

Intention-Based and Competence-Based Trust in the Behavioural Intentions of Clients of Financial and Fintech Organisations

Running head: Trust Foundations in Finance

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Abstract

Research on clients' trust in financial organisations usually treats trust as a single construct, so it is unclear which basis of trust underlies the decision to deepen a relationship and to recommend the organisation. This study compares competence-based and intention-based brand trust as predictors of the intention to expand the relationship, including cross-buying, and the intention to recommend, and tests the differences between their coefficients formally. Survey data from 274 clients of Russian financial and fintech organisations were analysed with PLS-SEM, percentile bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples) and PLSpredict. Intention-based trust predicts both outcomes strongly ($\beta = 0.694$ and 0.683), and its advantage over competence-based trust is significant for both ($\Delta = 0.662$ and 0.563). The unique contribution of competence-based trust is weak and unstable across specifications. In a mature market, competence may act as a baseline expectation, while clients' further commitment depends on how they judge the organisation's intentions.

Keywords: brand trust; competence-based trust; intention-based trust; cross-buying; word of mouth; emerging markets; PLS-SEM

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1. Introduction

Trust underlies a client's relationship with a financial organisation. Following Mayer et al. [1], we understand trust as the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another party, based on the expectation that this party will perform an action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control it. In financial services this vulnerability is tangible: the client hands over money and data and cannot observe how the organisation handles them. Trust therefore bears on the two outcomes that matter most to a provider once a client has adopted its services. The first is whether the client deepens the relationship, that is, takes up additional products, moves a larger share of payments and savings to the organisation and turns to it first when a new financial need arises. This outcome goes beyond continued use, the focus of the expectation–confirmation model [2], and in banking it is usually examined through cross-buying intentions (e.g., [3]). Deeper relationships have a direct financial dimension: in the Russian banking sector, digital maturity has been found to correlate with the share of household deposits and, among large banks, with the share of net commission income, which the authors attribute to clients making more fee-generating transactions through remote channels [4]. The second outcome is the client's willingness to recommend the organisation, long treated as a core expression of behavioural loyalty [5]. This study asks which of two foundations of trust, the client's judgement of the organisation's competence or of its intentions, stands behind these two decisions, and it examines both foundations and both outcomes within one model.

Trust, however, is not a single judgement. The most influential conceptualisation distinguishes the partner's ability, integrity and benevolence [1], and brand research reduces these to two dimensions: consumers judge brands by their perceived ability and by their perceived intentions [6]. A client may regard a bank as technically competent and still doubt that it acts in the client's interest. Studies of brand trust among bank clients in emerging economies nonetheless typically measure trust with a single global scale and link it to loyalty [7], and much of the work on the behavioural consequences of trust in financial services treats trust as one construct [8, 9, 10]. A single scale cannot show which of the two judgements a client's decision rests on. Research on fintech has begun to separate the bases of trust. A review documents the variety of ways in which trust in fintech is conceptualised [11], a meta-analysis of green FinTech adoption reports that the coexistence of unidimensional, integrity–competence–benevolence and technology-specific measures limits the comparability of findings [12], and a study of AI-based financial advice distinguishes competence-related from benevolence-related trust [13]. In the studies we reviewed that do separate the foundations, however, the outcome is

adoption or continued use, and the coefficients of the foundations are not compared formally; relationship expansion and recommendation remain outside this line of work. The evidence is also narrow geographically. Recent studies of trust in banking and fintech in emerging economies come largely from Asia, Africa and Latin America (e.g., [7, 9, 14, 15]), while mature and regulated retail financial markets dominated by a few large providers, such as the Russian one, are rarely represented.

The two foundations lead to competing expectations. A common intuition holds that competence matters most when a client considers deepening a relationship with a financial organisation. The more money and operations a client entrusts to it, the higher the cost of an error, and research on digital banking treats a bank's technological competence as a basis of customer trust [16]. The alternative view is that losses in financial services can also stem from how an organisation chooses to treat its clients (undisclosed fees, changing conditions, practices that exploit limited client knowledge) and not only from its inability to perform. Under this view, perceived intentions should weigh more heavily as the client's exposure grows. The aim of this study is to determine which foundation of trust, competence-based or intention-based, is more strongly associated with the intention to expand the relationship with a financial organisation and the intention to recommend it. We address this question with survey data from clients of Russian financial and fintech organisations and estimate a model in which both foundations of trust predict both outcomes simultaneously.

The study makes three contributions. First, it compares the two foundations of trust directly and for two outcomes at once, and it tests the differences between their coefficients formally instead of comparing path estimates by eye. Second, it shows that intention-based trust is an equally strong predictor of two qualitatively different intentions, a private decision to deepen one's own exposure through cross-buying and a public act of recommendation, whereas the unique contribution of competence-based trust is weak and depends on the specification. Third, it offers a testable interpretation of this asymmetry: in a mature and regulated market, basic functional competence may operate as a baseline expectation that most large providers meet, so it does little to set them apart. For practice, the results indicate where a bank may look for unused cross-buying potential: in how clients judge its intentions rather than in further gains in perceived technical competence.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1. Foundations of trust

Mayer et al. [1] define trust as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party, based on the expectation that the other will perform an action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. Vulnerability is central to the definition, since trust matters precisely where the trustor cannot verify the other party's behaviour. In their model, the judgement of whether a partner is trustworthy rests on three perceived characteristics. Ability concerns whether the partner can perform the task; integrity, whether the partner adheres to principles the trustor finds acceptable; and benevolence, whether the partner cares about the trustor's interests.

The empirical separability of these three characteristics has been questioned repeatedly. In a meta-analysis of 132 independent samples, the correlations among the three dimensions exceed 0.60, and the correlation between integrity and benevolence reaches 0.68 [17]. A direct test of the factor structure of trustworthiness found that a bifactor model with a strong general factor fits the data best, which the authors interpret as an essentially unidimensional structure [18]. Integrity and benevolence may be conceptually distinct but hard to separate in consumers' responses.

The brands-as-intentional-agents framework offers a structure that fits this evidence [6]. Building on the stereotype content model [19], it holds that consumers perceive brands along two dimensions, perceived intentions and perceived ability. Integrity and benevolence both belong to the first dimension. Whether a brand follows sound principles and whether it cares about its clients are two aspects of one question — how the brand means to treat them. Ability answers a different question, namely whether the brand can carry out what it intends.

On this basis, we distinguish two foundations of brand trust. Competence-based trust reflects the client's judgement that the organisation is able to perform its services reliably. Intention-based trust reflects the judgement that the organisation deals honestly with clients and takes their interests into

account. This two-dimensional specification also has an empirical basis: in our data, integrity and benevolence could not be separated (Section 3.2), and a specification with three foundations of trust leads to the same conclusions (Section 4.4). Russian research on digital trust likewise treats trust as a multidimensional phenomenon [20] and has summarised its determinants in a meta-analysis [21].

2.2. Two behavioural outcomes

Relationship expansion and recommendation are often grouped together under behavioural loyalty, but they are different decisions. Expanding the relationship is a private decision to deepen one's own dependence on the organisation. The client entrusts it with more money, more data and more operations and bears the consequences of any failure personally; cross-buying, in which the client relies on one provider for a wider range of financial needs, is the typical form of this decision. Recommending the organisation is a public act of endorsement. The client vouches for the organisation before a third party, and the cost of a bad outcome for the recommender is reputational rather than financial. Because the two outcomes involve different kinds of risk, private and financial in one case and social and reputational in the other, the foundations of trust may relate to them differently, and we model them separately. Adoption is only one behavioural endpoint, and the determinants of adoption need not explain post-adoption behaviour [22]. Post-adoption outcomes are not interchangeable either, although continued use and recommendation are sometimes averaged into a single retention measure [23].

Existing research gives reasons to expect that the drivers of different forms of loyalty differ. When loyalty to a brand, to a retail chain and to a private label are compared, loyalty to the brand is driven mainly by emotional factors [24]. Approaches to loyalty management have been summarised in an analytical review [25]. In digital payment services, trust predicts the intention to recommend more strongly than the intention to use the service [26]. Russian studies have also tested models of loyalty to online services [27] and analysed the determinants of the net promoter score in a large bank [28]. None of these studies, however, separates the foundations of trust behind the two outcomes.

2.3. Competence-based trust and behavioural outcomes

Deepening a relationship with a financial organisation means entrusting it with more money and more operations. The potential loss grows, while the client's ability to prevent it does not, because the organisation's internal processes remain invisible to the client. The conventional argument links this decision to competence-based trust. An organisation that cannot execute operations properly exposes the client to direct losses — a failed payment, a miscalculated charge, funds that are unavailable when needed. Such risks increase with the volume of operations transferred, so the judgement of the organisation's ability should become decisive. A similar argument applies to recommendation, since a client who recommends an organisation vouches, among other things, for its ability to deliver what it promises.

H1. Competence-based trust is positively associated with the intention to expand the relationship with the brand.

H2. Competence-based trust is positively associated with the intention to recommend the brand.

The argument behind H1 and H2 assumes that clients see meaningful differences in competence between providers, and this assumption need not hold in every market. Competence is a necessary condition of a financial relationship: a client is unlikely to deepen a relationship with an organisation that cannot execute payments reliably. In a mature and regulated market, however, most large providers may meet the basic level of functional competence that clients expect, and a characteristic that varies little across organisations can do little to distinguish between them. Competence-based trust may then show a weak association with behavioural intentions even though competence matters. We test H1 and H2 as the conventional expectation and return to this alternative in Section 5.2.

2.4. Intention-based trust and behavioural outcomes

The second foundation of trust concerns how the organisation intends to treat the client: whether it is honest in its statements, follows accepted principles and considers the client's interests in its decisions. When a client expands a relationship, this foundation works in a specific way. Losses that

clients of financial organisations suffer can be associated with conditions that were not disclosed in advance — fees, restrictions, changes of tariffs — and not only with an organisation's inability to fulfil an obligation. The Croatian Swiss-franc loan case is an example: banks could raise the loans' "administrative" interest rate unilaterally, without a market benchmark, while exchange-rate risk was shifted to insufficiently informed borrowers, and the borrowers' unfair position was eventually acknowledged in court and through government debt relief [29]. Such losses depend on intentions, not on ability. As the client's exposure increases, so does the importance of believing that the organisation will not use its informational advantage against the client.

For recommendation, the relevance of intention-based trust follows from the social nature of the act. A client who recommends an organisation answers for it to a third party. If the organisation proves technically weak, the recommender looks poorly informed; if it proves dishonest, the recommender looks complicit. The second is costlier. Research on communication in digital channels supports the view that clients' intentions are sensitive to how an organisation interacts with them. In online retail, for instance, the tone of a chatbot is associated with customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions [30].

H3. Intention-based trust is positively associated with the intention to expand the relationship with the brand.

H4. Intention-based trust is positively associated with the intention to recommend the brand.

The four hypotheses form a full two-by-two design in which each foundation of trust is linked to each outcome. This design allows us to compare the foundations for the same outcome and the outcomes for the same foundation, which a partial specification would not permit.

2.5. Trust in financial services in emerging markets

Most of the evidence on trust in financial services comes from developed markets, and emerging markets are themselves diverse. They differ in institutional arrangements, in the concentration of their banking sectors and in the maturity of digital finance, and these differences may change the role that each foundation of trust plays in clients' decisions. A bibliometric review of 118 publications on digital banking in emerging economies finds that most of them rely on technology adoption models, in which perceived risk, usefulness and ease of use explain the intention to use [31]. Studies in China and South Africa link trust to the adoption of fintech and to banking relationships but treat trust as a single construct [9, 10]. Levels of consumer trust also differ between emerging economies [32], as do the factors behind consumers' choice of digital services and the formation of online trust, for example between Russia and China [33, 34]. These findings caution against assuming that the structure of trust observed in one emerging market holds in another.

We treat market maturity as a condition that may shape the relative weight of the two foundations. Where providers are new and their operational record is short, clients have reason to doubt whether a provider can deliver, and competence should discriminate between providers. Where the market is mature, regulated and dominated by large organisations with established digital channels, basic functional competence may be expected of every major provider. Some studies from emerging markets point in this direction. Trust has been described as a background condition rather than an active driver of continued fintech use in Brazil [14], and among clients of the largest Indonesian banks, firm reputation was not associated with the intention to use mobile banking, which the authors attribute to banks in similar categories being perceived as equally reputable [15]. The Russian retail financial market belongs to the mature type. Twelve systemically important banks account for about 80% of the total assets of the banking sector [35], and in 2021 alone the number of bank accounts with remote access grew by 12.5%, while the number of bank branches fell by 6.4% [4]. A clearly specified test in this setting provides a reference point for comparative research in markets at other stages of maturity.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Data collection and sample

Data were collected through an online survey administered via the Anketolog research panel in August–September 2026. The target population comprised adult residents of Russia who use the services of a financial or fintech organisation and interact with it through more than one channel. Respondents named one specific organisation and answered all subsequent questions about it. The organisations named were predominantly large Russian banks, which is why we refer to the objects of evaluation as brands of financial and fintech organisations.

Screening questions confirmed that the respondent used the services of the organisation, that they used different channels depending on the situation and that they had used at least two interaction channels. Response quality was controlled with an instructed attention item placed inside a substantive block. The data contain no missing values.

The panel returned 308 responses, of which 300 met the screening criteria. We then excluded 20 respondents who used no more than two distinct scale points across all 37 substantive items of the questionnaire, since such responses do not differentiate between statements. We also excluded 6 respondents who reported living outside Russia and so fell outside the target population. Both criteria rely on properties of the response itself and not on how its exclusion affects the estimates. The final sample comprises 274 respondents. This size is comparable to that of other survey-based studies of Russian consumer markets using structural equation modelling [36].

Women account for 66.8% of the sample. The largest age groups are 35–44 years (30.3%), 45–54 years (28.1%) and 25–34 years (20.1%). Most respondents are long-standing clients of the organisation they evaluated. Of them, 71.2% have used its services for more than three years, and 52.6% interact with it daily. The median number of channels used is three. The questionnaire also covered constructs analysed in a companion study that uses the same dataset to examine a different research question — how characteristics of omnichannel marketing communication relate to the foundations of trust [37]. The two studies share the data collection procedure, the sample description and the measurement of the two trust foundations, which both of them use; their research questions, hypotheses and structural models differ. The sample is thus skewed towards women and middle-aged respondents; we return to the implications of this composition in Section 5.7.

3.2. Measures

All items used seven-point agreement scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Competence-based trust was measured with the four-item competence subscale of Li et al. [38]. Intention-based trust combines three integrity items [40] and four benevolence items [38]. The intention to expand the relationship was measured with four items. They capture the intention to use more of the organisation's products, to turn to it with a wider range of financial matters, to extend the use of its services and to transfer a larger share of one's financial operations to it. This operationalisation reflects relationship expansion only partly. It captures intentions, not behaviour, and does not cover, for example, the duration of the relationship. The intention to recommend was measured with three items adapted from the loyalty dimension of Zeithaml et al. [5]. The items were translated into Russian and adapted to the context, and their wording underwent an expert assessment of content validity before data collection. A comparable approach to adapting and testing scales on the Russian consumer market is described by Kusraeva et al. [39]. The English wording of all items is given in the Appendix.

Integrity and benevolence were merged on empirical grounds. In the pilot study, the HTMT ratio between the two constructs was 0.947, with a bootstrap interval of [0.881, 1.008] lying entirely above the 0.85 threshold. We compared three specifications: three separate foundations of trust, three foundations after removing the weakest integrity item, and two foundations with integrity and benevolence combined. Removing the weak item worsened discriminant validity instead of improving it, which indicates that the problem lies in the constructs themselves and not in a single item. The main sample supports the merged specification again, with an HTMT ratio of 0.920 [0.862, 0.967] between the integrity and benevolence subscales.

3.3. Analysis

We use partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) rather than covariance-based SEM. The main reason for this choice is the predictive orientation of the study. When comparing two

foundations of trust, we are interested not only in the size of the coefficients but also in how well the model predicts behavioural intentions out of sample, and PLS-SEM allows this to be assessed with PLSpredict [41]. The constructs are conceptualised as reflective and estimated with the standard PLS-SEM algorithm, using Mode A weights and the path weighting scheme [42]. Significance is assessed with percentile bootstrap confidence intervals based on 5,000 subsamples; a relationship is considered significant when its 95% interval excludes zero. Differences between path coefficients are computed on the same bootstrap subsamples, so the interval for each difference reflects the covariance between the two coefficients, which a comparison of separate intervals would ignore. The estimates were obtained independently in two implementations, the SEMinR package for R and an implementation of the algorithm in Python, and the point estimates agree to the third decimal place.

We assessed whether the sample is large enough with the inverse square root method [43]. At a 5% significance level and 80% statistical power, the minimum sample size equals $(2.486 / |\beta_{\min}|)^2$, where $\beta_{\min}$ is the smallest path coefficient that should be detected. Detecting paths of 0.20 requires about 155 observations; with $n = 274$, the smallest detectable path is about $2.486 / \sqrt{274} \approx 0.15$. The sample is therefore adequate for paths of moderate size, but paths below about 0.15 may remain undetected, which matters for the interpretation of non-significant results.

The absence of a direct association between competence-based trust and the outcomes calls for an explanation. We also estimate an exploratory model in which competence-based trust is related to intention-based trust, and we assess indirect effects simultaneously with direct effects [44]. This relationship was not part of the original model, and we treat the analysis as an explanation of the results and not as a test of a hypothesis.

3.4. Ethical considerations

The study used an anonymous online survey of adult consumers administered through a commercial research panel. Participation was voluntary. Respondents gave their consent before answering the questionnaire and could stop at any point. No personally identifiable information was collected or transferred to the researchers. The study followed the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model

Table 1 reports reliability and convergent validity. Overall, the measures perform well. Outer loadings range from 0.768 to 0.963, above the 0.708 threshold, and average variance extracted exceeds 0.50 for all constructs. Two values are borderline. The composite reliability of intention-based trust (0.955) and of the intention to recommend (0.972) exceeds the upper bound of 0.95, which points to semantic redundancy among the items of these scales.

Table 1. Reliability and convergent validity (n = 274)

Construct	Items	α	ρ_A	CR	AVE	Min. loading	Max. VIF
Competence-based trust (CBT)	4	0.913	0.916	0.939	0.794	0.869	3.89
Intention-based trust (ITB)	7	0.944	0.947	0.955	0.751	0.768	4.39
Intention to expand the relationship (REI)	4	0.920	0.924	0.944	0.808	0.849	4.95
Intention to recommend (RAI)	3	0.956	0.957	0.972	0.919	0.951	6.63

Thresholds: $\alpha \geq 0.70$; CR 0.70–0.95; AVE ≥ 0.50 ; loading ≥ 0.708 ; VIF < 5 . α = Cronbach's alpha; ρ_A = Dijkstra–Henseler's rho; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; VIF = variance inflation factor.

Discriminant validity was assessed with the HTMT criterion and its bootstrap intervals [45], the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loadings. All HTMT point estimates are below 0.85. For competence-based and intention-based trust, the ratio is 0.764, and the upper bound of the one-sided 95% interval is 0.846, still below the threshold. For the two outcomes, the ratio is 0.780 with an upper bound of 0.840. The closest pair is intention-based trust and the intention to recommend: 0.808, with an upper bound of exactly 0.850. The Fornell–Larcker criterion holds for all constructs, and no item

loads more strongly on another construct than on its own. Discriminant validity is supported, although for some pairs it is borderline.

For the intention to recommend, the high composite reliability and variance inflation factors of about 6.6 for two items reflect similar wording, and these two items correlate at 0.908. A shortened scale without one of them reduces the variance inflation factor to 3.95 and changes none of the conclusions; the path coefficients shift by no more than 0.007. We retain the full scale.

4.2. Structural model

Table 2 reports the structural estimates, and Figure 1 summarises them. The model explains 51.3% of the variance in the intention to expand the relationship and 59.9% in the intention to recommend.

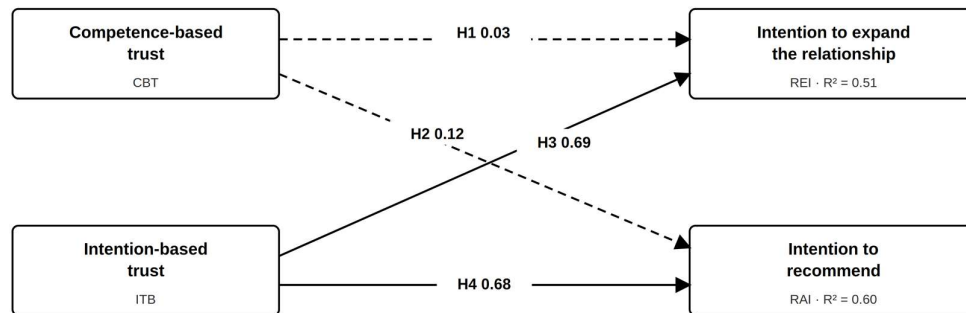


Figure 1. Structural model estimates. Standardised path coefficients ($n = 274$). Solid arrows denote paths whose 95% percentile bootstrap interval (5000 subsamples) excludes zero; dashed arrows denote paths whose interval includes zero. The coefficients of determination (R^2) of the endogenous constructs are shown next to the construct labels.

Table 2. Structural model estimates and differences between path coefficients

Hypothesis / comparison	β / Δ	95% CI	f^2	Conclusion
H1: CBT $\rightarrow$ REI	0.031	[-0.135, 0.234]	0.001	Not supported
H2: CBT $\rightarrow$ RAI	0.121	[-0.037, 0.312]	0.018	Not supported
H3: ITB $\rightarrow$ REI	0.694	[0.540, 0.805]	0.484	Supported
H4: ITB $\rightarrow$ RAI	0.683	[0.530, 0.793]	0.576	Supported
(ITB $\rightarrow$ REI) - (CBT $\rightarrow$ REI)	0.662	[0.315, 0.927]	—	Significant
(ITB $\rightarrow$ RAI) - (CBT $\rightarrow$ RAI)	0.563	[0.220, 0.823]	—	Significant
(CBT $\rightarrow$ RAI) - (CBT $\rightarrow$ REI)	0.089	[-0.039, 0.213]	—	Not significant
(ITB $\rightarrow$ REI) - (ITB $\rightarrow$ RAI)	0.010	[-0.097, 0.121]	—	Not significant

Standardised coefficients; percentile bootstrap confidence intervals based on 5,000 subsamples; differences computed on the same subsamples. R^2 : REI = 0.513, RAI = 0.599. CBT = competence-based trust; ITB = intention-based trust; REI = intention to expand the relationship; RAI = intention to recommend.

Two of the four hypotheses are supported. Intention-based trust predicts both outcomes with similar strength: $\beta = 0.694$ for relationship expansion ($f^2 = 0.484$) and $\beta = 0.683$ for recommendation ($f^2 = 0.576$), both large effects. Competence-based trust shows no significant association with either outcome when both foundations are estimated jointly. H1 is not supported: $\beta = 0.031$ [-0.135, 0.234]. H2 is not supported either: $\beta = 0.121$ [-0.037, 0.312].

The central result of the study is the formal comparison of the two foundations. Intention-based trust outperforms competence-based trust by 0.662 [0.315, 0.927] for relationship expansion and by 0.563 [0.220, 0.823] for recommendation; both intervals exclude zero. Within each foundation, the differences between the two outcomes are not significant: 0.089 [-0.039, 0.213] for competence-based trust and 0.010 [-0.097, 0.121] for intention-based trust. The asymmetry therefore lies between the foundations of trust, not between the outcomes.

The H2 result is borderline. A parametric test based on the latent variable scores would indicate significance ($p = 0.028$); we report the bootstrap result because it is the criterion specified in advance. Its point estimate also lies below the smallest path that the sample can reliably detect (Section 3.3).

We assessed predictive performance with PLSpredict using ten-fold cross-validation. For each indicator of an endogenous construct, the prediction errors of the model were compared with those of a linear benchmark model that regresses the indicator directly on the indicators of the antecedent constructs. All Q^2 predict values are positive, ranging from 0.339 to 0.449 for relationship expansion and from 0.511 to 0.581 for recommendation. The model produces lower prediction errors than the benchmark for all seven indicators, which indicates high predictive power.

4.3. Exploratory analysis

The absence of a direct association between competence-based trust and the outcomes calls for an explanation. The exploratory model tests whether the association runs through intention-based trust. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3. Exploratory decomposition of the association of competence-based trust with the outcomes

Effect	Relationship expansion	Recommendation
Total effect of CBT	0.524 [0.366, 0.670]	0.606 [0.459, 0.737]
Indirect effect via ITB	0.494 [0.395, 0.595]	0.487 [0.389, 0.582]
Direct effect controlling for ITB	0.030 [-0.141, 0.234]	0.119 [-0.044, 0.310]
Share of indirect effect	94%	80%

Percentile bootstrap confidence intervals based on 5,000 subsamples. The path from CBT to ITB was not part of the original model; the analysis is exploratory.

The total effect of competence-based trust is significant for both outcomes: 0.524 for relationship expansion and 0.606 for recommendation. Most of it runs through intention-based trust — 0.494 and 0.487, respectively. The direct effects are not significant once the mediating construct is controlled.

This pattern allows several readings. Cross-sectional data cannot establish the direction of the relationship between the two foundations of trust. The observed structure is consistent with a sequence in which judgements of ability precede judgements of intentions, with the reverse sequence, and with a general positive image of the brand that shapes both judgements at once. The common method diagnostics reported below add a further reason for caution. We treat the result as exploratory. Trust items do not always form a separate factor in banking surveys either: in a study of digital banking clients, they loaded on the access, transparency and reputation factors and were merged with reputation [46].

4.4. Robustness checks

We re-estimated the model on four alternative subsamples. The first excludes respondents who showed no variation in seven or more of the ten scale blocks ($n = 240$). The second excludes respondents whose object of evaluation was an aggregator, several organisations or an uninformative name ($n = 255$). The third and fourth separate respondents who completed the survey on a smartphone ($n = 205$) and on a personal computer ($n = 68$). Table 4 reports the results.

Table 4. Robustness checks: path coefficients in alternative subsamples

Path	Full sample ($n = 274$)	Low-variation responses excluded ($n = 240$)	Problematic objects excluded ($n = 255$)	Smartphone ($n = 205$)	Personal computer ($n = 68$)
CBT → REI	0.031 [-0.135, 0.234]	0.179 [0.033, 0.324]*	0.040 [-0.131, 0.252]	0.009 [-0.188, 0.271]	0.085 [-0.139, 0.313]
CBT → RAI	0.121 [-0.037, 0.312]	0.255 [0.113, 0.400]*	0.125 [-0.046, 0.328]	0.133 [-0.064, 0.383]	0.154 [-0.072, 0.382]
ITB → REI	0.694 [0.540, 0.805]	0.577 [0.450, 0.704]	0.698 [0.534, 0.815]	0.696 [0.500, 0.825]	0.710 [0.492, 0.920]

ITB → RAI	0.683 [0.530, 0.793]	0.576 [0.447, 0.696]	0.677 [0.509, 0.795]	0.662 [0.455, 0.796]	0.694 [0.516, 0.870]
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Standardised coefficients with 95% percentile bootstrap intervals (5,000 subsamples). * The conclusion differs from that for the full sample.

H3 and H4 are supported in every specification, with coefficients between 0.576 and 0.710. The conclusions also hold in a specification with three foundations of trust, where integrity and benevolence are separated and both are positively associated with each outcome, and with the shortened recommendation scale. The paths of competence-based trust behave differently. They are not significant in three of the four subsamples, but both become significant once respondents with low within-block variation are excluded: 0.179 [0.033, 0.324] for relationship expansion and 0.255 [0.113, 0.400] for recommendation. Intention-based trust remains considerably stronger in that subsample as well (0.577 and 0.576). Responses with low variation appear to bring the two foundations of trust closer together; without them, competence-based trust gains explanatory power of its own. In short, the contribution of competence-based trust is clearly weaker and unstable, but its absence cannot be claimed.

4.5. Common method variance

All variables were collected from the same respondents with the same instrument, so we conducted extensive common method diagnostics. Harman's single-factor test attributes 62.0% of the variance to the first factor. The test is weak as evidence in either direction [47], and a high share of the first factor is expected for four conceptually related constructs. The full collinearity variance inflation factor [48] exceeds the 3.3 threshold for intention-based trust (3.55). In a confirmatory factor analysis with an unmeasured latent method factor and equal loadings, the method factor accounts for 42.5% of the indicator variance. This is an upper-bound estimate. When all constructs are positively related, the model cannot fully separate method variance from shared substantive variance. A specification with free loadings on the method factor did not allow method and content to be separated for intention-based trust. In the equal-loadings specification, the correlation between competence-based and intention-based trust falls from 0.76 to 0.37.

This has an important implication. If part of the variance shared by the two foundations of trust is produced by the method, their high correlation makes it harder to detect the unique contribution of each, above all that of the weaker, competence-based foundation. The null result for competence-based trust may partly reflect common method variance and not the absence of a relationship. The leading role of intention-based trust is not called into question, but its estimates should be regarded as upper bounds.

5. Discussion

5.1. Main finding and the proximity of trust foundations to behavioural decisions

The main finding of the study is that clients' judgement of a financial organisation's intentions, rather than of its competence, is associated with their intentions to deepen the relationship and to recommend the organisation, and the difference between the two foundations of trust is significant for both outcomes.

The results are consistent with the idea that the foundations of trust differ in how close they stand to behavioural intentions. McKnight et al. [49] distinguish trusting beliefs — perceptions of a partner's competence, benevolence and integrity — from trusting intentions, the willingness to depend on the partner. The construct we measure as intention-based trust is not an equivalent of trusting intentions. It refers to an evaluation of the partner and so belongs to the level of beliefs. Our argument does not replicate their structure. It makes a more general observation, namely that evaluations of a partner are heterogeneous and differ in their proximity to a behavioural decision.

In our model, competence-based trust lies further from behavioural intentions than intention-based trust. When both are estimated jointly, we detect no unique association between competence-based trust and either outcome. Between the judgement of ability and the decision to expand the relationship

or to recommend the organisation there appears to lie a judgement about how the organisation will use the opportunity it is given. This is an interpretation; cross-sectional data do not allow us to test the sequence of judgements.

The definition of trust proposed by Mayer et al. [1] places vulnerability at the centre of the construct. Expanding a relationship with a financial organisation increases vulnerability, because the client transfers more money and more data without gaining additional means of control. In such a situation, the question of the organisation's intentions becomes more pressing than the question of its ability. This reading is also compatible with Russian research that treats digital trust as a multidimensional phenomenon and separates trust in the service itself from other dimensions [20].

5.2. Competence as a baseline expectation: an interpretation

We interpret the weak unique contribution of competence-based trust as a sign that competence functions as a baseline expectation. This is an interpretation, not a tested mechanism, and it rests on the distribution of the ratings. Competence-based trust received the highest mean of all constructs, 5.79, and the lowest dispersion, with a standard deviation of 1.08. Sixty-four per cent of competence ratings fall in the top two points of the scale, compared with 45% for intention-based trust and 38% for the intention to expand the relationship. Clients rate competence higher than the other characteristics and more uniformly, and a characteristic that differs little across organisations can explain little of the differences in clients' behaviour.

A close parallel exists in research on financial brands. In a study of word of mouth about financial brands, service responsiveness was treated as an assumed expectation and a hygiene factor, whereas brand sincerity was directly associated with positive word of mouth [50]. Responsiveness in that study and competence-based trust in ours play a similar role: clients expect them, and their presence alone does not move clients to act. Comparable readings have been offered elsewhere. Trust has been described as a background condition for the continued use of fintech in Brazil [14]. In Islamic mobile banking in Indonesia, perceived security and trust in AI-supported features showed only small direct associations with continuance intention, which the authors interpreted as baseline conditions rather than the strongest drivers of continued use [51]. In all these studies, as in ours, the baseline reading is an interpretation of the estimates and not a tested mechanism.

Competence thus appears to be a necessary but insufficient condition. Without it, a relationship is unlikely to develop, yet its presence alone does not seem to be enough for a client to entrust the organisation with a larger share of their finances or to vouch for it to others. The interpretation yields a testable prediction: the association between competence-based trust and behavioural intentions should be stronger in markets or segments where functional competence varies more across providers, for example among new fintech entrants or in less concentrated banking systems.

5.3. Comparing the two outcomes

The two outcomes behave similarly. The differences between their coefficients within each foundation of trust are not significant. The asymmetry we observe lies between foundations of trust, not between outcomes. Intention-based trust significantly outperforms competence-based trust for relationship expansion and for recommendation alike.

A difference between the outcomes could have been expected. When clients expand a relationship, they bear the risk alone, and the consequences are financial. When they recommend an organisation, the consequences fall on a third party, and the recommender's costs are reputational. The data do not support such a difference. For both kinds of risk, intention-based trust is the leading predictor. One implication is that intention-based trust works as a general proximal basis for behavioural intentions towards a financial organisation, irrespective of whether the risk involved is private or social. This matters for research on cross-buying: the judgement that leads clients to vouch for an organisation in public is the same one that is associated with their readiness to deepen their own dependence on it.

5.4. Theoretical implications

The study has three implications for research on trust. First, the foundations of trust should be modelled separately. In our data, the two foundations correlate strongly, yet only one of them carries predictive weight once both are estimated together. Studies that combine them into one score, or that

include only one of them, may misattribute the effect of perceived intentions to trust in general or to competence. A related argument has been made about the objects of trust: in Hungary, trust in independent and in domestic financial institutions was associated with FinTech use in opposite directions [52], and a meta-analysis of green FinTech adoption studies recommends measuring several trust targets in the same study [12]. Our results suggest that a comparable separation matters within a single object, between the perceived ability and the perceived intentions of the same organisation. As to the number of foundations, integrity and benevolence could not be separated empirically either in the pilot study or in the main sample, whereas competence remained distinct from both. This pattern matches meta-analytic evidence on the high correlation between integrity and benevolence [17] and the two-dimensional structure of the brands-as-intentional-agents framework [6]. For consumer research on financial brands, a two-dimensional specification appears to be a realistic starting point, although this conclusion rests on a single measurement instrument and needs replication.

Second, the relative role of the foundations should be tested formally. The difference between two path coefficients is a quantity in its own right and can be estimated with a confidence interval on the same bootstrap subsamples as the coefficients themselves [42]. Comparing point estimates by eye can mislead in both directions: two coefficients may look different while their difference is not significant, and a borderline coefficient may look either present or absent depending on the test. Our results illustrate the second risk. For the borderline path from competence-based trust to recommendation, a parametric test based on latent variable scores and the bootstrap interval led to different conclusions. Reporting bootstrap intervals for coefficients and for their differences matters precisely for such effects.

Third, competence may matter mainly through the judgement of intentions. In the exploratory decomposition, 94% of the total association of competence-based trust with relationship expansion and 80% of its association with recommendation run through intention-based trust. One reading is that clients use evidence of an organisation's ability as one input into their view of how it will treat them. Cross-sectional data cannot establish this sequence, and a general positive image of the brand could produce the same pattern, so the reading is a hypothesis for longitudinal or experimental research. Future studies could also test whether intention-based trust leads for other outcomes, such as actual share of wallet, switching or complaint behaviour; switching intention, for example, has been linked to institution-based trust in a provider [53].

5.5. Relevance for emerging markets

Our findings come from a market in which clients deal mainly with large organisations through well-developed digital channels. In our sample, 71% of respondents have used their organisation's services for more than three years, and 53% interact with it daily. If the baseline-expectation interpretation holds, its traces should be visible precisely in such a context and should be weaker in emerging markets where digital finance is younger and providers are more heterogeneous. We do not treat the national context as a tested moderator; that would require a cross-country sample. Most studies of trust in banking and fintech in emerging markets measure trust as a single construct (e.g., [7, 9, 10]), so the two foundations have rarely been compared across these markets. Regulatory and market-maturity indicators, which have been proposed as contextual moderators of trust effects in FinTech [12], offer a starting point for such a comparison.

5.6. Practical implications

The results suggest three implications for managers of financial and fintech organisations. They rest on associations in cross-sectional data, and our model does not include the organisational actions that shape intention-based trust, so they are directions to test rather than proven levers.

First, intention-based trust deserves its own metric. Russian banks already analyse the determinants of the net promoter score [28]. Adding a few items on whether the organisation deals fairly with clients and takes their interests into account to such surveys would show which foundation of trust lies behind a low or falling score. A single overall trust question cannot make this distinction, because it combines a foundation that predicts both outcomes with one whose unique contribution is weak.

Second, the potential for cross-buying appears to lie in how the organisation communicates and enacts its intentions rather than in further gains in perceived operational quality. Clients who doubt an

organisation's intentions have reason to limit their exposure to it, and the judgement of intentions is formed where an organisation can act against the client: in the clarity of fees and conditions, in honesty when conditions change and in the handling of complaints. Unilateral changes of conditions and insufficient disclosure can also turn into reputational and legal risk, as the Croatian Swiss-franc loan case shows [29]. The literature points to possible mechanisms: the perception of the motives behind a firm's actions is part of the concept of brand transparency [54], and care and benevolence have been identified among the drivers of the perceived trustworthiness of financial organisations (Sekhon et al., 2014, as cited in [11]).

Third, operational reliability is a hygiene minimum. It has to be maintained, since a relationship is unlikely to develop without it, but in our data further differences in perceived competence add little to clients' intentions once their view of the organisation's intentions is taken into account. Acting on intention-based trust also raises an organisational difficulty. In Russian companies, brand management and loyalty management are often assigned to different units, which leads to diverging managerial practices [55]. For providers of financial technologies, the task is complicated by the fact that even basic concepts of some services lack a commonly accepted definition in the Russian market, as shown for robo-advising [56]. Under such conditions, clarity of communication becomes part of the product rather than an addition to it.

5.7. Limitations and future research

The data are cross-sectional and come from a single respondent per observation, so the relationships we report are associations and predictive relationships, not causal effects, and the sequence in which the judgement of ability precedes the judgement of intentions is an interpretation of a correlational structure. This reliance on stated intentions is shared by much of the research on FinTech [22]. Longitudinal designs, experiments that vary information about a provider's competence and conduct, and providers' records of actual cross-buying would test the direction of the relationships and replace intentions with behaviour.

Common method variance limits the comparison between the foundations of trust. The diagnostics indicate that a considerable part of the relationship between them may be due to the method, so the null result for competence-based trust may partly reflect the method, and the estimates for intention-based trust should be read as upper bounds. Measuring the foundations of trust and the outcomes at different times, or taking the outcomes from a different source, would address this limitation.

The conclusion about competence-based trust depends on the composition of the sample: when respondents with low response variation are excluded, both of its paths become significant. Its contribution is clearly weaker and unstable, but not demonstrably absent. Larger samples with enough power to detect paths below 0.15 would show whether a small unique effect exists. The mediation analysis is exploratory, and its results provide a hypothesis for future research rather than a test of one.

Respondents were recruited through an online panel with non-probability sampling, and the sample is dominated by women and by respondents aged 35 to 54; quota or probability samples would show whether the pattern holds across demographic groups. The study covers a single country. The baseline-expectation interpretation presupposes a mature market and an institutional infrastructure of trust, and a comparison across markets of different maturity would test it directly. Finally, the composite reliability of two constructs exceeds 0.95, which reflects closely worded items inherited from the original scales; for the recommendation scale, the shortened version did not change the conclusions, and future studies could use more varied item wording.

6. Conclusions

This study asked which foundation of trust, competence-based or intention-based, is more strongly associated with clients' intentions to expand their relationship with a financial organisation and to recommend it. Among clients of Russian financial and fintech organisations, intention-based trust predicts both outcomes strongly, its advantage over competence-based trust is significant for each of them, and the unique contribution of competence-based trust is weak and depends on the specification. The study contributes a formal test of the difference between the two foundations,

evidence that the same foundation underlies a private decision to deepen the relationship and a public act of recommendation, and a testable interpretation of competence as a baseline expectation in a mature market. For financial organisations, the results suggest that reliability is a precondition, while the decision to entrust the organisation with more, or to vouch for it to others, rests on how clients see its intentions. Replications with longitudinal and behavioural data and in emerging markets at different stages of maturity would show whether competence indeed recedes into a baseline expectation as markets mature.

Ethics statement: Ethical approval was not required for this study under national law. The study was an anonymous, non-interventional online survey of adult consumers administered through a commercial research panel; no personal data within the meaning of Federal Law of the Russian Federation No. 152-FZ “On Personal Data” were collected or transferred to the researcher, and under Russian legislation mandatory ethics committee review applies to biomedical and clinical research, not to anonymous consumer surveys.

Informed consent and consent to publish: Informed consent was obtained online from all participants before they started the questionnaire. Participants agreed to take part in the anonymous survey and to the use of their anonymised, aggregated responses in research publications.

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Appendix A

All items used a seven-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The items were administered in Russian; the English wording in Table A1 is the author's translation. Standardised outer loadings are from the main model (n = 274).

Table A1. Measurement items and standardised outer loadings.

Item	Wording	Loading
Competence-based trust (adapted from [38])		
CBT1	This company does its job well.	0.869
CBT2	I expect this company to deliver on its promises.	0.893
CBT3	I am confident in this company's ability to perform well.	0.929
CBT4	The quality of this company's work is consistent.	0.873
Intention-based trust: integrity (adapted from [40]) and benevolence (adapted from [38])		
ITB1	This company's behaviour appears to be guided by sound principles.	0.768
ITB2	This company clearly tries to be fair in dealing with its clients.	0.893
ITB3	This company has a strong sense of justice.	0.893
ITB4	This company has good intentions towards its clients.	0.896
ITB5	This company would respond constructively if I had a problem with a product.	0.850
ITB6	This company would do its best to help me if a problem arose.	0.859
ITB7	This company cares about my needs.	0.900
<i>Intention to expand the relationship</i>		
REI1	I intend to use more of this company's products and services.	0.885
REI2	I intend to turn to this company for a wider range of financial matters.	0.938
REI3	I intend to extend my use of this company's services.	0.921
REI4	I intend to transfer a larger share of my financial operations to this company.	0.849
Intention to recommend (adapted from [5])		
RAI1	I will say positive things about this company to other people.	0.951
RAI2	I will recommend this company to someone who seeks my advice.	0.962
RAI3	I will encourage friends and relatives to use this company's services.	0.963