

May 2021

EXTRACT

# Perceptions of Consulting in China

Client Perception Studies



# Our values and integrity

Our purpose is to help you grow your business. We aim to provide you with the best data and analysis to help you make the right decisions for your firm.

To that end, Source Global Research is completely independent of any professional services firm we work with or comment on. The views about each firm expressed in this report come from senior end-users of professional services—your clients and prospects, in other words. All analysis is our own—as experts in interpreting client data, our aim is to help you make sense of it and bring the important messages to your attention quickly.

It is not possible to influence our rankings either by subscribing to our research or by paying us money—it never has been and it never will be.

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# How to use this Client Perception Study

It's very important to be clear about what our Client Perception Studies are, and are not:

What they're not are exhaustive studies of clients' opinions about specific firms that remain statistically robust when filtered to provide detailed data about views at a very granular level of the market. So if, for instance, you want statistically robust data about what clients in the pharma sector in Germany think about McKinsey's operational improvement capabilities, you won't find it in these reports. We do profile individual firms in our reports to the extent we can—indeed this remains one of the most popular parts of the reports with readers—and we do, separately, provide tailored presentations to firms that buy this report, contextualising the results for that individual firm. However, our Client Perception Studies are not designed to replace the sort of in-depth client research that many firms carry out (and often ask us to carry out for them) or the more wide-ranging, global view of perceptions provided by our Consulting Brand Barometer.

What they are designed to do is provide a snapshot of views within a particular consulting market at a point in time. What they lack in detail about individual firms they make up for in three important ways:

- **A multi-firm view.** Our reports enable consulting firms to see how they stack up against their competitors in the minds of clients.
- **A view from prospects, not just existing clients.** We include the views of people who aren't current active clients of the firm they're telling us about, enabling us to understand what we tend to think of as a firm's brand pipeline, and to compare the views of prospective and active clients. In doing this, we're able to assess the extent to which clients' expectations of a firm are met in reality, and how well a firm's marketing and delivery capabilities are aligned.
- **Independence and expertise.** The trouble with conducting your own client research is that clients are often reluctant to express negative views about firms (and people) with whom they've worked closely. They have no such concerns when they're telling us. Added to which, we're able to bring to bear the expertise we've gained over years of analysing the consulting market, helping to interpret the results within the context of the wider market and the strategic priorities of consulting firms.

It's important to remember that this is a study of client perceptions; a summarised view of what we're hearing from the market. It's not Source's view, nor is it a comment on market share or a recommendation to clients about which firms to buy from. The audience of these reports is very much the firms featured in them, and those interested in the strength of the competition in any given market.

# Methodology

## *Who did we talk to?*

We have 207 responses from our survey of executives, directors, and senior managers in China undertaken in October to December 2020, all of whom have been responsible for buying substantial volumes of consulting services in the past two years. We ask all respondents about three firms they're familiar with, giving us 621 responses about different firms. They represent a wide range of regions and business functions, and 84% work in organisations that generate more than \$500m in revenue.

For more information about the people we surveyed, please see the extended methodology section at the back of this report.

## *The difference between direct clients and prospects*

We talk about two types of clients in this report: direct clients and prospects.

Direct clients are clients who have bought services from a firm on a reasonably regular basis. They're current clients, or ones with an ongoing relationship with a firm.

Prospects are clients who feel qualified to share an opinion about a firm but aren't among the firm's direct clients. They may have had exposure to the work the firm has done elsewhere in their organisation or have simply formed an impression based on reading a firm's thought leadership or being exposed to its marketing in some other form. In this research, we segment this group into those that are simply aware of a firm, and those that have shortlisted a firm but decided not to proceed with that firm.

The differences between the opinions of these two types of clients tell us a lot about the differences between expectation (prospects) and reality (direct clients). But they also tell us something about the differences between a firm's marketing and what it actually delivers.

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<sup>1</sup>Note that for the purposes of this study, we do not include responses from buyers of consulting in Hong Kong SAR as, although part of China, we consider that the market dynamics in the territory are different to the rest of the country.

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## The Consulting Brand Barometer

Do you want more detailed brand insights for your firm or its competitors? Would you like to see how well your brand will fare in the future?

Brand insights are a key input to making the right strategic choices and realising business opportunities for your firm. Source Global Research provides a better solution for firms to track, measure, and understand their brand more intelligently, enabling faster decisions based on what customers really want.

Source's Consulting Brand Barometer is a brand benchmarking tool that assesses how well positioned a firm's brand is today, and for growth in the future. It is used by the most senior leaders within the consulting industry to enable them to assess the potential of their brand and the opportunities for them. The Barometer combines our market-leading client survey methodology with data from our global data model. We then incorporate our deep knowledge of the consulting industry to measure, interpret, and contextualise the impact of a firm's brand—and that of its competitors.

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## Our custom work

In addition to our report programmes, we also provide custom advice and research-led consulting services to the world's biggest and most successful professional services firms, helping them identify the best areas for investment and plan their strategic responses.

Among other things, our work includes:

- Deep market and competitor analysis
- Acquisition strategy
- Proposition strategy and development
- Brand and client sentiment analysis
- Thought leadership and content strategy, development, and review

For more information about any of these, please visit our website or get in touch.