

THE ROLE OF CYNICISM AND INVOLVEMENT IN PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY
OF MEDIA SOURCES AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

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Chair

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Abstract

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This study explores the role of political decision making in college students' perceived credibility of media sources. Specifically, it tapped into the associations among perceived credibility of media sources, cynicism and involvement. This study also compared the differences in the levels of perceived credibility between traditional and new media sources. Employing an online survey on Survey Monkey, the study generated responses via three-wave blanket emails and obtained a final sample of 668 responses. The regressions results indicate that cynicism negatively predicts traditional media but not new media sources except political comedy and talk radio. Involvement positively predicts both traditional and new media sources except TV, social networking sites, and talk radio. One way analysis of variance with post-hoc reveals that traditional media sources are significantly more credible than new media sources. Implications of the results were discussed and directions of future research were suggested.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Despite some intermittent upsurge in voter turnout, the last two decades overall witnessed a trend of decline in various forms of political participation, which was particularly true of the younger segment of the population (Delli Carpini, 2000; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Macedo, 2005; Putman, 1995; Zukin, 1997). Bennett & Rademacher (1997) indicated that college students have been particularly notorious for their unresponsiveness to the basic forms of civic engagement. One of the consequences of lack of civic engagement is the decline in the level of political knowledge and interest towards politics. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) found that the political knowledge of younger population is largely static despite the overall increase of years of education. In line with existing evidence suggesting the rising political disaffection, researchers have also pinpointed the sources by which young citizens obtain public affairs information.

Buckingham (1997) argued that media play a pivotal role in young adults' understanding of public affairs information. Research indicates that media may serve as their primary information sources, as youth's socialization process is not completed yet (Buckingham, 1997; Pinkleton & Austin, 2004). Research indicates that television typically introduces younger voters to politics (Chaffee & Yang, 1990). Likewise, newspaper use is often found to be associated with political knowledge (Chaffee, Zhao, & Lesner, 1994; Weaver & Drew, 1995). In short, there is substantial evidence that media serve as important sources for young adults' civic knowledge (Austin & Nelson, 1993; Chaffee, Ward, & Tipton, 1970).

While literature indicates that the politically inexperienced are becoming cynical (Buckingham, 1997; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), a few national surveys have revealed that adolescents are willing to absorb public affairs information from a variety of sources. In particular, young people have been found to access public affairs information from a broad array of new media outlets. A survey from the Pew Research Center showed that more than 20% of people aged 18 to 29 learns some news about political campaigns from political comedy shows and internet (Pew Research Center, 2004a). Although TV news and newspapers are still reported as the major sources for campaign information, their popularity has undergone a significant plunge over past few years, especially among younger audience. As young people are turned away from traditional sources, they are increasingly relying on alternative sources such as entertainment programming and Internet for political information. In an age of indifference to politics (Bennett & Rademacher, 1997), this new trend of media consumption has prompted many communication scholars to examine the impact of new media on civic engagement (Baum, 2002; Bennett, 1998; Davis & Owen, 1998; Hofstetter & Barker, 1999; Hollander, 1997, 2005; Pan and Kosicki, 1997; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002).

Previous research linking media use with civic engagement measured viewers' frequency of media exposure as independent variable. However, some researchers suggested that attention to news media may be a stronger predictor of political knowledge (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986). Pinkleton and Austin (2002) found that audience's satisfaction with media performance was a more useful measure than media use frequency in predicting cynicism and negativism toward news media. Similarly, Reagan (1996) argues that individual motivations and interest have come to be perceived as more

valuable predictors in viewers' selection of information sources. Pinkleton & Austin (2001) suggest that the role of media in political decision-making process depends on the benefits viewers foresee in them. They argue that the discrepancy between expectations and actual benefits experienced in media is associated with various aspects of political disaffection. In short, empirical evidence seems to support that individual perceptions or motivations are more important than single measure of media use frequency in extrapolating media' role in political processes.

Research on audience's perceptions suggests that cynicism may be exacerbated by viewers' negative judgments of media messages in that the view that reporters hold back information or there is more to a story may contribute to cynical attitudes towards media and campaigns, ultimately political processes (Pinkleton & Austin, 1999). Meanwhile, perception of media content as incomplete have been found to be less damaging as judgments of incompleteness may help produce healthy skepticism, which in turn may encourage information seeking (Austin & Pinkleton, 1995). Gunther (1992) argues that judgments of credibility in media messages depend on a person's involvement with issues being covered on media. He proposed that credibility can be alternatively defined as viewers' perceptions rather than attributes of media messages. In summary, previous research has showed that individual perceptions about media content may affect their expression of political disaffection, and the relationships are more likely to be in a cyclical fashion (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Pinkleton & Austin, 2002).

Nevertheless, comparatively less is known of the dimensions of viewers' perceptions of mass media and their impact on attitudes toward politics. Evaluations of media credibility may be an integral part of viewers' sense-making process, as the public

is frequently skeptical about information from media sources such as newspapers and television (Harris, 1983). As part of viewer's media perceptions, perceived credibility of media and its relationship with civic engagement remain less explored, thus demanding more scholarly attention.

Although a handful of studies examined the relationship between perceptions of media content and political decision making (Pinkleton & Austin, 1999, 2001), fewer studies have measured the relationship from a media credibility standpoint. In particular, studies gauging the impact of perceived credibility of new media sources on political processes are noticeably lacking. Given college voters' patterns of media consumption, it is necessary to go beyond traditional media sources to explore the role of new media sources. As an attempt to fill in that gap, this study examined the relationship between political attitudes and judgments about mass media credibility for college students. Specifically, this study will assess the impact of college students' cynicism and involvement on perceived credibility of a wide range of traditional and new media sources.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media use and political socialization

Brim (1966) defines socialization as “the process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make them more or less able members of society” (p. 3). Greenstein (1965) suggests that political socialization can be considered in either a narrow or broad term. Narrowly speaking, political socialization simply means civics classes in high school. Socialization in a broad sense can be defined as any forms of political learning. More literature suggests that political socialization is a life-long process rather than a prerogative for pre-adults as described by Greenstein. O’ Keefe and Reid-Nash (1987) specified that political socialization deals with “the processes by which individuals gain politically relevant cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors” (p. 426). Austin and Nelson broadened O’ Keefe and Reid-Nash’s definition of political socialization and defined it as “a process by which individuals obtain knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable them to function competently in the social-political structure” (Austin & Nelson, 1993, p. 420).

In order to dissect the political socialization process, it is imperative to identify the sources by which individuals rely on to gain politically relevant knowledge and form political attitudes. Moore, Lare, and Wagner (1985) suggested that “innate characteristics such as levels of basic intelligence and rates of cognitive maturation set the broad parameters within which political learning takes place. As these inner forces develop they permit more fruitful interaction with environmental stimuli provided by parents, teachers, peers, and the public media.” (p. 224). Similarly, O’Keefe and Reid-Nash (1987) argue

that socialization occurs through the interactions between biological characteristics and social stimuli. Specifically, individual's cognitive capabilities and the level of information provided by the social environment including media are among the key determinants in the process of political socialization. Above studies suggested that external stimuli from family, school, and increasingly media, interact with individual's cognitive and affective characteristics to shape one's political socialization process.

Traditional media and political socialization

Early research on political socialization was rooted in a transmission model in which knowledge, partisanship and attitudes are passed down from parents to children (Eveland, Mcleod, & Horowitz, 1998). Mass media were not even considered as part of the socialization agents until the 1970s, and media were largely ignored in political socialization research (Atkin, 1981). Chaffee, Ward and Tipton (1970) suggested that the "limited effects" model of mass communication on child may have contributed to the dismissal of media's role in political socialization. In the 1950s, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954) presented a model of two-step flow of information, which highlighted the impact of interpersonal communication and opinion leaders rather than mass media on individuals' political information seeking. Their findings suggest that mass media exert limited effects on individuals.

However, more recent literature indicates that mass media exert an important impact on the cognitive aspects of political socialization as mass media provide the bulk of politically relevant information (Atkin, 1981). Atkin indicated that TV news and public affairs programming is the leading source of information for children. Chaffee and Yang (1990) suggest that media serve as young voters' first contact with politics. In

another study, Chaffee et al. (1976) found that high school students more frequently reported mass media than teachers, parents, and friends as sources of information for public affairs. Chaffee, Ward, & Tipton (1970) found that newspaper readership was associated with political knowledge and opinion change. Similarly, Eveland, Mcleod and Horowitz (1998) found that mass-mediated communication variables, such as TV news exposure and newspaper exposure, were significantly related to political knowledge after some degree of control.

Atkin and Gantz (1978) claimed that exposure to television news on a regular basis contributes to interests and knowledge in public affairs. Interestingly, literature consistently documents a knowledge gap between heavy newspaper users and heavy TV users, between TV and print media users and TV-only users (Chaffee & Yang, 1990; Culbertson and Stempel, 1986; Eveland, Mcleod, & Horowitz, 1998). For example, Culbertson and Stempel (1986) found that reliance on TV was not associated with knowledge of issues, but reliance on newspapers did.

In exploring media's role as a socialization agent, some studies support direct effects from mass media while others favor various types of contingent conditions (Becker, McCombs, & Mcleod, 1975). The agenda setting hypothesis claims that there is a strong correlation between the attention to socio-political issues given by mass media and the salience assigned by the audience members (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). As Cohen (1963) interpreted it, the mass media may not be successful in telling people what to think but very successful in telling people what to think *about*. The implication is that audience members' cognitions are affected by mass media's selection and display of information.

Incongruous with agenda setting hypothesis, the effects of mass media have been described as influencing “the pictures in mind” that is, the image of certain issues is highlighted by repeated media exposure. Holbrook and Hill (2005) describes priming effects as “by virtue of steering attention to certain issues, the news media are able to determine in part the standards by which people make evaluations about politics and politicians” (p. 278).

Mass media can also exert influence by defining and constructing meanings or frames. Framing refers to how issues are packaged by media to present so as to achieve desirable interpretations from audience. In the words of McCombs and Estranda (1997), framing of mass media draws attention to certain attributes of media objects at the expense of other attributes. As Nelson, Oxley and Clawson (1997) drew distinctions among the three perspectives: media messages may impact audience by “adding information to an individual’s stockpile of considerations about the issue (belief change), by making particular considerations temporarily more accessible (priming), or by altering the weight of particular considerations (framing)” (p. 236).

The above media effects models, to some extent, underestimate the active reactions from the audience. Reagan (1996) summarized that motivations, interest and other active audience characteristics are perceived as more important factors in recent years. Uses and gratifications hypothesis derives from that line of active audience research. It proposes that people actively select their television viewing based on whatever utilities they are seeking for (Katz & Blumler, 1974). In other words, people actively choose media content that satisfy their situation-specific needs (Grunig, 1979; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001).

Taken together, existing body of literature points to the undeniable impact on audience's political socialization imposed by mass media regardless of the degree and process of that impact. In the words of Atkin (1981), mass media influence the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning in political socialization, which may be moderated by viewers' levels of attention and motivations toward mass media.

Arnett (1995) argues that adolescents may see media as a way of diverting themselves from other concerns. Media, therefore, may be seen as passive and less effort-demanding forms of entertainment. In that vein, it is not difficult to explain why college students are increasingly relying on new media to get political information, as they tend to be higher sensation seekers than adults (Arnett, 1995), and new media aptly provide far more entertainment-oriented content than traditional media outlets.

New media and political socialization

Before discussing the role of new media in political socialization, it is necessary to understand how new media has been conceptualized in the literature. There are some debates and ambiguity over the definition of "new media" among communication scholars (Lemert, Rosenberg, & Berstein, 1996). Some scholars saw newer forms of media as "infotainment" and developed a scale measuring the features of infotainment and its role in shaping political landscape (Brants & Neijens, 1998). Baum (2002) tapped into the role of entertainment-oriented "soft news" in reaching the politically inattentive. They found that political information presented in "soft news" formats actually serve to better inform politically inattentive Americans. Davis & Owen (1998) examined the interactions between "new media" and politics. They argue that new media are rather infant industries that are dedicated more to dollars than to furtherance of political

participation. For the purpose of this study, media sources different from traditional broadcast and print media are identified as “new media” despite the fact that some of the media sources are newer forms of traditional media and are not technically new.

As discussed earlier, there is enormous evidence that citizens' faith in government and political institutions, along with voter turnout, has declined considerably over years. Exposure to negative political advertising and horse-racing public affairs coverage on traditional media may have contributed to the increasing cynicism and apathy in citizens (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Crotty and Jacobson 1980). As a result, the disgust for negative public discourse on traditional media may have fueled new media's speedy penetration into the disaffected American public, as new media aptly fill in the information gap left by traditional media.

Studies linking new media with audience's political participation fail to produce consistent findings. For example, no relationship between televisions talk shows use and civic engagement was found to be significant in a study of talk shows (Weaver, & Drew, 1995). Pan and Kosicki (1997), however, found that talk radio did have an impact on political participation as talk radio is interactive and helps engage more listeners to politics. Nevertheless, Pfau et al. (1999) suggest that political talk radio describes political institutions in a negative way, thus contributing to listeners' reduced confidence in political institutions. Weaver and Drew (2001) indicated online news use may have no impact on civic participation when other uses of other media are controlled, suggesting a complementary relationship between uses of different media. Lemert et al. (1996) found that television talk show viewing is positively, but not all linearly, correlated with

political knowledge, suggesting that the relationship may be moderated by other variables.

McLeod, et al. (1996) found no support for a statistically significant relationship between television talk shows exposure and overall political participation. But they did find limited support for a positive relationship between talk show use and candidate issue stance. In addition to television talk shows, scholars have conducted research on MTV and revealed that attention to candidate appearances on MTV negatively predicted candidate issue knowledge (Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994). Shah, McLeod, and Yoon (2001) cast doubt on the potential for internet to increase political knowledge or interest, as their research findings failed to demonstrate such impact of Internet. Literature on new media use and politics, taken together, provides mixed results for the relationship between new media use and political engagement. This line of research displays a need for more empirical support, as new media are reshaping the mass media landscape and winning over younger audience.

Davis and Owen (1998) have observed that new media outlets, such as talk radio, television talk shows, and cutting-edge news outlets “The Drudge Report” and “Hard Copy” are driven by ratings and lack accuracy in news reporting. They called into question the believability and accuracy of new media. Although a fair amount of research has gauged the relationship between new media use and political outcomes, the bulk of the research focuses on frequency of media use and civic engagement. Fewer have examined the interaction between perceptions about new media and their perceptions about politics. Even fewer has delved into the perceptions of media credibility and politics. The credibility research and civic engagement research appear, to some extent,

two parallel lines without crisscross. As a result, more attention is needed on the role of audience's perceptions of media credibility and politics, as new media have been linked with inaccuracy and untrustworthiness (Davis & Owen, 1998).

Perceptions of media source credibility

In a study of source credibility, Austin and Dong (1994) found that the reputation of the source has no direct impact on the credibility judgments among young people. However, a more innocuous message induced more positive judgments of believability of the source. This finding corresponds to several other studies, in which credibility of the source is more affected by situational factors such as audience's issue involvement rather than global reputational judgments (Gunther, 1992; Sternthal, Philips, & Dholakia, 1978). Nevertheless, literature also indicates that individuals analyze both specific messages as well as the source reputation when making credibility judgments (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969). In order to better understand viewers' credibility perceptions of media, it is necessary to unravel both the situational factors and reputational judgments.

Information source credibility has been typically defined in two dimensions: expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Pornpitakpan, 2004; Sternthal, Philips, & Dholakia, 1978). Expertise refers to the extent to which a source or speaker is perceived to be capable of making appropriate judgment (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which audience perceive the judgment or assertions to be valid (Hovland, 1953). The expertise dimension, to some extent, mirrors the reputational judgments of the source, while the trustworthiness dimension represents situational judgments about specific content.

The typical concern of information source credibility was the comparison between high credibility source and low credibility source in shaping audience's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Hovland, 1953; Ross, 1973). Previous research on source credibility can be divided into two categories: the main effects and the interactions by other situational factors (Pornpitakpan, 2004; Sternthal, Philips, & Dholakia, 1978). The main effects research concerns the differences between perceived levels of credibility in prompting changes in attitudes toward the source (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Lirtzman & Shuv-Ami, 1986; Ross, 1973; Schulman & Worrall, 1970). Research on interactions, in turn, focuses on the impact of audience and media characteristics on moderating attitude changes (Sternthal, Philips, & Dholakia, 1978; Wu & Shaffer, 1987).

Literature indicates that information sources with higher level of credibility may induce a more positive attitude toward the position advocated than sources with lower levels of credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Schulman & Worrall, 1970). A highly credible source is often associated with more behavioral compliance in consumers than a low credible source. For example, Ross (1973) demonstrates that the differences between sources with high and low credibility in inducing behavioral compliance are statistically significant.

Marketing literature suggests that it is much easier and cost-effective to attract customers when the source is highly credible (Gotlieb, Gwinner, & Schlacter, 1987). Research on celebrity endorsements shows that celebrity endorsers' perceived expertise could significantly affect audiences' reported intention to purchase certain items (Ohanian, 1991). Similarly, Austin and her colleagues (2006) found that celebrity-endorsed political campaigns can potentially exert positive influence in younger citizen's

civic engagement, as their findings suggest that receptivity to celebrities is associated with lower level of complacency and higher level of self efficacy.

There is also evidence that the trustworthiness and expertise dimensions of source credibility produce differential effects. McGinnies and Ward (1980) argued that trustworthiness is more impactful than expertise, as trustworthy communicators were more influential than untrustworthy communicator regardless of whether he or she was considered an expert. In other words, situational judgments of the content are more influential than general judgments of the source reputation in shaping receivers' attitudes and perhaps behaviors. As a result, it is important to examine the interactions of situational factors such as audience and message characteristics.

Studies on content have tapped into message discrepancy (Halperin et al., 1976) and message's inclusion of opposing arguments (Hass & Reichig, 1977). The results from these studies indicate that a highly credible source is more persuasive than a low credible source in shaping attitudes and behaviors only when the discrepancy within the message is low. Additionally, inclusion of refutation strengthens the power of high credible source in creating perceptual changes (Pornpitakpan, 2004).

Research on audience characteristics focuses on individual differences in initial disposition (Harmon & Coney, 1982). Moderately credible source was found to be more powerful than the highly credible one when the audience is in a favorable issue disposition. Another study found that low expertise source was more persuasive than high expertise source when participants had a favorable disposition toward the message (Chebat, Filiatrault, Laroche, & Watson, 1998). Studies have also scrutinized the direct

experience with the object (Wu & Shaffer, 1987). They suggest that direct experience with the object in the message moderates the credibility of the message.

To sum up, credibility judgments are multi-faceted processes and many factors may be activated to make judgments (Austin & Dong, 1994). The above literature suggests that higher credibility sources tend to prompt more attitudinal and behavioral changes to the extent that discrepancy within the content, audience's experience, issue disposition and attitudes moderate the credibility perceptions.

Political Involvement

It is necessary to recognize that involvement has been conceptualized differently in the literature. Gunther (1992) found that if a person identified with a particular group, he or she was significantly more likely to say the media gave unfavorable coverage to that group. In this study he conceptualized involvement as group membership. In some literature, involvement was conceptualized at the behavioral level such as the frequency of group participation and identification with particular group (Gunther, 1992, Perloff, 1988).

However, as Pinkleton and Austin (2001) summarized, involvement was often conceptualized as “an individual's perceptions of issue relevance at a particular point in time or level of interest in a short-term outcome.” (p. 322). According to Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman (1998) involvement is centered on differences in motivational processes at individual level. Individuals' involvement may encourage them to actively seek out information to confirm or disconfirm information on television (McLeod & Becker, 1974). As a similar note, some researchers suggest that a higher level of involvement predicts higher knowledge, political learning and political behaviors

(Culbertson & Stempel, 1986).

Interest in certain issues has been linked with active selection of information sources. Reagan (1995) found that there is a positive correlation between interest in a topic and the information repertoire. As people's interest increases, so do the sources they select for information. Relatedly, as involvement increases, people's repertoire of information source is likely to go up, as the motivating nature of involvement encourages citizens to regularly and purposefully engage in an active information seeking (Austin & Pinkleton, 1999; Kanihan & Chaffee, 1996; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001).

Involvement is important to political decision making, as involvement activates individuals' purposeful information search and involved individuals are active information seekers (Kanihan & Chaffee, 1996; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). Informed decision making derives from a higher level of involvement. As individuals are integrated into politics, they develop more active information seeking habits and become less likely to distance themselves from political information.

Gunther (1992) demonstrated that issue involvement is a stronger predictor of media credibility. Studies on media credibility have shown that identification with the source and direct experience with the source affects the perceived source credibility (Sternthal, Philips, & Dholakia, 1978; Wu & Shaffer, 1987). Put differently, individuals' level of involvement affects their perceived credibility of media sources. Meyer (1988) noted that credibility judgments seem to correspond to the degree to which individuals view a news source as concerned about or connected to the local community. The judgments may be more critical for those who are highly involved and have a high degree of familiarity (Gunther, 1992).

Research indicates that involved individuals will select information they consider as important (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). In a similar logic, it is reasonable to expect that involved individuals will seek out information they consider credible for political decision making. Taken together, literature suggests that involvement is related to credibility judgments and a high degree of involvement is more likely to be related to a synonymous degree of trust in information sources. It makes less sense to say that involved citizen will exert an effort to seek out information they do not trust for political decision making. The above discussion of literature points to a positive relationship between involvement and perceived credibility of media:

H1: Political involvement positively associates with perceived credibility of media sources.

Political Cynicism

While political apathy indicates a lack of interest in voters, cynicism reveals a feeling of distrust in voters (Austin & Pinkleton, 1995). It has been defined as a lack of confidence in or a feeling of distrust toward politics (Bandura, 1986; Capella & Jamieson, 1997). Cynical voters are found to believe that political system and governments themselves are corrupt and problematic, and they can not be trusted (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). As a similar note, cynicism is attributed by some scholars to prevalent negative political campaigns. Particularly, negative coverage about candidates and political institutions contribute to cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Others suggest that a reliance on television can lead to such an attitude (Bowen, Stamm & Clark, 2000). Some researchers believe that cynicism among the young particularly needs attention. Lau and Erber (1995) suggest that the young may be at the mercy of political rhetoric and more likely to be negatively affected by attack political advertising.

More cynical the voters become, less likely they will engage themselves in the political process. Ultimately they may distance themselves from political processes (Pinkleton et al., 2005).

Pinkleton and Austin (2002) argue that evaluations of media usefulness – ratings of satisfaction with media performance – may be a stronger predictor of political attitudes than exposure frequency. Although weak, global and specific media usefulness measures were found to negatively associate with cynicism and negativism. Credibility assessment and media usefulness judgments may represent different dimensions of viewers' perceptions. Yet they are comparable when it comes to predicting the general patterns of relationships between media perceptions and political disaffection. Thus we expect that cynical attitudes toward media and campaign information are more likely to be related with negative judgments about media credibility. In turn, negative judgments about political information on media will contribute to cynicism in the long run. Additionally, studies suggest that motivated individuals are willing to spend time seeking out additional information (Atkin, 1973). If they succeed in getting that information, heightened cynicism will be unlikely (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). Motivated individuals may develop active perceptions about media such as they may curb the cynicism toward media.

H2: Political cynicism negatively associates with perceived credibility of media sources.

Perceived importance of media sources

The process of agenda setting has been described as transferring salience from the media to the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1977). The definition of salience is debatable. It has been equated with accessibility but some researchers maintained that accessibility

and perceived importance are distinct constructs within salience (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). Researchers concluded that “perceived importance was more theoretically valuable than accessibility because the former variable was found to mediate the subsequent effect of framing while the latter did not.” (p. 277).

The above discussion suggests that perceived importance is a critical construct in audience’s perceptions of media. Perceived importance of media has been used as a surrogate measure for attention to media and was found to predict lower cynicism and increased efficacy for some media sources (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001, 2002). Pinkleton and Austin (2004) incorporated perceived importance of media into a composite index of perceptions of information source benefit and found the measure was very reliable across different media sources, suggesting that perceived importance was highly related to other aspects of media evaluations. This evokes the concern of whether perceived importance of media sources belongs to the same construct as perceived credibility of media sources. To answer that query, a research question was denoted as:

RQ1: Is perceived importance a different construct from perceived credibility of media sources?

Westly and Severin (1964) conducted first study on channel credibility across different types of media outlets. They found that demographic variables moderate people’s perceptions of media credibility. Surprisingly, it was found that people do not always go for the most credible media, as they observed a gap between the most preferred and most credible media in respondents’ ratings.

Research has shown that television is perceived to be more credible than newspapers (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Other studies seem to indicate that perceived credibility of newspaper is significantly higher than television (Johnson & Kaye, 1998;

Kiousis, 2001). Newhagen and Nass (1989) explain the discrepancy between the two traditional media as people are more liable to evaluate the individual anchorperson who delivers the news on television, but assess the entire newspaper institution of the newspaper when evaluating the credibility of print media. As opposed to the nameless individuals, respondents report that television anchorperson are more identifiable and tend to ally them with television. Powell and Ibelema (2000) found that the credibility of local radio news was comparable to local newspaper, but lower than local television. This finding is supported in a few previous studies that television was found to be more credible than other media outlets (Carter & Greenberg, 1965; Flanagin & Metzger, 2000).

Compared to credibility research on traditional media, assessment of new media is limited. Sporadic evidence suggests that new media are perceived to be more credible than traditional media (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Davis (1997) argues that talk radio may be considered as a credible media, as political talk show hosts are open about their biases and present themselves as true authorities on political issues. On the contrary, the traditional media are perceived to be hiding or lying about real situation behind the coverage.

Contrary to popular impression, several studies indicate that newspapers and television are judged as less credible than new media. Research on online media indicates that Internet news are rated as more credible than news on traditional media by internet users, but both online and traditional media were judged only as moderately credible (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Another study conducted on Web logs indicated that blog users reported blogs as highly credible and even more credible than traditional media (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). Although respondents do not seem to think that Web logs are as fair as

traditional media, they do report higher rating of Web logs in terms of depth of information. There is some evidence that online news outlets were judged as more credible even than their print and broadcast counterparts. Pew Research Center (2000) illustrated that online newspapers and televisions Web sites were rated as substantially more credible than newspapers and televisions. There is some evidence that respondents rate talk radio, Web logs, and online news Web sites as more credible than traditional media (Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2004). However, the samples used in Johnson and Kaye's study were not probability-based which invokes the concerns of external validity of their findings. As a concluding remark, previous studies provide mixed support for the credibility levels of traditional and new media, which is explainable in the sense that a variety of contextual variables factor into the process of credibility judgments.

Overall, the literature is unclear regarding whether traditional media are perceived as more credible than new media (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Thus the second research question was raised as:

RQ2: How traditional and new media sources differ in terms of perceived credibility among college-aged voters?

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

This study tested the hypotheses and research questions by using data generated from an online survey. First of all, a list of 5000 randomized email addresses was generated by the Office of Registrar from a major public university in Northwestern United States. The selected email addressees then served as the respondents of the survey. The respondents received a greeting email which includes introduction of the research, IRB approval and consent statement. The introduction email also came with a hyperlink, which was connected to an online survey on Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). When clicking on the hyperlink, respondents would be guided to finish the online survey. Considering the typical low response rates of online survey, a second and third wave of emails was sent to all respondents as kindly reminders.

The survey lasted from May, 1 to June 10 and resulted in a final sample of 668 responses. The cooperation rate for this survey was approximately 13.36%, which included both completed and partially completed responses.

The sample consisted of 287 men (43%), 378 women (56.6%), and three cases missing the sex value (0.4%). The respondents were primarily undergraduate students. Their ages ranged from 18 to 48 ($M=21.93$, $SD=3.56$). Respondents came from a variety of racial backgrounds, in which Caucasian respondents were about 84.5% ($n=565$), followed by African Americans (2.2%, $n=15$), Asian respondents (9.9%, $n=66$), Hispanics (4.5%, $n=30$), natives (2.7%, $n=18$). Among the respondents, 4.8% ($n=32$)

reported as “other” indicating they did not fit into the existing categories or they were multi-racial. 18 respondents (2.7%) refused to share their racial background.

In terms of respondent’s educational levels, 4% of them received a high school degree (n=27), 61.5% of them finished some college including AA and trade degrees (n=411), 32.6% of them had a bachelor’s degree (n=218), 1.2% of the respondents had some graduate work or degree (n=8), 0.3% of them refused to report their educational background (n=2), and there were another 0.3% (n=2) with missing value.

Among the respondents, 1.8% (n=12) reported that they were very conservative, 16.9% (n=113) reported as conservative, 33.1% (n=221) labeled themselves as moderate, 29.3% (n=196) were liberal, 7.5% (n=50) were very liberal, 11.1% (n=74) either did not know or refused to answer the question, and 0.3% (n=2) had no responses.

The family income of the respondents was based on their best estimation. 6.3% (n=42) reported a household income below \$10,000, 5.7% (n=38) was between \$11,000 to \$25,000, 13.9% (n=93) was between \$26,000 to \$50,000, 14.7% (n=98) was between \$51,000 to \$75,000, 18% (n=120) was between \$76,000 to \$100,000, 17.2% (n=115) was between \$101,000 to \$150,000, 6.6% (n=44) was above \$150,000, 17.7% (n=118) either did not know or refused to tell.

–Insert Table 1 about Here–

Measures

The survey was composed primarily of a series of 7-point, semantic-differential scaled questions, in which 1 means strongly disagree and 7 means strongly agree. The questions used to measure political decision making constructs were based primarily on Pinkleton and Austin (1998) and several other studies (Austin & Pinkleton, 1995; Craig,

Niemi, & Silver, 1990; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001, 2002). Composite scales as used in previous research have been found to be fairly reliable over time.

Kiousis (2001) synthesized the questions that were used to measure media credibility in order to compute a media credibility index. The composite index he constructed includes questions that measure how factual a medium is, the extent to which the media are motivated by money, whether it invades people's privacy, what the media's concerns for the community are, and whether it can be trusted. While Kiousis argues that the scale he created is comprehensive, it has not been consistently used in later studies and the Cronbach's alpha was quite low for the scale when it was used to measure different types of media (Kiousis, 2001). In this study, items used to measure the credibility of mass media were based on the popular media credibility index that has been consistently used in previous studies (Bucy, 2003; Jennings & Niemi, 1974; Johson & Kaye, 1998, 2002, 2004; Meyer, 1988).

Perceived media credibility

Respondents were asked to tell to what extent they think that each type of new media and traditional media is believable, accurate, fair, and in-depth in covering public affairs information on a scale of 1 to 7, in which 1 means not believable, accurate, fair, and in-depth at all and 7 means very believable, accurate, fair, and in-depth. The measure has been used in a few previous studies (Bucy, 2003; Johson & Kaye, 1998, 2002, 2004).

Perceived importance of media sources

Respondents were asked to tell how important they think each of these various types of media sources on a scale of 1 to 7, in which 1 means very important and 7 means

not very important. This measure was based on two previous studies (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001, 2002).

Political cynicism

Respondents were be asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the following statements using a scale of 1 to 7, in which 1 means strongly disagree and 7 means strongly agree: Politicians are out of touch with life in the real world; Politicians put their own interests ahead of the public's interest; It seems like politicians only care about special interests; Politicians loose touch quickly with the public after they get elected. The questions used in this measure were adopted from previous studies (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001, 2004).

Political involvement

Respondents were asked to answer the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the following statements using a scale of 1 to 7, in which 1 means strongly disagree and 7 means strongly agree: I pay attention to political information; I actively seek out information about politics; I am interested in election information; and I like to stay informed about the elections. The involvement measure has been used quite extensively in previous research (Austin & Pinkleton, 1999; Pinkleton & Austin, 2001).

Statistical analyses

The first research question was answered by conducting a series of factor analysis. The factor analysis was conducted by putting together perceived importance and the original perceived credibility measure comprising four items to see if they load together. The factor analysis was performed on each of the eight media sources. If perceived importance and perceived credibility were indeed not separate, perceived

importance would be joined with perceived credibility to form a new credibility measure, incorporating the original items measuring credibility and perceived importance.

Initially, bivariate correlations were computed to examine the variable relationships. The hypotheses were tested by using multiple regression analysis following stepwise approach. Income, race, sex, education, political orientation, and age were entered in the first block. Cynicism and involvement were entered into the second block.

–Insert Table 2 about Here–

The second research question was answered by conducting one-way analysis of variance with post-hoc. First of all, credibility values for all eight media sources were put together in the original order in one column resulting in 5344 values. Then TV news credibility values were all assigned number 1. Newspaper credibility values for all the participants were assigned number 2, and the remaining media sources were assigned a number in that order till number 8, resulting in another column of 5344 values. The first was the perceived credibility and the second was a categorical variable indicating the type of media sources. The second categorical variable was used as the independent variable to predict perceived credibility in the first column.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The first research question asked whether perceived importance and perceived credibility of media sources are measuring the same construct. Results from a series of factor analysis indicated that perceived importance and perceived credibility were indeed measuring the same construct as the factor loadings for these two measures were high and only one factor (eigenvalue>1) emerged consistently across eight media sources. Perceived credibility and perceived importance explained more than 60% of variance across seven media sources, and 59.67% of variance for social networking sites. As a result, perceived importance was added to items within perceived credibility index to form a new measure of perceived credibility.

–Insert Table 3 about Here–

Hypothesis 1 predicted that involvement positively associates with perceived credibility of media sources. The multiple regressions indicated that involvement was positively associated with perceived credibility of newspapers ($\beta=.18, p<.001$). Involvement was also positively associated with perceived credibility of Web-only news portals ($\beta=.14, p<.001$). An equally strong relationship was found between involvement and perceived credibility of political comedy ($\beta=.13, p<.01$). Additionally, regressions indicated that involvement was associated with blogs and opinion sites ($\beta=.10, p<.05$) and video-sharing sites ($\beta=.09, p<.05$). However, the results did not support an association between involvement and perceived credibility of TV news ($\beta=.05, p>.05$), social networking sites ($\beta=.03, p>.05$), and talk radio ($\beta=.06, p>.05$).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that political cynicism negatively associates with perceived credibility of media sources. The multiple regression results revealed a mixed support. The results confirmed that cynicism was negatively associated with perceived credibility of newspaper ($\beta=-.16, p<.001$); cynicism was negatively associated with perceived credibility of TV news ($\beta=-.13, p<.01$); cynicism was positively associated with perceived credibility of political comedy ($\beta=.09, p<.05$); cynicism was negatively associated with talk radio ($\beta=-.08, p<.05$). On the other hand, cynicism was not associated with Web-only news portals ($\beta=-.06, p>.05$), blogs and opinion sites ($\beta=.01, p>.05$), social networking sites ($\beta=-.00, p>.05$), and video-sharing sites ($\beta=-.02, p>.05$).

–Insert Table 4 about Here–

One-way analysis of variance was conducted to answer the second question. The results indicated that there was significant difference across all eight types of media sources, $F(7, 5313)=391.98, p<.001$. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean scores for the eight media sources were all significantly different from each other except that social networking sites were not significantly different from video-sharing Web sites ($p>.05$). The perceived credibility of TV news ($M=4.83, SD=1.27$) was less than that of newspapers and their Web sites ($M=5.08, SD=1.18$). The perceived credibility of Web-only news portals ($M=4.21, SD=1.26$) was significantly higher than the perceived credibility of social networking sites ($M=2.51, SD=1.10$) and video-sharing sites ($M=2.71, SD=1.17$). Political comedy shows ($M=3.42, SD=1.37$) were perceived as slightly less credible than talk radio ($M=3.95, SD=1.41$). Blogs ($M=2.96, SD=1.28$) were both perceived as less credible than political comedy and talk radio.

–Insert Table 5 about Here–

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Previous studies have tapped into the relationship between perceptions of media sources and political decision making (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001, 2002). This study went one step forward to examine perceptions of media credibility and political attitudes. Involvement has been proposed to act as a likely entry point to media perceptions and the political decision making process (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). Similarly, this study utilized involvement as the independent variable, along with cynicism, to predict perceived credibility of media sources. There are some meaningful findings and implications.

As cynicism increases among young people, it also has generated a great deal of scholarly interest. Heightened cynicism may manifest itself as a high level of distrust in political institutions and political figures. Ultimately, cynicism may deter people from political participation, casting detriments on the representative democracy. Cynical voters are unwilling to participate in politics as they do not trust the political institution. On the other hand, elevated involvement may boost active information seeking. Coupled with self-efficacy, it may result in further political participation including voting. Literature indicates that involvement is negatively associated with cynicism. As a result, it was expected that cynicism and involvement would predict perceived credibility of media sources in different directions. Cynicism should be related to negative media perceptions while involvement predicts active perceptions. This hypothesis held true with some of media sources but not all media sources.

Newspapers and their Web sites

Results indicate that involvement is positively associated with perceived credibility of newspapers and their Web sites. In other words, involved individuals are more likely to perceived newspapers and their Web sites as credible. Newspaper use has been consistently found to predict civic knowledge and involvement (Pinkleton, Reagan, Aaronson, & Chen, 1997; Tan, 1980). This study extended that relationship by showing that involvement positively predicts perceived credibility of newspapers. This finding confirms previous studies which indicate that perceptions of newspapers are related to political attitudes (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001, 2002).

The results from this study indicate that cynicism is negatively associated with perceived credibility of newspapers. Cynicism represents a lack of trust in politics including political information on mass media. Thus, as cynicism goes up, perceived credibility of political information on media sources will decline. Cynical individuals typically are not willing to exert an effort to read newspapers, and they are less likely to lend credence to the information on newspapers. Consequently, a deplorable cycle described by Pinkleton and Austin (2002) may ensue, in which cynicism predicts negative perceptions of media credibility, in turn, negative perceptions of media credibility contribute to more cynicism.

TV news and their Web sites

The results did not support a relationship between involvement and perceived credibility of TV news, suggesting credibility perceptions of TV news were not affected by the respondents' level of involvement. Different from newspapers, research suggests that TV news may be seen as a less effort-demanding source of information. As a result,

TV news may not help that much in furthering audience's political knowledge, as the audio-visual nature of TV may shift the mental efforts needed to commit the substantive topics to memory. Although audience may not see TV news as credible, they still can be highly involved as they may rely on newspapers for more serious political information-seeking and deliberations. Previous research has shown that TV news use did not contribute to the political knowledge (Atkin, 1972; Tan, 1980), suggesting TV news may have been easier to use for our respondents and therefore do not require the greater cognitive development and life experience that other communication sources such as newspaper necessitates (Eveland, Mcleod, & Horowitz, 1998). Therefore, respondents' perceptions about TV news credibility remained unchanged regardless of their level of involvement.

Cynicism did predict lower level of perceived credibility of TV news in college students. As cynical voters are shut-off against politics and political information from media sources, it is not difficult to explain why they do not trust TV news.

Web-only news portals

As the results suggest, college student's cynicism seems to be unaffected by their perceived level of credibility in Web-only news portals. Online media sources' unregulated flow of information may cause many people to question its credibility. There is evidence that netizens are generally distrustful and disconnected from the government and major institutions (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Katz, 1997). Considering college student's higher reliance on online media sources, their level of cynicism is more likely to be higher than the general public. Regardless of the perceived credibility of online news portals, college students' cynicism may be more stubborn and is here to stay.

This study reveals that involvement positively predicted perceived credibility of Web-only news portals. John and Kaye (1998) indicated that “the more credible the public finds a particular medium the more they rely on it as their primary news source. Therefore, the most relied-upon sources are deemed the most credible.” (p. 331). Taken together, involved college students are more likely to trust Web-only news portals, thus more likely to use them as political information source.

Political comedy show

As it was expected, involvement and cynicism should predict perceived credibility differently. One anomaly fell on the political comedy show. As involvement was found to be positively associated with perceived credibility of political comedy, it is expected that cynicism would negatively associate with perceived credibility in political comedy. Surprisingly, the results indicate that cynicism positively predicts perceived credibility of political comedy, $\beta=.13$, $p<.01$. Worded differently, as cynicism rises up, perceived credibility in political comedy escalates accordingly. Cynical people distrust political information on media sources, but political comedy seems to be an exception. This finding actually mirrors previous research in which political comedy was found to contribute to viewers’ level of cynicism (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006). They found that exposure to *The Daily Show* lead to decreased trust in the media and the electoral process. They speculated that Jon Stewart’s highlight of the absurdities of the political world may result in such an effect. Cynical viewers who see politics as untrustworthy may resonate with political comedy’s illustrations of the ridicule in politics. As a result, they may perceive political comedy as credible in the sense that these shows give “real” portrayals of politics.

Ideally political comedy shows boost their political participation by either providing political information or increasing their level of efficacy (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006), which is the key to future information seeking and political participation. The results from this study suggested that politically involved college students may perceive political comedy shows as credible source of information. The finding confirms several previous surveys from Pew Research Center that young people gravitates more towards new media sources including political comedy and may perceive them as credible.

Talk radio

Talk radio use has been found to predict political knowledge. Bennett (1998) indicates that the more people listen to talk radio broadcasts, the more knowledgeable they are about current events regardless of their demographic background and/or exposure to other communication media. Similarly, he suggested that the more frequently people listen to call-in radio broadcasts, the more likely they are to take part in public affairs. The results of this study suggest that cynicism negatively predicts the perceived credibility of talk radio. In other words, the more cynical college students are, the less likely they will trust talk radio. This implies that elevated cynicism indicates a degree of distrust of political information on talk radio. This finding is in line with previous research in that cynical voters do not believe in the political information from talk radio and are less likely to engage in call-ins or other forms of participation in talk radio.

Based on the literature, it is expected that involvement positively predicts perceived credibility of talk radio. However, this study failed to demonstrate such link. This is may be due to the fact that college students barely listen to talk radio as one study

revealed that well under 10% of people ages from 18-24 reported local radio news as one of the major sources of information, even lower for talk radio (Papper, 2006). While talk radio may predict the political knowledge in general public, College students may be unaffected because they simply do not listen to them. As a result, the perceived credibility of talk radio may be irrelevant to their level of involvement.

Blogs and opinion sites

Papper (2006) indicated that roughly 6% of people ages 18-24 regularly read blogs for political information. As blogs become less involved in college student's political information seeking, the impact of blogs on political perceptions may be less obvious. This relationship manifested itself in this study by showing that cynicism did not predict college students' perceived credibility of blogs and opinion sites. In this case, the resistance to change in credibility results from a degree of irrelevance of talk radio.

Blogs use may not impact those who are cynical, but it does seem to affect the perceptions of those who are involved. Eveland and Dylko (2004) found that blog readers are generally more likely to use other online media sources and less likely to believe that traditional broadcast media is credible. They did not find a significant relationship between blog reading and political knowledge. However, online political discussion and online news use are strong predictors of blog reading, which suggest that frequent blog readers are more likely to be involved individuals who seek out a range of online media sources. The relationship was indirectly replicated in this study in that involvement was found to predict perceived credibility of talk radio. In other words, politically involved college students are more likely to believe blogs are credible, and they are more likely to use blogs than those who perceived them as not credible.

Video-sharing and social networking sites

There is evidence that social networking sites and video-sharing Web sites are gaining popularity and have the potential to affect the political participation of college students (Turkheimer, 2007; Westling, 2007). However, this study seems to paint a different picture. The results of this study suggest that involvement and cynicism is not directly related to perceived credibility of social networking and video-sharing Web sites except that there is a weak correlation ($\beta=.09$, $p<.05$) between involvement and perceived credibility of video-sharing sites.

One possible explanation for this is that the majority college students are not using social networking and video-sharing Web sites for political information. As a result, their perceptions of these websites' credibility in terms of political information seeking keep stagnant. Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield (2006) found that Facebook was most commonly used as a tool to communicate with or learn about offline acquaintances such as classmates, high school friends, other students that live in the same community, or even other people that were met randomly through a mutual friend or at a party or university event. In another study, Ellison et al. (2007) suggested that Facebook was used as a way of bridging, maintaining and bonding social capital, in which social capital was measured on the degree of social integration into community. In both studies, social networking sites (SNS) were found to be used as a supplementary form of offline communication rather than political information seeking.

One of the differences between social networking sites and video-sharing Web sites is the political campaigning discussion is more vibrant on YouTube or other video-sharing sites than social networking sites. As young people express their political

opinions by posting videos on YouTube like “the Obama girl” or “the Hillary man,” they partake in politics and interact with other video-sharers. On the other hand, Facebook does not have the video feature like YouTube and users can not post personal videos and favorite visual campaign advertisements on their Facebook pages. Additionally, users have to have an account and have added somebody as a friend in order to view his or her profile depending on whether that profile has been set as private. On YouTube, the pages are open to everyone and users can post videos using Gmail or YouTube accounts. With this comparison in mind, it is not difficult to explain the nuance in results, that is, involvement positively predicted perceived credibility of video-sharing Web sites but not social networking sites. As college students watch presidential debate on YouTube and political advertising, they are more likely to perceived YouTube as a credible information source.

As a sum-up of above discussion, it is observed that the more involved college students are, the more credible they perceive media sources depending on whether they are using that particular source for political information. Because college students may not be using social networking sites and talk radio for political information, involvement does not predict perceived credibility of these sources. It is also observed that the more cynical college students are, the less credible they perceive traditional but not new media sources, suggesting that college students might not use new media sources for serious civic information-seeking except political comedy and talk radio.

The results of this study disclose that traditional media sources are perceived as significantly more credible than various new media sources. Newspapers are perceived as most credible, followed by TV and Web-only news portals. The finding confirmed a few

national surveys indicating traditional media sources are perceived as more credible (Papper, 2006; Pew Research Center, 2004a, 2004b). As Papper (2006) suggested, the sudden demise of traditional media outlets is unlikely at least in the near future.

Traditional media are still the most trusted sources for political information seeking. In the meantime, new media are becoming increasingly popular with younger audience.

Although they are not popular enough to substitute traditional media sources, they carry important implications for audience's political participation, especially the disaffected younger audience.

The results indicate that political comedy is perceived as significantly more credible than other new media sources and is related to cynicism and involvement, suggesting that at least some new media sources are playing a role in college students' political perceptions. Involvement positively predicted the majority of new media sources, which implies that involved younger audience are more likely to perceive new media sources as credible. The worries that new media sources contribute to the increasing cynicism may be a little overreacting. College students may be more cynical than the general public but they are also willing to use new media as their sources of information, which is better than being impervious to political information, ultimately political processes. As long as younger audience is constantly seeking information from new media sources, it may be more benefiting than damaging to political processes.

One surprising finding of this study is that cynicism positively associates with involvement. In other words, younger audience can be involved even if they are cynical at the same time. However, previous research has consistently demonstrated that cynicism is different from involvement and they are often negatively related. This

anomaly could be attributed to the differences between younger audience and the general demographics. Unlike older generations, young adults' higher level of distrust does not linearly result in their lack of concern or involvement in politics. Although they are cynical, they can also be involved in the sense that they express their cynicism via new media outlets such as political comedy or video-sharing Web sites. Their sense of involvement can originate from a feeling of sudden learning from new media or may be a fake impression of involvement. That is, young citizens may perceive limited expressions of distrust or concerns in politics over new media as equal to involvement. This finding indicates the established relationship between involvement and cynicism may not hold true with college students. More research is needed to verify the existence of this new relationship.

Efficacy was found to be a very important predictor in understanding the relationship between media perceptions and political participation (Delli Carpini, 2000; Austin & Nelson, 1993). Without efficacious attitudes, participation would not be possible to start out with (Delli Carpini, 2000). As a limitation of this study, future research can measure the relationship between efficacy and perceived credibility of media sources.

This study has a few more limitations. The sample is only from a college campus, which renders it inadequate to generalize to a bigger population. Future studies can employ more demographically representative sample to examine the relationship between these variables. Secondly, this study only observed the relationship between perceptions of media sources with political attitudes without tapping into political participation variables such as voting intent. Without political participation, it is unknown whether

active perceptions of media sources can translate into active political outcomes. Future studies can measure the link between media perceptions and political participation. Similarly, media perceptions are often coupled with media use frequency in measuring media's role in political decision making in previous research. As a limitation, this study didn't incorporate media use frequency measures. As a result, future research can address this limitation by incorporating both media use frequency and media perceptions. Additionally, the online survey generates the bias concerns. The online surveys typically have lower response rate, which drives researchers to question whether the respondents are different from non-respondents or not. To address this concern, future studies can employ telephone or mail surveys, as they typically have higher response rates.

Albeit with these limitations, this study does extend the existing line of research by showing that perceived credibility of media sources is related to political perceptions, specifically cynicism and involvement. Becker, McCombs and Mcleod (1975) suggested that motivational bases of use may be as important as exposure per se in determining political effects. This study showed that perceptions of media sources are related to political outcomes. Credibility perceptions of some new media sources associate with cynicism and involvement while some of the new media sources did not associate with cynicism and involvement, signaling that new media is a loosely-defined concept calling for further clarifications. Different new media sources may also need to be treated separately in measurement in future research.

One of the features of new media consumption is that young people are using new media to get information more from their peers, friends, and people in their networks or communities, and less from the authoritative figures or experts in a distance like in

traditional media. This fresh audience and media dynamic may impact audience's perceptions of new media credibility differently. Future research can assess the influence of this new audience-media dynamics in the credibility perceptions.

Cynicism may increase when individuals find their use of media frustrating instead of fulfilling. Conversely, it would benefit the political process and be likely to help build trust between the media and the public if the media were able to inform audience on substantive subject matters and do so in a way perceived as fair and evenhanded (Pinkleton & Austin, 1998). In that vein, perceived credibility of media sources might be the missing link between the public and politics. If media's credibility were regained, it would become more likely that audience actively interact with political processes.

As a final note, as younger audience continue to rely on new media sources, the pressing concern of increasing cynicism in younger audience is probably not to worry about how to bring back younger audience to traditional forms of civic engagement, but how to tailor our civics programs to the characteristics of the new era and aptly utilize new technological breakthroughs to improve their efficacy so as to engage the disaffected public into politics.

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Table One
Measures and Indices

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>
<i>Perceived credibility of media sources</i>				
Network/Cable TV news and their websites	657	24.86	6.04	.85
Newspapers and their websites	656	26.06	5.59	.85
Web-only news portals	648	21.30	6.23	.86
Social networking sites	653	12.50	5.44	.83
Political comedy or satire	663	17.25	6.89	.87
Talk radio	654	19.68	7.02	.88
Blogs and news opinion sites	657	14.89	6.36	.84
Video-sharing sites	650	13.47	5.74	.84
<i>Cynicism</i>				
Politicians loose touch quickly with the public after they get elected.	665	4.70	1.68	
It seems like politicians only care about special interests.	665	4.60	1.64	
Politicians are out of touch with life in the real world.	665	4.29	1.73	
Politicians put their own interests ahead of the public's interest.	665	4.53	1.64	
<i>Involvement</i>				
I pay attention to political information.	664	4.70	1.71	
I am interested in election information.	664	4.97	1.69	
I like to stay informed about the elections.	664	5.01	1.64	
I actively seek out information about politics.	664	4.17	1.87	

Note. Perceived credibility of media sources is the new index comprising both existing items measuring perceived credibility and perceived importance of media sources.

Table Two: Bi-variate Correlations of Variables

		cynicism	involve	TVcred	Newscred	Webcred	Netcred	Comcred	Radiocred	Blogcred	Videocred
cynicism	Pearson Correlation	1	.158**	-.152**	-.158**	-.058	-.022	.099*	-.045	.014	-.010
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.136	.569	.011	.249	.708	.803
	N	668	668	668	668	668	668	668	668	668	668
involve	Pearson Correlation	.158**	1	.026	.140**	.131**	.018	.142**	.069	.104**	.081*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.495	.000	.001	.640	.000	.073	.007	.035
TVcred	Pearson Correlation	-.152**	.026	1	.744**	.522**	.199**	.031	.280**	.125**	.124**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.495		.000	.000	.000	.426	.000	.001	.001
Newscred	Pearson Correlation	-.158**	.140**	.744**	1	.536**	.135**	.127**	.231**	.129**	.120**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.001	.000	.001	.002
Webcred	Pearson Correlation	-.058	.131**	.522**	.536**	1	.387**	.199**	.243**	.265**	.302**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.136	.001	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Netcred	Pearson Correlation	-.022	.018	.199**	.135**	.387**	1	.373**	.268**	.451**	.668**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.569	.640	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
Comcred	Pearson Correlation	.099*	.142**	.031	.127**	.199**	.373**	1	.138**	.319**	.400**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.000	.426	.001	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
Radiocred	Pearson Correlation	-.045	.069	.280**	.231**	.243**	.268**	.138**	1	.324**	.247**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.249	.073	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
Blogcred	Pearson Correlation	.014	.104**	.125**	.129**	.265**	.451**	.319**	.324**	1	.478**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.708	.007	.001	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
Videocred	Pearson Correlation	-.010	.081*	.124**	.120**	.302**	.668**	.400**	.247**	.478**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.803	.035	.001	.002	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table Three
Factor Analysis of Perceived Credibility and Perceived Importance of Media Sources

	TV News	Newspapers	Online Portals	Social Networking	Political Comedy	Talk Radio	Blogs	Video-sharing Sites
Accuracy	.862	.875	.869	.838	.862	.863	.834	.848
Believability	.819	.799	.790	.808	.843	.837	.777	.801
Fairness	.775	.773	.789	.710	.754	.787	.730	.731
Depth	.804	.794	.784	.812	.784	.794	.781	.791
Importance	.708	.703	.769	.682	.795	.807	.730	.725
Eigenvalue	3.16	3.13	3.21	2.98	3.27	3.35	3.04	3.05
Total Variance	63.26	62.53	64.15	59.67	65.36	66.94	60.79	60.95

Note. The results are from principal component analysis on perceived credibility and perceived importance using varimax rotation for eight media sources.

Table Four
Multiple Regressions Predicting Perceived Credibility of Media Sources with
Cynicism and Involvement

Dependent variable/ Independent variable	β	R^2	R^2 change	df	F
TV news and websites		.09	.02**	8, 652	7.83***
Age	-.14**				
Gender	.14***				
Political ideology	-.14***				
Cynicism	-.13**				
Involvement	.05				
Newspapers and websites		.09	.05***	8, 652	7.61***
Age	-.15***				
Cynicism	-.16***				
Involvement	.18***				
Web-only news portals		.04	.02**	8, 652	3.20**
Age	-.12**				
Cynicism	-.06				
Involvement	.14***				
Social networking sites		.02	.00	8, 652	1.38
Age	-.12**				
Cynicism	-.00				
Involvement	.03				
Political comedy/satire		.09	.03***	8, 652	7.95***
Gender	-.21***				
Political ideology	.12**				
Cynicism	.09*				
Involvement	.13**				
Talk radio		.05	.01	8, 652	3.90***
Political ideology	-.18***				
Cynicism	-.08*				
Involvement	.06				
Blogs & opinion sites		.03	.01*	8, 652	2.53*
Age	-.09*				
Gender	-.08*				
Cynicism	.01				
Involvement	.10*				

Table Four (continued)

Video-sharing sites		.04	.01	8,652	2.94*
Age		-.11**			
Gender		-.11**			
Cynicism		-.02			
Involvement		.09*			

Note. The results were derived from multiple regressions following stepwise approach. Demographic variables (age, education, gender, income, political ideology, and race) were entered in the first block. Cynicism and involvement were entered in the second block. Listwise deletion was used to treat the missing values. Beta weights were the coefficients for the whole model. Demographic variables were reported only when significant. The values of R^2 change were based on the additional variance explained by adding the second block of variables.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table Five

Results from One-way Analysis of Variance with Post-hoc

Media Credibility	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4342.315	7	620.331	391.980	.000
Within Groups	8408.130	5313	1.583		
Total	12750.445	5320			

Table Five (continued)**Results from One-way Analysis of Variance with Post-hoc**

Types of media (I)	Types of media (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
TV	Newspaper	-.25*	.07	.006
	Web-only	.62*	.07	.000
	SNS	2.32*	.07	.000
	Political Comedy	1.41*	.07	.000
	Talk radio	.88*	.07	.000
	Blogs	1.86*	.07	.000
	Video-sharing	2.12*	.07	.000
Newspaper	TV	.25*	.07	.006
	Web-only	.87*	.07	.000
	SNS	2.57*	.07	.000
	Political Comedy	1.66*	.07	.000
	Talk radio	1.13*	.07	.000
	Blogs	2.12*	.07	.000
	Video-sharing	2.37*	.07	.000
Web-only	TV	-.62*	.07	.000
	Newspaper	-.87*	.07	.000
	SNS	1.70*	.07	.000
	Political Comedy	.79*	.07	.000
	Talk radio	.26*	.07	.004
	Blogs	1.25*	.07	.000
	Video-sharing	1.50*	.07	.000
Social networking sites	TV	-2.32*	.07	.000
	Newspaper	-2.57*	.07	.000
	Web-only	-1.70*	.07	.000
	Political Comedy	-.91*	.07	.000
	Talk radio	-1.44*	.07	.000
	Blogs	-.46*	.07	.000
	Video-sharing	-.20	.07	.066

Political Comedy	TV	-1.41*	.07	.000
	Newspaper	-1.66*	.07	.000
	Web-only	-.79*	.07	.000
	SNS	.91*	.07	.000
	Talk radio	-.53*	.07	.000
	Blogs	.46*	.07	.000
	Video-sharing	.71*	.07	.000
Talk radio	TV	-.88*	.07	.000
	Newspaper	-1.13*	.07	.000
	Web-only	-.26*	.07	.004
	SNS	1.44*	.07	.000
	Political Comedy	.53*	.07	.000
	Blogs	.99*	.07	.000
	Video-sharing	1.24*	.07	.000
Blogs	TV	-1.86*	.07	.000
	Newspaper	-2.12*	.07	.000
	Web-only	-1.25*	.07	.000
	SNS	.46*	.07	.000
	Political Comedy	-.46*	.07	.000
	Talk radio	-.99*	.07	.000
	Video-sharing	.255*	.07	.005
Video-sharing	TV	-2.12*	.07	.000
	Newspaper	-2.37*	.07	.000
	Web-only	-1.50*	.07	.000
	SNS	.20	.07	.066
	Political Comedy	-.71*	.07	.000
	Talk radio	-1.24*	.07	.000
	Blogs	-.25*	.07	.005

Note: SNS is the abbreviation for social networking sites.

APPENDIX

Media and Political Decision Making Survey, April, 2008

1. In your opinion, how believable are the following sources of information about political candidates and the elections? Indicate your opinion using the following scale where 1 indicates not at all believable and 7 indicates very believable.

	Not at all believable						Very Believable	Don't Know/ RF
Network/cable TV news and their websites (e.g. CNN, CBS)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Newspapers and their websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Web-only news portals (e.g. AOL, Yahoo, Google)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Myspace)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Political comedy or satire (e.g. the Daily Show, the Colbert Report)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Talk Radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Blogs and news opinion sites (e.g. the Drudge Report, the Huffington Post)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Video-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9

2. In your opinion, how much depth do the following sources of information provide when they cover political candidates and the elections? Indicate your opinion using the following scale where 1 indicates no depth and 7 indicates a lot of depth.

	No depth						A lot of Depth	Don't Know/ RF
Network/cable TV news and their websites (e.g. CNN, CBS)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Newspapers and their websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Web-only news portals (e.g. AOL, Yahoo, Google)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Myspace)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Political comedy or satire (e.g. the Daily Show, the Colbert Report)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Talk Radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Blogs and news opinion sites (e.g. the Drudge Report, the Huffington Post)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Video-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9

3. On a scale of 1 to 7, please indicate whether you strongly disagree or strongly agree with each of the following statements concerning the elections in the U.S. On this scale, 1 means strongly disagree and 7 means strongly agree. So the lower the number, the more you disagree with the statements and the higher the number, the more you agree with the statements.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree	Don't Know/RF
1c. Politicians are out of touch with life in the real world.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
2i. I pay attention to political information.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
3c. Politicians put their own interests ahead of the public's interest.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
4i. I actively seek out information about politics.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
5c. It seems like politicians only care about special interests.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
6i. I am interested in election information.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
7c. Politicians loose touch quickly with the public after they get elected.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
8i. I like to stay informed about the elections.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9

4. In your opinion, how accurate or inaccurate are the following sources of information about political candidates and elections? Indicate your opinion using the following scale where 1 indicates not at all accurate and 7 indicates very accurate.

	Not at all accurate						Very accurate	Don't Know/RF
Network/cable TV news and their websites (e.g. CNN, CBS)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Newspapers and their websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Web-only news portals (e.g. AOL, Yahoo, Google)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Myspace)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Political comedy or satire (e.g. the Daily Show, the Colbert Report)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Talk Radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Blogs and news opinion sites (e.g. the Drudge Report, the Huffington Post)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9
Video-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9

5. In your opinion, how fair or unfair are the following sources of information in covering political candidates and elections? Indicate your opinion using the following scale where 1 indicates not at all fair and 7 indicates very fair.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very fair	Don't Know/ RF
Network/cable TV news and their websites (e.g. CNN, CBS)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Newspapers and their websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Web-only news portals (e.g. AOL, Yahoo, Google)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Myspace)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Political comedy or satire (e.g. the Daily Show, the Colbert Report)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Talk Radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Blogs and news opinion sites (e.g. the Drudge Report, the Huffington Post)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Video-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9

6. One more question before we finish this part of the survey. Please indicate how important are the following media as information sources? Indicate your opinion using the following scale where 1 indicates not at all important and 7 indicates very important.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very Important	Don't Know/ RF
Network/cable TV news and their websites (e.g. CNN, CBS)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Newspapers and their websites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Web-only news portals (e.g. AOL, Yahoo, Google)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Myspace)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Political comedy or satire (e.g. the Daily Show, the Colbert Report)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Talk Radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Blogs and news opinion sites (e.g. the Drudge Report, the Huffington Post)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9
Video-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7	9

.....Just a few more questions to go.....

7. How much education have you completed? Check the blank space that applies.

- 1) Less than high school degree _____
- 2) High school degree _____
- 3) Some college (including AA and Trade degrees) _____
- 4) College graduate (bachelor's) _____
- 5) Graduate work or degree _____
- 9) Other/ Refuse _____

8. What is your age? _____ (RF=9) _____

9. Are you _____ male or _____ female?

10. What is your race or ethnicity? Check all that apply.

- 1) African American _____
- 2) Asian _____
- 3) Hispanic _____
- 4) Native American _____
- 5) White _____
- 6) Other _____
- 9) RF _____

11. What is your political orientation?

- 1) Very Conservative _____
- 2) Conservative _____
- 3) Moderate _____
- 4) Liberal _____
- 5) Very Liberal _____
- 9) DK/RF _____

12. Please indicate your family's annual household income last year to the best of your estimation (in dollar amount)

- 1) 10,000 or less _____
- 2) 11,000 to 25,000 _____
- 3) 26,000 to 50,000 _____
- 4) 51,000 to 75,000 _____
- 5) 76,000 to 100,000 _____
- 6) 101,000 to 150,000 _____
- 7) Over 150,000 _____
- 9) RF/DK _____

Kitchen Sink