

Exploring Information Credibility

IN TRADITIONAL MEDIA WEBSITES AND NEWS PORTALS

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*D*igital media transmits information faster than traditional media, but it is often met with skepticism regarding its credibility. As digital media becomes increasingly dominant, it is crucial to assess the credibility of its information. This paper presents a study that evaluates the credibility of information on traditional media websites and news portals among journalism and communication university students. A survey of 253 students from seven different journalism and communication departments examines factors influencing media credibility, including medium dependency, interactivity, transparency, argument strength, personal expertise, and information quality. The study employs various machine learning models to validate its findings, showing that traditional media websites are perceived as more credible than news portals, with argument strength and information quality being the most significant contributors to the credibility of information.

Keywords: information credibility; medium dependency; interactivity; medium transparency; argument strength; personal expertise; information quality.

INTRODUCTION

The intense competition on the Web, combined with rising commercialization, has put pressure on journalistic standards, compromising quality norms (Urban and Schweiger 2013, 2). In this context, the capabilities of professional journalists – such as tracking events, gathering and synthesizing information for high-quality

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reporting, and exercising independent, informed judgement – remain invaluable and irreplaceable.

Numerous scholars describe the current era as one of mass self-communication, where every social media user can function as an information source. While the rise of mass self-communication [...] broadens the opportunities for social change, it leaves the content and purpose of such change undefined (Castells 2009, 9). This trend makes it hard to guide people toward trustworthy information sources, particularly in an era where media literacy is crucial. Many people tend to focus on entertaining content rather than on what is truly relevant to them.

In the past, the difference between popular and quality journalism was clear-cut. However, this balance began to shift with the emergence of the internet and the rise of digital journalism (Saliu, Çipuri and Izmaçu 2024, 2). At the same time, society plays an ongoing role in shaping new media (Lindgren 2017, 12).

Today, audiences are important in the information economy, so the need for reliable, credible, and professional media is crucial. Industry leaders must evaluate media credibility and trustworthiness and ensure they provide accurate and reliable public information sources.

This study explores how traditional media websites and news portals maintain credibility amid the rise of engaging, yet potentially misaligned user-generated content.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Media Trust” versus “Media Credibility”

“Media trust” and “media credibility” are frequently used interchangeably, with little distinction made between the two; they are often treated as synonymous terms (Otto and Köhler 2018, 4). However, it is essential to differentiate between these concepts. Building trust is centered around emotional connections, while establishing credibility relies on concrete facts (Strömbäck, Tsfatı, *et al.* 2020). Trust relates to character and intent, which are difficult, if not impossible, to change or fake. In contrast, credibility is based on evidence, a proven track record, or a reputation built over time (Phillips 2022).

Reliance on the media carries some risk since audiences rely on journalists to handle the intricate process of choosing and curating information (Kohring and Matthes 2007, 239), relying on editorial processes across various reporting levels (Otto and Köhler 2018, 4). Simultaneously, trust and the credibility of messages must be granted to the media by its audience (Henke, Leissner, and Möhring 2019, 4). Trust is a fluid occurrence that relies on a fragile equilibrium, making it essential to refresh it or halt its decline (Christofoletti 2024, 3).

Kohring and Matthes suggest that the audience’s trust in news media arises from believing that the information provided helps guide them. Trusting individuals are more likely to overlook occasional low-quality content from a trusted source,

while those who are distrusting may miss out on high-quality information (Lucassen and Schraagen 2012, 566). For instance, followers may maintain their faith in a well-established newspaper despite infrequent inaccuracies, trusting that its editorial procedures guarantee generally dependable information. In contrast, those who are wary of the media may completely steer clear of credible content because of their doubts regarding the selection process. “Conversely, an audience that lacks trust might refrain from engaging with high-quality investigative journalism, viewing it as biased or manipulated, thus missing out on valuable, trustworthy information because of their skepticism towards the media’s selection process” (Lucassen and Schraagen 2012).

Media credibility relies on how trustworthy, accurate, and fair it is perceived to be, along with its commitment to editorial standards and its demonstrated reliability over time (Otto and Köhler 2018; Phillips 2022). Credibility, based on proof and logic, is essential for engaging and maintaining an audience’s interest, unlike trust, which relies on feelings and intentions (Strömbäck, Tsifti, *et al.* 2020; Johnson and Kaye 2015). As trust decreases, audiences may seek out other platforms that they view as more trustworthy, emphasizing the importance of focused actions and commitment to professional standards to restore this crucial quality (Christoforetti 2024). For example, audiences may perceive a news outlet as credible when it consistently provides well-researched, fact-checked reports, supported by reliable sources and transparent editorial processes.

Digital Media Credibility: A Changing Landscape

Research on media credibility stems from studies in persuasion, highlighting the credibility of sources, messages, and media (Metzger, *et al.* 2016, 296). Aristotle established the basis for grasping credibility in political speeches by highlighting the importance of logos (logic), pathos (emotion), and ethos (authority) (Flanagin and Metzger 2017, 459; Kennedy 1991). The abundance of media organizations and the numerous platforms accessible today have increased doubt regarding the trustworthiness of the media and the reliability of the information they deliver (Salaudeen and Onyechi 2020, 3).

In today’s digital age, the lack of conventional gatekeeping amplifies these difficulties. Online content can be easily distorted because of minimal editorial control and the absence of established credibility (Metzger, *et al.* 2016, 295). The rise of AI technologies has complicated the landscape of journalism by allowing machines to generate news articles. However, this shift has led to questions regarding the trustworthiness and biases of such automated reporting, which is frequently viewed as less dependable than content created by humans (Alzoubi, Ahmad, and Hamid 2024; Waddell 2019).

Algorithmic News Recommenders (ANRs), commonly implemented for tailoring content, present advantages and difficulties. While they improve audience interaction, there is a potential threat to editorial autonomy and the formation of “filter bubbles” (Bastian, Helberger, and Makhortykh 2021; Simon 2024). Ensuring

the trustworthiness of these systems requires openness and adherence to journalistic principles, which is essential for safeguarding integrity and minimizing reliance on platform companies (Pavlik 2023; Simon 2024).

Theoretical Frameworks for Assessing Media Trust and Credibility

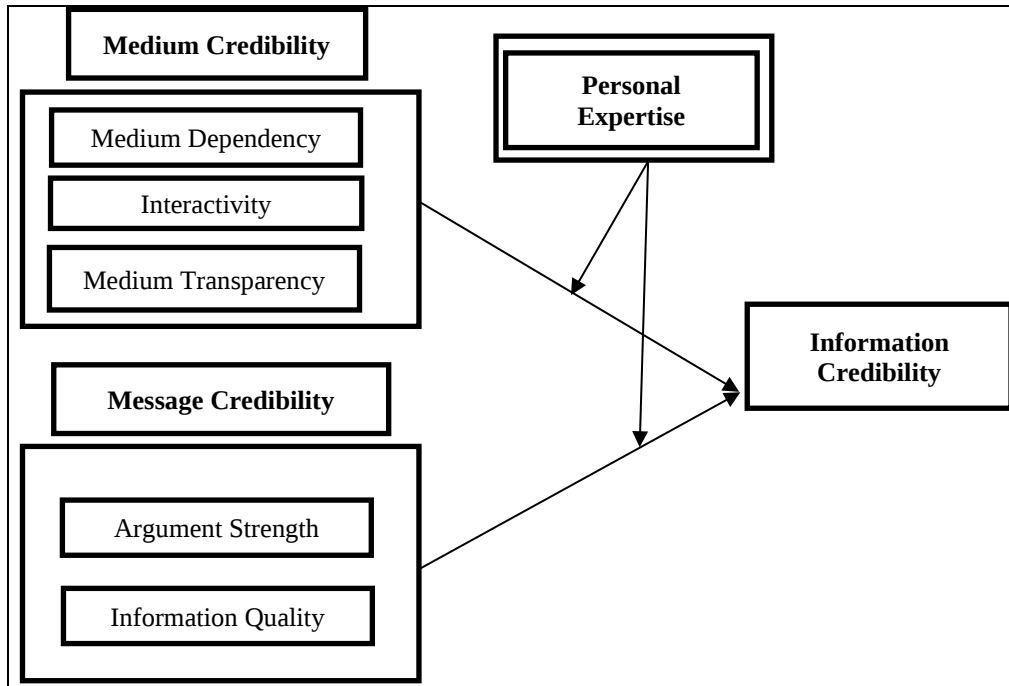
The credibility of different media has been assessed by comparing perceptions of factors such as credibility, accuracy, fairness, bias, trustworthiness, ease of use, completeness, reliability, and attractiveness – whether of the media itself, news reporters, or coverage of specific topics (Metzger, *et al.* 2016, 309). Evaluating audience trust and credibility is complex and often debated. Researchers are developing models to measure these aspects, considering the subjective nature of the indicators. Most models emphasize message, medium, transparency, and information sources.

Earlier, Lucassen and Schraagen proposed a research model consisting of four layers: trust in information, trust in the source, trust in the medium, and an individual's propensity to trust (Lucassen and Schraagen 2012). In this model, each layer enhances the next, refining trust. Trust in information depends on trust in its source, which is influenced by the medium delivering it. Ultimately, an individual's natural tendency to trust impacts their trust in the medium.

Pasi and Viviani advanced a framework that utilizes propagation patterns, supervised learning algorithms, and semantic web technologies to evaluate the trustworthiness of information found in social networks (Pasi and Viviani 2020, Strömbäck, Tsfati, *et al.* 2020). A framework for assessing media trust emphasizes its complexity by including content, journalists, media organizations, and institutional trust. It provides a method to explore how trust at each level interacts and influences media usage.

In our study, we base our analysis on Ruohan Li and Ayoung Suh's five-dimensional model, (Li and Suh 2015) which offers a more comprehensive framework for evaluating media and message credibility, particularly suited to our target group (*Figure 1*). This model evaluates the credibility of digital news media and traditional news sources using five indicators across two dimensions: medium credibility (dependence on the medium, interactivity, transparency) and message credibility (argument strength, information quality).

Figure 1



Hypotheses and research questions

Drawing from the model proposed by Li and Suh (2015), we develop the following hypotheses and research questions:

H1. The higher the medium's credibility, the greater the perceived credibility of the information.

– RQ1. Is there a positive relationship between 'medium dependency' and 'information credibility'?

– RQ2. Is there a positive relationship between audience 'interactivity' and 'information credibility'?

– RQ3. Is there a positive relationship between 'medium transparency' and 'information credibility'?

H2. A positive evaluation of 'Message Credibility' is positively correlated with the audience's perception of 'information credibility'.

1. RQ5. Is there a positive relationship between 'Argument strength' and 'Information Credibility'?

2. RQ6. Is there a positive relationship between 'Information quality' and 'Information Credibility'?

H3. Individuals with high level of personal expertise are less influenced by the medium when evaluating information credibility.

METHODOLOGY

The study primarily utilizes quantitative data from a questionnaire conducted with journalism and communication students at seven Albanian universities. The electronic survey, completed by 253 students in March 2024, features a sample intentionally selected for their relevant media and information literacy skills.

Students were randomly selected with help from the academic staff at the University of Tirana, Luigi Gurakuqi University, Aleksander Moisiu University, Aleksander Xhuvani University, Beder University College, European University of Tirana, and Mediterranean University, who assisted in administering the questionnaire.

The questionnaire is based on the model proposed by Ruohan Li and Ayoung Suh (2015), with additional statements tailored to address the characteristics of traditional media websites and news portals, particularly within the context of the Albanian media landscape and the study's specific research questions.

Limiting the sample to journalism and communication students may impact on the generalizability of the findings; however, this group possesses advanced media literacy and critical skills crucial for evaluating media credibility. Their insights can significantly influence future journalistic practices and credibility methods in media organizations. Future studies could expand the sample to include media professionals and the public for richer analysis and greater validation of the findings.

The questionnaire evaluates students' trust in traditional media websites compared to news portals and assesses credibility factors using a Likert scale (1 to 5), where 1 represents "Strongly Disagree" and 5 represents "Strongly Agree."

FINDINGS

Relationship with online information sources

Source credibility is mainly understood through aspects like trustworthiness and expertise. Sources that are seen as trustworthy are considered valid, while those that display relevant competence show expertise (Housholder and LaMarre 2014, 6). The results indicate that 54.9% of journalism and communication students consider digital media a major information source, while 40.7% still rely on traditional TV channels, highlighting the shift from traditional media to the Internet.

The data show that online information sources lacking a traditional 'logo' have not yet gained significant credibility with audiences. Source credibility can be viewed as a heuristic factor that influences assessments independent of the actual content when processing information heuristically (Li, Ma and Wu 2023, 3). About 52% of respondents, or 131 out of 253, do not agree (1&2) with the statement 'I trust online news portals more than traditional media's websites' even when asked about the premise 'Online news portals provide more credible information'.

This result is similar when respondents were asked if ‘Online news portals provide more credible information’, with less than 18% agreeing and around 55% disagreeing. In contrast, traditional media websites were viewed as more credible, with 43.3% of respondents expressing agreement (4&5) with their credibility.

Table no. 1

**Perceptions of Journalism Students Regarding Primary Sources of Information:
Online versus Traditional Media**

Relationship with online information sources		1	2	3	4	5	Total
<i>Digital media (online and social) is a major source of information for me</i>	%	6.70	9.90	28.50	31.60	23.30	100
<i>TV channels in linear broadcasts (TV screens) are the main source of information for me</i>	%	6.30	23.30	29.60	27.70	13.00	100
<i>I trust more news in online media than traditional media (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.)</i>	%	14.60	17.40	29.60	22.10	16.20	100
<i>I trust online news portals more than traditional media's (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.) online websites</i>	%	22.90	28.90	30.00	15.40	2.80	100
<i>The online websites of traditional media outlets provide more credible information</i>	%	8.70	17.00	32.00	26.10	16.20	100
<i>Online news portals provide more credible information</i>	%	21.70	33.20	27.30	14.60	3.20	100
<i>Traditional media online sites operate more independently of politics and other actors outside the newsroom</i>	%	22.10	28.10	32.80	14.20	2.80	100
<i>Online news portals operate more independently of politics and other actors outside the newsroom</i>	%	19.40	26.90	34.40	15.00	4.30	100
<i>I am aware of the ownership of the mediums I follow</i>	%	11.50	23.30	30.40	21.70	13.00	100
<i>I trust the news from traditional media journalists published in online channels more</i>	%	5.90	16.60	31.20	35.60	10.70	100
<i>I trust the news from online news portals' journalists published online more</i>	%	15.80	25.70	39.50	15.40	3.60	100

The Table no. 1 presents the responses of journalism and communication students regarding their primary sources of information, comparing the credibility of online news portals with traditional media and their associated online platforms. The

data consistently indicates higher credibility for traditional media websites. However, a significant portion of respondents evaluate the statements with 3 points, reflecting a neutral stance – they are unsure whether to support or reject the assertion.

Medium credibility

Dependence on the most trusted medium

The media's relationship with other social entities must evolve to reflect both (a) the media's development and its partners' dependency relations, and (b) shifts in the social ecology of those relationships (Ball-Rokeach 1998, 16). Studies suggest that a medium's perceived credibility is closely linked to how frequently it is used (Johnson and Kaye 1998, 327). For example, users who rely on traditional media often view it as more credible due to its established reputation, while news portals, appealing to a digital-savvy audience, are seen as more accessible and immediate, affecting trust and interaction (Westerman, Spence and Heide 2014). Media dependency is high when an individual's satisfaction is strongly tied to information from the media system (Ruggiero 2000, 9).

The responses indicate a clear preference for traditional media websites among journalism and communication university students. The majority rated these platforms as more credible than news portals. Over 74% 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' that traditional media websites are their source for staying informed, and approximately 77% trust these outlets more when seeking information.

The target audience relies more on traditional media websites than news portals, visiting them frequently for information, using them in conversations, and following them on various online platforms.

Our assessment (*Table no. 2*) indicates that our target audience has a limited connection with traditional media's digital platforms. This may reflect their reluctance towards digital sources and preference for traditional media's reliability.

Table no. 2

Credibility of Information in the Medium Most Trusted by Students

Dependency on the medium you trust the most		1	2	3	4	5	Total
<i>I start my day by visiting this website to stay informed.</i>	%	19.80	21.70	32	16.6	9.90	100
<i>I end my day by visiting this website to stay informed.</i>	%	15.80	24.90	26.90	24.5	7.90	100
<i>This is the first webpage I visit to stay informed when I want to know.</i>	%	7.10	13.40	23.30	32.8	23.3	100
<i>This website helps me to form my opinions about current events.</i>	%	7.10	15.00	32.00	28.1	17.8	100

<i>I use the data from this website to bolster my arguments when I speak with others.</i>	%	6.70	15.00	33.20	26.50	18.60	100
<i>I rely on this website to meet my primary information needs.</i>	%	6.70	17.80	31.20	30.40	13.80	100
<i>I follow this website on all online platforms</i>	%	17.80	20.90	21.70	23.30	16.20	100

The Table no. 2 shows students' evaluations of the credibility of their most trusted medium in meeting informational needs and shaping opinions. While most rely on television and traditional media for reliable information, dependence on digital sources is low, with many respondents also providing neutral answers.

Interactivity in the most trusted medium

Interactivity refers to how users can engage with content through comments, likes, and shares, fostering a sense of community and involvement (Sundar 2008). Interactivity distinguishes 'old' media from 'new' media and is touted as a tool that enables active participation in the political news cycle (Johnson and Kaye 2016, 142). As the social action unit grows, its ability to control knowledge creation grows. This control leads to a broader resource scope in media relations, including information creation, gathering, processing, and dissemination (Ball-Rokeach 1998, 15).

Interactivity with online content affects its credibility. Engaging with trusted friends and experts helps users determine if a site offers reliable information (Johnson and Kaye 2016, 138). The extent to which interactivity influences users' motivations depends on how easily they can share information and communicate with others through the platform (Ruggiero 2000, 4).

Table no. 3

Student Engagement and Interactivity with the Most Trusted Medium

Interactivity in the most trusted medium		1	2	3	4	5	Total
<i>I engage in discussions with readers/followers who comment on the news published on this page (Web, social networks)</i>	%	43.10	23.30	19.80	10.70	3.20	100
<i>Journalists of this medium engage with audiences by commenting on news stories across various platforms</i>	%	20.90	29.60	24.10	20.60	4.70	100
<i>The journalists of this media assist in elucidating subjects that spark discussions among readers/followers</i>	%	18.20	27.30	27.70	19.80	7.10	100

<i>This media has garnered a devoted following, with individuals actively engaging by leaving comments on posts</i>	%	11.10	17.00	29.60	27.70	14.60	100
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This *Table* explores the level of student interaction with their most trusted medium, including activities such as commenting, sharing news, and participating in online discussions. It shows that interactivity is not a significant factor in determining information credibility. Most students, 66.4%, do not engage in discussions with commenters on trusted news platforms, while only about 14% actively participate in such discussions.

Journalism students believe that over 50% of journalists do not participate in online discussions by commenting on news stories across various platforms.

Transparency of the most trusted medium

Transparency means being open about information sources, processes, and intentions. It enhances perceived credibility, as users trust platforms that disclose their sources and maintain clear editorial guidelines (Karlsson 2010). The relationship between transparency and quality journalism is crucial for promoting accountability and improving credibility (Figueira and Silva 2023, 3). Informed citizens are better positioned to hold media accountable (Strömbäck 2005, 335). Therefore, fulfilling legal obligations, leading news media are required to report key business figures, including ownership and management details, to the financial supervisory service annually (Meier and Trappel 2022, 267). Ensuring transparency in journalism and the media can significantly contribute to rebuilding trust in journalism and mitigating the effects of broad media criticism (Meier and Trappel 2022, 261).

Table no. 4

Transparency of the Medium Most Trusted by Students

Transparency of the medium trusted the most		1	2	3	4	5	Total
<i>I am aware of the ownership of this medium</i>	%	13.40	16.20	28.90	20.22	21.30	100
<i>I am acquainted with the journalists employed by this media outlet</i>	%	13.80	20.20	32.80	24.50	8.70	100
<i>The website provides sufficient information to identify its ownership, staff, and org. structure</i>	%	11.90	28.10	33.60	18.20	8.30	100
<i>News shared on the web and social platforms is always credited to the journalists who reported it</i>	%	13.80	15.80	30.40	25.70	14.20	100

This *Table* summarizes students' perceptions of the transparency of their most trusted medium, encompassing awareness of ownership, editorial policies, and staff details.

As shown in *Table no. 4*, media transparency is rated at moderate levels. A closer examination reveals that news portals are evaluated more favorably in terms of transparency than traditional media websites. For the statement "I am aware of the ownership of this medium", traditional media websites received stronger agreement – about 43% – with scores of 4 and 5. In contrast, news portals received higher ratings than expected for the second and fourth statements. The third statement, however, had similar agreement percentages of around 34% for both types of media.

The Credibility of the message of the most trusted medium

Argument strength of the most trusted medium

The quality of the argument is assessed based on its validity through thorough processing, which affects how its quality is perceived (Larasati and Yasa 2018, 893). The difference between argument quality and information quality lies in the emphasis on user acceptance of information rather than its quality from service providers (Handayani *et al.* 2020, 2). If an individual perceives the information has some valid arguments, he or she will develop a positive attitude toward the information and consider it to be credible (Li and Suh 2015, 318).

Table no. 5

Strength of Arguments Presented by the Most Trusted Medium

Argument strength of the medium trusted the most		1	2	3	4	5	Total
<i>The persuasive power of the information in this medium is strong</i>	%	4.30	14.60	34.00	34.40	12.60	100
<i>The information presented within this medium is deemed to be valid</i>	%	4.30	13.40	31.20	36.00	15.00	100
<i>The information presented in this medium is logically argued</i>	%	5.10	10.70	30.40	36.40	17.40	100.00

This *Table* highlights students' perceptions of the logical validity and persuasive power of arguments in their most trusted medium. The strength of the argument is assessed as a significant factor influencing the credibility of information. Data from *Table no. 5* show that 47% or more of respondents agree (4&5), while disagreement is limited to about 19 percent. When comparing responses between supporters of traditional media websites and news portals, agreement levels are 47.42%, 51.55%, and 54.63%, respectively for traditional media for the questions in

Table 5. For news portals, the support levels are 45.76%, 49.15%, and 50.85%, respectively.

Information Quality of the medium trusted the most

The quality of information is essential for developing an effective information system and is described as the suitability of characteristics of information for users of information (Jiang, *et al.* 2021, 14). The quality of information is the degree to which individuals perceive the message as current, precise, good, and useful (Kang and Namkung 2018, 2).

Similar to their assessment of argument strength, respondents also rate the quality of information highly.

Table no. 6

Quality of Information Provided by the Most Trusted Medium

Information Quality of the most trusted medium		1	2	3	4	5	Total
<i>The information on this page is accurate</i>	%	2.80	12.60	29.60	36.00	19.00	100
<i>The information on this page is objective</i>	%	3.20	16.20	32.00	34.80	13.80	100
<i>The information contained within this medium is comprehensible</i>	%	2.80	7.10	23.70	43.10	23.30	100
<i>The information in this medium is derived from reputable sources</i>	%	2.40	12.30	26.90	37.20	21.30	100
<i>This medium stresses the importance of balancing information from different sources</i>	%	2.80%	11.90%	32.00%	36.40%	17.00%	100.0

The Table no. 6 evaluates students' assessments of the information quality in their most trusted medium, considering accuracy, objectivity, and reliance on reputable sources.

The quality of information is rated as more reliable on traditional media websites for three of the indicators listed in Table no. 6: accuracy, comprehensibility, and the use of reputable sources. In contrast, news portals receive higher ratings for the objectivity and balance of information from various sources.

Similar to the above factor, analyzing the responses from supporters of traditional media websites versus those of informational portals, agreement levels are 55.67%, 46.91%, 69.08%, 59.28%, and 51.55% for traditional media, respectively, and 52.58%, 54.23%, 57.63%, 55.93%, and 59.32% for news portals.

Personal expertise

Individual ability, or expertise, refers to the extent of an individual's background knowledge necessary to understand information on a specific platform (Li and Suh 2015, 319). This ability significantly influences how individuals perceive and trust information sources. Users with greater knowledge or expertise in a particular area are more discerning about the quality and credibility of information, often critically evaluating the content presented to them (Bromme, Kienhues and Porsch 2010).

The students, regardless of their study level, typically have the skills to evaluate media effectively, allowing for a more analytical approach to assessing information credibility.

Table no. 7

Students' Expertise in Evaluating Information Credibility

Personal expertise		1	2	3	4	5	Total
<i>I am familiar with the editorial policy of this site</i>	%	12.60	22.10	37.20	17.80	10.30	100
<i>I possess the expertise and skills required to appraise the quality of information</i>	%	2.80	13.00	32.80	32.00	19.40	100
<i>I understand the information in this medium without difficulty</i>	%	3.60	10.30	24.50	37.90	23.70	100
<i>I understand the specific purposes of the content on this medium</i>	%	4.00	9.50	27.70	34.00	24.90	100

This Table summarizes students' self-reported skills in evaluating the quality and intent of information from their trusted medium. The responses suggest strong expertise, particularly in assessing information quality, understanding content easily, and recognizing its specific purposes.

Credibility of information in the medium trusted the most

Referring to the theoretical model by Li and Suh, we observe a link between the factors used for measurement and the resulting conclusions. The following table reflects students' perceptions of the credibility, accuracy, and reliance on trustworthy sources in the medium they trust most.

Table no. 8

Perceived Credibility of Information Offered by the Most Trusted Medium

Credibility of information in the most trusted medium		1	2	3	4	5	Total
<i>This medium's information is credible</i>	%	4.00	10.30	30.40	39.10	16.20	100
<i>The information in this medium is accurate</i>	%	2.80	10.70	31.20	36.40	19.00	100
<i>The medium relies on trustworthy sources</i>	%	2.40	11.50	29.60	36.80	19.80	100

In all three statements of *Table no. 8*, agreement with ratings of 4 and 5 is more prevalent than other responses. Respondents indicate that the digital media they trust the most for information is reliable, accurate, and uses trustworthy sources. Again, traditional media websites receive greater support for these qualities, with positive ratings of 56.19%, 59.28%, and 59.28% for each statement. In comparison, news portals receive positive assessments of 52.54%, 42.37% and 47.46% for the same criteria.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

The session highlights the importance of understanding and interpreting data in statistical research. It covers topics like descriptive results, internal consistency, and various types of validity, including congruent and discriminant validity. It also reviews comparative analysis methods and key factors for clarifying complex relationships in studies.

Descriptive Results and Internal Consistency of Constructs

The following table provides a reliability analysis of the constructs measured in the study, highlighting Cronbach's Alpha values for each variable to confirm internal consistency and the reliability of the data. A value above 0.7 indicates strong consistency, ensuring meaningful, reliable data.

Table no. 9

Internal Consistency of Constructs: Reliability Analysis Using Cronbach's Alpha

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation	No. of questions
Medium Dependency	.879	22.06	40.631	6.374	7
Interactivity	.794	16.68	25.480	5.048	4
Medium Transparency	.765	5.94	4.496	2.120	4

Argument Strength	.917	10.30	8.347	2.889	3
Information Quality	.925	17.89	19.546	4.421	5
Personal Expertise	.882	13.77	13.747	3.708	4
Information Credibility	.932	10.72	8.022	2.832	3

The reliability analysis for each construct (e.g., Medium Dependency, Interactivity, Medium Transparency, Argument Strength, Information Quality, Personal Expertise, and Information Credibility) was carried out using Cronbach's Alpha. All constructs achieved values exceeding 0.7, signifying acceptable to excellent reliability. These elevated scores indicate that the items consistently and effectively measure their intended dimensions of credibility.

Table no. 10

Descriptive Statistics of Key Factors Influencing Information Credibility

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Information Credibility	3.53	1.010	253
Medium dependency	2.75	1.230	253
Interactivity	2.08	1.157	253
Transparency	2.83	1.116	253
Argument strength	3.36	1.021	253
Information Quality	3.56	1.024	253
Personal Expertise	2.91	1.146	253

The *Table no. 10* summarizes the descriptive statistics for the primary factors analyzed in the study, including mean values and standard deviations, to present an overview of the data distribution and central tendencies.

The data indicate that 'Information Quality' and 'Argument Strength' have the highest mean values, at 3.56 and 3.36, respectively, suggesting that these factors are viewed more favorably than other variables. In contrast, 'Interactivity', 'Medium Dependency', and 'Transparency' received lower ratings (2.08, 2.75, and 2.83, respectively). The high standard deviation for these factors reflects varied opinions among respondents regarding their dependence on the medium. 'Personal Expertise' was assessed moderately, with significant response variability.

Following this, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using Principal Axis Factoring with Promax rotation to investigate the data structure and validate item groupings based on the Li and Suh model. Promax rotation, suitable for correlated factors, produced stable factor solutions.

The analysis resulted in five factors, aligning well with the theoretical constructs defined by the model.

Total Variance Explained: The five factors explained 70.127% of the total variance, with the first factor alone accounting for 45.116%, highlighting its significant influence.

Factor Loadings: Items loaded strongly on their respective factors, typically above 0.6. For example, items related to “Medium Dependency” consistently loaded onto the same factor, confirming the construct’s validity. Similarly, items related to “Interactivity,” “Medium Transparency,” “Argument Strength,” and “Information Quality” demonstrated clear loading patterns onto their respective factors.

Communalities for items ranged from 0.480 to 0.818, suggesting that the extracted factors account for a substantial portion of each item’s variance. High communalities indicate that the model is well-fitted to the data.

The factor correlation matrix from the Promax rotation indicated moderate to strong correlations between factors, with values ranging from 0.362 to 0.699. This confirms the theoretical expectation that constructs such as Medium Credibility, Message Credibility, and Personal Expertise are not entirely independent but interrelated aspects contributing to overall Information Credibility.

TEST OF THE MODEL: COMPARATIVE AND CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS

This table presents the results of regression analysis, showing unstandardized and standardized coefficients for dimensions such as Medium Credibility, Message Credibility, and Personal Expertise, to determine their relative impact on information credibility.

Table no. 11

Regression Coefficients for Key Dimensions Influencing Information Credibility

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.226	.189		6.493	.000
	Medium credibility	.108	.044	.131	2.464	.014
	Message Credibility	.449	.055	.454	8.104	.000
	Personal experience	.172	.050	.195	3.445	.001
a. Dependent Variable: Information Credibility						

In our case, based on the theoretical model used, information credibility is associated with other variables. **Higher Beta values** indicate that the variable is more strongly associated with ‘**Information Credibility**’. **Significant p-values** (less than 0.05) indicate that the predictor is statistically significant in explaining ‘**Information Credibility**’.

The results suggest that ‘Message Credibility’, where Beta = 0.454, exhibits the highest association with ‘Information Credibility’, reaching 58.21%. Meanwhile, ‘Medium Credibility’, where Beta = 0.131, has the lowest association with 16.79%.

Personal Expertise is also an important variable that affects the assessment of other factors that lead to the level of ‘Information Credibility’. This accounts for 25.00% of the total explanatory power.

These results are also observed in the correlation related to the factors that comprise the above categories.

Table no. 12

Correlational Analysis of Factors Associated with Information Credibility

	Information Credibility	Medium dependency	Interactivity	Transparency	Argument strength	Information Quality	Personal Expertise
Information Credibility	1.000	.337	-.007	.292	.581	.670	.440
Medium dependency	.337	1.000	.247	.278	.309	.350	.336
Interactivity	-.007	.247	1.000	.363	.135	.068	.239
Transparency	.292	.278	.363	1.000	.441	.434	.379
Argument strength	.581	.309	.135	.441	1.000	.709	.442
Information Quality	.670	.350	.068	.434	.709	1.000	.429
Personal Expertise	.440	.336	.239	.379	.442	.429	1.000

The above Table no. 12 examines the relationships between key variables, highlighting the correlation coefficients to identify the strength and direction of associations with information credibility.

Information Quality and **Argument Strength** are most associated with information credibility, with correlations of 0.670 and 0.581, respectively.

Personal Expertise and **Medium Dependency** have a moderate impact on information credibility.

Transparency and **Interactivity**, two variables in ‘Medium Dependency,’ have a low impact on Information Credibility. While Transparency shows a low correlation with it, Interactivity has almost no correlation.

DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the credibility of digital media, focusing on traditional media websites and news portals. The results showed a strong preference for traditional media, with 74.31% favoring them compared to 25.69% for news portals. Additionally, around 41% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed on the credibility

of traditional media in linear broadcasts, reflecting a similar trend across European countries (Fotopoulos 2023, 6–7). The Eurobarometer survey indicates that citizens of the EU have more confidence in traditional media compared to online news platforms (Eurobarometer 2022), perceiving them as more reliable and more resistant to the spread of disinformation (Pedriza 2021, 605–606).

This means that despite the widespread use of digital media, traditional media is highly credible, at least for the audience selected in this study.

On the other side, the findings from the correlational analysis in Table 12 emphasize the varying levels of influence that different factors have on *Information Credibility*. Among the variables analyzed, *Information Quality* and *Argument Strength* demonstrate the strongest associations, while other variables, such as Personal Expertise, Medium Dependency, Transparency, and Interactivity, exhibit moderate to low correlations.

High-Impact Variables: Information Quality and Argument Strength

The analysis identifies *Information Quality* ($r=0.670$) and *Argument Strength* ($r=0.581$) as the strongest predictors of *Information Credibility*. These results are consistent with prior studies, such as Metzger and Flanagin (2015) and Li and Suh (2015), highlighting the importance of well-crafted and substantiated content in shaping audience trust.

The reliability of information offered by the media greatly influences the level of trust, as audiences anticipate that the content will be accurate, impartial, and thoroughly researched (Fotopoulos n.d., 6, McGrew 2024, 6). While Information Quality is a foundational determinant of trust, Argument Strength complements it by ensuring the credibility and reliability of the conveyed message.

Argument Strength also significantly correlates with *Information Credibility*, serving as a key factor in perceived message reliability (Bernette and Sjoblom 2022, 17). Compelling and well-supported arguments are more convincing and improve how information is perceived regarding credibility, owing to their clarity and cohesion (Bastian, Helberger and Makhortykh 2021, 850; Herne *et al.* 2022, 6). This highlights the dual role of argument strength in persuading audiences and reinforcing the credibility of the conveyed message (McGrew 2024, 8; Zhao *et al.* 2011, 50).

These findings underscore the importance of high-quality content and strong arguments in building audience trust and enhancing media credibility. By prioritizing these factors, media organizations can meet audience expectations and maintain trust in a changing landscape.

Moderate-Impact Variables: Personal Expertise and Medium Dependency

Personal Expertise shows a moderate positive correlation with *Information Credibility* ($r=0.440$), indicating that an audience's ability to critically evaluate

content significantly influences their trust in the information. Media-literate audiences are better equipped to assess sources and detect misinformation, as highlighted by Potter (Potter 2013). This aligns with findings that the credibility of media sources is often judged based on the perceived expertise and reliability of the journalists or institutions behind the content (Fotopoulos, *Traditional media versus new media: Between trust and use* n.d., 7, McGrew 2024, 7).

Similarly, *Medium Dependency* ($r=0.337$) also exhibits a moderate impact on *Information Credibility*, reflecting the influence of habitual reliance on specific media channels in shaping audience perceptions of trustworthiness. The *Medium Dependency Theory* emphasizes that reliance on specific platforms for information directly affects credibility perceptions (Pamoukoglou 2022, 4; Qureshi and Malick 2023, 9). Audiences who depend on certain media platforms are more likely to perceive those platforms as credible (McGrew 2024, 10). However, as media ecosystems become increasingly diversified, this dependency may weaken over time (Strömbäck, *et al.* 2020, 144).

These findings suggest that *Personal Expertise* and *Medium Dependency* influence *Information Credibility*, but their impact varies with audience media literacy and the changing media landscape.

Low-Impact Variables: Transparency and Interactivity

Variables with *Medium Dependency*, like *Transparency* ($r=0.292$) and *Interactivity* ($r=-0.007$), show weak correlations with *Information Credibility*. *Transparency* has a low positive correlation, highlighting the greater significance of factors like content quality. *Transparency* fosters trust by requiring clear communication about sources, intentions, and methodologies (Pamoukoglou 2022, 5; Fotopoulos n.d., 9; Qureshi and Malick 2023, 6). Despite enhancing audience trust through openness and accountability, its overall contribution to credibility remains minimal (Baudier and Boissieu 2024, 5; Al-Omouh, Garrido and Canero 2023, 6).

Interactivity, a defining characteristic of digital media, demonstrates almost no correlation with *Information Credibility*. Features like user comments and personalized feeds may enhance audience engagement, but their influence on credibility perceptions is secondary to content quality and source reliability (Fotopoulos n.d., 12; Baudier and Boissieu 2024, 8). This aligns with findings that interactivity, while useful for engagement, exerts a weaker influence on trust and credibility than other factors (Bernette and Sjoblom 2022, 15).

These findings indicate that while *Transparency* and *Interactivity* foster audience trust and engagement, their impact on *Information Credibility* is limited. Stronger predictors like content quality and argument strength remain more influential in shaping credibility perceptions.

This study explores how journalism and communication students perceive factors affecting media credibility, like transparency and argument quality. Their

insights can help journalists enhance standards, build audience trust, and navigate credibility challenges in an era of misinformation.

Expanding Media Credibility Frameworks in the Digital Era

While this study adopts and applies the model of Li and Suh (2015) to examine media credibility, the evolving media landscape presents opportunities to enhance this framework by incorporating technological dimensions. Factors such as AI-driven content generation and social media algorithms increasingly influence how audiences produce, disseminate, and perceive media. AI will significantly change the landscape of journalism, affecting everything from editorial processes to business operations (Simon 2024, 2). These elements introduce new dynamics, such as algorithmic biases or news production automation, which may shape perceptions of trustworthiness and credibility in distinct ways. *Transparency in AI is key to reducing misinformation and building audience trust* (Jia et al. 2024). Future research could explore these dimensions to develop a more comprehensive understanding of media credibility in the context of digital and algorithmic influence.

Theoretical Implications

This study examines the key factors influencing information credibility in the easily accessible and inexpensive digital age. Previous research has focused on how social media impacts our lives and relationships (Lindgren 2017, 7).

The unique nature of media products, especially news, demands a high level of respect. Given its critical role, media organizations should approach it with more than just an economic perspective). As Ben H. Bagdikian notes, “the media do not manufacture nuts and bolts, but they manufacture a social and political world” (Bagdikian 2004, 9). Media products emerge from creative efforts involving information, ideas, and literary and artistic endeavors (Picard 2005, 65).

This study’s contribution lies in its comparative analysis of the credibility of traditional media websites versus news portals. Traditional media websites continue to benefit from the established credibility of the brand (image inherited from traditional media’s ‘logos’), while news portals face skepticism due to their innovative nature, especially in their beginnings.

The information helps media managers identify credibility challenges in the digital age and provides insights into how professionals evaluate information credibility, benefiting online readers by helping them understand what contributes to it.

Though focused on Albanian journalism students, the findings have broader implications for global media landscapes. The emphasis on media literacy, transparency, and credibility is relevant in Western Europe and North America, where digital transformation and trust issues also prevail. Insights on professional

standards and argument strength can inform international discussions on rebuilding trust in media across various cultural and technological contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

The convergence of media and the low-cost establishment of new communication channels highlight the need for media investment to build and retain audience trust. As information becomes freely available, media outlets must focus on credibility to maintain and expand their loyal audience base.

As discussed, information reliability is closely tied to journalists' adherence to ethical standards and professional principles. The findings emphasize the critical role of upholding high information quality and robust argumentation in media to build and retain audience trust.

In today's landscape of abundant online information sources, a medium can only establish credibility through a combination of strong argumentation, high quality, transparency, accuracy, and other key elements essential for a reliable information product.

The society engages in interactions that cross territorial and demographic boundaries. To connect with audiences, media outlets must prioritize interactivity, involving both readers and journalists to address ambiguities and foster clear communication with followers.

This analysis offers valuable insights for media outlets looking to improve their credibility with university students.

While rooted in the Albanian context, this study's findings hold broader implications for media credibility in diverse social and cultural settings. The interplay between media trust, public awareness, and societal well-being is a universal concern, making these insights applicable across various media landscapes.

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Media digitală transmite informațiile mai rapid decât media tradițională, dar este adesea întâmpinată cu scepticism în ceea ce privește credibilitatea sa. Pe măsură ce media digitală devine tot mai dominantă, este esențial să evaluăm credibilitatea informațiilor sale. Această lucrare prezintă un studiu care evaluează credibilitatea informațiilor de pe site-urile media tradiționale și portalurile de știri în rândul studenților de la facultăți de jurnalism și comunicare. Un sondaj realizat pe 253 de studenți din șapte departamente diferite de jurnalism și comunicare analizează factorii care influențează credibilitatea media, inclusiv dependența de mediul de informare, interactivitatea, transparența, forța argumentului, expertiza personală și calitatea informației. Studiul utilizează diverse modele de învățare automată pentru a valida rezultatele, arătând că site-urile media tradiționale sunt percepute ca fiind mai credibile decât portalurile de știri, iar forța argumentului și calitatea informației sunt factorii cei mai importanți în determinarea credibilității informațiilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: credibilitatea informației; dependența de mediu; interactivitate; transparența mediului; forța argumentului; expertiză personală; calitatea informației.

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