

Trust in Traditional News Sources:

Has the growth of online news sources affected how people perceive traditional news sources?

Critical Approaches to Online Learning

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Bachelor of Digital Media

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Introduction

This paper will investigate and assess the impact that the growth of online news sources has had on consumer perception of, and trust in, traditional news sources, that is, print and transmission-based media.

In 2018, the Gallup-Knight Foundation surveyed approximately 19,196 Americans and found that 43% of the survey participants had an overall 'unfavourable' opinion of news media (see Appendix B). Less than a year later in 2019, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) Media Intelligence Service carried out a public opinion survey of approximately 1,000 Europeans and found between 34-46% of the survey participants 'tend not to trust' traditional news sources (see Appendix A). These results highlight a world-wide trend regarding consumer trust in news media.

The issues identified in this paper argue that the digitisation of news media, growth of online news sources and unethical journalism practices have undermined consumer trust in traditional media.

Results

Ardèvol-Abreu, Hooker and Gil de Zúñiga (2018) polled 6,024 people in their study to ascertain consumer trust in traditional and non-traditional news sources, how trust in the media inspires a consumer's interest in news media, and the link between trust in the media and consumer engagement and alternate (citizen) news generation. This peer reviewed article confirms a link between consumer trust and traditional or alternate media usage, and the amount of non-traditional news created (Ardèvol-Abreu, Hooker & Gil de Zúñiga 2018, p. 623). Ardèvol-Abreu, Hooker and Gil de Zúñiga (2018, p. 624) found that consumer confidence in traditional news sources reduces the need for alternate commentary online. If a consumer has greater confidence in alternate commentary then consumer online engagement, that is, sharing or commenting, and the creation of citizen news sources online increase significantly. This article contains references to 96 other sources, its authors have not received remuneration, and it has been cited five times.

Through the analysis of news consumption survey data (Newman & Rasmus 2015, pp. 50-62), Fletcher and Park (2017) found that a consumer's bond with traditional news sources may have evolved due to the emergence of online news sources and the consumer's ability to share news articles and to comment. This study found that a correlation does exist between the level of trust in our news media and the consumer's partiality for either traditional or online news sources (Fletcher & Park 2017, p. 1291). In fact, Fletcher and Park (2017) discovered that consumers with little confidence in traditional news sources acknowledged they gathered their news exclusively from online news sources without a print or transmission-based heritage. The institutions that funded this study can all be classified as traditional news media, which may imply bias, but the methodology (Newman & Rasmus 2015, p. 5) appears bipartisan. This peer reviewed article contains references to 45 other sources, and it has been cited 14 times.

Published in the *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, Tuten and Perotti (2019) demonstrate in their study the sway and associated impact that partisan media coverage and social media has when a false claim is spread across social media platforms. When traditional news media does not behave ethically, as impartial news reporters, any partisan or negative sentiment expressed in media coverage may result in reputation damage due to digital exposure. This study proved that consumer sentiment was markedly more negative. When the truth of a situation is exposed, traditional news media has found their own consumer trust decrease. A good example of this is the Russian Collusion Hoax (Nunes 2019) and how the ratings of major media organisations in the USA fell following the release of the Mueller Report (Adweek

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2019a, 2019b). This research paper has been peer reviewed and contains references to 10 other sources.

Fisher (2018, pp. 19 & 22) extensively researched consumer trust in news sources over an 80-year period, utilising literature from several disciplines, namely psychology, journalism, communication and computing. Fisher (2018, p. 19) found that consumers have turned away from traditional news sources due to digitisation and unethical journalism, that is, major scandals, high-profile identities pointing out false news reporting, increasing broadcast partisanship. The rise of citizen journalism has also had a part to play in providing a different perspective for news consumers, as well as disputing occurrences, or events reported by mainstream media (Fisher 2018, p. 21). Digitization of news is the primary reason behind the failure of the traditional media's financial model due to online platforms stealing away advertising contracts from both print and transmission-based, that is, television or radio, news sources. This peer reviewed chapter referenced 86 sources and has been cited once (Fisher 2018, p. 21).

In their 2016 paper, Berganza, Arcila-Calderón and Herrero-Jiménez (2016) surveyed both digital and traditional news journalists and asked them to comment on their news platform and perceived influences. Berganza, Arcila-Calderón and Herrero-Jiménez (2016, pp. 184-185) found that, apart from the digital journalists being younger, less experienced, having less job security, having more duties, and their reference groups having a higher influence on the journalist due to their lack of contact with a traditional newsroom or other journalists, perception of the differences between working on the two news platforms, that is, digital and traditional, were minimal. This peer reviewed paper has been cited 14 times and contains 46 reference sources.

Through their 2017 study, Ardèvol-Abreu and Gil de Zúñiga (2017, p. 703) assessed whether an increase in western consumer media mistrust, and their recognition of media preference would influence consumer usage of news sources, that is, traditional, digital (citizen) and social network systems. This peer reviewed paper determined that consumer usage of all three news sources was impacted negatively. The more the media shows a preference, the less information consumed from news sources (Ardèvol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga 2017, p. 715). This paper contains 89 reference sources and has 22 citations.

Published in the Social Science Computer Review, Johnson and Kaye (2015) investigate in their peer reviewed survey consumer trust in social media, that is, social network systems, Twitter, YouTube and Blogs, and how consumer use of these digital platforms influences personal views regarding the traditional news media. Results of the survey (which contained 86 reference sources and has 26 citations) confirmed:

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1. 13% of survey recipients trust that traditional newspapers, provide unbiased and accurate reporting.
2. 21% of survey recipients confirmed trust in traditional television to provide unbiased and accurate reporting.
3. Consumers who accessed political information from:
 - a. YouTube received a negative impression of the traditional news media.
 - b. Social Network Systems including Twitter received a positive impression of the traditional news media.

Research presented by Chung and Nah (2013, p. 276) from a five-week online Qualtrics survey assessed 130 citizen journalists' views on traditional and digital (citizen) news content and journalistic procedures. Chung and Nah (2013, p. 284) discovered that citizen journalists rate traditional journalist's news creation and dissemination skills higher when their news content is deemed factual and trustworthy. If, however, a traditional journalist is seen to create and distribute false or misleading news, this would result in a citizen journalist generating a contradictory news report for circulation. The citizen journalist might also motivate their followers to react to, and to disrupt the false story narrative. This peer reviewed study has 48 reference sources and 24 citations.

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Discussion

The research results highlight that the growth in online news sources has affected how people perceive traditional news sources, and this is due to industry digitisation and unethical journalism (Fisher 2018, p. 19). Johnson and Kaye (2015) found that consumers only trusted traditional print and transmission-based media, to be bipartisan and factual, respectively 13% and 21%. They also found that YouTube consumers of news had a negative impression of traditional news media (Johnson & Kaye 2015, p. 136). Fletcher and Park (2017, p. 1291) have confirmed that consumers with low trust in traditional news media sources are more likely to prefer and seek out news sources without a print or transmission-based heritage. Through analysis of the findings, a correlation exists between the level of trust in traditional news media and the consumer's partiality for either traditional or online news sources (Fletcher & Park 2017, p. 1291).

Digitisation of News Media

Through the analysis of news consumption survey data Fletcher and Park (2017, p. 1281) found that a consumer's bond with traditional news sources may have evolved due to the emergence of online news sources and the consumer's ability to interact, that is, commenting and sharing. Digitisation of news is the primary reason behind the failure of the traditional media's financial model due to online platforms appropriating advertising contracts from both print and transmission-based news sources (Fisher, p. 21). Berganza, Arcila-Calderón and Herrero-Jiménez (2016, pp. 184-185) identified that digital journalists are less likely to work in a newsroom setting, or in close proximity to other journalists due to the digitisation of the news. The breakup of the traditional newsroom has led to the employment of opinion bloggers in place of journalists mostly due to a shift in content, culture and platform (Oaten 2017).

Unethical Journalism Practices

Ethical journalists ensure that their reporting and written articles embody the following core values: honesty, independence, fairness, and usefulness. Chung and Nah's (2013) research showed that when a citizen journalist recognises that a traditional news media journalist has distributed or presented a false or misleading report, a contradictory news report is generated and circulated to disrupt the false narrative in play. The citizen journalist might also, through their distribution mechanism, motivate their followers to react and mobilise, releasing their own narratives inside their areas of influence.

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Diminishing trust in traditional media news sources has increased the amount of online content, that is, citizen journalist news media (Ardèvol-Abreu, Hooker & Gil de Zúñiga 2018, p. 624). False narrative exposure by a growing number of citizen journalists online has had an impact on how consumers perceive traditional news sources.

Tuten and Perotti (2019) demonstrated partisan or negative reporting by traditional media news sources can damage a brand, organisation, or an identity's reputation due to digital exposure. When the truth of a situation is exposed (Nunes 2019), traditional media find their own consumer trust decrease significantly (Adweek 2019a, 2019b).

Overall, the evidence found during my research supports the statement that the growth of online news sources has affected how people perceive traditional news sources. What was also found was that traditional media shared the responsibility of this finding with news digitisation, due to exposed unethical journalism practices.

Recommendations

1. A proven industry-wide and accepted 'trust' certification (and measure) of news media journalists and citizen reporters.
2. A proven industry-wide and accepted fact checking methodology to be used by news media journalists and citizen reporters.
3. A consumer education program and database to teach consumers how to research news fact legitimacy, and the news source credentials. This education program would assist consumers to identify if a news story is biased, and if the journalist has any conflicts of interest.
4. News dissemination and interview standards introduced for news media organisations, journalists and citizen reporters, that is, bipartisan questioning techniques, opinion-based reporting acknowledged, audience exposure to opposing ideologies, and their advocates.
5. An investigation into media-related employment discrimination established.

Conclusion

This paper highlighted the influence online news source growth has had on consumer perception of, and trust in, traditional news sources.

Research results suggest that there are two main issues: the digitisation of news media and unethical journalism practices. Digitisation has provided an opportunity for consumers to react, and to interact online, that is, the ability to comment on a news article, and to share the article electronically (Fletcher & Park 2017, p. 1281). Advertising has moved from traditional news sources, that is, television, radio and newspapers, to various digital platforms, which has resulted in the collapse of the traditional media financial model (Fisher 2018, p. 21). This collapse has led to the break down of the traditional newsroom, and the replacement of journalists with less qualified, opinion-based writers and bloggers (Oaten 2017). With the rise of citizen journalists, a variety of opposing viewpoints to traditional media are available online. A reduction of news generated by credentialed journalists, exposure of traditional news media false narratives by citizen journalists, and their ability to mobilise their followers has resulted in consumers viewing traditional media in an unflattering partisan light (Chung & Nah 2013, p. 284).

Ardèvol-Abreu and Gil de Zúñiga (2017, p. 715) uncovered a significant trust-related issue in their study which found that a consumer's perception of partisan news reporting results in less engagement with future traditional news dissemination. In brief, media bias by traditional news sources has reduced their own audience share.

By addressing the issues within this paper, and by implementing the proposed recommendations, news media consumers perception of, and their trust in, traditional news sources should improve world-wide.

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Appendices

Appendix A – The proportion (%) of Trust Europeans place in certain media institutions (Autumn 2018)

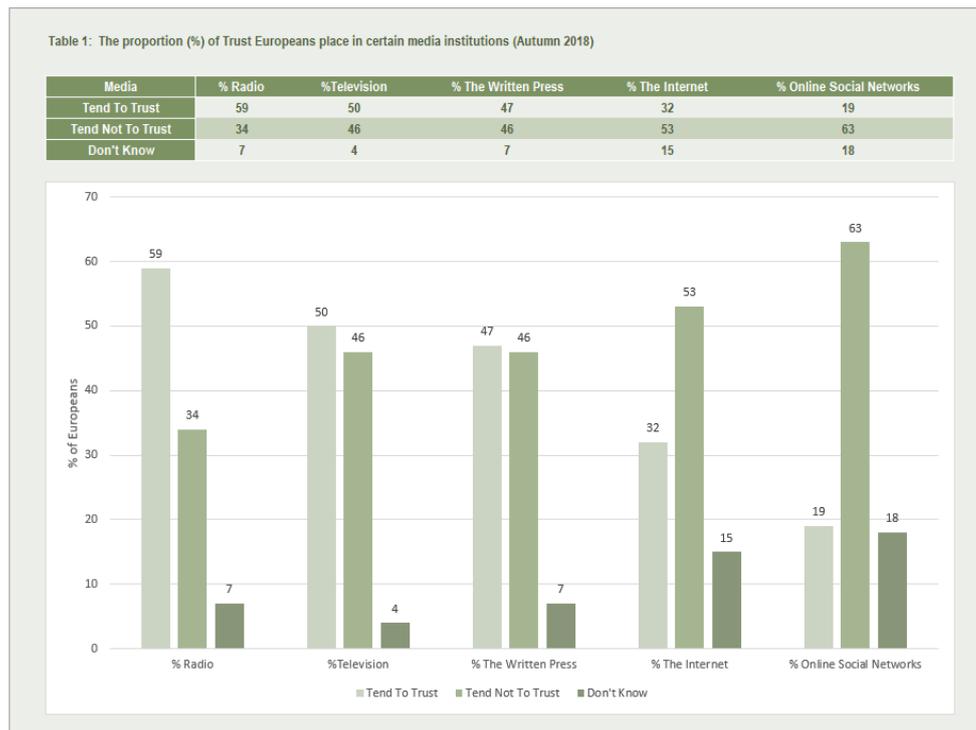


Figure 1: The proportion (%) of Trust Europeans place in certain media institutions (Autumn 2018)
(Author's own 2019, unpublished)

The results above were extracted from an EBU report (European Commission Public Opinion Survey performed between 8-22 November 2018) that sampled approximately 1,000 Europeans in face-to-face interviews across 34 countries inside the European Union (EBU 2019, p. 8).

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Appendix B – The proportion (%) of USA citizens overall opinion of News Media (by Age)

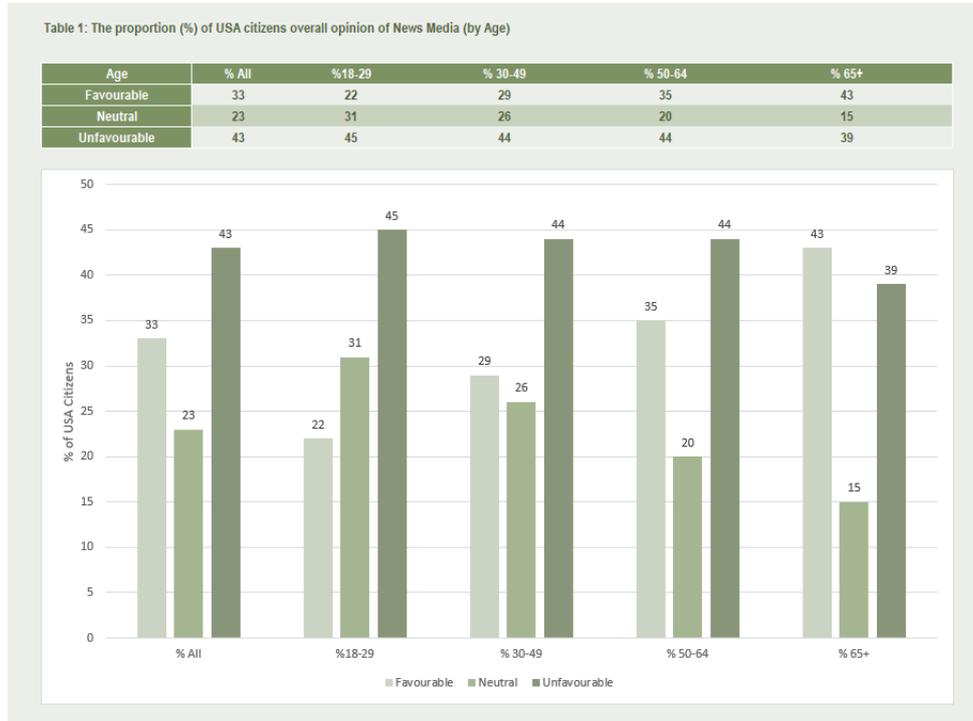


Figure 2: The proportion (%) of USA citizens overall opinion of News Media (by Age)
(Author's own 2019, unpublished)

The results above were extracted from a Gallup/Knight Foundation Survey that sampled approximately 19,196 adult Americans aged 18 and older (Gallup-Knight Foundation 2018, p. 38).