



PERSPECTIVES AND ATTITUDES ON THE CREDIBILITY OF NEWS ON SOCIAL NETWORKING (SNS) SITES: URGENT NEED OF RESEARCH WORK



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ABSTRACT

The role of journalists, and journalism has progressed into a more digitalized journalism. Social Networking Sites (SNSs) allow people to take part in online activities and remove the barrier for online users to publish and share information at any place at any time. Among various social media, this review limits its review scope to SNSs, which have been considered to be the most pertinent social medium used in the field of communication management. This paper intends to show that credibility of social media is the key factor that enhances public engagement and communication effectiveness in the digital/social media. This paper is intended to elicit the factors that could affect the credibility of news from SNSs. Specifically, this article reviews on the needs to study journalist perspectives and attitudes on the credibility of news published on SNSs sites, and found few variables that could affect the credibility of the media and the news, which is linked to journalistic work. These include: the interactive media, technology acceptance, quality of news' source, and the exposure of the media. The review of the literature suggests the dire research needs to focus on journalists' perspectives and attitudes towards the new media to ensure credibility of news and journalism is continuously sustained and improved.

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Keywords: Credibility, Social media, Social networking sites, Interactive media, Journalists' perspectives, News sources, Source credibility, Media exposure.

Contribution/ Originality

This study contributes to the existing literature that social networking sites contribute to the communication between people and institutions more effectively than other media. This study examines the urgent need to study the views of journalists about the credibility of social networking sites as a new source of news.

1. INTRODUCTION

The literature review over the last 10 years on the subject of new media and the challenges it has, suggest that credibility of news is key to good journalism work. Today, readers are more proactive and receptive to select the communication channels of their likings on issues that they like to read more. Subsequently, when they (the readers) consider a particular medium to be more credible than other media, they would likely rely on that medium for information search and sharing than other media. Therefore, credibility can be suggested as the key pertinent factor that encourages individuals to social media. Therefore, social media credibility can also be considered pertinent to enhance the effectiveness of the entire communication management process because without a valid, reliable measure

of social media credibility, successful management of social media credibility is hardly feasible and would have a negative implication on all stakeholders in journalism.

Public relations essentially deal with the credibility of the organization and the communicated messages. Therefore, in managing organization-public communication strategically, credibility management is pertinent. In communication research, the credibility of the information conveyed has widely been suggested to influence the processing of the communicated content, which may impact on readers' attitudes and beliefs. This is true for all types of media, including the new media such as the social media.

The Internet evidently, has become one of the major news sources. The literature reports that over 3 billion people around the world now use the internet via various devices (Greenwood, 2013). In addition, news websites have become more profitable, and media organizations tend to invest in online journalism (Mitchell and Page, 2014). This new role of SNSs as a news platform provide a new landscape for all stakeholders in journalism. Social media users can access news not just as the news or information recipient, but equally as new and information providers (Smith, 2009). Today, readers and the wider public are paying closer attention to the media that they perceive to be credible. When individual audiences rely more on a certain communication medium for information seeking, they are likely to rate the medium more credible than other media. The nature of contemporary media is difficult to manage because of the massive flow of information, and little regulating policies or law to regulate public participation in social media. SNSs are considered highly interactive platforms for individuals and communities to publish and discuss information via messages. This makes interaction easier and open (Hermida, 2012; Mitchell *et al.*, 2013; Mitchell *et al.*, 2013). SNSs are a powerful tool to disseminate and receive information, and it allows flexibility to generate official and public opinions (Alejandro, 2010). Today, globally many journalists are relying on the news published on the Internet for information and feeder of news (Hampton *et al.*, 2011; Greenwood, 2013). So much so, Cassidy (2007) and Goode (2009) suggested that the Internet has significantly change the role of journalists in how they function and work, and has offered new alternatives for users use other news platforms to access information.

Similar conditions are progressively taking place in the Middle East. In the past few years, extensive arguments on the value and credibility of news generated by SNSs have been echoed by many Arab nations (Armbrust, 2012; Hermida *et al.*, 2014; Meeds, 2015). Advocates of SNSs claimed that SNS is an open source for information that provides the audience with multiple components with the realities without falsification of truth and facts (Moody, 2011; Stroud *et al.*, 2015). Nevertheless, there are progressive proponents that believe that the new media like the SNS helps to spread rumors and lies because the news often does not explain the source of the news, and do not care much about the elements of credibility. Consequently, the concept of credible news, which is synonymous with accuracy, completeness, efficiency and impartiality and balance in predetermined, equity, objective, honest and trustworthy in the source and media organization is a focal point of discussion in journalism (Popoola, 2014). The news media industry is often reminded and bombarded with credibility, reliability and morality of news received, attained or publish in the new media like SNSs. The credibility of SNSs such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp can be affected by many factors such as one's bias, assumption, distortion, deletion, generalization, evil intentions, and others. Therefore, there is substantial study needs to investigate the journalists' perceptions and attitudes towards the new media like SNSs and their acceptance of such media. This article offers the literature review that calls for research to undertake study on journalists' perception and attitude on SNSs credibility as a source of news and information and the factors that could affect the credibility of news. Despite various discussions on social media credibility in the new media (Westerman *et al.*, 2014).

Evidently, there have been very few empirical research to validate the measurement system of social media credibility. With the emergence of the new audiences or readers and new media types, the concept of credibility should be investigated for journalism and communication needs and motives of new audiences as well as new functions of new media. This paper believes that without reliable measurement of news credibility, such as those from

SNSs, the management of credibility in social media will be hardly feasible. Therefore, this article argues the necessity of research to study a new measure of blog credibility from the perspective of journalists.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND PRACTICE OF JOURNALISM

Conventionally, in communication research, the credibility of 'news' has been highlighted by trustworthiness and expertise. In the contemporary new media types, the credibility has often been replaced with emergent terms, such as "authenticity," "legitimacy," "transparency," "authority," or "passion. Additionally, the legitimacy of the news in SNSs is enhanced by personal passion and devotion to the news content brings out the legitimacy of the media type, especially when the writer or author has authority about the knowledge to audiences who care. With the rising use of social media in presenting news, the users realized that news is changing (Marshall *et al.*, 2015) and people now expect to access news immediately with constant updates of news (Whiting and Williams, 2013). This is reflected in today's practices of journalism is of concern of many stakeholders. The availability of online websites and SNSs have altered the way journalists work and journalism in general (Smith, 2009).

This also means that in some cases journalists may be having a competition with the followers in publishing breaking news via SNSs, such as Twitter, are increasingly being used as a source and a way to publish the news by the audiences, especially among younger (Murthy, 2013). Furthermore, journalists must check and verify information that posted via SNSs, and evaluate news that published on SNSs before they use it Westerman *et al.* (2014). Internet consumers live in an interdependent world and they still need to information is more important to their lives, and it is the role of journalism to impart that information (Beckett, 2011). This means that journalism should search other ways to reach the new audience in cyberspace and encourage news organizations to adopt new technology and be familiar with in ways that add new value to their work (Ludtke, 2009).

The uptake of SNSs in news agencies is growing and today's journalists are "romancing new communities by blogging and posting updates and stories on Twitter, YouTube and Facebook" (Stassen, 2010). The demand for new stories has altered the traditional way to obtain and display information. The perception and desire of users for real-time updates have encouraged journalists to develop their roles in such cases (Stroud *et al.*, 2015). One of the greatest benefits of SNSs for journalists is the ability to deal with huge audiences worldwide. In addition, SNSs have the potential to transfer information fast to a wider audience; It is able to impact audiences positively or negatively at a speed that may not be challenged by the conventional news media (Newman, 2009). SNSs are a powerful new medium that transforms local news to become global because its ability to spread news and information across the world instantaneously.

3. CREDIBILITY OF THE NEWS

Evidently, literature review performed seems to suggest that credibility is key in news. Today, instead of just being a passive recipient of messages, readers or audiences are able to select their communication channels. When the public (news recipient) considers a medium to be more credible than other media, they are also more likely to rely on that medium for information search and sharing than other media. Therefore, credibility can be suggested as one of the key factors driving the public to organizations' social media. Journalists' perspectives and attitudes towards social media credibility can be considered pertinent to enhance the effectiveness of the entire communication management process. Therefore, this paper believes that without a valid, reliable measure of social media credibility, successful management of social media credibility is hardly feasible. Credibility is one of the most significant concepts theoretically. However, it is one of the most complex concepts and is not as well understood as it should be. Mehrabi *et al.* (2009) measured the concept of credibility to the press and television with ask a few questions about the credibility of the media, and has reached a multi-concepts of credibility, namely: justice, impartiality, accuracy, and to respect people's minds, and taking into account the public interest, and taking into account public morality and realism, and the public interest in the ideas of totalitarianism, and the extent of the editor efficiency.

Azza (2006) has defined the concept of credibility stated that credibility is a kind of professional, cultural and ethical treatment of press material so that where all the dimensions of the subject and trends raised around it in a balanced way based on the evidence and accuracy in the presentation of information and separated from the personal views. The information should be declared clearly and explicitly and stripped of available passions and special interests that are consistent with the views of others posed by the newspaper or writer at another time, or in another place, in the framework of in-depth and comprehensive (Kioussis, 2001).

Mustafa (2003) mentioned indicators of credibility that help to identify the journalist such as secured credibility (balance in exchange bias, and pluralism as opposed to unilateralism, and trust in exchange for questioning, integration and inclusiveness as opposed to retail). Mustafa has added other standards in the private professionalism, clarity and freedom of definition media practice and taking into account the public interest And taking into account public morality. Hovland and his colleagues defined source credibility in terms of the believability of a communicator, which is determined by the receiver's evaluation of a source's expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland *et al.*, 1953). Although, other dimensions have been suggested, including reliability, composure, sociability, similarity to the source, goodwill, dynamism, safety, and likability (Berlo *et al.*, 1969) as well as composure and sociability. Although credibility is also a concern in information science, where it is conceptualized primarily as a criterion for information selection and usage, the locus of most scholarly work on source credibility has been in the fields of communication and social psychology (Self, 2009).

Interest in newspaper credibility is not new. It reached its highest point in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, as the advancement of technology, the Internet, and Social Media and the involvement of traditional media (for example, television and newspapers) in the Internet with the media (Hampton *et al.*, 2011) the credibility issue as suggested by the literature review that this paper pursued strongly recommend that news and media credibility must again be pursued rigorously as a research area. This is pertinent, particularly so when we have massive Internet penetration into all facets of human life and activities. There is a huge increase of interest in the study of media and news credibility, especially when the news can be generated and published not just by journalists, but others (non journalists) (Mehrabani *et al.*, 2009; Smith, 2009). Media audiences and readers have become skeptics in the information published daily on the Internet. Therefore, those who provide or publish on the Internet must have a high degree of credibility to increase the reliability of the information. Interestingly, some studies have found that online information is more reliable than other media regardless of certain characteristics, such as the freedom of information exchanges and the free flow (Moody, 2011; Popoola, 2014). The fact remains; the internet and information also offer an increased potential error, distorted information, and other forms of exploitation of information. The new media, and the credibility of information on the Internet can grow larger with the availability of a number of characteristics that allow interaction between users and sources (Cassidy, 2007; Moody, 2011; Whiting and Williams, 2013; Westerman *et al.*, 2014) with enhanced credibility.

4. THE TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE

It is important to note that social media and blogs are not replacing the traditional or conventional journalism. However, media such as the SNSs are providing an additional layer of information to existing news sources (Stassen, 2010; Tang and Liu, 2015). Undoubtedly, the social media has changed how journalists work, sending and receiving news. Technology such as SNSs have helped journalists an alternative way in newsgathering and crowdsourcing. This has helped them to collect more materials on news stories and has provided them access to a wider range of *public journalism* that are able to tell their own stories and opinions on respective issues and news. Social media also helps journalists to contact with eyewitnesses quickly, as people are keen to tweet or post about interesting things they have witnessed to tell their friends about what they have seen or experienced. Although, such can be seen as beneficial for journalists to contact and do news follow-ups, such news and avenues of information may and may not be from

reliable source, which may also impact on the news credibility. Subsequently, invalid and unreliable news and information may have negative repercussions (Newman, 2009).

Nevertheless, Beckett (2011) believes that not only new media such as SNSs is more fun compared to traditional media channels; the interactivity offers a sense of community that transcends from everything that is offered by the mainstream media. Technology such as the Social media has also permeated journalism.

Journalists are professionals who are always seeking news and information from various news sources and including the social media to support their work. SNSs provide a wealth of information, however, it does not necessarily offer 'just' to journalistic work. Nevertheless, SNSs provides breaking news (Hampton *et al.*, 2011) making it a worthy site for journalists to discover new story. Facebook and Twitter are not a news site, but has become a source for news for many people today. Anybody can post anything on Facebook and Twitter and it becomes news (Murthy, 2013). People tend to believe what they see on Facebook and Twitter, and many people do not remember to verify what they have seen or read on Facebook and Twitter. Therefore, it is worrying phenomenon that if a journalist, for instance, tends to rely on Facebook and Twitter for his source of news without verifying, this could be misleading and troubling phenomenon (Westerman *et al.*, 2014).

5. INTERACTIVE MEDIA

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) Social Media refers to any media shared online like videos, music, photos, news, text, information, among others. Social Networking sites allow users to keep track of their existing interpersonal relationships and form new ones. Social Networking sites enable people to stay abreast of one's own network of friends and organizations via one website. Furthermore, Social Media depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content. It introduces substantial and pervasive changes in communication between organizations, communities and individuals (Self, 2009). Social Media differentiates from traditional/industrial media in many aspects such as quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy, and permanence.

Interactivity is considered the most important features of new media. New media is the new platforms enable the reader to interact with the news content. Despite this, the recipients of media content by new media have the ability to interact with it, but they do not have control over the message themselves. This matter will be more pronounced in traditional media such as TV shows and some newspapers, which have a very little interaction (Chung *et al.*, 2012). For this, the new media provides an opportunity for users to interact and selection of media content that is compatible with the receiver, with the possibility to respond to it and to establish a dialogue with the sender, and this is the experience for users to interact with media content and the formation of new experiences.

While the study of Johnson and Wiedenbeck (2009) on the need to develop a link Hyperlink and information about the writer, where it increases the credibility of the news stories. In Addition, using videos and animated media has led to a noticeable increase in power on the honesty and transparency of the content without linking the source (Mourtada and Salem, 2011). The use of multimedia as an attachment with the news, increase the interest in the news among the people. The use of images or video with text will enhance the level of credibility of the information sent or received. The use of multimedia in the social networking sites to attract the reader to see the media message (Oviedo *et al.*, 2015). The use of multimedia aims to shorten part of the text, relying on the photo or video to mention other details, which adds credibility and attractiveness of the subject (Mateus, 2015).

However, the main drawback of SNSs is that some topics or news can only be partially verified or confirmed, and cannot be sure of its credibility of the media published, especially with videos and images that have nothing to do with the news and is only interested to attract the readers only (Meeds, 2015). The other important drawback is that interactive media cannot handle or manage the social media, such as videos or images because these sites allow anyone to publish any information without placing any restrictions on publication (Saikaew and Noyunsan, 2015).

6. QUALITY OF SOURCE

Review of the literature shows that online information today is facing lots of the criticisms on its credibility. Journalists used social networking sites in their work, in order to stay in touch with journalists, sources and the audiences (Hampton *et al.*, 2011). But with the spread of news and rumors is correct, and the lack of controls to social networking sites, and the lack of strict laws, some journalists, perhaps are motivated to publish news to gain the largest number of readers (Smith, 2009).

Overtimes, the existence of misleading, biased, distorted information have pushed many to question the credibility of online information and the credibility of sources that broadcasts such information (Cassidy, 2007). Contrary to those concerns, some studies addressing the credibility of online information showed that people tended to have positive attitudes toward these sources (Self, 2009; Meeds, 2015) because of the easy access via the Internet. This, however do not safeguard the credibility of information.

Chung *et al.* (2012) relates its findings to the emergence of the idea of intermediaries in the transfer of the news on the internet through multiple sources, and to the fact that the audience cares only looking for news in more than one source; to only look audience attention to only one source and of the information. The study of Metzger *et al.* (2010) concluded that majority of Internet users rely on others in assess the majority credibility of the source through the opinions of the group. It is also of great concern when the audience tends to assume that the news posted on more than one page and more than one source, indicating the greater credibility of the news.

The issue of credibility of new media is a pressing issue. Non-journalists and the wider audiences may accept news posted in more than one Internet source as credible news. The multiplicity of sources of news and details, and transportation of more than one source may help to confirm the event (Bowman and Willis, 2003) and consequently helped the audience to receive the news as genuine. The source or sender of news should practice good ethics of news reporting (Westerman *et al.*, 2014). This is not the case in many reporting or such publication (Hovland *et al.*, 1953). The combination of several types of sources of information is likely to offer the richness of news and information; however, the public needs to be protected from bad and unreliable information, and only presented with credible news.

7. THE MEDIA EXPOSURE

Picard (2009) believes that through the use of social media, journalists can get information, ideas and feedback from their audiences. The Journalist is working on the review of people and journalists pages, and pages of news sites, local and international newspapers, to know the latest news and details about a specific issue (Westerman *et al.*, 2014) or to get new ideas for the writing or construction of a report or story; many of these pages raises pertinent issues of whether such news and information are reliable and credible as news (Tang and Liu, 2015).

Many people are commenting on the news, or information that people post without an official source, to illustrate news or to get feedback on the incorrect news (Mitchell and Page, 2014). It is therefore of pertinent concern that journalist knows how to assess, measure and validate all news and information that people transmits them in their own lives or using social networking sites (Callison, 2003; Smith and Brenner, 2012).

Journalists may choose social media because it offers a faster alternative way to distribute their news content or publication to ensure that their hard work and research does not go wasted (Murthy, 2013; Mateus, 2015). Journalist resort to social networking sites, and applications used in the media and communicate with others, to publish more details separately from the news, these sites and applications are a wide space to express opinions and publish information (Smith and Brenner, 2012). The problem that may face the journalist at the adoption of information that people post without reliable sources, or comments on the news and to clarify parts of the news, that this information may be published as a personal opinion, or incomplete information, or aimed at people from which to raise the issue and attract attention (Saikaew and Noyunsan, 2015). In addition, the journalist should be sure that the information obtained from sources before publication, whether in the newspaper or on social networking sites, there are many

goals for sources such as spread rumors or false news or stir up public opinion, and this can cause problems for the journalist (Pearson, 2007; Tang and Liu, 2015).

8. THE CONCLUSION

For many years now, the term credibility, or source credibility, has been an important area of research in persuasion theory. Perceived source credibility becomes an increasingly important variable to examine within social media, especially in terms of crisis and risk information. New technologies have dramatically expanded the way in which individuals communicate and receive information and the process by which mainstream media can reach consumers. The study of news consumers' preferences of news sources and perceptions of credibility sheds light on the continually evolving path of journalism, online news delivery, and consumption process.

There are a few of the factors that affect the credibility of the media and the news, some of which is linked to the journalistic work, such as the interactive media, and other factors related to the journalists, such as the technology acceptance, quality of sources, and the exposure to the media. These factors changed the role of SNSs as a news site and encouraged to change the job of journalists in the communication process, and developed new style of the news. These factors may have positive and negative attributes towards journalists and journalism. Nevertheless, credibility of news is a central issue of the new media, and journalists' perspectives and attitudes of the new media like SNSs is the primary pillar on ensuring good, effective and most important of all credibility news. Though the new media in many ways have helped to speed the cycle of news and make media more interactive, journalist and good journalism have to ensure that news whatever the source maybe have to be credible, reliable at all times.

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