

Media Consumer Perception: An Evaluation

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Abstract

The study assessed the nature of relationship between the credibility of the media and the duration of their use. The aim was to know whether a person who spent more number of years in using a medium would give more credibility to that medium when compared to another person who spent less number of years in using the same medium or else, whether the credibility of a medium was related to the number of years of its use. Accordingly, the correlation between the total number of years spent by the respondents in using each medium and its respective credibility rating was calculated . The result showed that there was no significant correlation between the two. So, the study found that media credibility was not related to duration of media use.

Another specific objective of the study was to understand the difference if any in the credibility ratings given to the three media based on the media dependence of the respondents. The variable of media dependence was assessed by finding out the medium used most often by each respondent to get news.

Introduction

A source regarded as highly credible is often more influential than a less credible source in communication. Researchers have found the relevance of the credibility variable in several communication

contexts. For instance, Haiman (1949), Hovland and Weiss (1951) have observed that more attitudinal changes can be created by highly credible sources. Likewise Bettinghaus (1980) found source credibility as the most striking factor of a communicator's influence in persuasive situations. Also, it was noticed that if a message originated from a low credibility source, it was considered as more biased and unfair than if it emanated from a source regarded as high in credibility.

In mass communication context, the credibility possessed by a medium can promote or impede its potency to disseminate information to the public. Rampal (1996) underscored this assumption by observing , " Credibility is the most precious attribute a medium can have". Lee (1978) rightly said, "As more people use the mass media as their main source of information , the media must maintain the credibility of what they present to the public".

Earlier studies which looked at the significance of credibility in communication were carried out more with relation to interpersonal interactions and public speaking contexts. However, as the mass media emerged as major sources of information for the public in due course , the focus of studies was shifted more towards credibility assessment in mass communication contexts. The relevance of assessing the credibility of mass media as sources of information acquires added significance in the present age.

The current media scene in India shows that a variety of mass communication channels are competing with each other to catch the public attention . In terms of reach and coverage our media have grown and are poised to grow further. Though our electronic media are on an expansion spree, scathing criticisms are on the increase with regard to their performance as sources of news.

Religious and political bias, sensationalism , subjective coverage, distortion of facts etc are some of the accusations levelled against our media personnel both from the print and visual sectors. These types of criticisms can surely erode the credibility of media organizations as centers of news and information which negatively affect their image.

In the light of the criticisms regarding the functioning of media organizations, it is highly relevant to assess the level of credibility possessed by them. Hence, the present study was carried out to know the credibility of major mass media as sources of news and information. The study was conducted in Kerala, a state having a very high media exposure in India.

Kerala stands unique in many ways. With its highest percentage of literacy, largest network of educational institutions, high political awareness and highest rate of media consumption in the country both in items of the print and the electronic media, Kerala is distinct from other states. Readership surveys have repeatedly reported that Keralites have the highest newspaper reading habit in the country. In terms of the reach of the electronic media, Kerala is in the forefront of other states. Considering all these factors , Kerala seemed ideal for carrying out the study.

Objectives of the study

The study was conducted with the major objective to understand the credibility of mass media - newspapers, television and radio as sources of news for the general public in the state. Specifically , the study tried to determine the nature and extent of relationship between the credibility of the three media and the duration of their use and also to understand the difference if any in the credibility ratings given to each of the three media based on the media dependence of the respondents.

Methodology

In the survey conducted for the study, a multi- stage stratified random sampling method was adopted to select the sample. 600 respondents drawn from three randomly selected districts representing the northern, central and southern regions of the state constituted the sample for the study.

A questionnaire and a summated rating scale formed the tools of data collection for the study. For collecting the data on the socio-demographic variables and the media habits of the respondents, the questionnaire was used and the scale was employed to get data on the credibility ratings given to the media by the respondents. The data were analysed through descriptive and statistical methods.

Findings

A major objective of the study was to make a comparative assessment of the credibility attributed to daily newspapers, television and radio as sources of news. The credibility of the three media was assessed through a summated rating scale. The scores given to the items on the scale by the respondents were summed up in respect of each of the media and then the mean of the scores was found out. The mean value of each medium signified the credibility rating for it- higher the mean, higher the credibility and lower the mean, lower the credibility . By determining the mean of the credibility scores given by the sample for each medium , a comparison of the credibility ratings was possible.

A look at the mean values showed that the highest credibility rating by the sample was given to daily newspapers followed by television and radio. While daily newspapers secured a mean of 58.6528 (std .dev. 4.2618) based on the scores given by the total sample of the study, television received a mean value of 52.4642 (std. dev.4.8889) and radio obtained a mean of 52.4472(std. dev. 4.7375). From this it

was evident that daily newspapers were considered as the most credible source of news by the respondents of the study.

The differences in the credibility ratings between newspapers and radio and between newspapers and television were found to be significant ($p < 0.05$). Though between the two electronic media, television secured a higher credibility rating than radio, the difference was not significant ($p > 0.05$).

It could be inferred from the study that for the literate people of Kerala, the print medium appeared to be more credible than the electronic media as a source of news. On the overall, the study showed that the credibility ratings given to all the three media were not disconcerting. That is, the mean scores obtained for each medium were not very low. However, the glamorous medium of television or the personal medium of radio could only stand behind the traditional medium of print when the question of credibility was assessed. For the media users of Kerala, what appeared in print or in documented form turned out to be the most credible.

As stated, one of the specific objectives of the study was to determine the nature and extent of relationship between the credibility of the media and the duration of their use. The aim was to know whether the duration of use of the three media in terms of number of years had any association with the credibility attributed to each one. In other words, whether the number of years spent by a respondent in using daily newspapers, radio, and television had any correlation with the respective credibility given to each of these media as a source of news. This would help to know whether a respondent who had been using a medium for a longer period or for more number of year attributed a higher credibility to that medium in comparison with a respondent who had been using that medium for a shorter period.

First, the correlation between the total number of years spent by the respondents in using daily newspapers and the credibility rating given to that medium was assessed. The result showed that there

was no significant correlation between the two. From this it could be inferred that the duration of use of daily news papers had no association with the credibility attributed to that medium by the respondents. (see Tb.1)

Table 1 : Newspaper credibility and duration of use

(Correlation Matrix)

Correlations	Years of use	Newspaper credibility
Years of use	1.0000	0.0565
Newspaper credibility	0.0565	1.0000
No. of cases	600	

(Not significant at 0.05 level)

To know the association between radio use and radio credibility , the correlation between the total number of years spent by the respondents in listening to radio and the credibility rating assigned to that medium was assessed. The result indicated that there was no significant correlation between the two. Hence, it could be deduced that the number of years spent by the respondents in listening to radio and duration of use of it had no association with the credibility possessed by that medium as a source of news (see Tb.2).

Table 2: Radio credibility and duration of use

(Correlation Matrix)

Correlations	Years of use	Radio credibility
Years of use	1.0000	-0.0119
Radio credibility	-0.0119	1.0000
No. of cases	600	

(Not significant at 0.05 level)

When the association between the number of years spent by the respondents in watching television and the credibility rating given to that medium as a source of news was assessed, it was found that there was no significant correlation between the two. Therefore, it could be concluded that the duration of use of television had no association with the credibility attributed to that medium (see Tb.3)

Table 3: Television credibility and duration of use

(Correlation Matrix)

Correlations	Years of use	Television credibility
Year of use	1.0000	0.0025
Television credibility	0.0025	1.0000
No. of cases	600	

(No significant at 0.05 level)

Thus, the analysis carried out to know the kind of relationship between media use and media credibility came up with a similar type of finding in respect of all the three media under study. That is, the duration of use of a medium and the credibility given to that medium were found to be not correlated to each other. Hence, based on the study it can be drawn out that whether a person has spent more number of years or less number of years in using a medium is not associated with the credibility attributed to it. In other words, media credibility is not related to media use.

The finding posits that in actual terms the established media cannot take for granted that it might have a high credibility. Even a nascent medium may sometimes acquire more credibility from the users than an established medium. Another possible inference is that familiarity with a medium is not a guarantee for higher credibility . This could mean that media men cannot be complacent due to their organization's long existence.

Another specific objective of the study was to understand the difference if any in the credibility ratings given to the three media based on the media dependence of the respondents. Media dependence, a variable related to media habits was assessed by finding out the medium used most often by each respondent to get news and information. Based on the kind of media dependence of the respondents, they were classified into three groups : those who used daily newspapers most often, those who used television most often and those who used radio most often to get news . Accordingly, it was found that 76.8% of the sample depended mostly on daily newspapers. 14.9% on television and 8.3% on radio for news.

The aim of the study was to ascertain whether the kind of media dependence of the respondents had any bearing on the credibility attributed by them to daily newspapers , television and radio as sources of news . In other words, to know whether a respondent who depended mostly on a particular medium (say daily newspaper) attributed a higher credibility to that medium as a source of news when compared to the other media (television and radio).

As the first stage of the analysis, the mean of the credibility scores given to daily newspapers, television and radio as sources of news was assessed based on three types of media dependence of the respondents. Then, to ascertain whether the differences in the mean values were statistically significant, the data were subjected to ANOVA.

On examining the mean values of the credibility scores to daily newspapers as a source of news, it was found that the highest credibility rating was accorded by the group that depended mostly on the same medium to get news. The mean value calculated for this group was 58.8133 (std. dev.4.1959). The lowest credibility rating for

newspapers was given by the group which depended mostly on radio to get news, indicated by the mean value of 57.4091 (std dev. 4.4057). The mean value of newspaper credibility ratings calculated for the group which depended mostly on television was 58.5190 (std.dev. 4.4516). Thus, the mean values indicated differences in the credibility ratings given to daily newspapers based on three types of media dependence. To know the significance of the differences in the credibility ratings, the data were subjected to one- way analysis of variance. It was observed that the F- ration was 2.2111 at a probability level of 0.1106. This clearly indicated that the differences in the credibility ratings were not significant. From this it could be inferred that those who had their dependence on daily newspaper for news and information did not give a significantly higher credibility to that medium when compared to the other two groups. So it could be concluded that the variable media dependence had no bearing on the credibility attributed to daily newspapers.

On analysing the mean values of the credibility scores given to radio , it was observed that the highest credibility rating was accorded by the group that depended mostly on the same medium and the lowest rating by the group that depended mostly on news papers. The mean value for the group which depended on radio for news was 53.3409 (std. dev.5.1306). The mean value calculated for the group which depended on daily newspapers was 52.1892(std. dev.4.5741). Those who depended on television for news secured a mean value of 53.2785 (std. dev. 5.2255), based on the credibility scores.

The verify whether the differences in the credibility ratings given by the three groups were statistically significant, the data were subjected to one way analysis of variance. The result showed an F-ration of 2.6186 at a probability level of 0.0739. This indicated that the differences in the credibility ratings were not significant. So , it

could be deduced that those who depended mostly on radio for news did not attribute a significantly higher credibility to that medium when compared to the other two groups. Thus, the variable media dependence was found to have no bearing on the credibility given to radio as a source of news.

On assessing the credibility attributed to television, it was noticed that the highest rating was given by the group that depended mostly on the same medium for news and information. The mean estimated for this group was 54.0253 (std.dev.5.1788). The next higher rating for television was given by the group which depended mostly on radio, indicated by the mean value of 53.2955(std. dev. 6.0907). The lowest credibility rating for television was given by the group which depended mostly on daily newspapers, evident by the mean value of 52.0713 (std.dev.4.6214).

Though the mean values pointed out to the existence of differences in the credibility ratings given to television by the three groups of respondents, one-way analysis of variance was carried out to know the significance of the differences. The result showed an F-ratio of 6.0934 at a probability level of 0.0024. This was indicative of statistically significant differences in the credibility ratings given by the three groups.

To know among which group differences existed, the data were subjected to Scheffe test. It was observed that statistically significant differences existed between the group which depended mostly on television and the group which depended mostly on daily newspapers. From the findings, it could be inferred that those who depended mostly on television gave a significantly higher credibility to that medium as a source of news when compared to those who depended mostly on daily newspapers. Hence, the variable media dependence was found to have a bearing on the credibility attributed to television as a source of news.

The study has revealed that people's nature of media dependence or their habit of using a particular medium most often to get news/information has an influence on the credibility attributed to the visual medium. However, media dependence has no bearing on the credibility of the print medium and radio. Or else, heavy use of the print medium or radio cannot be taken as an index of high credibility of the two media. May be the visual dimension of television has an influence on heavy users to perceive as more credible what they see on the small screen.

This study was carried out within the State of Kerala. Even though there may not be much of a difference in the credibility ratings given to mass media as source of news by media users in other states, it is always better to study the situation elsewhere. This will help to know whether cultural differences prevailing in different states are creating variations in the media credibility perceptions. More number of studies are needed to understand the Indian media credibility in its totality.

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