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News Credibility and Blogs: Exploring the Effect of Blog Use on Perceptions of News Credibility

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News Credibility and Blogs:
Exploring the Effect of Blog Use On
Perceptions of News Credibility

Daniel Duerden

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

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Master of Arts

News credibility studies have been around since radio and television began competing with the newspaper industry for consumers' attention. However, at this time, the news industry is experiencing a shift in medium as the Internet is quickly becoming the predominant source by which many get their news. Due to the free and independent nature of the Internet and the rise of blogging as a source by which people get news and information, audience perception of what constitutes a credible source needed to be examined. This study took the dimensions of news credibility that have been set in previous studies and compared them against an individual's news blog use to see if there was any change in what was important in measuring credibility. Through these comparisons, the measure that was used in previous studies did not seem deep enough and did not produce the expected outcome. Barely touching on each dimension, this study calls for individual studies on each dimension that would provide a better look at how credibility is perceived by news blog users.

Keywords: blogging, news credibility, new media, journalism

Brigham Young University

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Introduction

In early January 1999, one simple post on a website by a man working out of his basement would change the way journalists, news editors and producers operated. Matt Drudge, a manager at the CBS Studios gift shop, armed with nothing but a computer and his personal website dedicated to providing news and gossip from Hollywood and Washington D.C. broke the news on the Monica Lewinsky scandal, beating *Newsweek* to the punch in the process (Perlmutter 2008, p. 59). He posted:

NEWSWEEK KILLS STORY ON WHITE HOUSE INTERN X X X X X
BLOCKBUSTER REPORT: 23-YEAR OLD, FORMER WHITE HOUSE
INTERN, SEX RELATIONSHIP WITH PRESIDENT. (Drudge, 1998)

Within the next week, *Newsweek* printed the story. However, the damage had been done and a new era of gate-keeping had begun. Now journalists and editors had to be on guard so as to not be scooped by the ever-watchful citizen journalist and his or her blog.

David Perlmutter (2008) explains, “It was the world turned upside down—‘blind chaos in media circles,’ indeed—and the great snowball of the alternative media challenging the mainstream media began” (p. 59). He continues,

Internet news, the rise of outsiders, the warlike culture of modern politics, and a huge demand for up-to-the-second news to fill Websites and twenty-four-hour news operations of big media have combined to kill the news cycle as we knew it. Since Drudge’s post, big media worry about being scooped not only by their competitors in the large glass-and-steel buildings down the street but by the millions of voices online. (p. 59)

This worry of being scooped has, according to Perlmutter (2008), created an “anxiety about whether to withhold before verifying, [a] dread of outing by independents both reliable and fantastic, of what is out there in the world” (p. 60).

This has created a new paradigm on how information is collected and disseminated, as the traditional gatekeepers now have to make way for the everyman. It brings up new questions on what the audience perceives as reliable, and credible. In one recent Pew Institute (2008) study that looked at the perceived credibility and believability of print and television sources, found that audiences have slowly begun to express more skepticism about what they read, see and hear from the varying news outlets. For example, the study points out ten years ago, 41 percent of news consumers rated the Wall Street Journal as believable. That number has since dropped to 25 percent. This trend is also seen in other printed sources such as The New York Times and Newsweek. Television exhibited a similar trend, with CNN dropping from 42 percent to as low as 28 percent in 2007 and 30 percent in 2008. Interestingly enough, in spite of increased popularity of the Internet as a news source, the perceived believability remains markedly lower than the traditional news sources. Only Google News and Yahoo News, which pull their stories from traditional sources, receive a higher believability rating with nearly 60 percent rating them a 3 or 4 in believability (Pew Institute, 2008).

As technology has advanced, bloggers now have the ability to post anything, anywhere at any time. This leads to a broad variety of blogs. Some categories refer to the content of the blog itself, such as personal journals, literary blogs, political blogs, entertainment blogs, and news blogs. Perlmutter (2008) explained that there

are many different categories that blogs could fall into and that these blogs could even overlap each other. 3

Obviously many categories morph into each other: You can have a group, gay, liberal, Canadian, and/or photo blog. Some blogs are concerned with the home, family, and everyday life; others express fanaticism about certain television shows or rock-'n'-roll bands; still others are techie, citing, assessing, or carping about new types of iPods or even blogging itself. (p. 14)

Other categories could refer to the platform or technology used to produce the blog. For example, in the past few years, micro-blogging has become increasingly popular with people using websites like Twitter, Facebook and Myspace to publish small updates about their lives. While some bloggers have used the blogging platform to open a window to the public, sharing their experiences with the world, others have used their blogs to entertain and advertise events. These personal logs have been key in providing potential breaking news, or potentially ruining lives by posting unverified falsehoods.

This new found “power” in the media has allowed for bloggers to gain an ever increasing audience as more people turn to the Internet, more specifically to blogs, for their news. One study shows 10 percent of Americans surveyed saying they used blogs as one of their news sources (Hayes, Singer & Ceppos, 2007; Horrigan, 2006). The main question is, “Has what the audience perceives as a credible news source changed?” Or more specifically, “Will the audience’s perception of the dimensions of news credibility change as news blog use increases?” This study looks at how the perception of the different aspects of news credibility, as established by previous studies, changes as a consumer’s usage of blogs as a news source increases. It brings up the main research question:

RQ1: Will the dimensions of news credibility be affected by the amount of time spent reading blogs, the level of involvement in reading blogs, and the use of blogs as a news source?

It is proposed that as blog usage increases, such aspects of credibility as objectivity and social responsibility will be seen as less or more important, skewing the overall perceived credibility of traditional news sources. This paper will do this first by looking at the history of news credibility and the various aspects that are associated with it—such as trustworthiness, objectivity, reporter training, social awareness and timeliness—then by looking at the history of blogging and nature of blogging and the blogger as well. These hypotheses were formed and tested based on the nature of those who use blogs and how they might view these aspects of news credibility.

Literature Review

News Credibility and Its Measures

Research on news credibility started out as research looking at source credibility in persuasion research, rather than focusing on news entirely. However, Phillip Meyer (1988) explained that news credibility is more complex than the traditional definition of the word credibility in common use:

To be credible is to offer “reasonable grounds for being believed.” The concept is neither complicated nor particularly subtle, and if that were all there were to its application to newspaper it should be fairly straightforward. However the concerns expressed by some newspaper editors suggest an added dimension, that of maintaining harmony in and leadership status with the newspaper’s community. (p. 567)

Meyer continues to explain that “a newspaper can be believed but still be alienated” if it takes a position that the majority of the community opposes or engages in investigations that are perceived to be going against the interests of the community (p. 567).

Source credibility research began as early as the 1940s when Hovland and Weiss (1951) began research on how Frank Capra’s “Why We Fight” World War II propaganda films affected audience attitude. During that study, Hovland and his colleagues, while looking at the effects on attitude change, came up with two main components to source credibility: trustworthiness and expertise (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). These two components became the basis for much of the research that would be done on newspaper, television and radio news credibility for years to come.

In the late 1950s television had just burst on the media scene, prompting the Roper Organization, an independent research foundation, to begin researching

heavily into news credibility. The newspaper industry, as it did before when radio came into prominence, was worried about how this would affect the perception of its credibility with its audience. The Roper Organization sent surveys out to see if public opinion had changed as to how credible the public felt television news was in comparison to newspapers. During these early research surveys the Roper Organization would ask simple questions looking at where the public got their news, and which source they felt was more believable if they were to get conflicting reports (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). These questions became known as the “Roper Questions,” which have been critical in subsequent news credibility studies (Carter & Greenberg, 1965; Gantz, 1981; Miller, Singletary & Chen, 1986). The first question dealt with news sources:

First I would like to ask you where you get most of your news about what’s going on in the world today—from the newspapers or radio or television or magazines or talking to people or where? (Carter & Greenberg, p. 29)

The second question dealt with the perceived credibility of the news source by the audience:

If you got conflicting or different reports about the same news story from radio, television, the magazines or the newspapers, which of the four versions would you most be inclined to believe—the one on the radio or television or magazines or newspapers? (Carter & Greenberg, p. 30)

Since 1963, audiences have overwhelmingly chosen television as their primary source for news, while also seeing it as a more credible news source (Carter & Greenberg, 1965; Gantz, 1981; Miller et al., 1986).

Measures for News Credibility

During the 1960s and 1970s, many of the studies on news credibility focused on the two components brought out by Hovland (1951) and the questions posed in

the Roper Institute studies while also focusing on the merit of the Roper studies. It was not until the 1980s that media credibility studies were expanded into multivariate measures, taking into account varying aspects of journalism and news reporting not previously included. During this time, researchers formed many different measures for news credibility. Building upon and sometimes contradicting each other, researchers showed that measuring media credibility was much more complex than the original reports from the Roper studies showed, and required a more meticulous scale.

Early on, Carter and Greenberg (1965) found evidence that the Roper questions were biased toward television over newspaper. They explained that with the first question often respondents gave more than one source as an answer and wondered how this would change if they asked about each source individually (p. 29). They “had little difficulty showing anti-newspaper bias was operating on which media are used—or which medium is used—for most of the news” (p. 34). However, they pointed out that “anticipated anti-newspaper bias in the Roper question on the special case of conflicting reports did not appear in [their] study. Newspapers seemed to indeed be favored by this question” (p. 34).

Abel and Wirth (1977) explained that many other researchers pointed out that the Roper studies usually focus on national television rather than the local television broadcasts as the main source. Abel and Wirth sought to expand their study on the Roper question to specifically compare local and national television news. They explain,

The respondent is probably comparing his reactions to Walter Cronkite, John Chancellor or Harry Reasoner with his local newspaper. Greenberg

and Roloff suggest that researchers could obtain more meaningful results by comparing respondent perceptions of regularly viewed local TV news to their perceptions of a regularly read local newspaper. The purpose of the present research was to make these local media comparisons. (p. 372)

However, even with these changes—focusing on local broadcasts in comparison to accounts in local newspapers—Abel and Wirth (1977) still found that audiences perceived broadcast news to be more credible than that of print journalism, specifically newspapers. They explained that while television was largely seen as an entertainment medium, and newspaper was still seen as a source of information, newspapers at that time continued to be perceived as less credible than television (p. 375). Reagan and Zenaty (1979) revisited this study in different markets and found results supporting Abel and Wirth's findings.

Gantz's (1981) study looked at the influence of research methods on previous evaluations of news credibility. Gantz sought to assess the extent to which the news credibility scores for television were a function of operationalization. However, Gantz found that "when assessed individually, television's rating was a razor's edge higher than newspapers," but that when a hypothetical conflicting report was added, the lead became more substantial (p. 168). Gantz, seeing many credibility studies as oversimplified, showed that credibility measures needed to be much more complex than assessing what is believable and what is not.

During the early to mid-1980s, credibility measures became more complex as researchers (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Newhagen & Nass 1989; Rimmer & Weaver, 1987) began to look at the different variables that play into news credibility. Researchers also brought in different theories such as uses and gratifications (Mulder 1980; Rimmer & Weaver, 1987) in conjunction with news credibility

studies. Gaziano and McGrath (1986) initially sought to find the different dimensions of credibility. Using a survey method, and a factor analysis of the results, they found 12 items grouped together:

The items concerned whether newspapers and television are fair, are unbiased, tell the whole story, are accurate, respect people's privacy, watch out after people's interests, are concerned with the community's well being, separate fact and opinion, can be trusted, are concerned about the public interest, are factual, and have well-trained reporters. (p. 454)

These dimensions became the basis of other studies as researchers began to simplify these dimensions into different operational variables and factors.

Other researchers, such as Rimmer and Weaver (1987), simplified Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) 12-item list of variables of credibility through another study on media use and credibility. An abbreviated scale was created by Rimmer and Weaver using just four items from the scale: item 2, are biased or unbiased; item 3, tells the whole story or does not tell the whole story; item 4, are accurate or inaccurate; and item 9, can be trusted or cannot be trusted (p. 31). Using these scales, the researchers measured the perceived credibility of the news source against usage of that particular medium. In their findings, the researchers found that "sheer frequency of newspaper and television use is not generally correlated with how credible (trustworthy, unbiased, complete, accurate) newspapers and television news are perceived to be" (p. 36). However, they did find weak associations with the credibility measures when the measures involved some choice or preference among media.

Meyer (1988) took the factors that Gaziano and McGrath (1986) developed and created a simplified index to measure news credibility. He found that of the 12-

item scale that five of those items—fairness, lack of bias, the willingness to tell the whole story and accuracy—were more universal, meaning they always loaded high in factor analyses when brought to different populations. He explained that by using these five items, a more accurate description of credibility forms due to the fact that the factors in the 12-item scale measure a close approximation of the same thing (p. 574). “This redundancy provides a far more accurate measurement than could be made by one of these items alone” (p. 574). This abbreviated scale provided a foundation for many other studies (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Bucy, 2003; Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Kiouisis, 2001; Newhagen & Nass, 1989).

Using the abbreviated scale above, Newhagen and Nass (1989) sought to show that the criteria people use to judge the credibility newspaper and television differed, because television seemed to outscore newspapers in credibility studies.

They explain,

If credibility is defined from a receiver-oriented perspective, credibility is the degree to which an individual judges his or her perceptions to be a valid reflection of reality. Yet another dimension is added to the concept when information is mediated by machine technology—such as a television or a printing press—as is the case with modern mass media's reporting of the news. Mass media news credibility, then, is the perception of news messages as a plausible reflection of the events they depict. (p. 278)

Newhagen and Nass (1989) showed that the credibility perceptions audience members produce differ due to the varying ways the news is disseminated, mainly due to the differing technology. They found that the perceptions of the credibility of newspapers largely depended upon how the institution performs as a whole, whereas perceptions of television news credibility largely depend on the on-air

talent (p. 284). To show these perceptions with newspapers, they specifically looked at circulation size of the newspaper and how it related to the perceptions of credibility. As newspaper circulation sizes decreased, or the story became more local, the gap between the perceived credibility of television and newspaper closed. They suggest, "It would then stand to reason that familiarity with newspaper people would heighten the dimension of personal credibility for that medium. Such a feeling might come from acquaintance with the person named in a byline, or the assumption that newspaper people were like the respondent" (p. 282).

More recently, an adjusted form of Gaziano and McGrath's news credibility scale has been used in looking at measuring the credibility of online news outlets. Abdulla, Salwen, Driscoll and Casey (2005) compared the dimensions of news credibility found in traditional media outlets—television, radio and print—to online outlets. They found that the dimensions for both traditional outlets and online outlets mirrored each other just with a stronger emphasis on different dimensions of credibility. However, they also explained that the nature of the Internet seems to have an impact on the findings as well, as Internet users generally have a higher education level and also have a greater interest in international news due to the borderless nature of the Internet (p. 160).

In summary, the methods used in measuring news credibility have run through a small cycle. At first, the methods were very simple. Then Gaziano and McGrath brought a more complex method of measuring credibility. The first hypothesis in this study concerns trustworthiness in news credibility. As stated

before, trustworthiness has been an integral part in determining news credibility since the first credibility studies in the 1940s.

H1: Trustworthiness

H1a: A positive correlation will be found between the time spent using blogs and the importance of trustworthiness in reporting the news.

H1b: A positive correlation will be found between the level of involvement in blog use and the importance of trustworthiness in reporting the news.

H1c: A positive correlation will be found between the use of blogs as a news source and the importance of trustworthiness in reporting the news.

Blogging, Internet Credibility and Blog Credibility

Blogging Beginnings

In the early 1990s blogging started out as lists of websites such as the “What’s New” page on the Netscape browser (Perlmutter 2008, p. 61). However it was not until December 17, 1997 that the blog was officially born. On his website RobotWisdom, Jorn Barger coined the term weblog to refer to the various websites he had logged onto (Baker, 2008; Kottke, 2003, The Economist, 2006; Wortham, 2007). Peter Merholz brought about the shortened form of weblog, blog, with a simple post in a sidebar on his website peterme.com, “I’ve decided to pronounce the word ‘weblog’ as wee'- blog. Or ‘blog’ for short” (Merholz, 1999).

Perlmutter (2008) explains that Barger initially began his weblog as a list of places he had been to on the web with hyperlinks to them.

On RobotWisdom, his posts were disjointed—for example, “40 AAA batteries for \$7 shipped (Buy.com-DealNews)” and “Purported mp3 of December tsunami-quake (Columbia via Eureka) [wav?] I can’t hear anything.” Barger did not provide space for comments or any level of interaction. (p. 62)

Part of the reason for this lack of interactivity between users, meaning no way for readers to comment and converse with each other, in the early years of the blog came from technological limitations.

In the early part of the twenty-first century, blogging was mostly driven by major events and conflicts such as the attacks on September 11 and the war in Iraq. However, as time passed, many blogs have become more of a personal online diary for others to read (Gunter 2009, Youngs, 2009). Gunter explains, “Blogs are now a phenomenon that embraces private authors who go online to write personal diaries through to representatives from different types of commercial, political and voluntary organizations who utilize them for a range of information exchange, debating, promotional and support purposes” (p. 121). Rather than just post a listing of websites that the blogger had gone to, they began to post their own opinions and experiences as well. Blogging had become a personal outlet that the masses could participate in. Gunter continues,

Most blogs are written as personal diaries or disclosures designed for others in the individual’s close (offline) social network. Some personal blogs, however, are designed to reach out to a wider online community, often of individuals who though strangers share certain interests or problems with the blogger. Other blogs, though personal in their perspective, are deliberately targeted at mass audiences online and have as their purpose self-promotion or simply the objective of creating alternative information exchange or debating forums to those created by mainstream media or political organizations. (p. 124)

At the same time blogs also began to be more interactive in nature, allowing the reader to participate in the discussion. In recent years, audience/author interaction has become an integral part of blogging and online news as technology allows for readers to leave comments and interact with the author, and the author to interact

with his or her audience. This interaction has allowed readers to point out errors, state whether they agree with what is being written and foster discussion about the issue presented by the blogger, and allows the blogger to join in the discussion. For example, if one were to log on to the website *Ain't It Cool News*, a blog-type news site dedicated to entertainment run by Harry Knowles, it would not be uncommon to see Knowles himself posting in the comments section of news stories he has written often giving added insight to what he has written (Knowles, 2009). Comment sections allow for not only the reader to post their thoughts and opinions, but also allow for the author to respond and begin a conversation with his or her readers. While many traditional news sites have added comments sections to their news stories often the news organization will have a policy against a reporter commenting on their own story.

Blogger interactivity also played a key role in the incident known as “Memogate” or “Rathergate,” resulting in Dan Rather resigning from his position as anchor of the *CBS Nightly News*. On September 8, 2004, Rather ran a story looking at reports on President George W. Bush’s service in the Alabama National Guard during the ‘70s (Kurtz, 2004). During the report, alleged photocopies of documents stating that Bush had not completed his guard service requirements were shown. This set off a firestorm in the blogosphere as images of the documents bounced between various blogs allowing for many different people to examine them, bringing questions as to the authenticity of the documents. Within two weeks after the story’s airing, CBS had to admit that they could not verify the documents. This eventually led to Dan Rather retiring the following March (Kurtz, 2005).

Perlmutter (2008) explains that two main things happened with the Dan Rather incident. First, the blogosphere suddenly became a watch dog for the mainstream media, fully exploring the issue in a matter of days. He explains, “The bloggers may have been wrong or right, but at least they put all their arguments and evidence out there for everyone to review, and they did not need management or shareholder approval to do so” (p. 93). There was nothing holding them back, and there was no fear of being proven wrong. It sped up the process, but more importantly it allowed for all sides to be seen.

Second, Perlmutter (2008) explains that this incident showed how bloggers were able to distribute information and intelligence quickly and with ease. He explains:

No surprise to learn that 60 Minutes II’s chief producer “acknowledged that the bloggers and other matters ... had shaken his confidence” in the twenty-four hours following the airing of the story. And indeed, from then on, blogs would be described, as the title of one examination of the relationship of blogs to journalism put it, as those who are “watching the watchdogs.” (p.93)

The speed at which all this happened brought an added implication to the news industry, which was that the bloggers were watching, and were setting up a new form of new media gatekeeping.

Blogs as a News Source

While the majority of blogs on the Internet are personal in nature acting as an online diary, a heavily publicized portion of the blogosphere has been dedicated to reporting news and disseminating political information (Lowery & Mackay, 2008; Mackinnon, 2005). At the turn of the new millennium, especially during the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, blogging provided up-to-date

information and personal accounts that mainstream media just could not provide (Gunter, 2008). Since then, blogging, along with advances in technology like social networking (Facebook) and micro-blogging (Twitter), have become critical sources of information in major world events when the media has no way of getting into the area. It is not uncommon for news to break through Twitter or blogs before it is picked up by CNN, AP and/or other wire services, whether that news is legitimate or not (Bauder, 2009, Fiedler, 2008). In December 2004, the mainstream media had to rely on bloggers and cell-phone video to get any kind of coverage of the tsunami in the Indian Ocean (Schwartz, 2004). In 2007, the Burmese government completely cut Internet access to the country to prevent bloggers from getting information on the Buddhist monk protests against the government to the rest of the world (Samuels, 2007).

Whereas Twitter became the source of choice during the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, with reports of an estimated 80 tweets (Twitter posts) every five seconds with eye-witness reports (Busari, 2008). And even more recently, Twitter became the communication method of choice during the elections in Iran and the subsequent protests by citizens (Morozov, 2009). Much like blogging during the Burmese monk protests, Twitter was one of the only outlets for news as the government shut down most outlets of online communication (Berman, 2009). In fact, the U.S. State Department went as far as to request that Twitter not go through with a scheduled update that would have interrupted services during those events (Musgrove, 2009). During these times the mainstream media has been forced to rely on the citizen and the blogger for information. This brought about what has been

termed citizen journalism, and set up a new conflict pitting bloggers and citizen journalists against traditionally trained journalists, especially as an increasing number of people turn to blogs as their source of news.

This conflict stems from the fact that a blogger often will have little or no training in news reporting. This idea that anyone can report the news has been seen as preposterous by some, and often directly contradicts earlier studies showing how perceptions of credibility can be affected by something as simple as a recognizable journalist. Gunter, Campbell and Touri (2008) explain that it is often argued that many people are turning to the blogosphere for their news because they have lost faith in the mainstream media. Memogate has become a prime example of this. “Bloggers and their proponents regard mainstream journalists ‘as an arrogant, exclusive club that puts down its own version of self-interest and economic survival above the societal responsibility of a free press’ (Bowman & Willis, 2003, p. 13)” (p. 186). In addition, Bowman & Willis (2003) explain that “many traditional journalists are dismissive of participatory journalism, particularly webbloggers, characterizing them as self-interested or unskilled amateurs” (p. 13).

While many webbloggers have little to no journalistic training, many journalists have criticized this debate, calling it ridiculous and pretentious (Penrod, 2005; Regan 2003; Rosen, 2005; Touri, 2009). Rosen (2005) explained,

The question now isn't whether blogs can be journalism. They can be, sometimes. It isn't whether bloggers “are” journalists. They apparently are, sometimes. We have to ask different questions now because events have moved the story forward. By “events” I mean things on the surface we can see, like the tsunami story, and things underneath that we have yet to discern. (para. 3)

Rosen, attempting to put the blogger versus journalist debate to bed, points to an article in the New York Times by John Schwartz (2004) in which Schwartz explains that the blogosphere has become crucial in reporting information that traditional journalists may have difficulty getting. Schwartz used the blog posts following the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean as an example. However, in spite of this ability to gather and spread this information quickly he still points out the lack of trust by the audience. Quoting one blogger, he explains, "Blogging from the tsunami, she said, is 'more raw and immediate,' but the postings still lack the level of trust that has been earned by more established media" (para. 16).

In addition to journalism training for bloggers and the newly found importance of bloggers in reporting the news another issue with blogging is motivations for reading blogs (Huang, Shen, Lin & Chang 2007; Kaye, 2007). In looking at the motivations for Internet users' blog usage, Kaye (2007) found that many users were attracted to the features that were entirely specific to blogs and blogging in general. She found that those that used blogs were attracted to features such as the links provided to multiple information sources, the depth of information from varying viewpoints, commentary and analysis of the news and up-to-date information (p. 137). In addition to that Kaye (2007) found that many people also use blogs due to the perceived bias of those reporting in the traditional media, and also use blogs to supplement their traditional media use.

Many respondents use blogs as an alternative to traditional media, but for others blogs supplement traditional media use. Overwhelmingly, respondents rely on these sites for "access to a broader spectrum of news than is available through traditional media outlets." (p. 138)

This shows that blogs can often provide more information and more points of view than what traditional media can provide. In spite of this, researchers have still looked into the credibility of the Internet as a source of both information and news.

One dimension of news credibility initially included in early studies (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986) was reporter training. Subsequent studies have eliminated it; however, in recent years there has been a resurgent interest in reporter training as citizen journalism has become more prevalent in the journalism world. As more “civilians” put out journalistic works through various channels and citizen journalism becomes increasingly popular, the audience has begun to perceive that journalistic training is unneeded. Overby (1993) explained that through proper training of journalists, press freedom is strengthened. Fahmy (2008) did not look at how important reporter training was, but looked at what trained reporters, specifically online news reporters, felt was needed for the modern day journalist. Fahmy (2008) found that even though there is a definite trend to train journalists in the new digital and web formats, traditional journalist skills are still important:

Respondents stressed the importance of strong fundamental journalism skills and also emphasized the importance of a few digital skills and one Web-coding skill. Thus, while students should continue to learn about convergence to be familiar with the multiplatform reporting trend and how it will evolve, they should still concentrate on excellence in traditional journalism skills. (p. 34)

In spite of this resurgent interest in reporter training, not much research has been done on audience perception of how important journalistic training is.

Online Credibility

As the Internet became more of a factor in media consumption in the 1990s, many studies of the late '90s and into the early part of the new century turned to

focus on source and online credibility (Banning & Sweetser, 2007; Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Greer, 2003; Johnson, 2002 Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Johnson & Kaye, 2002; Kiousis 2001; Lankes, 2008; Metzger, Flanagin; & Zwarun, 2003; Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & McCann, 2003; Morris & Ogan, 1996; Schweiger, 2000; Sundar, 1999; Sweetser, Porter, Chung & Kim, 2008). Metzger et al. (2003) explained that “as the amount of information available via the Internet increases steadily so too does the amount of fraud and misinformation online” (p. 294). These studies mainly focused on the perceived credibility of information gathered from the Internet by news consumers.

Over the past decade, the Pew Institute (2008) has conducted studies and consistently found the Internet rated as the least credible source for information. In one of their more recent studies in 2008, they found that even though audiences were rating both print and broadcast news lower in credibility than in previous years, audiences were still more skeptical about online news sources (Pew 2008).

Johnson and Kaye (1998, 2000, 2002) looked at the perceived credibility of online news sources among politically interested web-users. In the first of these studies (1998) they measured credibility using scales traditionally used in measuring credibility of print and broadcast: believability, fairness, accuracy and depth. In comparing the perceived credibility of traditional news media and online news, Johnson and Kaye (1998) found that online credibility rated higher:

However, online newspapers and online candidate literature are judged as significantly more credible than their traditional counterparts. On the other hand, the mean credibility scores for online news magazines and online issue-oriented sources are nearly identical to their traditional versions. (p. 331)

Additionally, this study looked at how reliance on the Internet as a news source affects the perception of credibility, showing that it becomes a stronger indicator of credibility than the actual amount of use, supporting previous studies (p. 335).

Timeliness has become a huge issue with the advent of the Internet as it has allowed for information to be uploaded and disseminated to mass audiences instantly. As a part of their study on online news credibility, Abdulla et al. (2005) replaced the parts concerning social concerns in Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) measure of news credibility with timeliness. Unfortunately, timeliness has not had nearly as many articles written on the subject as other aspects of news credibility. Galtung and Ruge (1965) initially set out to examine the factors that influenced the news, specifically international news. These factors would become the basis for news values taught to journalists for years to come because they introduced issues such as prominence, relevance and cultural proximity to news. Timeliness was a large issue prior to the introduction of online news as there were problems with disseminating and receiving information (Shelton, 1978; Straughen, 1989; Tiedge & Ksobiech, 1982). One might expect that with the Internet timeliness would become less of an issue in determining credibility, but it can be argued that timeliness becomes more important as more information becomes instantly available (Abdulla et al., 2005; Cassidy, 2007; Robinson, 2006; Singer, 1997). This is especially apparent in blogging and its continuous updates.

Blog Usage and Credibility

In the past 5 years or so, as blogging has become more of a mainstream activity, both as a form of entertainment and a form of dispersing news, researchers

have been turning their attention toward studying blogs and their users. Many early blogs that were not personal journal-type blogs focused mainly on political issues and often represented bipartisan views of the current election or political situation. Perlmutter (2008) explained that during the Democratic primary elections in 2003 and 2004, Howard Dean's political campaign helped give birth to the political blogger:

Although blogs would no doubt have achieved their present popularity, prominence, and power even if Howard Dean had never run for president, no one drama had so powerful a magnifying role in telling ordinary Americans and political professionals and journalists that blogs had arrived. (p. 71)

During Howard Dean's run in the Democratic primary election, the Dean campaign used the bloggers as a way to organize and spread their message, and essentially treat "the blog constituency as campaign advisors in a sort of virtually democratic campaign" (p. 72). Since then, many different studies (Choi, Watt & Lynch, 2006; Feld & Wilcox 2008; Guadagno, Okdie & Eno, 2008; Johnson, 2004; Johnson, Kaye, Bichard & Wong, 2008; Singer 2005; Tomaszeski, Proffitt & McClung 2009) have focused on bloggers views and perceptions of blogging as a news source. Singer (2005) looked at the political j-blogger, or journalist who also operates a blog, and their attempt to normalize the blog format as online news. She explained that they would use links to other sites extensively to provide more transparency in their reporting, but many of these links would be to other mainstream websites rather than to smaller, more independent sites. Tomaszeski, Proffitt and McClung (2009) looked specifically at bloggers' perceptions of their roles in the news media, finding that bloggers see themselves as a more accurate extension of the traditional

media—following the same norms and practices that journalists have in reporting. In addition to looking at the perceptions of bloggers and blog users, as researchers have done in the past, this current study seeks to find the perceptions of news credibility of those who are not blog users to compare these attitudes.

This leads into the next two hypotheses concerning reporter training and timeliness, taken from Abdulla et al.'s (2005) study on online news credibility. As blogging has become more prominent, reporter training has also become a bigger issue. Blogs have become a forum for anyone to spread information, including news, regardless of how much journalistic training. Finally technology has allowed for timeliness to become more of an issue as information is now instantly available to those who seek it. News consumers no longer have to wait for news to filter through the proper channels. Blog users would also see this as something important in measuring news credibility. To correctly measure news blog use, each hypothesis has three levels looking at the time spent using blogs, the level of involvement when using blogs and the use of blogs as a news source:

H2: Reporter Training

H2a: A negative correlation will be found between the time spent using blogs and the importance of having well-trained reporters reporting the news.

H2b: A negative correlation will be found between the level of involvement in blog use and the importance of having well-trained reporters reporting the news.

H2c: A negative correlation will be found between use of blogs as a news source and to the importance of having well-trained reporters reporting the news.

H3: Timeliness

H3a: A positive correlation will be found between the time spent using blogs and the importance of currency and timeliness in the news reported.

H3b: A positive correlation will be found between the level of involvement in blog use and the importance of currency and timeliness in the news reported.

H3c: A positive correlation will be found between use of blog as a news source and the importance of currency and timeliness in the news reported.

Objectivity as a Factor of News Credibility

More so than the previously mentioned aspects of news credibility like trustworthiness and timelines, one of the first things that is often mentioned when looking at news writing,—and journalism in general—is the notion of the objective reporter. Boyer (1981) explains that of all the standards that journalists hold, objectivity is the most pervasive (p. 24). However, of all the standards in journalism, objectivity has also in recent times become one of the most hotly debated as the term is defined, redefined, declared unattainable, and yet taught as the standard to up-and-coming journalists (Merrill 1990; Schudson 2006, Tuchman, 1972; Wien 2005). Mindich (1998) explained,

But what is “objectivity” anyway? That depends on whom you ask. For some it is a vague point to strive for, like the North Star. For others it involves specific practices. Still others define it in the breach, citing journalists who break its rules. And lately “objectivity has come under fire, a casualty of a bitter battle over the future of journalism. But even as some journalists celebrate it and others call for its end, no one seems able to define it (p. 1).

In looking to define it, journalists are told to check their own personal opinions and biases at the door. They are told to only report the facts of the story and then leave it up to the audience to decide how they feel about the events that have transpired. Schudson (2001) gives a similar definition,

The objectivity norm guides journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts. Objective reporting is supposed to be cool, rather than emotional, in tone. Objective reporting takes pains to represent fairly each

leading side in a political controversy. According to the objectivity norm, the journalist's job consists of reporting something called 'news' without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way. (p. 150)

Merrill (1990) explains that there are many different dualistic orientations that journalists fall into, with one side leaning toward the more objective reporting and the other leaning to the more activist or "truth-as-I-see-it" reporting. He explains that out of all dualistic orientations and allegiances that journalists face "two basic tendencies emerge. One of these is what might be referred to as a 'subjective' orientation or tendency and the other as an 'objective' tendency" (p. 148).

Objectivity, however, according to Merrill, is something more than just taking a neutral stance or detaching one's self from the story. He explains,

Objectivity is not, as it often implied in a false idea of "scientific" objectivity, synonymous with detachment, with absence of intent and care. How can one penetrate the veiling surface of things to their causes and relationships if one does not have an interest in that is vital and sufficiently impelling for so laborious a task. (p. 153)

For Merrill "respect" has more to do with objectivity rather than detachment from the story.

Challenging Objectivity

Objectivity was not always the standard in journalism (Cunningham 2003; Kaplan 2002; Mindich, 1998), which explains why early journalism was often just the opinion of the predominating political party, with news sources often towing the party line. It was not until the mid-1800s that newspapers started to break off and form some sense of objectivity in their papers. Mindich (1998) explains the rise of the penny papers, "The pennies were the first newspapers to formally break from political parties, and this break caused the first step toward journalistic 'objectivity':

detachment” (p. 12). During this time Mindich (1998) explains that these early pioneers in objectivity brought in ideas such as removing color from the story and adding balance in reporting.

Objectivity had become a staple in journalistic codes of ethics and remains so today. However, in the ‘60s and ‘70s, some journalists challenged the notion of the “aloof”, detached journalist that Merrill (1996) described. New journalists such as Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, Norman Mailor and Hunter S. Thompson began to bend and break the rules that had been set up by journalists before them. Wolfe (1973) explained in the opening essay of his book, *The New Journalism*, that in order for journalists—such as Capote with his non-fiction novel *In Cold Blood*—to get the better story, they had to do more than just report the facts. Wolfe explained,

What interested me was not simply the discovery that it was possible to write accurate non-fiction with techniques usually associated with novels and short stories. It was that—plus. It was the discovery that it was possible in non-fiction, in journalism to use any literary device from the traditional dialogisms of the essay to stream-of-consciousness, and to use many different kinds simultaneously, or within a relatively short space. (p. 15)

This meant taking literary devices from fiction writing, such as third-person perspective, dialogue and scene construction. More importantly, for the writers themselves it meant immersion into the story. No longer could journalists be detached and cold in their reporting. For example Thompson, in a story he wrote on the biker gang, the Hell’s Angels, nearly lost his life as he was savagely beaten by some gang members (Wolfe 1973, p. 27). These journalists became part of the story. While for some this became an argument against objectivity, for many it added a new facet to objectivity in news writing.

In the late '70s, Merrill (1996) coined the term “existential journalism”, in which he explains that while similar to new journalism it is different in many ways.

For it is not simply an attitude or stance of rebellion for rebellion's sake, nor is it an obsession with writing style or form, nor is it a concern for exhaustive communication. Rather, existential journalism is that aspect of journalism manifested in an attitude of freedom, commitment, rebellion, and responsibility. (p. 27-28)

Merrill (1996) explained that existential journalism is a subjective journalism due to man's subjective nature and that when he tries to be objective or a “‘reflector’ of his environment—he takes on a false nature; he becomes inauthentic” (p. 29). However, Stoker (1995) argued that existentialism is not necessarily a subjective form of journalism. He argued that existentialism is something that can be used as a way to keep the objective journalist grounded ethically and morally. While Merrill himself admitted that existential journalism is subjective, Stoker argued that it would also force the journalist to be more objective in the sense that the journalist's works would be more complete and more unbiased.

This would also influence journalists to take an active, responsible role in society while still maintaining their obligation to fidelity and justice; that is reporting stories accurately, fairly, impartially, and completely. Existentialism would free journalists not only from their own biases but the biases of their own profession. It would emphasize authenticity. (p. 18)

These challenges to objectivity have not done away with it, but have made objectivity become more complex.

Online Objectivity and Citizen Journalism

As the Internet became more popular as a news source during the late '90s and early part of the twenty-first century, citizen journalism became increasingly prevalent. Citizen bloggers witnessed and reported on events using new technology

that enabled instant delivery of information, becoming journalists in their own right. (Perlmutter, 2008). However, as they reported on these events, they usually would make no attempt to filter their information (Niekamp, 2009). The term citizen journalist, according to Tilley and Cokley (2008) carries both positive and negative connotations. It is positive in the sense that the citizen journalist democratizes the gatekeeping. No longer do the traditional news outlets hold the power to decide what is news and what is not (p. 98). However, citizen journalists are also seen as untrained, which brings a negative connotation. They explain that the term 'citizen journalist' tends to "devalue the ethical and commercial worth of the term 'journalist' and with it the specialized information processing skills" (p. 98). These are just some of the connotations that the term 'citizen journalist' creates, and are also at the heart of the debate between citizen and traditional journalism.

As more citizens started reporting on events, blogs became the main outlet of citizen journalism at first (Niekamp, 2009; We Media, 2003). While some bloggers, mostly those with journalistic training or that were journalists themselves, held to the journalistic ideals such as objective reporting (Singer, 2005), many bloggers strayed from these and began reporting not only the news but their opinions on the news as well. Political blogs mostly began as partisan blogs focusing on one specific political party, forgoing any balance in covering any one issue (Perlmutter, 2008).

As much as it would seem that objectivity in news writing would be set aside in favor of more subjective blogs and citizen journalism, other online news sites—such as Wikinews—are in fact attempting to keep the objective ideal by taking

multiple news sources to form their stories. At the same time, websites devoted completely to citizen journalism—such as Digital Journal and NowPublic—came into prominence, giving people the outlet to post news stories from around the world. Wikinews, for example, allows for what the site refers to as the neutral point of view by providing space for registered users to write and edit news stories on the website rather than presenting a single, unbiased or objective article, Wikinews seeks to have the contributors produce a fair representation of the varying points of view (Thorson, 2008). However, Thorson explains that the neutral point of view is a process rather than an ideal. He quotes Wikipedia founder Jimmy D. Wales:

The neutral point of view attempts to present ideas and facts in such a fashion that both supporters and opponents can agree. Of course, 100 percent agreement is not possible; there are ideologues in the world who will not concede to any presentation other than a forceful statement of their own point of view. We can only seek a type of writing that is agreeable to essentially rational people who may differ on particular points. (p. 939)

With Wikinews, objectivity has taken a more collective form in which the reporter no longer has to be completely objective. The reporter brings what he or she has to the table and integrates it with other, continuously updated, points of view. As online news media becomes more pervasive and blogging and citizen journalism becomes a larger outlet for news reporting, a question arises: will objectivity be seen as an important part of journalism by those who are heavy users of blogs as news sources?

Due to the passionate, personal and very partisan nature of blogging objectivity would be seen as something less important in determining news credibility. Blogging has often been, and continues to be a platform to not only

provide the news but to comment and discuss it as well. This forms the fourth hypothesis concerning the importance of objectivity in credibility and blog use:

H4: Objectivity

H4a: A negative correlation will be found between the time spent using blogs and the importance of unbiased and non-opinionated reporting in measuring news source credibility.

H4b: A negative correlation will be found between the level of involvement in blog use and the importance of unbiased and non-opinionated reporting in measuring news source credibility.

H4c: A negative correlation will be found between the use of blogs as a news source and the importance of unbiased and non-opinionated reporting in measuring news source credibility.

Social Awareness and Responsibility in News Credibility

Part of Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) study on measuring news credibility included questions asking whether a news source respects people's privacy, watches after readers'/viewers' interests and is concerned about the community's well-being (p. 455). Each of these questions is at the heart of the social responsibility theory of the press that started to gain popularity in the middle part of the 20th century.

In Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's (1956) work, *The Four Theories of the Press*, which has often been marked as one of the seminal works in defining social responsibility in the press, the authors explain that the movement began much earlier in the twentieth century. They define social responsibility in the press through six tasks that they ascribe to journalists. The first three—servicing the political system by providing information, discussion and debate on public affairs; enlightening the public to make it capable of self-governing; and safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as a watchdog against government—have often

become the main focus in looking at social responsibility. These items are in fact very close to Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) questions. While the latter three tasks—servicing the economic system, primarily by bringing together the buyers and sellers of goods and services through the medium of advertising; providing entertainment; maintaining its own financial self-sufficiency so as to be free from the pressures of special interests—focus more towards the economics and entertainment aspects of the news business.

At a time when liberalism in the press was at its peak and people were suspicious of the large conglomerates that controlled the news media, the Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947)—also known as the Hutchins Commission—was set up by journalists and researchers to provide a clearer definition of press freedom and the responsibilities associated with it (Nordenstreng, 1998). Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) also explained that as the twentieth century brought about a gradual change in the libertarianism that was prevalent in the press in its earlier days (p. 73). This commission came together to not only define and redefine established aspects in journalism, such as objectivity and balance, but also looked at the importance of freedom of the press. “Freedom of speech and press is close to the central meaning of all liberty. Where men cannot freely convey their thoughts to one another no liberty is secure” (p. 107). However, the Commission also explains that with freedom of the press come certain responsibilities toward society. For example, it explains that “wherever there are two parties within a community, there is always a third party, the community itself” (p. 110), who makes up the consumers of the media. The consumer then has rights.

The Commission explains, “Freedom of the press must imply the freedom of the consumer not to consume any particular press product; otherwise the issuer’s freedom could be at the expense of the consumer’s freedom” (p. 111).

The Hutchins Commission signaled the beginning of social responsibility in the press because it explained that the press must use the principles of self-regulation to keep consumers informed while maintaining their own freedom to publish what they wanted. Through social responsibility, movements in journalism such as civic or public journalism took the basic premises of the theory of social responsibility in the press and applied them. The public journalism movement came around in the early- to mid-’90s. Voakes (2004) explained that the movement did not come from any university research, but rather “an experiment at a newspaper, which led to a similar experiment at another newspaper, and it simply caught on—without a manifesto, without any list of principles, with nary a mission statement” (p. 25). Like many terms and movements within journalism, however, defining public journalism has proven to be difficult because many scholars and experts formed varying opinions. Nip (2008) synthesized the works of various experts on the subject and formed 6 different points defining public journalism:

- 1) Listening to the public to help shape the news agenda;
- 2) Giving ordinary people a voice;
- 3) Covering stories in a way that facilitates deliberation of the problem behind the stories;
- 4) Presenting news to make it more accessible and easier for people to engage in the issues;
- 5) Engaging the community in problem solving;
- 6) Maximizing the impact of the coverage in the community. (p. 180)

However, with the rise of public journalism, many scholars (Blanchard, 1998; Merrill, 2001; St. John, 2007) saw public journalism as abandonment of creativity and of the freedom of the press. Merrill (2001) explained,

Slowly but inexorably the communitarian worldview is unfolding. Order and community spirit are taking over from social chaos and individualism. Out of the disorder that threatened to turn the 20th century into a vast wasteland is evolving a cautious and pluralist world of tribalized societies seeking stability and safety. Freedom is being sacrificed to order. Individualism is being sacrificed to social responsibility. (p. 193)

Merrill (2001) sees public journalism as something that is usurping the autonomy and freedom that the American press has enjoyed over the years. He continues, stating that the future does not necessarily promise a global community, but small homogenous groups composed of members with the same ideological values (p. 193).

While public journalism has had some detractors, it also has supporters in those who have seen public journalism as something to improve journalistic integrity and ethics in journalism. Others have seen it as a clear way to improve journalism in other parts of the world that may have previously struggled with press freedom. In recent times, with an increased use of new media in the journalism world, many parallels can be made between the public journalism movement and blogging, and many things about public journalism directly contrast blogging as well. For the blogger, one of the most important facets of his or her work is being an advocate for or representing the common man and pushing against the established media while breaking the rules of gatekeeping.

The Hutchins Commission (1947) explained that social responsibility in the press is important for society as a whole. "The truth about any social group, though it should not exclude its weaknesses and vices, includes recognition of its values, its aspirations and its common humanity" (p. 26-27). This holds true for the blogger as well because bloggers who discuss news or political events, also seek to cut past the

gatekeeping process and provide information to the masses using blogs, and social networking (Bauder 2009; Perlmutter 2008). Tilley and Cokley (2008) explain, “The discourse from citizen journalists about citizen journalism suggests it provides greater truthfulness, less bias, more open access to information, more ‘freedom’ to report what is seen, and greater plurality of perspectives, especially counter-hegemonic perspectives” (p. 103). In addition to providing additional information and perspective for stories already covered in the mainstream media, bloggers can also provide the public with news that may have been overlooked by the mainstream press. McGill, Iggers and Cline (2007) explain an incident in which McGill reported on the massacre of members of the Anuak tribe by the Ethiopian government. McGill et al. (2007) explained that had he not ignored his traditional journalistic training, the Anuak tribe genocide would have gone unnoticed by the press around the world (p.283-284). McGill et al. (2007) explained,

The experience has made me consider whether, in printing the story of the Anuak genocide, I was acting as a journalist following professional journalistic norms as I had learned them at The New York Times, or whether I was forced by a wider conception of myself—especially my role as a citizen—to go ahead and publish although I never would have done so, nor been able to do so, if I had been working for the Times or another newspaper. I’ve decided that it was only by sidestepping several professional journalistic norms, and by recourse to what I took to be my rights and responsibilities as a citizen, that allowed me ultimately to tell the Anuak’s story. (p. 282)

By pushing past the traditional gatekeeping methods blogging contrasts social responsibility theory and civic journalism as well. Blogging, because it has no traditional gatekeeping, has a reputation for leaning toward libertarianism. This means that much of what is published in blogs can be unfiltered and unchecked. Lovink (2007) explains,

Communications via the Internet do not have immediate repercussions on the local social life of the individual participants. Thus they feel free(r) to express themselves in a uninhibited way. This is precisely the reason why Internet communications are characterized by two extreme manifestations of social behavior: being excessively and unwontedly sweet to other people (“netslutting” or “flirting”) and excessively insulting or even threatening (“netsh---ing” or “flaming”). (p. xvii)

This does not mean, however, that the blogger is unconcerned with the public or the reader’s best interests. In fact, some researchers (Hayes, Singer & Ceppos, 2007; Perlmutter, 2008; Reisner 2005; Singer 2005) have said this is generally the opposite as the blogger believes they are seeking to get information out to the public for their benefit. Examples include what the bloggers did with Dan Rather and Memogate, and Matt Drudge reporting on the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal. Bloggers and blog users are often faced with a paradox as they seek freedom to publish what they want when they want but still seek to inform and protect the public’s best interests.

The importance of social factors in news credibility leads to the fifth and final hypothesis:

H5: Social Concerns

H5a: A positive correlation will be found between the time spent using blogs and the importance of social concerns in measuring of news credibility.

H5b: A positive correlation will be found between level of involvement in blog use and the importance of social concerns interest as a measure of news credibility.

H5c: A positive correlation will be found between use of blogs as a news source and the importance of social concerns as a measure of news credibility.

Conclusion

As stated earlier, this study is examining whether audience perception of the previously established dimensions of news credibility will differ as blog use and also news blog use increases. Throughout the study five hypotheses have been formed. These hypotheses are based off of four factors of news credibility from earlier studies, and another outlying factor previously a part of news credibility shown to have importance in this particular study: objectivity, trustworthiness, timeliness (Abdulla et al., 2005 ; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986), social factors (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986), and reporter training (Fahmy, 2008; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Each hypothesis is split into three subsets using each of the three variables used in determining news blog use: time spent using blogs, level of involvement, motivations for blog use. While some of the hypotheses do not really change any of the aspects of news credibility by predicting a positive correlation—trustworthiness, reporter training and social concerns—the hypothesis concerning objectivity and social concerns go completely against precedence. This prediction may indicate a shift in how one approaches the measurement of news credibility.

Methods

Introduction

This study took previous news credibility studies (Gaziano, 1988; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Meyer, 1985; Meyer, 1988) and applied them to current issues relating to blog use and online news. Using original survey instruments, the study looked for a relationship between the amount of blog use, specifically blog use as a news source and the perceptions of what makes a news source credible. This chapter will give a description of the sample, variable and methods used. The sample section will show how the sample was chosen and explain the demographics of the people who participated in the study. The variable section describes the variables used in the study, how the variables were chosen and the methods involved in choosing these variables.

Sample

The sample used for this study was a mixed sample of college students and web users (n=237). Unlike other samples used in similar studies, this study sought to find those who do not blog or use blogs as well as those who do for comparison purposes. A combination of paper and web surveys was used to collect the data. Other past studies (Johnson & Kaye, 2000; Johnson, et al., 2008; Kaye, 2005; Tomaszeski, Proffitt & McClung, 2009; Yang, 2007) have focused solely on bloggers, blog-users only, and Internet users in a general sense. This study seeks to identify a change in perception of news credibility as blog use increases, specifically blog use as a news source. In order to ensure a significant range in the level of Internet and

blog use, a combination of both online surveys and paper surveys were used to collect data.

The findings of this survey showed that of the 237 people who took the survey 39 percent (n=94) reported that they operate blogs. More women completed the survey at 54 percent (n=129), and nearly twice as many women reported to operate a blog than men at 60 women to 33 men. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 61 with an average of 27.7 years. Of this age range the majority of bloggers came from 21 to 29, however this is also the range into which most of the participants fell as well. In education, the majority of those who took the survey reported that they had at least some college but had not yet graduated with 47 percent (n=112) of the respondents. The next highest were those who reported having a bachelor's degree at 32 percent (n=77). The vast majority of those who operate their own blog fall into those two educational categories—college students or graduates—as well, with 37 people and 39 people respectively.

Variables

There are two main variables in this study: the use of blogs as a news source and news credibility. The independent variable is the level of blog usage as a news source. Using questions from previous studies on blogging motivations and uses (Kaye, 2005; Kaye, 2007), this variable had three different levels to determine whether a person uses blogs as a news source. The first dimension in the variable was based on how much a person reads blogs in an average day. To measure this, the participant was asked how much, in minutes, they read blogs on both an average weekday and day on the weekend. Then to produce an accurate score between the

two, they were combined only after multiplying time spent on week days by 5 and multiplying the time spent on weekends by 2.

The second dimension measured the interactivity and participation in reading a blog, asking whether they post comments on the blog and send links. This is measured using a question with 5 levels based on what Kaye (2005) used previously: never participate—with a person just reading the blog and not participating; low participation—reading the blog and on rare occasions will send in comments or links; sometimes participate—will occasionally send in links and comments while reading the blog; high participation—will often send in comments and links; and very high participation—will very often send in comments and links. In this study, the respondents were also asked to estimate how the average numbers of hours they spent on blogs during the week. The last dimension determined the subjects' motivations behind reading blogs, asking whether they use the blog as a way of informing themselves of current events and news, as opposed to looking at blogs for social purposes and entertainment (Kaye, 2007). Each item was measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Because this study was specifically looking at the effect of the use of blogs as a news source on a person's perception of news credibility, a factor analysis was then done on the blogging motivations to factor out the items that would come together to form a news blog use dimension. The items that loaded together were, making up my mind on important issues, comparing online accounts to traditional media, finding information not found in traditional media, seeking commentary on news and current events, keeping up with main issues of the day, checking accuracy of traditional media accounts that, finding information about

current events and politics, seeking out points of view similar to my own. The reliability test also recorded a Chronbach's alpha of 0.91.

The dependent variable in the study, news credibility was a variation of the 12 items of news credibility by Gaziano and McGrath (1986) that Abdulla et al. (2005) used in a study measuring the credibility of online news as compared to other media. Abdulla et al. chose this scale due to the reliability of the scale. The

Table 1

Sample Demographics

Demographic Variable	n	percent
Gender		
Male	106	45.2
Female	129	54.8
Education Level		
High School	10	4.2
Some College	112	47.3
Bachelor's Degree	77	32.5
Graduate Degree	38	16.0
Blog		
Yes	94	39.7
No	143	60.3
Age		
Max	61	
Min	18	
Average	28	

items they used were: trustworthy, current, biased, fair, report the whole story, objective, dishonest, up-to-date, believable, balanced, accurate, and timely. A factor analysis was then done by Abdulla et al. finding that the items loaded into three main factors: trustworthiness, currency and bias. In addition to these variables that

loaded in high in the news credibility scale, other variables discussed in Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) study on news credibility that were replaced by other variables in Abdulla's study were used in the survey as well. Those variables include the social concerns items and items concerning reporter training: being concerned for public interest, watching after readers' interests, being concerned for community well-being, having reporters with a college degree, being written by a journalist with newspaper experience, coming from an established journalistic source, and following specific journalistic rules.

For this study, however, an adjustment was made to how the scale for news credibility was used. In past studies, the scale was used to measure whether a news source was considered credible or whether one source was more credible than another. This study attempted to measure the perceived importance of the varying items within news credibility against blog use by the participants. This meant that, while factor analyses have been done on these items before, a new factor analysis would need to be done. This new factor analysis identified five different dimensions—trustworthiness, objectivity, timeliness, social concerns and reporter training. However, two of the items—believability and follows specific journalistic rules—did not factor cleanly and were thus excluded. Believability in the past loaded with trustworthiness, however this time it loaded stronger with the social concern. However, while it loaded with social concern, it significantly weakened the reliability of the social concern factor. The dimension follows specific journalistic rules, on the other hand did not load strongly with any other factor and was dropped as well.

In addition to the factor analysis, reliability tests were done to ensure that the dimensions within each factor measured retained internal consistency and reliability. For the factor of trustworthiness, a reliability test was run on four items: trustworthiness, believability, accuracy and reporting the whole story, recording a Chronbach's alpha of 0.581. However, if the dimension of believability were to be taken out, then the number increased to 0.71 making the other three reliable dimensions of the trustworthiness factor. The next three factors—objectivity, timeliness and social concerns—all were shown to be reliable with Chronbach's alphas of 0.84, 0.84 and 0.90 respectively. The item believability, while it did not

Table 2

Blogging Motivations Factor Analysis		
<i>Factor</i>	<i>Use of blogs as a news source</i>	<i>Other items</i>
Use of blogs as a news source		
Making up my mind on important issues	0.87	-0.171
Comparing online accounts to traditional media	0.87	-0.160
Finding information not found in traditional media	0.85	-0.216
Seeking commentary on news and current events	0.79	-0.193
Keeping up with main issues of the day	0.75	-0.078
Checking accuracy of traditional media accounts that	0.74	-0.160
Finding information about current events and politics	0.68	0.055
Seeking out points of view similar to my own	0.62	0.153
Chronbach's alpha		0.91
Other items		
Entertainment news	0.49	0.473
Keeping up with family	0.20	0.822
Escape Boredom	0.47	0.593

load with trustworthiness and made the factor less reliable, did load with the factor social concern. Because it had not loaded with social concerns in previous studies and it weakened the reliability of the social concerns factor, the item was dropped rather than included with the social concerns factor. The last factor, reporter training, only had a Chronbach's alpha of 0.62 with the four items included in the original factor analysis. However, when the item, follows specific journalistic rules, was removed, the alpha rose to 0.86 showing the other three to be a more reliable measure.

Once each of these tests was done on both the motivations and news credibility variables, new dimensions were then created to obtain a total score for each of the original five dimensions. This was done by totaling the score for each of the items within each respective dimension. For example, the scores of the items unbiased, objective and balanced were totaled to form the new objectivity factor. In addition to the five news credibility factors created, one other factor also was created in the same fashion, measuring the use of blogs as news. This was done first by a factor analysis on the blogging motivations finding those specific items—making up my mind on important issues, comparing online accounts to traditional media, finding information not found in traditional media, seeking commentary on news and current events, keeping up with main issues of the day, checking accuracy of traditional media accounts that, finding information about current events and politics, seeking out points of view similar to my own—loaded together. Afterwards the scores from these dimensions were totaled to form a variable, blogs as a news source. With this done the researcher was now prepared for hypothesis testing.

Table 3

News Credibility Factor Analysis					
<i>Factor</i>	<i>Trustworthiness</i>	<i>Objectivity</i>	<i>Timeliness</i>	<i>Social Concerns</i>	<i>Reporter Training</i>
Objectivity					
Unbiased	0.27	0.84	0.11	0.10	0.09
Objective	0.17	0.80	0.13	0.17	0.06
Balanced	0.11	0.80	0.14	0.16	0.02
	Chronbach's alpha	0.84			
Trustworthiness					
Trustworthy	0.81	0.08	-0.02	0.12	-0.05
Report the whole story	0.73	0.17	0.36	0.11	0.08
Accurate	0.73	0.28	0.08	-0.04	0.06
	Chronbach's alpha	0.71			
Timeliness					
Current	0.06	0.23	0.84	0.12	0.21
Up-to-date	0.24	0.04	0.82	0.18	0.11
Timely	0.04	0.18	0.75	0.34	0.19
	Chronbach's alpha	0.84			
Social concerns					
Watch after readers' interests	-0.08	0.18	0.24	0.74	-0.08
Show concern for public interest	0.01	0.36	0.25	0.69	0.01
Show concern for community well-being	0.07	0.03	0.28	0.66	0.07
	Chronbach's alpha	0.90			
Reporter training					
Written by journalist with newspaper experience	-0.03	0.06	0.09	0.25	0.83
Have reporters with college degree	0.00	-0.12	0.12	0.24	0.83
Come from an established journalistic news source	0.09	0.07	0.14	0.14	0.81
	Chronbach's alpha	0.86			

Results

Introduction

This chapter reports the results of the survey, and whether the hypotheses were accurate in their prediction. It is separated into different sections based on the five hypotheses—trustworthiness, reporter training, timeliness, objectivity, and social concerns. As previously stated, when attempting to measure blog use as a news source, it was rather difficult to find a specific scale that would measure not only a person’s blogging motivations but also the time spent blogging and participation. So each hypothesis was broken down into three levels starting with

Table 4

Correlation Test Results				
<i>Factor</i>	<i>Time Spent Reading Blogs</i>	<i>Blogging Interaction & Participation</i>	<i>Use of Blogs as a News Source</i>	
Trustworthiness				
Pearson’s r	-0.07	-0.10	0.02	
1-tailed significance	0.13	0.46	0.36	
Reporter training				
Pearson’s r	-0.12	-0.08	-0.02	
1-tailed significance	0.03	0.12	0.37	
Timeliness				
Pearson’s r	0.00	-0.01	0.06	
1-tailed significance	0.49	0.46	0.20	
Objectivity				
Pearson’s r	-0.09	-0.10	-0.00	
1-tailed significance	0.10	0.07	0.95	
Social concerns				
Pearson’s r	-0.02	0.00	0.09	
1-tailed significance	0.37	0.48	0.10	

Note: Bold italicized numbers indicate significance at the 0.05 level.

time spent blogging, then moving on to blog participation and interaction and then finishing with blog motivations, or use of blogs as a news sources. Each of these levels formed a variable which was run against each news credibility factor—objectivity, trustworthiness, timeliness, social concerns and reporter training.

Trustworthiness

The first series of hypotheses regarding trustworthiness, the first hypothesis predicted that there would be a positive correlation between the perceived importance of trustworthiness in news credibility and blog use. However, no correlation was found.

H1a: A positive correlation will be found between the time spent using blogs and the importance of trustworthiness in reporting the news.

H1a was unsupported as there was no correlation found between the perceived importance of trustworthiness and time spent reading blogs ($r = -.07, p = .13$).

H1b: A positive correlation will be found between the level of involvement in blog use and the importance of trustworthiness in reporting the news.

The second level, H1b, was also not supported, with no correlation between the two ($r = -.1, p = .46$).

H1c: A positive correlation will be found between the use of blogs as a news source and the importance of trustworthiness in reporting the news.

H1c, the last level in H1, was also unsupported with no correlation between the two variables ($r = .02, p = .36$).

Reporter Training

The second series of hypotheses predicted a negative correlation between blog use and the importance of well-trained reporters in measuring news

credibility. However, as with the previous hypotheses, correlation tests showed no correlation between the two.

H2a: A negative correlation will be found between the time spent using blogs and the importance of having well-trained reporters reporting the news.

H2a was supported, showing a slight negative correlation between the time spent using blogs and the perceived importance of reporter training in measuring news credibility ($r = -.12, p = .03$).

H2b: A negative correlation will be found between the level of involvement in blog use and the importance of having well-trained reporters reporting the news.

The second level of the hypothesis, H2b, however, went unsupported with no correlation ($r = -.08, p = .12$).

H2c: A negative correlation will be found between use of blogs as a news source and to the importance of having well-trained reporters reporting the news.

The last level, H2c—comparing the importance of reporter training to blog use as news source—also went unsupported with no correlation ($r = -.02, p = .37$).

Timeliness

The next series of hypotheses predicted that there would be a positive correlation between the perceived importance of timeliness and general blog use across all three levels. However, this was not the case as no correlation was found.

H3a: A positive correlation will be found between the time spent using blogs and the importance of currency and timeliness in the news reported.

H3a was not supported as no correlation was found in comparing the time spent using blogs against the importance of timeliness in determining news credibility ($r = .00, p = .49$).

This continued through the next two levels of the hypothesis.

H3b: A positive correlation will be found between the level of involvement in blog use and the importance of currency and timeliness in the news reported.

No correlation was found in H3b, between the level of participation and involvement in blog use and the importance of timeliness ($r = -.01, p = .46$).

H3c: A positive correlation will be found between use of blog as a news source and the importance of currency and timeliness in the news reported.

H3c also was not supported as the comparison of the use of blogs as a news source and timeliness, drew no correlation as well ($r = .06, p = .20$).

Objectivity

The fourth series of hypotheses predicted a negative correlation between the perceived importance of objectivity in news reporting and general blog use. This was not the case as there was little to no correlation between the time spent using blogs and objectivity.

H4a: A negative correlation will be found between the time spent using blogs and the importance of unbiased reporting in measuring news source credibility.

The first level in H4, H4a, was not supported as no correlation was found between the perceived importance of objectivity and time spent reading blogs ($r = -.09, p = .10$).

H4b: A negative correlation will be found between the level of involvement in blog use and the importance of unbiased reporting in measuring news source credibility.

H4b was also not supported, with no correlation found between objectivity and the level of involvement and interaction in blog use ($r = -.10, p = .07$).

H4c: A negative correlation will be found between the use of blogs as a news source and the importance of unbiased reporting in measuring news source credibility.

The third level, H4c was not supported with any correlation as well ($r = .00, p = 0.95$).

Social Concern

Due to the early involvement that blogging has had in politics and community affairs throughout its short history, the final series of hypotheses predicted that there would be a positive correlation between the importance of social concern and awareness and the three levels in blogging. However, this was also not the case as no correlation was found between the two variables.

H5a: A positive correlation will be found between the time spent using blogs and the importance of social concerns as a measure of news credibility.

H5a was not supported, as no correlation was found in comparing the time spent on blogs to the perceived importance of social concerns as a measure of news credibility ($r = -.02, p = .37$).

H5b: A positive correlation will be found between level of involvement in blog use and the importance of social concerns interest as a measure of news credibility.

The second level in H5, H5a, went unsupported as well with no correlation being found between the level of involvement in blog use and the importance of social concerns in measuring news credibility ($r = .00, p = .48$).

H5c: A positive correlation will be found between use of blogs as a news source and the importance of social concerns as a measure of news credibility.

The last level in this hypothesis, comparing use of blogs as a news source to the importance of social concerns in measuring news credibility, H5c, was also unsupported, showing no correlation ($r = .09, p = .10$).

Discussion

Introduction

Unfortunately, this study did not yield the expected results, as none of the hypotheses were supported. This section will discuss the results and attempt to explain why the survey yielded the results it did. It will be broken up into four sections based on the hypotheses—timeliness, social concerns, reporter training, with objectivity and trustworthiness were combined into one section.

While there was the chance that some of the hypotheses might not turn out the way that had been previously predicted, but none of the hypotheses yielded correlations as predicted. Social concerns, timeliness and reporter training were both issues that, while predicted to have a positive correlation, it came as less of a surprise that there was no correlation, than the other two variables, objectivity and trustworthiness. While the measure was shown to be reliable through reliability tests, the lack of correlation shows a lack of validity in the measure. This indicates that another, more valid measure should be created to measure the relationship between blog use and news credibility.

Timeliness

One explanation for this is that timeliness came across as something that was just a given as a part of news. With today's technology, many people just cannot see news coming in an untimely fashion. Associated press stories no longer have the lag time between when they are written and when they are published. Through sites like *Yahoo News* and *Google News* stories are uploaded to websites almost

instantaneously, allowing people to read and comment on news as it happens. With technology, timeliness has now become a given rather than an issue.

Social Concerns

The problem of social concerns, on the other hand, has become a non-issue due to the split between how people view it. In the literature review, many scholars and experts have been split on how much concern a reporter has to show toward the general public. Some (Haas, 2009; Haas & Steiner, 2006) see the reporter as a person who is out to protect and help people progress, while others (Blanchard, 1998; Lippman, 1995; Merrill, 2001; St. John, 2007) see the reporter as someone who is not out to give the public what they want, but what they need. While these two sides overlap in certain areas, they differ in many others creating two very opposing sides. Often an advocate for a socially responsible press will say that one has to carefully decide what to print with the greater good in mind. On the other side, this is seen as censorship and is seen as something that will ultimately harm society by hiding what could be crucial information. Both sides claim to be promoting society's greater good, despite their opposing viewpoints. With such vague definition of social responsibility, it becomes difficult to measure what a person's perception of social concern in the media. Clearly, this was the case with the present study. While the questions used to measure social concerns maintained internal consistency and reliability with a high Chronbach's alpha, the validity remained suspect. The questions may not be measuring social concern to the highest degree, and probably would need to be changed or dropped accordingly.

Reporter training

When looking at the importance of reporter training, there are two possible suggestions why measuring this variable did not yield the expected results. First, while the reliability tests and factor analyses show that the questions asked are consistent and will continue to yield the same results, there are issues with validity. The scale used to measure reporter training, was created specifically for this study using information gathered in the literature review, meaning there could be better tested questions that would measure what the variable set out to measure. The scale measuring reporter training could definitely benefit from some more testing and maybe different questions, however, due to a lack of resources, mostly time, that was not possible. In spite of this issue, there seemed to be more variance in the answers provided.

The other, and more likely, issue with reporter training is similar to the problem with the previous two variables—the people's views on the importance of reporter training. As with timeliness, reporter training is something people just do not think about when they look at news and news credibility. Again coming from unofficial personal observations, many people do not realize that there is a specific writing style employed in news writing, and specific things a reporter must learn to do before he or she gets published in the newspaper. In reality, many people struggle when learning to write in AP style because it is so different. This is just one of the things involved in becoming a news writer; other things include learning to gather information, fact checking, and interviewing. What may not be realized by the

public is that there is a lot more to reporter training than what is initially thought, causing people to not really care about it when looking at news credibility.

Objectivity and Trustworthiness

Objectivity and trustworthiness, on the other hand, were two of the factors that were strongly believed to elicit some sort of correlation, be it positive or negative. For the variable of objectivity, it was predicted that as people read more blogs, specifically as a news source, that the perceived importance of its objectivity would go down. This, however, was not the case because tests showed no correlation. For trustworthiness, the opposite was expected—that the perceived importance of it would go up. This at first was a little surprising because in personal discussions on news credibility, both objectivity and trustworthiness became the focus of the discussion. One thing that will be discussed in more depth in the future research section is that these two variables are much deeper than the three or four questions asked to measure it. For example, just looking at objectivity alone, entire books and studies have been written looking at the various factors that may or may not be involved in objective writing. Objectivity has been one of the most hotly debated issues in news credibility since it was introduced to news writing in the early part of the 20th century. What was discussed in the literature review was just the small tip of a rather large iceberg.

Attempting to measure trustworthiness on a deeper level, on the other hand, leads to a new set of issues. There are many different ways to look at the variable. For example, in asking what makes a news source trustworthy, one can look at a broad variety of different aspects: the author of the text, the publishing source that

produces the text, or an intermediary source like a blogger. In addition to looking at the trustworthiness of a source, one could also look at the person evaluating the trustworthiness of a source to see how trusting they are. Each of these issues with trustworthiness in news credibility adds to the complexity of the issue. Without a more specific measure these issues could potentially produce a different answer from the same person, and should be examined as well.

Technological Shift

Right now, the way news, entertainment and information is disseminated is currently experiencing an unprecedented shift in technology as everything is moved toward the Internet, affecting both print and broadcast. This could be having an impact on how people perceive news credibility, while providing problems in trying to measure these perceptions. In the past, the technological shift was only from one medium to another, while retaining the original medium as a viable format. For example when radio was introduced, it did not spell the end of the newspaper. The newspaper retained its readership. Television was the same. While decidedly seen as more credible than print by the public, newspaper and radio still survived and retained their audience as well.

This shift of news and entertainment toward the Internet has had an all-encompassing effect. Radio, television and print are all shifting toward the Internet and unlike previous shifts, are all being affected. Each news medium is now looking to be fully integrated into the online world, potentially spelling the death of the traditional format. Television, radio and print news organizations all have online divisions becoming increasingly more popular. With the Internet, print media has

taken the biggest hit financially as newspapers around the country have been forced to lay off employees and consolidate to stay in business. Over the past few years, many major newspapers have been forced to lay off employees. In 2010, USA Today was forced to lay off 130 employees (Liedtke, 2010). In fact, one website dedicated to tracking newspaper layoffs has tracked nearly 2,500 layoffs in the newspaper industry in 2010 alone (Paper Cuts, 2010). In addition to the financial problems the news media are facing, the Internet has allowed the public to circumvent traditional gatekeeping methods and become a part of the news gathering process. Now news organizations not only compete with each other, but they have to compete with anyone with a computer and initiative.

At the same time, news credibility studies, at least modern, more complex studies that extend beyond the Roper questions have never had to deal with such a major shift. As previously shown, news credibility studies during early major technological shifts were very simplistic. When television came into the picture, credibility studies consisted of variations of the Roper questions and not much else. Once the more complex measures were introduced in the '70s and '80s, no real new technology was being introduced. Researchers did not have an audience straddling converging mediums like they do right now. News consumers have many more options when it comes to getting news than when these news credibility studies were done. And some of these new options, such as social media, blogging and citizen journalism, can sit well outside of what not only researchers, but also consumers have seen before. This leaves the audience in a different position as they decide what is credible and what is not credible. For example with blogging and

citizen journalism, traditional gatekeeping has been circumvented with users left to decide whether the blogger is someone to be trusted. At the same time, it is much easier for a person to seek out those viewpoints similar to their own, and completely avoid opposing viewpoints.

Because of this, more complex measures on some of the traditional items in older news credibility studies are needed. Rather than just asking whether objectivity or social concern is important or not, studies will have to ask how new media users define objectivity or social concern. If two people have differing definitions of objectivity, but both see it as important and current credibility studies cannot effectively measure perceptions of news credibility. This study points to a potential change in the definition of the traditional news credibility dimensions by blog users and by new media users as well. Additionally, new media users, specifically blog users, seem to have a different culture when it comes to consuming news. Connectivity and interaction between users is an immensely important part of the news gathering experience in the Internet age. Much like what happened in the Dan Rather incident, information can now be passed between users at lightning fast speeds, allowing users to scrutinize every bit of information reported in the news. This change in culture could also contribute to a potential change in how news credibility is measured and defined by the individual user.

In the end, as the news industry—broadcast, print and radio—is still in the process of moving into cyberspace, so are consumers. NBC, CNN, *USA Today* and *The New York Times* have yet to completely move online, their traditional counterpoints still exist and thrive. News consumers act in a similar fashion. While it may not be

as hard to find a group who mostly uses the Internet for their news consumption, one would be hard pressed to find a group who is not familiar with the Internet at all. Much of the news consuming population is also in a state of transition using a hybrid of both traditional and new media. This hybrid makes it hard to measure just what exactly is considered credible news by consumers, as consumers' themselves most likely sure of what they believe.

Limitations

These issues in the discussion show the largest limitation of this study--the breadth of the questions asked in the scale. One of the main fears going into this study was that a respondent might read each of the items used for credibility and feel that they are all good things to have when determining the credibility of a news source. This seemingly was the case for each of the different news credibility variables, as respondents recorded that they felt each of the variables were important to news credibility with only reporter training receiving the only correlation. The majority of respondents consistently scored from 18 to 21 in importance using a 7-point Likert scale for the questions involving objectivity (n =

Table 5

Mean and Standard Deviation			
<i>Factor</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean (0 - 28)</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
Trustworthiness	237	26.21	2.02
Reporter training	237	13.40	4.61
Timeliness	237	18.51	2.98
Objectivity	237	17.84	3.61
Social concerns	237	15.39	4.59

159), trustworthiness (n = 220), timeliness (n = 176) and social concerns (n = 97).

Another issue that may have affected the results could be the general lack of a part of the sample that does not participate in blogging in any form. Nearly everyone that completed the survey has participated in or currently participates in blogging, whether it's operating a blog themselves, reading them for news

information, or just checking up on family members. While a question was asked whether a person operates a blog or not, even then those who do not operate a blog still had some experience with blogging. This lack of a non-blogger population takes away the ability to have a true comparison between those who blog and those who do not. This would have most likely greatly influenced the results, yielding the expected results.

Due to the issues with the validity of the questions, other potential limitations have been rendered ineffective. For example one consistent limitation in any study is sample size and variation in demographics. Many studies can often benefit from a larger sample. However, if it is found that the scale is not measuring what it set out to measure, it does not matter how large the sample size is, the study will yield the same results.

Suggestions for future research

While this particular study did not yield the expected results, it did open up a wealth of possibilities for future research through its shortcomings. As stated before one of the main shortcomings of this study comes from the scale for news credibility. While this scale has been used previously yielding greater results, for this study it seemed too shallow with its questions on the news credibility factors. A future researcher could benefit from going into greater depth about one of the news credibility factors—objectivity, trustworthiness, timeliness, social concerns or reporter training—and compare it to blog use. Rather than use a broad set of questions encompassing all of the factors, take one factor and find questions that dig deeper into the factor.

For example, objectivity is a factor within news credibility that is definitely much deeper than the 3 questions in this scale suggest. Many studies (Boyer, 1981; Edmonson & Perry, 2008; Hemanus, 1976; Kaplan, 2006; Ryan, 2001; Schiller, 1979; Wien 2005) and even entire books (Kaplan, 2002; Mindich, 1998) have been written on objectivity in the media that show the importance of and reporters' struggle with objectivity. While there are very few actual scales used to measure objectivity, a future project could be to create such a scale. This could potentially be recreated for each news credibility factor. Also, in future studies, it might be beneficial to study the blogger in more detail as well. A researcher could look at different aspects of the blogger's personality and perception by using the news credibility dimensions. For example, one could look at how trusting a blogger is using various trust scales. By

understanding the psychology and behavior patterns of bloggers and how their minds operate, it becomes easier to see how they perceive credibility in the news.

Another area of future research is the use of new media for news in areas other than blogging. Blog users are just one small part of new media use. Future areas of studies could involve looking at the dissemination of news through social networks. It is now not uncommon for events and news to spread through friends on social networking sites like Facebook. A credibility scale could be made for the dissemination of news through friends, measuring what it takes for someone to see news spread through Facebook or YouTube as credible. New media is greatly expanding with new technologies emerging every day. As with television and radio in the past, both source credibility and audience perceptions of credibility need to be questioned.

Another direction for future research is to focus on bloggers themselves. Many studies have been done to show why people read blogs, and what motivates bloggers to blog. Another study a researcher could do is to compare the personalities of bloggers compared to those who do not blog. This could especially important be to news credibility if one were to look at how trusting bloggers are as compared to non-bloggers. Using a scale by Yamigishi and Yamigishi (1994) one could gauge not only how trusting a blogger is, but how they see others as well. Other studies could be done using similar personality scales to help determine whether a blogger's personality has any effect on how he or she perceives credibility in news sources.

Conclusion

In spite of the lukewarm results that came from this study, much can be gleaned from it for future research. Blogging is more than just a passing trend; it is becoming a major force in news media today (Perlmutter 2008). More journalists have begun operating a blog in addition to their own traditional journalistic endeavors, leading to greater convergence between the two forms. It is getting harder to differentiate between a personal blog and a news site. With this convergence more studies are going to have to be done looking at blogging and how it affects the news world.

Blogs have become a major part in disseminating news, especially in places where it's just too difficult for a news organization to get in right away. Because of this, the public will have to turn to these newer technologies during times of crisis. This trend has already begun during certain events such as the protests during Iranian elections in 2009, when because the government shut out the Western press, the only information on what was happening was coming from citizens' Twitter updates. Or in 2007, during the Burmese protests and riots when the government completely shut down all Internet access to the country because bloggers had spread the word about what the government was up to.

As blogging and new media become more prevalent, anyone is able to post anything anywhere. This begs for more studies on credibility to be done, whether they are testing the actual credibility of the medium itself or looking at the audience perception of what should be considered credible. This study was an exploratory study taking what has been done in the past with credibility and attempted to apply

it to the current trends in media, to mixed results. The lack of correlation between the two main variables—general blog use and news credibility—should not be considered a failure, but a call to find new methods in measuring news credibility.

Appendix A: Survey

To start, we would first like to ask you some questions on what you believe make news credible.

Explain whether you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 7 (7=Strongly Agree, 1=Strongly Disagree).

For a news source to be credible it is important for it to:

1. Be trustworthy

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

2. Be believable

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

3. Be balanced

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

4. Be accurate

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

5. Report the whole story

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

6. Be current

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

7. Be up-to-date

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

8. Be timely

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

9. Be unbiased

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

10. Be objective

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

11. Show concern for public interest

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

12. Watch after readers' interests

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

13. Show concern for community well-being

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

14. Have reporters with a college degree

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

15. Be written by a journalist with newspaper experience

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

16. Come from an established journalistic source

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

17. Follow specific journalistic rules

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

For the next part, we would like to know more about your personal use of blogs and your blogging habits.

Time spent on blogs

On an average week day, how much time do you spend reading blogs? _____
Minutes

On an average day on the weekend, how much time do you spend reading
blogs? _____ Minutes

Involvement with blogs

What is your level of participation in using blogs?

- 1) never participate (only read, never send in comments or follow links)
- 2) low participation (mostly read, rarely send in comments or follow links)
- 3) sometimes participate (sometimes send in comments or follow links),
- 4) high participation (often send in comments or follow links), and
- 5) very high participation (very often send in comments or follow links)

Motivations in using blogs

What is the likelihood of achieving the following out comes when reading blogs:

1. Make up my mind on important issues

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

2. Escape boredom

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

3. Compare online accounts to traditional media

Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

4. Finding entertainment or news on entertainment
Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree
5. Finding information not found in traditional media
Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree
6. Seeking commentary on news and current events
Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree
7. Keep up with main issues of the day.
Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree
8. Compare traditional (meaning media from traditional channels such as print, television and radio) media, to check accuracy.
Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree
9. Find information about current events and politics
Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree
10. Reading about and keeping up with friends and family .
Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree
11. Seeking out points of view that are similar to my own.
Strongly agree 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 Strongly disagree

Lastly, we would like get some basic information from you.

Male or Female? _____

Age? _____

Do you currently operate a blog? (Yes or No)

What is your current level of education?(High School, Some College, Bachelor's Degree, Post-Graduate)

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