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The Rochester Institute of Technology

Department of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Credibility on Cable News: An Examination of the Factors that
Establish Credibility in Newscasters

by

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in Communication & Media Technologies

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CREDIBILITY ON CABLE NEWS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE FACTORS THAT
ESTABLISH CREDIBILITY IN NEWSCASTERS

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Abstract

This study investigates the factors that contribute to and hinder a cable newscaster's establishment of credibility with their audiences. Considerations were made for political factors, exposure to newscasters, para-social relationship strength and visual credibility. A survey was administered online that obtained a sample of 139 participants. Findings suggest that audience members reporting high levels of exposure to newscasters tended to have higher credibility perceptions. The ability to recognize a newscaster was not a significant indicator of credibility perceptions. Newscasters that were perceived to have liberal political views tended to be perceived as more credible than those perceived as having more conservative views.

Keywords: credibility perceptions, cable news, journalism

Credibility on Cable News: An Examination of the Factors that Establish Credibility
in Cable Newscasters

The television news landscape has been drastically changed over the past three decades with the introduction of cable. With American news consumers no longer confined to the three network anchors of the national evening news broadcasts, questions have arisen regarding the credibility of the many newscasters that have emerged on cable. Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell (2000) defined credibility as “the extent to which the source is perceived as possessing expertise relevant to the communication topic and can be trusted to give an objective opinion on the subject” (p. 43). Evidently, television audiences are concluding that cable television news offers more in terms of credibility than does traditional broadcast television news. Those relying on television (TV) as the medium of choice for obtaining news are increasingly choosing cable over traditional broadcast news. Only ten years ago, more Americans chose broadcast news over cable, with 30% regularly watching broadcast TV news and only 26% regularly watching cable TV news (Kohut, Doherty, Dimock & Keeter, 2010). Today, those selecting cable TV as their news medium of choice are approaching 40% (Kohut, et al., 2010). This trend presents the need to better understand the factors that are drawing audiences to cable newscasters, and what influences the credibility perceptions of a cable newscaster. Differing from the resigned demeanor and objective reporting styles of the evening broadcast newscasters, many cable newscasters have displayed a penchant for zany antics and political inflexibility. This paper examines not only the political make-up of cable newscasters and their viewers, but the amount of time viewers spend watching a newscaster as well as the constructs of visual credibility and the para-social relationship, to determine the effect each has upon the perceptions of a cable newscaster’s credibility. This study not only builds on previous findings in the realm of

credibility, but yielded results that were at odds with commonplace assumptions. The findings of this study suggest that the political leanings of the audience do not matter as much as the perception of a newscaster's politics when it comes to making determinations about credibility. High amounts of exposure do not necessarily translate into high credibility perceptions. Newscasters that fall into the political extremes of the spectrum may prove to be more apt in the cultivation of para-social relationships and that the visual characteristics of a newscaster do not carry as much weight as once thought.

Previous studies have examined source credibility in the broadest terms, focusing on the differences between source and channel credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1952). Those credibility studies dealing specifically with news have examined entire news networks or even the medium through which the news was delivered. With today's diverse news media landscape, measuring the credibility of a news network as a whole may not offer programmers the specifics they need to accurately gauge audience perceptions of their daily lineup. This study will be limited to a single channel of communication: cable television news. While earlier days of broadcast television news brought viewers only three national news anchors to choose from during a single daily broadcast, cable has given the viewer the option of viewing three newscasters every hour, 24 hours a day. Different news media outlets must work to distinguish themselves in order to attract and retain an audience (Stroud & Lee, 2008). From an industry perspective, understanding what makes a newscaster credible would help to provide a leg up on the competition. Mass media exist explicitly to provide information. For them, a perception of diminished credibility results in losing audiences, societal influence, and legitimacy (Jakob, 2010). From a scholarly perspective, the increasing fragmentation of news audiences could be read as disconcerting. This trend could potentially lead to a more polarized, less politically tolerant electorate (Stroud & Lee,

2008). Understanding the factors that influence people's credibility perceptions can assist in monitoring and improving the media's role in our democratic system.

Review of Related Literature

After establishing theoretical frameworks for the present study, this literature review will examine prior findings regarding the influence of exposure upon news perceptions, as well as the political, visual, and para-social factors that affect trust, preference, and credibility perceptions. Credibility is one of the primary predictors for certain interpersonal and mediated interaction outcomes such as attitude change and trust (Jin & Yongjun, 2010). Persuasion of an audience is more difficult if a source fails to establish credibility (Hovland, 1959). If a communicator is perceived to be an expert or to be trustworthy, the message conveyed by the communicator is credible (Jin & Yongjun, 2010). Many scholars speculate that a trend toward increased selective exposure by news viewers will eventually lead to a more polarized, segmented, or extreme climate of opinion (Jakob, 2010). Selective exposure theory posits that people's beliefs motivate their media selections (Cotton, 1985; Frey, 1986; Milburn, 1979). Along similar theoretical lines exists Joseph Klapper's phenomenistic theory, which will be the primary theory employed for this study (Wicks, 1996). Klapper (1960) suggests people seek out the media and content that reinforces their preexisting beliefs, rather than media that challenge their beliefs. For this reason, the phenomenistic theory is also known as the reinforcement theory. Klapper felt that media did not change people's opinions, but instead served to give people reasons to go on believing and acting as they already did (Wicks, 1996). Some argue that Klapper's theory is reflected clearly in today's polarized media environment, with the rise of politically segmented news audiences (Mutz, 2006). An explanation for this selective exposure often revolves around the idea of cognitive dissonance or the psychological discomfort resulting from holding inconsistent

cognitions (Festinger, 1957). Such inconsistencies generate an emotional distress called dissonance, resulting in a drive to restore consistency, which is often attained by seeking out congenial information to alleviate such discomfort (Festinger, 1957; MacFarland, 1996). With the undeniable political polarization that exists between today's cable news networks, the hostile media theory fits nicely into a discussion about credibility in politically charged climates. The hostile media theory posits that highly partisan individuals will perceive more bias in media sources that are contrary to their personal views (Knobloch-Westwick & Meng, 2009). These highly partisan individuals will perceive more bias against their political stance in media coverage than a less politically passionate individual will, thus creating perceptions among partisan individuals that opposing media outlets possess less credibility (Feldman, 2011). Both liberal and conservative partisans perceive a negative bias in reports that neutral audiences deem to be objective (Dalton, Beck & Huckfeldt, 1998). This is a familiar argument as we often hear pundits on the more conservative Fox News Channel perceiving a "liberal media bias" in other media outlets, while pundits on the more liberal MSNBC perceive deliberate "misinformation campaigns" generated by Fox News and talk radio (Mutz, 2006). Several studies have indicated this same invective is increasingly shifting to the Internet. News blogs like Huffington Post are perceived by conservatives to have a liberal slant, and the Drudge Report website is perceived by liberals to have a conservative bias (Kobayashi & Ikeda, 2009). A perception of bias in a news organization serves to drastically undermine its credibility. These theories will serve as a framework for the present study in terms of explaining why respondents choose to expose themselves to certain news outlets over others.

Credibility and the Cable News Landscape

Not until 1980, when Ted Turner founded CNN, did twenty-four-hour cable news begin (Oyedeji, 2009). For 15 years, CNN was the lone all-news cable station in the United States until MSNBC and Fox News began broadcasting in 1995 and 1996, respectively (Oyedeji, 2009). The introduction of competition for CNN created a situation in which these three networks had to vie for the loyalty of different audiences, and opinion infused punditry became a commonplace format used to attract different demographics. Unlike other news media such as newspapers, which often enjoy monopolies in their respective regions, cable news networks are national channels that compete directly with one another in the same market (Oyedeji, 2009). With three cable news networks up and running by the end of the 1990s, the era of choice for audiences being limited to only a handful of TV news anchors was gone. Prior (2007) states “cable television and the Internet have shattered the homogeneity of political information” (p.2). With this wide selection of news sources, each having a distinct political nature, American TV news audiences have become increasingly polarized (Doherty, 2004; Johnson, 2004). The myriad of news options now present on television poses a challenge for cable news networks, as cable newsrooms have to fill almost 50 times as much airtime as the broadcast news programs (Oyedeji, 2009). Some have argued that this need to fill excess airtime has forced producers to reach for boisterous, colorful and often times unseasoned personalities to host programs that require argumentative tone and gimmicks to retain an audience. Cable news programs often strive for combative discourse to attract ratings, while ratings are something that broadcast newscasters do not need to worry about as much. So with these realities of the current television news environment, what can we learn about the credibility of newscasters in this day and age?

The construct of credibility is multidimensional and is comprised of concepts such as expertise and trustworthiness (Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell, 2000). Expertise refers to the source's knowledge of the subject at hand, whereas trustworthiness is a combination of honesty, believability, and lack of bias (Miller & Kurpious, 2010). Generally, the empirical perspectives studying the concept of credibility have been researched in two principal domains: medium and source (Kiousis, 2001; Ryan, 1975). When examining the source, trustworthiness and expertise have often been considered essential factors in establishing credibility (Kiousis, 2001). Source credibility took on a new meaning as more modes of communication became widespread. As early as the 1950s the significance of the medium itself became a focus for researchers of credibility. Hovland et al. (1959) recognized that "the impact of a message probably depends also upon the particular publication or channel through which it is transmitted" (p. 19).

Although there is no single standardized scale for the measurement of trust in the news media, recent studies have examined the credibility of the channel, or the medium through which messages are sent during the communication process (Kohring & Mattes, 2007). Kiousis (2001) conducted a study of perceptions of credibility among three popular media for news: newspapers, television, and the Internet. The data obtained in the study revealed that newspapers were perceived as the most credible news medium, and television news was rated the lowest. This was an unforeseen outcome as television had always eclipsed newspapers in credibility ratings in empirical work observing the opposite trend since the 1960s (Kiousis, 2001). An explanation for this change may be the introduction of a new medium. With the widespread availability of online news sources, the opinions audiences hold regarding the credibility of traditional media may have been altered (Kiousis, 2001).

Despite Kiousis's findings that pegged television as the least credible news medium, the fact remains that cable television news continues to attract more viewers. According to a Pew research poll conducted in 2010, 58% of Americans watch television news an average of 55 minutes per day, with 39% watching cable news (Kohut, et al., 2010). Television is the medium through which people spend the most time getting their news from than any other source, and the trend over the past decade has signaled that audiences are increasingly turning to cable news (Kohut, et al., 2010). Yet, Kiousis (2001) found that television was perceived to be the least credible news medium. What can explain the increased viewership of cable news despite this finding of television as having low credibility?

The answer may lie in the sharp political polarization that has subsumed cable news in the last decade (Johnson, 2004; Johnson, 2006). Ideologies of nearly every stripe can be found represented by one pundit or another on today's cable news spectrum. The increased political nature of cable newscasters has drawn partisan audiences away from broadcast TV news (Johnson, 2006). From 1998 to 2008 the share of Democrats and Republicans who regularly watch broadcast network evening news fell 15 points (Kohut, et al., 2010). Klapper's phenomenistic theory can be observed as partisan audiences are turning to those cable newscasters who reinforce their beliefs. Ideology continues to be closely associated with people's choice of certain news sources (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1982). Eighty percent of Americans who watch Sean Hannity identify as conservative, which is roughly twice the national average of 36% (Kohut, et al., 2010). The same appears to be true for cable newscasters at the other end of the political spectrum. Keith Olbermann, Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and Rachel Maddow have regular audiences that include nearly twice the proportion of liberals than in the public as a whole (Kohut, et al., 2010). The cable networks themselves have developed political slants and

this is reflected in the partisan demographics of their respective audiences. The newscasters with programs on MSNBC tend to lean towards the liberal end of the spectrum, while those on Fox News tend to be more conservative (Kohut, et al., 2010). Four-in-ten Republicans now say they regularly get their news from Fox, up from 36% just two years ago and only 18% ten years ago. Just 12% of Republicans regularly watch CNN, and only 6% regularly watch MSNBC (Kohut, et al., 2010). This trend is relatively new. As recently as 2002, Republicans were as likely to watch CNN (28%) as Fox News (25%) (Kohut, et al., 2010). Despite the gravitation of Republicans to the Fox News audience, the network still manages to attract a less politically polarized mix of viewers than does CNN. Among regular Fox News Channel viewers, 39% identified as Republican, 33% as Democrats and 22% as independents (Press, 2009). The contrast is starker among regular CNN viewers with 51% identifying as Democrats, 23% as independents and just 18% as Republicans. In short, Democrats comprise a larger share of the Fox News audience than Republicans do of CNN's audience (Press, 2009).

Mitigating Variables on Credibility

Politics. The political divide among the audiences of the three major cable news networks is clear, but what effect has this increased polarization had upon the perceived credibility of the networks? Kohut, et al. (2010) found that partisan gaps in perceptions of media credibility continue to grow, with Republicans being far more skeptical of most major news sources than Democrats. The one exception is Fox News, which twice as many Republicans believe all or most of (41%) compared with Democrats (21%) (Kohut, et al., 2010). These statistics reflect the hostile media theory, in which highly partisan individuals tend to view other media outlets as biased or unsympathetic to the positions they hold (Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). Stroud and Lee (2008) conducted a study that evaluated people's credibility perceptions of both CNN and Fox.

Respondents were asked to identify their partisan orientations on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from strong Democrat to strong Republican. The same was done to measure political ideology separate from party, ranging from strong liberal to strong conservative. Those who identified as Republicans found Fox News to be more credible while Democrats found CNN to be more credible. Individuals with political attitudes landing at the extremes of the scales were more likely to find Fox News credible and CNN not credible (Stroud & Lee, 2008). Those with weaker ideological inclinations and less polarized attitudes were more likely to find both outlets credible and those with weaker partisan inclinations were more likely to find both outlets *not* credible (Stroud & Lee, 2008). This study highlighted the either-or nature of credibility perceptions of cable news networks with only 6% rating Fox News and CNN as equally credible (Stroud & Lee, 2008). Political knowledge was also taken into consideration by administering a brief quiz in the survey, but there was no evidence that political knowledge was related to perceptions of Fox News or CNN (Stroud & Lee, 2008). Stroud and Lee (2008) suggest, “for both CNN and Fox, credibility mediates or partially mediates the relationship between political predispositions and media choice” (p. 19). Given past findings indicating people’s politics influence their cable news preferences, this study’s first and only research question is as follows:

RQ1: How does one’s political leanings bear upon credibility perceptions of a newscaster?

Exposure. Similar to Stroud and Lee (2008), Oyedeji (2009) also compared the credibility of CNN and Fox News. In that study, respondents expressed positive opinions of CNN in four out of five constructs of media credibility, each of which was statistically significant. The respondents agreed that CNN was fair, accurate, trustworthy and comprehensive (Oyedeji, 2009). On the other hand, the respondents’ views of Fox News were significantly negative in the fairness and bias categories, but still ranked the network accurate and comprehensive (Oyedeji,

2009). This is an especially interesting finding considering that Neilson observes Fox News as having consistently higher audience ratings than both CNN and MSNBC since 2003 (Oyededeji, 2009). Ratings alone, it seems, are not a reliable indicator of the level of perceived credibility a news network possesses.

Many media channels have been studied to observe the effect heavy exposure has upon trust. Earlier work on credibility found that increased use of media was usually linked with enhanced credibility ratings, regardless of the medium being studied (Kioussis, 2001). Jakob (2010) conducted a phone survey in Germany to measure the relationship between perceived media dependency and trust in the media. Unlike credibility research, there exists almost no significant theories of media trust nor a larger body of empirical research that focuses on trust (Jakob, 2010). However, this does not mean that trust and credibility are fundamentally different concepts. As Jakob (2010) indicates, credibility is a central component of trust. To quantify the variable of trust, respondents in this survey were asked broad questions such as “do you trust media reports?” They were given four possible responses: wholeheartedly, somewhat, not very much, and not at all. Those being surveyed were then asked to describe the amount of time spent with certain media, one factor in determining their level of dependence. The study revealed that individuals feeling dependent on media express significantly higher levels of trust in it (Jakob, 2010). The intensity of the dependency grows with the perceived helpfulness of the media in attaining personal goals (Jakob, 2010). Of the demographics measured, only age was statistically significant, indicating that older respondents were more likely to feel dependent on the media, while education and gender did not play a role (Jakob, 2010). In terms of television, media skeptics watch less TV than respondents expressing confidence in mass media (Jakob, 2010).

Stroud and Lee (2008) also examined the role of media exposure in their study on perceptions of Fox News and CNN. Regardless of political affiliation, those watching more cable news were more likely to find Fox News credible and CNN not credible. Those who watched less cable news were more likely to find *both* CNN and Fox News not credible (Stroud & Lee, 2008). These results support the findings of Jakob (2010) that increased media dependency is positively correlated with increased perceptions of credibility. Generally speaking, communication research has by and large confirmed that media use and trust in the media is positively related (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Taking these past findings into consideration, this study's first and second hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Those who report greater exposure to a newscaster's program will perceive that newscaster as more credible.

H2: Those who report greater exposure to a newscaster's network as a whole will perceive that newscaster to be more credible.

Para-social relationships. Para-social relationships form when a sense of familiarity with a media figure makes them seem as though they are part of a viewer's peer group. Audience members feel as though they 'know' a media figure in somewhat the same way they know their own friends (Horton & Wohl, 1956). These relationships evolve over time and can foster feelings of intimacy, commitment, and affective attachments with the television personality (Russell & Heckler, 2004). Differing from real life relationships, para-social relationships are lacking in reciprocity, are entirely controlled by the media figure and are not susceptible to mutual development (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Although, the recent advent of social media platforms has somewhat altered this definition, as reciprocity is now somewhat more feasible. Such relationships can vary in intensity and quality (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Para-social relationships

can be long term, affect people's selection of media and their level of enjoyment during exposure (Klimmt, Hartman, & Schramm, 2006). Viewers can form para-social relationships with media personalities of all stripes, including those on fictional television such as sitcoms (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In fact, television producers hope that audiences will form these relationships with the characters so that audiences will view programs week after week (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). If an audience member holds a strong positive para-social relationship with a media figure, the audience member will be more likely to seek their message due to the para-social relationship (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005). Para-social relationships can explain many emotional and cognitive processes involved in selection, experience and effects of media, and viewers may continue to engage in para-social relationships when their television is turned off, just as people continue in interpersonal relationships when a friend is not around (Klimmt et al., 2006; Rubin & McHugh, 1987).

Several studies have examined para-social relationships and television news. Rubin et al. (1985) found strong relationships between para-social interaction and both perceived news realism and news affinity. Viewing news for information, rather than for excitement or entertainment purposes, was found to be a predictor of para-social interaction with a viewer's favorite local television news personality (Rubin et al., 1985). While the visual features of a newscaster could help to cultivate a para-social relationship, Rubin and McHugh (1987) found that the physical attractiveness of a media figure did not facilitate the creation of a strong para-social relationship, but rather the social attractiveness.

Levy (1979) found that people who watched more television news engaged in more para-social interaction with news personalities (Levy, 1979). In Levy's study, 52% of subjects agreed that newscasters are almost like friends one sees everyday (Levy, 1979). The idea of a para-

social relationship with a newscaster can best be described by one of Levy's participants who made this statement: "I grew up watching Walter Cronkite. I guess I expect him to be there when I turn on the news. We've been through a lot together. Men on the moon and things like that" (Levy, 1979, p.72). Given these previous findings regarding the importance of para-social relationships, this study's third hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Respondents who are found to have a stronger para-social relationship with a newscaster, will perceive that newscaster as more credible.

Visual credibility. Newhagen and Nass (1989) argue that because "seeing is believing" television news relies on its "natural assets" of being a visual medium to enhance its credibility as a news source (p. 279). However, a newscast's visual aspects are often an overlooked determinant of credibility. In terms of scholarly research, the visual aspect of news remains understudied (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). Yet, we still know much about visual communication and its application in TV news settings. For instance, visuals handily outperform the written and spoken word in tests of both long and short-term memory recall (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). Grabe and Bucy (2009) examined TV news coverage during presidential campaigns and found that the evaluative and emotional responses viewers experienced upon seeing visual portrayals of presidential candidates can translate into enduring attitudes, feelings and political behaviors (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). These emotional and attitudinal manifestations that occurred in audience members resulted even when visuals of the candidates were simply embedded in the background of newscasts, without their voices ever being heard (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). Grabe and Bucy (2009) also found evidence that visual framing on TV news can hinder candidate appeal, which was reflected in the polling numbers of Al Gore, George W. Bush, and John Kerry during their respective campaigns.

Newhagen and Nass (1989) argue that television news producers have substantial control over the perception of confidence that viewers have towards a news program. Sophisticated production techniques have been utilized to enhance the credibility of a news program with simple visual cues (Newhagen & Nass, 1989). The manner in which camera angles and other packaging features are employed in newscasts can greatly transform the content and embedded meaning (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). Even the presentation of newscasts in high definition has been demonstrated to have a positive influence on audience perceptions of the overall credibility of newscasts (Bracken, 2006). McCain and Wakshalg (1974) found that higher camera angles consistently produced higher credibility ratings than low angle shots. Additionally, the perceived attractiveness of the newscaster also increased with higher angle shots when tested against the traditional eye level shot (McCain & Wakshalg, 1974). The authors suggest that higher angle camera shots may help to equalize the power status that audiences perceive newscasters as having, thus cultivating a perception of approachability (McCain & Wakshalg, 1974). The opposite effect was found by Tiemens (1970) in a study where subjects who viewed a newscaster from a high camera angle tended to rate him as being the least communicative, least knowledgeable and least authoritative of the three newscaster choices (Tiemens, 1970). However, the opinionated political editorials the on-camera personas read may have caused subjects to simply rate the one they agreed with as most credible (Tiemens, 1970). This perhaps outlines a case for political leanings trumping visual factors when measuring credibility.

Shosteck (1973) sought to test the argument that the ability of a news viewer to simply recognize a newscaster would be enough to elicit a favorable view towards them. Viewers were shown pictures of newscasters, if they identified them correctly the news personality scored high in recognition. Those newscasters who were recognized, but were not named correctly received a

medium and those who failed to be recognized entirely scored a low. Those newscasters who were the best known tended to be the highest rated in terms of favorability (Shosteck, 1973). Despite this finding, Shosteck (1973) also noted that TV News personalities might not have the same level of appeal across different segments of the audience. Viewer traits such as age, sex or socio-economic status of the viewer can affect the appeal of a TV newscaster (Shosteck, 1973). The source similarity argument states that news sources more similar to the viewer would be seen as more credible (Miller & Kurpius, 2010).

The way a newscaster looks and sounds are of prime importance (Houlberg & Dimmick, 1980). For this reason, TV news producers seek newscasters who are highly personable and can employ the studied use of even the smallest facial gesture to enhance a refined image of trust, warmth and confidence (Newhagen & Nass, 1989). A newscaster's appearance, clothing and inflection constitute a non-verbal language that communicates to an audience just as the words the newscaster speaks (Sanders & Pritchett, 1971). In fact, the president of Fox News, Roger Ailes, has been reported to routinely watch his network with the audio turned off so he can gauge the effectiveness of strictly the visual aspects of the newscasts (Melber, 2011). Sanders and Pritchett (1971) sought to determine the visual traits that make for a viewer's ideal newscaster. A ranking scale was employed to measure visual traits such as height, weight, hair color, race, age, and clothing. A negative rating on anyone of these variables indicated that a viewer did not want their ideal newscaster to possess that particular visual characteristic. Among the first visual traits to be eliminated from the audience's perceptions of an ideal newscaster were a heavy build, short height, red hair, light coat, striped shirt, sports shirt, bow tie, and beard and moustache (Sanders & Pritchett, 1971). Even racial preferences were observed in this study as the people surveyed indicated their image of an ideal newscaster was not African American (Sanders & Pritchett,

1971). Slender build, tall height, and pastel colored shirt were also eliminated, but not as overwhelmingly. The visual traits that the participants felt an ideal newscaster possessed were 31- 40 years of age, blond hair, a solid colored tie, medium height and build, with a white shirt and a dark coat (Sanders & Pritchett, 1971). Seemingly minute details such as these can prove to be important considerations for producers selecting wardrobe for their newscasters, and when selecting the newscasters themselves. The more appealing a newscaster's image, the larger his or her audience is likely to be. If a newscaster's image is positive, it is more likely that what he/she has to say will be believed (Sanders & Pritchett, 1971). Based on these previous findings, this study's fourth and fifth hypotheses are:

H4: Respondents that rate a newscaster as having highly credible visual characteristics will perceive said newscaster to be more credible overall.

H5: Respondents that are able to identify a newscaster will perceive the newscaster to be more credible.

Method

The method of choice for this study was a survey. This was the chosen instrument of measure over other potential methods due to its low cost and ease of accessibility. An online survey was sent via email to both graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts at the Rochester Institute of Technology during the fall of 2011. Concomitantly, the survey was distributed via Facebook to non-RIT students in case the response rate from RIT was insufficient. Before taking the survey, each participant was given a description of what it entailed. The survey was created with Clipboard, which can be set to require an RIT username to access the questions, thus insuring only RIT students and faculty would be measured in the RIT-only sample. The survey that collected data from the general public was the identical Clipboard

survey, but an RIT username was not required to participate. The survey was comprised of five distinct sections that measured different variables. Part 1 of the survey consisted of questions that sought to measure the participant's amount of exposure to cable news programs. A 7-point Likert scale was used allowing participants to rate how often they viewed certain cable newscasters, ranging from always to never (Stroud & Lee, 2008, p.13). Part 2 measured the perceived credibility of a cable newscaster with a 5-point scale adopted from Newhagen and Nass (1984) that ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Respondents had to rate the degree to which 17 separate statements applied to each newscaster. Each of these scores was averaged and this was used as the overall credibility rating for each newscaster and served as the dependent variable in the regression tests. Part 3 of the survey measured the strength of para-social relationships formed with each cable newscaster. Five-point Likert scales were adopted from Russell et al. (2004) and Houlberg (1984) that allowed participants to respond to each statement ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Part 4 measured the recognition, perceived political leanings, and visual characteristics of each cable newscaster. This section consisted of the 5 and 7-point Likert scales used in the previous sections of the survey, and a single open-ended response to determine the newscaster's level of recognition. The open-ended question asked respondents to write the newscaster's name after viewing their picture, if they were able to identify them. The order in which the newscasters' pictures appeared was altered from the previous sections of the survey so respondents were truly tested on whether or not they could identify the newscaster, and not just rely on a pattern. The scales in this section of the survey were adopted from Shosteck (1973). The final section of the survey collected simple demographic information about the participant. Slight modifications were made to the wording of questions adopted from previous research to fit the goals of this present study. The RIT-only

data and general public data were downloaded into two separate data sets and a paired sample *t*-test was run to determine if the two samples were independent. The test revealed that the two samples were indeed independent, so the data was combined into a single sample set. A copy of the survey used can be found in Appendix C. Of the surveys distributed a total of 139 responses were received, 58 from the snowball sample obtained via Facebook and 81 obtained from the email distributed to RIT students enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts. The average age of respondents was 25.46. The sample consisted of 59 male respondents (37%) and 80 female respondents (58%). The newscaster that garnered the highest overall credibility ratings was Anderson Cooper with an average rating of 3.57. Bill O'Reilly was perceived as the least credible newscaster, with an average credibility rating of 2.67. For this scale, the newscaster with a credibility rating closest to 5 is rated as the most credible. The network that received the highest amount of exposure was CNN with an average score of 2.97, comparatively low with the highest possible exposure rating of 7 = always. Fox News was the least watched network with an average exposure rating of 2.05. The individual newscaster that received the highest amount of exposure was Anderson Cooper with an average rating of 2.8. The newscaster that received the lowest amount was Greta Van Susteren with an average rating of 1.3. The respondents in the sample tended to lean more to the liberal side of the political spectrum with an average rating of 3, with 1 = liberal and 7 = conservative. The same was true of the sample's party affiliation, once again having an average rating of 3, with 1 = strong democrat and 7 = strong republican. In terms of the political perceptions of the newscasters themselves, respondents perceived Rachel Maddow as the most liberal with an average rating of 3.06. She was also perceived to be the strongest democrat with a rating of 2.95. Bill O'Reilly was the newscaster that respondents perceived as the most conservative, with an average rating of 5.68. O'Reilly was also perceived

to be the strongest republican with an average rating of 5.60. The most recognizable newscaster was Anderson Cooper with an average rating of .83. The least recognizable newscaster was Lawrence O'Donnell with an average rating of only .19 (see Table D1).

Results

Politics

The mean credibility score was calculated for each newscaster. This served as the dependent variable in the linear regression tests that were run for each variable. The first was a test of the effect the respondent's reported political leanings had upon the perceived credibility of each newscaster (see Table D2). Research question 1 asked, "How does one's political leanings bear upon credibility perceptions of a newscaster?" None of the other eight newscasters' credibility ratings were impacted by respondents' political leanings at a statistically significant level. Additionally, party affiliation of the respondent, as well as the perceived party affiliation of the newscaster bore no significant effect on credibility perceptions. However, the perceived political leanings of the newscaster themselves did exert a statistically significant effect upon credibility perceptions in three cases. Bill O'Reilly was found to be credible by those who perceived him to be liberal ($\beta = -.343$, $p = .014$). This is an especially interesting finding, as Bill O'Reilly was perceived to be the most conservative overall newscaster. Rachel Maddow was also found to be credible by those who perceived her to be liberal ($\beta = -.458$, $p = .037$). This was also the case for Lawrence O'Donnell ($\beta = -.527$, $p = .028$).

Exposure

A linear regression test was conducted once again to determine the effect that respondents' reported level of exposure to cable news would have upon perceived credibility levels (see Table D3). Hypothesis 1 stated, "Those who report greater exposure to a newscaster's

program will perceive that newscaster as more credible.” Of the CNN newscasters, both Erin Burnett ($\beta = .526, p = .001$) and Wolf Blitzer ($\beta = .471, p = .004$) were perceived to be credible as exposure to their programs increased, lending support for H1. However, Anderson Cooper did not exhibit a statistically significant relationship between exposure to his program and credibility perceptions. He did display higher credibility ratings as viewership of CNN as a whole increased ($\beta = .338, p = .020$). This was the only case for the CNN newscasters that lent support to Hypothesis 2, which stated, “Those who report greater exposure to a newscaster’s network as a whole will perceive that newscaster to be more credible.” Interestingly, those respondents with a lower amount of exposure to Greta Van Susteren’s program displayed a significant tendency to perceive Erin Burnett as more credible ($\beta = -.456, p = .046$). Additionally, those who reported lower levels of exposure to Sean Hannity’s program tended to find Wolf Blitzer credible at a significant level ($\beta = -.594, p = .008$). Among Fox News newscasters only Sean Hannity displayed statistically significant relationships. He was perceived as more credible by those who reported high exposure to his program ($\beta = .508, p = .021$) and by those who reported high exposure to the Fox News network as a whole ($\beta = .294, p = .022$) lending support to both H1 and H2, respectively. For MSNBC newscasters, Rachel Maddow was perceived as credible as exposure to her program increased ($\beta = .339, p = .014$). Interestingly, she was also found to be credible as exposure to Fox News decreased ($\beta = -.283, p = .025$). Rachel Maddow was also perceived to be credible among those who reported higher exposure to Lawrence O’Donnell’s program ($\beta = .466, p = .008$). Lawrence O’Donnell was also found to be credible by viewers who reported higher levels of exposure to his program ($\beta = .483, p = .040$). Ed Schultz did not exhibit a statistically significant relationship between his credibility perceptions and exposure to any

network or individual news program, as was the case with Erin Burnett. Respondents who reported lower amounts of exposure to Greta Van Susteren's program displayed a significant tendency to perceive Rachel Maddow as being more credible ($\beta = -.425, p = .011$). No newscaster was perceived as being more credible by respondents that reported low amounts of exposure to their personal program at a significant level.

Para-social Relationships

To determine the effect the strength of a para-social relationship that a viewer has with a cable newscaster has upon the newscaster's perceived credibility, a linear regression test was run (see Table D4). Hypothesis 3 stated, "Respondents who are found to have a stronger para-social relationship with a newscaster, will perceive that newscaster as more credible." For CNN newscasters, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between para-social relationship strength and perceived credibility for Anderson Cooper ($\beta = .575, p = .000$), lending support to H3. Anderson Cooper was the newscaster that respondents exhibited the strongest overall para-social relationship with, garnering an average rating of 2.88. Those displaying a weak para-social relationship with Erin Burnett also tended to find Anderson Cooper more credible ($\beta = -.572, p = .016$). There was a significant relationship between Wolf Blitzer's credibility perceptions and a strong para-social relationship with Lawrence O'Donnell ($\beta = -.722, p = .022$). No such statistically significant relationships were found for Erin Burnett. Among Fox News newscasters, Bill O'Reilly was found to be credible among respondents displaying a strong para-social relationship with him ($\beta = -.512, p = .002$) offering support to H3. This is an interesting finding as Bill O'Reilly was found to have cultivated the weakest overall para-social relationship with respondents, garnering an average rating of 2.12. Greta Van Susteren exhibited three statistically significant relationships between para-social relationship and her perceived

credibility, but none of these para-social relationships were cultivated with audience members of her program. Weak para-social relationships with Rachel Maddow ($\beta = -.336, p = .046$), and Lawrence O'Donnell ($\beta = -.947, p = .002$) displayed significant tendencies to find Greta Van Susteren credible. However, respondents displaying a strong para-social relationship with Ed Schultz ($\beta = -.743, p = .008$) also tended to find Greta Van Susteren credible. No significant relationship existed between Sean Hannity's credibility perceptions and para-social relationship strength. Among MSNBC newscasters, only Rachel Maddow was found to have a significant relationship that lent support to H3. Viewers that cultivated a strong para-social relationship with Rachel Maddow tended to perceive her to be more credible ($\beta = -.422, p = .024$). Ed Schultz and Lawrence O'Donnell displayed no significant relationships.

Visual Credibility

Finally, a linear regression test was run to determine the effect that the credibility of the visual characteristics of the newscasters had upon their overall perceived credibility (see Table D5). Hypothesis 4 stated, "Respondents that rate a newscaster as having highly credible visual characteristics will perceive said newscaster to be more credible." Not a single CNN newscaster was found to have a statistically significant relationship between visual characteristics and perceptions of credibility, despite Anderson Cooper being rated as having the highest credibility for his visual characteristics overall with an average of 3.9. Among Fox News newscasters, Bill O'Reilly's visual characteristics had a significant effect upon his perceived credibility ($\beta = .323, p = .033$) lending support to H4. Those who found Bill O'Reilly to be visually credible also displayed a tendency to perceive Greta Van Susteren as credible overall ($\beta = -.429, p = .012$). Additionally, Greta Van Susteren was the only newscaster whose credibility perceptions were found to be significantly affected by the visual characteristics of someone other than themselves.

Respondents who did not perceive Rachel Maddow to be visually credible displayed a significant tendency to perceive Greta Van Susteren as more credible overall ($\beta = -.590, p = .000$). No significant relationship was observed for Sean Hannity. For MSNBC newscasters, Rachel Maddow was perceived as credible overall by those who found her to be visually credible ($\beta = -.383, p = .009$). Despite having the lowest overall visual credibility rating with an average of 3.01, Ed Schultz was also perceived as credible overall by those who found his visual characteristics to be credible ($\beta = -.356, p = .023$). Rachel Maddow and Ed Schultz were the two cases for MSNBC that lent support to H4. Lawrence O'Donnell exhibited no significant relationships. Hypothesis 5 stated, "Respondents that are able to identify a newscaster will perceive the newscaster to be more credible." The results determined that the ability of respondents to recognize and correctly identify a newscaster had no significant effect on their credibility perceptions, thus rejecting H5.

Discussion

The linear regression tests revealed that no single hypothesis was supported by every newscaster on every occasion. The first test that examined political affiliations yielded interesting results. Not a single newscaster's credibility was affected by the politics of the audience. Instead, the perception of the newscaster's politics is what affected their perceived credibility. Still, this was only the case for three of the nine newscasters. Rachel Maddow and Lawrence O'Donnell garnered higher credibility ratings by those who perceived each to be liberal. The same was true of Bill O'Reilly, despite his being perceived as the most conservative newscaster overall. Given the more liberal make-up of the sample, the reasoning for the findings for the MSNBC newscasters seems intuitive enough, but the findings for Bill O'Reilly of Fox News remain open for discussion. Notice that CNN was not part of the mix when it came to

significant results for partisan perceptions. CNN markets itself as the most centrist and objective of the cable news networks and often accuses MSNBC and Fox News of catering to the political left and the political right, respectively (McDermott, 2010). This assertion by CNN appears to be backed up by these findings. Still, with only three of the nine total newscasters found to have their political perceptions effect their credibility perceptions in a significant way, MSNBC and Fox News newscasters are not necessarily reflecting a hyper-partisan image to their audiences. The lack of significant findings in terms of partisanship in this regard seems to be at odds with the hostile media theory that states that highly partisan individuals will perceive opposing news sources as highly biased and therefore less credible.

CNN newscasters each were found to have a significant relationship between exposure and credibility perceptions. Wolf Blitzer and Erin Burnett were both perceived as credible by respondents that reported watching their shows. Watching more of the CNN network as a whole significantly influenced perceptions of Anderson Cooper as being credible. Anderson Cooper was the most watched newscaster overall and had the highest overall credibility rating, but this did not translate into a significant finding when it came to the effect that exposure to his personal program had upon his credibility perceptions. On Fox News, only Sean Hannity was found to have significant relationships between exposure to his program, exposure to Fox News as a whole, and his credibility perceptions. Bill O'Reilly received the most amount of exposure of the Fox News newscasters, yet did not yield a significant result. This indicates that high viewership does not necessarily translate into high credibility perceptions. Rachel Maddow and Lawrence O'Donnell each had significant relationships between exposure to their shows and credibility perceptions. The interesting finding in this case was that low exposure to Greta Van Susteren and to Fox News as a whole significantly related to perceiving Rachel Maddow as credible. This

could be a political consideration as Rachel Maddow was perceived as the most liberal overall newscaster, and liberals may choose not to expose themselves to newscasters on the more conservative Fox News channel. However, significant findings for Rachel Maddow's credibility perceptions were not observed for respondents reporting low exposure to either of the other Fox News newscasters. Erin Burnett of CNN also exhibited the same phenomenon of respondents that reported low exposure to Greta Van Susteren perceiving her to be credible at a significant level. Perhaps this occurrence has less to do with politics and more to do with gender, as Rachel Maddow, Greta Van Susteren and Erin Burnett were the only three female newscasters in this study. Joseph Klapper's reinforcement theory states that individuals will seek out the media sources with which they already agree. Although it appears respondents are exposing themselves to the newscasters they find more credible, we cannot say the increased exposure is the reason they find these newscasters more credible. Possibly, it is the perceptions of high credibility that cause viewers to expose themselves to these newscasters in the first place. Five out of the nine newscasters were found to support H1 and only two of the nine were found to support H2. This may indicate a need for networks to promote newscasters on an individual basis, rather than promoting the network as a whole.

The same may be true of para-social relationships as only three out of the nine newscasters were found to have para-social relationship strength effect their credibility perceptions at a significant level. Rachel Maddow, Bill O'Reilly, and Anderson Cooper were the newscasters that displayed a strong para-social relationship with their respective audiences and in turn exhibited a significant positive effect on their credibility perceptions. No newscaster was found to be significantly credible by audience members displaying a weak para-social relationship with them personally. Keep in mind that Rachel Maddow was perceived to be the

most liberal newscaster overall, Bill O'Reilly the most conservative, and Anderson Cooper the most credible and the most watched. Perhaps politics and exposure may influence the manner in which a para-social relationship is cultivated. Since the phenomenistic theory states that people will seek that media that serves to reinforce their worldview, the cultivation of a para-social relationship would seem to only occur with the media figures with which you already agree. Understanding the ways in which newscasters can strengthen para-social relationships with their audience members is an area that warrants further research.

With respect to the importance of a newscaster's visual characteristics, only Bill O'Reilly, Rachel Maddow, and Ed Schultz were found to have significant effects upon their credibility perceptions. Ed Schultz received the lowest visual credibility score, yet this still managed to influence his overall credibility perceptions in a significant manner. Anderson Cooper received the highest visual credibility score, however this did not affect his overall credibility perceptions significantly. This could indicate that factors such as age, clothing, hairstyle and attractiveness may not bear the same level of influence in establishing credibility on cable news as they once did on broadcast news. Still, networks today, especially Fox News who has been criticized for this practice, have made an effort to place attractive newscasters and pundits on the air at considerable frequency. Additionally, the ability to recognize a newscaster bore no significant effect upon credibility perceptions, completely rejecting H5. Shosteck (1973) found that the ability to recognize a newscaster usually translated into favorable opinions of them. This does not appear to be the case with credibility, at least not at a significant level. The newscaster's picture that respondents could most easily recognize was that of Anderson Cooper, and he was also rated as the most credible. However, the former did not exert a significant effect upon the latter. The newscaster that respondents were able to recognize the least was Lawrence

O'Donnell, yet he scored above Bill O'Reilly in credibility perceptions and Bill O'Reilly was the second most recognizable newscaster. This finding may indicate that networks do not have to overextend their marketing reach of newscasters. Many newscasters make appearances on late night talk shows or even make cameos in comedy or other non-news television programs. In some cases, individuals who have built up their celebrity in other venues are offered cable news shows. John McEnroe, Joy Behar, and DL Hughley have all hosted shows on cable news networks in the past decade to varying degrees of success (Larson, 2004). Building, or acquiring, a highly identifiable face for a cable news host may not be an essential task for networks, as a high level of notoriety was not found to affect any newscaster's credibility in a significant way. Networks may want to be wary of the amount of fame a newscaster acquires. Bill O'Reilly was the second most recognizable newscaster, yet the least credible. This may suggest that some newscasters become well known for the wrong reasons.

Interestingly, the newscasters that made up the political extremes of the spectrum tended to yield significant results in each of the regression tests. Rachel Maddow, who was rated as the most liberal overall, produced significant results in each of the four regression tests. Her perceived political leanings, exposure to her show, the strength of the para-social relationships she cultivated with her audience members, and her visual credibility all significantly affected her overall credibility perceptions. Bill O'Reilly, who was rated as the most conservative overall, produced significant results in three of the four regression tests. Only the exposure variable failed to exert a significant effect upon his overall credibility perceptions. The political polarization of cable news audiences may be at the heart of what determines a newscaster's credibility perceptions. This observance falls in line with the phenomenistic theory, in that the newscasters with whom viewers already agree with will be the ones that they ultimately choose

to watch. The more staunch an audience member's political views, the more they would watch a newscaster with similarly uncompromising views, develop a para-social relationship with them, and perhaps even find them more visually appealing.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The sample size of this study was very limited in size and diversity. A far more adequate and representative sample is needed before the findings of this study can be generalized to the population at large. Another limitation is the volatility in the cable news business. Two of the pundits I intended to measure initially had been removed from their programs by the time my survey was crafted. This study is one that should be reproduced every few years or so. This will help networks to see if their current lineups have maintained credibility from year to year, and identify the factors that may have led to a decline. Another limitation is the self-reported nature of the data, leaving room for errors on the behalf of the respondent such as lapses in memory or unfamiliarity with the topic at hand. A more in depth question is required for the measurement of recognition to obtain data for a specific application in a news marketing strategy. In addition to seeing if respondents could identify a newscaster by looking at their picture, asking respondents specifically where they recognized the newscaster from may have yielded more useful information.

Not included in this study was Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, or Bill Maher. Certain studies indicate that an increasing number of Americans, predominantly younger people, get their news from these shows exclusively (Kakutani, 2008). An examination of how comedic presentation of news stories effects credibility perceptions would be an interesting endeavor. A 2009 poll conducted by Time Magazine found Jon Stewart was rated as the most trusted newscaster in America (Chafets, 2010; Harris, 2009). Stewart's "The Daily Show" is branded as

a comedy show first, and a news program second if at all (Kakutani, 2008). The use of comedy on “news-first” programs has been increasingly widespread in recent years, especially on cable. Rachel Maddow, who is not considered a comedian like Stewart, often infuses comedy into her presentation of the news, and Keith Olbermann’s “Worst Person in the World” segment is often a comedically presented, sarcastic jab at Olbermann’s detractors. Comedy in newscasting is not limited to the liberal side of the spectrum. In fact, conservative Glenn Beck has gone on several stand-up comedy tours himself (Gills, 2011). Determining the role humor plays in credibility perceptions is a research area worth exploring.

Another direction may be the impact that the brand name of a newscaster’s home network has upon credibility. Keith Olbermann and Glenn Beck were highly rated cable newscasters on MSNBC and Fox News, respectively (Gills, 2011). Each has recently found homes on new media outlets, but will the credibility they attained on their old networks follow them to their new platforms? How much of their credibility was due to the Fox News or MSNBC brand name? Glenn Beck enjoyed immense popularity while on Fox News, but parted ways with the network in June of 2011 (Gillis, 2011). Beck has since launched an internet-only show, attempting to emulate the success of Internet-based news programs like “The Young Turks.” The melding of television and the Internet is increasing with sites like Hulu and now Beck’s “GBTV.” As this trend continues, an exploration of credibility of online-only newscasters seems like a natural next step. Would the credibility of Internet pundits like Beck suffer without the brand of an established news outlet to back them up?

Research on the credibility of “side pundits,” such as Ann Coulter or Alan Colmes, who do not have television shows of their own, could help to better understand the credibility perceptions of the actual news program hosts. Would the amount of agreement or disagreement

with pundit guests like Coulter or Colmes affect the host's credibility in a positive or negative manner? Does the fact that a newscaster would even allow certain pundits onto their programs hinder their credibility perceptions? Building on the findings of this study can lead researchers down new paths for understanding the factors that enhance newscaster credibility.

Conclusion

This study set out to determine the effect the factors of politics, exposure, para-social relationship strength, and visual credibility had upon perceptions of a newscaster's overall credibility. This study was done to provide insight into credibility by examining factors that are not necessarily clear to the naked eye. Prior findings indicate that political leanings often determine your preference of news outlet, especially in the cable news realm. These current results allow us to say which aspects of a news outlet, specifically which newscasters featured on said outlet, are perceived to be most credible and why. It is not the political leanings or party affiliation of the audience that matters; rather it is the perception of the newscasters' politics that really determines credibility perceptions. Previous studies confirmed that people who reported higher amounts of exposure to news networks displayed a tendency to perceive that network as more trustworthy. We can now say that the same is true when it comes to individual newscasters on that network, and this may prove more important than exposure to the network as a whole. Five out of the nine newscasters displayed significant relationships between credibility and exposure to their individual programs, and only two out of the nine newscasters exhibited significant relationships between credibility and exposure to their host networks as a whole. The importance of television personalities cultivating para-social relationships with their audiences has been well demonstrated on other media outlets such as fictional television, but it has proven to be less so when it comes to television news. Only three of the nine newscasters exhibited a

significant relationship between their credibility perceptions and para-social relationship strength. Perhaps this is due to the more serious and less casual interaction style that is the hallmark of news. Cable newscasters may be more casual than the rigid, just the facts presentation style often used by broadcast news anchors, but the present findings indicate new techniques may be necessary to make the cultivation of para-social relationships more widespread among newscasters. Previous findings indicated that small details in the visual characteristics of a newscaster could enhance or hinder credibility perceptions. This was not the overwhelming case in this study, with only three of the nine newscasters having their overall credibility perceptions significantly affected by their visual characteristics. Perhaps the look of a newscaster is not as important to an audience as it once was. These findings can assist news producers in creating a program that has specific appeal yet manages to be taken seriously across a broader audience. Television news is not as it once was, and with fierce competition among newscasters today any insight into the factors that may provide a leg up is invaluable.

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Appendix B
Letter to Participants

Dear _____,

You have been selected to participate in a survey that seeks to gain a better understanding about today's television news media. The wide selection of news pundits from each side of the political spectrum facilitates the need to comprehend why viewers choose the news sources they do.

This survey is entirely anonymous and confidential and takes less than 15 minutes to complete. I am the only person who will have access to the data and your name will never appear in any results.

Participation in the survey is entirely voluntary, and you can stop participating at any point. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions posed in the survey.

Should you experience any discomfort as a result of taking this survey, contact the counseling center at 585-475-2261, second floor of the August Center (Bldg. 23A).

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have. My email address is:
jmm4127@rit.edu

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Max Mertel

Appendix C
Survey (p. 43 – 46)

Cable Newscaster Credibility Survey

Please answer all questions to the best of your ability.

Part 1: Exposure - Questions 1 - 7

Please read each question carefully. Select a single number for each question from 1 to 7

1. Politically, I tend to be:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very Liberal						Very Conservative
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strong Democrat						Strong Republican

2. How often do you watch Fox News?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never						Always

3. Who do you watch on Fox News?

Bill O'Reilly:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never						Always

Sean Hannity:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never						Always

Greta Van Susteren:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never						Always

4. How often do you watch MSNBC?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never						Always

5. Who do you watch on MSNBC?

Lawrence O'Donnell:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never						Always

Rachel Maddow:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never						Always

Ed Schultz:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never						Always

6. How often do you watch CNN?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never						Always

7. Who do You Watch on CNN?

Anderson Cooper:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never						Always

Piers Morgan:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never						Always

Wolf Blitzer:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never						Always

Part 2: News Credibility Scale - Questions 8 - 23

Rank from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree how you feel about each cable news pundit (This will be done for all 9 newscasters)

Bill O'Reilly is:

8. Factual - SA A N D SD

9. Can be trusted - SA A N D SD

10. Fair - SA A N D SD

11. Accurate - SA A N D SD

12. Tells the whole Story - SA A N D SD

13. Well trained - SA A N D SD

14. Separates facts from opinions - SA A N D SD

15. Concerned mainly about the public interest - SA A N D SD

16. Unbiased - SA A N D SD

17. Moral - SA A N D SD

18. Qualified - SA A N D SD

19. Watches out after your interests - SA A N D SD

20. Sensationalizes - SA A N D SD

21. Respects people's privacy - SA A N D SD

22. Patriotic - SA A N D SD

23. Honest - SA A N D SD

24. Don't know this person - SA A N D SD

Part 3 - TV Connectedness Scale - Questions 24 - 45

Rank from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree how you feel about each cable news pundit (This will be done for all 9 news pundits)

24. Daily visits from Bill O'Reilly helps make my problems easier to handle. SA A N D SD

25. Bill O'Reilly Talks to me as if actually in my home. SA A N D SD

26. I would like to know more about Bill O'Reilly off the job. SA A N D SD

27. Watching Bill O'Reilly is almost like an everyday friend of mine. SA A N D SD

28. Everyday visits from Bill O'Reilly helps make me feel connected. SA A N D SD

Part 4 – Recognition and Visual Credibility - Questions 46 – 52

Please observe each photo and answer the questions that follow to the best of your ability (this will be repeated for all 9 news pundits photos)



46. **This Newscaster’s name is**_____

47. **The political leanings of this newscaster tend to be:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very Liberal				Very Conservative		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strong Democrat				Strong Republican		

48. This newscaster’s clothing makes him/her appear credible. SA A N D SD

49. This newscaster’s hairstyle makes him/her appear credible. SA A N D SD

50. This newscaster is physically attractive. SA A N D SD

51. This newscaster’s age makes him/her appear credible. SA A N D SD

52. This newscaster appears intelligent and educated. SA A N D SD

Part 5 – Demographics - Questions 53 – 58

Please answer any and all question that are applicable.

**Appendix D
Tables**

Table D 1

Descriptive Statistics (p. 47 – 50)

Credibility

	Bill O'Reilly	Sean Hannity	Greta Van Susteren	Lawrence O'Donnell	Rachel Maddow	Ed Schultz	Wolf Blitzer	Anderson Cooper	Erin Burnett
Valid	137	137	135	135	133	134	134	135	134
<i>N</i> Missing	2	2	4	4	6	5	5	4	5
Mean	2.6750	2.6954	2.7614	2.7564	3.1107	2.7949	3.1196	3.5782	2.7727
Median	2.8824	2.8824	2.8824	2.8824	3.0000	2.8824	3.0000	3.7059	2.8824
Mode	3.00	2.88	2.88	2.88	2.88	2.88	3.00	2.88	2.88
Sum	366.48	369.27	372.78	372.11	413.72	374.51	418.03	483.06	371.54

Recognition

	Bill O'Reilly	Erin Burnett	Lawrence O'Donnell	Rachel Maddow	Anderson Cooper	Ed Schultz	Greta Van Susteren	Sean Hannity	Wolf Blitzer
Valid	135	136	137	135	136	136	136	136	136
<i>N</i> Missing	4	3	2	4	3	3	3	3	3
Mean	.7630	.2500	.1971	.4741	.8309	.2059	.3235	.3750	.5515
Median	1.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000	1.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000	1.0000
Mode	1.00	.00	.00	.00	1.00	.00	.00	.00	1.00
Sum	103.00	34.00	27.00	64.00	113.00	28.00	44.00	51.00	75.00

Para-social Relationships

	Bill O'Reilly	Sean Hannity	Greta Van Susteren	Wolf Blitzer	Erin Burnett	Anderson Cooper	Rachel Maddow	Ed Schultz	Lawrence O'Donnell
Valid <i>N</i>	130	126	123	124	124	127	123	123	121
Missing	9	13	16	15	15	12	16	16	18
Mean	2.1242	2.2492	2.4000	2.4597	2.5290	2.8886	2.6472	2.4650	2.5240
Median	2.0000	2.7000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.0000
Mode	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Sum	276.15	283.40	295.20	305.00	313.60	366.85	325.60	303.20	305.40

Network Exposure

Network Exposure	Fox News	MSNBC	CNN
Valid <i>N</i>	137	137	136
Missing	2	2	3
Mean	2.0511	2.5109	2.9706
Median	1.0000	2.0000	2.5000
Mode	1.00	1.00	2.00
Sum	281.00	344.00	404.00

Exposure to Newscasters

Newscaster Exposure	Bill O'Reilly	Sean Hannity	Rachel Maddow	Ed Schultz	Lawrence O'Donnell	Erin Burnett	Anderson Cooper	Wolf Blitzer
Valid <i>N</i>	138	136	137	135	136	135	137	136
Missing	1	3	2	4	3	4	2	3
Mean	1.6377	1.4412	1.7956	1.3407	1.3971	1.4593	2.8248	1.9485
Median	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	1.0000	3.0000	1.0000
Mode	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Sum	226.00	196.00	246.00	181.00	190.00	197.00	387.00	265.00

Demographics

	Political Lean	Parent's Politics	Party	Parent's Party	Religion	Major	Income	Gender	Age
Valid <i>N</i>	132	132	133	132	131	131	100	132	134
Missing	7	7	6	7	8	8	39	7	5
Mean	3.0076	4.3030	3.0602	4.2047	4.0305	4.2672	1.9100	1.6136	25.4627
Median	3.0000	4.5000	3.0000	4.0000	5.0000	6.0000	2.0000	2.0000	23.5000
Mode	2.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	6.00	6.00	1.00	2.00	24.00
Sum	397.00	568.00	407.00	555.00	528.00	559.00	191.00	213.00	3412.00

Visual Trait Credibility

	Bill O'Reilly	Erin Burnett	Lawrence O'Donnell	Rachel Maddow	Anderson Cooper	Ed Schultz	Greta Van Susteren	Sean Hannity	Wolf Blitzer
Valid	128	123	121	123	129	118	122	124	132
<i>N</i> Missing	11	16	18	18	10	21	17	15	7
Mean	3.1992	3.6276	3.3752	3.4016	3.9736	3.0153	3.1012	3.2081	3.4564
Median	3.4000	3.8000	3.4000	3.4000	4.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.4000	3.6000
Mode	3.60	3.80	3.00	3.80	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Sum	409.50	446.20	408.40	418.40	512.60	355.05	378.35	397.80	456.25

Table D 2

Political Leanings and Credibility – Linear Regression Tests (p. 51 – 52)

	CNN	Erin Burnett	Wolf Blitzer	Anderson Cooper
		β	β	β
Model 1 Demographics	Income	.023	-.112	-.253*
	Gender	.065	-.194	-.117
	Age	-.105	.137	.183
	Incremental R^2	.038	.104	.132
Model 2 Politics	Political Leanings	.068	-.012	-.191
	Party Affiliation	.085	-.202	-.036
	Perceived Political Leanings of Newscaster	-.295	.082	-.305
	Perceived Party Affiliation of Newscaster	.132	-.205	.158
	Incremental R^2	.044	.023	.037
	Final R^2	.082	.127	.169

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

		Fox News	Bill O'Reilly	Sean Hannity	Greta Van Susteren
		β	β	β	β
Model 1 Demographics	Income	.185	.125	.092	
	Gender	.039	.114	.136	
	Age	-.073	-.157	-.048	
	Incremental R^2	.268	.183	.120	
Model 2 Politics	Political Leanings	.217	.143	.146	
	Party Affiliation	.280	.298	.175	
	Perceived Political Leanings of Newscaster	-.343*	-.276	-.065	
	Perceived Party Affiliation of Newscaster	-.022	.043	-.028	
	Incremental R^2	.113	.036	.007	
	Final R^2	.381	.219	.127	

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

		MSNBC	Rachel Maddow	Ed Schultz	Lawrence O'Donnell
		β	β	β	β
Model 1 Demographics	Income	-.066	.141	.039	
	Gender	-.062	.003	.002	
	Age	.063	-.122	-.164	
	Political Leanings	-.301	.138	-.067	
	Incremental R^2	.107	.034	.033	
Model 2 Politics	Party Affiliation	.000	-.223	-.098	
	Perceived Political Leanings of Newscaster	-.458*	.312	-.527*	
	Perceived Party Affiliation of Newscaster	.049	-.556	.320	
	Incremental R^2	.146	.082	.08	
	Final R^2	.253	.116	.113	

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Table D3

Exposure and Credibility – Linear Regression Tests (p. 53 – 55)

		CNN	Erin Burnett	Wolf Blitzer	Anderson Cooper
			β	β	β
Model 1 Demographics	Income		.035	.005	-.223
	Gender		.084	-.075	-.098
	Age		-.067	.051	.123
	Political Leanings		.001	.178	-.072
	Party Affiliation		.134	-.409	-.136
	Perceived Political Leanings of Newscaster		-.223	-.060	-.573*
	Perceived Party Affiliation of Newscaster		.093	-.192	.352
	Incremental R^2		.053	.177	.217
Model 2 Network Exposure	Fox News Exposure		.207	-.156	-.179
	MSNBC Exposure		-.083	.139	.023
	CNN Exposure		.013	.241	.338*
	Incremental R^2		.025	.085	.086
Model 3 Newscaster Exposure	Greta Van Susteren		-.456*	-.148	-.373
	Bill O'Reilly		-.044	.264	.257
	Sean Hannity		.202	-.594**	-.112
	Rachel Maddow		.129	.144	-.019
	Ed Schultz		-.073	-.218	-.100
	Lawrence O'Donnell		.031	.536*	.429
	Erin Burnett		.526**	.034	-.066
	Anderson Cooper		.087	.066	.279
	Wolf Blitzer		-.212	.471**	.114
	Incremental R^2		.294	.277	.127
	Final R^2		.372	.539	.430

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

	Fox News	Bill O'Reilly	Sean Hannity	Greta Van Susteren
	β	β	β	β
Model 1 Demographics	Income	.053	.002	.074
	Gender	.038	.033	.129
	Age	.034	-.078	.018
	Political Leanings	.138	-.017	.044
	Party Affiliation	.195	.371*	.191
	Perceived Political Leanings of Newscaster	-.358*	-.136	-.025
	Perceived Party Affiliation of Newscaster	-.066	-.170	-.073
	Incremental R^2	.365	.287	.091
Model 2 Network Exposure	Fox News Exposure	.209	.294*	.261
	MSNBC Exposure	-.139	-.155	-.161
	CNN Exposure	.080	.052	.208
	Incremental R^2	.032	.057	.07
Model 3 Newscaster Exposure	Greta Van Susteren	-.241	-.178	.422
	Bill O'Reilly	.145	-.116	-.279
	Sean Hannity	.260	.508*	.009
	Rachel Maddow	-.134	-.074	-.357
	Ed Schultz	-.094	.007	.135
	Lawrence O'Donnell	-.171	-.221	-.429
	Erin Burnett	.055	-.065	.063
	Anderson Cooper	-.178	-.055	-.118
	Wolf Blitzer	.240	.133	.012
	Incremental R^2	.039	.094	.204
	Final R^2	.493	.438	.365

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

	MSNBC	Rachel Maddow	Ed Schultz	Lawrence O'Donnell
		β	β	β
Model 1 Demographics	Income	-.044	.026	.049
	Gender	.130	.044	-.023
	Age	-.087	-.087	-.230
	Political Leanings	.073	.047	.021
	Party Affiliation	-.330*	-.162	-.261
	Perceived Political Leanings of Newscaster	-.619*	.832*	-.694*
	Perceived Party Affiliation of Newscaster	.136	-1.153**	.413
	Incremental R^2	.309	.205	.179
Model 2 Network Exposure	Fox News Exposure	-.283*	-.100	-.201
	MSNBC Exposure	.220	.203	.228
	CNN Exposure	.088	-.048	.000
	Incremental R^2	.073	.025	.048
Model 3 Newscaster Exposure	Greta Van Susteren	-.425*	-.309	-.329
	Bill O'Reilly	-.015	-.076	.011
	Sean Hannity	-.080	-.278	-.107
	Rachel Maddow	.339*	.127	.151
	Ed Schultz	-.087	.263	.067
	Lawrence O'Donnell	.466**	.439	.483*
	Erin Burnett	.066	.057	.124
	Anderson Cooper	.035	.086	.041
	Wolf Blitzer	-.054	-.149	-.091
	Incremental R^2	.275	.341	.272
	Final R^2	.657	.571	.499

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Table D 4

Para-social Relationship Strength and Credibility – (p. 56 – 58)

	CNN	Erin Burnett	Wolf Blitzer	Anderson Cooper
		β	β	β
Model 1 Demographics	Income	-.074	-.078	-.022
	Gender	.081	-.164	.000
	Age	-.094	.118	.007
	Political Leanings	-.062	.228	.054
	Party Affiliation	.075	-.410*	-.180
	Perceived Political Leanings of Newscaster	-.355*	.097	-.368*
	Perceived Party Affiliation of Newscaster	.039	-.296	.033
	Incremental R^2	.121	.173	.150
Model 2 Connectedness	Bill O'Reilly	-.063	.105	-.186
	Sean Hannity	.285	-.261	-.099
	Greta Van Susteren	-.347	-.066	.142
	Wolf Blitzer	-.112	.220	.025
	Erin Burnett	.438	-.432	-.572*
	Anderson Cooper	.096	.276	.575***
	Rachel Maddow	.187	-.012	-.002
	Ed Schultz	.057	-.244	.073
	Lawrence O'Donnell	-.301	.722*	.423
	Incremental R^2	.085	.291	.379
	Final R^2	.206	.464	.529

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

		Fox News	Bill O'Reilly	Sean Hannity	Greta Van Susteren
		β	β	β	β
Model 1 Demographics	Income	.126	.098		-.006
	Gender	.026	.064		.107
	Age	-.033	-.123		.021
	Political Leanings	.123	-.050		.000
	Party Affiliation	.216	.397*		.257
	Perceived Political Leanings of Newscaster	-.380*	-.356		-.134
	Perceived Party Affiliation of Newscaster	-.044	.033		-.021
	Incremental R^2	.377	.305		.111
Model 2 Connectedness	Bill O'Reilly	.512**	.262		.180
	Sean Hannity	.086	.357		.068
	Greta Van Susteren	-.117	-.165		.147
	Wolf Blitzer	-.031	.069		-.090
	Erin Burnett	.352	.314		.271
	Anderson Cooper	-.012	-.074		.237
	Rachel Maddow	-.023	-.017		-.336*
	Ed Schultz	.230	.120		.743**
	Lawrence O'Donnell	-.567	-.623		-.947**
	Incremental R^2	.023	.241		.394
	Final R^2	.607	.546		.505

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

	MSNBC	Rachel Maddow	Ed Schultz	Lawrence O'Donnell
		β	β	β
Model 1 Demographics	Income	-.103	-.069	.004
	Gender	.060	-.029	.030
	Age	-.007	-.045	-.163
	Political Leanings	.004	-.001	-.038
	Party Affiliation	-.210	-.120	-.123
	Perceived Political Leanings of Newscaster	-.536*	.325	-.536*
	Perceived Party Affiliation of Newscaster	.065	-.598	.279
	Incremental R^2	.262	.125	.128
Model 2 Connectedness	Bill O'Reilly	-.175	-.111	-.138
	Sean Hannity	-.004	.457	.023
	Greta Van Susteren	.039	-.376	-.099
	Wolf Blitzer	.117	.120	-.301
	Erin Burnett	-.362	-.447	-.228
	Anderson Cooper	.046	-.152	.194
	Rachel Maddow	.422*	.008	.092
	Ed Schultz	-.120	.418	.228
	Lawrence O'Donnell	.356	.408	.414
	Incremental R^2	.221	.296	.245
	Final R^2	.483	.421	.373

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Table D 5

Visual Credibility and Recognition - Linear Regression Tests (p. 59 – 61)

	CNN	Erin Burnett	Wolf Blitzer	Anderson Cooper
		β	β	β
Model 1 Demographics	Income	-.029	-.048	-.239
	Gender	.105	-.134	-.101
	Age	-.120	.121	.161
	Political Leanings	-.074	.162	-.104
	Party Affiliation	.072	-.307	-.128
	Perceived Political Leanings of Newscaster	-.349*	.062	-.366*
	Perceived Party Affiliation of Newscaster	.021	-.271	.085
	Incremental R^2	.121	.145	.214
Model 2 Visual Credibility	Bill O'Reilly	-.057	-.040	-.089
	Erin Burnett	-.128	.034	.162
	Lawrence O'Donnell	.183	-.012	-.036
	Rachel Maddow	-.181	.247	.013
	Anderson Cooper	-.112	.035	.254
	Ed Schultz	-.029	.138	.199
	Greta Van Susteren	-.013	-.148	-.130
	Sean Hannity	-.084	-.185	-.144
	Wolf Blitzer	.132	.166	.035
	Incremental R^2	.051	.159	.16
Model 3 Recognition	Recognition of Newscaster	-.100	.078	.010
	Exposure to Newscaster	.453	.373**	.276*
	Incremental R^2	.145	.1	.04
	Final R^2	.317	.404	.414

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

	Fox News	Bill O'Reilly	Sean Hannity	Greta Van Susteren
		β	β	β
Model 1 Demographics	Income	.050	.084	.054
	Gender	.038	.084	.169
	Age	.023	-.097	-.041
	Political Leanings	.055	-.058	-.041
	Party Affiliation	.256	.409*	.235
	Perceived Political Leanings of Newscaster	-.382*	-.434	-.234
	Perceived Party Affiliation of Newscaster	-.040	.122	.147
	Incremental R^2	.370	.306	.110
Model 2 Visual Credibility	Bill O'Reilly	.323*	.124	.429*
	Erin Burnett	.058	.225	-.055
	Lawrence O'Donnell	-.104	-.227	-.057
	Rachel Maddow	-.116	-.218	-.590***
	Anderson Cooper	-.132	-.085	.117
	Ed Schultz	.115	.098	.242
	Greta Van Susteren	.080	.160	.008
	Sean Hannity	.116	.101	-.044
	Wolf Blitzer	-.069	.050	-.080
	Incremental R^2	.194	.21	.38
Model 3 Recognition	Recognition of Newscaster	.010	.067	.115
	Exposure to Newscaster	.106	.121	.146
	Incremental R^2	.008	.011	.027
	Final R^2	.572	.527	.517

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

	MSNBC	Rachel Maddow	Ed Schultz	Lawrence O'Donnell
		β	β	β
Model 1 Demographics	Income	-.047	-.010	.082
	Gender	.035	-.003	.035
	Age	-.015	-.090	-.243
	Political Leanings	-.009	.028	-.029
	Party Affiliation	-.182	-.143	-.170
	Perceived Political Leanings of Newscaster	-.528*	.295	-.401
	Perceived Party Affiliation of Newscaster	.059	-.557	.152
	Incremental R^2	.266	.113	.120
Model 2 Visual Credibility	Bill O'Reilly	-.291	-.091	-.070
	Erin Burnett	-.136	-.170	-.066
	Lawrence O'Donnell	-.021	.148	.175
	Rachel Maddow	.383**	.039	.162
	Anderson Cooper	.070	.107	.132
	Ed Schultz	.244	.356*	.212
	Greta Van Susteren	-.027	-.259	-.200
	Sean Hannity	-.006	-.169	-.146
	Wolf Blitzer	-.071	.024	-.167
	Incremental R^2	.263	.241	.173
Model 3 Recognition	Recognition of Newscaster	.006	-.081	.197
	Exposure to Newscaster	.360**	.413***	.274*
	Incremental R^2	.073	.109	.089
	Final R^2	.602	.463	.382

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Biographical Sketch: MAX MERTEL

Max graduated from the Rochester Institute of Technology with a Masters Degree in Communication & Media Technologies in May 2011. While at RIT, he served as the representative of the College of Liberal Arts on the Graduate Student Advisory Committee. Prior to RIT, he graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Communication TV/Digital Film with a minor in American History from SUNY Fredonia. Max is currently pursuing a PhD from the University at Buffalo.