Perceived Credibility of News Media Sources

by
Nicole Palczewski

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

University Honors College

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in Political Science
(Honors Associate)

Presented May 19, 2016
Commencement June 2016

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Nicole Palczewski for the degree of <u>Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in Political Science</u> presented on May 19, 2016. Title: <u>Perceived Credibility of News Media Sources</u> .

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Michael Jones

The purpose of this research is to study the relationship between popular news media sources and individual perceptions of media credibility. Findings in this research show that there is a relationship between media credibility, media habits, and media trust, which affects the choice of media that an individual determines is credible. Using a quasi-experimental survey, information was collected from a representative sample of the U.S. population on their opinions of the credibility of 19 mainstream news media outlets after reading an article about the passage of recreational marijuana laws in Alaska. Analysis of the findings from these experiments indicates that media trust is positively correlated with media credibility; media habits show less stable results. This research finds a trend of different audiences for different news sources, with a split between 'sophisticated skeptics' and 'the less well informed', as seen in previous research. These results are discussed for their theoretical implications.

Key Words: political science, media, media trust, media credibility, news media

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<u>Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in Political Science </u>project of Nicole Palczewski presented on May 19, 2016.

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

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Nicole Palczewski, Author

Perceived Credibility of News Media Sources

Introduction

More often than not, we receive our ideas of what is important from news sources like television stations, newspapers, and the concerns and interests of those around us.[1] But what makes us take some news reports seriously, while questioning the credibility of others?

Media credibility is important; it affects the way in which policymakers, journalists, and issue advocates try to inform and influence media audiences.[2] Media credibility in the United States has been declining; audiences have started breaking apart in to narrower 'publics', rather than one large and general whole audience.[3] Fracturing of audience attentions has led to media sources that are more specific, with a smaller range of biases more tailored to specialized audiences.[4] This narrower focus on biases by media produces a media-consuming public that may only trust news sources that appeal to their ideals, and inherently distrusts media that does not conform to these audience ideals.[5] This keeps audiences from being properly informed by their news media, or worse, keeps

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[1] Mitchell, Amy, Jeffrey Gottfried, Jocelyn Kiley, and Katerina Eva Matsa. "Political Polarization & Media Habits." *Pew Research Centers Journalism Project*. Pew Research Center, 20 Oct. 2014. Web. 28 Dec. 2015. <http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/>.

[2] Golan, G. J. "New Perspectives on Media Credibility Research." *American Behavioral Scientist* 54.1 (2010): 3-7. *SAGE Journals*. Web. 1 May 2016.

[3] Geary, David. "The Decline of Media Credibility and Its Impact on Public Relations." *Public Relations Quarterly* 50.3 (2005): 8-12. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 1 May 2016.

[4] Geary, David. 8-12.

[5] Rouner, Donna, Michael D. Slater, and Judith M Buddenbaum. "How perceptions of news bias in news sources relate to beliefs about media bias." *Newspaper Research Journal* 20.2 (1999): 41. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 5 May 2016.

them from consuming news media altogether, as news media is considered by audiences to be inherently biased against them.[6]

The purpose of this paper is to study the relationship between popular news media sources and individual perceptions of media credibility. Findings in this research show that there is a relationship between media credibility, media habits, media trust, and media spin, which affects the choice of media that an individual determines is credible. Using a quasi-experimental survey, information was collected from a representative sample of the U.S. population on their opinions of the credibility of 19 mainstream news media outlets after reading an article about the passage of recreational marijuana laws in Alaska. Findings from these experiments are analyzed, indicating that media trust is positively correlated with media credibility, but media habits may not have as strong of an effect on media credibility as has been previously believed.

Media credibility perception is an important topic of research because it helps explain why differing sources of news, which may contain high levels of media spin, receive more individual trust and viewership than media with less media spin. This research operationalizes several variables that are likely drivers of perceived credibility of source media, according to previous research. This research defines media credibility, media trust, media spin, and the effect of media habits on media credibility, and uses recent marijuana policies as an applicable policy area for how and why media credibility is important to understanding the political landscape of the U.S.

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[6] Rouner, Donna, Michael D. Slater, and Judith M Buddenbaum. 41.

Media Credibility

Golan (2010) has identified two types of researched media credibility: medium credibility, which focuses on the platform that the media is presented through (such as television or mobile news), and source credibility, which focuses on the influencing characteristics of the source of the message (such as the organization that is broadcasting the news).[7] This research focuses on source credibility as defined by Golan (2010). The influencing characteristics of the source of the messages that come from news media sources can be defined as being a part of a greater, more believable news media whole.[8] Credibility is robustly defined as 'believability' – that is, a source that is believable due to its inherent and assumed expertise on a subject, where the audience does not doubt the material coming from the source.[9] Therefore, for this research, we define media credibility as the believable and influencing characteristics of the source of a message, in this case specifically the organization that is broadcasting the news.

Previous research has shown that media source credibility change can be explained through simple variables, like audience demographics (for example, income, age, gender, race, and education).[10] However, more complicated variables have been found to be correlated with source credibility. Political ideology and partisanship have been shown to be correlated with media source credibility.[11] Lee (2010) found that political trust, ideology, and political partisanship were associated with consumer's trust

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[7] Golan, G. J. 3-7.
[8] Wathen, C. N. and Burkell, J. (2002), Believe it or not: Factors influencing credibility on the Web. J. Am. Soc. Inf. Sci., 53: 134–144. doi: 10.1002/asi.10016
[9] Wathen, C. N. and Burkell, J. 134–144.
[10] Golan, G. J. 3-7.
[11] Mitchell, Amy, Jeffrey Gottfried, Jocelyn Kiley, and Katerina Eva Matsa. 20 Oct. 2014.

in news media.[12] Using the previously defined terms for media credibility, this research

will test media credibility as the dependent variable against media trust, media spin, and

media habits as independent variables that may have on effect on perceived media

credibility. Much like previous credibility research, this research will utilize credibility

ratings by the survey respondents by directly asking them to indicate whether the sources

they're presented with seem believable.[13]

Drivers of Media Credibility

1. Media Trust

Although they are often mistaken for one another, media trust and media

credibility are two separate variables. As defined above, media credibility focuses more

on the believability of a news source, and is often conjoined with the assumed expertise

of the source that is presenting that story.[14]

Media trust, on the other hand, is usually defined in terms of vulnerability. Tsfati

defines trust as an interaction between "the trustor – the side that places trust, and the

trustee—the side being trusted… in which the trustor stands to gain or lose".[15] Trust is

therefore based more on an assumption of risk on behalf of the news media audience,

rather than believability, as in media credibility. Media trust implies uncertainty on behalf

of the news media audience, whereas media credibility does not; although the risks for a

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[12] Lee, T.-T. "Why They Don't Trust the Media: An Examination of Factors Predicting Trust." *American Behavioral Scientist* 54.1 (2010): 8-21. *SAGE Journals*. Web. 1 May 2016.
[13] Wathen, C. N. and Burkell, J. 134-144.
[14] Wathen, C. N. and Burkell, J..134–144.
[15] Tsfati, Yariv, and Jonathan Cohen. "Perceptions of Media and Media Effects: The Third Person Effect, Trust in Media and Hostile Media Perceptions." Ed. Erica Scharrer. *Blackwell's International Companion to Media Studies: Media Effects/Media Psychology*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013. 128-46. Print.

news media audience facing severe consequences for misplacing their trust may not be high (misinformation or feeling betrayed from the trust they put in to the media, at best), these are risks that audiences do not face in the media credibility variable. Simply put, media credibility is based in assumptions of reliability; media trust is based on the vulnerability of doubt that an audience has for the depictions of news they consume.

Previous research on media trust and media credibility show that these variables go hand in hand. Kohring (2007) describes media trust as being composed of four factors: trust in the selectivity of reported topics that are relevant to the audience; trust in the selectivity of facts, so that a story is properly contextualized; trust in the accuracy of depictions, so that there is a classification of who is 'right' and 'wrong'; and trust in journalistic assessment, so that the reported event is evaluated properly[16]. Kohring's model shows a more complicated relationship between media credibility and media trust than previously presented by other researchers,[17] but also presents a stable model for correlating questions of media trust with media credibility; this research will compare the relationship of media credibility and media trust to Kohring's theoretical model of media trust, in order to test whether or not media trust influences media credibility. However, the model does not take in to account the type of platform(s) that audiences receive their media from.

2. Media Habits

Research on media credibility and media exposure via different media platforms by Tsfati (2010) has shown that there is a higher correlation between online media

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[16] Kohring, M., and J. Matthes. "Trust in News Media: Development and Validation of a Multidimensional Scale." *Communication Research* 34.2 (2007): 231-52. *SAGE Journals*. Web. 1 May 2016.

[17] Kohring, M., and J. Matthes. 231-52.

consumption and mainstream media trust, as well as a correlation between more nonmainstream news source viewership and more media skepticism.[18] Tsfati (2010) found that as media audiences became more skeptical, they consumed less news media online, despite the Internet's ability to provide news that features "connectivity, reduced hierarchy, diversity, and boundlessness present [as] an alternative for those skeptical of mainstream news".[19] Thus, mainstream media skeptics should have more diversified sources of information than those who whole-heartedly trust the mainstream media, and should show less media trust than those who consume more mainstream media.

Further research by Tsfati & Capella (2003) has shown that although some of the experimental audiences did not trust mainstream media, all audiences in the experiment were exposed to mainstream media sources often.[20] Tsfati (2010) and Tsfati & Capella (2003) both show that media credibility and media skepticism are related, and that the type of platform that an individual consumes news media from can affect their views of news media credibility. Even simple variables like how news media is consumed can affect media credibility and overall media trust levels of the audiences that the news media is presented to. This raises the question of clashing forms of media trust: can a mainstream media source that is not trusted still report a story that an audience may accept as true? This research questions the media habits of respondents in order to test the correlations between media credibility and media habits, such as amount of news media consumed and platform that news media is consumed from. This will test the relationship

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[18] Tsfati, Y. "Online News Exposure and Trust in the Mainstream Media: Exploring Possible Associations." *American Behavioral Scientist* 54.1 (2010): 22-42. *SAGE Journals*. Web. 1 May 2016.

[19] Tsfati, Y. 22-42.0

[20] Tsfati, Yariv, and Joseph N. Cappella. "Do People Watch What They Do Not Trust?: Exploring the Association between News Media Skepticism and Exposure." *Communication Research* 30.5 (2003): 504-29. *SAGE Journals*. Web. 1 May 2016.

between media credibility and media platform preferences, in order to see if mainstream media consumption affects perceptions of media credibility; as we have seen, media trust and media habits are correlated, but does this relationship further extend to media credibility as well?

3. Media Spin

Media spin is the bias that a news media source retains in collecting and distributing information to their receiving audience for a profit.[21] As Burke argues, individuals who consume media wish to receive their news from sources that are biased favorably towards their point of view.[22] But is this the only source and reason for media spin?

Although scarce, there is previously established research that supports the idea that there are two separate and inherently different news media audiences, which function in very different ways: the "sophisticated skeptics" and the "less well informed and suspicious".[23] Gaziano & McGrath (1985) found in their research that there are two prominent groups of news media audiences that are especially critical of the news they consume. The 'sophisticated skeptics' are highly educated, earn a higher income, generally tend to be more conservative or identify as Republican more often, and have a greater knowledge of news coverage – but they tend to be critical of the news they consume.[24] Alternatively, there are the 'less well informed and suspicious', who had

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[21] Burke, Jeremy. "Primetime Spin: Media Bias and Belief Confirming Information." *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy* 17.3 (2008): 633-65. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 1 May 2016.
[22] Burke, Jeremy. 633-65.
[23] Gaziano, Cecilie, and Kristin McGrath. "Media Publics and Media Trust." *MORI Research, Inc.* (1985). *Education Resources Information Center*. Web. 24 May 2016. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED263610.pdf>.
[24] Gaziano, Cecilie, and Kristin McGrath. 134-144.

relatively low education and income, less media knowledge, and a harder time separating fact and opinion out of news media sources.[25]

As discussed in their article, Gaziano & McGrath (1985) argue that both defined groups of news audiences should be contextualized as a part of the society they are in; in the 1980's, this included the fact that society was becoming more information-based and mass media was changing to specialize towards more ideologically extreme audiences.[26] Since that time, news media spin has increased to draw more committed and extreme audiences, and as a way to draw audiences in. This research will be tested through the relationship between media credibility and media habits; if there are these defined audiences, as Gaziano & McGrath (1985) argue, then they should also show defined media habits and relationships to media that vary dramatically.

Media spin affects how audiences frame and process facts from their news media sources. Commonly, audiences complain of too much spin doctoring in their news media, and ask for fair and balanced news; and yet, previous research contends that audiences instead search for news that is biased towards their previously-held ideas.[27] Similarly, the audiences that want more biased news are more likely to seek it out, and not believe the news that critiques their previously-held beliefs.[28] This research examines the relationship between reported media credibility and beliefs of media spin with different media sources, in order to test if audiences believe that their media sources are unbiased and credible.

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[25] Gaziano, Cecilie, and Kristin McGrath. 134-144.
[26] Gaziano, Cecilie, and Kristin McGrath. 134-144.
[27] Burke, Jeremy. 633-65.
[28] Gaziano, Cecilie, and Kristin McGrath. 134-144.

Marijuana Use as a Standard of Media Credibility

Marijuana legalization policy is a topic that is gaining growing popularity in the United States; there are currently four states that decriminalized or legalized marijuana for recreational use.[29] Many states are currently reconsidering decriminalization of marijuana or are more lax in their enforcement of marijuana possession policies in 2015.[30] As the 2016 election process continues, marijuana legalization on a federal level continues to be a relevant topic of debate, for the policy area is new and not well-developed or well-known by the public.[31] This issue is a good gauge of public opinion and a test of news sources and credibility structures that individuals rely on when they are unsure of information regarding a topic. The data in this research uses marijuana policy as a way to gauge media credibility and trust through the legality of current marijuana laws.

Research Design, Data, and Method

This research illustrates the more complex relationships between media credibility and other potential media biases in audiences, which can influence their choice of news media source; this favoring of news media sources can ultimately lead to a lack of uniformity in audience knowledge about policies, which does not help engaged citizens

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[29] Governing Data. "State Marijuana Laws Map." *Governing: The States and Localities*. Web. 21 Jan. 2016. <http://www.governing.com/gov-data/state-marijuana-laws-map-medical-recreational.html>.
[30] Becker, Sam. "7 States On the Verge of Marijuana Legalization." *The Cheat Sheet*. 15 Oct. 2015. Web. 21 Jan. 2016.
[31] Sledge, Matt. "How Marijuana May Influence The 2016 Election." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 23 Jan. 2014. Web. 01 Mar. 2016. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/23/marijuana-2016-election_n_4647715.html>.

make informed policy choices. The previous research has shown that there is evidence of a relationship between media credibility, and media trust, media habits, and media spin. Therefore, this research conducts correlational analyses between the dependent variable, media credibility, and media trust and media habits, which act as independent variables. Results will be discussed using the research previously described, using marijuana policy as a substantive policy area to find relationships between the dependent and independent variables.

1. Research Question

Outside of the content of any given news article, what explains the perceived source credibility of media sources by their viewing audiences? This paper tests two hypotheses for correlations of media source credibility and other variables using the literature review as a basis of knowledge. The survey structure includes separate sections that explicitly questioned participants about their media habits, their knowledge of media sources, their political knowledge, and their political culture background. The purpose of the survey and the questions overall is to understand the relationship between source media credibility and the variables brought up in the literature review that could affect media credibility.

First, we test the question, "Is media credibility correlated to media trust?", hypothesizing that:

H_1: Media credibility is positively correlated to media trust.

H_0: Media credibility is not correlated to media trust.

Based on the previous research found in the literature review, media credibility and media trust are strongly correlated. Kohring (2007) developed a stable model of media trust that has worked in multiple experiments to predict what individual variables evoke media credibility.[32] Similarly, several theoretical models of media credibility explored by Wathen & Burkell (2002) name trustworthiness as a part or central theme of media credibility.[33] From this literature, we argue that the data will support H_1 over the null hypothesis.

The second question tested is, "Is media credibility correlated to media habits?", leading to the hypotheses:

H_2: Increased media credibility is positively correlated with stronger media habits, like increased consumption and enjoyment of news media.

H_0: Media credibility and media habits are not correlated.

In the wake of the conclusions found in the literature review, it is reasonable to assume that media habits influence individual perceptions of media credibility. Tsfati (2010) has shown that individuals with high levels of media skepticism – a defined lack of perceived media trust – have different patterns of media consumption than individuals who do not have high levels of skepticism.[34] This suggests that as media credibility ratings increase, levels of media trust will increase, and more consumption and enjoyment of news will occur. As Burke (2008) has also shown, individuals consume media from sources that are biased favorably towards their point of view, and enjoy these news sources more than those that are not biased towards their point of view, so news

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[32] Kohring, M., and J. Matthes. 231-52.
[33] Wathen, C. N. and Burkell, J. 134–144.
[34] Tsfati, Y. 22-42.

audiences should show an increase in media enjoyment and consumption in media sources they recognize and trust more.[35] Research by Gaziano & McGrath (1985) has indicated that there are two distinct news audiences who consume news media in different ways; for example, audiences that are more conservative should react more positively to a wide range of news media sources.[36] This previous research leads to the conclusion that audiences will evaluate media credibility in different ways, depending on their individual media habits. As justified by the literature review, we argue that the data will support H_2 over the null hypothesis.

2. Research Design

The quasi-experimental online survey tests the demographic, ideological, cultural, and political knowledge of participants, addressing the research questions and hypotheses as described previously (See Appendix A). Participants read a short news article about Alaska's passage of recreational marijuana laws in 2015, originally modified from a published article by AP News (See Appendix B for the three separate modified experimental conditions of the article).[37] Respondents answered questions about their media consumption habits, political ideological preferences, generalized political knowledge of how the U.S. government works, individual political culture, and demographic information. In this survey, 'media trust' was defined as self-reporting that the individual believed the article was reported correctly. 'Media credibility' was tested

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[35] Burke, Jeremy. 633-65.

[36] Gaziano, Cecilie, and Kristin McGrath. 134-144.

[37] Associated Press. "Alaska Becomes Third State with Legal Recreational Marijuana." *CBSNews*. CBS Interactive, 24 Feb. 2015. Web. 28 Apr. 2016. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/alaska-becomes-third-state-with-legal-recreational-marijuana/>.

by the amount of trust and media spin that each individual rated on the separate experimental tracks.

The question order can be viewed in Appendix A. The survey was configured so that respondents had to pass an age-verifying question before proceeding to the survey; only respondents who reported being older than 18 proceeded to the survey. Respondents were given a randomized experimental track of the survey: the conservative condition (Form A, FOX News), the liberal condition (Form B, MSNBC News), or the neutral condition (Form C, AP News). Note that in every experimental track of the survey, the article presented was the exact same, to account for potential narrative bias differences. After reading the article assigned to them, respondents answered if they thought the article was reported truthfully, and reported how much media spin they believed was in the article on a scale of 1 to 7. Respondents then answered questions about their media habits, like how much they enjoy watching the news, what platforms they receive news from, how often they consume news media, and their preference for politically biased or unbiased news.

Respondents were given a list of 19 different news media sources to judge which ones they trust, distrust, do not know if they trust, or had never heard about. Based on the rankings and research done about these news sources by previous Pew Research Center studies, these news media sources are mixed based on how mainstream they were (either mainstream or non-mainstream), their political affiliation (conservative, liberal, or neutral), and their available platforms (digital, traditional, or a mix of both).[38] Platform is defined by the most likely way that a respondent would access news from a given source;

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[38] Mitchell, Amy, Jeffrey Gottfried, Jocelyn Kiley, and Katerina Eva Matsa. 20 Oct. 2014.

for example, Yahoo! News is a web-exclusive news media source, so it is defined as digital-only, while the Rush Limbaugh Show is mostly given to audiences through television and radio talk shows, so it is defined as traditional-only. As can be seen in Table 1, most of the news sources are defined as a mix of both, because they contain a strong traditional and digital presence. The types of audiences that previous research has established are more drawn to these media sources defined political affiliation (conservative, liberal, or neutral).[39] Similarly, if a source was considered 'mainstream' or not depended on previous statistics regarding the popularity and widespread knowledge of the news sources.[40]

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[39] Mitchell, Amy, Jeffrey Gottfried, Jocelyn Kiley, and Katerina Eva Matsa. 20 Oct. 2014.
[40] Mitchell, Amy, Jeffrey Gottfried, Jocelyn Kiley, and Katerina Eva Matsa. 20 Oct. 2014.

Table 1. Traits of News Media Sources across Survey Experimental Tracks

Recognized Media Source	Platform of Media (Digital or Traditional)	Conservative, Liberal, or Neutral	Mainstream or Non-mainstream
BBC	Both	Neutral	Mainstream
NPR	Both	Neutral	Mainstream
PBS	Both	Neutral	Mainstream
ABC News	Both	Neutral	Mainstream
CNN	Both	Neutral	Mainstream
Yahoo! News	Digital	Neutral	Non-mainstream
The New York Times	Both	Liberal	Non-Mainstream
The Washington Post	Both	Neutral	Mainstream
The Huffington Post	Digital	Liberal	Non-mainstream
MSNBC	Both	Liberal	Mainstream
The Daily Show	Traditional	Liberal	Mainstream
Daily Kos	Digital	Liberal	Non-mainstream
FOX News	Both	Conservative	Mainstream
BuzzFeed News	Digital	Neutral	Non-mainstream
The Rush Limbaugh Show	Traditional	Conservative	Non-mainstream
Slate	Digital	Liberal	Non-mainstream
CBS News	Both	Neutral	Mainstream
Mother Jones	Digital	Liberal	Non-mainstream
The Economist	Both	Conservative	Mainstream

Respondents then answered questions about their political knowledge, and rated on a 1 to 7 point scale how much they agreed with statements that related to political culture. Political culture questions were borrowed from a previous study on correlations between ideology and climate change, with permission of the author.[41] Finally, respondents answered questions about their demographic information, such as race, age, and sex. Respondents who answered that they were under 18 years old at this stage of the survey are disqualified from the data pool. There were no post-survey questions.

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[41] Jones, Michael D.. "Leading the Way to Compromise? Cultural Theory and Climate Change Opinion". *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44.4 (2011): 720–725. Web.

600 total participants were fielded from Survey Sampling International (SSI) via the Oregon State University Qualtrics survey host. Each experimental track has a limit of 200 total respondents. Survey data was collected between March 8-11th, 2016, and the survey was closed to the public on March 12th, 2016. Demographic information about participants can be found in Table 2.

Experimental tracks are considered incomplete if half or less of the survey questions are answered. Form A, the FOX News condition, had 282 total responses. Of the 207 total viable responses, only the first 200 submitted complete surveys are used. Form B had 793 total responses, and the 199 total viable responses are used. Form C had a total of 1,045 responses, but only 199 complete viable responses are used.[42]

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[42] See Note.

Table 2: Survey Respondent Demographics across All Three Experimental Tracks

| Demographic Information	Survey Form		
	FOX News (N = 200)	MSNBC News (N = 199)	AP News (N = 199)
Age (In Years)			
18 to 24	29 (14.5%)	23 (11.5%)	29 (14.6%)
25 to 39	66 (33.0%)	68 (34.0%)	58 (29.0%)
40 to 59	63 (31.5%)	67 (33.5%)	79 (39.9%)
60 to 79	39 (19.5%)	38 (19.0%)	32 (16.2%)
80+	2 (1.0%)	2 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Sex			
Male	87 (43.5%)	91 (45.7%)	82 (41.2%)
Female	113 (56.5%)	107 (53.8%)	117 (58.8%)
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian	5 (2.5%)	4 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Asian	12 (6.0%)	11 (5.5%)	12 (6.0%)
Black or African American	15 (7.5%)	21 (10.6%)	19 (9.5%)
Hispanic	17 (8.5%)	14 (7.0%)	15 (7.5%)
White Non-Hispanic	144 (72.0%)	144 (72.4%)	143 (71.9%)
Other	6 (3.0%)	5 (2.5%)	10 (5.0%)
Highest Level of Education			
Elementary or some high school	4 (2.0%)	3 (1.5%)	4 (2.0%)
High school graduate/GED	40 (20.0%)	46 (23.1%)	37 (18.5%)
Some college/vocational school	57 (28.5%)	52 (26.1%)	67 (33.5%)
College graduate	50 (25.0%)	60 (30.2%)	55 (27.5%)
Some graduate work	18 (9.0%)	7 (3.5%)	5 (2.5%)
Master's degree	25 (12.5%)	24 (12.1%)	22 (11.0%)
Doctorate (of any type)	6 (3.0%)	6 (3.0%)	9 (4.5%)
Other degree	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Political Party Identification			
Republican	64 (32.0%)	56 (28.1%)	88 (44.2%)
Democratic	82 (41.0%)	94 (47.2%)	63 (31.7%)
Neither	54 (27.0%)	49 (24.6%)	48 (24.1%)
Political Ideology			
Strongly liberal	16 (8.0%)	13 (6.5%)	13 (6.5%)
Liberal	27 (13.6%)	34 (17.1%)	38 (19.1%)
Slightly liberal	23 (11.6%)	26 (13.1%)	17 (8.5%)
Middle of the road	57 (28.6%)	77 (38.7%)	63 (31.7%)
Slightly conservative	27 (13.6%)	18 (9.0%)	22 (11.1%)
Conservative	32 (16.1%)	22 (11.1%)	33 (16.6%)
Strongly conservative	17 (8.5%)	9 (4.5%)	13 (6.5%)

3. Results

  For all forms of the survey, results were formulated by the correlational relationships found between media credibility and other survey variables. The significance threshold was set at .05 for all Pearson's correlations.

Hypothesis 1: Is media credibility correlated to media trust?

  As stated in the research question, the literature leads us to believe the data will support H_1, "media credibility is positively correlated to media trust". As seen in Figure 1, mean answer results show that respondents did not believe the article had more media spin because of the source, and respondents had a strong belief that the story was factually accurate across all experimental tracks of the survey. Additionally, correlation coefficients across all three experimental tracks showed a correlation between media credibility and media trust; all three tracks reported $p < .001$, with a weak positive direction (Form A, FOX News, $r = .401$; Form B, MSNBC News, $r = .320$; and Form C, AP News, $r = .325$). In light of the evidence of a positive correlation between media trust and media credibility in all three experimental tracks, we fail to reject H_1, "media credibility is positively correlated to media trust", and reject the null hypothesis.

Figure 1: Mean Answers on Media Credibility Questions across All Survey Forms
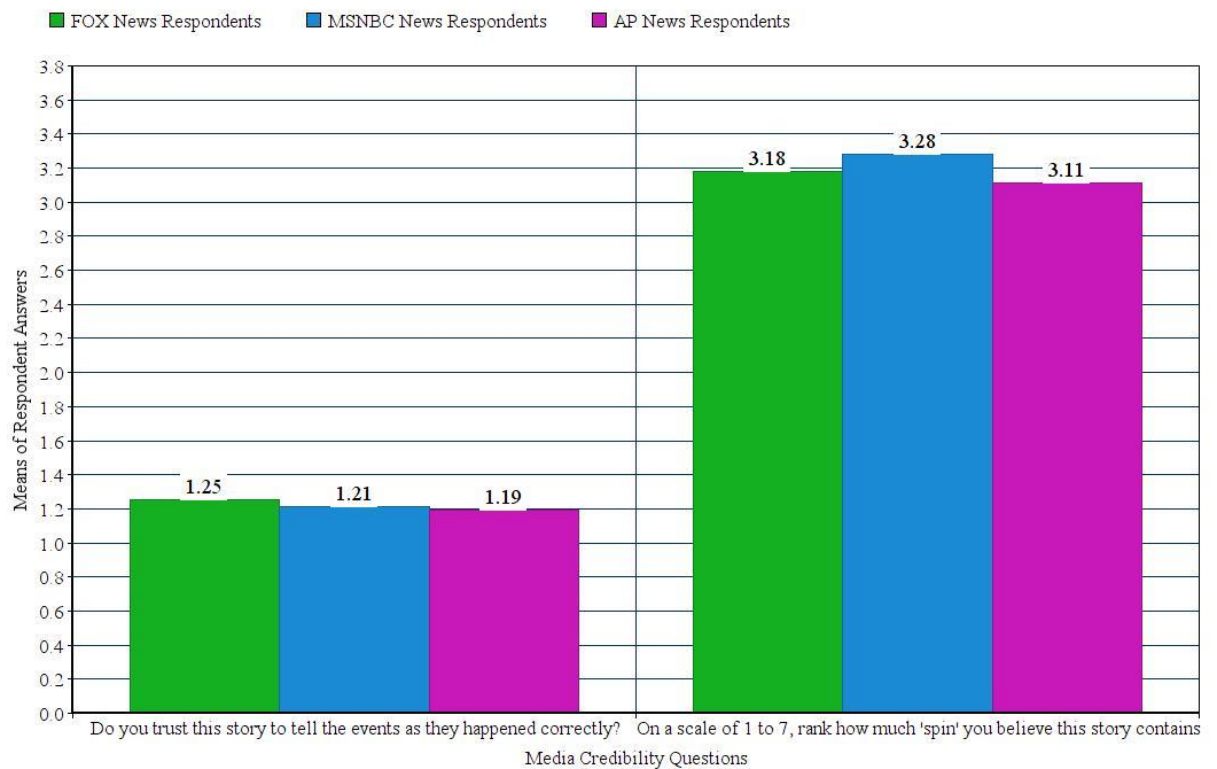
This conclusion follows the previous research in the literature review, especially

the Kohring (2007) model of media trust, which showed that media trust and credibility

were both important for formulating total credibility of a news media source.[43] These

results also confirm media trust as defined by Tsfati (2010)[44], as the respondents

generally trusted the news; there was not a great assumption of risk in trusting the

separate news sources, even though the FOX News experimental track and MSNBC

News experimental track have different perceptions of biases towards conservatism or

liberalism than the AP News track does. These results question the argument made by

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[43] Kohring, M., and J. Matthes. 231-52.
[44] Tsfati, Yariv, and Jonathan Cohen. 128-46.

Burke (2008) that audiences are more likely to seek news media sources that confirm their previously established biases;[45] if anything, these results show that audiences in general will trust the news they receive from a variety of sources, whether or not they would trust that source separate from the news. Similarly, the assumed amount of media spin in these sources is considered to be low, showing a general trend of media credibility and media trust being related when it comes to believing the news from an organization.

Hypothesis 2: Is media credibility correlated with media habits?

The literature leads us to believe the data will support H_2, the hypothesis that "increased media credibility is positively correlated with stronger media habits, like increased consumption and enjoyment of news media", but the results from the data show a more complicated picture of the relationship between media credibility and media habits.

The average respondent answers for media habits showed no uniform pattern or significance across experimental tracks. As seen in Table 3, general trends for all media habits answers show few very differences in frequency of habits across experimental tracks; MSNBC News and AP News experimental track respondents preferred television as their platform of news, but for FOX News respondents, television and mobile or online news sources were almost equal choices for the preferred platform of news media. The vast majority of respondents preferred to consume news media daily, but AP News respondents showed the largest frequency of daily news consumers (147 respondents) and monthly or longer news consumers (4 respondents). The AP news track also showed the greatest number of respondents who enjoyed keeping up with the news a lot (86

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[45] Burke, Jeremy. 633-65.

respondents), and had the most amount of respondents who preferred unbiased news (122 respondents). From these three separate frequencies, we can see the subtle formation of a separation of news audiences, much like what Gaziano & McGrath (1985) concluded in their research; there is a more sophisticated and questioning audience that seeks news and critiques it, and a less-informed audience that relies on the news to be credible in and of itself.

Table 3: Frequency of Answers to Media Habits Questions across All Experimental Tracks

Media Habits Questions	Frequency of Media Habits Answers				Total Percentage of Respondent Frequencies
	FOX News	MSNBC News	AP News	Total	
Q3: What medium do you get most of your news from?					
Television	77	95	93	265	44.3%
Newspapers	27	17	21	65	10.9%
Radio news	8	9	7	24	4.0%
Mobile/online news	65	60	56	181	30.3%
Social networking websites	23	17	23	63	10.5%
Q4: Traditional platforms, digital platforms, or a mix of both?					
Traditional only	45	36	42	123	20.6%
Digital only	37	23	28	88	14.7%
Mix of both	118	136	127	381	63.7%
Q5: Do you get news from local sources or national news channels?					
Local	100	94	96	290	48.5%
National	99	102	101	302	50.5%
Q6: How often do you consume news media?					
Daily	136	132	147	415	69.4%
3+ days a week	39	37	26	102	17.1%
Weekly	18	17	21	56	9.4%
Every Other week	3	3	1	7	1.2%
Monthly	0	2	4	6	1.0%
Other	4	5	0	9	1.5%
Q7: Do you enjoy keeping up with the news?					
A lot	77	80	86	243	40.6%
Some	96	93	86	275	46.0%
Not much	18	18	22	58	9.7%
Not at all	8	8	4	20	3.3%
Q8: Do you prefer news media that endorses your political point of view, or has no political point of view?					
My point of view	53	51	51	155	26.0%
No point of view	120	117	122	359	60.0%

As seen in Table 4, the separate experimental tracks were collapsed in to singular correlations to test the strength of relationships between the media credibility questions and the media habits questions. Unlike in the frequencies chart, no relationship between media credibility and the media habits questions in the collapsed respondent data was found.

Table 4: Average Significance of Respondent Answers to Questions about Media Habits, Correlated with Questions about Media Credibility

Media Habits Questions	Significance of Average Respondent Answers Correlated to Trust in News Article	
	Q1: Do you trust this article?	Q2: How much media spin is in this article?
What medium do you get most of your news from?	.298	.423
Do you get your news from only traditional platforms, only digital platforms, or a mix of both	.414	.923
Do you get your news from local sources, like a city newspaper or local news station, or national news channels, like cable news or online news journals?	.859	.664
How often do you consume news media?	.580	.271
Do you enjoy keeping up with the news?	.210	.356
Do you prefer news media that endorses your political point of view, or has no political point of view?	.531	.125

*Statistically significant correlations are bolded

Because of this jarring distinction between general relationships to media habits and differing frequencies in media habits, a correlation was made between each

experimental group and their separate answers to media habits questions, to test for the viability of two separate audiences within the data. As seen in Table 5, media habits and media credibility ratings were aligned in the FOX News and MSNBC News experimental tracks, but not in the AP News experimental track. In the FOX News experimental track, the relationship between media credibility and media habits showed no significance, except for preference for unbiased news; however, this correlation is weak ($p = .023$, $r = .174$). In the MSNBC experimental track, media credibility is significantly correlated to enjoyment of the news, but the correlation is weak ($p = .002$, $r = .223$). Media credibility is also significantly correlated to preferring unbiased news sources, but the correlation is weak ($p = .019$, $r = .186$). In the AP news experimental track, there is not a significant correlation between news media credibility and any of the media habits.

Table 5: Average Significance of Respondent Answers to Questions About Media Habits, Correlated with Questions about Media Credibility

Media Habits Questions	Significance of Average Respondent Answers		
	Form A (FOX News)	Form B (MSNBC News)	Form C (AP News)
What medium of news?	.135	.298	.448
Traditional or digital platforms?	.095	.593	.054
Local or national news sources?	.680	.120	.425
How often do you watch news?	.839	.076	.630
Do you enjoy keeping up with the news?	.119	**.002**	.340
Do you prefer biased or unbiased news?	**.023**	**.019**	.684

*Statistically significant correlations are bolded

As seen in these results, respondents in the more ideologically extreme conditions answered that they preferred more unbiased news, and only respondents for the MSNBC experimental track reported enjoying the news; however, these results were only found when the respondent pools were purposefully broken in to the three separate experimental tracks, and not found in the generalizable correlations across experimental track respondents. When the results are pooled, we instead see a pattern of general trends for all news media audiences, with slight differences in frequency for the AP News respondents that show higher rates of news consumption, news enjoyment, and a preference for unbiased news. These results prove an interesting parallel to Burke's (2008) argument that individuals choose media sources that reinforce their previously-held beliefs[46]; because of the self-reporting nature of the survey, it is possible that both of the more ideologically extreme survey track respondents believe their news source is less biased, even though that is not the case. Similarly, the lack of significant relationships between any of the media habits questions and the pooled respondent results shows an interesting challenge to Burke's (2008) assumptions of bias in news media audiences, since these respondents did not show a significant relationship between media credibility and enjoyment of the news or preferred bias in their news.

In order to test the relationship between media credibility and mainstream or non-mainstream news source trust, respondents across all experimental tracks were asked to identify whether they trusted, distrusted, did not know their level of trust, or had not heard of a list of 19 media sources, which varied from multiple-platform mainstream sources to singular-platform nonmainstream sources, as seen in the respondent pool correlations in Table 6. From these results, it is clear to see that there is a relationship of

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[46] Burke, Jeremy. 633-65.

media credibility to FOX News, although the correlation is weak ($p = .017$, $r = .180$); however, as trust for the article presented to the respondents in the survey increased, their reported trust for the Rush Limbaugh Show decreased, although this relationship was also weak ($p = .012$, $r = -.187$). Interestingly, PBS was identified as having more media spin by the respondents at a significant level, but the relationship was weak ($p > .001$, $r = .257$). In general, the respondent pool seemed to weakly trust FOX News, did not trust the Rush Limbaugh Show, and found significant spin in PBS as a news source.

Table 6: Experimental Track Breakdown of Significance of Media Credibility and Media Trust Correlation Coefficients for Individual Q9 News Media Sources

Recognized Media Source	Q1 Significance (Do you trust this story to tell the events…?)	Q2 Significance (On a scale of 1 to 7…?)
BBC	.565	.120
NPR	.729	.061
PBS	.459	**>.001**
ABC News	.147	.964
CNN	.443	.063
Yahoo! News	.632	.564
The New York Times	.549	.600
The Washington Post	.975	.750
The Huffington Post	.515	.808
MSNBC	.958	.952
The Daily Show	.193	.236
Daily Kos	.713	.163
FOX News	**.017**	.247
BuzzFeed News	.259	.359
The Rush Limbaugh Show	**.012**	.166
Slate	.357	.965
CBS News	.248	.216
Mother Jones	.989	.885
The Economist	.879	.490

*Statistically significant correlations are bolded

Correlation coefficients and directional strengths between media credibility, media trust, and news source recognition for all separate experimental tracks showed scattered results, as seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Experimental Track Breakdown of Significance of Media Credibility and Media Trust Correlation Coefficients for Individual Q9 News Media Sources

Recognized Media Source	Q1 Significance (Do you trust this story to tell the events…?)			Q2 Significance (On a scale of 1 to 7…?)		
	Form A: FOX	Form B: MSNBC	Form C: AP	Form A: FOX	Form B: MSNBC	Form C: AP
BBC	.304	.080	**.008**	.977	.416	**.010**
NPR	.671	.942	.061	.944	.892	.305
PBS	.577	**.007**	.134	.117	.209	.101
ABC News	.594	.872	**< .001**	.072	.367	.074
CNN	.947	.399	**.005**	.101	.899	.012
Yahoo! News	.810	.726	**.011**	.708	.861	.948
The New York Times	.870	.903	**.004**	.909	.547	.067
The Washington Post	.181	.557	.107	.933	.628	**.007**
The Huffington Post	.511	.734	.608	.833	.651	.453
MSNBC	.969	.415	**.022**	.210	.928	.226
The Daily Show	.868	.086	**.002**	.338	.595	.288
Daily Kos	.731	.209	.866	.137	**.042**	.228
FOX News	**.011**	.616	**.001**	.856	.623	.220
BuzzFeed News	.099	.501	**.011**	.122	.873	.067
The Rush Limbaugh Show	.249	.141	**.048**	.995	.480	.270
Slate	.638	.094	.535	.172	.137	.994
CBS News	.263	.861	**< .001**	.593	.437	.355
Mother Jones	.083	.354	.272	.597	.483	.752
The Economist	**.033**	.279	.292	.534	.967	.410

*Statistically significant correlations are bolded

In the FOX News experimental track, respondents believe FOX News ($p = .011$, $r = .183$) and The Economist ($p = .033$, $r = .153$) are credible news sources, but these correlations are weak. Respondents showed no clear significance or direction for ratings

of media spin on any of the news sources. Respondents for the MSNBC News

experimental track showed significant trust for PBS, but the strength of the correlation

was weak ($p = .007$, $r = .197$). Although there was not a relationship between media

credibility and trust in The Daily Kos article, respondents in this experimental track

showed a significant, but weak, negative correlation between this news source and ratings

of media spin ($p = .042$, $r = -.145$). This shows that as respondents in the liberal condition

experimental track showed decreased media credibility, they rated The Daily Kos as

having less media spin. The Daily Kos is a nonmainstream media source that is

considered more liberally biased than other, more mainstream sources of media like

MSNBC News and AP News. This relationship gives credence to the conclusions found

by Tsfati (2010), as respondents on the MSNBC News experimental track trusted a more

mainstream news source (PBS), but showed a media spin rating preference for a

nonmainstream, online-exclusive media sources, confirming Tsfati's conclusion that

media skeptics were more likely to view nonmainstream news sources.[47]

AP News experimental track respondents showed the largest amount of media

trust and media spin answers out of all three experimental track respondent groups. These

respondents identified significant, but weak, positive correlations between media

credibility and trust of the BBC ($p = .008$, $r = .190$), ABC News ($p < .001$, $r = .336$),

CNN ($p = .005$, $r = .202$), Yahoo! News ($p = .011$, $r = .181$), The New York Times ($p =$

$.004$, $r = .206$), MSNBC News ($p = .022$, $r = .165$), The Daily Show ($p = .002$, $r = .224$),

FOX News ($p = .001$, $r = .240$), BuzzFeed News ($p = .011$, $r = .181$), and CBS News (p

$< .001$, $r = .259$). These respondents also showed a weak negative correlation between

media credibility and trust in The Rush Limbaugh Show ($p = .048$, $r = -.142$), showing a

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[47] Tsfati, Y. 22-42.

more critical evaluation of media credibility than respondents in the FOX News or MSNBC News experimental tracks. As The Rush Limbaugh show is broadcast on a mainstream news media source (FOX), this result challenges the conclusion by Tsfati (2010) that more skeptical viewers would choose more nonmainstream news media sources; indeed, more of the respondents in this experimental track showed a significant amount of trust in mainstream news media sources, but were still critical of this particular source.

Respondents in the AP News experimental track also showed positive correlations between media spin ratings and news source trust, but recognize more media spin in their media sources than respondents in the FOX News or MSNBC News experimental tracks did. There was a weak but significant correlation between media spin ratings and trust of news media sources for the BBC ($p = .010$, $r = .182$) and The Washington Post ($p = .007$, $r = .192$), showing a general trend of critical thinking about source credibility effects by respondents in the AP News experimental track that was not found in the FOX News and MSNBC News experimental track. These results both challenge and endorse the conclusions made by Burke (2008), as respondents in the FOX News and MSNBC News experimental tracks showed positive correlations between media credibility and media sources that were more likely to endorse certain political views, but the media credibility ratings shown by respondents in the AP News experimental track challenge the assumption that there are only fragmented bipolar audiences that consume news media.

The overall trend of the separated survey track data shows that some of the more mainstream media sources, like FOX News and the BBC, were identified more often than more non-mainstream or social-media based news sources, like Slate and Mother Jones.

These less-identified sources were usually Internet-exclusive and considered more liberally biased than the more mainstream sources that rely on both traditional platforms like television, and modern platforms like websites and mobile browsing, which confirms the results the conclusions of Tsfati (2010).[48] It is also noteworthy that many respondents reported trusting some sources that they recognized were biased. For example, In Table 7, MSNBC News experimental track respondents believed that the news source PBS would report a story truthfully, but did not show a relationship between media spin ratings and PBS media credibility. There were no significant relationships between the type of platform that respondents used to consume news media and their evaluations of media credibility in the pooled results, which challenges the conclusions of Tsfati (2010).[49] However, as Tsfati (2010) and Tsfati & Capella (2003) postulated, media credibility can show a relationship with more mainstream and nonmainstream media sources.[50] This was true in the results that were separated by experimental track.

This research, when broken in to experimental tracks, supports the conclusions of Tsfati & Capella (2003), as all the experimental track respondents recognized the major media news sources, and showed trust for major mainstream news sources even if they did not believe the news was spin-free.[51] Although there were some strong relationships between media credibility and news source trust for some individual sources found in the separated FOX News and MSNBC News experimental track respondents, the lack of a significant correlation through the pooled results means that there is not enough data to support H_2, "increased media credibility is positively correlated with stronger media

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[48] Tsfati, Y. 22-42.
[49] Tsfati, Y. 22-42.
[50] Tsfati, Yariv, and Joseph N. Cappella. 504-29.
[51] Tsfati, Yariv, and Joseph N. Cappella. 504-29.

habits, like increased consumption and enjoyment of news media.". However, this data does not necessarily invalidate the research on media audiences that was found in the literature review, as subtle differences between more 'sophisticated skeptics' and the 'less well informed' did appear in the generalized results; this was especially prevalent in the AP News experimental track data, which showed a clear delineation of a 'sophisticated skeptic' audience that consumed more news media and was more critical and less trusting of the news they consumed, compared to the other two experimental track respondents, who generally failed to critique the media they trusted. For the pooled respondents in general, we fail to accept the hypothesis, and must accept the null hypothesis.

Discussion & Conclusions

This article tested whether or not there were any significant correlations between source media credibility, and media trust, news media habits, and media spin.

Hypothesis 1, regarding the positive relationship between media credibility and media trust, is supported in this research. This follows the previous media trust literature, especially Kohring's model of media trust (2007), by showing that media trust and media credibility are correlated. This also supports further research done by Wathen & Burkell (2002), which established several models of media credibility that relied on media trust. The media credibility and media trust relationship is the strongest relationship observed across all three survey experimental tracks, with the highest significant positive relationship between media credibility and media trust found in the FOX News condition ($r = .401$), and the weakest significant positive relationship between media credibility and media trust found in the MSNBC News condition ($r = .320$). The results of this research

validate the previous literature, showing a positive correlation between media credibility and media trust. It is easy to argue this hypothesis, as very rarely do we as news consumers trust sources that we do not think are credible; even in spite of research by Tsfati & Capella (2003) that audiences are often exposed to news sources they do not find credible, this does not necessarily mean it will affect their views of the source credibility. It makes sense that trust and credibility would go hand in hand; the 'believability' of a source can influence the risk we take in trusting the information the source gives to us, and if that source does not seem believable, then it is unlikely that news audiences should be assumed to take the risk of trust.

Hypothesis 2, regarding the positive relationship between media credibility and media habits, show results that complicate conclusions found in the established literature. Although the literature establishes a strong correlation between certain media habits and media credibility ratings, these results were not as clear to find in this research. The pooled results of all 600 survey respondents showed that media habits were not radically different between groups, except when they were re-grouped to fit the survey experimental track they completed. The media habit differences that were present were not very dramatic; for example, even though the MSNBC News respondents and the AP news respondents ranked television as the most common platform for watching news, they also ranked mobile/online news as being a close second to their preferred news platform. Even though the FOX News respondents had more equal frequencies of television platform preference and mobile/online news media preference, the numbers were not dramatic enough to inspire a clear divide between these audiences. The importance of news media platform, as described in Tsfati (2010) and Tsfati & Capella

(2003), is negated in this research, as there were no significant relationships between the type of platform that respondents used to consume news and their evaluations of news media credibility.[52] Burke's argument (2008) that audiences unequivocally choose media that they are favorably biased towards is challenged by the results of Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2, as rates of media credibility and trust were roughly the same across survey experimental tracks, and no significant relationship between media credibility and media habits or enjoyment was found in the pooled results.[53]

Interestingly, the only time when a defined audience like Gaziano & McGrath's (1985) 'sophisticated skeptics' was found was when the experimental groups were separated by experimental track. In these results, it is very easy to see how the AP News experimental track respondents correlated to a defined type of audience who was critical and consumed many different sources of media, and did not put their trust in their media sources easily. These respondents seemed to fit in to Gaziano & McGrath's (1985) 'sophisticated skeptic' group very easily. Considering the results of the FOX News and MSNBC News track respondents, it would be easy to dismiss these results as the continuation of two separate audiences that focus on consuming lots of news critically, or consuming news only from sources that seem credible. However, when the respondent results are pooled, these changes are a lot more subtle and less dramatic than their significances show.

This indicates at a media audience that is quite a bit broader than what Gaziano & McGrath (1985) originally concluded; instead of clear differences between the education, income levels, and political ideologies of audiences and the type of credibility they assign

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[52] Tsfati, Y. 22-42.; Tsfati, Yariv, and Joseph N. Cappella. 504-29.
[53] Burke, Jeremy. 633-65.

to news media sources, there are now more subtle variables involved in what separates these two types of audiences. It is not unreasonable to assume that because of the recent transformation of technology, especially the Internet, assigning significance of news media credibility to a singular source or media habit is now a moot point. Any mainstream news media source will have an Internet presence, and some sources that are Internet-exclusive, like BuzzFeed, still have a wide and recognizable presence among audiences that do not usually consume news from the Internet. This could convolute the efforts of research, like this paper, that tries to separate traditional from digital media platforms, as almost all mainstream traditional media is now attached to a website or social media account. There is evidence for a 'split' audience in these results, but respondent characteristics and ratings of media credibility are not dramatic enough to justify supporting Hypothesis 2. Further research to expand on the causation of this audience split would help us better understand just why and how news media audiences in previous research show such dramatic differences in news media credibility ratings.

Further Research

Clearly, these results show a more complex correlation picture than previously presented in the relevant research. Further research on this subject should include explorations in to mediated relationships between variables, such as political ideology, political culture, and source credibility trust. Testing for third variable interference that could affect media trust results is also worth noting: unaccounted for variables like media

brand recognition over source recognition could skew results towards a more favorable or well-known company image, instead of trust in the news that comes from the source.

The relationships shown have questioned the viability of previous research in various ways, especially concerning the validity of relationships between media credibility and media habits. Further reporting on media habits, especially in relation to media credibility and trust, may help strengthen the results of this research.

Further research should also include a larger pool of respondents; the present research was limited to only 200 respondents per survey form, which could account for some results that are not true to the population, may include a bad sample, or could be biased and over-exaggerated. Similarly, a survey form that includes more extensive questioning of respondent political ideology and does not rely on self-reporting answers may find more stable results.

Note

1. There was potentially a glitch or bot that got ahold of the survey, as all forms had responses that were marked as complete, but had no answers attached past Q0. This was a particular problem for Forms B and C. However, because these forms are incomplete and were outside of the 200 initial participants fielded for each form, they were not used or analyzed.

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Appendices

<u>Appendix A: Full Survey</u>

Survey Version: 4/22/15

Survey forms were randomized for each individual respondent. Although all demographic questions and follow-up questions about culture, media habits, and political knowledge were asked at the end of the survey, subjects were given a random assignment of Form A, B, or C articles. For the full survey shown below, the Form A article is presented. For the Form B and Form C articles, see Appendix B.

[Age Screening] Q0: Are you 18 years or older?
1. Yes [Continue to article]
2. No [Thank you for participating]

Please read this news clipping and answer the following questions about what you have read.

FOX NEWS: Alaska becomes 3rd state with legal recreational marijuana

Alaska on Tuesday becomes the third U.S. state to end prohibition of marijuana, officially putting into effect Ballot Measure 2, approved by 53 percent of state voters in November.
Alaskans age 21 and older may now legally possess up to one ounce of marijuana, grow as many as six marijuana plants in their homes, and possess any additional marijuana produced by those plants.

Shops selling legal recreational marijuana aren't likely to open until 2016, after the state legislature establishes a regulatory framework. State lawmakers have begun introducing legislation to that end.

"State laws allowing adults to use marijuana are becoming less and less of a novelty," said Mason Tvert, communications director for drug policy reform group Marijuana Policy Project. "It won't be long before it's the rule instead of the exception nationwide. Colorado and Washington are proving that regulating marijuana works, and soon Alaska will, too."

The Marijuana Policy Project, a backer of the Alaska ballot measure, is launching a public education campaign reminding marijuana users to "consume responsibly," with ads that read: "With great marijuana laws comes great responsibility."

"Most adults use marijuana for the same reasons most adults use alcohol," Tvert said. "We want them to keep in mind that it carries the same responsibilities."

Marijuana remains illegal under federal law and states that have proceeded with legalization have been able to do so because of Department of Justice guidance that urges federal prosecutors to refrain from targeting state-legal marijuana operations.

Despite the conflicted federal stance, legal marijuana is the fastest-growing industry in the U.S., according to a recent report from industry analyst ArcView Group. When regulated marijuana sales begin next year in Alaska, the industry is likely to generate millions in tax revenue. According to a recent study, as much as $8 million in marijuana taxes could flow into state coffers in the first year of sales, with more than $20 million projected by 2020.

[Lead-in] Now we would like to ask you a few questions related to what you have read.

Q1: Do you trust this story to tell the events as they happened correctly?
1. Yes
2. No

Q2: On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means you believe this story has absolutely no media spin, and 7 means you believe the story is nothing but media spin, please rank how much 'spin' you believe this story contains.
1. Absolutely no media spin
2. Some media spin
3.
4. Equal parts spin and facts
5.
6. Mostly media spin
7. Only media spin

Media Habits
We will now ask you some questions about where you get your news and how often you consume news media.

Q3: What medium do you get most of your news from?
1. Television programs
2. Newspapers
3. Radio news
4. Mobile/online news
5. Social networking websites

Q4: Do you get your news from only traditional platforms, only digital platforms, or a mix of both?
1. Traditional platforms only
2. Digital platforms only
3. Mix of both

Q5: Do you get your news from local sources, like a city newspaper or local news station, or national news channels, like cable news or online news journals?
1. Local
2. National

Q6: How often do you consume news media?
1. Daily
2. 3+ days a week
3. Weekly
4. Every other week
5. Monthly
6. Other [please fill in]

Q7: Do you enjoy keeping up with the news?
1. A lot
2. Some
3. Not much
4. Not at all
5. Don't know

Q8: Do you prefer news media that endorses your political point of view, or has no political point of view?
1. My point of view
2. No point of view
3. Don't know

Q9: The following is a list of news media sources found in traditional and online platforms. Please indicate for each one whether you **trust** the news they report, **distrust** the news they report, **don't know** if you trust the news they report, or **have not heard of** the news source.

a. BBC
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

b. National Public Radio (NPR)
1. Trust
2. Distrust

3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

c. PBS
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

d. ABC News
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

e. CNN
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

f. Yahoo! News
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

g. The New York Times
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

h. The Washington Post
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

i. The Huffington Post
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

j. MSNBC

1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

k. The Daily Show
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

l. Daily Kos
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

m. Fox News
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

n. BuzzFeed News
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

o. The Rush Limbaugh Show
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

p. Slate
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

q. CBS News
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

r. Mother Jones
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

s. The Economist
1. Trust
2. Distrust
3. Don't know
4. Have not heard of it

Questions about Political Knowledge
These questions are presented to test your knowledge about the political process. Please answer them to the best of your knowledge. You are free to guess if you aren't sure of your answer.

Q10: Which party has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives?
1. Republican
2. Democrat
3. Neither, there are equal numbers of Republicans and Democrats in the House of Representatives

Q11: How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?
1. Two-thirds
2. Three-fourths
3. Four-fifths
4. Majority

Q12: How long is a term on the U.S. Supreme Court?
1. 4 years
2. 8 years
3. 20 years
4. As long as a justice chooses to serve

Q13: How old must a person be to be elected to the U.S. Senate?
1. 25 years old
2. 30 years old
3. 40 years old
4. 45 years old

Questions about Culture
These questions are presented to gauge how you feel about American society. On a scale of one to seven, where one means you strongly disagree, and seven means you strongly agree, please respond to each of the following statements.

Q14: Most of the important things that take place in life happen by random chance.
1. Strongly disagree
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Strongly agree

Q15: We are all better off when we compete as individuals.
1. Strongly disagree
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Strongly agree

Q16: It is our responsibility to reduce the differences in income between the rich and the poor.
1. Strongly disagree
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Strongly agree

Q17: Even if some people are at a disadvantage, it is best for society to let people succeed or fail on their own.
1. Strongly disagree
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Strongly agree

Q18: No matter how hard we try, the curse of our lives is largely determined by forces outside our control.
1. Strongly disagree
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Strongly agree

Q19: The best way to get ahead in life is to do what you are told to do.
1. Strongly disagree
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Strongly agree

Q20: Society would be much better off if we imposed strict and swift punishment on those that break the rules.
1. Strongly disagree
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Strongly agree

Q21: What our society needs is a fairness revolution to make the distribution of goods more equal.
1. Strongly disagree
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Strongly agree

Q22: It would be pointless to make serious plans in such an uncertain world.
1. Strongly disagree
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

7. Strongly agree

Q23: Society works best if power is shared equally.
1. Strongly disagree
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Strongly agree

Q24: Our society is in trouble, because we don't obey those in authority.
1. Strongly disagree
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Strongly agree

Q25: Even the disadvantaged should have to make their own way in the world.
1. Strongly disagree
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. Strongly agree

Questions About Respondents
Q26: How old are you?
Self-submit question

Q27: Are your male or female?
1. Male
2. Female

Q28: What is your highest level of education?
1. Elementary or some high school
2. High School Graduate/GED
3. Some college/vocational school
4. College graduate
5. Some graduate work
6. Master's degree
7. Doctorate (of any type)
8. Other degree [keep answer as recorded]

Q29: If you had to choose, would you place yourself closer to either the Republican or Democratic Party?
1. Democratic Party
2. Republican Party
3. Neither party represents my views in any way.

Q30: On a scale of political ideology, individuals can be arranged from strongly liberal to strongly conservative. Which of the following categories best describes your view?
1. Strongly liberal
2. Liberal
3. Slightly liberal
4. Middle of the road
5. Slightly conservative
6. Conservative
7. Strongly conservative

Q31: Which of the following do you most associate with your own ethnicity or race?
1. American Indian
2. Asian
3. Black or African American
4. Hispanic
5. White Non-Hispanic
6. Other (Please specify)

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Appendix B: Survey Articles, As Presented in Each Separate Survey Form

FORM A
Please read this news clipping and answer the following questions about what you have read.

FOX NEWS: Alaska becomes 3rd state with legal recreational marijuana

Alaska on Tuesday becomes the third U.S. state to end prohibition of marijuana, officially putting into effect Ballot Measure 2, approved by 53 percent of state voters in November.
Alaskans age 21 and older may now legally possess up to one ounce of marijuana, grow as many as six marijuana plants in their homes, and possess any additional marijuana produced by those plants.

Shops selling legal recreational marijuana aren't likely to open until 2016, after the state legislature establishes a regulatory framework. State lawmakers have begun introducing legislation to that end.

"State laws allowing adults to use marijuana are becoming less and less of a novelty," said Mason Tvert, communications director for drug policy reform group Marijuana Policy Project. "It won't be long before it's the rule instead of the exception nationwide. Colorado and Washington are proving that regulating marijuana works, and soon Alaska will, too."
The Marijuana Policy Project, a backer of the Alaska ballot measure, is launching a public education campaign reminding marijuana users to "consume responsibly," with ads that read: "With great marijuana laws comes great responsibility."

"Most adults use marijuana for the same reasons most adults use alcohol," Tvert said. "We want them to keep in mind that it carries the same responsibilities."

Marijuana remains illegal under federal law and states that have proceeded with legalization have been able to do so because of Department of Justice guidance that urges federal prosecutors to refrain from targeting state-legal marijuana operations.

Despite the conflicted federal stance, legal marijuana is the fastest-growing industry in the U.S., according to a recent report from industry analyst ArcView Group. When regulated marijuana sales begin next year in Alaska, the industry is likely to generate

millions in tax revenue. According to a recent study, as much as $8 million in marijuana taxes could flow into state coffers in the first year of sales, with more than $20 million projected by 2020.

FORM B
Please read this news clipping and answer the following questions about what you have read:

MSNBC NEWS: Alaska Becomes Third State to Legalize Marijuana

Alaska on Tuesday becomes the third U.S. state to end prohibition of marijuana, officially putting into effect Ballot Measure 2, approved by 53 percent of state voters in November.
Alaskans age 21 and older may now legally possess up to one ounce of marijuana, grow as many as six marijuana plants in their homes, and possess any additional marijuana produced by those plants.

Shops selling legal recreational marijuana aren't likely to open until 2016, after the state legislature establishes a regulatory framework. State lawmakers have begun introducing legislation to that end.

"State laws allowing adults to use marijuana are becoming less and less of a novelty," said Mason Tvert, communications director for drug policy reform group Marijuana Policy Project. "It won't be long before it's the rule instead of the exception nationwide. Colorado and Washington are proving that regulating marijuana works, and soon Alaska will, too."
The Marijuana Policy Project, a backer of the Alaska ballot measure, is launching a public education campaign reminding marijuana users to "consume responsibly," with ads that read: "With great marijuana laws comes great responsibility."

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regulated marijuana sales begin next year in Alaska, the industry is likely to generate millions in tax revenue. According to a recent study, as much as $8 million in marijuana taxes could flow into state coffers in the first year of sales, with more than $20 million projected by 2020.

FORM C
Please read this news clipping and answer the following questions about what you have read:

ASSOCIATED PRESS: Marijuana is Officially Legal In Alaska

Alaska on Tuesday becomes the third U.S. state to end prohibition of marijuana, officially putting into effect Ballot Measure 2, approved by 53 percent of state voters in November.
Alaskans age 21 and older may now legally possess up to one ounce of marijuana, grow as many as six marijuana plants in their homes, and possess any additional marijuana produced by those plants.

Shops selling legal recreational marijuana aren't likely to open until 2016, after the state legislature establishes a regulatory framework. State lawmakers have begun introducing legislation to that end.

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