

ICA 年度雙語論文

受眾心目中的傳媒公信力：研究評析

郭中實

摘要

傳播學對公眾如何看待傳媒公信力問題的探討大多基於三個前提：一、公信力的內涵具有普世性；二、受眾對傳媒表現的判斷是理性的，且公信力是其中一個重要標準；三、信任傳媒是公民政治參與的一個必要條件。本文對這三個假設在文獻中所佔的核心地位逐一做出評析並提出質疑，同時指出過往研究對傳媒公信力的測量存有疏漏，使得一些人為製造出的觀察結果被錯誤地當成了顯著的研究發現。其中最為突出的問題是在調查問卷中公信力概念出現過早，從而引發啟動效應將受訪者對隨後問題的回答局限在了狹窄的與傳媒規範和社會期望值相關的指標上。針對上述評析中提出的部分問題，我們採用面對面的形式，對24名香港報紙讀者進行了深度訪談。研究發現：一、傳媒公信力幾乎完全存在於受眾意識之外，處於休眠狀態；二、受訪者最經常閱讀的報紙並非是他們心目中最具公信力的報紙，人們對此反差做出多種「馬後砲」解釋，目的明顯是為了消滅認知不協調以達到心理平衡；三、受眾對傳媒的評價感性多於理性。本文對研究發現的理論含義作出了詳細的探討。

關鍵詞：傳媒公信力、香港報紙、政治參與、休眠觀念、信任

郭中實，香港浸會大學新聞系教授，上海復旦大學信息與傳播研究中心研究員。研究興趣：傳媒生產過程、信息內容、受眾效果。電郵：guo@hkbu.edu.hk
論文投稿日期：2018年2月8日。論文接受日期：2018年6月5日。

ICA Annual Bilingual Paper

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

Zhongshi GUO

Abstract

This study contests the three main assumptions that precede traditional studies of public perceptions of media credibility: (1) universally shared meaning of credibility; (2) audience rational evaluation of media performance using credibility as a core criterion; and (3) perceived credibility as a necessary condition for political participation. In building the case against the centrality of perceived media credibility in political communication scholarship, this critique also draws academic attention to the possibility that much of the findings in existing literature may be a methodological artifact because respondents have been primed to narrow their assessment of media within a set of normative and socially desirable measures. To address some of these issues, we conducted a face-to-face depth interview on 24 Hong Kong newspaper readers. We found that when unprimed, (1) credibility has minimum salience or is dormant in the public mind; (2) interviewees were quick to elicit post hoc rationalization strategies to achieve balance and reduce dissonance created by the gap between the paper they read most often and the paper they deem to be the most credible; (3) people seldom rely fully on rational routes of reasoning to assess media. Theoretical implications are discussed.

Keywords: Media credibility, Hong Kong newspaper, political participation, dormant perceptions, trust

Zhongshi GUO (Professor). Department of Journalism, Hong Kong Baptist University; (Research Fellow). Center for Information and Communication Studies, Fudan University. Research interests: media production process, message content, audience effects.

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

Citation of this article: Guo, Z. (2018). Media credibility in the public mind: A critique. *Communication & Society*, 46, 121–182.

致謝

本研究得到香港政府優配研究基金的資助（項目編號：244212）。作者感謝兩位匿名評審對本文提出的建設性意見和建議。

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

傳播學文獻中不乏關於受眾如何看待傳媒公信力問題的探討，雖然程度不同，但現有研究大多離不開三個預設前提：其一，公信力概念所包含的一整套符號意義具有普世性，可以套用於生活在不同文化和不同政治制度中的傳媒與受眾。學者們極少對這個普世性論點的依據表示詫異或提出質疑。

其二，受眾對傳媒表現的觀察是主動而不是被動的，是理性而不是非理性的。也就是說，普通讀者雖然並不具備核實任何一則具體新聞中所描述的事實和因果關係的**能力**，但他們都習慣性地依賴某些固有的**標準**（其中公信力排位很高）對傳媒機構、信息源和消息本身是否值得信賴做出判斷。能力-標準落差的本質是什麼，它對受眾判斷傳媒公信力的影響是什麼，這些問題同樣沒有得到學界足夠的關注。

其三，傳媒公信力高有利於促進公民的政治參與。究其原因，多數研究者認為傳媒報導可信、百姓消息靈通是民主社會公民議政的基礎。雖然傳媒是否能夠真正滿足公眾了解真相的需求是個有爭議的問題，但是公信力作為新聞生產過程中一個重要質量指標則是得到普遍認同的。即便如此，受眾對傳媒信任的邊界到底應該劃到哪裡才是一個社會民主進程的最佳節點，至今仍然是個模糊不清的問題，對邊界的定義亦可謂見仁見智。

本文對以上三點逐一做出評析並提出批判，認為應該大大地削弱或徹底消除它們在公信力研究中扮演的預設前提角色。挑戰傳統公信力研究不是沒有風險的，可能很難被人接受。因為三個前提每一個都在邏輯上說得通，每一個都在民主討論中備受推崇，尤其值得指出的是，當權者、傳媒從業者和學者對公信力的大力倡導使其順理成章地在公眾話語中佔據著主導地位，這種由權力恩賜的光環具有一舉兩得的作用，在賦予公信力概念生命力的同時也強化了它的正當性。

與人們普遍認同的觀點相悖，本文認為在傳媒公信力的討論中，權力的介入是一件令人憂慮而不是值得慶賀的事。首先，經驗和教訓告訴我們，位居機構權力要職的人（如高官、富商、知名學者）對公信力或任何其他問題的高談闊論總是伴有隱藏議程（如仕途、利潤、職稱），對他們的話語，我們不能不持懷疑態度。除此之外，我們接觸到的大量文獻從兩個方面增加了我們的憂慮：一、現有研究大多是圍繞著信息

生產端如何維繫而不是消費端如何評判公信力這一議題展開的(綜述參見Metzger et al., 2013);二、即便是受眾如何看待傳媒公信力的研究也存有漏洞,許多顯著發現可能是由於測量方法不當而產生的人造假象。

早期傳媒公信力的研究設計較多採用控制實驗方法(Charnley, 1936; Hovland et al., 1953),在隨後的幾十年裡,學術界對公信力的思考發生了諸多變化,一個潛在的共識似乎已經形成,那就是傳媒公信力應該天經地義地被理解為是傳媒專業主義的一個不可割裂的組成部分(Van der Heide & Lim, 2015; Westerman et al., 2014),而傳媒專業主義的內涵在一個更宏大的層面又與普世價值(如自由、平等、民權等)密切相連。正如普世價值信奉者所想像的理想社會那樣,各種各樣對傳媒公信力的說法逃不出規範的框架,即:傳媒應該如何做。

「傳媒應該如何做」與「傳媒實際是如何做的」,兩者之間的距離給傳播學研究帶來了一個令人頗為苦惱的悖論:實踐與期望背道而馳。一個典型的例子就是課堂裡傳授的新聞道德倫理到了業界會面臨變通甚至遭到抵觸(Hanson, 2009)。這對矛盾同樣存在於傳媒公信力的研究中(Fisher, 2016),它從兩個方面威脅著傳媒公信力的測量效度:一個是所謂的「純粹在場效應」,另一個是「社會期望值偏見」。

下文中,我們首先探討這兩個影響公信力操作化過程的問題,之後再對前文提到的三個預設前提做出詳細的評析。在文章的第三部分,我們將展示一個有關香港讀者如何看待報紙公信力的深度訪談個案研究。

「純粹在場效應」和「社會期望值偏見」

無論採用什麼方法,公信力實證研究在操作上都需要受訪者給傳媒機構、信息源或信息本身打分,常見的做法是用同義詞(且以形容詞為多)來替代公信力,包括:可信任、可相信、準確、客觀、專業、勝任、具吸引力、全面、公平、誠實等等(Armstrong & Collins, 2009; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986)。

很明顯,作為獨立概念這些詞的含義區別很大,抽象程度不同,它們的定義和闡釋也是開放的,當公信力研究者視它們為可互換時,這些詞在詞義上的差異以及使用這些詞的人背後不同的動機便被完全

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

忽略了，好像所有這些區別均與公眾對傳媒的看法並沒有什麼直接關係 (McCroskey & Teven, 1999)。語言學研究發現各種符號表述無不包含細小的差別。哪怕是極為相近的同義詞，它們之間在含義上的微妙差異也是不容輕視的，否則就會引向不同的、有時甚至是南轅北轍的理解 (DiMarco, Hirst, & Stede, 1993)。

例如，從語義學的角度來看，**信任**表示出的是一種比**相信**更深層以及更具道德感的心理投入；**專家**比**專業人士**更具某一領域的知識；而**客觀**與**全面**只能是相對的（嚴格來說，相對客觀與不客觀沒什麼有意義的分別），這在很大程度上使得它們無法真正作為傳媒表現的判斷標準。雖然新聞客觀性和全面性的倡導者們大概對此說法難以認同，但絕對的客觀和全面在現實中是不存在的。當然前人研究中使用的各種公信力的同義詞可以作為公信力的間接測量指標，然而它們在語義上的區別或者過大或者過於模糊，以至於無法真正達到「條條大路通羅馬」的效果。更不用說同一個詞在不同歷史時期、不同文化中所展示出的詞義變化可以是無窮的 (Kim & Kim, 2016)。

另外一個比較隱性的問題是，描述公信力的詞一旦被受眾接觸到，就會喚醒他們腦中處於休眠狀態的想法，或者在他們腦中植入一些原本根本不存在的想法，將受訪者的注意力束縛在傳媒表現某些相對狹窄的側面。如此得到的測量結果很難代表真實意見，屬於研究方法疏漏導致的人為現象。被我們稱為「純粹在場」的效應就是其中之一，這個效應特指問題選項僅僅因為出現在問卷裡便會被選擇的情況，主要有以下三個表現。

第一，封閉問卷問題包含的各種選項，無論在日常生活中多麼罕見，只要出現就有人選 (Schuman & Scott, 1987)。這個發現與早前著名心理學家 Tversky 和 Kahneman (1973) 提出的「可利用性法則」(availability heuristics) 不謀而合，即人們的決定和選擇往往是受到了某種啟發而做出的。

「可利用性法則」著重研究外部環境與大腦內部認知結構是如何通過互動而產生思維捷徑的。按照這個法則，一個事件通過記憶或外部提示進入意識層面的過程越不費力氣，人們就越容易誇大該事件的重要性和發生頻率。「純粹在場效應」具有類似屬性，因此可以視其為「可

利用性法則」的一個重要的子向面。作為提示或啟示，它在認知過程中有四個典型的特性：一、將抽象的概念化為具體的表現，如在問卷中將「信任」與「勝任」之類的與公信力相關的抽象概念轉化成意象圖景（如電視主持人的外表或報紙專欄作家的名氣等）。二、固化兩個或多個概念間的關係，也就是說當人們看到一個概念時，頭腦中會自動出現另一個或幾個概念，這個過程也被稱之為**定置**，就是在原本各自獨立的概念間武斷地建立起某種似乎是天然的聯繫（Hilgartner, 1992），比如問卷中有關新聞報導是否「屬實」的問題，就有可能讓人同時聯想到與其含義完全不同的「公平」。三、儘管上述現象與啟動效應（priming）接近，但不同的是定置的關係多數情況下屬於偽關係（Chapman, 1967），比如人們會認為一個有獨立資金來源的傳媒一定比靠廣告生存的傳媒更具公信力，雖然兩者並無必然關係。四、以上三種情況導致一個連鎖反應，即一個帶有很強價值取向的概念（如公信力）一旦出現在問卷中，其重要性自然而然地會被放大，進而延伸出它和傳媒表現的緊密關係，同時增加了這個概念被選擇的機會。

如此看來，我們或許可以說訪員在提示受訪者對某預設選項表示同意與否時，實際上正當化了該選項並將受訪者的答案引向研究者預設的選擇（Plous, 1993）。雖然所有的封閉問卷問題均受此限，但是傳媒公信力概念帶有的濃厚的道德含義使得與其相關的測量指標更容易得到受訪者的垂青，所以這方面的問題變得尤為突出。解決這個問題最理想的辦法之一，就是在問卷中讓公信力概念出現在受訪者回答傳媒使用和傳媒評價問題之後，並盡可能使用開卷問題。我們在個案研究中就是這麼操作的，具體過程會在下文中詳細描述。

第二是「社會期望值偏見」。它是另一個隱形壓力，在不知不覺中驅使著受訪者對傳媒公信力的各類測量指標表示支持。研究發現，當人們對傳媒公信力的本質缺乏足夠的認識，並且也沒有能力證實任何信息時，通常會採用規範的話語、常識、套話或官腔來回答問題，答案很難不與社會期望值的方向一致。一項早期的問卷調查發現美國的受訪者幾乎都對憲法第一修正案所陳述的權利（如集會自由、言論自由等）在原則層面表示完全支持，但大多數人對這些抽象原則在日常生活中的具體實踐（如允許新納粹分子在猶太社區舉辦抗議遊行活動或在

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

學校園內出售色情刊物)則持保留態度(McLeod et al., 1996)。很明顯，即使在美國這樣的民主國家，人們也並不了解憲法賦予的各項公民權利在社會實踐中的真實含義。他們表達的對權利的支持無非是因為那些權利符合社會期望值，聽上去好聽而已。

與其他新聞傳播概念不同，公信力帶給人們的社會期望值壓力更加直接，更加難以推卸。這不僅僅因為公信力是傳媒表現的一個集合指標，更重要的，它是傳媒專業操守與職業規範的化身，與之緊密相關的社會期望值偏見很容易內化為個人價值觀，從而享有高於其他判斷標準的地位和對質疑的免疫力(Nederhof, 1985)。此價值觀表現出來與道德執照效應(Monin & Miller, 2001)頗有類似之處，人們傾向於將自己的價值觀歸於(社會期許的)正義一方，由此獲得的道德優越感會在很大程度上降低他們對自己身上的毛病、弱點的認識，對自己行為所帶來的負面結果亦是置若罔聞。

追求讚許之心人皆有之。實驗室外，老百姓在日常生活中受社會期望值影響隨時隨地表現出的言行不一，雖形式各異，但追根求源，大都離不開「追求讚許」這樣一個簡單的、普遍存在的社會動機(Crowne & Marlowe, 1980)。在問卷訪談相對狹窄的場景中，受訪者的答案在明處，心理活動在暗處，社會期望值的影響無處不在。這種影響有很強的可預測性，因為它有一個很明確的目的：正面印象管理。只要社會期望值真的令人限制自己的言行，公信力研究便可探尋它作為心理和行為動機是如何在不同人身上表現出有趣的差異，從而對相關理論和現有知識做出貢獻。

第三，社會期望值偏見還從另一個不同的方面扭曲著傳媒公信力的實證研究結果。如果說傳媒公信力的重要性在問卷調查中被高估或誇大了的話，其中一個主要原因是問答雙方都認為與公信力相關的問題**值得**問和答。受訪者配合調查，積極回答問題的行為本身就說明他們對問題的正當性沒有異議。如此看來，一份完成的問卷有兩個部分，一個是問題設計者為防止受訪者猜測研究假設(威脅建構效度)而精心掩蓋起來的真實用意；另一個是問題接受者對問卷有問必答的被動的全盤接受，整個過程隱含著雙方對於「哪些問題是有意義的，那些問題是正當的」的共識(Bourdieu, 1979, p. 124)。

綜上所述，現有研究在測量公眾對傳媒公信力看法時，典型的做法是打造問題，讓它們顯得像一般常識、社會期望值高、毋庸置疑和正當的，然後利用心理啟動機制將答案引向預設的選項，這樣操作得到的研究結果，很容易一面倒地偏向傳媒公信力在受眾心目中佔有十分顯著地位的結論。本文的論點與此恰恰相反，認為前人的結論所依賴的證據有可能是研究設計不當而得到的人造假象。

探討了公信力研究中方法上存在的問題之後，我們現在回到前面提出的三個前提以及對它們的評析。這三個前提是：普世標準、理性判斷以及政治參與先行條件。

「普世標準」前提

公信力研究一般會將研究對象按照所處位置分為三個相互關聯但在概念層面又相互獨立的場域：傳媒公信力；消息源公信力；內容公信力 (Metzer et al., 2003; Sundar, 1998)。然而，雖然場域不同，但不同測量者使用的標準卻如出一轍，這或許就是為什麼使用各式各樣的測量指標得到的結果的相關度比較高 (Roberts, 2010)。

如前所述，研究中被用來替代公信力的形容詞可謂五花八門，但極少有人把它們放在不同的價值體系、傳媒形式、文化和政治制度裡做比較分析 (Johnson & Kaye, 1998)。這裡，我們感興趣的不是諸如「可相信的」、「勝任的」、「客觀的」等詞語是否能準確地描述公信力，而是這些詞對於不同群體和意識形態陣營的成員是否有著不同的含義 (Gaines et al., 2007)。政治立場對立的黨派報紙各自有自己的忠實讀者，他們都認為自己報紙提供的信息是可靠和專業的 (Cohen, 2003)。

研究受眾如何看待傳媒公信力是否可以置意識形態於理論思考之外，這是我們對普世標準提出的第一個質疑。有研究發現，來自八個不同民主國家的受眾都對自己國家的政治制度和主流傳媒的表現表示滿意 (Kim, 2009)。無獨有偶，另外一項研究也發現受眾和自己慣用的傳媒在意識形態上的吻合決定著他們對該傳媒的公信力判斷，吻合度越高，公信力越強 (Oyedemi, 2010)。

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

在《傳媒制度比較》一書中，作者(Hallin & Mancini, 2004)採用了**政治平行**概念來描述傳媒政治光譜和其所在的國家/社會/社區的政治光譜之間近乎完美的交集。左中右各派在傳媒均有各自的代言人或與之平行的聲音。書中闡釋的政治平行概念含五個因素：傳媒公開的政治聯盟；傳媒-黨派的機構聯繫；在政府機構供過職的傳媒工作者；記者的仕途與他們的黨派隸屬關係；受眾的政黨歸屬。五個因素共同固化了黨-媒之間的紐帶，使得傳媒公信力成為了名符其實的「情人眼裡出西施」。有鑑於此，新聞意識形態中立之說實在無法令人信服。

第二個質疑針對的是「信任」在普世標準中的核心地位。信任之所以在公信力研究中備受關注，是因為它與人類交往互動的諸多方面有著直接的關聯，也是培養理論(Gerbner et al., 1980)和社會資本研究的主要內容(Putman, 1995)。傳媒公信力是受眾在信息接受端作出的判斷，由於評判目標是傳媒機構，而信任的本質又是主觀的，所以公信力判斷相當容易受到來自權力方的左右。受眾對傳媒公信力的判斷傳統上是依賴政府和專家的，多數人相信政府和專家發布的信息是可靠的，特別是「當其他信息源有限以及公眾自行發布信息障礙重重的時候」(Metzger & Flanagin, 2015, p. 447)。

我們挑戰「普世標準」前提的立足點主要植根於一個信念，那就是：一個人對任何社會機構及其代言人(如醫生之於醫院、老師之於學校、牧師之於教堂、記者之於傳媒)的完全信任等同與徹底放棄了自己的批判思考能力，同時也顯出對各種機構先天所帶或後天追求的既得利益的無知。就傳媒而言，徹底信任的惡果之一，是公眾對紛雜的政治事件的理解只能聽憑信息控制者的擺佈，這與民主社會中強調的公民理性意識原則的想法是相左的(Popkin, 1994)。

其實，早期的研究已經發現人們對傳媒是否具有公信力的看法與政治制度的威權性成反比，這一發現在近期的研究中也得到了驗證。具體來說，與民主社會的受眾相比，生活在集權體制的受眾對傳媒持有更多戒心，主要表現在他們對新聞及新聞機構更多挑剔和評頭論足，對信息中的微妙細節更加關注以及在社會化過程養成的更持久的尋找信息背後弦外之音的習慣(Oates, 2006)。學者們在16個非洲國家進行了一項傳媒公信力調查，數據分析結果顯示對官方傳媒的正面評

價主要來自政治頭腦複雜度低，政治態度保守以及在人口中佔多數的擁護現任當權者的人 (Moehler & Singh, 2011)。

西方也不例外，研究發現對傳媒日常運作有深入了解且在新聞解讀過程中認知投入高的受眾對傳媒的不信任度也較高 (Gunther, 1992; Kioussis, 2001)。從效果上看，這在一個更高層次上反映出了「信息-頭腦」的關係和一種更複雜的媒介素養形式。正如 Luhmann (1996) 貼切地指出的那樣：「我們十分了解大眾媒體，以至於我們無法信任這些信息源，我們的應對之道是質疑其中有操控，但我們的質疑最終不會產生任何有意義的結果，因為人們從大眾媒體獲得的知識好像自發般地融合在一起，自行進入一個自我強化的結構中」(p. 1)。

雖然具體緣由不詳，但在整個西方民主社會裡，受眾心目中的傳媒公信力近年來一直處於穩步下滑的狀態。最近一個研究報告展示出幾組對比，結果頗耐人尋味 (Splichal & Dahlgren, 2016)：1979年超過半數的美國受訪者對報紙表示「絕對信任」，但這個數字到了2007年掉到了22%以下。同年，只有不到五分之一的英國受訪者表示仍然信任傳媒。而在德國的從業人員信任度排序中，傳媒工作者排在第29位，緊隨其後的是地產代理、保險銷售員和政客。

換一個角度，我們或許可以從正面來看傳媒公信力流失現象。研究發現政府管理體制的改進以及對人權的尊重均與傳媒自由度成正相關 (Soon & Tan, 2016)。雖然二者與傳媒公信力並無直接關係，但研究者在此基礎上提出了一個「傳媒自由-傳媒公信力」悖論 (Soon & Tan, 2016)，即傳媒自由是信息多元的先決條件，但卻不是公眾信任傳媒的主要原因，對於深諳傳媒偏見的人來說，多數情況下，人們看到的傳媒「公信力赤字」其實完全在乎意料之中 (George, 2007, p. 898)。

對傳媒的信任度到底應該如何拿捏沒有一個公認的尺度，而且公認的尺度也不一定是可慾或渴求的 (Coleman, 2012)。在任何時候對任何傳媒都保持「存疑式求知」是一種健康的態度，有利於社會的健全發展和有效地遏制當權者濫權 (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010, p. 26)。只要把完全信任從其在公信力研究中至高無上的寶座上拉下來，清醒的受眾就可以利用公信力的特點，將其作為一個有效的緩衝工具與權力保持距離。

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

由此可見，學術界如果將傳媒公信力研究和理論建構的視線更集中於發生在受眾端的事情，更清晰地引導學者們去發現受眾信任和傳媒社會問責之間的最優搭配，或者發現社會契約雙方任意一方的違規行為，相關的理論成果或許會更有洞見。

「理性判斷」前提

作為傳媒自我標榜的核心價值之一的公信力，在業界、立法界、公關界以及學界一直備受尊重。由於定義社會規範是一種特權，而掌握這個權力的人通常帶有機構背景，所以公信力的共享含義是跨越機構的，且隨著時間的推移基本保持不變。

但在各種不同機構對傳媒公信力的齊聲頌揚中幾乎聽不到普通百姓的聲音。政治傳播研究領域有個盡人皆知的老生常談，那就是傳統意義上的信息製造者基本上都是帶有機構動機的專職從業人員，他們慣用的修辭表達方式較為正式，結構嚴謹，邏輯性強，最終是服務於機構利益的。另一方面，形形色色的信息接收者大都偏向自我導向，信息處理方式是零散和業餘的。故此，機構的本質決定了其對公信力的闡釋必然是理性的。

與此形成鮮明對比的是一般受眾，他們不具備專業人士的訓練、工具和資源，因此不能對信息公信力做出評判(如核實事實、背景調查等)，同樣也沒有足夠的知識對信息源的公信力做出評判(如那些常被傳媒引用或邀請對時事發表看法的權威人士和專家是否符合資格以及他們的偏見是什麼等)，而且大部分人亦沒有動力以公信力為標準對各種信息平台或機構進行排序後再選擇使用哪個，不使用哪個(Tsfati & Cappella, 2005)。

具體實踐中，多數人出於無奈只好依賴經驗法則(又稱「拇指規則」，rule of thumb)或捷徑對傳媒做出判斷和選擇，此類經驗法則可以是第三者效應，也可以是敵意媒體感知效應(Tsfati & Cohen, 2013)。有些經驗法則的非理性特點可一目了然，有些則相當隱蔽和微妙，它們之間在概念化層面的區別仍有待傳播學者深入的了解和闡釋。在一項調查中，研究者在十個內容類別中找出18組人們用以評估傳媒公信

力的啟發性提示 (Fogg et al., 2003)。半數以上的提示都和非理性沾邊 (如作者的聲譽、寫作語氣等)。尤其有趣的是心理學中自我確認概念在這個過程中表現出的啟發力量，它強調的是信息—固有信念的高度吻合與公信力評估之間的顯著正相關。「如果信息與人們現有觀念相悖，那麼無論該信息的論據多麼充分、研究多麼詳盡、全面以及引用多麼得體」，人們都會摒棄它或對信息的可信性大打折扣 (Metzger & Flanagin, 2015, p. 453)。

試看下面幾個例子，人們會根據記者的性別、年齡或種族給出不同的公信力評估，這一點已為學者們熟知 (Balon et al., 1978; Weibel et al., 2008)。人們會認為聲音與圖像比文字更具公信力 (Kioussis, 2001)。新聞報導是否可信取決於播音員的打扮和裝束 (Newhagen & Nass, 1989)。與此相關，研究發現傳媒培養受眾的信任和忠誠度時，採用的一個屢試不爽的法寶是打造傳媒人的人格魅力並使受眾對其產生情感依附 (Guo et al., 2006)。由此而建構的準社會關係可以在受眾心理層面引發一個強大的雙重敬仰 (double deference) 現象，即對一個傳媒人或傳媒的好感和信奉 (第一重敬仰)，會愛屋及烏般地轉移到對該人或傳媒所說的一切話的信任 (第二重敬仰) (Bloom, 2012; Cohen, 2003)。

傳媒公信力非理性的評估無處不在，但具諷刺意義的是，有時這種評估卻讓公信力較差的傳媒從中獲利。具體有三方面：**特定事件**，報導意識形態爭議性極小的新聞事件 (如人類登上火星等科學發現) 可以令官方審查最嚴的傳媒變成人們最相信的傳媒；**特定地區**，當公信力很低的傳媒在報導發生在遙遠地區的新聞時，受眾會將批判性解讀暫時擱置，選擇信任該新聞，新聞發生的地理位置越遠，對傳媒報導的質疑越小 (Guo, 2011)；**特定平台**，受眾會情不自禁地向另類傳媒靠攏 (如社交媒體或匿名信息平台)，希望能在那裡找到主流官方傳媒企圖封殺或掩蓋的事件「真相」，儘管這些另類傳媒本身毫無公信力可言。

「政治參與先行條件」前提

對政治參與過於沉迷的學者視其為民主社會公民概念的一個神聖組成部分，他們特別看重以「一人一票」為典型的公民義務的社會效用，有的甚至認為將選票投給一個壞的候選人(或兩害取其輕)也勝過完全不投票。參與行為的正面效果會給政治傳播研究人員帶來莫名的亢奮，但他們卻往往忽略了普通百姓以不參與的形式對體制進行被動抵抗的力量(Gitlin, 1978)。

傳統的分析模型中，對政治參與在行為層面的維度(如投票、抗議、遊行等)，最常見的處理方法是將它們擺放在模型最後作為終極因變量，前因則是一連串觀念和態度變量。此類模型符合刻板的社會規範，整個影響鏈囊括了一個人的先天和後天屬性，按先後順序排列，這些屬性含有人口學指標、政治興趣、傳媒接觸、對具體傳媒內容的關注、獲取的信息、學到的知識、形成的態度、期望的功效、預期的行為意圖等。受眾對傳媒公信力的感知在整個過程中是不言而喻的，儘管這點在過往的經驗研究中幾乎從來沒有得到過證實(Fisher, 2016)。

無論信息還是知識均不是人們採取行動參與政治的必要前提，對此，社會運動積極分子和政治活動家們並不陌生。如果說信息和知識有什麼作用的話，它們更可能是參與的障礙。例如，在2003年7月1號在香港發生的大規模反對《基本法》第23條(反顛覆)立法的示威遊行中，絕大多數走上街頭的抗議者完全不了解23條的具體內容，對《基本法》也一無所知(陳韜文，2004)。這就說明抗議者頭腦深處存有對共產主義意識形態的普遍反感和敵意，一旦察覺到自己的利益有可能受到侵犯，反共意識便不失時機地浮現出來，以各種形式達到洩憤的目的。

究其所述，心理學裡的「純粹接觸假設」和「生動度假設」對受眾多少帶有貶損之意，二者均有證據表明讓人們對任何事物產生好感或正面態度無需多勞，只要令其反覆接觸相關信息或將信息打造成有趣和具吸引力即可。很明顯，研究者如果願意視信息生產端公信力的缺失為常態，信息消費端人們的輕信為常規，並對其進行深入研究探索，那麼政治參與分析模型會變得更加完整，更有深度。

從下文展示的研究個案可以看出，多數人從來沒有接到過對傳媒公信力看法的正式提問。一旦被問及，他們的回答通常反映出不確定、遲疑和不系統。他們對公信力的定義與機構的定義不盡相同，也表示公信力概念對他們完全不重要，與個人日常傳媒使用習慣亦不搭界。

研究個案：香港的受眾

研究背景

香港本地的報紙在讀者心目中素來就有著雙重印象。一方面，讓港人引以為傲的是本地報紙的觀點多元、編輯方針自主以及表達自由，這些特點和內地同業形成了鮮明的對比。另一方面，一些報紙頻繁違背專業道德準則的做法（如對煽情報導的放任；對個人隱私的肆意侵犯；對政治壓力的屈從等）（黃天賜，2013）又使得很多新聞消費者心懷不滿。

兩個印象之間的張力不但像瘟疫般地困擾著本地傳媒，而且長期以來導致了社區各派間的爭執不休、讀者分化、立法會被動的應對，以及學界的憂心忡忡。處在問題核心的正是傳媒公信力。

學界對傳媒公信力的意義有明顯的共識，而這種共識在業界的社會實踐中可以說完全不存在。縱觀坊間政治立場針鋒相對的報紙各執一詞，寸土不讓的情形，即使是「如實報導新聞」這樣最簡單的公信力定義都無法讓各方達成共識。處於政治光譜兩端敵對陣營的報紙就何為事實（或什麼報導角度）以及哪些事實應該放大，哪些應該大事化小，哪些屬於小事化無等問題從來都糾纏不清（李少南，2015）。

遍佈在香港大街小巷的報攤上，人們隨處可以看到各種各樣的觀點，這種看得見的多元掩蓋了看不見的壟斷。香港的紙媒非但與傳統自由主義意義上的意見集市相去甚遠，且長期以來由三份大眾報主導，分別是：《東方日報》、《太陽報》（2016年4月停刊）和《蘋果日報》以及它們的互聯網版和附屬的免費子報。這幾份以取悅大眾為己任的報紙在反共意識和偏重報導本地新聞方面頗具共性，它們在社交傳媒日益普及的浪潮衝擊下能夠得以倖存，有幾個主要原因：辦報歷史、與讀者意識形態的契合、本地新聞為報導重點以及公然的煽情（黃煜

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

等，2010)。幾個因素合在一起帶來的利益彌補了三份報紙在公信力方面的缺失(參閱圖一)。

圖一 香港主要商業報紙的政治光譜



資料來源：張讚國、劉娜(2016，整理自李少南〔2015〕、蘇鑰機〔2012〕、黃天賜〔2013〕)

註：粗體字的報紙為免費報；《虎報》和《南華早報》為英文報紙；《新報》於2015年7月12日突然停刊

在意識形態量表的另一端，建制報有著公開黨派背景，它們的生存之道來源於國家的財政補貼，但讀者甚微。然而，研究發現即便是上述的三家大眾報也早已開始實行自我審查，旨在進入內地市場從而獲得豐厚的廣告收入(Fung, 2007)。

雖然本地報紙政治取向差異很大，但它們在公眾心目中公信力排序等級上的名次卻相當穩定(蘇鑰機，2012；黃煜等，2010)。以此觀察為基礎，在移除了由研究方法不當而帶來的人造結果的前提下，學者們可以通過精心設計的問題從不同報紙訂閱者口中引出有趣的回答，並可以了解傳媒公信力在人們頭腦中是否真的佔有一席之地。

深度訪談：公信力作為休眠感知

我們創造了一個詞叫**休眠感知**，用它來描述傳媒公信力在人們心目中可能存在的兩種狀態，一種是把公信力看作傳媒表現最低門檻，大致等同於行醫執照，也就是說所有的傳媒均有之，另一種是把公信力看作新聞報導可望而不可及的最高規範目標。

不管兩者中的哪一種，公信力均存在於意識之下，在受眾腦中是處於休眠或睡眠狀態的，不大可能被人從大腦的文件櫃中隨時抽取，用來解釋個人的傳媒選擇或內容偏愛。這種沉寂無聲的存在只有通過激活才能進入意識，也就是說，人們需要某種外界的啟發提示來喚醒沉睡在認知結構深處的公信力概念。由於公信力概念攜帶著道德和公民義務的雙重壓力，所以一經進入意識表層，便主導著人們隨後對傳媒表現的評估。需要指出的是，休眠感知與睡眠效應 (sleeper effect) 的概念內涵大不相同，後者指的是隨著時間的推移，人們腦中的某個概念不斷得到強化的過程 (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949)。

不難想像，傳媒公信力在人們心目中的相對重要性在概念激活前和激活後是有顯著不同的，由此引發的連鎖反應牽扯到以下幾個因素：一、人們最經常使用的傳媒或信息平台；二、傳媒使用的動機與驅動；三、來自外界或周邊環境的壓力；四、受眾個人認知中社區內最具公信力的傳媒；五、受眾認為最具公信力的傳媒與其本人最常使用的傳媒之差異。

為了探尋公信力休眠感知與傳媒使用習慣之間是否有關係，是什麼樣的關係，我們的研究團隊於2014年下半年進行了一項以深入訪談為主的田野調查，主要目的不是回應所有上述提出的問題，也不是用實證的方法驗證全部的對立假設，而是追蹤一個心理過程的移動軌跡，從(1) **休眠狀**，即公信力概念處在意識之外；到(2) **認知不協調**，即個人並不閱讀自己認為最具公信力的報紙；進一步到(3) **合理化**，即讀者想盡辦法為自己的傳媒選擇辯護，試圖化解認知不協調。

我們請了五個廣東話是母語的香港本地大學新聞系學生幫忙做訪談，並對她們進行了系統的培訓。我們用滾雪球的方式找到了24個符合我們人口學指標要求的本地居民作為受訪者。按照要求，每個學生至少要訪談兩個受訪者，在得到受訪者同意之後對訪談全程錄音，並在訪談結束後將談話錄音抄錄成文字。每個訪談大約為時30分鐘。我們付給每個受訪者港幣80元以表謝意。

訪談的開始部分是個鋪墊，主要目的是營造訪員和受訪者的融洽關係，這期間，訪員的職責是在不透露研究假設的情況下向受訪者簡短地介紹研究項目。其實，為了防止研究假設猜測效應 (Shimp et al., 1991)，

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

連訪員自己也不知道研究假設是什麼。訪談的第二部分共有17個問題，含傳媒使用習慣、對社會熱點議題的意見、對不同傳媒的態度，以及對傳媒公信力的看法。人口學信息是在最後也就是第三部分收取的。

表面上看，面訪的形式不是很正規，那是我們為了讓受訪者放鬆而刻意設計的。實際上，對談的結構有嚴格的規定，所有受訪者接受的問題都是完全一樣的，所有問題的順序都是完全一致的，所有程序上的規則都是一絲不苟地遵守的，唯一的特例是當受訪者對某個開放問題的回答過於簡短的時候，訪員會隨時追問。我們設計問卷時在問題次序上下了功夫，確保在訪問進行到一半，傳媒公信力概念第一次出現之前，沒有任何一個受訪者收到任何形式的與傳媒公信力有關的提示和啟發。

表一展現的是24位受訪者在四個人口學指標上的分佈：性別、年齡、個人月收入以及受教育程度。受訪者的年齡要麼小於等於25歲，要麼大於等於40歲，製造這個年齡差的目的是盡量擴大差異。整體上看，大約一半的受訪者是女性，40歲以上，月薪港幣30,000以上，具有大學文憑。

表一 受訪者人口學指標分佈

編號	性別 (女 = 13人)	年齡 (<25 = 11人)	收入 (<\$30,000 = 15人)	教育程度 (≤本科 = 11人)
1	女	<25	<30,000	≥本科
2	女	<25	<30,000	≥本科
3	女	<25	<30,000	≥本科
4	女	<25	<30,000	<本科
5	男	>40	>30,000	<本科
6	男	>40	<30,000	<本科
7	女	>40	<30,000	<本科
8	女	<25	<30,000	<本科
9	女	>40	<30,000	<本科
10	男	<25	<30,000	<本科
11	男	>40	>30,000	≥本科
12	女	<25	<30,000	≥本科
13	女	<25	<30,000	≥本科
14	女	<25	<30,000	≥本科
15	女	<25	<30,000	≥本科
16	女	<25	<30,000	<本科
17	女	>40	>30,000	<本科
18	男	>40	<30,000	<本科
19	男	>40	>30,000	≥本科
20	男	>40	>30,000	≥本科
21	男	>40	>30,000	<本科
22	男	>40	>30,000	≥本科
23	男	>40	>30,000	≥本科
24	男	>40	>30,000	≥本科

訪談開始時，訪員簡單向受訪者介紹研究目的，告訴他們這是一個傳媒使用調查項目，隨後的兩條問題是關於傳媒的使用頻率，一條問的是新聞內容，另一條是他們最頻繁使用哪個傳媒平台獲取信息。接著，訪員讓受訪者列出三個使用該傳媒平台的最主要的原因。絕大多數受訪者慣常閱讀大眾報或免費報，收看TVB（香港收視率最高的電視台）以及上網看新聞。只有一個受訪者是坊間被譽為最具公信力的《明報》的固定讀者。

沒有一個受訪者在談到傳媒使用三個主要原因時提及公信力以及任何一個與之相關的同義詞，這和我們預期相符。我們認為出現這種情況，至少部分原因是受訪者沒有得到相關提示，他們完全不知道前面這些問題是傳媒公信力研究項目的組成部分，直到訪談的後半部分他們才首次聽到公信力一詞。受訪者提示後與提示前的反應會出現矛盾，比較兩種反應可以發現由它們誘發的「後此謬誤」或事後合理化現象（post hoc rationalization）以及心理防衛機制。

表二總結了24位受訪者自述的決定其傳媒選擇最重要的三個理由。我們將它們歸為三類：個人原因、社會原因、技術原因。受訪者為這三個原因提供的所有內容均與傳媒公信力無關。**個人原因**有七個具共性的選擇動機。其中，「觀點與本人相符」一條使人不免聯想起選擇性接觸概念，它是傳媒效果研究「有限效果論」時代「兩級傳播」理論的核心影響機制。「工作/生意需要」背後是功利考慮，「方便」和「日常生活的一部分」也在此類。「習慣/熟悉」反映出個人內心深處依賴慣性，躲避創新和冒險的趨向，這種不願跨出舒適區的心理也解釋了人們為什麼那麼容易對用慣的傳媒「有感情」。相比之下，「娛樂需求」暴露出的是逃避現實心態。

社會原因的動機主要源於外部環境的壓力。「家人訂閱」意指訂閱決定是由其他家庭成員作出的，自己只是甘願接受這個決定而已。同樣，「很多人讀這份報紙」以及「接觸這份報紙的新聞可以增加談話資料」體現出沉默的螺旋式的從眾心態，這些反應或多或少是偏負面的。受訪者回答中唯一可以被視為正面動機的是「與他人分享」，大致意思是希望個人的傳媒使用習慣能夠成為全家人共享的傳媒體驗的一部分，通過一起參與（如看電視）或事後一起討論的方式拉近家庭成員之

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

間的關係。從某種意義上說，這個過程與Carey (1989)的傳播儀式觀相近，他重新定義了傳媒使用，指出讀報的主要目的是建立與其他讀報人類似宗教群體般的團契關係。

技術原因層面，新媒體的形式和內容正在飛速地取代個人和社會力量，決定著人們的使用習慣，這一點並不令人吃驚。大多數受訪者都提到了列在表二「技術原因」欄下的幾乎所有的傳媒使用原因。從本質上說，新媒體的核心集中在圖像素質的提高，傳送速度的加快，多媒體共存的順暢和便攜性的改進。實際上，新媒體已經將內容和內容的公信力逐漸推向邊緣，這個趨勢既不可抗拒亦無法逆轉。對此，麥克盧漢的門徒或許頗感欣慰，因為它似乎又一次證實了媒體就是信息的論點。

表二 受訪者選擇具體傳媒的三個最主要的原因

個人原因	社會原因	技術原因
• 觀點與本人相符	• 家庭訂閱	• 文字、圖像、視頻三合一
• 工作/生意需要	• 免費/便宜	• 方便攜帶
• 習慣/熟悉	• 與他人分享	• 速度快
• 娛樂需要	• 很多人讀這份報紙	• 不停更新
• 有感情	• 談話資料	• 可重複閱讀
• 方便		• 高像素
• 日常生活的一部分 (如早飯的時候看報紙；開車的時候聽廣播)		• 沒有墨跡

總結起來，在談及傳媒選擇的動力和標準時，沒有一個受訪者提到公信力。個人、社會和技術層面的原因頗有重疊。假設受訪者講的都是實話(我們沒有理由認為他們會講假話)，那麼很明顯，公信力和新聞消費之間的關係幾近於零。驅使人們使用新聞主要是個人功利動力，外部社會壓力和不斷更新的媒體技術。只有被問到如何改進「個人最經常使用的傳媒」時，受訪者的回答才開始觸及到公信力。在24個受訪者中，有四人的觀點一致，認為應該減少廣告，五人對新聞的文字水平表示憂慮，三人擔心煽情和標題新聞氾濫。

公信力作為後此謬誤（事後合理化）

訪談進行到一半的時候，訪員開始第一次把公信力概念引入對話，先是讓他們自己定義公信力，然後請他們說出香港哪家報紙最具公信力。有趣的是，對公信力定義的問題讓大約一半的受訪者感到措手不及，一時語塞，經過較長時間的思考才說出自己不大確定公信力的準確含義以及如何去定義這個概念。他們似乎擔心自己的定義與一個想像中的標準答案有出入。

整體來看，受訪者對公信力的定義大多是圍繞著基於信任的常規標準展開的，但也有特例。有人對公信力的理解集中在傳媒日常報導中「缺失的東西」；有人認為傳媒公信力是要通過政府加強制定法律法規，限制煽情和侵犯隱私情形的氾濫來實現的；還有人在定義公信力時強調新聞要增加透明度，弱化黨派隸屬關係，更多為普通百姓而不是權力機構和大公司說話。例如其中一個受訪者（周先生，42歲，大學文憑）說：

傳媒公信力……其實我不知道用什麼具體的形容詞定義。我覺得公信力就是傳媒做自己該做的事情，替老百姓說話，講真話，要有權威。否則，沒人會相信傳媒。

（廣東話原文：傳媒公信力……我都唔知點講，其實我諗唔到有咩 Concrete 既形容詞去講，係佢地應該做嘅野，係為市民講出心聲，真實 d 啦，有冇咁既 authority 去令社會上既人去相信。）

另一位受訪者，梁女士，（35歲，高中文憑）表達的觀點有所不同：

我最反感的就是報紙誇大其詞，而且他們一貫如此。這樣報導新聞是錯誤的，會誤導大眾。所以在我看來傳媒公信力有哪點做得不好呢，就是現在報導一面倒，為攻擊而攻擊，這一點傳媒要好好檢討。言論自由要自己去珍惜。

（廣東話原文：我最憎就係咁報章講野太過誇大，而佢哋不鑒如此，咁樣報導新聞唔啱，會誤導大眾。咁所以我覺得傳媒公信力呢，如果係講得唔好呢，我諗而家個社會就係太過一面化囉，就

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

為左攻擊而攻擊，所以變左呢樣野係要傳媒自己檢討。言論自由係要自己去珍惜嘅。)

儘管周先生的回答比梁女士略為正面，但兩人的第一反應基本上代表了其餘受訪者在這個問題上的意見，答案都局限在了狹窄的判斷標準上。受訪者普遍認為傳媒應該按照社會期望行事，而且受眾有能力依靠常識輕而易舉地識破傳媒玩弄的把戲。

為了進一步深入探究受眾心目中的公信力問題，我們在訪談中安插了一個公信力參照標杆：《明報》。有著六十多年歷史的《明報》素以編輯方針獨立、報導全面準確、社論犀利著稱。多年來，它對本地和內地重大政治經濟事件的深入調查報導更使其在坊間眾口皆碑。「公信第一」四個大字一直印在報頭醒目位置，在過去的幾十年裡，這個報紙自我宣稱的說法從未遇到嚴肅的挑戰。

雖然24個受訪者中只有一個是《明報》的固定讀者，但有22人認為《明報》當之無愧是本地唯一最具公信力的報紙或最具公信力的兩份報紙之一。認為《明報》公信力高但並不閱讀《明報》，這兩者間的反向差本是預料之內的，我們所不清楚的是受訪者當著訪員會用什麼方法消除由此帶來的心理不協調。

為什麼認為《明報》公信力高然而卻不讀《明報》，這個問題讓所有的受訪者始料未及。由於沒有時間細想和組織思緒，受訪者們必須在很短的時間內啟動心理防衛機制，我們看到最多的就是社會心理學講的後此謬誤或事後合理化(Haidt, 2012; Hawkins & Hastie, 1990)，也就是日常生活中人們常說的「事後諸葛亮」或「馬後砲」。

受訪者對先給出選擇決定後提供理由的反應基本上分成兩個主要修辭建構方向：一個向內找選擇的理由和責任（「我的決定」），一個向外找周邊因素（「不是我的決定」）。沒有受訪者對自己的選擇表示愧疚，沒有人認為公信力閱讀差異是個問題，更沒有人表示要將「我慣常讀的報紙」換成《明報》(表三)。

表三比較了「我的報紙」和《明報》，細讀表三，後此謬誤現象變得更加明顯，「馬後砲」的論點更具說服力。「我的決定」一欄是受訪者為自己選擇慣常讀的報紙提供的理由，包括：**不可替代**——因為人們對

受眾心目中的傳媒公信力：研究評析

某份報紙已經產生了感情（「兩天看不到這份報紙，我就會想得難受」）；**功利和功能**（「這份報紙和我的工作密切相關」）；**熟悉和了解**（「我非常熟悉報紙的版面和內容，完全不用到處尋找想看的消息在哪裡」）。看來，過去的研究發現，傳媒公信力得分偏低因為是人們不熟悉該傳媒，是不無道理的（Rimmer & Weaver, 1987）。

相反，「不是我的決定」一欄下面的話反映出不選《明報》是有其必然性的，因為「訂什麼報不由我決定」；「《明報》比我那份報要貴」；「我那份報紙和《明報》沒有很大區別」；「《明報》這幾年一直在走下坡路」等等。這裡面有些話與受訪者早些時候把《明報》評為最具公信力報紙時所講的是自相矛盾的，說明他們為捍衛自己的選擇不惜對《明報》吹毛求疵，雞蛋裡挑骨頭。一個典型的例子就是稱《明報》已經喪失它的專業準則，它的批判意識和獨立的編輯方針已經在立場上蛻化成擁護主流價值觀以及在內容上討好市場的低級趣味。

表三 受訪者對「為什麼你認為《明報》公信力最高，而卻不讀《明報》呢？」的回答

我讀的報紙 vs.《明報》：後此謬誤（馬後砲）	
我的決定	不是我的決定
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 時間久了，看慣了• 我的工作需要我讀這份報• 我喜歡這份報紙的某個版面、專欄、作家或排版• 我有個應用程序，匯總了當天所有新聞• 我沒有評價，因為我從來不讀《明報》• 我讀報不光是看新聞	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 報紙是家人訂的• 我那份報紙便宜/免費• 總體來看，《明報》和我讀的那份報紙沒什麼本質區別• 《明報》逐漸失去了它的獨立和批判立場，變得越來越支持建制• 我的家人、朋友還是很多其他人都讀我那份報紙• 沒有十全十美的報紙

「我的決定」和「不是我的決定」兩類回答並不是相互排斥的，而且同一個受訪者為了消滅內心的認知不協調會同時給出兩類回答。在一定程度上，我們可以視其為一個表象，是人們心理深處有意無意地捍衛自己在諸如選擇傳媒等問題上的獨立性，這點和使用與滿足理論的主要論據是吻合的（Katz et al., 1973）。

綜上所述，我們的訪談揭示出，公信力概念一旦被激活便在受訪者腦中佔據主導地位，令他們的回答朝著規範內容偏移。無論是對公

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

信力的定義還是對改進傳媒公信力的建議，受訪者們的回答無大差異，均指向傳媒應該如何做，而不是傳媒實際是怎樣做的。另一個顯而易見的規律是，多數受訪者拒絕承認他們慣用的傳媒在任何一個方面與《明報》相比處於劣勢。

結論與討論

本文開篇提出一個論點，認為傳播學對受眾心目中的傳媒公信力問題的研究在操作化過程應該納入受訪者未經提示的感知與看法。具體來說，我們對過往公信力研究的三個未經挑戰的前提提出異議：一、公信力的普世含義；二、受眾對傳媒公信力的理性評判；三、傳媒公信力是政治參與的前因。

我們的分析發現一旦公眾因素進入考量視野，一些普遍為人接受的關於傳媒公信力重要性和不可或缺的前提便面臨崩潰之危，我們的論點為過往研究中許多不顯著的結果，特別是公信力感知和傳媒使用之間的負相關，提供了合理的解釋。

深度訪談的結果驗證了公信力研究中存在的幾個主要問題，同時也發現了矛盾和疑點。其中，最具說服力的證據來自受訪者對公信力概念的反應，從中可以看出傳媒公信力在決定人們信息平台和內容選擇方面起到的作用充其量是輔助性和邊緣的。由於我們刻意將公信力概念以及它的變異詞和同義詞置於受訪者的意識之外，保持在休眠狀態，並且採用了開放式問題，所以成功地移除了傳統研究在方法上人為製造的測量結果的弊端。正如我們預測的那樣，「公信力」或任何與其相關的詞語均未出現在受訪者提出的三個最主要的選擇傳媒的原因之中。

我們的發現與之前的一項研究觀察不謀而合，即「獲取有關這個世界準確和客觀的信息只能是人們觀看新聞的眾多動機之一」(Tsfati & Capella, 2005, p. 254)。撇開新聞的「準確性」和「客觀性」二詞模稜兩可的含義以及相關的爭論，本文主要關注的是受眾對傳媒公信力的看法，在多大程度上引導著他們的傳媒使用和對傳媒的評價，以及公信力是否能在與其他傳媒使用動機較量過程中勝出。

使問題變得更加複雜的是，有學者懷疑個人在判斷公信力時可能缺乏一致性，而這恰恰因為公信力判斷是與其他動機鬥爭的結果，是做決定者主客觀規範鬥爭的結果。「公信力主觀評判純屬個人決定，依賴的是個人判斷、感知和傾向，缺少清晰表達出來的邏輯」，且因人而異 (Kagan, 2003, p. 374)。我們的論點和個案研究得出的結論與這種懷疑正好相反。人與人之間在公信力判斷問題上並沒有表現出任何飄忽不定，他們的判斷受到來自內部的心理傾向和外部的道德壓力之影響，被調教的規規矩矩，做出的決定穩定持久，具有高度的可預測性。

對於一般人「凡事都有解釋」的現象，心理學有很多不同的理論，但這些理論在一點上是共通的，即人們天生就有在紛亂世界中尋找規律和解釋的需求，且以因果關係為最佳。這種看法的前提假設是人們不但知道自己需要什麼，而且還積極努力尋找滿足自己需求的方法。上文提到的使用與滿足理論將人們先天和後天屬性匯集在一起作為自變量，用其來解釋傳媒選擇和使用。按照這個理論的說法，不同的社會和心理需求基本都有可能在傳媒使用中得到滿足。比如，Wenner (1985) 在一項研究中識別出十幾種不同的、特點鮮明的傳媒使用動機，包括：捍衛自尊、自我表達、減壓、逃避現實、消磨時間、情緒控制等。

傳媒公信力在這個複雜的需求網中有一個特殊的位置。人們一聽到這個詞，立刻就會感到某種道德壓力，不得不承認它的重要性，甚至被迫壓抑或隱藏其他佔據主導地位的需求。這正是我們在訪談中觀察到的。受訪者的回答表現出某種「人格分裂」，他們對自己使用傳媒真實情況（公信力概念未被激活）與他們認為傳媒應該如何表現（公信力概念激活後）的說法截然不同，由此而產生的表裡不一令人不快，所以受訪者啟動了各種修辭手法（如「我經常閱讀的那份報紙，公信力也很高」等）為自己的行為進行辯解，將其合理化。

受訪者在回答通常使用什麼傳媒，為什麼使用那個傳媒問題時，沒有一個人提到對該傳媒的信任是理由之一。雖然每個人都尊重《明報》並且認為它是本港最具公信力的報紙，但只有一個受訪者是《明報》的忠實讀者，這清晰地表明日常生活中，人們讀報、聽廣播、看電視的決定與公信力完全無關。換個角度來看，人們並不是故意選擇或依

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

賴他們不信任的傳媒，而是選擇傳媒行為在先，(經提示或啟發的)公信力評估在後，如果人們有意願作出評估的話。

關於信任，我們的論點是對傳媒完全沒有質疑的人，在任何社會裡都很容易成為當權者操控的獵物。同樣，只要傳媒公信力的定義權和解釋權掌握在政治權力的手中，老百姓在公信力含義和實施方面的共識也是不利於社會健康發展的。除此之外，Luhmann (1996) 認為大眾傳媒是個封閉的信息系統，從業人員日復一日地按照自己設定的遊戲規則重複著操作常規。內容生產過程中這種自我指涉的本質使得傳媒社會現實的建構得以持久的延續。「大眾傳媒好像在搭建公信力的同時也在為自身的公信力拆台。它們「解構」自己，在日常運行中不斷地再造敘事話語和行事話語之間一成不變的矛盾」¹ (Luhmann, 1996, p. 39)。

對訪談材料的分析結果顯示，受訪者只能採取官方或至少是官方認可的傳媒公信力的維度和指標來判斷報紙的表現，包括他們自己習慣閱讀的報紙。正如 Marcuse (1964) 在他影響深遠的《單向度的人》一書中所描述的那樣，社會制度的權力的作用要麼是排除異己的話語和獨立思考，要麼是去掉此類話語的鋒芒，將它們納入可以被權力接受的話語體系中去。

同樣，以信息多元為基礎、傳媒公信力為前提的公民參政模型亦有它的盲點，既表現在大事上，如選舉中勝出的政客當政之後露出戰爭販子或保護主義煽動者的原形，也表現在諸如讀報這樣的小事上。香港右派和左派的報紙在報導重大政治事件時通常會站在對立面，偶爾也可以成功地鼓動各自的追隨者走上街頭，站在馬路兩邊搖旗吶喊、揮拳對峙。雙方如同照鏡子一般，均認為自己使用的傳媒是真實可信的。

應該說一個社區擁有多元的意見、廣闊的公民參政社會空間是一個值得慶幸的事情，但如果傳媒說什麼公眾就做什麼，二者之間的關係過於密切則需謹慎看待。講得直白一點，在民主進程中，無論是精英階層還是普羅大眾都不應該被賦予最終話語的權利。

然而，儘管傳媒公信力遭到越來越多的批評和指責，很多人仍然認為傳媒公信力的建構、改進和評判主要是傳媒機構的事。我們認為

受眾感知研究中，學者若將關注點放到影響受眾評判傳媒公信力的障礙因素上，可能更有利於理論建構。比如，雖然公眾對傳媒公信力涵蓋的具體元素，包括準確、全面、勝任、誠信和公平等等評分很高，但幾乎沒人真正具有驗證這些元素的資源、能力和意願。不幸的是，最簡單可行的一個驗證法對很多人來說可能也是最勞神的，那就是對照不同的、特別是觀點相悖的報導，從而作出分析。就香港目前的政治語境而言，即使是對政治頭腦複雜度極高的人，用比較不同信息源的方式來探尋新聞真相也是一件奢侈的事情。

我們的個案研究核實了我們最初的想法，那就是新聞消費行為有自己內在的規則和規律，它們得以延續是因為驅使人們對傳媒作出選擇的是一些難以控制的實用、功利、和逃避現實的動機，這就解釋了為什麼人們最喜歡的傳媒不是他們認為最具公信力的傳媒。這裡，研究者面臨的不是簡單的刺激-反應、編碼-解碼、行為-回應之類的二元關係，也超越了人們在自己能力範圍內可以採取什麼方法來克服或規避傳媒影響的問題。用傳媒專業主義各種具體表現定義公信力雖然頗為常見，但與之相比，意識形態一致性明顯在解釋信息與理智的關係上略勝一籌。

如果我們視機構對現實的符號建構為一種特殊形式的社會力量，那麼整個公信力話語就變得沒有修辭者自稱的那麼具有學術魅力。在權力-資源連續量表的一端，說出來的只不過是個虛假的話語外表，掩飾著更真實但同時也更隱秘的沒說出來的潛台詞（如治理與控制、新聞與盈利、學術發表與晉級升等）。如果公信力概念可以被一些居心叵測的人用來將自己的地位和利潤合理化，那麼它在公眾腦中的休眠狀態和有識之士對其不買賬也許不完全是一件壞事。

註釋

- 1 在新聞和傳媒公信力領域，敘事話語可以狹義地理解為「硬新聞」，而行事話語包括「特寫」和「社評」，前者簡單描述事實，記者盡量消除個人主觀判斷，後者則以語言或其他符號形式參與或指導行為。

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

參考文獻

中文部分 (Chinese Section)

- 陳韜文(編)(2004)。《七一解讀》。香港：明報出版社有限公司。
- Chen Taowen (Ed.). (2004). *Qiyi jiedu*. Xianggang: Mingbao chubanshe youxian gongsi.
- 黃天賜(2013)。《新聞已死?》。香港：中華書局。
- Huang Tianci (2013). *Xinwen yisi?* Xianggang: Zhonghua shuju.
- 黃煜、郭中實、杜耀明、陳芳怡(2010)。〈新聞內容之建構與表現測量——香港案例研究〉。《傳播與社會學刊》，第12期，頁148-174。
- Huang Yu, Guo Zhongshi, Du Yaoming, Chen Fangyi (2010). Xinwen neirong zhi jiangou yu biao xian celiang—Xianggang anli yanjiu. *Chuanbo yu shehui xuekan*, 12, 148-174.
- 李少南(2015)。《香港傳媒新世紀》(第2版)。香港：中文大學出版社。
- Li Shaonan (2015). *Xianggang chuanmei xinshiji* (di er ban). Xianggang: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe.
- 蘇鑰機(2012)。《特首選戰·傳媒·民意》。香港：天地圖書。
- Su Yaoji (2012). *Teshou xuanzhan, chuanmei, minyi*. Xianggang: Tiandi tushu.
- 張讚國、劉娜(2016)。〈從定調到解釋性界限：佔中運動、商業報紙與獨立媒體〉。《傳播研究與實踐》，第6卷第1期，頁45-77。
- Zhang Zanguo, Liu Na (2016). Cong dingdiao dao jieshixing jiexian: Zhanzhong yundong, shangye baozhi yu duli meiti. *Chuanbo yanjiu yu shijian*, 6 (1), 45-77.

英文部分 (English Section)

- Armstrong, C., & Collins, S. (2009). Reaching out: Newspaper credibility among young adult readers. *Mass Communication and Society*, 12(1), 97-114.
- Balon, R., Philport, J., & Beadle, C. (1978). How gender and race affect perceptions of newscasters. *Journalism Quarterly*, 55(1), 160-164.
- Bloom, P. (2012). Religion, morality, evolution. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 63, 179-199.
- Bourdieu, P. (1979). Public opinion does not exist. In A. Mattelart, & S. Siegelau (Eds.), *Communication and class struggle: An anthology in 2 volumes. Vol. 1: Capitalism, imperialism*. (pp. 124-129). New York, NY: International General.
- Carey, J. (1989). *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society*. New York: Routledge.
- Chan, J. (Ed.). (2004). *Reading July 1st*. Hong Kong: Ming Pao Press Ltd.

- Chang, T. K., & Liu, N. (2016). From keying to interpretative boundaries: Occupy Central, commercial newspapers and independent media. *Journal of Communication Research and Practice*, 6(1), 45–77.
- Chapman, L. (1967). Illusory correlation in observational report. *Journal of Verbal Learning*, 6(1), 151–155.
- Cohen, G. (2003). Party over policy: The dominating impact of group influence on political beliefs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(5), 808–822.
- Coleman, S. (2012). Believing the news: From sinking trust to atrophied efficacy. *European Journal of Communication*, 27(1), 35–45.
- Coursaris, C., & Van, O. W. (2016, July). *Exploring the effects of source credibility on information adoption on YouTube*. Paper presented at the Third International Conference of HCI in Business, Government and Organizations, Toronto, Canada.
- Crowne, D., & Marlowe, D. (1980). *The approval motive: Studies in evaluative dependence*. Westport, CONN: Greenwood Press.
- DiMarco, C., Hirst, G., & Stede, M. (1993). The semantic and stylistic differentiation of synonyms and near-synonyms. *AAAI Technical Report*, 93(2), 114–121.
- Fisher, C. (2016). The trouble with “trust” in news media. *Communication Research and Practice*, 2, 451–465.
- Fisher, R. (1993). Social desirability bias and the validity of indirect questioning. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20(2), 303–315.
- Fung, A. (2007). Political economy of Hong Kong media: Producing a hegemonic voice. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 17(2), 159–171.
- Gaines, B., Kuklinski, J., Quirk, P., & Peyton, B. (2007). Same facts, different interpretations: Partisan motivation and opinion on Iraq. *The Journal of Politics*, 69(4), 957–974.
- Gaziano, C., & McGrath, K. (1986). Measuring the concept of credibility. *Journalism Quarterly*, 63(3), 451–462.
- George, C. (2007). Credibility deficits: Why some news media don’t pay the price. *Journalism Studies*, 8(6), 898–908.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1980). “Mainstreaming” of America: Violence profile No. 11. *Journal of Communication*, 30(3), 10–29.
- Gunther, A. (1992). Biased press or biased public? Attitudes toward media coverage of social groups. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 56(2), 147–167.
- Guo, Z., Zhou, B., & Lu, Y. (2006). Media literacy, political cognition, media functions and media use: An analysis of their theoretical connections. *Communication & Society*, 1(2), 122–145.
- Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Hallin, D., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Hanson, G. (2009). Learning journalism ethics: The classroom versus the real world. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 17(3), 235–247.
- Hawkins, S., & Hastie, R. (1990). Hindsight: biased judgments of past events after the outcomes are known. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(3), 311–327.
- Hilgartner, S. (1992). The social construction of risk objects: Or, how to pry open networks of risk. In J. Short, & L. Clarke (Eds.), *Organizations, uncertainties and risk* (pp. 39–53). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Hovland, C., Lumsdaine, A., & Sheffield, F. (1949). *Experiments on mass communication*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Huang, Y., Guo, Z., To, Y., & Chan, F. (2010). Measuring news content and press performance: The case of Hong Kong. *Communication & Society*, 12, 148–174.
- Johnson, T., & Kaye, B. (1998). Cruising is believing? Comparing Internet and traditional sources on media credibility measures. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 75(2), 325–340.
- Karlsson, M., Clerwall, C., & Nord, L. (2014). You ain't seen nothing yet: Transparency's (lack of) effect on source and message credibility. *Journalism Studies*, 15(5), 668–678.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523.
- Kim, M. (2009). Cross-national analyses of satisfaction with democracy and ideological congruence. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 19(1), 49–72.
- Kim, S. H., & Kim, S. (2016). National culture and social desirability bias in measuring public service motivation. *Administration & Society*, 48(4), 444–476.
- Kiousis, S. (2001). Public trust or mistrust? Perceptions of media credibility in the information age. *Mass Communication and Society*, 4(4), 381–404.
- Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2010). *Blur: How to know what's true in the age of information overload*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.
- Luhmann, N. (1996). *The reality of the mass media*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Marcuse, H. (1964). *One-dimensional man: Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*. Boston: Beacon.
- McCroskey, J., & Teven, J. (1999). Goodwill: A reexamination of the construct and its measurement. *Communication Monographs*, 66, 90–103.
- McLeod, J., Sotirovic, M., Voakes, P., Guo, Z., & Huang, S. (1998). A model of public support for First Amendment Rights. *Communication Law and Policy*, 3(4), 479–514.
- Metzger, M., Flanagin, A., Eyal, K., Lemus, D., & McCann, R. (2003). Credibility for the 21st century: Integrating perspectives on source, message, and media credibility in the contemporary media environment. *Communication Yearbook*, 27, 293–336.

- Metzger, M., & Flanagin, A. (2015). Psychological approaches to credibility assessment online. In S. Sundar (Ed.), *The handbook of the psychology of communication technology* (pp. 445–466). New York, NY: Wiley Blackwell.
- Moehler, D., & Singh, N. (2011). Whose news do you trust? Explaining trust in private versus public media in Africa. *Political Research Quarterly*, *64*(2), 276–292.
- Monin, B., & Miller, D. (2001). Moral credentials and the expression of prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *81*(1), 33–43.
- Nederhof, A. (1985). Methods of coping with social desirability bias: A review. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *15*(3), 263–280.
- Newhagen, J., & Nass, C. (1989). Differential criteria for evaluating credibility of newspaper and TV news. *Journalism Quarterly*, *66*(2), 277–284.
- Oates, S. (2006). *Television, democracy and elections in Russia*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Oyededeji, T. (2010). The credible brand model: The effects of ideological congruency and customer-based brand equity on news credibility. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *54*(2), 83–99.
- Plous, S. (1993). *The psychology of judgment and decision making*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Popkin, S. (1994). *The reasoning voter: Communication and persuasion in presidential campaigns*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Putnam, R. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, *6*(1), 65–78.
- Roberts, C. (2010). Correlations among variables in message and messenger credibility scales. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *54*(1), 43–56.
- Schuman, H., & Presser, S. (1996). *Questions and answers in attitude surveys: Experiments on question form, wording, and context*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schuman, H., & Scott, J. (1987). Problems in the use of survey questions to measure public opinion. *Science*, *236*(4804), 957–959.
- Shimp, T., Hyatt, E., & Snyder, D. (1991). A critical appraisal of demand artifacts in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *18*(3), 273–283.
- Soon, C., & Tan, T. H. (2016). The media freedom-credibility paradox. *Media Asia*, *43*(3–4), 176–190.
- Splichal, S., & Dahlgren, P. (2016). Journalism between de-professionalization and democratization. *European Journal of Communication*, *31*(1), 5–18.
- Sundar, S. (1998). Effect of source attribution on perception of online news stories. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *75*(1), 55–68.
- Tsfati, Y., & Cappella, J. (2005). Why do people watch news they do not trust? The need for cognition as a moderator in the association between news media skepticism and exposure. *Media Psychology*, *7*(1), 251–271.
- Tsfati, Y., & Cohen, J. (2013). Perceptions of media and media effects: The third person effect, trust in media and hostile media. In E. Scharrer (Ed.),

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第46期(2018)

- Blackwell's international companion to media studies: Media effects/media psychology* (pp. 128–146). New York, NY: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1973). Availability: A heuristic for judging frequency and probability. *Cognitive Psychology*, 5(2), 207–232.
- Weibel, D., Wissmath, B., & Groner R. (2008). How gender and age affect newscasters' credibility—an investigation in Switzerland. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52(3), 466–484.
- Wenner, L. A. (1985). The nature of news gratification. In K. E. Rosengren, L. A. Wenner, & P. Palmgreen (Eds.), *Media gratification research* (pp. 171–193). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Westerman, D., Spence, P., & Van der Heide, B. (2014). Social media as information source: Recency of updates and credibility of information. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19, 171–183.
- Zajonc, R. (1968). Attitudinal effects of mere exposure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 9(2), 1–27.

本文引用格式

郭中實 (2018) 。〈受眾心目中的傳媒公信力：研究評析〉。《傳播與社會學刊》，第46期，頁121–182。

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

Zhongshi GUO

Studies on public perceptions of media credibility are, to varying degrees, predicated on three fundamental assumptions. First, credibility embodies a set of generally agreed-upon ingredients whose symbolic meanings are shared among media and audiences of different cultures and political systems. Scholars rarely raise eyebrows, much less questions, about the basis on which this universality claim rests.

Second, audience members engage in active rather than passive, rational rather than irrational mental processes when evaluating the performance of any particular media outlet. That is to say, although they do not possess the ability to verify or validate any facts and causality claims of any news report, ordinary people do habitually rely on certain fixed criteria, credibility being somewhere on the top of the list, to make judgment about the merit (or the lack of which) of media organizations, sources of information, and messages. The nature of the ability-criteria gap and its impact on audience evaluation of media credibility too has not received sufficient scholarly attention.

Third, high credibility ratings of media are conducive to political participation since to most researchers a well-informed citizenship constitutes the basis of democracy. Although media's adequacy in fulfilling individuals' need for truth is contested, credibility as an important layer of quality control in news production is not a matter for dispute. Nonetheless, the boundary of audience trust beneficial to social health and democratic process is far from clearly mapped out. There are almost as many definitions as people who try to define the problem.

This essay challenges all three assumptions and offers a critique that argues for the reduction, if not the total abandonment, of their role as premises in theorizing on public perceptions of media credibility. Such a critique risks fierce objections, because each of the three claims is logically plausible and democratically desirable, particularly so when the vociferous presence of political authorities, media industry practitioners, and members of the academia has endowed media credibility with a dominant place in public discourse that appears to be natural. The ascribed halo serves the dual purpose of keeping the notion alive and reinforcing its legitimacy.

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

Contrary to common belief, we see the heavy involvement of power in discussions of media credibility as a cause for concern instead of celebration. For one thing, apart from an informed suspicion of hidden agenda (e.g., gains in control, profit or career advancement) by incumbents of important institutional positions (e.g., top government officials, business tycoons, and renowned scholars) whose voices on credibility, or any other issues for that matter, are usually the loudest, this view of ours also stems from a survey of literature on media credibility where two impressions emerge. Studies either: (1) revolve around the making and maintaining of credibility at the message production rather than evaluation of it at the consumption end (see Metzger et al., 2013 for a review) or, (2) show results of audience responses at the reception end that are likely to be methodological artefacts.

In the decades that have followed the early experiments on credibility (Charnley, 1936; Hovland et al., 1953), an implicit agreement has formed among communication scholars that media credibility may best be understood as an integral component of media professionalism (Van der Heide & Lim, 2015; Westerman et al., 2014). And the content of media professionalism is intimately tied to the broader scheme of universal values (e.g., freedom, equality, civil liberties, rights of citizenship etc.). Very much like the utopic society envisioned by subscribers to universal values, diverse usages of the concept of media credibility are more or less pegged into a normative frame: what media *ought to do*.

In communication research, the *ought-be* contrast in media performance introduces an unsettling paradox: the observed denies the expected. A typical example would be the gap between journalism ethics taught in the classroom and those practiced (more likely bypassed and resisted) in the newsroom (Hanson, 2009). In a significant way, this problem lies at the core of media credibility research (Fisher, 2016) because it makes measurement of credibility susceptible to two inter-related threats to validity. One is the so-called mere presence effect and the other is social desirability bias.

In the pages that follow, we first address the methodological issues that impede the operationalization of credibility. We will then move on to a detailed critique of the three assumptions mentioned above. In the third part of this essay, we will present a case study of credibility perceptions by newspaper readers in Hong Kong.

Mere Presence Effect and Social Desirability Bias

Regardless of research methods adopted, nearly all existing studies of audience perceptions of media credibility ask participants to rate whether a media outlet, source or message is credible. A common practice is to substitute the word “credible” with some of its derivatives or synonyms, usually in adjective form. Among the most frequently seen are: trustworthy, accurate, objective, believable, professional, competent, expert, attractive, comprehensive, fair, honest, and the list goes on (Armstrong & Collins, 2009; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986).

An obvious problem is that these words, which are conceptually distinct, varied in levels of abstraction, and open to diverse interpretations, are used interchangeably, as if the vast differences in their meanings and intentions behind are of no meaningful relevance to perceptions of credibility (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). Linguistic representations of reality contain nuances and subtleties in shades of meaning across even the closest synonyms that, if overlooked, could result in distorted and sometimes opposing understanding of the terms (DiMarco, Hirst, & Stede, 1993).

For example, semantically, *trust* suggests a deeper and more moral-bound level of faith than *believe*; *expert* denotes a greater degree of knowledge in a field of specialization than *professional*; and both *objective* and *comprehensive* can only be taken as relative criteria (the difference between relative objective and non-objective being insignificant), which defeats the very purpose of their use in evaluations of media performance. Although adherents of news objectivity and comprehensiveness probably see it otherwise, absolute objectivity and comprehensiveness are practically non-existent. Granted that each of the synonyms of credibility used in various studies could be viewed as indirectly tapping the same underlying idea (e.g., Fisher, 1993; Metzger & Flanagin, 2015), however, semantic distinctions among them may be too large or too fuzzy to serve the purpose of interchangeability, not to mention the almost unlimited variations in the meaning of the same term across different historical periods and cultures (Kim & Kim, 2016).

A more latent problem, however, is the fact that their very presence primes participants to ideas that are likely dormant or even nonexistent prior to the interview and narrows attention to normative aspects of media

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

performance and professionalism. If true, then responses thus generated are likely, at least potentially, to be a methodological artefact. We term this phenomenon the “mere presence effect” to refer to the impact the presence of response categories in questionnaires has on the chances of their selection by respondents. Three methodological issues ensue. First, previous research has discovered that respondents share the tendency to choose response categories, including some very uncommon ones, simply because they are presented to them as answers to closed-ended questions (Schuman & Scott, 1987). The results reverberated with those from an earlier study by psychologists Tversky and Kahneman (1973) who found that availability heuristics is capable of guiding decision and selection.

The availability heuristics, which links external environment and internal schema, intervenes in mental activities as shortcuts to expedite judgment and decisions. It denotes the false connection between the ease with which an event is brought to consciousness through recall or external cues on the one hand and the perceived importance and frequency of appearance of that event on the other. The mere presence effect shares much of these properties and can be aptly seen as a large subset of the availability heuristics. It typically manifests itself as cues in the following four cognitive processes: (1) reducing abstract concepts such as trustworthiness and competence to concrete mental imageries (e.g., the appearance of a TV anchor or the fame of a newspaper columnist, etc.); (2) increasing the perceived frequency with which events co-occur and ideas co-appear. This process, known as *emplacing*, makes arbitrary mental associations between concepts appear to be natural (Hilgartner, 1992). For example, if a questionnaire item seeks answers on whether a news report is “factual”, it is likely to bring to the mind the concomitant idea of “fairness”, despite the independence and drastic differences in meaning of the two terms; (3) although this kind of elicited association is akin to priming, the intimate connections between the co-occurring ideas in available heuristics are largely false and illusory (Chapman, 1967). The perception that a media outlet with an independent source of funding is more credible than the one with advertising revenue is a case in point; and (4) creating a chain effect whereby the mere presence of a value-laden term (e.g., credible) in a questionnaire will lead to an overestimation of its importance which in turn will perpetuate its ties with media performance and strengthen the probability of its selection by respondents.

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

Viewed in this light, one can say that by asking respondents to indicate their preference for or agreement with a questionnaire item, researchers have quite literally given the item license and forced people into pre-set choices (Plous, 1993). Although this can be said about all closed-ended questions, the problem this brings about is particularly pronounced for media credibility studies due to the moral standing of the concept. One way to remove the mere presence effect is to place credibility related words and statements *after* respondents' ideas about media performance have been obtained, ideally through open-ended questions. This was what we did in our case study to be described later.

Second, apart from availability heuristics, respondents are pushed by another invisible hand to express favorable attitudes toward measures of media credibility. That is "social desirability bias". People who lack deep convictions about what credibility really means and are unequipped with the ability to confirm or disconfirm information usually resort to normative statements, conventional wisdom, common sense, or accepted official discourse in the direction of social desirability bias (Schuman & Presser, 1996) even in open-ended questions. Similar results were reported in a study (McLeod et al., 1998) that found although most American respondents expressed unwavering support for First Amendment rights when stated as abstract principles (e.g., freedom of assembly and freedom of the press), few were willing to endorse these rights in actual practice (e.g., neo-Nazis rallying in Jewish neighborhood or sale of pornographic magazines on university campus). Apparently, a general misconception about the true meaning of constitutional rights in social practice prevails even in a democracy like the United States. Respondents' expressed support for the nice-sounding rights is nothing more than a systematic yielding to social desirability bias.

Media credibility is expected to exert weightier social desirability pressures on responses than other concepts in journalism studies not only because of its nature as a summary measure of performance. More importantly, credibility is media professional principles and norms personified. As such, the social desirability bias associated with credibility perception works as an internalized system of value, which dwarfs other criteria of judgment and makes it practically immune to skepticism (Nederhof, 1985). In a way, the bias thus manifested resonates with the moral licensing effect whereby one's value alignment with a perceived

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

position of (socially desired) righteousness tends to greatly reduce one's awareness of and concerns about one's own negative attributes and negative consequences of one's behaviors (Monin & Miller, 2001).

Acts of dissimulation and endorsement of socially desirable values in everyday life outside of experiment laboratories are variants of a simple and broad human need for approval (Crowne & Marlowe, 1980). More narrowly defined, in an interview setting, social desirability bias points to latent factors lurking beneath people's manifest responses. These factors are goal-oriented and predictable because they share the common trait of positive impression management. To the extent that social desirability triggered self-censorship exists, studies of media credibility could contribute to relevant literature and general knowledge on human motives by treating it as an intriguing source of mental and behavioral variance rather than an inherent error to be corrected or a disease to be cured.

Third, social desirability bias could also distort empirical findings on media credibility perceptions in a different direction. The importance of credibility may be over-represented or exaggerated in opinion surveys because people on both sides of an interview think questions about credibility deserve to be asked and answered. The co-operative act of answering an opinion question by respondents gives the question legitimacy. One can say that a completed questionnaire contains both the well-concealed intentions of its designers (to avoid hypothesis-guessing as a threat to construct validity) and the passive compliance by respondents. The entire process implies "an agreement about which questions are worth asking" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 124).

Taken together, past research on credibility perceptions typically primes responses on questions that appear to be commonsensical, socially desirable, natural, and legitimate, thus tinting study findings in favor of the conclusion that media credibility is highly salient in the public mind. The case we are making here is that evidence on which the conclusion is based may be an artefact of research design.

Having discussed the implications of the methodological problems in credibility research, we now return to the critique of the three assumptions outlined at the beginning of the essay. These are: universal criteria assumption; rational evaluation assumption; and antecedent to political participation assumption.

The “Universal Criteria” Assumption

Credibility research generally divides the object of study into three closely related and yet conceptually distinct loci: the message carrier or media credibility; the message initiator or source credibility; and the content of the message itself or message credibility (Metzger et al., 2003; Sundar, 1998). However, the criteria employed to gauge credibility across the three contexts are essentially the same in different studies, which have more or less explained the high correlations among different scales of measurement (Roberts, 2010).

As mentioned above, adjectives being used interchangeably with credibility are seldom cast in comparison across belief systems, forms of media, cultures and political systems (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Of particular interest is not whether terms like believability, competence, and objectivity accurately describe the meaning of credibility, but whether they mean the same thing to people of different group memberships and ideological stances (Gaines et al., 2007). In all likelihood, loyal readers of partisan newspapers of contending political alliances may find their respective source of information equally believable and competent (Cohen, 2003).

The first issue to be taken with this assumption, then, is the problem of leaving ideological congruence out of people’s credibility judgment. In a study, Kim (2009) found that audience members of eight consolidated democracies all expressed satisfaction with the political system and its representative media. Similarly, Oyedemi (2010) showed that audience perceptions of credibility of news media are a direct function of ideological consonance.

In their book *Comparing Media Systems*, Hallin and Mancini (2004) adopted the term *political parallelism* to describe the near perfect overlap between the political spectrum of a nation/society/community and that of the mass media. The right-wing, left-wing, and independent political factions all have their corresponding, or parallel, voices in the media. Subsumed under political parallelism are five factors: media’s overt political allegiance; media-party institutional link; media personnel as former political actors; journalist career advancement and political affiliations; and audiences’ partisanship. Together, the five factors help to cement the party-press ties, creating, in the exact sense of the word, a “credibility in the eye of the beholder” phenomenon. Seen this way, claims about the existence of

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

an ideologically neutral account in news are simply too difficult to be convincingly built.

The second bone to pick with the universal criteria assumption is the centrality of trust in this assumption. Trust has earned its status in research agenda mainly due to its immediate relevance to other essential aspects of human interaction as the staple in cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1980) and social capital research (Putman, 1995). In media credibility studies, trust is a judgment at the receiver end. The institutional target of evaluation and the subjective nature of trust make opinions on media credibility particularly susceptible to influences from authorities. Metzger and Flanagin (2015) found that public credibility evaluations are traditionally based on trusting government and experts which are believed to provide reliable information, especially “when there is a limited number of sources and when there are high barriers for public dissemination of information” (p. 447).

The stand with which we challenge the universal criteria assumption is rooted in the belief that full trust in any social institutions and their representatives (e.g., hospital and doctor, school and teacher, church and priest, media and journalist) is equivalent to a complete surrender of one’s critical faculties and ignorance of the (any) institutions’ ascribed or aspired vested interest. In terms of the media, this leaves public understanding of political affairs at the mercy of those who control information, which runs counter to the idea of the reasoning citizenship in democratic societies (Popkin, 1994).

Early studies reported findings on the inverse relations between perceptions of media credibility and the authoritarian political system, which has been confirmed in more recent research. That is, compared with audiences in democracies, those in authoritarian societies are more skeptical of media, as indicated by their being more critical of news and news organizations, their tendency to pay more attention to nuances in messages, and their enduring habit of reading between the lines formed in the socialization process (Oates, 2013). Analyses of data from 16 African democracies on media credibility by Moehler and Singh (2011) reveal that low political sophistication, conservative attitudes and support for incumbents which takes a larger segment of the population account for favorable assessment of official media.

The West is no exception. Research has found that audience members who are more knowledgeable about media practices and devote more

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

mental efforts at interpreting news are more likely to distrust the media (Gunther, 1992; Kioussis, 2001). In effect, this pattern can be seen as a higher ordering of message-mind relationship and a more sophisticated form of media literacy. As Luhmann (1996) aptly stated, “.....we know so much about the mass media that we are not able to trust these sources. Our way of dealing with this is to suspect that there is manipulation at work, and yet no consequences of any import ensue because knowledge acquired from the mass media merges together as if of its own accord into a self-reinforcing structure.” (p. 1)

For reasons not exactly ostensible, the level of audience trust in the media has been on a steady decline in Western democracies over the years. A recent study (Splichal & Dahlgren, 2016) offered some intriguing comparisons: more than half of one survey’s respondents reported “extreme trust” in newspapers in the US in 1979 but the figure had dropped to less than 22% in 2007. In the same year, only about one fifth of respondents in a UK survey expressed trust in the media, while in Germany trust in media professionals ranked 29th among various sectors, followed closely by real estate sales persons, insurance sales persons and politicians.

Seeing the slippage of media credibility in an optimistic light, Soon and Tan (2016) discovered a positive correlation between improvements of governance, respect for human rights and media freedom, although neither is empirically tied to perceived credibility. In what they termed “the media freedom-credibility” paradox, Soon and Tan (2016) asserted that while it is a pre-requisite for diversity of views, press freedom is not a recipe for trust of the press. If anything, to people who are privy to media’s predictable bias, much of the observed “credibility deficit” (p. 898) are well within expectations (George, 2007).

While a universally agreed-upon limit of trust in media may not be attainable or even desirable (Coleman, 2012), a healthy attitude of “skeptical knowing” toward any media at all times is expected to contribute to the wellbeing of a community, if for nothing but a vigilance against the impulse for control by those in power (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010, p. 26). By dethroning full trust, the sober-minded audience can then rely on media credibility as an effective buffer to keep the leviathan at arm’s length.

Therefore, attention in academic research into the construct of credibility may be insightfully focused on what happens at the reception end with theorizing directed towards discovering either an optimal synchronization of

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

audience trust and media accountability to society or its reverse—acts of betrayal of the shared norms by one side of the social contract.

The “Rational Evaluation” Assumption

Credibility as a core merit of media has a long history of recognition and respect by practitioners, legislators, publicists and members of academia. Since people with the privileged right to define social norms are usually institutionally anchored, ideas about what constitutes the proper content of credibility tend to be shared across institutions and remain constant across time.

But public definition is missing in this chorus of unanimity. It is common knowledge, indeed a homily, in traditional political communication research that message initiators are institutionally motivated professionals whose rhetoric tends to be formal, well-organized, logical and, by and large, self-serving. Message recipients, on the other hand, are diverse, self-oriented, unorganized and amateurish. Institutional descriptions of media credibility are therefore rational by definition.

In contrast, audience members are generally ill-equipped with the professional training, tools and resources to appraise the message credibility (e.g., fact checking, background research, etc.), deficient in knowledge to ascertain source credibility (e.g., qualifications and biases of the pundits frequently cited or invited by media to comment on current issues), and on average unmotivated to assign priority to media credibility in their choice of platforms and outlets (Tsfati & Cappella, 2005).

In practice, most people are predisposed to rely on rules of thumb or short cuts in their judgment and selection of media, be it the third-person effect, trust in media or hostile media perceptions (Tsfati & Cohen, 2013). Some of these rules of thumb are overtly irrational and others more subtly so. Their conceptual distinctions are yet to be fathomed by communication scholars. In a study, Fogg and associates (2003) identified over 18 clusters of cues people rely on to assess media credibility across 10 content categories. More than half of those cues (e.g., author reputation, writing tone, etc.) border on the irrational. Of particular interest is the power of self-confirmation heuristic which emphasizes the strong positive relationship between information-prior belief congruency and credibility assessment.

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

Individuals tend to discount or discard information if “it counters their existing beliefs, regardless of how well argued, exhaustively researched, comprehensive, or appropriately sourced it is” (Metzger & Flanagin, 2015, p. 453).

For instance, people are known to give differential credibility ratings to journalists by gender, age, and race (Balon et al., 1978; Weibel et al., 2008). Auditory and visual messages are deemed more credible than textual ones (Kiousis, 2001). How believable a report is depends on how well groomed the newscaster is (Newhagen & Nass, 1989). A related finding is that media can never fail to cultivate trust and loyalty from audiences if efforts are devoted to making them psychologically attached to charismatic media persona (Guo et al., 2006). And this kind of para-social relationship has proven to be powerful in creating a double deference mentality where people’s fondness and faith (primary deference) in a person or a media outlet carry over to believing everything (secondary deference) that person or media have to say (Bloom, 2012; Cohen, 2003).

Ironically, irrational evaluations of media credibility, prevalent as they are, sometimes work in favor of the least credible media. These evaluations can be issue specific where the most censored media outlets may turn out to be the most trusted one in their coverage of ideologically uncontested events (e.g., scientific discovery such as landing on Mars). They can also be region specific where the least trusted media gain credibility, at least uncritical reading, in their report of faraway events such as international news (Guo, 2011). And they can be channel specific. That is, people gravitate toward alternative media sources with their own questionable credibility issues (e.g., social media or platforms of anonymously generated information) to uncover “truth” of events that they suspect the mainstream official media are trying to cover up.

The “Antecedent to Political Participation” Assumption

Researchers preoccupied with political participation as a sacred constituent of citizenship in a democratic society have attributed tremendous potency to the “every vote counts” kind of civic duty to the point of preferring voting for a bad candidate (including the lesser of the two evils) to not voting at all. The euphoria about the positive impact

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

of action in political communication research has largely ignored the power of passive resistance by ordinary citizens through non-participation (Gitlin 1978).

Behavioral dimensions of political participation (e.g., voting, protesting, and rallying etc.) are typically ultimate dependent variables in traditional models of analysis and treated as the consequence of an array of perceptual and attitudinal variables. As normative as the model gets, the flow of influence contains the gamut of ascribed and achieved attributes, including demographic anchoring, political interest, media exposure, attention to specific content, information received, knowledge gained, attitude formulated, efficacy expected, and behavioral intention anticipated, in that order. In the whole process, media credibility perceptions are assumed, even though empirical data have consistently demonstrated different results (Fisher, 2016).

Social movement activists would know that neither information nor knowledge is a pre-requisite for behavioral involvement. If anything, they could be barriers to participation. For example, most of the Hong Kong people who took to the streets in July 1, 2003 in massive demonstrations against the proposed legislation for Article 23 (anti-subversion) of the *Basic Law* had no idea about the specific content of Article 23 and knew very little about the *Basic Law* for that matter (Chan, 2004). This finding suggests that resentment of or hostility toward communist ideology, for example, is deeply rooted in the psyche of protesters who would rise to whatever occasions where intrusion is suspected and venting of steam possible.

Unflattering though they are, both the “mere exposure hypothesis” (Zajonc, 1968) and the “vividness hypothesis” have provided evidence showing that people can be led to form a positive attitude towards anything by not much more than repeated exposure to it or if that “anything” is presented in an interesting and attention-grabbing manner. Clearly, the full model of civic participation would be made more complete and our understanding more insightful if researchers are willing to give the lack of credibility as a normal state of affairs on the content production side and credulity as a routine on the message consumption side their fair share of attention.

As we shall demonstrate later with empirical evidence, most individuals have never had questions about media credibility formally put

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

to them. And when they do, they tend to be uncertain, hesitant and unorganized in their answers. They neither define credibility exactly in the same way as institutions nor consider the concept even remotely important and relevant to their patterns of daily media use.

Case Study: Hong Kong Audience

Research Context

Local newspapers in Hong Kong project a double image. On the one hand, residents take great pride in the community press for its diversity of views, autonomy of editorial policy and freedom of expression, particularly when cast in comparison with its counterpart in the mainland. On the other hand, a sizeable portion of regular news consumers harbor no small frustrations with some newspapers for their violations of professional codes of conduct such as unscrupulous practice of sensationalism, rampant invasion of privacy, and effete yielding to political pressures.

Tensions between the two images not only plague the press industry, but have also become a perennial cause of community controversy, readership divide, legislative reaction and academic concern. At the heart of the problem lies the issue of media credibility.

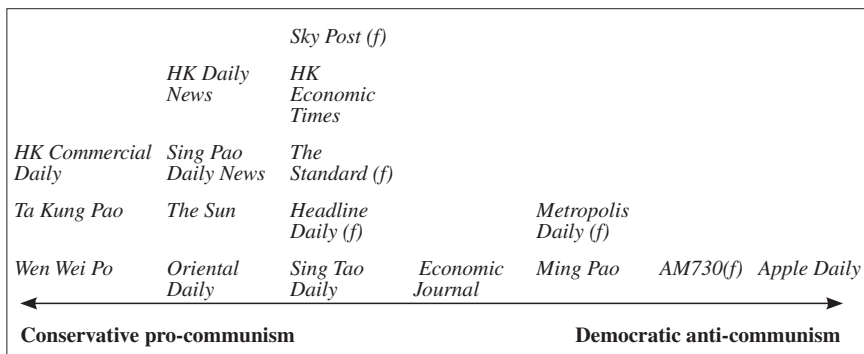
The apparent consensus in the academia on the meaning of media credibility is at vast variance with disparities in practice. Judging by the firmness with which local newspapers stick to their diametrically opposed political grounds, even the simplest definition of credibility, such as getting the basic facts right, cannot avoid squabbles between warring camps on both extremes of the political spectrum over which facts (or angle of coverage) ought to be revealed and which concealed.

The real diversity of voices one sees on the newsstand that scatters Hong Kong streets belies a virtual monopoly. Far from being a marketplace of ideas in the classical libertarian sense of the term, local print news has long been dominated by three tabloid newspapers, *Oriental Daily*, *The Sun* (whose publication ceased in April, 2016), *Apple Daily* and their subsidiaries on the Internet or distributed free of charge. These mass-appeal newspapers, which are similar in their anti-communism stance and parochial appeal, have not shown significant signs of fading out in the wake

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

of the rise of social media for several reasons: long history; ideological congruence with readers; local news centrality; and blatant sensationalism (Huang et al., 2010). Together, these factors more than make up for what these newspapers lose in credibility (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Location of Hong Kong's main commercial newspapers on the local political spectrum



Source: Chang & Liu (2016)

Note: Newspapers marked with (f) are free

On the other extreme of the ideological continuum, the overt partisan pro-establishment press whose continued existence has been sustained by state financial subsidies is least read. However, research in local newspaper distribution shows that even the three biggies mentioned above have succumbed to routine self-censorship in a bid to woo huge mainland advertising dollars (Fung, 2007).

Despite the variability in Hong Kong's print media landscape, different local newspapers are pinned to consistently stable places on the hierarchy of credibility in the public mind (Huang, 2010). That being the case, carefully crafted questions on the true salience of media credibility for subscribers to various newspapers could lead to interesting answers if attempts are made to remove methodological artefacts.

Depth Interview: Credibility as Dormant Perception

We coin the term *dormant perception* to describe the situation where people regard media credibility either as the lowest threshold of performance equivalent to a license in medical practice (that is, all media

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

must have it) or as the highest normative goal in news reporting that is desired by all, but achieved by none.

In either case, credibility is dormant or *asleep*, unlikely to be readily retrieved by audience members from their mental filing cabinet to explain their choice of media or media use preferences. This kind of inarticulate presence tends to make credibility judgment relevant only when primed. That is, a heuristic cue is needed to awaken credibility in the schema. Once summoned to the forefront of consciousness, the concept will guide further evaluations of media performance due to moral and civic duty pressures. It is worth noting that dormant perception defined here is conceptually different from the sleeper effect which refers to the delayed strengthening of attitude over time (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949).

A chain of actions and reactions can be envisioned where people could be expected to demonstrate discrepancies between their unprimed responses and their primed responses to the relative importance of media credibility. At stake are the following initial main factors: (1) the media outlet or message platform most often used; (2) motivation or drive for use; (3) external or environmental pressure for use; (4) self-reporting of most credible media in the community; and (5) consistency or inconsistency between the most credible media nominated and those most often exposed to.

To explore the associations, or disassociations rather, between dormant perceptions of credibility and patterns of media consumption, our research team conducted a field study focused on depth interviews in the second half of 2014. The main task is not to address all the issues raised in the critique, nor empirically test all the proposed alternative explanations. The primary object of interest in this study is to track the flow of a mental process that moves from (1) *dormancy* where credibility or its synonymous derivatives lay below or outside of the threshold of consciousness; to (2) *dissonance* where the newspaper deemed to be the most credible is least read; and further to (3) *rationalization* where readers offer various rationale to justify their choice of newspaper and explain away the inconsistency.

With the help of five trained undergraduate journalism students who are all native speakers of Cantonese serving as interviewers, we recruited through snowballing techniques 24 Hong Kong residents who fitted the demographic profiles. Each student was asked to interview at least two respondents, record the full conversation with the consent of interviewees

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

and transcribe the interview into a soft-copy Word document. The interview was limited to within 30 minutes each, and a small payment (HKD\$80) was offered to each interviewee as a token of appreciation for their participation.

The first part of the interview functioned as a rapport-building prologue during which the interviewer provided a brief description of the project without giving away the research hypotheses. Actually, the interviewers were themselves blinded to the research questions of the project to prevent possible hypothesis guessing bias (Shimp et al., 1991). The second part contained 17 questions covering habits of media consumption, opinions about social issues, attitudes towards media outlets and media credibility. Demographic information was collected in the third and final part.

Despite the casual appearance of the exercise, which was designed to relax interviewees, the conversations were highly structured where all the interviewees were asked exactly the same questions, all the questions were asked in exactly the same order, and all procedural protocols were followed to the letter, except for the occasional probe when interviewees were too brief in their answers to open-ended questions. We ordered the questions in such a way that no interviewee was primed and sensitized to the idea of media credibility before the word first appeared half way through the interview according to design.

Table 1 presents the distribution of the 24 interviewees along four basic demographic measures: gender, age, personal monthly salary, and education. The age of each interviewee was either 25 or below or 40 or above. We intentionally created this age gap among participants for the purpose of variance maximization. Overall, a little over half of the interviewees were female, over 40 years old, earning a monthly salary above HK\$30,000, and with a college degree.

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

Table 1 Demographic distribution of interviewees

No.	Gender (F=13)	Age (<25=11)	Salary (<30,000=15)	Education (≤B. A.=11)
1	F	<25	<30,000	≥B.A.
2	F	<25	<30,000	≥B.A.
3	F	<25	<30,000	≥B.A.
4	F	<25	<30,000	<B.A.
5	M	>40	>30,000	<B.A.
6	M	>40	<30,000	<B.A.
7	F	>40	<30,000	<B.A.
8	F	<25	<30,000	<B.A.
9	F	>40	<30,000	<B.A.
10	M	<25	<30,000	<B.A.
11	M	>40	>30,000	≥B.A.
12	F	<25	<30,000	≥B.A.
13	F	<25	<30,000	≥B.A.
14	F	<25	<30,000	≥B.A.
15	F	<25	<30,000	≥B.A.
16	F	<25	<30,000	<B.A.
17	F	>40	>30,000	<B.A.
18	M	>40	<30,000	<B.A.
19	M	>40	>30,000	≥B.A.
20	M	>40	>30,000	≥B.A.
21	M	>40	>30,000	<B.A.
22	M	>40	>30,000	≥B.A.
23	M	>40	>30,000	≥B.A.
24	M	>40	>30,000	≥B.A.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were told very briefly and generally that this was a media use study and were asked two frequency-of-exposure questions about news content and the medium that they used most regularly for information. The two questions were followed by a question asking them to give the top three reasons why they chose their particular outlet for news. Most of the interviewees nominated mass-appeal (i.e., tabloid and free) newspapers, TVB (the dominant TV station in Hong Kong) or the Internet media as their primary source of daily news. Only one person cited *Ming Pao*, which is reputed to be the most credible newspaper in the community, as the most often read paper.

Consistent with expectations, at no point in their answers did any of the interviewees mention “credibility” or any of its synonyms as one of the three reasons for relying on the particular medium of their own choice for information. We attribute this result at least in part to the fact that their responses were unprimed. They had no idea that these questions were part of a study into media credibility until much later in the interview, when they heard the term for the first time. The primed responses were used to

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

compare with unprimed ones to detect post-hoc rationalization and the triggering of defense mechanisms in case of clashes between the two.

Table 2 summarizes the top three reasons offered by the 24 participants for selecting a particular media outlet. We cluster them into three categories: personal, social and technical. Credibility is irrelevant across all three categories. At the *personal* level, respondents cited seven reasons as common motives for media message consumption. Choice of media based on “consistency with prior belief” is reminiscent of the mechanism of selective exposure in the two-step-flow model during what is typically known as the “limited effects phase” of media effects research. The “job/trade needs” claim is utilitarian in nature and so is “convenience” and “daily routine.” “Habit/familiarity” is reflective of individuals’ innate tendency toward passive reliance on inertia rather than innovation and adventure because of their reluctance to step out of the comfort zone, which also accounts for the ease with which they become “emotionally attached” to a media outlet. In contrast, the “need for entertainment” reveals an escapist inclination.

Influences on participants’ media selection at the *social* level stem mainly from environment and external pressures. On the negative side, “household subscription” refers to a subscription decision made by other members of the family and one’s willingness to yield to that choice. Similarly, responses that “many other people read it” and that following news could serve as “conversation material” resonate with a spiral of silence process of social conformity. The only positive response in this category is “shared experience” whereby participants expressed the wish that their habitual media use could actually turn into a family affair capable of bringing members of the clan closer together either in the action itself (e.g., watching TV) or in the discussions afterwards, or both. To some extent, this last expression brings to mind James Carey’s (1989) re-definition of media use as ritual, that is, reading for purposes of bonding and fellowship formation as if in a religious community.

Not surprisingly, the *technological* side of media form and content has taken increasing precedence over personal and social forces in determining habits of use. Most of the interviewees mentioned some or all of the entries under the “technological” column in Table 2. The very nature of new media technology centers on improvement of image quality, speed of transmission, multimedia symbiotic union and portability, which in effect renders content

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

and credibility of content to the periphery, an apparently irresistible and irreversible trend that would perhaps please fans of the McLuhanian notion that the medium is the message.

Table 2 Top three most important reasons for relying on a particular media outlet for news

Personal	Social	Technological
• Consistency with prior belief	• Household subscription	• Text, picture, video all in one
• Job/trade needs	• Free/Cheap	• Portability
• Habit/familiarity	• Shared experience	• Fast
• Need for entertainment	• Many other people use it	• Constant updating
• Emotional attachment	• Conversation material	• Re-reading possible
• Convenience/free		• High definition image
• Daily routine (e.g., radio when driving; newspaper at breakfast)		• Not inky

Taken together, none of the interviewees acknowledged credibility as a motivation and criterion for selecting media. Responses overlapped across personal, social and technological categories. Assuming that the interviewees were truthful in their responses as we have no reasons for expecting otherwise, it is obvious that credibility is minimally, if at all, correlated with news consumption which is driven by personal utilitarian motives, subject to social pressures, and shaped by ever-advancing media technology. Only when answering the question on how to improve “the media most often used” did answers start to touch on the borders of credibility. Four out of the 24 interviewees concurred in their view about the need to reduce advertising, five were worried about the deterioration of language quality in news stories, and three expressed concerns about the increase in sensationalism and headline news.

Credibility as post-hoc rationalization

In the second half of the interview, the interviewer introduced the term credibility into the conversation for the first time. We did this first by asking interviewees to offer their own idea or definition of the term and then name the most credible newspaper in the community. It is interesting to note that when asked to define credibility, about half of those interviewed were quite taken aback and responded with a long pause before saying they were not

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

exactly sure what the term meant and how it ought to be defined. They appeared fearful of giving wrong answers against an imagined correct definition.

In all, definitions of credibility by the interviewees largely conformed to the trust-based normative criteria, but were not without exceptions. It appeared as if a significant part of people's understanding of credibility concentrated on "what's missing" from the actual everyday practice of the media. To some, media credibility entailed tighter government regulations to curb the rampant sensationalism and invasion of privacy. Others defined credibility as more transparency, less partisanship and siding with ordinary people rather than authorities and corporations. For example, one interviewee, Mr. Chow, male, 42 years old with a college degree, said:

I don't really have a concrete word for credibility. In my view, credibility is the press doing the right thing such as say things on behalf of ordinary people, be truthful, and be authoritative. Otherwise, nobody will believe media.

Another interviewee, Ms. Leung, female, 35 with a high school degree, expressed somewhat different ideas:

I hate it most when newspapers exaggerate, and they do that almost all the time. Those reports are misleading. Where does media credibility go wrong? If you ask me, I think it is this one-sidedness, attacking for the sake of attacking. Media should look deep at themselves on this. Press freedom is something they should treasure.

These kinds of initial reactions, Chow being more positive than Leung, are quite representative of the views expressed by the rest of the participants on this question. They are confined within a relatively narrow frame of reference: the press ought to act its expectations and audience members, relying on common sense and shared rules of thumb, are capable of spotting mischiefs the press has up its sleeves.

To dig deeper into the issue, we had built into the interview a benchmark of credibility: *Ming Pao*, a six-decade old Chinese-language newspaper renowned for its editorial independence, comprehensive and accurate coverage, and its critical editorials on political and economic issues in Hong Kong and mainland China. The newspaper enjoys a

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

longstanding reputation for being the most credible local press outlet. The words “No. 1 in credibility” have been on the paper’s masthead in the past decades and the claims has remained unchallenged.

Although only one of the 24 interviewees reported reading *Ming Pao* regularly, nearly all of them, 22 out of 24, named *Ming Pao* as either the sole or one of the two most credible newspapers in Hong Kong. The knowing-using discrepancy was actually anticipated, but we knew very little about the kind of explanations people would come up with to neutralize the dissonance that might arise in front of the interviewer.

The question as to why they do not read the newspaper deemed most credible caught all of the interviewees off guard. With little time to think the issue through and organize their thoughts, the interviewees had to quickly activate the defense strategies known as post-hoc rationalization or hindsight justification in social psychology (Haidt, 2012; Hawkins & Hastie, 1990).

Basically, the decision-before-reason responses were divided into two main rhetorical areas: one directed attention inwards to own choice and responsibility (“it was me”) and the other directed attention outwards to external factors (“it wasn’t me”). None of the participants was really apologetic, and neither did any of them see the discrepancy as a problem or express the desire to switch from “my paper” to *Ming Pao* (Table 3).

The pattern becomes pronounced and much more convincing when one takes a closer look at Table 3, which pits “my paper” against the benchmark *Ming Pao*. Responses under the “it was me” column are rationales uttered by people who mainly pointed to the irreplaceability of my paper either from the angle of psychological attachment (“I will miss my paper terribly if I don’t read it for more than two days”), utility and function (“My paper is highly relevant to what I do for a living”), or familiarity and knowledge (“I do not need to hunt for anything in my paper because I know exactly where everything is”). Studies have confirmed that low credibility ratings could at least partially be the result of a lack of familiarity with a given medium (Rimmer & Weaver, 1987).

Conversely, comments of the “it wasn’t me” type emphasized the inevitability of not choosing *Ming Pao* because “it was beyond my control what to subscribe to”; “*Ming Pao* is a lot more expensive than my paper”; “my paper isn’t all that different from *Ming Pao*”; “*Ming Pao* has gone downhill in recent years”, and so on. Some of the statements contradicted

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

the earlier nomination of *Ming Pao* as the most credible newspaper, suggesting that people resorted to nit-picking and fault-finding to defend their own choice of the lesser media. A typical example would be that *Ming Pao* had compromised its professional standards, changing its critical and independent editorial policy to one of advocacy of dominant values and appeal to the lowest market taste.

Table 3 Response to the question “Why do you name *Ming Pao* as the most credible newspaper but do not read it?”

My Newspaper vs. <i>Ming Pao</i>: Post-Hoc Rationalization	
<i>It was me</i>	<i>It wasn't me</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have grown used to my paper • My job requires me to read my paper • I like a particular section, column, writer, or layout of my paper • I have an App that gathers news from different media • I cannot comment on <i>Ming Pao</i> because I do not read it • I don't just read my paper for news 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My paper is a family subscription • My paper is cheap/free • All things considered, <i>Ming Pao</i> isn't that different from my paper • <i>Ming Pao</i> is losing its independence and critical edge. It is becoming pro-establishment • My paper is read by many other people, including my family and friends • Nobody is perfect

The two categories are not mutually exclusive and tended to be uttered by the same persons when trying to rationalize away the discrepancy between what they use and what they consider to be the most credible. In a way, this can be seen as an indication of people's tendency to consciously or unconsciously defend their own independence in matters related to choice of media, which is consistent with the main postulates of the uses and gratifications theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973).

To sum up, our analysis shows that once credibility was primed and gained salience in the mind of interviewees, responses began to take a turn toward a normative sub-content. There is considerable invariance in definition of credibility and proposed ways of improvement, most of which were highly congruent with what media are expected to perform rather than what they actually do. There is also an overt resistance to acknowledging that the media outlet most often used by one is in any significant way inferior to *Ming Pao*.

Conclusions and Discussions

We started off with an argument in favor of the inclusion of unprimed perceptions of ordinary people into the operational definition of media credibility in communication research. Specifically, we raised objections to: (1) universal meaning of credibility; (2) rational evaluation; and (3) antecedents to political participation as unchallenged premises in the study of public perceptions of media credibility.

Our analysis found that when the public is factored into the general equation, some of the longstanding and prevailing assumptions about the importance and indispensability of media credibility tend to collapse and many of the null findings in previous studies become explainable, especially with regard to the weak and even inverse relationships between perceived credibility and media consumption.

Our depth interviews have confirmed, contradicted and cast into doubt some of the major issues related to media credibility. Among them, the strongest and the most compelling evidence came from interviewees' responses showing that media credibility is at best of marginal salience in the public perceptions that guide choice of media platform and content. By not putting credibility or any of its variants into participants' mind and by offering open-ended questions only, we have successfully removed the methodological artefact in many traditional measurement and kept the concept dormant. As expected, "credible" or related adjectives did not appear once in participants' answers to the question of top three reasons for their media selection.

This conclusion is consistent with early findings that show "obtaining accurate and objective information about the world is just one motivation for watching the news (Tsfati & Capella, 2005, p. 254). Regardless of ambiguities and debates surrounding the terms of "accuracy" and "objectivity" in news, the main issues under investigation in this paper is whether credibility perceptions play any viable parts in guiding media use and assessment and how strong can credibility judgment hold its ground when other motivations are present.

To complicate the matter, scholars have expressed suspicion about individuals' consistency in credibility assessment exactly because such an assessment involves a battle between motives and norms of subjective and objective decision-making. "The subjective assessments are highly personal

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

to the decision-maker, dependent on personal judgment, perceptions, and disposition, and often lacking an articulated logic” and tend to vary from one decision-maker to another (Kagan, 2003, p. 374). Our argument and case study have led to a different conclusion. The suspected capriciousness in credibility assessment across individuals is regulated by powerful innate psychological tendencies and external moral pressures, resulting in enduring and highly predictable patterns of decision-making.

Views about people being tacit theorists converge on people’s innate need to seek patterns and make sense of the world around them, preferably in causal terms. This conception of human behavior assumes that individuals not only know what they need, but are always actively looking for ways to gratify these needs. The uses and gratifications theory puts together audience members’ ascribed and achieved attributes at the source end to explain media selection and use. Depending on the social and psychological status of individuals, gratifications cover all the basic needs. Wenner (1985), for example, identified more than a dozen distinct motivations that prompt individuals to adopt a given pattern of media use, including ego-defense, self-expression, tension reduction, escapism, killing time, mood control and so on.

Media credibility has a special place in this elaborate and complex web of needs. At the mention of the term, people tend to feel moral pressures to recognize its importance and are perhaps forced to tentatively reduce or conceal other, more dominant, needs. This was primarily what we found in the depth interviews, where participants demonstrated almost a “split personality” between what they actually do with media (unprimed condition) vis-à-vis what they ought to do with media (primed conditions). Once primed, the near total absence of media credibility as a motive for media use in the unprimed condition is either rationalized away or fended off by people with the statement, “My newspaper is also credible.”

Trust in media had no role in participants’ responses as to which media to use and why use it. Although it is in everyone’s knowledge and has every one’s respect, *Ming Pao*, one of the few highly credible newspapers, was not read by all but one of the interviewees, a convincing indication that credibility is irrelevant to everyday decisions about which paper to pick up, what station to tune in to and what channel to switch to. Seen differently, people may not deliberately choose to believe or rely on media that are deemed not credible. Selection of media may very well

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

precede (cued) judgment of credibility, if such judgment takes place at all.

We had argued that people with full trust in media in any society may fall easy prey to manipulation by authorities. Similarly, consensus among people about the meaning and implementation of media credibility is equally detrimental to social health when political power is the ultimate source of definition and interpretation. In addition, according to Luhmann (1996) the mass media form a closed-circuit message system whereby practitioners operate in recursive routines according to rules of the game set up by the media themselves. This self-referential nature of the content production perpetuates media's construction of social reality. "The mass media seem simultaneously to nurture and to undermine their own credibility. They 'deconstruct' themselves, since they reproduce the constant contradiction of their constative and their performative textual components with their own operations."¹(Luhmann, 1996, p. 39)

As the interview responses have shown, participants could only resort to official, or at least the officially recognized, dimensions and indicators of media credibility to judge the performance of newspapers, including the one they read regularly. This rings true of Marcuse (1964)'s words in his seminal work *One Dimensional Man* about the power of the social system to dispel deviance or independent thinking and reduce these within the accepted realm of discourse.

By the same token, the information-based civic participation model premised on media credibility has its own blind spots, revealed as much in the election into office of politicians that turn out to be warmongers or protectionist demagogues as in the more mundane business of newspaper reading. In Hong Kong, right- and left-wing newspapers usually take the opposite sides on major political issues and are on occasion effective in bringing their constituencies to opposite sides of the street in banner-waving, fist-raising confrontations. Like mirror images, both believe the media they rely on for information are credible.

While it is comforting to know that a community boasts diversity of opinions and vibrant social space for civic participation, the overly intimate relationship between words of the press and deeds of the public ought to be viewed with some caution. To put it bluntly, in the pursuit of the democratic process, neither the elite nor the rank-and-file are entitled to having the last word.

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

That said, the notion that media credibility, its construction, improvement and assessment are mainly the job of media organizations is still with us despite its being disparaged more widely than ever before. Even when public perceptions are acknowledged, academic attention may still be fruitfully paid to barriers that impede public credibility assessment.

For instance, although various specific elements of media credibility, such as accuracy, comprehensiveness, competence, honesty and fairness may be rated highly by audience members, very few people actually have the resources, ability or willingness to engage in any form of validation of them. The easiest way to verify a news narrative, which unfortunately also turns out to be too much of an effort for most people, is to obtain different or contradictory accounts from alternative sources. In the context of political life in Hong Kong, the quest for truth behind news reports from multiple sources is increasingly becoming a luxury that even the most politically sophisticated minds cannot afford.

Empirical data gathered from the case study have confirmed our belief that news consumption has a built-in regularity whose continuity hinges on gratifications of the utilitarian and escapist urges a person has when faced with choice of media, which explained why the most favored media channel was not the one nominated to be the most credible. The issue at hand goes beyond a simple stimulus-response, decoder-encoder and action-reaction sort of dyadic social relationship. It also transcends the problem of what means people have at their disposal to overcome or at least circumvent the influence of mass media. Compared with credibility defined as concrete manifestation of media professionalism, ideological consistency appears to be superior in cementing the message-mind relationship.

If symbolic representations of reality by institutions are to be seen as a special form of social force, then the entire credibility rhetoric becomes a less glittering affair than what it claims to be. At the extreme end of the power-resource continuum, what is said would be nothing short of a discursive façade of that which is perhaps more true but unsaid (e.g., governance vs. control; news vs. revenue; academic publication vs. tenure). To the extent that credibility is but another abstract notion used by some to justify status and profit, then its dormancy in the collective consciousness, or its non-acceptance by thinking members of society, may not be an entirely bad thing.

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

Note

- 1 In the field of journalism and media credibility, a narrower understanding would constrict “constative” to “hard news” and “performative” to “feature” and “editorial”. The former refers to simple descriptions of what happens, free of reporter’s personal judgments, while the latter sees text as either being part of action or offering guidance to action.

References

- Armstrong, C., & Collins, S. (2009). Reaching out: Newspaper credibility among young adult readers. *Mass Communication and Society*, 12(1), 97–114.
- Balon, R., Philport, J., & Beadle, C. (1978). How gender and race affect perceptions of newscasters. *Journalism Quarterly*, 55(1), 160–164.
- Bloom, P. (2012). Religion, morality, evolution. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 63, 179–199.
- Bourdieu, P. (1979). Public opinion does not exist. In A. Mattelart, & S. Siegelau (Eds.), *Communication and class struggle: An anthology in 2 volumes. Vol. 1: Capitalism, imperialism*. (pp. 124–129). New York, NY: International General.
- Carey, J. (1989). *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society*. New York: Routledge.
- Chan, J. (Ed.). (2004). *Reading July 1st*. Hong Kong: Ming Pao Press Ltd.
- Chang, T. K., & Liu, N. (2016). From keying to interpretative boundaries: Occupy Central, commercial newspapers and independent media. *Journal of Communication Research and Practice*, 6(1), 45–77.
- Chapman, L. (1967). Illusory correlation in observational report. *Journal of Verbal Learning*, 6(1), 151–155.
- Cohen, G. (2003). Party over policy: The dominating impact of group influence on political beliefs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(5), 808–822.
- Coleman S. (2012). Believing the news: From sinking trust to atrophied efficacy. *European Journal of Communication*, 27(1), 35–45.
- Coursaris, C., & Van, O. W. (2016, July). *Exploring the effects of source credibility on information adoption on YouTube*. Paper presented at the Third International Conference of HCI in Business, Government and Organizations, Toronto, Canada.
- Crowne, D., & Marlowe, D. (1980). *The approval motive: Studies in evaluative dependence*. Westport, CONN: Greenwood Press.
- DiMarco, C., Hirst, G., & Stede, M. (1993). The semantic and stylistic differentiation of synonyms and near-synonyms. *AAAI Technical Report*, 93(2), 114–121.

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

- Fisher, C. (2016). The trouble with “trust” in news media. *Communication Research and Practice*, 2, 451–465.
- Fisher, R. (1993). Social desirability bias and the validity of indirect questioning. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20(2), 303–315.
- Fung, A. (2007). Political economy of Hong Kong media: Producing a hegemonic voice. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 17(2), 159–171.
- Gaines, B., Kuklinski, J., Quirk, P., & Peyton, B. (2007). Same facts, different interpretations: Partisan motivation and opinion on Iraq. *The Journal of Politics*, 69(4), 957–974.
- Gaziano, C., & McGrath, K. (1986). Measuring the concept of credibility. *Journalism Quarterly*, 63(3), 451–462.
- George, C. (2007). Credibility deficits: Why some news media don’t pay the price. *Journalism Studies*, 8(6), 898–908.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1980). “Mainstreaming” of America: Violence profile No. 11. *Journal of Communication*, 30(3), 10–29.
- Gunther, A. (1992). Biased press or biased public? Attitudes toward media coverage of social groups. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 56(2), 147–167.
- Guo, Z., Zhou, B., & Lu, Y. (2006). Media literacy, political cognition, media functions and media use: An analysis of their theoretical connections. *Communication & Society*, 1(2), 122–145.
- Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Hallin, D., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hanson, G. (2009). Learning journalism ethics: The classroom versus the real world. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 17(3), 235–247.
- Hawkins, S., & Hastie, R. (1990). Hindsight: biased judgments of past events after the outcomes are known. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(3), 311–327.
- Hilgartner, S. (1992). The social construction of risk objects: Or, how to pry open networks of risk. In J. Short, & L. Clarke (Eds.), *Organizations, uncertainties and risk* (pp. 39–53). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Hovland, C., Lumsdaine, A., & Sheffield, F. (1949). *Experiments on mass communication*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Huang, T. (2013). *Is news dead?* Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Co. Ltd. (In Chinese)
- Huang, Y., Guo, Z., To, Y., & Chan, F. (2010). Measuring news content and press performance: The case of Hong Kong. *Communication & Society*, 12, 148–174.
- Johnson, T., & Kaye, B. (1998). Cruising is believing? Comparing Internet and traditional sources on media credibility measures. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 75(2), 325–340.
- Karlsson, M., Clerwall, C., & Nord, L. (2014). You ain’t seen nothing yet: Transparency’s (lack of) effect on source and message credibility. *Journalism Studies*, 15(5), 668–678.

Media Credibility in the Public Mind: A Critique

- Katz, E., Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523.
- Kim, M. (2009). Cross-national analyses of satisfaction with democracy and ideological congruence. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 19(1), 49–72.
- Kim, S. H., & Kim, S. (2016). National culture and social desirability bias in measuring public service motivation. *Administration & Society*, 48(4), 444–476.
- Kiousis, S. (2001). Public trust or mistrust? Perceptions of media credibility in the information age. *Mass Communication and Society*, 4(4), 381–404.
- Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2010). *Blur: How to know what's true in the age of information overload*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury.
- Lee, S. (2015). *New century for Hong Kong media* (2nd ed.). Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Luhmann, N. (1996). *The reality of the mass media*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Marcuse, H. (1964). *One-dimensional man: Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*. Boston: Beacon.
- McCroskey, J., & Teven, J. (1999). Goodwill: A reexamination of the construct and its measurement. *Communication Monographs*, 66, 90–103.
- McLeod, J., Sotirovic, M., Voakes, P., Guo, Z., & Huang, S. (1998). A model of public support for First Amendment Rights. *Communication Law and Policy*, 3(4), 479–514.
- Metzger, M., Flanagin, A., Eyal, K., Lemus, D., & McCann, R. (2003). Credibility for the 21st century: Integrating perspectives on source, message, and media credibility in the contemporary media environment. *Communication Yearbook*, 27, 293–336.
- Metzger, M., & Flanagin, A. (2015). Psychological approaches to credibility assessment online. In S. Sundar (Ed.), *The handbook of the psychology of communication technology* (pp. 445–466). New York, NY: Wiley Blackwell.
- Moehler, D., & Singh, N. (2011). Whose news do you trust? Explaining trust in private versus public media in Africa. *Political Research Quarterly*, 64(2), 276–292.
- Monin, B., & Miller, D. (2001). Moral credentials and the expression of prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81(1), 33–43.
- Nederhof, A. (1985). Methods of coping with social desirability bias: A review. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 15(3), 263–280.
- Newhagen, J., & Nass, C. (1989). Differential criteria for evaluating credibility of newspaper and TV news. *Journalism Quarterly*, 66(2), 277–284.
- Oates, S. (2006). *Television, democracy and elections in Russia*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Communication & Society, 46 (2018)

- Oyedemi, T. (2010). The credible brand model: The effects of ideological congruency and customer-based brand equity on news credibility. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 54(2), 83–99.
- Plous, S. (1993). *The psychology of judgment and decision making*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Popkin, S. (1994). *The reasoning voter: Communication and persuasion in presidential campaigns*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Putnam, R. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 6(1), 65–78.
- Roberts, C. (2010). Correlations among variables in message and messenger credibility scales. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 54(1), 43–56.
- Schuman, H., & Presser, S. (1996). *Questions and answers in attitude surveys: Experiments on question form, wording, and context*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schuman, H., & Scott, J. (1987). Problems in the use of survey questions to measure public opinion. *Science*, 236(4804), 957–959.
- Shimp, T., Hyatt, E., & Snyder, D. (1991). A critical appraisal of demand artifacts in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18(3), 273–283.
- So, C. (2012). *Chief executive, media, public opinion*. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books Ltd. (In Chinese)
- Soon, C., & Tan, T. H. (2016). The media freedom-credibility paradox. *Media Asia*, 43(3–4), 176–190.
- Splichal, S., & Dahlgren, P. (2016). Journalism between de-professionalization and democratization. *European Journal of Communication*, 31(1), 5–18.
- Sundar, S. (1998). Effect of source attribution on perception of online news stories. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 75(1), 55–68.
- Tsfati, Y., & Cappella, J. (2005). Why do people watch news they do not trust? The need for cognition as a moderator in the association between news media skepticism and exposure. *Media Psychology*, 7(1), 251–271.
- Tsfati, Y., & Cohen, J. (2013). Perceptions of media and media effects: The third person effect, trust in media and hostile media. In E. Scharrer (Ed.), *Blackwell's international companion to media studies: Media effects/media psychology* (pp. 128–146). New York, NY: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1973). Availability: A heuristic for judging frequency and probability. *Cognitive Psychology*, 5(2), 207–232.
- Weibel, D., Wissmath, B., & Groner R. (2008). How gender and age affect newscasters' credibility—an investigation in Switzerland. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52(3), 466–484.
- Wenner, L. A. (1985). The nature of news gratification. In K. E. Rosengren, L. A. Wenner, & P. Palmgreen (Eds.), *Media gratification research* (pp. 171–193). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Westerman, D., Spence, P., & Van der Heide, B. (2014). Social media as information source: Recency of updates and credibility of information. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19, 171–183.