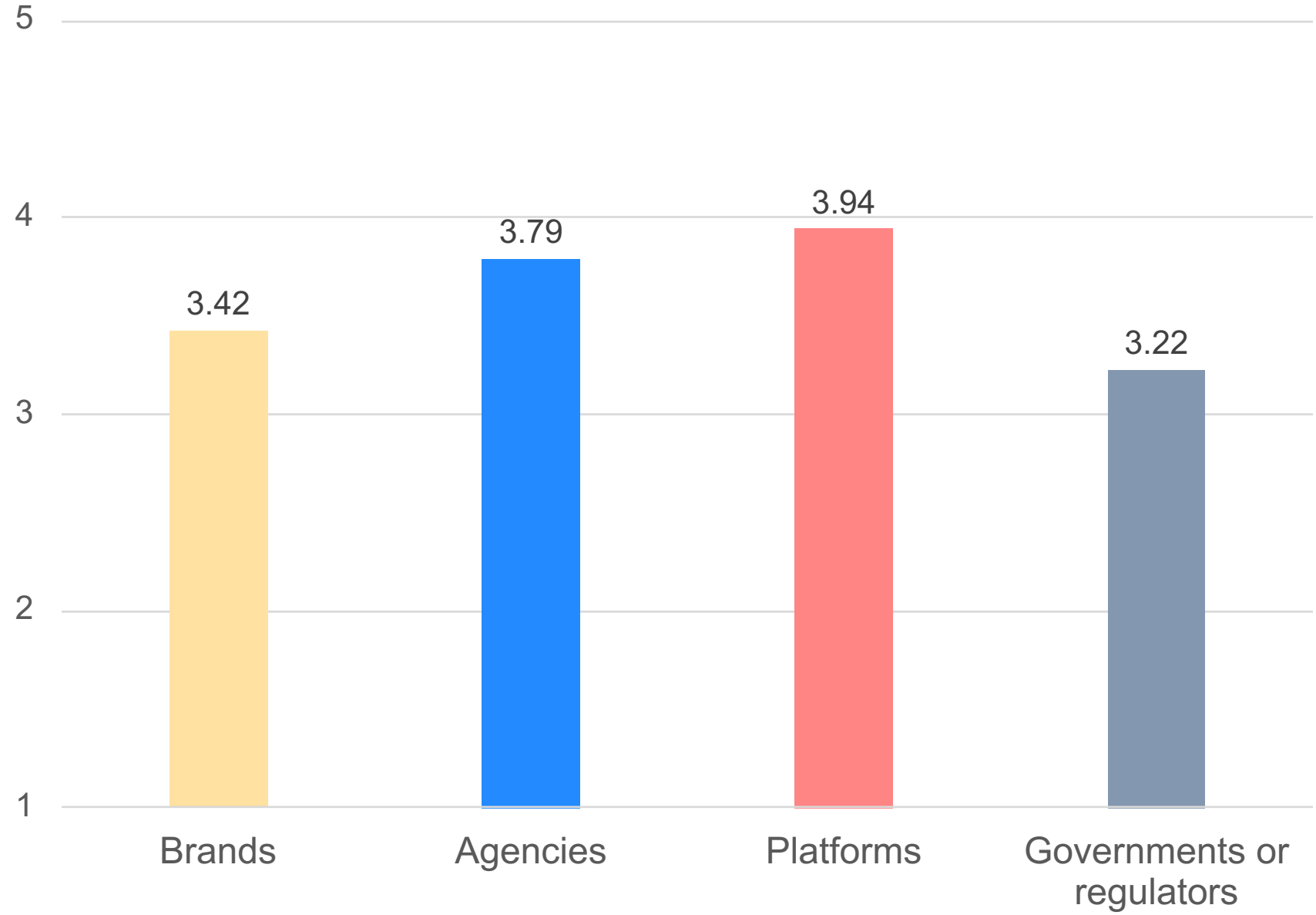
857 responses

Who's to blame?

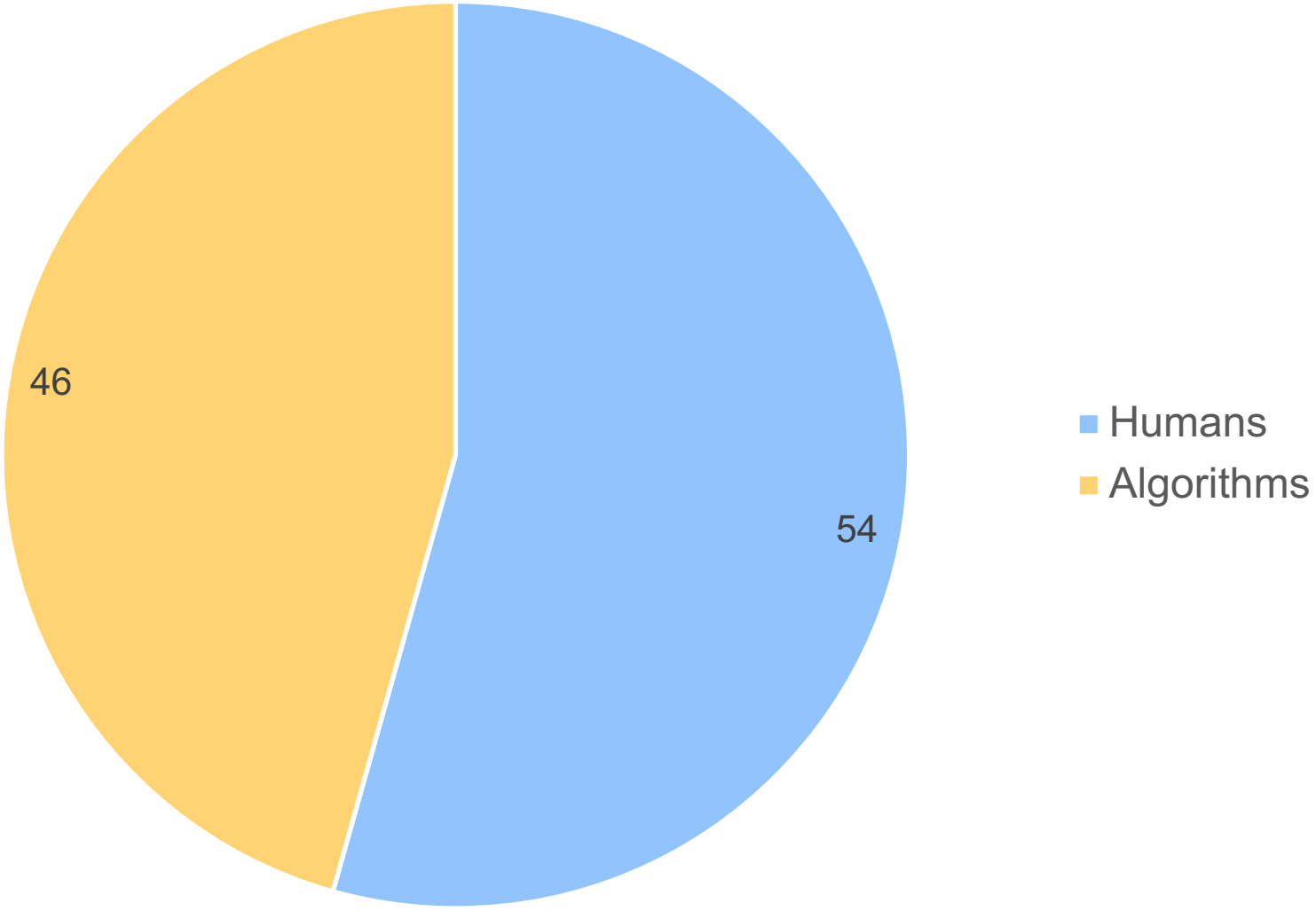


Who's to blame?

* All significantly different

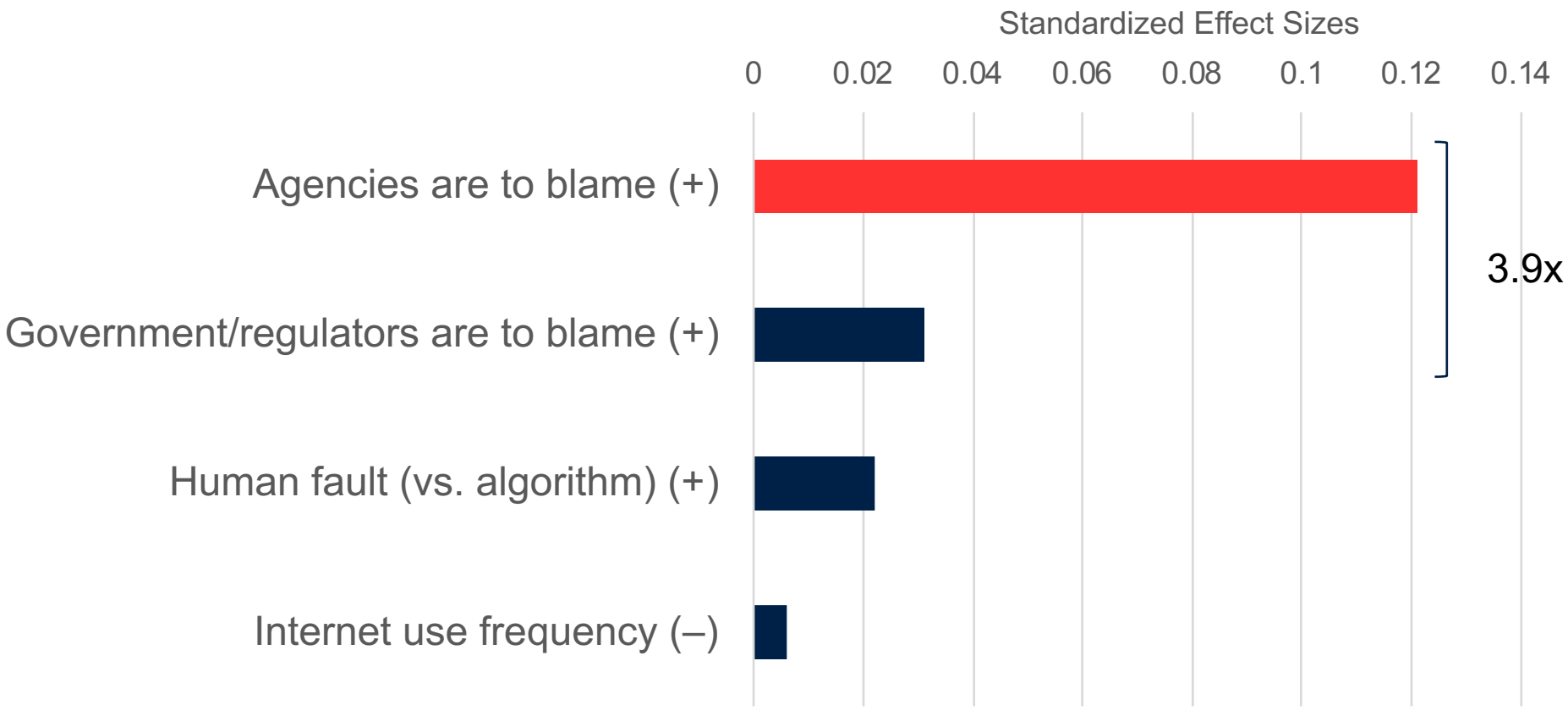


Who’s to blame: Human vs. Machine?

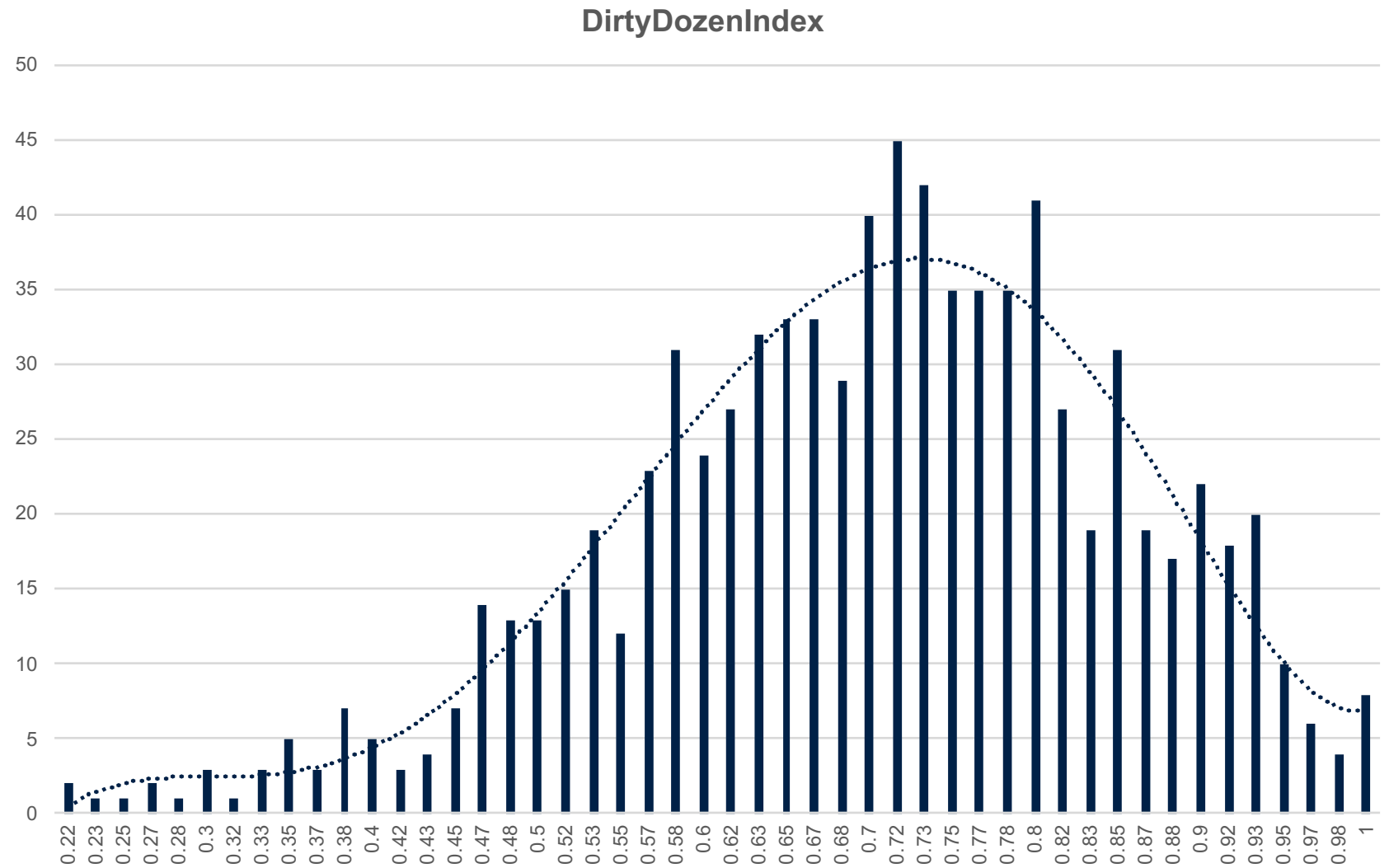


Drivers of the extent to which consumers blame the brand

- Demographics (age, sex, HHI, work)
- Political conservatism
- Internet and social media use frequency
- Advertising attitudes (positive, negative)
- Blame (agencies, platforms, gov/reg)



How offensive/inappropriate do consumers feel brand safety breaches are?



How offensive/inappropriate do consumers feel brand safety breaches are?

Does the **level of being offended** by “toxic content” affect the target of blame?

- ✗ Blame brands
- ✓ Blame agencies
- ✓ Blame platforms
- ✓ Blame government/regulators

1. Human error and algorithms are jointly responsible in consumers' minds

2. Platforms and agencies get more of the direct blame from consumers

3. Brand-directed blame is driven by agency-directed blame

4. Attitude towards toxic content not connected to brand-directed blame

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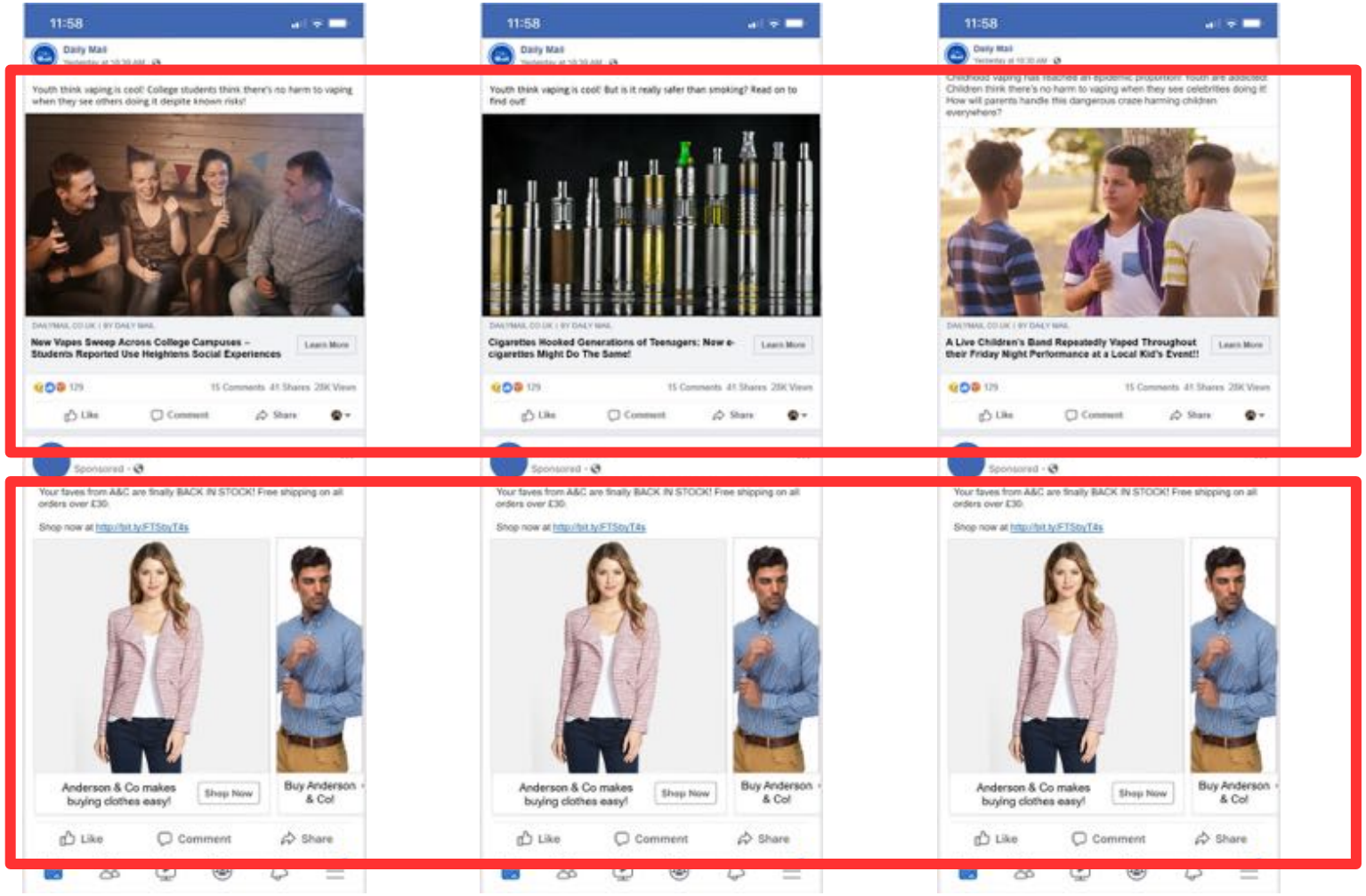
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US Consumer Experiment
May 2019

591 responses

Tested Low, Medium, High “Unsafe” Content in the Tobacco Context



Unsafe Content

Brand Ad

Tested Low, Medium, High "Unsafe" Content in the Tobacco Context

Fictional European clothing brand *Anderson & Co.*

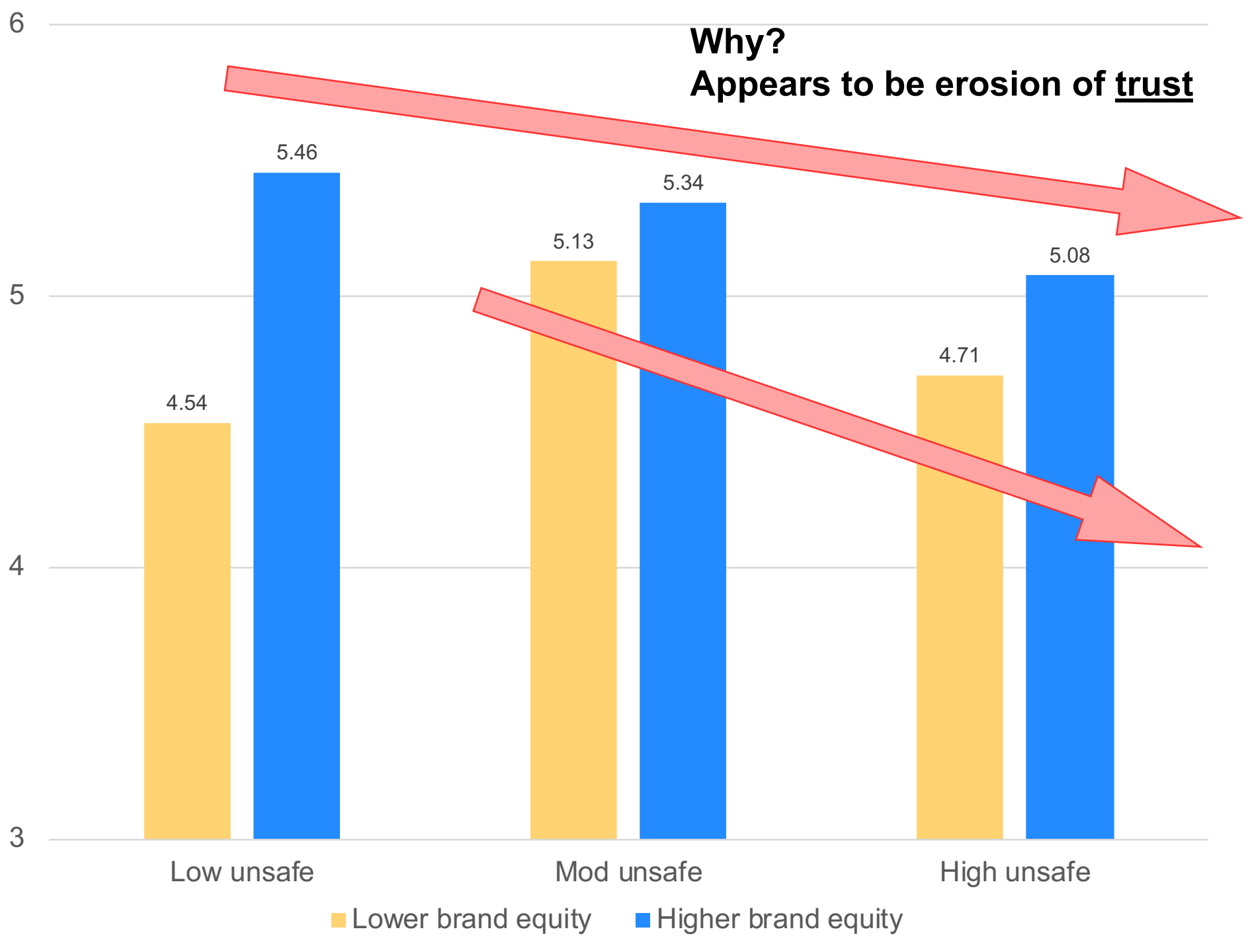
Described either as

Well-known, well-liked, and trusted [higher brand equity]

OR

Unknown, untested, and unfamiliar [lower brand equity]

Asked 1-7 scale evaluation of the brand and how much trust the brand


Why?
Appears to be erosion of trust
6
5
4
3
5.46
5.34
5.13
5.08
4.71
4.54
Low unsafe
Mod unsafe
High unsafe
Lower brand equity
Higher brand equity

1. Detectable but small effects

2. Bigger problem of adjacency to unsafe content if you have lower brand equity, not as well-known

3. Why does this happen? Erosion of brand trust

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Concluding Remarks

1. **Paradox!**
   - Consumers might not directly blame brands
   - But brands' ads adjacent to unsafe content can lower consumers' brand evaluations

2. **Solutions?**
   - Keep on trying to prevent issues using tech but don't overreact
   - Approaches that try to disassociate brands from the problem probably won't work (same goes for trying to "educate" consumers)
   - Build brand trust and brand equity up through other means as a buffer to brand safety problems

Thank you!

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