

Media credibility: A triangulation test

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ABSTRACT

Understanding credibility is crucial for newspapers to produce reliable-effectual content. In the present study, credibility of news articles is evaluated using three frames—media, message and source. To test interdependencies among these three credibility frames, a triangulation experiment involving content analysis and questionnaire was conducted with 102 articles (on 34 topics) sourced from three English newspapers published from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. As many as 306 readers evaluated the credibilities of these articles. Test results showed that there was a significant difference in media, message and source credibilities of the chosen three newspapers. Credibility factors, however, did not depend on gender of the readers but had significant relationships with their age and education. Message credibility was positively associated with both source and media credibilities. However, there was no correlation between media credibility and source credibility, indicating that news sources did not affect the overall perception about trustworthiness of newspaper.

Keywords: Media credibility, message credibility, source credibility, newspaper, experiment.

INTRODUCTION

Though online social media is emerging as a peremptory source of information-sharing (Weeks et al., 2017; Kümpel et al., 2015), its sluggish standards with regard to veracity of messages (Mitra et al., 2017) make credibility a decisive factor that differentiates traditional media, rated with more trustworthiness (Heath et al., 1995). It is, hence, unsurprising that even in the era of the internet; credibility is a crucial area of critical scholarly review more than ever before.

Credibility is a broad research aspect as it interrelates message, messenger, media source and receiver (Roberts, 2010). Most often than not, message credibility is determined with the intuition of the receiver (McCroskey and Young, 1981; Self, 1996). Ernst et al., (2017) study states that there are three major dimensions in which the credibility of the news article is measured: Media credibility, Message credibility, Source credibility.

Difference and distance between journalist and the public may be important factors which influence the public's attitude towards the news media (Gaziano et al., 1987). Dickson et al., (2001) study states that a survey of media educators and editors of daily newspapers in the United States concluded that the two groups had similar

concerns about public trust and media responsibility, and both groups saw public journalism as a potential means for improving media credibility. Golan (2010) study states that source credibility research typically focuses on the characteristics of the message source, whereas research on medium credibility focuses on the medium through which the message is delivered.

Rahman (2014) study proposed that trust in media would facilitate media's effectiveness in formation of opinion. Savolainen (2007) study stated that newspapers were perceived as less credible because of their political bias and the general level of news reporting. The significance of one's own critical reflection was emphasized in the judgement of the credibility of information sources of various types. Rouner (2008) states that credibility of messages, is generally defined as a collection of attributes of messages that make the message content or their senders valued relative to the information imparted. Franklin et al., (2011) states that the reporters nonetheless acknowledge that more credible sources are treated less thoroughly, that journalists' assessment of credibility are associated with specific source characteristics and that even less credible sources receive considerable news space.

Weibelet al., (2008) study states that a significant interaction between the newscasters' gender and age was observed: Age had no effect on the credibility of the younger newscasters, whereas older male newscasters were perceived as being the most credible. Tsftati (2008) study states that for audiences, perceived credibility of the media affects choices of and responses to the news. Greer (2003) states that source credibility was

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significantly tied to participants' ratings of the story. Bing (2009) study emphasized that "the people's trust" would determine the existence and development of a newspaper.

Stockwell (2006) study states that researchers have argued that credibility is not a stable attribute that a person assigns consistently to a source. Instead, credibility is highly situational and is a changeable perception by a receiver. American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) study revealed that newspapers fail to show respect for readers, suspects that stories are influenced by biases of journalists, and believes that sensational news stories get more news coverage because they sell newspapers rather than for being important credibility.

Sharma (2017) study states that 'Fairness,' 'correctness,' 'objectivity,' 'completeness,' 'comprehensiveness,' 'accurateness' is some of the factors that have been adopted in news credibility factor. Stockwell (2008) study states that the relationship between newspaper credibility and attitude is not linear however, and it is essential to consider what other factors are efficacious in causing attitude change in message receivers apart from the credibility of a source. Abdulla et al., (2005) pointed out that credibility becomes important heuristic for content selection at the time of information overloaded.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To bring in focus at this point, the following research questions are raised:

RQ1: Is there a difference in credibility in the chosen three newspapers?

RQ2: Do the demographic variable such as age, gender, area of residence, occupation have a association with the credibility factors?

RQ3: Is there a relationship among the credibility?

Message reception is subjective (Pollack et al., 1958). But most of the time the reliability of the news stories depends on the readers perceive a media to be credible (Zhang et al., 2013). Message credibility is assessed based on the content, structure, language, and presentation (Yamamoto et al., 2017). The credible content of the message are likely to be originated by the credible sources (Tormala et al., 2007). Message quality will have direct effects (Rouner et al., 1996). The reader's perception of truth accounts to credibility of the message.

Fico et al., (2004) results stated that imbalanced story structure directly led to perceived story bias, and perceived story bias in turn led to

negative evaluation of the credibility of the newspaper publishing the imbalanced story.

The trust and prominence plays a vital role in Source credibility (Ampofo et al., 2010). The credible and trusted source will provide credible information (Trumbo, 20013). Source credibility has huge impact in message credibility (Wathen, 2002). In the era of information-sharing, consumers are thrown into pool of information, but still they believe traditional mainstream media for credible news information (Kiousis, 2009). Media technology customization makes users the active participant in communication process (Kang et al., 2016). Sometimes, credibility is solely seen as a source attributes (Appleman et al., 2015). Credibility of a media message are influenced by other factors like the medium or channel of delivery and even the structure of the messages themselves (e.g., Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & Mccann, 2003). A highly credible source can alter the persuasibility of the readers (Heesacker et al., 1983).

A reputed newspaper has a high media credibility that can also influence an individual's perceptions of what other people are thinking (Gunther, 1998). Media credibility depends on age, sex, education, place of residence and socioeconomic status and socioeconomic status, as well as political preference. (Westley et al, 1964). Consumers can access information in all possible source they have, still newspapers have the highest credibility when compared with followed by online news and television news, respectively (Kiousis, 2001).

Influence of the sources can have impact in the perception of the consumers (Applbaum, 1972). Savolainen (2007) results found that perceived media credibility and cognitive authority significantly, though often implicitly, orient the selection of information sources.

If individuals perceive the media to be highly credible, they will rely on the media for information; will increase their exposure to media messages, and vice-versa (Wanta, 1994). Interpretation of third person has regressive effect on credibility (Banning, 2007). Conservative ideology, newspaper use, social trust, and political trust are factors significantly related to newspaper credibility (Yamamoto, 2017). In numerous studies, the media credibility is positively correlated with the media credibility (Rimmer, 1987). Media credibility and trust relationships suggest that media source credibility has an influence on the trust relationships (Jo, 2005).

Maier (2005) results found that sources found errors in 61% of local news and feature stories, an inaccuracy rate among the highest reported in nearly seventy years of accuracy research. Newhagen (1989) results found that people use different criteria to judge credibility of TV news than they do to judge newspaper credibility. Rimmer et al., (1987) results states that a positive correlation between media credibility and media use have been reported often over the last two decade of research on media credibility. Kohring (2007) results stated that trust in news media can be considered a hierarchical factor (of second order) that consists of four lower order factors, including trust in the selectivity of topics, trust in the selectivity of facts, trust in the accuracy of depictions, and trust in journalistic assessment.

Based on the review of the past studies, the following hypotheses are proposed:

HYPOTHESES

H1: There is a difference in the credibility of the three newspapers.

H2: Demographic variable such as age, gender, area of residence, occupation have a association with the credibility factors.

H3: There is a significant relationship among the credibility factors.

METHOD

The present study aims to measure Message Credibility, Source Credibility and Media Credibility among the chosen newspapers. To test the relationship between Message Credibility, Source Credibility and Media Credibility, the following factors (*independent variables*) were chosen for the study:

- Gender
- Age
- Area of Residence
- Occupation

Dependent variables

- Message credibility
- Source credibility
- Media credibility

A Structured instrument was developed by the researchers to measure these variables. As many as 102 news articles were sourced from three newspapers and analysed using similar methods for the ease of comparison. Quantitative and qualitative approaches are combined using message-centered methodologies. A within-subjects experiment was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the proposed message credibility measure. Participants read 102 news

articles— published in The New Indian Express, Deccan Chronicle and The Times of India and rated them answering the questionnaire.

MATERIALS

Hard copies of the questionnaires were distributed to willing respondents to collect self-reported data. For data storage and analysis, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word and portable versions of IBM SPSS were used. The questionnaire consisted of four A4 pages and a total of 50 questions. Of the 50, the first five were for the Independent variables.

Table 1 T-test for Demographic Variables

Groups	Message credibility	Source credibility	Media credibility
<i>The New Indian Express</i>	3.6297	3.4039	3.0957
<i>Deccan Chronicle</i>	3.6975	3.5804	3.0532
<i>Times of India</i>	3.5064	3.5550	3.1657

To test the relationship between the chosen three newspapers and the credibility factors, One-way ANOVA was conducted and the results are presented in the table 1.1. Results showed that there was a statistically significant relationship between newspapers and the credibility factors.

Table 2: One-way Anova results: Newspaper vs. Credibility Factors

Groups	Message credibility	Source credibility	Media credibility
<i>Male</i>	3.5587	3.5408	3.1964
<i>Female</i>	3.6648	3.4843	3.1964
<i>Rural</i>	3.5064	3.4403	3.1151
<i>Urban</i>	3.7226	3.5858	3.1014
<i>Young</i>	3.6465	3.5152	3.0771
<i>Old</i>	3.5823	3.6758	3.1061
<i>Employed</i>	3.7671	3.6560	3.0543
<i>Unemployed</i>	3.4436	3.4526	3.0150
<i>UG and below</i>	3.6000	3.4350	3.0621
<i>PG and above</i>	3.5734	3.4966	3.0555

To test the association between the dependent variables and the credibility factors, T-test was conducted and the results are presented in the table 1.2. Results showed that the content of the

news article and sources quoted in the Deccan chronicle news report is more credible. However, the message credibility of Times of India was rated more than the other two newspapers.

significantly declined in relation to frequency and severity of errors. Abdulla et al., (2002) mentioned in his study that the addition of online news to the list of sources of information available to the

Table 3: Correlation among Credibility Factors

Correlations				
		MessageCredibility	SourceCred	MediaCred
MessageCredibility	Pearson Correlation	1	.613**	.198**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.001
	N	305	305	305
SourceCred	Pearson Correlation	.613**	1	.056
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.328
	N	305	305	305
MediaCred	Pearson Correlation	.198**	.056	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.328	
	N	305	305	305
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

A Bivariate correlation test was run to determine the relationship between the Message Credibility, Source Credibility and Media Credibility of the news stories, and the results are presented in table 1.3. Results showed that Strong positive correlation was observed between message credibility and source credibility, which was statistically significant ($r = .000$, $n = 306$, $p < .05$). Similarly, there is strong positive correlation between the message credibility and media credibility ($r = .001$, $n = 306$, $p < .05$).

There is strong positive correlation between the source credibility and message credibility ($r = .000$, $n = 306$, $p < .05$). But, there is no positive correlation between the source credibility and media credibility ($r = .328$, $n = 306$, $p < .05$). There is strong positive correlation between the media credibility and message credibility ($r = .001$, $n = 306$, $p < .05$). But, there is no positive correlation between the media credibility and source credibility ($r = .328$, $n = 306$, $p < .05$). Hence, the hypothesis that (Ha3) There is a significant relationship among the credibility factors is accepted. These findings imply that message credibility is positively associated with the source credibility and media credibility, and vice-versa. But the media credibility has no significant relationship with the source credibility.

Discussion

Maier (2005) study mentioned that newspaper credibility, as perceived by news sources,

public has led to concerns about its credibility as well as its perception by the public as a news source in relation to established and more traditional news sources. Meyer et al., (2010) suggests that the strongest predictor of article and organizational credibility online is the author’s perceived expertise, but in today’s digital age, that expertise is largely determined by the level of orientation between the sender and receiver.

Kohring (2007) mentioned that trust in news media can be considered a hierarchical factor (of second order) that consists of four lower order factors, including trust in the selectivity of topics, trust in the selectivity of facts, trust in the accuracy of depictions, and trust in journalistic assessment. This model is the first validated scale of trust in news media in communication research. Eisend (2006) result shows that an expressive or exciting presentation leads to the expectation of other positive or negative attributes of a source and intensifies the perception of truth inclination and potential.

Zhou et al., (2014) in his study stated that there is no surprise in terms of age and its effect on credibility. Older people tend to trust traditional media such as TV and newspaper more. Younger and more educated people tend to have a higher degree of trust on newer media such as websites and mobile devices.

Survey of the newspaper during October 2017 has shown that the top selling newspapers in India—

The New Indian Express, Deccan Chronicle, and The Times of India shows significant difference in their message credibility, source credibility and media credibility frame. The 102 same news articles from three different newspapers were analyzed with survey questionnaire. To analyze the newspapers credibility T-test, Chi-square, One-way Anova and Correlation tests were conducted. With the result we can conclude that the newspapers are significantly different in their message credibility, source credibility and media credibility.

The T-test result indicated that there is no statistically significant association between gender and the credibility frame. The credibility frame does not depend on the region on the newspaper. The newspapers have significant effect on the source credibility. Deccan chronicle newspaper has the highest message credibility and source credibility. The Times of India has the highest media credibility among the news readers.

Likewise, The One-way Anova test indicate that there is a significant relationship between the age and the credibility frame. The readers young and below has highest effect of message credibility and source credibility and media credibility. The educational qualification of the respondent has effect on the credibility frame. The reader UG and below has effect on the message credibility. The readers PG and above has effect on source credibility. The UG and below category readers has the highest effect on Media credibility. The occupation has a significant effect on the credibility frame. Only employed has the highest effect on message credibility. The unemployed respondents have the highest effect on source credibility.

A Bivariate correlation test was run to determine the relationship between the message credibility, source credibility and media credibility. There is strong positive correlation between the message credibility and source credibility. Similarly, there is strong positive correlation between the message credibility and media credibility. There is strong positive correlation between the source credibility and message credibility. But, there is no positive correlation between the source credibility and media credibility. There is strong positive correlation between the media credibility and message credibility. But, there is no positive correlation between the media credibility and source credibility.

CONCLUSION

As the study result shows, Gender and Area factor does not share relationships with the

message credibility, source credibility and media credibility of the newspapers. Deccan Chronicle had high value in message credibility frame. The readers consider this newspaper gives credible messages in their news stories. Deccan Chronicle and The Times of India newspaper scored high in source credibility frame. The readers considered this newspaper used more credible sources for their news stories. The Times of India scored high in media credibility. The readers considered this newspaper as a credible media as well. The study found that The New Indian Express had relatively low message credibility, media credibility and source credibility.

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