WAG THE BLOG: HOW RELIANCE ON TRADITIONAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET INFLUENCE CREDIBILITY PERCEPTIONS OF WEBLOGS AMONG BLOG USERS

By Thomas J. Johnson and Barbara K. Kaye

This study surveyed Weblog users online to investigate how credible they view blogs as compared to traditional media as well as other online sources. This study also explores the degree to which reliance on Weblogs as well as traditional and online media sources predicts credibility of Weblogs after controlling for demographic and political factors. Weblog users judged blogs as highly credible—more credible than traditional sources. They did, however, rate traditional sources as moderately credible. Weblog users rated blogs higher on depth of information than they did on fairness.

While the debate over whether the Internet as a whole should be judged as a credible source of news and information has ebbed as more users have flocked to news sites sponsored by traditional media, the question remains of how much faith users should place in certain online components such as Weblogs (also known as blogs). Weblogs, diary-style Websites that generally offer observations and news listed chronologically on the site as well as commentary and recommended links,[1] surged in popularity after the events of 9/11.[2]

Bloggers (those who create blogs)[3] and traditional journalists[4] argue over how much faith to place in messages posted on the blogosphere (the blogging universe). But while several studies have examined credibility of online media, scholars have paid little attention to how credible users judge Weblogs. Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, and McCann argue that one weakness of online credibility studies is that they examine only the Web and ignore other Internet components.[5]

Alternative sources of news and information, such as Weblogs, have been ignored. However, their credibility deserves attention for several reasons: First, they are a growing phenomenon, increasing from an estimated 30,000 in 1998 to at least three million by the beginning of 2004.[6] Second, while the number of blog users is small (only 17% of Internet users have ever visited a blog),[7] their influence may exceed their readership. Because many blog users are politically interested and active, they are wooed by tech-savvy politicians. For instance, blog users

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may have given a boost to presidential hopeful Howard Dean.[8] Also, many journalists consider blogs a trustworthy source of information and rely on them for information and story ideas.[9] Blogs have been credited for bringing to light stories ignored by the traditional media, such as racist remarks by Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott that led to his resignation.[10]

This study surveyed Weblog users online to investigate how credible they view blogs as compared to other sources. This study will also explore how reliance on Weblogs, as well as traditional and online media sources, predicts credibility of Weblogs.

Traditional Media and Credibility

Beginning in the 1940s, many researchers studied the impact of the credibility of sources on interpersonal influence, examining what characteristics made a speaker persuasive. Similarly, researchers examined characteristics of persuasive messages. Studies of the credibility of a medium, however, arose from concerns in the newspaper industry first about the rising number of people turning to radio for news and then about the number relying on television. The rise of the Internet has led to a host of recent credibility studies comparing traditional sources with this emerging medium.[11]

Nontraditional Media and Credibility

Credibility research has focused almost entirely on mainstream media, particularly newspapers.[12] Many of these studies were conducted by news organizations that feared that falling credibility would signal further decline in readership and advertising profits.[13]

Credibility of Nontraditional Media. Several studies have explored the impact of nontraditional media such as talk radio and late-night talk shows in the last three presidential elections on voters[14] and on the campaign itself[15] while others have explored the content of such nontraditional media.[16] While scant attention has been paid to how credible voters find information in nontraditional media, anecdotal evidence suggests that users judge them as more credible than mainstream media.

For instance, scholars have noted that talk radio and talk television emerged as forces in the 1992 presidential campaign because the public was dissatisfied with media coverage. Users could talk directly to candidates or to talk show hosts, rather than have information filtered through the press.[17] While traditional media attempt to balance coverage, talk radio hosts openly attack both opposition candidates as well as what they perceive as liberal media coverage.[18] Political talk show hosts present themselves as true authorities on political issues while claiming traditional media hide or lie about facts, a suspicion apparently held by talk show listeners. Finally, listeners may trust the information they receive from talk radio because they believe the hosts are more open about their biases than traditional journalists who subtly interject their views into their stories.[19]

Early Internet Users and Credibility. Some of the earliest Internet credibility studies were conducted before traditional media became

established in online publishing. During the mid-1990s the Internet was compared to a frontier outpost where discussion was "free, sometimes pointed, often blunt, and frequently rebellious."[20] Critics suggested several reasons why the Web *should* be judged as a less credible source of information than traditional media: Anyone could post information to the Web, and these sites created by individuals spouting their views often appeared as credible as those hosted by reliable sources. Such sites lacked editorial oversight and did not have the professional and social pressures to provide accurate and unbiased information.[21] Also, the Internet was rife with rumors and misinformation, and several parody sites, which looked like official sites, sprouted up on the Internet.[22]

However, the public, particularly Internet users, did not share these fears. While some studies found that the Internet lagged behind traditional media in terms of credibility,[23] most found Web information just as, or more, credible.[24] Many of these studies only examined Internet users. However, when studies compared users to nonusers, findings indicated that those who relied on the Internet for news and information were more likely to judge it as credible.[25]

Weblog Credibility

Clear lines have been drawn between blog users and traditional journalists on the question of blog credibility. Critics advance the same arguments made against the Internet in its earliest days. Anyone can create a blog, and bloggers are not bound by ethical and professional standards of trained journalists. Indeed, a leading blogger, Sean-Paul Kelley of the Agonist, was accused of stealing information from a subscription intelligence service and posting it to his Weblog.[26] Similarly, bloggers are not bound by standards of objectivity; most have strong views that they express openly. As Instapundit blogger Glenn Reynolds says, "A blog is a disclosure of the blogger's biases."[27] Weblogs do not undergo gatekeeping or editing to cull misinformation, sharpen prose, and ensure what is written is fair.[28] Finally, many bloggers use pseudonyms such as Loco Parentis, Big Arm Woman, or No Watermelons, making it difficult to judge the credibility of the information on their site.[29]

Blogs do rely, however, on peer review of other bloggers to point out mistakes that can be easily and prominently corrected.[30] Users may find Weblogs more credible because they are independent rather than controlled by corporate interests; bloggers may discuss issues traditional media shy away from because they might hurt corporations.[31] Blogs also run stories from around the world that were unavailable or ignored by traditional media.[32] Like political talk radio listeners, then, Weblog users are likely to consider blogs a highly credible source of information.

Traditional Media Use and Weblog Credibility

Observers relate the rise in blogs to growing distrust and dislike of the traditional media,[33] particularly after 9/11, which saw the number of blogs increase due to the perception that traditional media coverage was overly sympathetic to Arab nations and their peoples.[34] Most bloggers and their readers are conservative, viewing the media as liberal,[35] and

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tend to see blogs as a new and better journalism that is opinionated, independent, and personal.[36] While studies of traditional media suggest that opinionated writing lowers credibility,[37] bloggers and blog readers contend that Weblogs contain thoughtful analysis of the news events missing from mainstream media.[38] Bloggers and readers criticize the media, and some sites, such as talkingpointsmemo.com, buzzmachine.com, and asmallvictory.net, are devoted to critiquing media coverage. Bloggers and readers routinely fact check stories in traditional media and gleefully point out errors.[39]

While bloggers and blog readers are critical of traditional media, they do not ignore them. Instapundit's Reynolds notes that to be a critic of the media means that you must pay attention to them. Because most bloggers are not independent newsgatherers, they must rely heavily on the Web for their content, and much of that comes from traditional media. Also, bloggers often try to lend authority to their sites by providing links to traditional media sites.[40]

Conversely, although journalists may perceive bloggers as "wannabe amateurs badly in need of some skills and editors," they increasingly rely on blogs for story tips, information, and access to stories from media throughout the world.[41] Further, while many political blogs are written by armchair observers spouting their views, many journalists and some news organizations like MSNBC host their own blogs.[42]

Studies consistently show that heavy media users judge the Internet as highly credible. Indeed, traditional media use in some studies is the strongest predictor of Internet credibility.[43] Those who go online for political news and information tend to be political junkies, heavy users of traditional political sources of information such as CNN, Sunday morning public affairs shows, and newsmagazines.[44] The Internet supplements rather than replaces traditional sources of political information.[45] Also, traditional media users tend to be highly media literate, knowing what sources to trust and what to discard, and have learned where to go online for credible news.[46]

Studies of mainstream media suggest that the more people rely on the media for news and information, the more they will judge that information as credible.[47] Similarly, people judge their preferred news source as the most credible.[48] Many studies examining Web credibility also find that the more people go online the more credible they rate the information they find. Greer[49] discovered that amount of time online was the strongest predictor of whether an online medium would be judged as credible. On the other hand, Johnson and Kaye[50] discovered that for both political and sports news, amount of Web use failed to predict online credibility, a finding supported by others.[51] Johnson and Kaye found that Internet users were not heavy users of traditional media and speculated that because of their limited experience with traditional media, they were not well trained to judge which Internet sources are credible.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Internet use would predict Weblog credibility. First, blog users are heavy Internet users.[52] Blog

Internet Use and Weblog Credibility

users are likely to be media literate and know what sources they trust and do not trust.

Blogs and Political Attitudes

With the exception of trust in the government, political variables have not proven strong predictors of online credibility. For instance, Johnson and Kaye[53] found that political trust was the second strongest predictor of credibility of online newspaper and TV news, and strong partisans tended to judge online media as believable.

Political attitudes may have little influence on online credibility because studies suggest that online users, rather than being socially isolated and apathetic, are politically interested[54] and are more likely to seek out information from the media than the general public.[55] However, researchers are split on whether they are more knowledgeable[56] than the average citizen. While trust in government initially was not a strong predictor of credibility, it has emerged as a stronger influence as the audience has become more mainstream and trust in government has increased.[57]

Political variables may have a limited effect on credibility judgments of blog users because many are strong political activists. While some Weblogs and blog readers lean toward the left, the blogosphere is predominately right of center, either conservative or libertarian.[58] Blog readers are also political junkies. The American Demographic survey found that political sites were the second most visited type of Weblogs behind personal or family blogs.[59]

Blogs and Demographics

Studies of the Web offer conflicting findings about the influence of demographics on Web credibility. Earlier studies found that those who judged the Internet as credible were, paradoxically, those who tended to use the media the least: young females of lower education and income.[60] Demographic influence, however, sometimes declined after controlling for other factors.[61] Some recent studies have also found fewer connections between demographics and credibility, particularly after controlling for other factors. Johnson and Kaye speculated that as the Web has moved from being a bastion of young, white, wealthy, well-educated males to one that is more demographically mainstream, the influence of demographics has declined.[62]

However, Flanagin and Metzger reported that men rated both message and site credibility significantly higher than women.[63] Johnson and Kaye,[64] in a study of how online experience influenced credibility judgments, found that demographics proved to be the strongest predictor of credibility, with young men with lower education rating the Internet as less credible. The authors speculated that because men had been online longer than women, spend more time online, and engage in more activities, that experience may help them judge which sites are credible and which ones are not. Demographics should predict Weblog credibility because, like the Web in general during the mid-1990s, the blogosphere is populated with younger white men of high incomes.[65]

This study poses the following research questions:

RQ1: To what degree will Weblog users view Weblogs as a credible source of information?

RQ2: Will Weblog users judge Weblogs as significantly more credible than other online sources?

RQ3: Will Weblog users judge Weblogs as significantly more credible than traditional sources of information?

RQ4: To what degree will reliance on Weblogs predict Weblog credibility after controlling for demographics, political attitudes, interest and knowledge of nonpolitical news, as well as reliance on traditional and other online media?

Method

A survey aimed at Weblog readers was posted online from 23 April to 22 May 2003. The survey was linked from 131 Weblogs of diverse ideologies[66] and 14 Weblog-oriented bulletin boards/electronic mailing lists.[67] Respondents also learned about the survey from announcements sent to Weblog-oriented chat rooms and to bloggers who agreed to post the survey URL. Additionally, a "snowball" technique was used where respondents could automatically forward the survey to fellow blog readers.[68]

Generating a random sample of Weblog users would be very difficult because there is no central registry of blog readers or any way to identify them from Internet users who do not access Weblogs. Unlike telephone and mail surveys, samples cannot be produced through census lists or random digit-dialing-type techniques such as random e-mail generators.[69] Therefore, this study employs a convenience sample. Although the findings cannot be generalized to Internet or Weblog users as a whole, they do present a picture of the 3,747 survey respondents.

Dependent Measures. Media credibility is generally defined as the worthiness of being believed, and it is often measured as a multidimensional construct consisting of believability, accuracy, fairness, and depth of information.[70] Respondents were asked to rate on a 5-point scale the degree of believability, fairness, accuracy, and depth of Weblogs. The 5-point scale ranged from "not at all" to "very" (believable, fair, accurate, or in-depth). Scores were combined into a Weblog credibility index (Cronbach's alpha = .79).

Independent Measures.

Credibility of Traditional and Online Sources. Respondents were asked to compare traditional and online media in terms of believability, fairness, accuracy, and depth using the same 5-point scale. Respondents marked their assessments of traditionally delivered broadcast television news, cable television news, newspapers, radio news, talk radio, and news magazines, and of the following online sources: broadcast television news sites, cable television news sites, newspaper sites,

radio news sites, and news magazines sites. Scores were combined into a credibility index for each traditional and online medium (alphas for traditional media range from .87 to .92 and for online media from .83 to .89).

Source Reliance. Past studies indicate that the credibility of a medium or source of information is strongly related to reliance on a source. Using a 5-point scale ranging from "heavily rely on" to "don't rely at all," respondents assessed their levels of reliance on the same six traditional media and five online sources.

Political Attitudes. Respondents assessed their knowledge and involvement in politics and in nonpolitical issues in relation to their Weblog use. Using a 5-point scale ranging from "greatly increased" to "greatly decreased," respondents judged whether Weblogs influenced their involvement in politics and their knowledge about political and general news issues. Respondents also indicated their degree of interest in politics, in general news, and in current events on a 0 to 10 scale.

Trust in the government was measured as a summated index of three items from the National Election Studies conducted by the University of Michigan: "Most of our leaders are devoted to service," "Politicians never tell us what they really think," and "I don't think public officials care much about what people like me think." The response options for each attitude item ranged from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The polarity was reversed on the second and third statements to create the index (alpha = .75).

Demographics. Gender, age, income, and education data were also collected.

Data Analysis. First, frequencies were run on the Weblog, online sources, and traditional media credibility indices. Second, paired *t*-tests were calculated to compare the credibility of Weblogs to each online and each traditionally delivered medium. Lastly, hierarchical regression was conducted to examine whether reliance on Weblogs predicts credibility of Weblogs after controlling for demographics, political attitudes, general news interest and knowledge, and reliance on traditional media and online sources. The predictors were entered into the regression models as blocks, with demographic variables entered first, followed by political and general news variables. Measures of reliance on traditional media were entered third, followed by reliance on online sources.

Results

Respondent Profile. The online survey was completed by 3,747 respondents.[71] Almost 9 out of 10 Weblog readers are white (89.3%), and 76.5% are male. The respondents are highly educated, with 92.6% reporting some college or higher, and 41.8% earning more than $65,001 per year.

Just over half (52.5%) credit Weblogs with increasing their levels of political involvement. Almost 9 out of 10 claim that they have become more knowledgeable about politics (87.3%) and about general news and current events (88.7%) since they started reading Weblogs. Almost three-quarters of the respondents are very interested in politics (64.9%) and general news and current events (67.8%). They are politically interested

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TABLE 1
Perceptions of Credibility and Depth of Weblogs and Traditional and Online Sources

(Mean Scores as percentages)

Weblogs Believable (N=3,688)	Weblogs Fair (N=3,680)	Weblogs Accurate (N=3,679)	Weblogs Depth (N=3,663)
Not at all/not very... 5.9	Not at all/not very... 22.7	Not at all/not very.. 10.4	Not at all/not very...9.4
Somewhat... 34.5	Somewhat... 38.9	Somewhat... 39.8	Somewhat... 18.4
Moderately/very.... 59.6	Moderately/very.... 38.4	Moderately/very.... 49.8	Moderately/very.... 72.2

	Credibility (Mean Scores as percentages)		Credibility (Mean Scores as percentages)
Weblogs (N=3,659)			
Not at all/not very...	03.5		
Somewhat...	22.9		
Moderately/very....	73.6		
Online Broadcast Television (N=3,518)		Broadcast Television News (N=3,578)	
Not at all/not very...	29.0	Not at all/not very...	41.5
Somewhat...	50.2	Somewhat...	43.7
Moderately/very....	20.8	Moderately/very....	14.8
Online Cable Television (N=368)		Cable Television News (N=3,551)	
Not at all/not very...	16.3	Not at all/not very...	19.1
Somewhat...	46.3	Somewhat...	45.9
Moderately/very....	47.4	Moderately/very....	35.0
Online Newspapers (N=3,574)		Newspapers (N=3,583)	
Not at all/not very...	15.8	Not at all/not very...	13.0
Somewhat...	41.5	Somewhat...	40.5
Moderately/very....	42.7	Moderately/very....	46.5
Online News Magazines (N=3,398)		News Magazines (N=3,484)	
Not at all/not very...	18.2	Not at all/not very...	14.2
Somewhat...	45.8	Somewhat...	42.1
Moderately/very....	36.0	Moderately/very...	43.7
Online Radio News (N=3,154)		Radio News (N≈3,392)	
Not at all/not very...	26.7	Not at all/not very...	23.0
Somewhat...	58.7	Somewhat...	51.0
Moderately/very....	14.6	Moderately/very....	26.0
		Talk Radio (N=3,375)	
		Not at all/not very...	39.4
		Somewhat...	36.5
		Moderately/very....	24.1

and knowledgeable, but only moderately trusting of government. Slightly less than one-half (47%) report high to very high levels of trust in the government, 30.9% are moderately trustful, and 22.1% claim low to very low degrees of trust.

Respondents have been online for just over 7 1/2 years, spending about 9.1 hours per week interacting with bloggers, reading comments, and following links to additional information, and have been doing so for 1 year and 9 months on average, which coincides with the post 9/11 popularity surge of Weblogs. Additionally, 64.5% seek information from

what they consider conservative or very conservative Weblogs, whereas only 16.3% turn to liberal or very liberal Weblogs, and the remaining 20.2% look for more moderate information. The demographic profile of the respondents and the types of Weblogs they visit closely mirror Weblog reader profiles reported by others.[72]

Credibility of Online and Traditional Sources.

Weblogs. RQ1 asks about the credibility of Weblogs. Almost three-quarters (73.6%) of Weblog readers view Weblogs as moderately to very credible and only 3.5% consider them "not at all" or "not very credible" (Table 1). When the credibility index is broken into its four components (believable, fair, accurate, depth), depth of information emerges as a Weblog's strongest attribute; 72.2% of respondents think of Weblogs as "moderately" to "very" in-depth sources of information. Weblogs are judged moderately to very believable by 59.6%. Blog users seem to acknowledge that accuracy of Weblogs may be questionable; 50.2% consider them "somewhat" or "not very" accurate. Additionally, respondents seem aware of Weblog biases with 61.6% claiming that Weblogs are "somewhat" or "not very" fair.

Online Media Sites. Weblog readers rated online newspapers the most credible of online media, although all online sources were generally thought of as only "somewhat" credible. However, only 42.7% rate online newspapers as "moderately" or "very" credible. Online radio news sites and broadcast television sites were judged as the least credible with 26.7% and 29.0%, respectively, considering them as "not very" or "not at all credible."
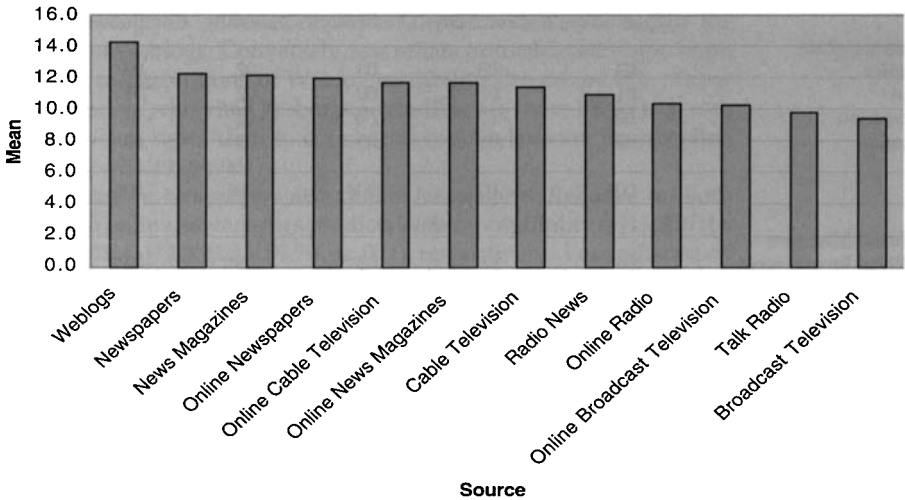
Traditional Media. Traditional media do not fare much better. Printed newspapers and news magazines had the highest percentage of respondents rating them as moderately to very credible sources, 46.5% and 43.7%, respectively; however, both had an almost equal percentage rating them as "somewhat" credible. Generally, Weblog users view traditional media as only "somewhat" credible.

Weblogs Compared to Online Media Sites. RQ2 asked whether respondents view Weblogs as more credible (M=14.3) than other online sources. Paired sample t-tests were used for comparisons. Weblogs were more credible than any other online source: online broadcast television (t=54.5, d.f.=3,496, p<.001), online cable television news (t=38.0, d.f.=3,539, p<.001), online newspapers (t=28.6, d.f.=3,548, p<.001), online news magazines (t=34.7, d.f.=3,376, p<.001), and online radio news (t=52.4, d.f.=3,332, p<.001). Online broadcast television and online radio news have the lowest mean (M=10.3, M=10.4, respectively) credibility scores, whereas online newspapers had the highest (M=12.0).

Weblogs Compared to Traditional Media. RQ3 involved comparing Weblogs to traditionally delivered media. Weblogs were judged significantly more credible than any traditional medium: broadcast television news (t=63.5, d.f.=3,549, p<.001), cable television news (t=39.9, d.f.=3,521, p<.001), newspapers (t=25.2, d.f.=3,554, p<.001), news magazines (t=27.9, d.f.=3,455, p<.001), radio news (t=44.9, d.f.=3,366, p<.001), and talk radio (t=61.2, d.f.=3,352, p<.001). Broadcast television (M=9.4) and over-the-air talk radio (M=9.8) are the two least credible traditional sources and

FIGURE 1

Credibility of Traditionally Delivered Information Sources vs. Online Counterparts

newspapers (M=12.3) and newsmagazines (M=12.2) the most credible (Figure 1).

Predictors of Weblog Credibility. RQ4 asks whether Weblog credibility can be predicted by Weblog reliance after controlling for reliance on traditional media and other online sources, and political attitudes, general news interest and knowledge, and demographics.

Even after controlling for other variables, reliance on Weblogs is a strong positive and significant predictor of perceptions of Weblog credibility (Table 2). The more users rely on Weblogs, the higher their assessments of credibility. Reliance on Weblogs explains between 12.7% and 14.6% of the perceptions of Weblog credibility.

Reliance on five of the six traditional media and on the online sources also significantly, but weakly, predicts Weblog credibility; however, all but two of those relationships were negative. Reliance on traditional media accounts for an additional .1% – 1.8% of the variance, and reliance on online sources for an additional 1%.

Political involvement, political knowledge, political interest, and general news knowledge are weak, but consistent, predictors of Weblog credibility, but general news interest is not. Trust in government is also a weak, but significant, predictor. The political and general news variables, however, explain a greater percentage of the variability (about 15%) than do the online and traditional reliance measures and about the same amount as the Weblog reliance variables. None of the demographic variables predicts Weblog credibility.

Reliance on Broadcast Television and Online Broadcast Television Websites. Perceptions of Weblog credibility are significantly, but negatively and weakly, predicted by reliance on broadcast television news (F[11,3370] = 64.44, p<.001) and their online counterparts

TABLE 2

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Reliance Variables as Predictors of Weblog Credibility

Predictor Variables	Weblog Credibility	Weblog Credibility	Weblog Credibility	Weblog Credibility	Weblog Credibility	Weblog Credibility
Demographics						
Gender	.03	.03	.03	.02	.03	.02
Age	.01	.01	.00	.02	.01	.01
Education	-.02	-.02	-.00	-.02	-.01	-.02
Income	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03	.03
R^2	.006	.006	.006	.006	.006	.006
Political Measures						
Political Involvement	.06***	.05**	.05**	.05**	.05**	.05**
Political Knowledge	.11***	.12***	.12***	.11***	.11***	.11***
General News Knowledge	.06***	.06***	.05**	.07***	.06***	.06***
Political Interest	.04*	.05**	.05**	.04*	.04*	.05**
General News Interest	.01	.00	.02	.00	.00	.00
Trust	.06***	.06***	.06***	.06***	.05**	.06***
R^2	.156	.156	.154	.155	.155	.155
R^2 Change	.150***	.150***	.148***	.149***	.149***	.149***
Reliance Traditional Media						
Broadcast TV News	-.05**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Cable TV News	N/A	.05**	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Newspapers	N/A	N/A	-.04*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Radio	N/A	N/A	N/A	-.00	N/A	N/A
Talk Radio	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	.09***	N/A
News Magazines	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	-.04*
R^2	.174	.156	.164	.156	.161	.156
R^2 Change	.018***	.000	.010***	.001*	.006***	.001*
Reliance Online Media						
Online Broadcast TV News	-.07***	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Online Cable TV News	N/A	-.06***	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Online Newspapers	N/A	N/A	-.12***	N/A	N/A	N/A
Online Radio	N/A	N/A	N/A	-.06***	-.08***	N/A
Online News Magazines	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	-.05**
R^2	.178	.160	.175	.161	.171	.157
R^2 Change	.004***	.004***	.011***	.005***	.010***	.001*
Reliance on Weblogs	.40***	.41***	.41***	.41***	.40***	.41***
R^2	.305	.298	.310	.297	.303	.298
R^2 Change	.127***	.138***	.146***	.136***	.132***	.141***
Adjusted R	.302	.295	.307	.293	.300	.295
Significance	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

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

($F[12,3369] = 60.76$, $p<.001$). The less Weblog users rely on broadcast television news and broadcast news Websites ($b=-.05$, $p<.01$; $b=-.07$, $p<.001$), the more they rely on Weblogs and, thus, the higher they rate Weblog credibility.

Reliance on Cable Television News and Online Cable Television Websites. Reliance on cable television news significantly, but weakly, predicts credibility of Weblogs ($F[11,3374] = 56.85$, $p<.001$) ($b=.05$, $p<.01$). The more a Weblog reader relies on cable television news the higher the credibility of Weblogs. Conversely, less reliance on cable television news sites leads to perceptions of Weblog credibility ($b=-.06$, $p<.01$). Those Weblog readers who view Weblogs as credible are more likely to watch cable television news than to connect to cable television news online ($F[12,3373] = 53.49$, $p<.001$).

Reliance on Newspapers and Online Newspapers. Reliance on both printed and online newspapers predicts Weblog credibility ($F[11,3381] = 60.40$, $p<.001$; ($F[12,3380] = 59.70$, $p<.001$), respectively. Less reliance on newspapers ($b=-.04$, $p<.05$) and their online sites ($b=-.12$, $p<.001$) leads to higher Weblog credibility.

Reliance on Radio News, Talk Radio, and Radio News Sites. Over-the-air talk radio is a significant and positive predictor ($b=.09$, $p<.001$). The greater the reliance on talk radio, the higher the Weblog credibility. Online radio news, on the other hand, is a significant but negative predictor ($b=-.08$, $p<.001$). Weblog users who rely on talk radio but not on online radio Websites for news and information are more likely to judge Weblogs as highly credible ($F[12,3362] = 57.91$, $p<.001$). Reliance on broadcast radio news is the only medium, traditional or online, that is not a significant predictor.

Reliance on News Magazines and Online News Magazines. Reliance on both print and online news magazines significantly, but negatively and weakly, predicts Weblog credibility ($b=-.04$, $p<.05$; $b=-.05$, $p<.01$, respectively). Weblog readers with low levels of reliance on news magazines are more likely to rate Weblogs as highly credible ($F[12,3371] = 52.51$, $p<.001$.

Discussion

This study surveyed Weblog users online to discover how credible they viewed blogs and how judgments of Weblog credibility compare to traditional and online media sources. This study also explored the degree to which reliance on Weblogs, as well as traditional and online media sources, predicts Weblog credibility.

Almost three-quarters of respondents view Weblogs as moderately to very credible and only 3.5% rate them not at all or not very credible. An important reason users say they rely on blogs is because they provide more depth and more thoughtful analysis than is available in other media.[73] On the other hand, fewer than four in ten thought blogs were fair. However, while fairness may be considered a hallmark of traditional journalism, bias is likely seen as a virtue by blog users. The majority rate themselves as conservative and almost two-thirds said they sought information from conservative or very conservative sites. Blog readers are seeking out information to support their views and are likely to consider conservative information they receive from blogs as highly credible.

Users view blogs as a new and better form of journalism than the mainstream media, one that is opinionated, analytical, independent, and

personal.[74] Not surprisingly, then, Weblog users judged blogs as significantly more credible than other media. However, this does not mean that bloggers do not consider some mainstream media credible. The plurality considered both online and traditional newspapers, traditional news magazines, and online cable television news as moderately to very credible and both online news magazines and traditional cable television news also recorded moderate credibility scores. These ratings for print media and cable television were similar to those found in a study of politically interested Internet users.[75] The moderate scores for print media and cable news may reflect bloggers' and blog readers' paradoxical attitude toward traditional media. They may distrust the media, but bloggers link to media sites and pay attention to media content, even if only to hunt for mistakes and look for what they consider bias.

Weblog reliance was the only strong predictor of Weblog credibility. These results parallel studies of traditional media that the more one uses a medium, the more credible one judges it.[76] Amount of reliance may also be a strong predictor of Weblog credibility because media consumers determine the credibility of a source by using various cues such as reputation of the medium and style of delivery.[77] For newbies, Weblogs may not appear credible. Most are a series of short journal entries with links to other information; they do not *look* like traditional media. Furthermore, the personal, opinionated writing style that attracts blog users may put off some newcomers used to the more balanced, disinterested writing style of traditional media. Finally, while traditional media claim to be nonbiased, most news Weblogs make no apologies for being conservative, liberal, or libertarian. Visiting blogs of a different political stripe than one's own may be particularly off putting for a new user. But as the user finds a blog with views matching his or her own and adjusts to the style of reporting, subsequent greater use of the blog may mean he or she will judge it credible.

Past studies have found that reliance on traditional media consistently is the strongest predictor of online credibility. This study found that both online and traditional media reliance were weak predictors of Weblog credibility. More important, most relationships were negative, meaning that those who rely little on traditional media are more likely to view blogs as credible.

Past studies have found that the Internet has served as a supplement to traditional information for news and information.[78] Internet users are news junkies who judge online and traditional sources as equally credible and rely on both to survey the news environment. However, blog users distrust traditional media and see Weblogs as a viable alternative.

However, the more blog readers use talk radio, the more credible they view Weblogs, even though blog users did not rate talk radio as highly credible. In many ways, Weblogs are online versions of talk radio. Talk show listeners can talk directly to talk show hosts or guests;[79] Weblog users can either e-mail the blog host directly or post comments to the blog. Both blogs and talk radio are dominated by conservative hosts who openly attack political opponents and what they perceive as liberal press coverage.[80] Blog users may trust information they receive

from Weblogs because they believe the hosts do not hide their biases.[81] Similarly, while blog readers praise Weblogs for their depth of coverage, talk radio also is applauded by its users for depth.[82] While early studies suggested that talk radio listeners were socially isolated and politically alienated,[83] later studies presented talk radio listeners as politically interested and active, with high levels of political involvement and political knowledge,[84] but low levels of trust in government.[85] This study's Weblog users also were politically interested, involved, active, and knowledgeable, but with only moderate trust in government. Furthermore, these variables positively, though weakly, predicted credibility of Weblogs.

Weblog credibility was also positively, though weakly, predicted by cable television use. Blog users who tire of the so-called liberal leanings of broadcast news may be taking shelter in cable networks such as Fox who have aligned themselves on the right end of the political spectrum.[86]

The study has limitations, of course. Reaching the small population of Internet users who have visited blogs is a challenge because traditional methods of data collection do not readily apply to the Internet. Though posting a survey online is recognized as an effective method of collecting data, limitations arise from the lack of random selection. This study relied on a self-selected convenience sample, and, therefore, results cannot be generalized to the Internet as a whole or even to blog users. As Babbie noted, however, in situations where random probability sampling is not possible, nonprobability sampling is acceptable.[87]

The Internet is conducive to purposive sampling, as subsets within the larger population of users can be identified and solicited through announcements posted on message boards, sent out to special mailing lists, and through hyperlinks posted on key online sites, as employed here.[88] Careful use of this type of purposive sampling generates results that may be representative of a specific subset of Internet users, but not the larger population.[89] Still, the demographic profile of the Weblog readers who responded to this study and the types of Weblogs they visit closely mirror the Weblog reader profiles reported by others.[90]

This study suggested that demographically, Weblog users resembled early Internet users: white males with high incomes and high levels of education. Past research indicates that as Internet users became more representative of the demographic mainstream, credibility scores for online and traditional media rose. Future studies could find if Weblog users follow a similar trend, or whether blog readers remain a distinct group of Internet users who maintain their dislike and distrust of the traditional media.

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