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College of Liberal Arts

Are New Media Credible? A Multidimensional Approach to Measuring News Consumers'

Credibility and Bias Perceptions and the Frequency of News Consumption

by

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ARE NEW MEDIA CREDIBLE? A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO MEASURING
NEWS CONSUMERS' CREDIBILITY AND BIAS PERCEPTIONS AND THE FREQUENCY
OF NEWS CONSUMPTION

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Abstract

An investigation of news consumers' self-reported news source preferences, frequency of media consumption, and perceptions of news bias and credibility was performed to understand where news consumers are receiving news content and judgments of credibility in mainstream and new media. A Web-based survey distributed to the Rochester Institute of Technology community was completed by 107 respondents. Results confirm previous findings that news consumers are more likely to have a higher frequency of consumption of media they perceive as credible. Results confirm the shift to online media where consumers report they are receiving their news. New findings brought forth by the present study provide insight on a direction for future research.

Keywords: Credibility, news consumer, citizen journalism

Are New Media Credible? A Multidimensional Approach to Measuring News Consumers' Credibility and Bias Perceptions and the Frequency of News Consumption

The Internet has altered the way individuals communicate, search for information, and purchase products. The Internet rapidly revolutionized the communication environment by enabling a network of simultaneous communication exchanges between both senders and receivers, capable of immediate and uncontrolled feedback (Sweetser, Porter, Chung & Kim, 2008; Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). Further, the decrease in consumption of traditional mainstream media has been attributed to the advent of the Internet (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). The Internet has altered the control of gathering news content and disseminating it to an audience, shifting the control from mainstream news organizations, comprised of professional journalists, to lay individuals acting as citizen journalists using new media; (Chung, Kim, Trammell, & Porter, 2007; Banning & Sweetser, 2007). Further, new technologies with Internet capability have also created new opportunities for lay individuals to provide mainstream media with news stories (for example CNN iReport, individuals send their recorded news event/story via mobile device). This type of citizen reporting has increased dramatically within the past year during events such as the Japan earthquake/tsunami disaster and the government protests in Libya.

The concept of citizen journalism is nothing new. Citizen journalism, also referred to as civic journalism or public journalism, has been around since the beginning of print media. The practice of citizen journalism has been referred to as a challenge to the formal principle of traditional journalism by altering the process in which news content is gathered, written, and distributed to news consumers (Chung et al., 2007; Banning & Sweetser, 2007). The Internet and new media have enabled individuals (with and without journalistic training) to act as news

reporters by distributing information to a mass audience; this is seen most commonly in the use of new media and user-generated weblogs.

The newfound opportunity for an individual to create and distribute news content via the Internet to a mass audience has further fueled the on-going discussion of what exactly defines a journalist. In Journalism and other forms of public speaking, the credibility of the source of information is important for determining the truth of the information. Questioning the credibility of a source has existed since the time of Aristotle. Concern over media credibility escalated when yellow journalism and war propaganda contributed to a disillusioned audience that perceived journalists to be ethically ill-equipped to accurately portray reality and enhance legitimacy (St. John, 2009). In the post-World War II era, professionalism crystallized into an enduring scientific fact-oriented approach to reporting that featured a reliance on experts (St. John, 2009). Modern-day journalists affirm credibility and integrity in their reporting through the claim that what is reported is the truth, and authenticity is maintained by focusing on objectivity (St. John, 2009). Thus, journalists are socially responsible by providing informative and unbiased news content that can enable news consumers to make an informed decision or form an opinion within society. Professional journalists have gone through formal training and education to maintain the skills necessary to ethically gather news content and write credible and objective news stories. However, what has been argued is that citizen journalists (lay individuals) do not have the proper credentials to be considered professional journalists.

Recently, scholarly research has reported conflicting findings regarding the news organizations' perceptions of citizen journalism and new media credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Research has found that new media credibility is questioned both by journalists and by

news consumers; this is particularly due to perceptions of lack objectivity and journalistic training (Chung et al., 2004). Meanwhile, the paradox of weblogs is brought forth due to the contradiction of value placement: “while fairness may be considered a hallmark of traditional journalism, bias is likely seen as a virtue by blog users” (Johnson & Kaye, 2004, p. 633). In other words, a paradox exists due to mainstream media stressing objectivity; whereas new media blogs gain readers by stylizing content with more of an editorial-type of reporting, that may lack in objectivity.

The present study adds to the knowledge of journalism and news consumer’s perceived frequency of news consumption and preferences. This study looked for differences between what news sources news consumers reported to prefer and the frequency with which those news sources were consumed. Further, the research compares news consumers’ perceptions of bias and credibility for specific mainstream and new media sources with their reported frequency of consumption.

RQ1: What are the differences between self-reported news source preferences and frequency with which news sources are consumed?

RQ2: What relationships are there among news consumers’ self-reported frequency with which news sources are consumed and news consumers’ self-reported perceptions of news content biases?

RQ3: What relationships are there among self-reported frequency with which various news sources are consumed and news consumers’ self-reported perceptions of news credibility?

Rationale

Communications and the way in which individuals communicate are evolving rapidly. With the introduction of new technologies and the capability to access multiple news sources via the Internet, it comes as no surprise that new media now compete for readers with mainstream media. I wondered which news sources consumers preferred, the extent to which they are exposed to the media, and the level of credibility news consumers ascribe to mainstream media and new media news sources. The present study of news consumers extends Communication and Journalism research by contributing to the existent academic literature.

Additionally, it is of societal interest to investigate news consumers' preferences because of the rapid change in how news is delivered and received. New media and blogs are not the first media to compete with mainstream media for news consumers. However, the rate at which blogs are expanding has already made an impact on news organizations (such as CNN, MSNBC, and more) by delivering news via blogs, microblogs (i.e. Twitter), and social networks to reach younger, technology-savvy audiences.

To begin to understand how news consumers perceive mainstream and new media bias and credibility, it is important to identify how credibility in journalism has been identified previously. The framework of social responsibility theory is suggested due to its influence in the belief that media operate on a higher level of journalistic responsibility, of being credible, in reporting and objectively informing the public (Adams-Bloom & Cleary, 2009). This study takes a multidimensional approach by examining credibility with the assumption that news consumers have different bias perceptions of different news media and find those media more or less credible; thus, consumers may prefer one media source to another for specific news content

categories. Therefore, components of the study were also suggested by Dutta-Bergman (2004), who focused on analyzing specific content categories (local news, national, international, political, etc.) rather than a medium-centric approach to media competition.

Literature Review

Social Responsibility Theory

Journalists seek to maintain their credibility through the claim that what is reported is the truth and that they maintain an objective stance on issues presented (St. John, 2009). Thus, journalists have a social responsibility to provide informative and unbiased news content to society, enabling news consumers to make an informed decision or form an opinion. The concept of social responsibility theory was created by the Hutchins Commission, formally known as the Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947), and included as a theory in *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956). Social responsibility theory is comprised of a set of ideas regarding how the media should perform (Siebert et al., 1956). The main principle argues that the press has a role in investigating the political system, enlightening the public by providing the projection of a representative picture of the constituent groups in society, serving as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism, and safeguarding the liberties and wellbeing of the individual and public as a whole (Commission, 1947; Siebert et al., 1956). Social responsibility influenced thinking about the proper role of the press and news content decision making, and insisted on a higher level of journalistic responsibility to inform the public about decisions and actions (Adams-Bloom & Cleary, 2009). Social responsibility theory encompasses what it means for the media to be credible in journalistic reporting.

Credibility in the Media

The advent of new communications technologies has continually prompted a challenge to existing print journalistic norms, practices, and credibility (Haas, 2005). Credibility research began with an interpersonal influence as researchers examined what characteristics made a speaker persuasive (Johnson & Kaye, 2004), and credibility has remained central to understanding public perceptions of news media (Bucy, 2003). It has been argued that a high credibility perception is essential for a news consumer to choose a news source preference (Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006).

It has been argued that news consumers are more likely to pay attention to, and become dependent on, media they perceive as credible (Bucy, 2003; Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006). High credibility perceptions lead to a reliance on a certain medium for news, and in turn, increase the frequency of exposure to the medium (Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006). Further, perceptions of credibility have also been found to influence the perceived level of topic importance (content being reported), agenda-setting, and acceptance of information validity (Bucy, 2003).

Hovland and Weiss (1951/1952) investigated how and to what extent individuals' opinions were formed by high and low credibility sources; and whether these opinions are maintained over time. Their study investigated differences in subjects' retention and perceptions of "trustworthy" and "untrustworthy" sources from communication media (Hovland & Weiss, 1951/1952, p. 636). A " sleeper effect " was found to take place. As time goes by, messages from those initially considered untrustworthy were remembered the most; and over time, opinions about the sources changed (Hovland & Weiss, 1951/1952). The study identified two key components to source credibility, trustworthiness and expertise (Hovland & Weiss, 1951/1952;

Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). This led some scholars to further identify credibility through factor analysis of multiple underlying dimensions, such as accuracy, fairness, and completeness (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986).

Credibility as a multidimensional concept.

As researchers' interest in credibility grew, further development of the concept also grew. Some scholars have identified credibility as a multidimensional concept (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). The dimensions that comprise news credibility have been identified as fairness, accuracy, lack of bias, completeness, depth (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006), and trustworthiness (Hovland & Weiss, 1951/1952). However, the credibility dimensions vary from study to study depending upon the context (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986).

The multidimensional approach to measuring credibility presumes that when individuals consume different media, they have different motives (or news content categories) for their selected media source, and may have different perceptions of credibility for different news media (Newhagen & Nass, 1989; Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006). For example, news consumers may expect in-depth coverage from cable news networks (e.g., CNN, MSNBC, etc.) but may expect timeliness from new media on the Internet. A news consumer could prefer to receive national or international news from an unbiased and fair news medium, but may also prefer a different news medium that communicates a political bias that corresponds with what they believe.

Online Shift in Media

New technologies create new challenges for journalistic credibility. "New mass media technologies have evolved to challenge the print and broadcast industries' control over gatekeeping, framing, agenda setting, and other traditional media roles" (Hayes, Singer, &

Ceppos, 2007, p. 263). The Internet has revolutionized the process of receiving information from media; news consumers are no longer passive receivers of information in a communication process dominated by corporate media, but rather are active in deciding where to receive news content, from which media, and at their own convenience (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008).

Recently, new media citizen journalism has sparked speculation about the challenges it imposes on traditional journalistic norms (Haas, 2005). Weblogs in particular have made it possible for citizen journalism to flourish. The traditional one-way communication flow, from one sender to many receivers, has evolved into a network of multiple simultaneous communication flows, capable of both one-to-one and one-to-many senders and receivers of information (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008; Sweetser, et al., 2008). This simultaneous flow enables news consumers to respond to the news content they are reading on the Internet and engage in dialogue with other news consumers, news reporters, and representatives from media organizations.

New media.

Weblogs are a particular form of new media that enables individuals to discuss events and topics by posting links to, and comments on, other internet-based materials and other user-generated blogs on the Internet (Haas, 2005). Blogging became popular in the 1990s with the launch of easy-to-use free software, such as *Blogger*, *LiveJournal*, and *Weblogger*, available to any individual with access to the Internet (Blood, 2003; Haas, 2005).

One crucial aspect of weblogs is their interactive capability (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). The interactivity of weblogs, particularly the practice of linking hypertext within text and commenting on other weblogs, has given rise to a radically different kind of news discourse, not found in mainstream media (Haas, 2005). This dialogical nature of weblogs has contributed to

the concept of weblogging as an appropriate tool in developing citizen journalism via the Internet (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008).

It is important to note that all weblogs are not the same; they can differ in topics, author motives, interests, and more. Domingo and Heinonen (2008) identified and categorized four different weblog categories: A citizen blog – a weblog that is produced by lay individuals outside of the media on a broad range of topics; Media blogs – weblogs produced by professional staff journalists in a media organization and part of the media's news content; Audience blogs - weblogs that news consumers can contribute to regarding an on-going discussion on specific topics provided by the media organization on their website; and Journalist blogs - weblogs professional journalists maintain outside of a media organization's interests. Citizen journalists posting weblogs would be categorized within the citizen blog category. Although some blogs may contain news content, most citizen journalists are outside of any media organization, thus weblog postings do not represent the interests of any media organization (with the exception of weblogs posted on news sites, such as CNN or the NYTIMES). Citizen journalists are often without journalistic training required to be classified as a professional journalist (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008).

Journalism and new media.

Weblogs have been perceived by some news consumers as a new and better journalism that is opinionated, independent, and personal (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Domingo and Heinonen (2008) argue that professional journalists and citizen journalists have a symbiotic relationship in which they work together to filter and report the news. Citizen journalists and weblogs are increasingly being credited as an agenda-setting force for breaking news by bringing issues to

mainstream media and the public's attention that otherwise would have not been reported (Sweetser, et al., 2008). Haas (2005) argues that citizen journalists challenge the narrow range of topics and sources featured in mainstream media. However, weblogs are also criticized for delivering news content that is too closely related to that of mainstream media. It was also found that not only do citizen journalists cover the same news content, but they also rely on mainstream media for their information, and often include a hypertext to the original source (Haas, 2005).

Together, both mainstream media and new media weblogs allow news consumers to compare and contrast competing truth claims within the different media sources (Haas, 2005). It has been argued that "blogs have become watchdogs and critics of the communication industry" (Sweetser, et al., 2008, p. 169). The watchdog capability of weblogs became clear in the case of *New York Times* journalist Jayson Blair and his dishonest reporting. Blair was forced to resign from the *New York Times* in 2003 after plagiarism and fabrication within his stories were discovered. Citizen journalists created a mass amount of negative attention on Blair; which also put pressure on the *Times*' editors who allowed Blair's breach of journalistic ethics to continue. The mass amount of negative attention resulted in Blair's former managing editors to also resign (Haas, 2005). In this situation, citizen journalism proved to be socially responsible by not allowing the managing editors in a professional media organization to make unethical decisions.

Credibility in the Media

The rise of the Internet has led to an increase in credibility studies comparing traditional mainstream media with emerging new media (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Bucy (2003) questions whether the cross-platform media used by broadcasters (coaxing broadcast viewers to visit their

website counterpart) is influential in “cultivating perceptions of broadcast news credibility” and maintaining positive audience perceptions of network news (p. 249).

Research has generally found that news consumers perceive online news similarly to other media. Johnson and Kaye (1998) surveyed politically-interested Internet users to investigate whether or not new media publications are perceived to be as credible as their traditionally delivered counterparts. Results indicated that the online newspapers, news magazines, and politically-oriented websites were perceived as somewhat credible; further, online newspapers and online candidate literature were judged as significantly more credible than their traditional counterparts (Johnson & Kaye, 1998).

Information delivered by new media is still vulnerable to being perceived as not credible due to readers’ perceptions of accuracy and inconsistencies regarding where the original information came from (Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006). Citizen journalism on the Internet (specifically via weblogs) has come under attack by academics and professional journalists because of its perceived lack of objectivity and editorial gatekeeping when compared to the process that is utilized in traditional journalism that ensures no misinformation or inaccuracies are published (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Blood (2003) states that the convention of embedding hyperlinks to sources of information in user-generated content, that relates to the information being discussed within the text, has led to an increase in the perceived credibility and reliability of the blog post.

Online user-generated weblogs rely heavily on peer review by other users and audiences to point out published mistakes (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). However, Lowrey and Mackay (2008) argue that although it has been said by online users and bloggers that citizen journalism content

serves as a “reliable fact-checking mechanism, the validity of the claim is not well-tested” and the “problem remains that unchecked information is routinely published, even if it is eventually corrected” (p. 75).

In recent years, other coverage-related factors have called the credibility of mainstream media into question due to corporate interests that overshadow gatekeeping and content. In contrast, an advantage for citizen journalism is that the content is not controlled by corporate interests; thus, citizen journalists have the flexibility of discussing issues and news content that mainstream media usually shy away from due to conflict of interests with big media corporations. It is argued that citizen journalists are socially responsible due to their greater concentrated interest on citizen involvement and on a healthier public climate, rather than on the rules and interests of a media organization (Rosen, 1999; Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004). Further, citizen journalism and weblogs exhibit social responsibility by allowing news consumers to contribute to the conversation regarding news content.

News consumers’ self-reported perceptions of credibility across mainstream media and new media remain the focal point for the current research. Credibility has been operationalized by previous research as the “degree to which news consumers judge network newscasts and web sites to be believable, fair, accurate, informative, and in-depth” (Bucy, 2003, p. 252). The current study uses Bucy’s study as a lens to operationalize media credibility for mainstream media and citizen journalist blogs.

Method

A Web-based survey was distributed at the beginning of December, 2010 at the Rochester Institute of Technology. A second request was sent two weeks later. Data were

collected from a convenience sample of students, faculty, and staff members from the RIT community. An emailed cover letter and link to the Web-based survey were distributed to 500 individuals [Appendix A and B]. This form of delivery was chosen because each individual within the RIT community has a registered RIT email address, accessible through the RIT email, and can receive the survey. Respondents who replied to the survey clicked on the link, which directed them to the survey on the RIT Clipboard program. The survey closed after being open for one month. There were a total of 107 responses, and data were analyzed using the Minitab statistical program.

Measures

The survey consisted of four parts. Each part of the survey was clearly labeled to move participants through the study, and introductions and directions were provided. The first part asked the participants to identify which medium they go to for particular news content. The following survey parts, as described below, measured media exposure frequency, and judgments of biases and credibility. Validity was judged by providing the survey to a group of individuals similar to the sample used for the study. The survey was given one time, and then repeated in order to determine the reliability with which the instrument performs each time. Respondents were asked whether they believe the questions are measuring what the survey is asking of them.

Media preference.

Respondents were asked to choose one medium that they prefer to receive news content, from these closed-ended response options: local newspaper and Internet website, local television broadcast and Internet website, radio, cable television and Internet website, and weblogs. The news content in each question ranged from local news, national news, international news,

politics, the economy, and entertainment/celebrity news. The results were analyzed individually and then collectively for individual and total percentages of self-reported news consumer preferences. The media preferences were then categorized by mainstream (newspaper, radio, and cable and local television broadcasts) and new media (local newspaper and local television websites, cable news website, and weblogs).

Frequency of media exposure.

Part II of the survey measured the frequency with which news sources were consumed. Respondents were asked how often they receive news content (almost never, once to twice weekly, 3 to 4 times weekly, 5 to 6 times weekly, or daily). The specified news media were broken down as local newspapers, radio, cable and local television news, online news websites, and weblogs (refer to Appendix B).

Media bias.

Part III of the survey measured self-reported perceptions of news content biases (refer to Appendix B). Media bias was operationalized as a multidimensional construct consisting of statements concerning trustworthiness, objective news coverage, believability, balance and fairness in reporting, and overall perception of bias of the news media. Respondents rated their degree of agreement with each belief statement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), to undecided (3) to strongly agree (5). The news media included in the belief statements are broken down into newspapers, radio, local and cable television, and weblogs.

Media credibility.

Media credibility was measured in part IV of the survey as a multidimensional construct consisting of statements concerning believability, accuracy, in-depth information, and overall

rating of credibility of the news medium specified (refer to Appendix B). Respondents rated their degree of agreement with each belief statement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), to undecided (3) to strongly agree (5) used for each statement. The news media included in the belief statements are broken down into newspapers, radio, local and cable television, and weblogs.

Results

A total of 107 web-based surveys were completed. The respondents included undergraduate and graduate students, as well as faculty, and staff of all ages and educational backgrounds. Although the findings cannot be generalized to news consumers as a whole, they do present a picture of the 107 survey respondents.

Research question one asked about self-reported news source preferences and the frequency with which news sources are consumed. One quarter (27.1%) said their preferred news medium was cable television news websites, followed by Cable television news broadcast (20.8%), and Weblogs (12%); see total column in Table 1. Local television websites were the least preferred news medium (5.2%). The results confirm that there is an online shift in news media preference by news consumers, and a decline in local news. When identified by news content category, the results indicate that Cable News (both Television and Website) were most often preferred across news content types, with the exception of local news. Weblogs were among the most preferred news medium to receive entertainment and celebrity news (22.4%) and for politics and the economy (11.2%).

Table 1

Percentage of Preferred Medium by News Content Category

Medium	Local News	National News	International News	Politics	Economic	Entertainment	Total %
Local Newspapers	16.8 %	3.7%	4.7 %	7.5 %	8.4 %	2.8 %	7.62%
Local Newspaper Website	20.6 %	3.7 %	4.7 %	3.7 %	5.6 %	5.6 %	7.62%
Radio	10.3 %	9.4 %	8.4 %	9.4 %	8.4 %	7.5 %	9.25%
Local Television News Broadcast	28.9 %	8.4 %	3.7 %	4.7 %	5.6 %	8.4 %	10.38%
Local Broadcast News website	12.2 %	4.7 %	3.7 %	4.7 %	3.7 %	0.9 %	5.2 %
Cable Television News Broadcast	1.9 %	25.2 %	26.2 %	28 %	21.5 %	16.8 %	20.8 %
Cable News website	3.7 %	32.7 %	35.5 %	26.2 %	29.9 %	28 %	27.1 %
Weblogs	5.6 %	9.6 %	9.4 %	11.2 %	11.2 %	22.4 %	12 %

The media preferences were categorized as mainstream (newspaper, radio, and cable and local television broadcasts) and new media (local newspaper and local television websites, cable news website, and weblogs). Paired sample t-tests compared media preferences (for each news medium) with the self-reported frequency with which a news source is consumed. The difference between mainstream and new media preference (by content category) and the frequency of local newspaper consumption were all significant (see Table 2). The mean frequencies of consumption were all between “almost never” and ranged slightly over “once to twice a week” towards “three

to four times weekly.” The significant differences were found in frequency of local newspaper consumption and local news ($t = 2.31, df = 104, p = .02$), national news ($t = 2.86, df = 91, p = .005$), international news ($t = 2.77, df = 89, p = .007$), political news ($t = 2.29, df = 97, p = .02$), economic news ($t = 4.04, df = 79, p < .001$), and entertainment news ($t = 3.04, df = 64, p = .003$). The mean of local newspapers consumption for mainstream media ranged from once to twice weekly (2.48 – 2.70) and for new media ranged within “almost never” (1.61 – 1.84). Results indicate that mainstream media were consumed significantly more for the content categories than new media.

Table 2

Mean Differences for Local Newspaper Consumption

Medium	Local News	National News	International News	Political News	Economic News	Entertainment News
Mainstream Media	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.7	2.6
New Media	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.6	1.7

Paired sample t-tests showed that there were few significant differences between frequency of radio news consumption and media preference, but the majority of t-tests were statistically non-significant. The differences between the frequency of radio consumption and international news ($t = 2.23, df = 96, p = .03$) and economic news ($t = 2.92, df = 95, p = .004$) were significant. The mean of consumption for new media was “once to twice weekly” (2.13, 2.27) and for mainstream media was within “three to four times weekly” (3.02, 3.11). The difference is that mainstream media were consumed significantly more for the content categories than new media. However, even though the frequency of consumption mean for mainstream

media was significantly greater than new media, more respondents preferred new media (n=56 and n=54) compared to mainstream media (n=47 for each).

The differences between local television news consumption and mainstream and new media preference were all significant (see Table 3). The significant differences were found in local news ($t = 6.16, df = 93, p < .001$), national news ($t = 2.18, df = 95, p = .032$), international news ($t = 2.85, df = 90, p = .005$), political news ($t = 3.86, df = 98, p < .001$), economic news ($t = 3.48, df = 91, p = .001$), and entertainment news ($t = 2.32, df = 76, p = .023$). New media was the most preferred news source for national news (n=54), international (n=56), economics (n=54), and entertainment (n=61). The mean frequency for local television news consumption for mainstream media ranged from “once to twice weekly” (2.8) to “three to four times weekly” (3.0); new media ranged from “almost never” (1.6) to “once to twice weekly” (2.2). The difference is that mainstream media were consumed significantly more for the content categories than new media.

Table 3

Mean Differences for Local Television News Consumption

Medium	Local News	National News	International News	Political News	Economic News	Entertainment News
Mainstream Media	3.0	2.8	2.9	3.0	2.9	2.9
New Media	1.6	2.2	2.1	1.9	1.9	2.2

The paired sample t-tests found that the differences between cable television news consumption and mainstream and new media preference were all significant (see Table 4). The significant differences were found in local news ($t = 4.88, df = 102, p < .001$), national news ($t = 4.15, df = 83, p < .001$), international news ($t = 2.42, df = 95, p = .017$), political news ($t = 3.56,$

df = 99, p = .001), economic news (t = 3.58, df = 85, p = .001), and entertainment news (t = 2.27, df = 76, p = .026). New media were the most preferred news source for national news (n=54), international news (n=56), economic news (n=54), and entertainment news (n=61). However, the mean for frequency for cable news consumption for mainstream media ranged within once to twice a week (2.5 – 2.6) and new media ranged within almost never (1.5 – 1.9). The difference found is that for cable television news, mainstream media were consumed significantly more than new media.

Table 4

Mean Difference for Cable Television News Consumption

Medium	Local News	National News	International News	Political News	Economic News	Entertainment News
Mainstream Media	2.5	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.5
New Media	1.5	1.6	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.9

Paired sample t-test found that the differences between frequency of online news website consumption and mainstream and new media preference were all significant, see Table 5. The significant differences were found in local news (t = -3.30, df = 96, p = .0001), national news (t = -2.82, df = 99, p = .006), international news (t = -3.83, df = 95, p < .001), political news (t = -2.50, df = 99, p = .014), economic news (t = -2.98, df = 94, p = .004), entertainment news (t = -3.39, df = 75, p = .001). New media was the most preferred news source for national news (n=54), international news (n=56), economic news (n=54), and entertainment news (n=61). The mean frequency of online news consumption for mainstream media ranged on the higher end of once or twice a week (2.5 – 2.8) and for new media ranged within the higher end of three to four

times weekly (3.5 – 3.7). The difference found is that new media were consumed significantly more than mainstream media.

Table 5

Mean Difference for Online News Website Consumption

Medium	Local News	National News	International News	Political News	Economic News	Entertainment News
Mainstream Media	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.8	2.7	2.5
New Media	3.7	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.6

The differences between the frequency of weblog news consumption and media preference were all significant (see Table 6). The significant differences were found in local news ($t = -2.84, df = 70, p = .006$), national news ($t = -4.33, df = 75, p < .001$), international news ($t = -3.93, df = 89, p < .001$), political news ($t = -5.14, df = 63, p < .001$), economic news ($t = -4.42, df = 85, p < .001$), and entertainment news ($t = -3.69, df = 96, p < .001$). New media were the most preferred news source for national news ($n=54$), international ($n=56$), economic news ($n=54$), and entertainment news ($n=61$). The mean frequency for weblog news consumption for mainstream media ranged within almost never (1.3 – 1.6) and new media ranged within once to twice weekly (2.3 – 2.6). The difference found was that new media were consumed significantly more than mainstream media.

Table 6

Mean Differences for Weblog News Consumption

Users	Local News	National News	International News	Political News	Economic News	Entertainment News
Mainstream Media	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.4
New Media	2.4	2.5	2.4	2.6	2.5	2.3

Research question two addressed the self-reported frequency with which news sources are consumed and self-reported perceptions of news content bias. Almost half the respondents believed there is a bias in the news: 45.8% disagreed with the statement “I believe the news media are unbiased.” Although Cable news was found to be the most preferred media source in research question one, 43.9% of respondents disagreed with the statement “Cable news is objective, without taking a side”, and 25.2% reported they strongly disagree with the belief statement. A quarter of respondents (27.1%) disagreed with the belief statement “news printed in local newspapers is objective, without taking a side.” Weblogs were also reported to be perceived as biased: 45.8% of respondents agreed with the belief statement “news from weblogs is biased.” Local television news broadcast had a split response, 24.3% disagreed with the statement “News presented in local television broadcasts are objective,” 29% agreed with the statement, and 32.7 were neutral.

Pearson Correlation Coefficient tests measured the relationship between the frequency with which a news source is consumed and the degree to which respondents perceive news content bias (broken down into multidimensional constructs consisting of trustworthiness, fairness, balance, and objectivity). There was a significant positive relationship between the frequency of local television consumption and the degree of perceived trust of local television

news ($r = .21, p = .03$). As the rate of consumption increases, the perceived level of trust increases. Further, there was a significant positive relationship between the perception of objectivity in local television broadcasts and the perception of trust in the local broadcast ($r = .30, p = .002$). There was also a significant relationship between the frequency of weblog consumption and the degree of perceived trust in weblog news content ($r = .20, p = .04$); the greater the perceived trust in weblogs, the greater the frequency of weblog consumption. Further, there was a significant positive relationship between the perception of balance and fairness in weblog news content and perceived trust in weblogs ($r = .44, p < .001$) and the perception of objectivity in weblogs and perceived trust ($r = .32, p = .001$). These significant relationships indicate that the greater the perception of balance, fairness, and objectivity (in weblogs), the greater the perceived trust in news consumers.

Research question three addressed the self-reported frequency with which news sources are consumed and self-reported perceptions of news credibility (broken down into multidimensional constructs consisting of informative, credible, believability, and accuracy). The large majority of respondents (78.5%) agreed with the belief statement “Local news is credible.” Results also indicated that local news was perceived as more credible (78.5% agreement) than cable news (39.3% agreement). Nearly half of the respondents (57.9%) agreed with the statement “Radio news is informative” and 41.1% agreed with the statement “News content in weblogs is informative.” However, 49.5% of respondents were undecided about the statement “News content in weblogs is credible”; 18.7% agreed with the statement; and 21.5% disagreed. Respondents were also split in their response to the statement “Cable news is credible”: 39.3% agreed with the statement, 34.6% were undecided, and 15% disagreed.

Pearson Correlation Coefficient tests measured the relationship between the frequency with which a news source is consumed and the degree to which responses perceive news credibility. In terms of local television news, there was a significant positive relationship between the frequency with which local television news is consumed and the perception of local news credibility ($r = .24, p = .01$) and the perception of local news believability ($r = .22, p = .02$). In terms of radio, there were significant negative relationships between the frequency with which radio news is consumed and the perception of depth in news content ($r = -.29, p < .001$); as the perception of news content depth decreases, the frequency of consumption decreases. Additionally, a significant positive relationship was found between the frequency of radio news consumption and the belief to how informative radio news content is ($r = .23, p = .02$). In terms of weblogs, there were significant positive relationships between the frequency with which weblogs were consumed and the perception of how informative weblog news content is ($r = .51, p < .001$), perceived credibility ($r = .28, p < .001$), and perception of accuracy in news content ($r = .32, p < .001$). These positive relationships indicate that the greater the perception of how informative, credible, and accurate weblog news content is, the greater the frequency of consumption. There were no statistically significant relationships between the frequency of cable television news consumption and perception of cable news believability.

Discussion

Results confirm previous findings that news consumers are more likely to pay attention to, and become dependent on, media they perceive as credible (Bucy, 2003; Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006). Previous research also found that credibility is essential for news consumers to choose a news source preference (Choi, Watt, & Lynch, 2006); the results for cable news

confirm this argument, higher credibility perceptions were positively associated with a news consumers' preference for a particular medium. However, there was a gray area with local news; the local news sources were perceived as credible, but had a very low preference and frequency of consumption. Although cable news was found to be the most preferred medium, 43.9% of respondents disagreed that cable news is objective, with a quarter (25.2%) reporting they strongly disagree with the belief statement. Results indicated a high perceived credibility rating for local news, however, a low rate of consumption. In contrast, there was a mixed response rate for perceived cable news credibility, yet the online news media were reported as consumed daily.

Choi, Watt, & Lynch (2006) argued preference for a particular medium often led to an increase in the frequency of exposure to that medium. Although mainstream cable news had a high preference, yet low frequency of consumption (43.9% almost never consumed), cable's use of new media websites had the highest frequency of consumption of all news sources, with 36.5% daily consumption. These results confirm a news consumer shift to the Internet for receiving news content. However, the results show that news consumers are receiving their news from accredited mainstream media websites, and not from new media, citizen journalists, or weblogs. Although new media and weblogs are becoming more popular for news consumption, weblogs are still rarely consumed for serious news content. These results also reconfirm findings from Hargrove and Stempel III (2007); despite the growth in blog use, blogs are still not a major source for news content.

Results confirmed what Choi, Watt, & Lynch (2006) argued that information on new media is still vulnerable to being perceived as not credible. It can further be argued that the vulnerability is due to readers' perceptions of inaccuracy and inconsistencies. Results indicated

that 52.3% of respondents reported that they were undecided on weblog accuracy. Results indicated that weblogs are preferred more for political, economic, and entertainment news categories. And although some respondents did prefer weblogs for other news content categories (local news, national, and international news) it can be argued that weblogs and mainstream media are consumed in conjunction with each other, allowing news consumers to compare and contrast competing truth claims within the different media sources (Haas, 2005), adding to the perceived informative value of weblogs (Sweetser, et al., 2008).

Conclusion

The present study investigated the relationship between the RIT faculty's, staff's, and student's frequency of news consumption, news source preferences, and perceived news source bias and credibility. Components of credibility in the media and social responsibility in journalism were analyzed with the shift in news source preference to online new media and weblogs. New technologies have dramatically expanded the way in which individuals communicate and receive information and the process by which mainstream media can reach consumers. The study of news consumers' preferences of news source and perceptions of credibility shed light on the continually evolving path of journalism, online news delivery, and consumption process.

Limitations and Future Research

The study's limitations include the instrument used, a web-based survey distributed via email, the belief statements for measuring perceived biases and credibility (there are alternative approaches to analyzing perceptions of credibility and biases that may provide more thorough and comprehensive data), and self-reported information from the respondents. Despite the

limitations, this study adds to knowledge of journalism studies and where news consumers are receiving their information while also providing a direction for future research.

Future research should address the limitations of the instrument and belief statements by using an alternative approach to testing perceived credibility and biases. Future research could also narrow the topic of investigation to specific media subgroups (CNN compared to FOX news) and perceptions of liberal media compared to conservative media. Participants who chose to submit feedback on the Web-based survey said they preferred to receive news content from media subgroups (CNN or FOX, *New York Times* or Rochester's *Democrat & Chronicle*).

Future research should also examine potential factors contributing to new media adoption, such as the Internet self-efficacy, online interactive experience, and views on technology. Further, researchers should also focus on the gratifications of the particular types of weblogs to ascertain the relation between news content and motivations; how individuals use interactive new media, such as weblogs and discussion boards, in order to share information and views. Studies could be designed to capture how the various interactive capabilities of the Internet might affect the perception of new media credibility. Also, future research could examine what categories of weblogs are preferred, and if weblogs written by professional journalists or citizen journalists' are attracting a larger audience. This direction for research is significant due to new media increasingly becoming important informational and communication tools for journalism.

This study's findings indicate that while overall perception of weblog credibility is low, weblogs are preferred more than mainstream local news (print and broadcast). This finding

directs future research to investigate why, despite the credibility and bias issues, weblogs are being used more frequently for news content and other informational purposes.

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Appendix A – Email Cover Letter

Subject: News Consumer Survey

Members of the RIT community,

Everyone is interested in news, but not everyone accesses the news in the same way or use the same news source to find their information. Further, individuals differ in their perceptions of different news sources, which can have an impact on their preference for one news source over another.

To better understand where individuals prefer to access news and their perceptions of the different news sources available, we have designed a brief survey. In order for us to gain a full understanding of people's preferences and news habits, we request 10-15 minutes of your time to fill out the brief survey which will help contribute to Communication research and fulfillment of a Master's thesis in Communication and Media Technology.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to respond to this email.

Thank you for you participation.

Survey link: <https://clipboard.rit.edu/take.cfm?sid=DC331870>

Bonnie McCracken

Department of Communication
Communication and Media Technologies

Appendix B – Survey

You are invited to join a research study examining people’s perceptions of weblogs and mainstream media news sources. To complete the survey it will take you between 10 and fifteen minutes.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be used when data from this study is published. Your personal information will be kept confidential.

YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to not participate at all or to leave the study at any time.

CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

Contact Bonnie McCracken at bjm2917@rit.edu.

Part I - Media Preferences: This section asks about which media you turn to for information about a number of topics. For each item, choose the news source that you go to first for specified news content.

1. To learn about local news, I go to _____.

- Local Newspapers
- Local Newspaper website
- Radio
- Local television news broadcast
- Local news station website
- Cable Television News Broadcast (CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, etc.)
- Cable Television News website
- Weblogs

2. To learn about National news, I go to _____.

- Local Newspaper
- Local newspaper website
- Radio
- Local television news broadcast
- Local news station website
- Cable Television Broadcast (CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, etc.)
- Cable news website
- Weblogs

3. To learn about International news, I go to _____.

- Local newspaper
- Local newspaper website
- Radio
- Local television news broadcast
- Local news station website
- Cable Television News Broadcast (CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, etc.)
- Cable news Internet website
- Weblogs

4. To learn about Politics, I go to _____ .

- Local newspaper
- Local newspaper website
- Radio
- Local television news broadcast
- Local news station website
- Cable Television News Broadcast (CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, etc.)
- Cable news website
- Weblogs

5. To learn about economic news, I go to _____.

- Local newspaper
- Local newspaper website
- Radio
- Local television news broadcast
- Local news station website
- Cable Television News Broadcast (CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, etc.)
- Cable news Internet website
- Weblogs

6. To learn about entertainment news and celebrities, I go to _____ .

- Local newspaper
- Local newspaper website
- Radio
- Local television news broadcast
- Local news station website
- Cable Television News Broadcast (CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, etc.)
- Cable news Internet website
- Weblogs

PART II - This section asks you how often you read, watch or listen to news content.

7. I read local newspapers:

- Almost Never
- Once or twice a week
- 3 or 4 times a week
- 5 or 6 times a week
- Daily

8. I listen to Radio news:

- Almost Never
- Once or twice a week
- 3 to 4 times a week
- 5 to 6 times a week
- Daily

9. I watch local television news:

- Almost Never
- Once or twice a week
- 3 to 4 times a week
- 5 to 6 times a week
- Daily

10. I watch news Cable Television news (MSNBC, CNN, FOX, ect.):

- Almost never
- Once or twice a week
- 3 to 4 times a week
- 5 to 6 times a week
- Daily

11. I read news from online news websites:

- Almost never
- Once or twice a week
- 3 or 4 times a week
- 5 to 6 times a week
- Daily

12. I read news on weblogs:

- Almost never
- Once or twice a week
- 3 or 4 times a week
- 5 to 6 times a week
- Daily

PART III - This section consists of belief statements. The statements pertain to perceptions of news bias. Indicate your level of agreement for each statement - 1 being strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree.

13.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I trust the news I read in local newspapers	<input type="radio"/>				
I cannot trust the news I hear on the radio	<input type="radio"/>				
I trust the news I watch on local television news broadcasts	<input type="radio"/>				
I trust the news I read on weblogs	<input type="radio"/>				
I believe news from weblogs is biased	<input type="radio"/>				
Weblogs present news in a balanced and fair manner	<input type="radio"/>				
Cable news is objective, without taking a side	<input type="radio"/>				
Weblogs present news is objective, without taking a side	<input type="radio"/>				
I believe news printed in local newspapers is objective, without taking a side	<input type="radio"/>				
News presented in local television broadcasts are objective, without taking a side	<input type="radio"/>				
Overall, I believe the news media are unbiased	<input type="radio"/>				

PART IV - The next section is also comprised of belief statements. This time the statements pertain to perceptions of credibility. Indicate your level of agreement for each statement - 1 being strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree.

14.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
News content in weblogs is informative	<input type="radio"/>				
Local new is credible	<input type="radio"/>				
Local news is believable	<input type="radio"/>				
Radio news is not in-depth	<input type="radio"/>				
News content in weblogs is not believable	<input type="radio"/>				
Radio news is not accurate	<input type="radio"/>				
Cable news is believable	<input type="radio"/>				
News content in weblogs is credible	<input type="radio"/>				
Local news is not in-depth	<input type="radio"/>				
News content in weblogs is accurate	<input type="radio"/>				
Radio news is informative	<input type="radio"/>				
Cable news is Credible	<input type="radio"/>				