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# INTRODUCTION

Historically, UK energy companies have been highly distrusted businesses. For the past 30 years, ‘the Big Six’ have dominated the market, operating with unfair charges, mis-selling and poor customer treatment (Financial Times, 2013). Following Edelman’s 2014 trust barometer (revealing only 32% trusted the energy sector), regulator Ofgem’s CEO announced: ‘*The industry... cannot go on like this. Competition, with proper protection for the vulnerable, is the best way to restore trust.*’ (Edelman, 2014; Ofgem, 2016).

This report will explore branding’s ability to elicit trust and the problems that arise from consumer trust being undermined.

## OCTOPUS ENERGY

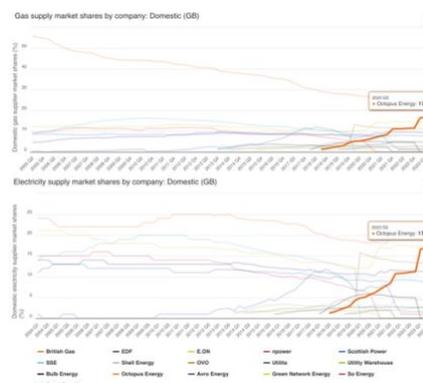
Octopus Energy self-identifies as an independent ‘global clean energy-tech business’ (although its UK operations drive 97.81% of its website traffic), positioned around sustainability, affordability, and transparency (Octopus, 2024; SimilarWeb, 2024).

Its primary differentiator is *transparency*, which is highly appealing to consumers in a traditionally profiteering energy market where 48% presently ‘distrust’ energy companies (National Home Energy Survey, 2023).

Accordingly, despite being younger than five of ‘the Big Six’ (entering the market in 2016) *fig. 1* demonstrates Octopus currently holds the second-largest market share for gas (17.2%) and electricity (17.4%), behind British Gas (28% and 20.4%) (Ofgem, 2024).

**Fig. 1: Octopus currently holds the second-largest market share for gas and electricity, behind British Gas.**

Supplier	Market Share (%)
British Gas	24.2
Octopus	17.3
E.ON	15.6
OVO	12.1
EDF	10.2
Scottish Power	8.1



## IDENTITY, VALUES, PERSONALITY & STRATEGY

Octopus’ brand identity may be defined as sustainable, responsible, compassionate and *trustworthy*. This is attributed to both its market positioning and brand personality, which *co-create* consumer perceptions of identity (Rajagopal, 2008).

Its mission characterises its positioning: ‘to drive the global energy revolution’ by ‘bringing affordable green energy to the world’ (Octopus, 2024). Its personality is cheerful, good-natured and approachable: demonstrated by an optimistic tone, colloquial, easily understood language, octopus emojis and ‘love and power’ sign-offs in communications (fig.2).

**Fig.2: Octopus’ personality is cheerful, good-natured, and approachable.**

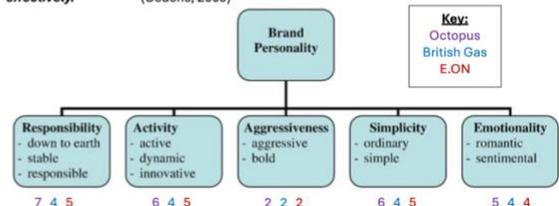


Within Aaker’s personality model, Octopus would be categorised as ‘sincere’ (Aaker, 1997). However, most major competitors within the energy sector would categorise as such – figs.3-4 illustrate how Geuens’ model defines Octopus’ differentiating values more effectively since Aaker’s model does not permit within-category discrimination (Geuens, 2009).

**Fig.3: Octopus’ transparency, honesty, optimism, and friendliness in communications categorises as a ‘sincere’ brand personality.** (Aaker, 1997)

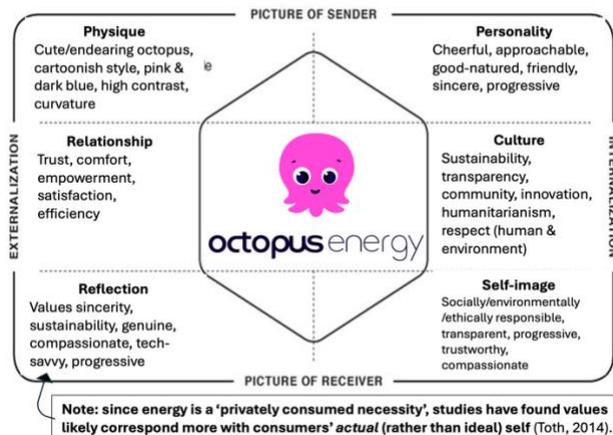


**Fig.4: As Geuens’ model permits within-category trait discrimination (using a seven-point Likert scale), it illustrates Octopus’ differentiating values against competitors more effectively.** (Geuens, 2009)



Aligning with self-congruity theory, Octopus likely attracts consumers with ‘agreeable’ personality types that value sincerity, sustainability and compassion since customers are ‘more positively disposed towards brands’ whose personalities and value systems reflect their own’ (Solomon, 2013; Dolich, 1969).

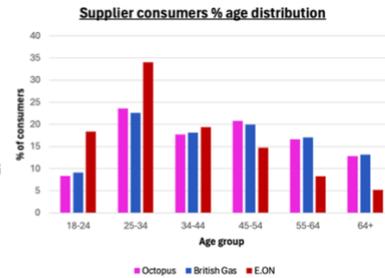
**Fig.4.1: Octopus’ brand identity prism** (Kapferer, 1992)



Octopus’ progressive values and identity suggest its target segment is a younger demographic. However, although Octopus does not publish consumer data, fig.5

suggests *psychological* factors (values) hold more importance than demographics in target segmentation.

**Fig.5: SimilarWeb data reveals 18-35 year-olds occupy a similar proportion of their customer base to other competitors. This indicates psychological factors are more important than age demographic in its consumer segment.**  
(Data source: SimilarWeb, 2024)



Strategically, Octopus’ *sustainable* and *affordable* positioning is effective, evident from an IPSOS UK poll (finding 51% wanted to contribute more to sustainability but could not afford to) and competitors’ widespread echoing of Octopus’ ‘sustainability’ positioning (fig.6) (IPSOS, 2023).

Supplier	Mission Statement	Positioning
British Gas	We're on a mission <b>to make homes more sustainable</b>	Traditional, Established, Reliable
Octopus	To <b>drive the global green energy revolution</b> by bringing affordable green energy to the world	<b>Sustainable</b> , Affordable, Trustworthy
E.ON	To provide the energy that powers and empowers communities	<b>Sustainable</b> , Reliable, Innovative
OVO	Powering human progress with <b>clean affordable energy for everyone</b>	<b>Sustainable</b> , Innovative, Customer-centric
Scottish Power	To deliver a better future, quicker for everyone	<b>Renewable</b> , Reliable, Customer-centric
EDF	To <b>bring a net zero energy future</b> with electricity and innovative solutions and services	<b>Sustainable</b> , Reliable, Nuclear powered
SSE	To provide the energy needed today while building a better world of energy for tomorrow / <b>to be a leading energy company in a net zero world</b>	<b>Renewable</b> , Customer-centric, Community-focused

However, Octopus’ sustainable identity is arguably stronger than competitors’: it has *always* been Octopus’ mission (and is intrinsic to its name and logo), whilst competitors have more recently adopted it in line with cultural trends. Successful *long-standing* brands culminate from *sustained* positioning rather than ‘embracing the trend’ as steadfast positioning leads customers to perceive brands as consistent and *distinctive* (Muntenau, 2015).

Octopus’ competitive advantage is customer service, an appealing differentiation for agreeable consumers within a historically distrusted industry. Figs.7-8 evidence Octopus’ customer service quality (which is ‘significantly positively linked’ to trust and loyalty) is *significantly better* than competitors, and trust-related credentials showcased on its website elicit credibility (Akbar, 2009).

**Fig.7: Octopus' customer service quality is significantly better than competitors.**



**Fig.8: Octopus showcases trust-related credentials on its website to elicit credibility.**



Philanthropic initiatives reinforce customers' perceptions: it actively highlights financial aid options in communications (*fig.9*), and it absorbed £150M of costs on customers' behalf rather than profit in 2022 (Octopus, 2022). Consumer perceptions of a brand as 'philanthropic' strengthen brand identification and *trust* in brand intentions (Siddiqui, 2023).

**Fig.9: Octopus actively highlights financial aid options in communications, which competitors tend to conceal.**



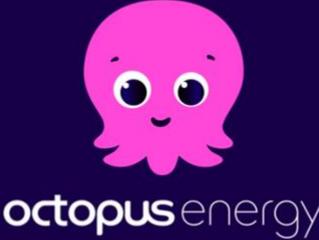
**Left:** Octopus TikTok showcasing of financial aid options on an unrelated video  
**Right:** CEO Greg Jackson: "There are so many ways we can help, from **credits on your bill**, to **debt repayment plans**, to **standing charge holidays**... sending you **free electric blankets**, saving hundreds of pounds on your heating bills so you can stay warm and safe."

However, Octopus' sincere personality exposes a *vulnerability*: when promises from a 'sincere' brand are broken, Aaker found that 'relationship strength and trust plummets', and vastly increases the likelihood of customer conversion (Aaker, 2004).

## VISUAL IDENTITY

Octopus' cute, cartoon-style octopus logo materialises its name, personality, and differential values (*fig. 10*). Visual elements' intrinsic linking of cognitive and affective information establishes a strong visual identity in consumers' minds and effectively informs consumers of the feeling and effect of using the service (Malik, 2015).

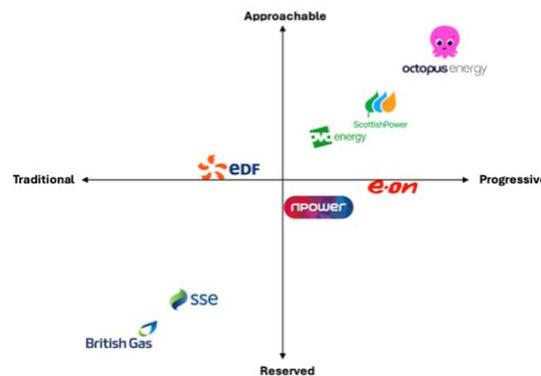
Fig. 10: Octopus Energy logo

<p><b>AFFECTIVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Anthropomorphism</b> Encourages <i>human</i> characteristic attribution, enhances memorability and brand attachment</li> <li>• <b>Colour harmony</b> complementary colours (pink/navy, black/white) produce subconscious feelings of satisfaction (Arknil, 2015)</li> <li>• <b>Gentle line curvature</b> visually comforting, cognitively evokes the natural world (Mazzalovo, 2012)</li> <li>• <b>Human-like eyes</b> enhances cooperative behaviour and increases contribution to the public good – a desire of the target segment (Burnham, 2007)</li> </ul>		<p><b>COGNITIVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Geometrically simple forms/font</b> (gothic, sans-serif) evokes associations with efficiency and clarity of energy use, customer service and communications</li> <li>• <b>High contrast</b> Improves information perception: we are more attuned to colour <i>differences</i> than 'absolute' colours (Arknil, 2015)</li> <li>• <b>Iconogram</b> naturalistic animal representation, evokes sustainability</li> </ul>
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Its ‘cuteness’, conveyed by big eyes and rounded lines, connotes friendliness and trustworthiness and evokes empathy and familiarity through providing a ‘friendly and accessible *face* to the public’ (Sinha, 2015). Anthropomorphism significantly enhances affective associations and emotional brand attachment (augmenting the attribution of *human* characteristics, particularly *feelings*, to the brand), enhancing memorability and recognition (Ma, 2021). Beneficially, its anthropomorphism shields its vulnerability – anthropomorphic agents have a higher resistance to breakdowns in trust (Visser, 2016).

Notably, Octopus’ visual identity prioritises *contrast* over familiarity: in its highly contrasting colour scheme, and its relativity against competitors (as demonstrated by fig. 11).

Fig. 11: Octopus’ visual identity prioritises contrast over familiarity.



Firstly, Octopus has the most progressive and approachable logo. This appeals to its target segment (progressive, desiring compassion) and differentiates it from ‘Big Six’ competitors (*particularly* the market leader). Secondly, aligning with semiotics theory, whilst competitors attempt to evoke sustainability through using the colour green to signify the environment, Octopus (the *only* anamorphic brand) uniquely signifies this through anthropomorphism.

In a hyper-competitive market of similar-commodity brands, ‘successful differentiation requires emphasis on *uniqueness* rather than commoditisation’ (Munteanu, 2015). Focus on *contrast* in its visual identity reinforces customers’ perception of them as ‘different’ from longer-standing competitors, whilst providing differentiation. This is further reinforced by it being the only site to have a non-white background across owned channels.

# COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

Although its slogan reinforces its positioning ('cheaper, greener energy'), most of its communications focus on customer-centricity. This is advantageous because whilst its affordability/sustainability-focused slogan heightens appeal to customers in the *consideration* stage of McKinsey's consumer decision journey; focus on customer-centricity elicits consumer trust and increases the likelihood of customers' retention in the *loyalty* stage (Court, 2009).

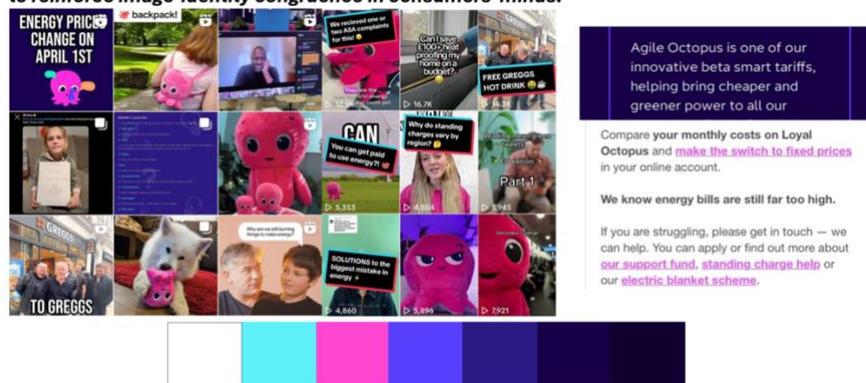
Its voice appears helpful, optimistic and informative, focused on *consumers'* benefits across all channels, informing educational content and tips on how to reduce energy consumption. Responses to customers are consistently fast across social media, effective for consumer perceptions of reliability considering 'difficulty getting in contact' was the top reason for dissatisfaction in 2023 (Ofgem, 2024).

They elicit trust by using their CEO to personally record videos promoting financial aid options and news (fig. 9), and his email is suggested on their website (Octopus, 2024). Direct engagement with shareholders helps humanise the brand, aligning with Octopus' brand identity by demonstrating transparency, philanthropy and social responsibility (Siddiqui, 2023).

All channels feature visual Octopus-associated elements to reinforce image-identity congruence in consumers' minds, which promotes affective associations and enhances brand loyalty (Nandan, 2005). This effectively elicits consumer trust as communication consistency across IMC channels has a strong direct impact on brand trust and loyalty (Seric, 2020). This is essential since the product is intangible, and tangible representations of an intangible product *reduce* consumers' perceptions of intangibility, increasing *perceived* understanding (Abadi, 2020).

Across visual-based channels (Instagram, TikTok), Octopus' colour palette, logo and 'plushie' are used in conjunction with content to perform this (fig. 12). Text-based channels (emails, website) evoke imagery through personification ('loyal/flexible/agile octopus' tariffs) and leveraging their colour scheme (fig. 13).

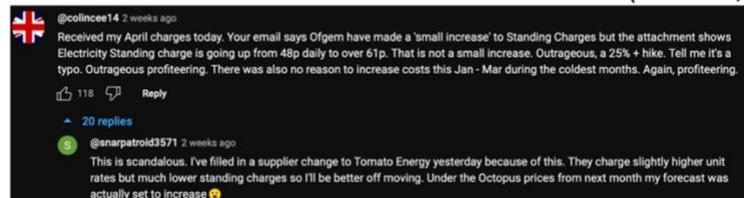
**Fig. 12: (Left) Octopus' colour palette, logo and 'plushie' are used on Instagram and TikTok to reinforce image-identity congruence in consumers' minds.**



**Fig. 13: (Right) Text-based channels evoke imagery through personification and colour. Tariffs: 'Agile Octopus'; 'Loyal Octopus'; 'Flexible Octopus'**

However, customers *could* perceive Octopus’ slogan as dishonest: they *aren’t* always the cheapest of competitors. Its tariffs *are* the cheapest, however, its unit prices can be considerably higher. *Fig. 14* demonstrates Aaker’s ‘problem’: the result of a sincere personality breaking trust is customer conversion, which risks diminishing Octopus’ revenue and equity. Accordingly, altering Octopus’ slogan to ‘*fairer, greener energy*’ is recommended.

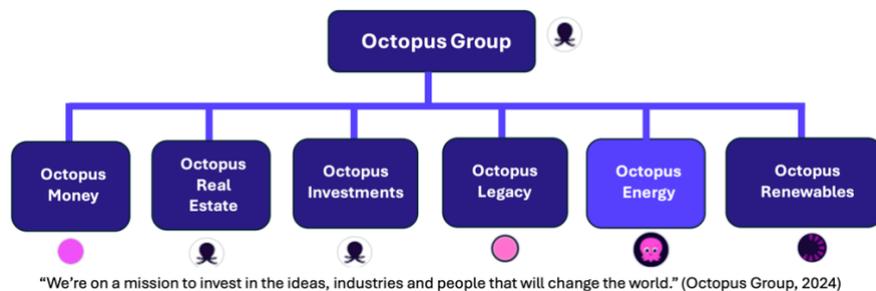
**Fig. 14: an ex-customer converted from octopus due to outrage over price transparency.** (YouTube, 2014)



## BRAND ARCHITECTURE AND EQUITY

Octopus is positioned as a brand extension within the Octopus Group, specialising in financial services (*fig. 15*).

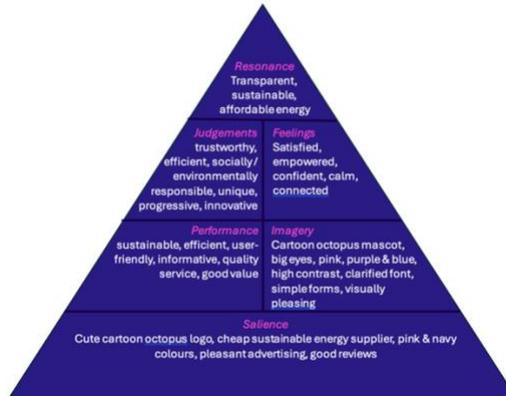
**Fig. 15: Octopus Energy is a brand extension within the Octopus Group.**



Its alignment with the group’s altruistic mission and businesses reinforces its credibility and brand equity (trustworthiness), whilst maximising awareness among other parent-associated investors, augmenting the group’s financial equity and market expansion (Octopus Group, 2024). Critically, its branded house architecture facilitates its unique ‘affordability’ differentiator: leveraging the group’s financial resources (to absorb rising wholesale energy costs) enables Octopus’ competitive pricing. The group also benefits in equity from *Energy’s* positive customer perceptions and awareness through linkages in name and visual identity (colour and symbolism), which create a ‘value-halo’ extending to *other* branded house businesses (Pitta, 1995).

Keller’s consumer-based brand equity model (*fig. 16*) demonstrates the main determinants of Octopus’ customer equity are *transparency*, sustainability and affordability (Keller, 1993). Octopus’ CBBE lies in quality service, eliciting feelings of satisfaction and judgements of trust – which has a direct positive effect on CBBE (Torres, 2011).

**Fig.16: Keller's CBBE model** (Keller, 1993)



However, CBBE fluctuates with consumers’ value perception – if its sources of equity (trust, quality service and affordability) are undermined, customer-based equity weakens. *Fig. 17* demonstrates Octopus’ complaints-handling quality *fluctuates*, and thus is an equity risk to itself *and* the group. Therefore, *additional* investment in customer service is recommended to reduce the risk of conversion due to this.

**Fig. 17: although highest-ranked, Octopus’ complaints-handling quality fluctuates, and thus is an equity risk to itself and the group.** (Octopus, 2024)

Reporting period	Complaints received	Complaints resolved per 100k customer accounts	Complaints resolved per 100k customer accounts	Resolved the same or better than last working day	Resolved in 4 weeks	
Q1 2020	1488	442	10837	417	62%	94%
Q2 2020	1286	475	12892	471	66%	93%
Q3 2020	8857	566	16779	567	64%	93%
Q4 2020	16632	507	16250	490	59%	92%
Q1 2021	10287	486	17864	481	57%	89%
Q2 2021	23001	583	22615	554	58%	88%
Q3 2021	23058	575	24319	558	58%	88%
Q4 2021	28725	580	26468	574	56%	87%
Q1 2022	27654	648	35153	605	56%	88%
Q2 2022	28862	662	39872	679	59%	87%
Q3 2022	48622	823	45284	788	58%	87%
Q4 2022	63053	1040	65406	1046	58%	86%
Q1 2023	68619	1190	69964	1101	68%	87%
Q2 2023	73333	1126	75328	1107	71%	90%
Q3 2023	102275	1183	97206	1046	63%	83%
Q4 2023	10197	1142	104126	1079	64%	84%

## CONCLUSION

Octopus elicits trust through its sincere personality, approachable logo, unique visual identity (highlighting *contrast* with traditionally distrusted competitors) and service quality competitive advantage. Its CBBE is rooted in transparency; however, this intensifies pressure to *maintain trust* due to the increased risk of customer conversion if trust is broken. Accordingly, Octopus should alter its slogan (to ‘*fairer, greener energy*’) and increase customer service investment to consolidate its transparency, reinforce CBBE, and improve customer retention.

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