

Exploring Students' Perceptions of News Credibility Across TV and Online Platforms: A Regression Analysis of Journalist, Media, and News Factors

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ABSTRACT

In today's rapidly evolving media environment, it is crucial to understand what influences perceptions of news credibility, especially among younger, media-savvy audiences. This study examines how university students assess the credibility of news content on television and online platforms, focusing on three main dimensions: journalist credibility, media platform characteristics, and news content attributes. Based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Semantic Differential Scale, data from 538 students from various faculties were collected and analyzed using regression modeling. Results indicate that while television-related variables such as journalist credibility, media reliability, and news objectivity significantly influence perceptions of news credibility, only two online factors—online journalist credibility and online news credibility—were found to be significant predictors. Combined models show that journalist credibility and news characteristics are the strongest predictors of news credibility transmitted via media, while platform characteristics play a relatively minor role. This study contributes to media scholarship and journalism research by highlighting evolving standards of credibility in a hybrid media environment and provides implications for journalists, educators, and policymakers seeking to increase trust in news content.

Introduction

In an era where people are exposed to a flood of news across multiple platforms, it is increasingly important to understand what makes information Reliable. With the proliferation of digital media and the continued importance of traditional broadcast media, questions about news credibility are central to both consumers and media producers. Credability of news becomes more important,

especially, during uncertain conditions like war, pandemic etc. In recent history people have witnessed the fake news during war like tension between India and Pakistan. Media credibility—defined as the extent to which consumers perceive news content, its sources, and its presentation as credible and reliable—significantly shapes public opinion, trust, and media consumption behavior (Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010).

This study examines the factors that influence students' perceptions of the credibility of news delivered, focusing on two primary media sources: television and online platforms. Media credibility refers to how credible news appears when delivered through media channels, rather than when experienced firsthand. As young viewers increasingly consume news online while interacting with television, it is crucial to identify which elements—such as journalist credibility, platform characteristics, and news presentation—influence their trust in news.

This study collected data from over 500 students, from different colleges, to assess perceptions of journalists, media, and news content using semantic differential modeling. The study used regression modeling to determine which factors significantly predict perceived news trustworthiness, distinguishing between the influences of television and online media.

The findings from this research contribute to a growing literature on media trustworthiness, particularly in the context of hybrid media environments where audiences transition between traditional and digital platforms for news. The study is particularly relevant to educators, media professionals, and policymakers interested in restoring or strengthening public trust in journalism.

News credibility is a multidimensional construct that includes perceptions of the credibility, accuracy, fairness, and objectivity of news sources and content. Flanagin and Metzger (2000) emphasize that audiences' perceptions of credibility significantly influence their selection and evaluation of media sources. In the digital era, where misinformation and false information spread rapidly, perceived credibility has become a critical filter through which people determine what news they believe and how they share it (Tsfati & Cappella, 2013).

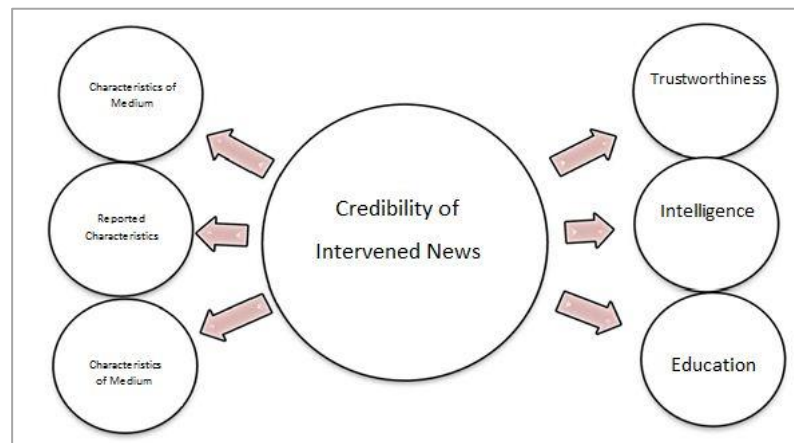
Journalistic credibility refers to how credible and Reliable a journalist appears to the audience. Attributes such as Expertise, fairness, professionalism, and neutrality contribute to credibility assessments (Meyer, 2015). In traditional broadcast media, anchors and correspondents have been symbols of credibility since the beginning. However, in an online environment dominated by user-generated content and anonymous authors, the credibility of journalists has become more fluid and contested (Johnson & Kaye, 2018).

The platform through which news is delivered also shapes perceptions of credibility. Television is often considered more authoritative than digital media because of its visual appeal and long-standing reputation (Kiousis, 2001). However, the interactivity, speed, and diversity of sources on the Internet present both opportunities and challenges for credibility. Studies show that the perceived professionalism and visual quality of the media influence how credible the public perceives the news (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2014).

Regardless of who reports the news and where it is presented, the content itself is important. Objectivity, completeness, public interest, and the absence of bias are often cited as components of credible news (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Viewers evaluate whether news is balanced, provides sufficient context, and avoids sensationalism. The style of presentation—such as clarity, coherence, and factual support—also influences how information is interpreted (Bucy, 2017).

University students, representing a media-savvy demographic, offer a unique lens into credibility judgments. They are both digital natives and occasional consumers of traditional media, which makes them susceptible to conflicting credibility cues. Studies have found that while young adults consume more online news, they often trust it less than traditional news. (Karlsson, Clerwall & Nord, 2017)

This study builds on the Uses and Gratifications theory, which suggests that individuals actively choose media based on expected satisfaction and reliability. The semantic differential approach used in this research captures the evaluative dimensions audiences apply to mediated news, thus aligning with prior models of credibility assessment (Heise, 1970; Ohanian, 1990).



Research Questions:

- What factors decide the apparent believability of news from TV and the web?
- To what degree do news moderators, media, and news believability influence the validity of interceded news?

Methodology

To assess students' perceptions regarding the credibility of TV and online journalists, the media platforms themselves (television and internet), and the news content presented through these platforms, bipolar adjective scales on a 7-point semantic differential scale were employed. The semantic differential scale is an effective method for measuring attitudes or perceptions using contrasting descriptors. These bipolar scales are adaptable across different respondent groups (Heise, 1970).

Accordingly, the scale was used to capture students' views on the stimuli mentioned above. The instrument also included questions about which media students considered most Reliable when presented with conflicting versions of the same news story. Additionally, students were asked to indicate which news websites they most frequently visited for online news.

A pretest of the instrument was conducted with 34 mass communication students to ensure clarity and appropriate length. Participants in the pretest were asked to provide feedback, which led to valuable suggestions, including simplifying certain terms. One particularly helpful suggestion pointed out the ambiguity of the phrase "mediated news." This was revised to "news as presented

on different media platforms," though the term "mediated news" will still occasionally be used in this study.

Overall, students reported no significant difficulties in understanding or completing the survey. As previously noted, the instrument was adapted from various existing measures, making it a new combination of previously validated scales. The constructs measured in the study focused on three core areas: credibility of journalists/news presenters, credibility of the media platform, and credibility of the news content.

A Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency and reliability of the various constructs, with a minimum acceptable threshold set at 0.70.

Information Analysis:

All collected information was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 15.0). Various measurement systems, for example, correlations, factor analysis, various direct regressions, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed to analyze the collected information.

Before conducting the research, it was checked whether the information from each factor met the model assumptions. In addition, information on the normal distribution of results, closeness of exceptions, arbitrariness of results, and autonomy of results, among others, was checked. All model assumptions were met and appear suitable for application in different truth systems. All theories were tested at an alpha level of 0.05.

Reportedly, 538 students wanted to take the exam. Ninety-six percent of the respondents were undergraduates ($n = 476$) and 10% ($n = 54$) were high school students. Of these, 38% ($n = 201$) were men and 62% ($n = 326$) were women. Seventy-six percent ($n = 401$) of the respondents were from Government College, University of Faisalabad, the university's largest department. Ten percent ($n = 55$) were graduates of the College of Pharmacy, while the remainder represented nine different colleges: College of Civil Engineering, College of Business Administration, College of Non-Invasive Medicine, Faisalabad Medical College, College of Education, College of Software Engineering, and NFC Research Institute. Students ranged in age from under 18 to over 50. The vast majority—69% ($n = 366$)—of participants were between the ages of 18 and 21, and 21% ($n = 111$) were between the ages of 22 and 25. Notably, the majority of respondents were from central Punjab (55%, $n = 288$), followed by African Americans (11%, $n = 56$), Asian Americans (10%, $n = 52$), Sindhis (10%, $n = 52$), Pashtuns (5%, $n = 24$), Kashmiris (0.6%, $n = 3$), and others accounted for 10% ($n = 52$). When information about their political views was available, 31% ($n = 160$) indicated that they belonged to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf group, 24% ($n = 125$) to the conservative group, 23% ($n = 119$) to the heterosexual group, 14% ($n = 73$) to the independent group, and the remainder to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf group.

Table 1.1: Age wise participation of the students

15-17	8	2%
18-21	366	69%
22-25	111	21%
26-30	33	6%
31-40	11	2%
51-60	1	.2%

Table 1.2: Factor Loadings for TV and Online Reporter Credibility

TV Reporter's Credibility

Experts/Amatures	.78
Unwise/Intellectual (recoded)	.66
Intellectual/Uneducated	.81
Reliable/Untrustworthy	.76
Authoritative/Disrespected	.73

Online Reporter Credibility

Experts/Amature	.81
Unwise/Intellectual (recoded)	.61
Intellectual/Uneducated	.84
Reliable/Untrustworthy	.77
Authoritative/Disrespected	.83

An eigenvalue plot was assessed to determine the sum of items required to satisfy the television media relevance scale. Three items had values extending from 1 to 5.4. The primary factor consisted of 7 constituents and was marked as the amplitude of the television media. The completeness of the television media included the freshness, completeness, animation, responsiveness, certainty, deepness, and transparency of the media. The 2nd factor comprised of 6 items and identified as the open intrigue of the television media, which provided the perception of intrigue and requirements of viewer groups and general population. The 3rd factor consisted of 2 items and was marked as the decency of the television media. Decency provided the absence of political inclination and behavior.

Table 1.3: Factor Loadings for TV Media Credibility
Comprehensiveness of television Media

Active/Inactive	.59
Narrow minded/Broad minded (recoded)	.58
Complete/Incomplete	.68
Irresponsible/Responsible (recoded)	.57
Narrow/Broad (recoded)	.54
Subjective / Objective	.46
Old/New (recoded)	.64

Table 1.4: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability for TV and Internet Media Credibility
Television

Comprehensiveness of TV	.78
Public Interest on TV	.77
Fairness television	.51

Internet

Trustworthiness of Online Media	.81
Public Interest on Online Media	.73
Objectivity of Online Media	.57

The Cronbach's alphas for all of the parts for newscast qualities were similar in manner. The

dependability coefficient for said segments extend between .78 to .86 with the most elevated coefficient in the TV factor 2 and the least alpha found in web segment 2.

To identify the factors that affect how people see the credibility of mediated news, four main regression models were created. In these models, arbitrated news reliability was found as the dependent variable. The other variables were taken from TV and internet media credibility scales.

Model 1: Influence of TV Factors on Mediated News Credibility

In the first model, six TV-related variables served as predictors. The model was statistically significant: $F(6, 511) = 76.66$, $p < .001$, with an R^2 value of .47. This means that 47% of the variance in mediated news credibility could be explained by these TV factors. The root mean square error (RMSE) was 0.80 on a 1-to-7 scale.

The regression equation for this model was:

Mediated News Credibility = $0.51 + 0.20(\text{TV Journalist Credibility}) + 0.20(\text{TV Media Thoroughness}) + 0.17(\text{TV Media Public Interest}) + 0.12(\text{TV Media Fairness}) + 0.22(\text{TV News Objectivity}) + 0.17(\text{TV News Reliability})$

Each predictor was statistically significant:

- TV journalist credibility: $t(536) = 4.81$, $p < .001$
- TV media thoroughness: $t(536) = 3.51$, $p < .001$
- TV media public interest: $t(535) = 3.48$, $p < .01$
- TV media fairness: $t(536) = 3.53$, $p < .001$
- TV news objectivity: $t(536) = 4.41$, $p < .001$
- TV news reliability: $t(536) = 4.54$, $p < .001$

Model 2: Influence of Online Factors on Mediated News Credibility

The equation of regression for this model was:

Arbitrated News Reliability = $0.51 + 0.20(\text{TV Journalist Credibility}) + 0.20(\text{TV Media})$. The second model looked at the impact of online news components. This model was also significant statistically:

$F(6, 489) = 26.36$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .24$. This means that 24% of the differences in credibility came from the online variables. The RMSE was 0.95.

Only two online variables significantly affected the model:

- Online journalist credibility
- Online news reliability

A refined model using just these two significant predictors produced $R^2 = .23$, with the equation:

Mediated News Credibility = $1.26 + 0.31(\text{Online Journalist Credibility}) + 0.30(\text{Online News Reliability})$

Model 3: Combined Effect of Journalists, Media, and News Attributes

The equation of regression for model was:

Mediated News Reliability = $0.51 + 0.20(\text{TV Journalist Credibility}) + 0.20(\text{TV Media}$. This model included all the important variables from three categories, journalist credibility, media credibility, and news characteristics, from both TV and online sources. The model was significant statistically:

$F(3, 482) = 149.48, p < .001$, with $R^2 = .48$. It means, 48% of the variance was explained. RMSE was 0.79.

Regression equation:

Mediated News Credibility = $0.81 + 0.44(\text{Journalist Credibility}) + 0.12(\text{Media Credibility}) + 0.64(\text{News Characteristics})$.

However, only journalist credibility ($t(536) = 6.76, p < .001$) and news features ($t(536) = 9.43, p < .001$) were statistically significant. Media credibility did not predict anything significant in this model.

Model 4: Combined Significant Variables from Both Media Types

Combining all the important predictors from both the TV and online spheres, the fourth and last model This model exhibited very statistically meaningful results:

$F(8, 487) = 69.07; p < .001$; with an R^2 of .53, it shows that 53% of the alteration in arbitrated news reliability can be explained. RMSE was 0.76; adjusted R^2 was .52.

Regression equation:

Mediated News Credibility: $0.44 + 0.14(\text{TV Journalist Credibility}) + 0.13(\text{Online Journalist Credibility}) + 0.22(\text{TV Media Thoroughness}) + 0.13(\text{TV Media Public Interest}) - 0.11(\text{TV Media Fairness}) + 0.25(\text{Objectivity of TV News}) + 0.10(\text{Reliability of TV News}) + 0.20(\text{Reliability of Online News})$

Every one of the eight factors in this model helped to account for the variation in mediated news credibility:

- TV journalist credibility: $t = 3.18, p < .01$
- credibility of Online journalist: $t = 3.10, p < .01$
- thoroughness of TV media: $t = 3.86, p < .001$
- public interest of TV media: $t = 2.60, p < .05$
- fairness of TV media: $t = 3.25, p < .01$ (notably with a negative effect)
- objectivity of TV news: $t = 5.22, p < .001$
- reliability of TV news: $t = 2.10, p < .05$
- reliability of Online news: $t = 5.20, p < .001$

It suggests that even if several TV-related elements have an impact on credibility, only two online related variables—online journalist credibility and online news dependability—significantly influence views of mediated news credibility.

Conclusions

This study provides detailed insights into how students assess the credibility of news on television and online platforms, revealing subtle differences in the factors shaping trust. Regression models highlight the crucial role of journalists' credibility and news characteristics in shaping perceived

news credibility across platforms. While television continues to benefit from the legacy of perceived authority, online platforms face challenges in building credibility, particularly in the absence of recognizable and credible newscasters. Interestingly, media platform attributes such as integrity and public interest have a relatively weaker impact, suggesting that the newscaster and the perceived objectivity and credibility of the content are more important than the media itself. These findings underscore the need for media producers to invest in transparency, accountability, and high-quality journalism to maintain or rebuild trust. For educators and policymakers, these results underscore the importance of media learning programs that offer young spectators with the gears to deeply assess information sources. In an era of information overload and disinformation, perceptions of credibility are crucial to protecting the integrity of public discourse.

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