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PCSI 295

12/8/18

How does the credibility of political media outlets affect the public in seeking information?

This literature review will be addressing the following question: How does the credibility of political media outlets affect the public in seeking information? The key points and trends I will be discussing include; political ideology, party affiliation, and worldview affect - whether an audience believes a news source to be credible or not. Popular and professional authors of news are perceived to be more credible than independent citizen news. The more the audience is exposed to mainstream news, the less likely they will expose themselves to online news. I found three significant points of conflict within the research of perceived credibility. The first conflict I uncovered is: credibility is determined by the audience and not the content itself. The second conflict is perceived credibility widely varies between users. It is based upon each individual user's perception and *it* is not determined by the accuracy of the news outlet providing a true account of the information. The final point of conflict I uncovered in my research is, market research on audiences allow media outlets to curate news which appeals to an audience. This factor alone may lead to gaps and the completeness of a report being withheld. One example of a gap in the research I encountered was, few of the articles discovered provided a direct correlation between audiences persuaded to not seek independent research after exposure to news, but many suggested this may be a result. The question of fake news prior to 2018 was (small) and has since reached the political stage where even the president has drawn attention to the claim on whether or not fake news exist. At the same time, we have independent news outlets being banned from

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the internet such as news outlet *Infowars*. My research suggests we may indeed find a correlation given the evidence provided.

The first theme the research highlights relates to audiences perceived credibility of mainstream media outlets. Behavior scientist Tien-Tsung Lee, author of *Why They Don't Trust the Media* found a correlation between an audiences ideology, partisanship, political efficacy and relationship to the audience's overall perceived credibility of media outlets. The party one identifies with, the bias towards their party, and their overall trust in the political process determines whether one has trust in news media they are viewing. An example would be news outlet *Fox News*; their viewership is more right-wing/conservative background. They also hold a bias towards this background and a high political efficacy, making audiences more likely to believe the media outlet. Vice-Versa with media outlets such as *CNN*. Mainstream news outlets are well known for catering content towards specified viewerships' ideology. The merit of this study is identified by the audience's perceived credibility of news. Their perceived credibility is greatly impacted by the criteria listed above. Author Tayo Oyedeji identifies in *The Credibility Brand Model: The Effects of Ideological Congruences and Customer-Based Brand Equity on News Credibility*, how the viewer perceived credibility of news media is determined. Findings showed a correlation between market research (CBBM) done by news media, impacting how audiences view news credibility. Media outlets curate their content based on market research, or what will resonate best with their audience. Given resources available for news outlets to perform market research, it may seem that mainstream media is more likely than non-mainstream

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media to perform market research on their audience. This building of a relationship between media outlets and their audience grows their perceived credibility. Author Chris Roberts findings in the article *Correlations Among Variables in Message and Messenger Credibility Scales* solidify mainstreams media's role in relation to the audience. Results concluded that elements within a news story before published, affect the judgment of the author writing the news story. Audiences expect news stories to be objective, but these findings suggest the mediator of news influence how the news stories are written. Mainstream media and their efforts of market research, curate of news content, and exposure to specific viewers point to larger roles these news outlets are trying to play. We as the audience may not hold awareness of all these findings while viewing prominent news media.

Following the first theme, these next research findings relate to how independent (non-mainstream) or online news resonates with audiences overall perceived credibility. Author Thomas J. Johnson of *Still Cruising and Believing* evaluates which outlet audience's believed to be more credible of broadcast television versus online news. Findings concluded that audiences credibility was high among online news outlets, and had low credibility among broadcast news sources. Although mainstream media reaches much of their audience through broadcast news, this researched suggest otherwise as the viewing audience of these outlets hold a low validity towards them. This directly addresses my research question as viewership validity of broadcast outlets has declined, while online news outlets have increased in perceived credibility. Lachlan Spence in *Social Media and Credibility Indicators: the effects of influence cues* examines

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determinants in Twitter users perceived credibility of tweets. Findings showed a correlation between who the author of tweets was, the author's ideology, and bandwagoning cues (increase in likes, re-tweets), all impacted viewers of tweets perceived credibility. In other words, credibility increased when audiences viewed tweets from a prominent Twitter user, similar ideology to that of the viewers, and when the tweet viewed was receiving popularity. The elements mentioned were based on non-content attributes, and irrelevant when determining content credibility alone. Another behavior scientist author Hans K. Meyer of the article *The Journalist Behind the News: Credibility of Straight, Collaborative, Opinionated and Blogg 'News'* further examines how audience goes about comparing the credibility of news outlets. Meyer suggests depending how popular or liked an author is may lead to factors concluding credibility of news outlets. Evidence from research supports this claim as authors anticipated skill in the field of content, become heavy predictors for audiences believed credibility on the news outlet. Meyer expresses that in today's digital age how authors interact with pre-existing, well known, and liked social groups are key to credibility resonating with audiences. A counterexample to this would be how president Trump may be perceived to be less credible due to social groups and prominent individuals dislike towards the president. These finding listed above show multiple elements can impact the judgment of audiences determining the credibility of news outlets, at the same time possibly encouraging or discouraging further research past news outlets.

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The last themes research touches on audiences perceived credibility overall when comparing mainstream to non-mainstream outlets. Andrea Miller, author of *A Citizen-Eye View of Television News Source Credibility* highlighted two key findings in her research on audience judgement towards hard news (breaking news) versus soft news (background news), and official news versus citizen news. These findings showed that audiences perceived hard news to be more credible than soft news. And found audiences perceived official news to be more credible than citizen news. The importance in these results shows audiences may be less inclined to further their independent research into soft news and citizen news, as they are less believed by the audiences. Another article by Seungahn Nah titled *when citizens meet both professional and citizen journalist: Social trust, media credibility, and perceived journalist roles among online community news readers* identify the roles journalist play and the correlation towards online viewerships. Findings concluded media validity was only positively associated with a professional journalist, while the social trust was found to be associated with both professional and citizen journalist. Results listed conclude again, that audience who take professionals word to be credible may be giving up their pursuit of discovering more independent news to solidifying their perceived credibility. Article by Tsfaty Y. titled *Online news exposure and trust in the mainstream media: exploring possible associations* identified key research that drew the gravity of all other findings listed. These three key findings found were as followed; a negative association between exposure to online news and cynicism, a negative association between mainstream media and confidence in the media, and lastly a correlation between media cynicism

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and exposure of non-mainstream media. To summarize as audiences are exposed to more online news (non-mainstream) they become less skeptical of the news they are viewing, hence building perceived credibility. The less audience exposure to mainstream media (broadcast news or online mainstream media) resulted in more confidence in the media, in turn strengthening perceived credibility. Lastly, as you become more skeptical of your media outlet you are exposure to non-mainstream media exposure increases, vise-versa for all findings. This shows that mainstream media sources are expected more by viewers to hold validity rather than non-mainstream media sources. An Additional article discovered by Guy Golan titled *In God We Trust: Religiosity as a Predictor of Perception of Media Trust, Factuality, and Privacy Invasion* brought one more comparative piece of evidence between non/mainstream news outlets. Findings from this article showed a direct relationship to audiences piety and perceived credibility of online news. The significance I found from these findings was that piety exists on mainstream outlets, but more prominently of those of right-wing news, while less so on left-wing news outlets. Piety also exists prominently on many other independent platforms labeled as non-mainstream such as Infowars. These findings suggest piety may increase your exposure to non-mainstream news, as we see much mainstream news excluding much piety talk from their platforms such as *CNN* and *The Washington Post*. Given the findings in listed articles, this may potentially lead to information being generalized and miss represented by mainstream media while discouraging independent research of non-mainstream media sources.

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To conclude the research given indeed showed correlations between audiences higher perceived validity of mainstream news compared to non-mainstream news. While this may be the case during our viewership of news outlets evidence also suggest official authors discourage the credibility of citizen authors, leading to audiences being less inclined to pursue independent research. Lastly, the research showed a direct correlation on how different amounts of exposure to non/mainstream news can impact further research on the audience's part. Flaws in research again are whether or not the viewed content was actually credible, as the perception of credibility from the audience was the main factor. If it turned out that articles of the news outlets were reported to be false, I believe the audience credibility towards given news outlets error would have significantly dropped. This concept and presumption never came up in my research, prompting future research into this specific criteria. That case aside, I believe given the research before us we are able to see the larger picture at play, which is simply to be aware of your media outlet you're using, and whether they are prompting you to investigate further or take their word for it. I was hoping to find a direct answer to, how does credibility of political media outlets affect the public in seeking information? In a way this question was answered more indirectly than directly. This research has also prompted me to start my own website with news content, to see for myself my audiences reaction and overall perceived credibility. To learn more with your investigation into non-mainstream media you can see *themillennialbridge.com* for more details.

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