THE CREDIBILITY DIVIDE: READER TRUST OF ONLINE NEWSPAPERS AND BLOGS

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If news organizations hope to keep readers, they must remain credible in the eyes of media consumers. This study considers how different online news formats can affect the perceived credibility of a news medium. Three news media were considered: online newspaper, journalist blog, non-journalist blog. Using an experiment, the researchers studied the effects of media use, media dependency, and political interest on the perceived credibility of a news medium. This study also discusses whether exposure to a medium that is primarily institutional is perceived as more or less credible than a news medium that appears more individualistic. Results showed that media use, dependency and political interest were not statistically significant predictors of credibility, but the non-journalist blog was found more credible than the other two media. The statistical significance might be explained by the non-journalist's blog's lack of attachment to an institution.

Keywords: credibility, media dependency, blogs, Internet news, media use

From new babies and local news to personal digestive abnormalities and celebrity gossip, media junkies record nearly every instant of their lives on the Internet. They preserve that information on social networking sites such as blogs, Twitter, and Facebook.

News organizations have plastered their Web sites with blog links. From 2004 to 2005, the number of online newspapers that hosted blogs nearly doubled (Lowrey & Mackay, 2006). Many journalists have their own blogs, which emphasize local issues. Some journalist blogs are more opinionated than others, but regardless of how they are worded,

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they often grant readers a more personal account of the news (Singer, 2005). The stylistic qualities of blogs conflict with tried and true American journalism mandates. Old-fashioned grammar rules are heaved aside as journalists write in the first person and ask unanswered questions (Robinson, 2006).

With blogs cluttering the Internet along with scores of stories derived from more traditional news staffs, the Internet has fashioned an information democracy. Readers mingle between the various types of blogs, social media sites and more traditional news sites as millions of news providers vie to be noticed. Some research has suggested that social media sites are becoming increasingly important information sources as some individuals abandon the blog world to pursue other social media options such as Twitter (Lowrey, 2011; Kopytoff, 2011; Zickukr, 2010; Pew, 2010) .

The plethora of information sources raises some questions regarding information credibility. How is one to know which online information sources are reliable? Previous research has suggested that readers are less likely to pay attention to information that they do not believe (Gaziano, 1988). Therefore, credibility may be an important factor for new media survival.

This study delves into the credibility of new media. The researchers used an experiment to study how readers evaluate the credibility of a traditional online newspaper in comparison to a journalist blog and a blog written by a non-journalist. The primary goal was to understand whether one medium is considered more credible than the others. The researchers also studied whether media use or media dependency predicts how an individual rates the credibility of a news source. It is hoped that this study will provide journalists and scholars better understanding of how audiences view credibility. Perhaps that knowledge will help news organizations to discover the best methods for marketing themselves and surviving the new journalism paradigm.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Credibility

Credible sources, or publications, are important to readers (Kaufman, Stasson & Hart, 1999). Hovland and Weiss (1951) found that information from a highly credible source is more believable. Two types of media credibility have traditionally been studied. Source credibility considers the trustworthiness of an individual who constructed a message (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Medium credibility evaluates the overall credibility of a larger entity, such as a local television news station or a newspaper (Gaziaon & McGrath, 1986). This paper is primarily concerned with medium credibility.

Much of the existing Internet credibility research has compared online newspapers to more traditional news formats. The studies have produced mixed results with some research indicating that online media are more credible than more traditional media, while other research suggests that online media are less credible.

Internet Credibility

Choi, Watt, and Lynch (2006) found that personal preferences can affect the perceived credibility of the Internet. Individuals who were opposed to the Iraq war were more likely to view the Internet as less supportive of the government and more credible than individuals who advocated the war. Likewise, Golan and Kiousis (2010) found a relationship between an individual's religiosity and the credibility of the media. Those who had a higher religiosity found the news media more credible than those with lower religiosity. Other personal characteristics have been connected to medium credibility. Melican and Dixon (2008) found that participants who rated nontraditional Internet sources as more credible than traditional news sources also acquired a higher racism score. The researchers argued that nontraditional Web media offer individuals the opportunity to seek out information that agrees with their own ideologies.

Research has shown that age affects credibility attitudes. Bucy (2003) found that college students deemed television news and online news more credible than older media consumers. Older participants, however, found online news to be more credible than television news. Meyer, Marchionni and Thorson (2010) suggested that the perceived skill of the journalist was a strong predictor of the credibility of a message as well the organization. They also suggested that the skill level of the journalist was evaluated through the relationship between the reporter and audience members.

Some credibility research has looked at the specific aspects of online news sites. Flanagin and Metzger (2000) studied credibility across four types of websites. Their study suggested that web credibility may be related to aspects of the sites such as the genre and design: "It is likely that high perceived credibility would result under situations with well-designed, reputable genres of sites, containing highly salient and involving messages of low persuasive intent, viewed by individuals with heavy web reliance and experience" (p. 21). They also suggested that the characteristics of a message and the audience may affect the perception of credibility. Websites affiliated with a news organization were considered most credible while personal sites were evaluated as the least credible. Greer compared the credibility of a highly credible and recognizable online news source, Nytimes.com (the online version of *The New York Times*), to a personal Web page (Greer, 2003). Participants saw either Nytimes.com or the less credible source and rated the credibility of a news story on the page. The Nytimes.com was judged as the most credible, but the difference was not

statistically significant. Participants also rated the credibility of advertisements on the Web sites. There did not appear to be a relationship between the credibility of the advertisement and the credibility of the news source. Lowrey found that online news credibility was not affected by story design (Lowrey, 2004). One group of participants rated the credibility of a news story written in a traditional, linear style. The other participants read a news story that was in a non-linear online format, which allowed participants to jump from one part of the story to another via hyperlinks. The influence of ownership on credibility also has been tested with radio audiences.

Blog Credibility

Those who depend more on blogs more find the medium more credible (Trammell, Porter, Chung & Kim, 2006). In addition, research suggests that bloggers value having credible information (Perlmutter & Schoen, 2007). Johnson and Kaye (2004) found that bloggers tend to find blogs more credible than other media. The study participants recognized that blogs may not be accurate, and most said that blogs were not fair; nonetheless, blogs were preferred over other types of online media. Users who relied on blogs more judged them to be more credible. Schweiger (2000) found that German audiences find the Internet about as credible as television and newspapers. Viewers were more like to believe information from the Web if they used it more frequently and if they had been Internet users for a longer period of time.

Kaye (2005) found that blog readers usually are young, well-educated males. People view blogs for information, convenience, entertainment, political and social surveillance, and interacting with others. Another study suggested that people blog for creative expression and to document their personal life (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Kelleher and Miller (2006) found that blogs were more conversational. That conversational voice correlated with several variables including trust and satisfaction. The authors argued that when blogs are used by organizations, they might help the organization to build and preserve relationships.

Thorson, Vraga, and Ekdale (2010) looked at how credibility is affected by the context information surrounding a news story. They found that news stories were perceived as more credible when they were surrounding by blog posts that used rude or uncivil comments than when the news story was accompanied by a more neutral blog post.

Political Interest and Media Credibility

Johnson and Kaye (1998) examined how individuals who use the Internet for political information judged the credibility of several news media, including the Internet, as well as

candidate paraphernalia. They found online media more credible than more traditional media, and credibility was associated more with readers' reliance on the Web than with how much readers use the medium. Johnson and Kaye (2002) also found that online newspapers and news magazines were highly credible. The same researchers looked at politically interested Internet users to study the perceived credibility of online information during the 2004 presidential election. Participants perceived online media to be moderately credible, as blogs and online newspapers were considered more credible than cable news or online broadcast news. Advertising research, on the other hand, suggests that individuals find advertising online less credible than advertising that is published through other media, such as television and newspapers (Soh, Reid, & White, 2007). In another study, Kim and Johnson (2009) studied politically interested online media consumers during the 2004 election in South Korea. They found that online newspapers that were not affiliated with a mainstream media institution were more credible for political information than other online news media or traditional media. Exposure to a particular media can increase the credibility of that medium, according to Meader, Whaley, & Dozier (2010). The study found that participates with high levels of exposure to *The Daily Show* were more likely to find the show as credible or more credible than most traditional news providers.

Credibility and Institutionalization

Limited research has looked specifically at how the affiliation to an institution may affect the perceived credibility of the news media. In their study of politically interested Internet users in South Korea, Kim and Johnson (2009) found media that were unaffiliated with a mainstream organization were perceived as more credible than those media that were connected to an institution. Newhagen and Nass (1989) found that audiences perceived television broadcasters as more credible than newspaper journalists. The researchers argued that the two groups were judged differently because the newspaper journalists were seen as faceless members of an institution whereas the television journalists were judged by their on-camera personas: "Differences in the nature of the media themselves, and how information from them is perceived, may lead to different information processing strategies" (p. 284).

Media Dependency

Media Dependency Theory suggests that people have become more dependent on the media as their lives became more complex (Merskin, 1999). Dependency occurs when one

entity's satisfaction depends on the resources of another (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). The theory suggests that when individuals have moved into cities, civic group participation, church, and family became less central to their lives. Individuals' ability to fulfill their goals depends on the resources provided by the media (Ball-Rokeach, & DeFleur, 1976).

There are two levels of relationships that individuals can have with the media. In a macro relationship, individuals become dependent on institutions. Their dependency ebbs and flows in accordance with the stability of those social and media institutions. Micro-media dependency theory considers individuals relationships with communication messages. It suggests that individuals that are more dependent on a particular message are more likely to allow the message to alter their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Dependency can be measured by asking participants how helpful they find a medium (Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1993).

The degree to which an individual is dependent on the media can be influenced by the goals that individuals have in using the media. Much dependency research has focused on the individual's need for comprehending society and him or herself, orientation regarding specific, and entertainment or escape. Riffe, Lacy, and Varouhakis (2008) found that people often depend on the Internet for in-depth information. Participants preferred the Internet to magazine, books and human interaction when they sought detailed information. The effects of media dependency are often tested via demographic and social characteristics. Halpern (1994) found that more highly educated people are less dependent on government-controlled media in Chile. Research suggests that demographics are related to the strength of media dependencies and dependency effects. More highly educated individuals tend to be less reliant on attaining information from the media. Studies show that age also is related to dependency.

Jakob (2010) found that individuals who are more dependent on the media tend to trust them more than those who are less dependent on the media. On the other hand, individuals who use alternative media sources feel less dependent on the media than those who do not use alternative sources. In another alternative media study, researchers found that consumers who were dependent on black newspapers trusted cancer coverage from mainstream newspapers and the Internet less than they did black newspapers. Recent research has considered dependency on the Internet. Mitchell and Beard (2010) found that Internet dependency rarely evolves into addiction, and the study also suggested that college students have moderate Internet dependency.

Yang and Patwardhan (2004) found that perceived credibility and dependency help explain how people use Internet current affairs news. Those who receive current affairs news from the Internet tend to depend on the Web more for that type of information. They also perceive Internet news as more credible. In their study of politically interested web users, Kim and Johnson (2009) found that those who relied on newspapers perceived

independent web newspapers as less credible than those who were relied less on newspapers.

HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary emphasis of this study is to understand how online media credibility is tied to individual factors. This study proposes that credibility can be affected by one's dependency and use of a medium. The research also considers whether other factors might affect the perceived credibility of a medium.

To gain a better understanding of online news credibility overall, this study looks at three types of media: online news produced by a newspaper; a blog created by a journalist; and a blog written by a non-journalist, which will be referred to as the citizen's blog. These media were selected because they represent different levels of institutional establishments. The online newspaper has a clear relationship to an institution, in essence, it virtually represents an institution. The journalists who write stories are part of that institution. The journalist blog also has a clear association to the institution, because the journalist is writing on behalf of the institution, but as blogs are individualized and more personal, that relationship is a bit softer than the institutional relationship posed by the online newspaper. The citizen's blog has no institutional affiliation. It represents a medium that is independent, thus the writer has more flexibility in what he chooses to publish.

Research has shown diverse results regarding media use of Internet media and credibility. Jakob (2010) suggested that people who depend more on the media are more likely to trust it more than people with less dependency. Research has suggested that people who frequently use blogs were more likely to consider the medium more credible. Likewise, Len-Rios, Cohen and Caburnay (2010) found that individuals who were more dependent on alternative publications were more likely to trust topic specific content from those alternative publications than they were to trust coverage from mainstream publications. Classic studies also suggest that there is a relationship between media use and credibility (Westley & Severin, 1964). Other research suggests that Internet reliance rather than media use is a stronger predictor of online media credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 2004).

Drawing from classic literature as well as the findings of some more research, the following hypotheses are posed:

H1a: Frequency of medium use will be positively related to the perceived credibility of the medium.

H1b: Level of dependency on the medium will be related to the perceived credibility of the medium.

Political involvement has been correlated with an interest in blogs. Kaye (2005) found that political involvement predicted an individual's motivation to use blogs. Johnson and Kaye (2002) found that some political attitudes predict credibility. To build from those findings, the following hypothesis was posed:

> H2: Politically involved individuals will find media more credible than those who are less politically involved.

The degree of institutional association also can affect credibility. Newhagen and Nass (1989) argued that people often find television news journalists to be more credible than newspaper journalists because they see television journalists as individuals. Newspaper reporters are more faceless, and therefore, seem to represent the collective institution.

A similar argument could be made for the relationship between bloggers as compared to newspaper journalists. A citizen-blogger is thought to be totally independent of any institution. He/she is free to publish at will. A newspaper journalist, however, is at the mercy of the institution. The journalist is part of the collective, whereas the blogger is a loner. For the purposes of this study, it would follow that the online newspaper would be considered the most institutional, and therefore the least credible of the news sources. The journalist blog would be slightly less institutional, but still has an institutional affiliation that would make him/her appear less credible. The citizen blog has no institutional affiliation, thus representing the most credible source.

Another argument could be made, however. One could argue that the most institutional news medium, the online newspaper, would be perceived as the most credible because it has an organization standing behind it. That organization not only has resources, it can also institute a system of checks and balances to ensure that the published material is credible. The journalist blog also would be subjected to those checks and balances, so it also would be credible. The citizen blog, however, is missing that organizational system. That could weaken the perceived credibility of the medium.

Because two strong arguments can be made regarding the relationship of the institution to the medium, the following research question was posed:

> RQ1: How does exposure to a medium that is primarily institutional or primarily individual affect the perceived credibility of a medium?

METHODOLOGY

An experiment was designed to test the credibility of different types of online news formats. The 138 participants were recruited from introductory mass communication classes

at a university in the southeastern United States, and they were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: online newspaper, journalist's blog, or citizen's blog. About 34% (47) of participants were assigned to the online newspaper condition, 27.5% (38) to the journalist's blog, and 38.4% (53) to the citizen's blog. Among the participants, 23.2% were male and 76.8% female. There were 4.3% communication study majors, 5.1% telecommunication, 15.2% advertising, 18.1% journalism, 24.6% some other major, 31.9% public relations.

Stimuli

The researcher wrote four blog-style news stories. The way the stories were written did not change across the three experimental conditions. Because the writing style did not change between the blogs and the news site, it was felt the story style needed to strike a balance between the informal tone of the blog posting and the more formal tone of the news story. The stories were, therefore, written more conversationally than a traditional news story. The stimuli were based on actual news stories, and the stories contained no quotes. The following passage is an excerpt:

Food Fight

A little lettuce turned a quiet nursing home lunch into an elderly barroom brawl.
Police said 86-year-old William Hocker became frustrated when fellow Spring Haven Retirement Community resident Lee Thoss, 62, was sifting through the lettuce at the salad bar.
Hocker told the 62-year-old that folks did not want to eat the food that he had been toying with. The conversation was followed by colorful language, a yelling match, and a round of punches . . .

Three mock Web sites were developed to house the stories, and these were loaded onto computers in a research lab (but not placed on a public server). Two of the sites were made to look like traditional news sites created by a news organization, and one site was intended to look like an individual's site. This was done in order to test for effects from perceived institutional attachment as stated in RQ1. The traditional online news site was called *The Daily News*. The site contained a number of fake links, which appeared to link to news stories. A menu bar on the left side of the page appeared to contain links to various parts of the newspaper, such as the features and sports sections. The only operating links on the page connected participants to the four blog-style news stories, and these links were

Figure 1: The traditional news site story page

listed at the top of the Web page to make it easier for participants to navigate the site. The page also included an advertisement, to make the page appear more like a legitimate online news site.

The links to the stories included only the first sentence of the story, and participants were required to click on each story link on *The Daily News* Web site home page to load and read the stories. Each linked story page included the text of the story, the newspaper banner, and menu bar on the left, containing non-operational linked buttons to other sections of the newspaper (Figure 1).

The journalist's blog was designed to look as though it was affiliated with a newspaper called *The Daily News* (Figure 2). The page included a banner bearing the newspaper name, and a menu on the left, containing non-operational links to other sections of the newspaper. An information box near the top of the page explained that the blog was written by an editor for *The Daily News*. The remainder of the page was the text of the four

Figure 2: The editor's blog page

news stories, which took the form of blog postings on this site (though again, the text was identical to the stories on the news site). Each posting contained a date creating the illusion that each posting had been published on a separate day. The blog postings contained non-operational links that would have allowed readers to post commentary related to the story.

The citizen's blog was designed to look as though it was not affiliated with any organization (Figure 3). It appeared to be non-professional. The page was called *The Newshound's Blog.* The four blog stories were presented in a format similar to the journalist's blog in that they contained non-operational links to post commentary, appeared to be published on different days, etc. The visual design differed however, to reflect the non-institutional environment. Participants were instructed to access the stimuli materials by clicking on a desktop icon that took them to a mock blog directory page. Participants were told to click on the site that linked to The Newshound's Blog. The link to the blog was the only operational link on the page. This page also included an ad.

Participants in each experimental condition received a survey packet. The first page of the packet provided directions on how to view the stimuli materials, and the directions

Figure 3: The citizen's blog page

varied slightly depending on the participant's assigned condition. The remainder of the survey was the same across all conditions. The participant answered the first half of the survey before viewing the stimuli materials, and then the participant clicked on an icon called "Credibility" on a computer's desktop and read the blogs/stories. The last half of the survey was completed after the Web site was closed.

Survey Measures

The first 12 open-ended questions evaluated the participant's use of media. Participants were asked how many days per week and how many hours per week they used the newspaper, Internet news sites (not including blogs), blogs, radio, television, and magazines. The next set of questions measured the participant's familiarity with each medium, using a scale of 1 to 5 (this measure was not used to assess hypotheses but was used in a follow-up analysis). Dependency was measured by asking participants to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, how much they depend on each medium for information. Participants also

were asked to rate the credibility (believability) of each medium using a scale of 1 to 5. This measure, which appeared on the pretest, assessed perception of media types in general and was not in response to experimental stimuli.

After reading all of the stories/blog entries, the participant rated the credibility of the news medium they viewed — the study's dependent variable — using Gaziano's News Credibility Scale (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). The semantic differential scale asked participants to rate thirteen aspects of news medium that they viewed from 1 to 5: fairness, bias, telling the whole story, accuracy, invading privacy, watching after the reader's interests, concern for community well-being, separation of fact and opinion, trust, concern for the public interest, factual, well-trained journalists.

Participants also responded to demographic questions and were asked how strongly they identified with their political preference and how interested they were in politics in general using a 5-point scale from "weakly" to "strongly."

RESULTS

Several survey items were combined to develop overall scores for the variables of interest. The main dependent variable, credibility, was calculated by summing the participants' scores across the News Credibility Scale (*alpha = .83*). The participant's use of the medium was calculated by multiplying the number of hours spent using the medium viewed for the experiment by the days per week spent with the medium. The participant's political interest was calculated by summing the participants' responses to an item that asked how strongly they identified with their political preference and a question that asked how interested they were in politics in general (*alpha = .72*). Perception of overall media credibility was calculated by summing participant responses to a series of questions that asked them to state how believable they find several individual media (newspaper, Internet, blogs, radio, television, and magazines). Again, these questions were asked prior to showing participants the websites.

Hypothesis 1A predicted that the frequency of the medium use would have a positive relationship to the perceived credibility of the medium. Hypothesis 1B predicted that a participant's dependency on a medium would be related to the perceived credibility of the medium. The relationships were tested using linear regressions controlling for the participant's dependency on the medium viewed (when use was the key predictor), frequency of use (when dependency was the key predictor), strength of the participant's political interest, and the participant's overall assessment of the media's credibility (as these variables have proved predictive in previous studies). Neither hypothesis was supported. There was a statistically significant relationship between the perceived credibility of media

Table 1
Perception of credibility for three Web site treatments regressed on predictors

	Online Newspaper Credibility (N = 47)	Journalist's Blog Credibility (N = 38)	Citizen's Blog Credibility (N = 53)
Political involvement	.031	-.292	-.116
	(.030)	(-.274)	(-.112)
Hours using medium each week	-.109	.030	.411*
	(-.108)	(.031)	(.344)
Overall media credibility	-.157	.059	-.034
	(-.147)	(.058)	(-.031)
Dependency	.122	-.309	.048
	(.116)	(-.280)	(.048)
R-Square	.04	.35	.375

Statistics are beta coefficients and partial regression coefficients in parentheses.
*indicates statistical significance

overall and the total credibility on the citizen's blog stimuli, however (beta = .41, p = .01) (See Table 1).

The research question asked if exposure to a medium that was connected to a media institution would affect stimulus credibility. The relationships were tested with an ANOVA, and the relationship was found to be insignificant among the three formats. As a follow-up test, credibility scores of the two blogging formats — the journalist blog and the citizen blog — were combined and compared to the credibility of the news sites. A t-test was conducted, and the relationship was statistically significant, $t(138)$ = -2.04, p=.044. The mean credibility score for the blogs was 35.5 and the mean credibility score of the news site was 32.9. The mean score of the journalist blog (35.7) was slightly higher than the mean score of the citizen's blog (35.4).

Hypothesis 2 suggested that politically involved participants would find the online media more credible than the less politically involved, as past studies have suggested this relationship. However, the hypothesis was not supported.

DISCUSSION

The difference between blog credibility and online news credibility scores was striking in this study. This finding supports research by Johnson and Kay (2004), which found that the Internet was perceived as being more credible than more traditional media. The present study suggests audiences are even more willing to accept the believability of the newest media formats. These results contradict findings from Kiousis (2001), which found that people were skeptical of online sources.

Results provide some support for the idea that participants are more trusting of news sources that are less affiliated with an institution. As discussed earlier, Newhagen and Nass (1989) suggested participants tend to trust television journalists more than newspaper journalists because they see television journalists as individuals, whereas newspaper journalists seem to be part of the institutional collective. Audiences may also view bloggers as more personal than staff journalists. Though the editor's blog derived from an institution, the blogging form may have been a stronger cue for readers than the institutional news home-page format they clicked through to reach the blog.

Though participants rated the blog stimuli with a higher credibility score than the more traditional Internet news site, the participants presented different views during the pretest phase. Before viewing the stimuli, participants were asked to rate the credibility of several types of news media on a scale of 1 to 5, blogs were considered the least credible. The most credible medium was the newspaper (*mean = 4.5*). The other means were: television (4.4), magazines (4.2), radio (4.0), Internet news (3.7), news blogs by journalists (2.65) and news blogs by non-journalists (1.7). These results differ slightly from Flanagan & Metzger (2000), who found that the Internet was almost as credible as other news sources. The results, however, are similar to what Kiousis (2001) found. When thinking about media in an abstract and general way, participants reported being skeptical of Internet sources. Once they were actually exposed to the sources, however, they were slightly more trusting of them.

The participants' inexperience with blogs might explain why participants found them less credible before they viewed the experimental stimuli. Participants rated their familiarity with the Internet and television the highest with a mean of 4.8. Their familiarity with blogs, however, was the lowest of the media (2.9). Perhaps the participant's familiarity with the Internet was substantial enough that once they viewed this type of Internet source, they were quick to accept it. Because these participants were college students, they may be somewhat more accustomed to the Internet than older audiences (though this difference by age is diminishing). As mentioned, results might have been different if the study had included older participants, and the study may have yielded stronger relationships if more participants

were included.

One interpretation of this finding is that readers are less trusting of corporations. To combat that issue, news organizations need to place need to develop a more personal relationship with their readers. Reporters need to be viewed as specific people rather than representatives of an large organization. Perhaps one way that journalists and news organizations can do this is by relying on social networking such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google Plus. In the meantime, small entrepreneurial news organizations may have a natural credibility advantage over the established media simply because of their natural separation from large institutions. In short, if credibility is required for news media survival, the new journalism paradigm may revolve around personal relationships between audiences and organizations.

This study did not support some of the findings from other studies, such as Westley and Severin (1964) and Kiousis (2001), which suggested that media use was related to credibility. This study also failed to support findings from several studies, including Yang and Patwardhan's (2004) data, which indicated that dependency was related to credibility. Nonetheless, findings raise some interesting questions about news credibility. Are younger audiences more likely to trust blogs, even without experience with the medium? Are participants unreliable at gauging credibility without looking directly at a news source? It also raises questions regarding the relationship between audiences and media institutions. Future research should explore why consumers question the credibility of media institutions and what organizations can do to increase their credibility in the eyes of their audience.

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