

2013

# The sources young people trust: The credibility ratings of sources of national political news in China

Chenyan Shan  
*Iowa State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Shan, Chenyan, "The sources young people trust: The credibility ratings of sources of national political news in China" (2013).  
*Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 13084.  
<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/13084>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [digirep@iastate.edu](mailto:digirep@iastate.edu).

**The sources young people trust:  
The credibility ratings of sources of national political news in China**

by

**Chenyan Shan**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Journalism and Mass Communication

Program of Study Committee:  
Lulu Rodriguez, Major Professor  
Thomas Beell  
Tonglu Li

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2013

Copyright © Chenyan Shan, 2013. All rights reserved.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
The Political Context of the Chinese.....	8
The Media in China.....	11
Publishing and printing.....	11
Television.....	11
Online social networks.....	11
Credibility of News.....	13
Dimensions of Credibility.....	14
Online News Credibility.....	15
Internet Use in China.....	16
Urban vs. Urban Residents.....	18
Party Membership.....	19
Other Factors Influencing Assessments of News Credibility.....	21
Exposure and attention to political news.....	21
Political involvement and attitude toward politics.....	22
Research Questions.....	24
CHAPTER 3. METHOD.....	26
The Research Design.....	26
Sampling.....	26
Variables and Their Measure.....	27
Traditional vs. online sources.....	27
News credibility index.....	27
Exposure to political news.....	29
Attention to political news.....	30
Political involvement.....	30
Attitude toward politics.....	31
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	34
The Sample.....	34
Media Use Habits.....	36
Media Dependence.....	37

Credibility Ratings .....	38
Demographic Influences .....	39
Place of residence .....	39
Party membership .....	39
Factors Related to News Credibility Assessments.....	41
Exposure to political news .....	41
Attention to political news .....	41
Political involvement .....	42
Attitude toward politics.....	42
The Influence of Covariates.....	43
Media platform.....	43
Place of residence .....	46
Party membership .....	48
The Most Powerful Credibility Predictor .....	50
Summary of Findings.....	53
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION.....	55
The Findings and Their Implications to Theory and Professional Practice.....	55
Limitations of the Study.....	59
Suggestions for Future Study.....	60
APPENDIX A. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE (in ENGLISH).....	64
APPENDIX B. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE (in CHINESE) .....	72
APPENDIX C. CODE BOOK.....	78
APPENDIX D. IRB APPROVAL LETTER .....	84
REFERENCES .....	85
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	95

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents .....	34
Table 2. Descriptive statistics for exposure and attention to traditional and online media	35
Table 3. Rank order of mean scores for dependence on media platforms .....	37
Table 4. Results of t-test testing the difference between students from urban and rural areas in terms of news credibility ratings .....	38
Table 5. Results of an ANOVA test to determine differences in credibility ratings among Party members, Youth League members, and non-members .....	39
Table 6. Pearson's correlation results .....	41
Table 7. ANCOVA results testing the influence of media platform use on traditional media credibility ratings with exposure, attention, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates .....	43
Table 8. ANCOVA results testing the influence of media platform use on online news credibility ratings with exposure, attention, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates .....	44
Table 9. Traditional and online media use according to place of residence .....	45
Table 10. ANCOVA results testing the influence of place of residence on traditional news credibility ratings with exposure, attention, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates .....	46
Table 11. ANCOVA results testing the influence of place of residence on online news credibility ratings with exposure, attention, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates .....	46
Table 12. Descriptive statistics for party affiliation.....	48
Table 13. ANCOVA results for the influence of Party/League membership on traditional media credibility ratings with exposure, attention, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates.....	48
Table 14. ANCOVA results for the influence of Party/League membership on online media credibility ratings with exposure, attention, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates .....	48
Table 15. Multiple regression results showing the influence of demographic, political,	

and media variables on traditional media credibility perceptions .....50

Table 16. Multiple regression results showing the influence of demographic, political,  
and media variables on online media credibility perceptions .....51

## ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine Chinese young people's perceptions of the credibility of traditional and online news media as conveyors of national political information. It also examined whether urban and rural residents as well as members and non-members of the Communist Party and/or the Communist Youth League differ in their assessments of the credibility of these two types of information sources. The study also assessed the impact of media platform, place of residence, and Party/League membership on perceptions of source credibility given the intervening influence of exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitude toward politics. Data were gathered from an online survey of a non-probability sample of college students in China.

The results show that students relied on micro-blogs the most, followed by non-social networking sites, social networking sites, and television. The respondents also rated the online media more credible than their traditional counterparts. Students from rural areas did not differ from urban residents in how they assessed the credibility of both platforms. However, a significant difference was found between Youth League members and non-members and between Party members and non-members in how they rated online media credibility. The preferred media platform, place of residence, and Party/League membership did not significantly influence credibility perceptions after controlling for the influence of exposure and attention to political news, political involvement, and attitude toward politics. Only individual characteristics related to politics, namely political involvement and attitude toward politics, were found to be significant antecedents of online credibility ratings.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the surge of the online media, television and newspapers still play an important role in Chinese daily life. According to a 2007 survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics, 1.2 billion Chinese, comprising roughly 93.9% of the national population, watch television on a daily basis. Keeping the news industry vibrant are 700,000 journalists who form the reporting staff of print and broadcast organizations. Despite audiences' dependence on the news and the growing number of news outlets and news practitioners, there is still a wide discrepancy between expectations of "what media ought to do" and evaluations of "what media actually do."

"In China, politics affects everything," says Howkins (1982). The mass media in mainland China are administered by various government agencies so that people have learned to live with the knowledge that government imposes restrictions on press freedom, leading to the common observation that only positive news can be seen on newspapers and television. The central government exercises strict control on the reporting of disasters, accidents and calamities; among others, "extra-territorial" reporting and monitoring are not permitted for these types of topics. Thus, skeptical Chinese audiences routinely attempt to decipher what is "official" and what is "latent" in media content.

There have been major instances in which Chinese confidence in the government—and, by extension, the press—has been challenged. Still fresh in people's minds are these two sectors' dismal performance during the outbreak of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2003. Wanting to avoid public panic, the government imposed a media blackout in the face of a fast-spreading disease. The



Ministry of Health denied the existence of SARS cases in the country, admitting only on February 11, 2003 that five people in Guangzhou had died of what it termed “atypical pneumonia” (*People’s Daily*, 2003). The article’s headline proclaimed: “Guangzhou atypical pneumonia already effectively controlled.” In the months following this announcement, the number of reported cases of, and deaths from, SARS in the country grew by over 1,000%, catapulting everyone in a global health and economic crisis. Even in the aftermath of the epidemic, the Chinese government continued to cover up the bad news.

Another example is the Wenzhou train collision on July 23, 2011. In this accident, two high-speed trains traveling on the Yongtaiwen railway line collided on a viaduct in the suburbs of Wenzhou, Zhejiang province. The two trains were derailed; four cars fell off the viaduct. Although the government tried to cover up the number of casualties, passengers and news professionals posted photos and videos in real time through electronic means. The *Wall Street Journal*, reporting on the incident on August 8, 2011, severely criticized the government’s restrictions: “Accidents happen, especially in a country of more than one billion people that is modernizing quickly, but a government that tries to suppress information loses any benefit of the doubt. China now spends as much on domestic security, including web censorship, as it does on its military. But Beijing just got a crash course in how hard it is to keep information from going off the rails” (Crovitt, 2011, para 3).

These two incidents expose the growing gap between government command and the realities on the ground. The government staunchly defends its position that “the mass

media are regarded as links between the government, the Communist Party, and the people, and are expected to help advance the socialist cause” (Chang, 1989, p. 68).

More than a dozen government bodies are involved in reviewing and enforcing laws related to information flows within, into, and from China (Wines et al., 2010). The most powerful monitoring body is the Communist Party's Central Propaganda Department (CPD), which coordinates with the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) and the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) to ensure that media content promotes Party doctrine. The CPD issues directives restricting the coverage of politically sensitive topics such as protests, Tibet, and Taiwan.

The Xinhua News Agency, the official press agency, is the country’s biggest information collection center. Xinhua is subordinate to the State Council and reports to the Communist Party of China’s Publicity and Public Information Department (Xinhua net, n.d.). It is considered a propaganda tool by most press freedom organizations. In the book, *Mass Media in China*, Chang (1989) says that “apart from keeping the people informed about what is happening in the world and in China, Xinhua takes it upon itself to publicize the policies of the Communist Party and the People’s Government, canvass the people’s views about these policies, and report these views or transmit them to the highest leadership through a feedback system. It also holds itself responsible for educating and inspiring the people to make concerted efforts for the prosperity of the country” (p. 68). In its domestic news reports and overseas service, Xinhua seeks to reflect all aspects of Chinese life, focusing on the current modernization drive, improvements in the national economy, development policies for the rural areas, foreign

trade, and cultural life.

There is no denying that the traditional media remain the major sources of information for Chinese citizens. However, more and more young people are getting their news online. According to a China Internet Network Information Center report (2010), the country had 384 million Internet users by the end of 2009. Of these, 28.8% are primary, middle and high school students, including those in college. Therefore, it is pertinent to find out: What are the sources young people depend on for national current affairs information?

There are factors, demographic or otherwise, that may account for differences in people's perceptions of the credibility of political news sources. This study takes a close look at two demographic characteristics that are seldom examined for their impact on young people's information source choices and how they rate the credibility of these sources: (1) place of residence and (2) membership in the Communist Party and/or the Communist Youth League.

According to the results of the 2010 census, 49.7% of China's population lives in urban areas, up from 36.1% in 2000. The urban population in 2007 was estimated to be 44%, compared to 90% in Great Britain and 13% in Ethiopia. Urban and rural areas are often distinguished by their vast disparity in incomes and opportunities. Data published by the *China Daily* (2010) indicate that the gap in income between urban and rural areas in the country has significantly widened. The income ratio between urban and rural residents now stands at 3.33:1, which means that a city dweller's average income is 3.33 times greater than that of farmers and others who live in the countryside. The urban-rural

dichotomy is reflected in all aspects of social life, including employment, labor and social security rules, social welfare policies, and the education system. It is therefore pertinent to ask: Is there a difference between rural and urban perceptions of the credibility of political news sources?

A more nuanced description of China's mass media audiences must take into account rural and urban preferences for political information sources based on perceived credibility. Few studies (e.g., Li, 2004) show that while some Chinese villagers see the state as monolithic, many believe there are substantial differences in the performance of central and local governments. Among those who see a divided state, most appear to have more trust in higher levels of government than in government at lower levels. These individuals also are more able to distinguish between the intent and the capacity of the central government to administer the nation. That is, they trust that the central government's intent is beneficent, but they distrust its capacity to ensure the faithful implementation of policies (Li, 2004).

Membership in the Party and/or the Youth League also may have a bearing on perceptions of source preference and evaluations of credibility. The CPC is the world's largest political party (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.), claiming over 80 million members at the end of 2010, which constitutes about 6% of the total population of mainland China (Xinhua, 2011). The vast majority of military and civil officials are members of the Party (USC US-China Institute, 2011); about 2.27 million are students. One is invited and may apply for membership to the ruling Party upon reaching the age of 18. Members accept the Party's program and Constitution, work actively in one of the

Party's organizations, carry out the Party's decisions, and pay membership dues regularly.

Party members normally subscribe to the *People's Daily*, the Party's official newspaper, and watch CCTV, the predominant state television network. Government employees also are forced to subscribe to Party newspapers. Since the 1990s, the Party has stepped up its efforts at ideological work and the recruitment of college students. Paradoxically, the former is succeeding while the latter seems barely effective. Pundits have observed that members, particularly the younger ones, do not have a strong commitment to the Party's sanctioned ideology. According to Zhu (2000), "In many schools of higher education, the Party leadership has lost authority, Marxism-Leninism has lost its effect, the ideological front has lost control, and political workers have lost their whereabouts" (p. 54). As a result, it is important to determine whether Party membership still carries its "bite" and whether this has a bearing on the sources of information to which people subscribe and how the credibility of these sources is judged.

This study has three objectives: (1) to find out the information sources Chinese college students depend on for national political affairs; (2) to determine what type of information sources Chinese college students consider credible—traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and TV and their online editions or social networking sites such as Sina Weibo and Renren; and (3) to ascertain the impact of the demographic variables place of residence (rural vs. urban) and Communist Party/Youth League membership on the credibility ascribed to these two broad types of information sources considering the intervening influence of exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitude toward politics.

An online survey of Chinese college students was conducted to gather data for this study. The results are intended to assist communication practitioners and national government leaders in pinpointing the most effective media platform with which to deliver political information to Chinese college students, especially the young people in rural areas. Furthermore, the findings are expected to point to strategies that could narrow the information or knowledge gap between the media-rich urban people and those who live in the countryside. It is the hope that the results may assist in the formulation of procedures that will enhance the transparency of the mass media environment in China.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study aims to determine young people's perceptions of the credibility of the traditional news media (including their online versions) and web-based social networking sites as conveyors of political affairs information, and to examine whether urban and rural residents as well as members and non-members of the Communist Party and/or the Communist Youth League differ in their assessments of the credibility of these two major types of information sources. The study also aims to assess the impact of these two variables on perceptions of source credibility given the potential intervening influence of exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitude toward politics. This chapter discusses the nature of China's media system that directly impinges on the perceived credibility of all news sources. It also reviews the literature on source credibility, focusing on credibility perceptions for traditional and online news outlets. Audience demographic characteristics that may have a bearing on credibility assessments are discussed with emphasis on place of residence and Party/Youth League membership. The study's research questions are posed in the final section of this chapter.

### **The Political Context of the Chinese Media**

How people assess the credibility of news sources in China may be best defined as a consequence of the relationship between the mass media and the government.

Freedom House, a U.S.-based non-government organization that conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom, and human rights, publishes an annual report that assesses the degree of press freedom in each country around the globe.

In its latest ratings (2012), Freedom House classifies the Chinese press as "not free," the

worst ranking it can confer, observing that “state control over the news media is achieved through a complex combination of Party monitoring of news content, legal restrictions on journalists, and financial incentives for self-censorship” (Freedom House, 2005, para. 5). In short, it finds the Chinese government exercising control over the media through administrative sanctions and policies. A major casualty of these restrictions on freedom of expression is mass media credibility.

The government’s control of the press is one of the major features of China’s political system, and this situation has not changed in recent years despite tremendous economic growth. The muzzling of the press is a practice that characterizes a communication system exclusively under government control. Since the Communist Party came to power in 1949, withholding information from the public and the world has been a long-standing practice of the Chinese press. A popular example is the government-imposed news blackout that escalated the spread of SARS in 2003 into a full-blown epidemic.

Nationwide cover-ups of potentially embarrassing incidents are common ostensibly to preserve social stability. In the book *Mass Communication in China*, Howkins (1982) says that in the country, “communication and society are matched to a greater degree than anywhere else. The main medium of communications is not broadcasting or newspapers or the cinema, but the Chinese Communist Party or CCP” (pp. 4-5). Later, in 1989, Chang adds that “China’s journalism, or the dominant part of it, is an organ of the Party, and its political orientation and fundamental policies largely or totally depend on those of the Party” (p. 56).



As China transforms itself into an economic powerhouse, it faces a serious crisis in governance. China has a long way to go before it can claim that its government is transparent and accountable (Ding, 2009). To be more responsive to the people, Beijing initiated measures in 2008 to increase the government's transparency and accountability. These include more open communication with the public through the use of information technologies. However, critics say these steps were not designed to "serve the people," but to increase the legitimacy of the CCP. More importantly, the implementation of these policies met with such hurdles as the government's low credibility, legal bottlenecks, and information disparities. For instance, in 2011, the number of Chinese rural Internet users stood at 136 million, accounting for only 26.5% of the overall online audience (CNNIC, 2012). The low proportion of Internet users in rural areas is mainly due to insufficient access to computers and consequently, people's lack of computer skills.

Censorship in the country is the purview of the CCP. Incidents that have produced anxiety and have thus been considerably censored include, but are not limited to, pro-democracy initiatives such as the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989, the actions of the spiritual movement called Falun Gong, the initiatives of ethnic independence movements, corruption, police brutality, activities considered to be anarchist, disparities in wealth between and among sectors of society, food safety issues, pornography, and religion (Kenji, 2010). The censored media include essentially all that are capable of reaching a wide audience, including television, the print media, radio, films, theater, text and instant messaging, video games, literature, and the Internet in general. Chinese officials gain access to uncensored information via an internal document system (Council

on Foreign Relations, n.d.).

## **The Media in China**

### **Publishing and Printing**

Xinhua is the country's official press agency and the biggest information collection center. It is subordinate to the State Council and reports to the CCP's Publicity and Public Information Department. The agency has been described as the "eyes and tongue" of the Party (Malek & Kavoori, p. 346). In other words, the agency serves as the bridge between the Party, the government, and the people, communicating both the public demands and the policies of the Party.

### **Television**

The China Central Television (CCTV) is the state's television station under the direct administration of the Ministry of Radio and Television. This state organization is the center of the nationwide broadcasting network (Chang, 1989). Television is controlled through a combination of laws, local propaganda departments, self-censorship by editors, and internalized rules about what is and is not an acceptable topic for reporting. Laws and regulations ban writing and reporting that might "undermine social stability" or challenge the one-party rule (Ickovic, Lane & Jones, 2006). Topics commonly forbidden on the air include constitutional amendments and political reform. By orders from the central government, regional and provincial channels must transmit CCTV1's *News Broadcast* program from 7:00 to 7:30 pm daily.

### **Online Social Networks**

According to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), by the end

of 2011, there were 250 million micro bloggers in the mainland, a figure that rose by a whopping 296% compared with that at the end of 2010. The utilization ratio, which refers to the ratio of effective time on a computer to the total “up time,” was registered at 48.7%. Over a year, micro blogs have become a vital Internet application accessed by nearly half of Chinese Internet users.

The micro-blogs’ potency as a venue for public discourse, however, is under threat with the introduction of a new government policy to regulate online information flows at the end of 2011. The new regulations require users to register before posting messages on micro-blogging platforms; otherwise, they are relegated to a read-only mode. Micro-blogging service providers have to verify the identity of their users within three months. The text of the regulations also states that users cannot post topics that can damage China’s reputation or lead to illegal gatherings likely to disturb civil order.

The real-name registration of users marks the latest attempt by Chinese authorities to tighten control over the country’s social networking sites, which have also become forums for people to express opinions critical of the government. China already censors the Internet for anti-government content, and has blocked foreign social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (Agence France Presse, 2012). Late last year, the real-name micro-blog registration was pretested in the major cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou and Shenzhen (Kan, 2012). This and other regulatory measures will undoubtedly have important impacts on the development of micro blogs as a public feedback mechanism.

## Credibility of the News

Aware of the government's stranglehold on the media, the Chinese have long seen credibility operationally as "the extent to which the news delivered by the media matches real world facts" (Yang, 2006, pp. 6-7). In other words, to the government-weary Chinese, credibility is synonymous with the authenticity and accuracy of news reports judged by how closely these reports reflect what they witness as objective reality.

In the field of mass communication, credibility was originally studied as an attribute of the source (e.g., Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953). Gunther (1992) argues, however, that credibility is a relational variable based on audience's perception of the source. Bracken (2006) agrees, suggesting that source credibility is "the amount of believability attributed to a source of information (either a medium or an individual) by receivers" (p. 723).

According to McQuail (2005), the extent to which people find a source credible contributes to news learning effects. "Some trust is essential for a news source to be effective, although there is plenty of evidence that people do habitually pay attention to media sources they do not trust" (p. 509). Indeed, a number of surveys have shown a clear distinction between a more trusted and a less trusted source. For example, an initial survey conducted by Gaziano and McGrath (1987), who developed a 12-item news credibility index that includes trustworthiness, bias, accuracy, fairness, and community relations, found that credibility had more to do with perceived fairness, lack of bias, and good faith rather than perceived accuracy or reliability of the information itself. "A relevant component was the [audience's] perception of the medium as having the interest

of the public at heart” (as cited in McQuail, 2005, p. 509).

How the public perceives the credibility of a specific medium has long been of interest to communication researchers (e.g., McCroskey & Jenson, 1981; Newhagen & Nass, 1989; Sargent, 1965). The general trend of research results is that audiences rate their primary source of news as credible (e.g., Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Sundar, 1998).

### **Dimensions of Credibility**

Numerous studies have examined the “building blocks” of credibility (e.g., Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Kioussis, 2001; Johnson & Kaye, 2002; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007) using different measures of the concept. Recent studies have focused on the role of communication technologies, collaborative and interactive media use, and source manipulation by various media corporations on credibility assessments (e.g., Sundar & Nass, 2000; Metzger, Flanagin & Zwarun, 2003).

Flanagin and Metzger (2008) argue that “endorsed credibility in the digital media environment compensates for the relative anonymity of tools like the web...The means of sharing these assessments can take many forms, resulting in several variants of credibility, most notably, conferred, tabulated, reputed, and emergent credibility” (pp. 10-11).

According to Flanagin and Metzger (2008), “credibility may be *conferred* on some information or its source when well-regarded entities produce or recommend...information repositories or service providers to information consumers” (p. 11). *Tabulated* credibility relies on peer rating. For example, eBay.com depends on its members to rate others. *Reputed* credibility is also a form of endorsement that is perpetuated through personal and social networks. This is based on the notion that a good

reputation is a powerful mechanism for persuasion. Finally, *emergent* credibility also arises from group and social engagement. For instance, *wikis* provide information repositories created largely by individuals rather than by a central organization. These observations suggest that credibility is a multi-faceted construct that affects and is affected by a number of factors (Johnson & Kaye, 2002).

Media credibility has been defined as being composed of a combination of the following dimensions: trustworthiness, honesty, believability, bias, fairness, accuracy, objectivity, verifiability, reporting of the whole story, being up-to-date and current, and timeliness (e.g., Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Infante, 1980; Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2000; Kioussis, 2001). Although the measures of credibility have not been consistent, previous studies provide a practical guide with which to evaluate people's perceptions of the credibility of various channels of news, including the online media.

### **Online News Credibility**

Deuze (2003) argues that the “ongoing levels of interactivity [in the online world] undermine the ‘we write, you read’ dogma of modern journalism” (p. 220). Despite the Internet's enhanced capabilities in presenting the news, incorrect information as well as errors due to instantaneous postings have assaulted the credibility of online news (Lascia, 2002). Indeed, some studies indicate that web users have expressed concern about the quality of the online news to which they are regularly exposed. For instance, Hilligoss and Rieh (2007) conducted interviews with undergraduate students in the U.S. and found that the Internet was rated lower in terms of credibility compared to books and scholarly

journals. Similarly, Metzger et al. (2003) found that college students perceive information found online to be less credible than information found in newspapers.

The Pew Research Center (2006) reports opposite results, indicating that young web users, in particular, consider the Internet equal to or even more credible than the traditional media. Flanagin and Metzger (2000) found that college students, compared to the general population, rate information online as more credible although they were less likely to verify the information they find online. Similarly, Kang (2009) found that young people generally hold positive attitudes toward online news.

The rise in the credibility assessments of online news came in tandem with the decline in the trust ratings for newspapers and television, a phenomenon that has been observed since the mid-1980s (Pew Research Center, 2009). In the United States, nearly 75% of web users consider newspapers, magazines, and political sites online as more credible than their traditional media counterparts (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Is the same phenomenon happening in China?

Chan, Lee and Pan (2006), surveying journalists in two Chinese cities, report that their sample regarded mainstream media organizations' websites more credible than commercial portals. The perceived credibility of these two types of news sites varied with journalists' beliefs about their own profession. That is, the lower credibility ratings assigned to commercial portals may have resulted from the view that these portals were practicing an alternative model of journalism, one of dubious quality. In another study, Cassidy (2007) reports that online journalists rated online news as significantly more credible than print newspaper journalists. These studies illustrate the different lenses with

which people make judgments about the credibility of a specific medium.

### **Internet Use in China**

It is pertinent to examine people's assessments of the credibility of online news in the light of the exponential growth of Internet users in China and throughout the world. In 2008, China surpassed the U.S. to become the nation with the highest number of Internet users worldwide. This was the conclusion reached following a survey conducted jointly by CNNIC and the Pew Research Center in 2012. Comparing the Internet activities of American and Chinese users, the survey report noted that Americans spend more time online for more serious-minded and purposive activities such as emailing, searching, and online banking, while Chinese Internet users lean more toward leisure activities such as online gaming, instant messaging, and listening to music.

These two organizations' data show that by the end of 2011, there were 513 million Chinese Internet users. In 2011 alone, 55.8 million were added to this rapidly rising use rate. Internet penetration rate stepped up to 38.3%, 4% higher than the rate of increase recorded the previous year. Of these Internet users, 136 million live in rural areas.

Despite the growing number of Internet users, the readership of online news is declining over the years, dropping from 77.2% in 2010 to 71.5% in 2011. Online news use, however, has been steadily rising for the past five years among young people 10-29 years old. According to CNNIC, Chinese Internet users spend an average of 18.7 hours per week on the medium, up 0.4 hours compared with the frequency reported at the end of 2010. For those with a college degree, the utilization ratio of online news stood at 87.6%;



among junior high school graduates, it was 62.1%. The figures show that Internet use is becoming more popular even among those with high school and junior high school education (CNNIC, 2012).

### **Urban vs. Urban Residents**

Westley and Severin (1964) are credited with conducting the first comprehensive analysis of channel credibility across media outlets. In their classic study, these scholars note that certain demographic variables (e.g., age, education, and gender) mediate people's perceptions of channel credibility, a finding supported by more contemporary research (e.g., Gunther, 1992 and Mulder, 1981).

Contrary to international experience, the disparity in the socioeconomic condition between Chinese rural and urban residents has widened in the past two decades (Yang, 2002). This growing polarization may have an impact on how urban and rural residents assess the credibility of news information sources.

According to CNNIC, the ratio of Chinese rural Internet users in 2010 was just 0.8% higher than 2009 figures partly due to the accelerating rate of urbanization and the consequent migration of rural residents to cities in search of job opportunities. However, many have observed that insufficient access to computers in the rural areas and the lack of Internet skills pose more important obstacles to the penetration of the Internet in the countryside. In 2011, 57.8% of rural non-Internet users said they "do not know how to use the computer and/or the network." Only 45.7% of non-Internet users in cities offered the same reason. Expanding Internet access in rural areas and developing the computer skills of rural residents, therefore, show great potential to narrow the information and

socioeconomic gaps between urban and rural areas.

Rural citizens also differ from city dwellers on a number of factors, such as the employment system, labor and social security rules, social welfare policies, and the education system. For example, Lou (2011), exploring how the transition of the countryside in northwest China challenged the urban-rural dichotomy being reproduced in and by formal schooling, found that rural middle school students expressed criticism of the chaos, pollution, and corruption they have experienced in the process of urbanization. Because of differences in Internet use and other characteristics, it can be surmised that people from rural areas may have different perceptions of the credibility of various news sources compared to their urban counterparts.

### **Party and/or Youth League Membership**

With more than 80 million members—up from 50 million in the early 1990s—the CCP is the largest political party in the world. Senior cadres remain overwhelmingly male, but there is now a compulsory retirement age and very low quotas for women. In recent years, the Party has concentrated on targeting the best and the brightest in its recruitment efforts. Over time, the Party has largely transformed itself from an organization designed for mass mobilization and ideological campaigns into a technocratic leadership corps. This was a stark departure from the past when peers looked down on recruits as careerists and second-rate students (Branigan, 2009).

Although some elite students still consider the Party with its attendant political meetings “boring and irrelevant,” between 30% and 50% apply for membership. An approval rate of about 5% reinforces the desirability of membership: recruiters seek those

with top grades, leadership potential, and youthful idealism. In return, the Party offers perks. To rise through the government hierarchy, membership is a must. Employers generally acknowledge Party membership as evidence of individual accomplishments (Branigan, 2009).

There is now a vastly larger pool of college graduates from which the CCP can recruit compared with the scenario ten years ago. With college credentials more common, competition for career opportunities has intensified. Having a college degree no longer distinguishes one from others as much as in the past. Party membership has therefore become much more important in career advancement for the highly educated.

The enhanced attractiveness of Party membership among college graduates in recent years has been extended to college students. In 1990, only 1.2% of college students were Party members. By the end of June 2003, however, 8% of college students nationwide—roughly 700,000—had already joined the Party. About 50% of all college students (about 3.95 million) had filed applications for membership in 2003, according to a national meeting on college education. In some universities, over 90% are membership applicants. At this rate, the number of college graduates in the Party (roughly 1.6 million) would more than double within three years. Statistics show that about 200,000 post-graduate students on campus are Party members (National College Education, 2003).

According to the latest figures from the Organization Department of the Communist Party Central Committee, the number of Party members has exceeded 80 million in 2011. The two leading groups of new members were college students and people at the frontline of production or work, such as industrial workers, farmers, herders,

and migrant workers. Both groups account for more than 40% of the total number of new Party members.

Today's college students strive for Party membership primarily out of a personal pragmatic concern for their future job searches and career advancement and not necessarily because of a strong commitment to the Party's sanctioned ideology (Guo, 2005).

The Party has stepped up its efforts to recruit younger citizens, those 14-29 years of age, to the Communist Youth League of China (CYLC), which is organized along Party structure. The League is responsible for guiding the activities of "young pioneers." Founded in 1922, the League was 75.439 million strong at the end of 2007, 51.34% of which are students (Xinhua News Agency, 2008).

### **Other Factors Influencing Assessments of News Credibility**

There are several factors that may intervene in the process of assessing the credibility of mass media channels. The most commonly cited are (1) exposure and (2) attention to political media content, (3) level of political involvement, and (4) attitude toward politics.

### **Exposure and Attention to Political News**

Chaffee and Schleuder (1986) assessed changes in knowledge about public affairs and politics by testing exposure and attention to media news. These tests showed significant increments in knowledge gain associated with media attention even after controlling for the influence of exposure to various media.

Early studies on credibility have established that increases in media use were

usually accompanied by enhanced credibility ratings for whatever channel was being scrutinized (Cobbey, 1980; Whitney, 1986). Two decades later, Kiouisis (2001) observed a similar relationship, reporting that news credibility perceptions are influenced by media use and interpersonal discussion of news. He found that, in general, people rated print newspapers as more credible than online or television news. Online news, however, was rated more credible than television news. He offered evidence of a link between media use and public perceptions of credibility for newspapers and television news, but not for online news.

### **Political Involvement and Attitude Toward Politics**

In an earlier work, Gunther (1992) posits that involvement with a topic or issue is a better predictor of perceived credibility, providing evidence that “a person’s involvement in situations, issues, or groups show the greatest power” in explaining how people make credibility judgments (p. 152). A number of studies have shown that those who are highly involved with politics are more motivated to seek information from political news (e.g., Aarts and Semetko, 2003; Judd & Milburn, 1980). Other studies suggest that the less involved in politics are also less likely to express political attitudes. When they do, their expressions contain more residual variance and error. At the same time, the attitudes of both the involved and uninvolved or not very involved show evidence of a single underlying ideology that is remarkably stable across groups (Judd & Milburn, 1980). Also, Aarts and Semetko (2003) found a positive relationship between attention to news and levels of political knowledge and civic engagement in their study that examined the effects of the news media on political attitudes. Their findings show

that from one perspective, media use contributes to political cynicism and declining voter turnout; from another, media use contributes to political involvement, trust, efficacy, and mobilization.

Television news viewing in the United States and the United Kingdom, among other countries, has been associated with higher levels of political knowledge, participation, and personal efficacy (e.g., Brehm & Rahn 1997; Norris 1996). In general, these studies indicate that those who pay more attention to political news tend to possess higher political knowledge and have a higher interest and willingness to cognitively process political news.

There is evidence suggesting that attitudes toward issues, particularly political news, strongly influence credibility perceptions. For example, Choi, Watt & Lynch (2006) observed that in an environment of political partisanship, perceptions of media credibility were affected by the audience member's political position on the Iraq War. Opponents of the war perceived the Internet as less aligned with the government's position and rated it as more credible than did those who were neutral about the war or those who supported the military effort. For those in the minority opinion group, the diversity of information and views on the war was the main reason why the Internet was assigned high credibility as a news channel.

When news consumers have strong opinions about an issue, they are more likely to express skepticism about the news coverage. That is, the magnitude of their attitude positively correlates with the degree of bias perceived (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Gunther, Christen, Liebhart & Chia, 2001; Schmitt, Gunther & Liebhart, 2004). Partisanship is

often identified by membership in a social or political group or organization.

The results of these studies support the findings that people's attitudes toward political personalities, topics, objects, events or politics in general affect the outcomes of viewing political news. For instance, Kazee (1981) found that viewers' negative attitude toward former U.S. president Richard Nixon considerably enhanced Watergate-related television watching. Furthermore, those who express distrust in government appear to be more dissatisfied with the political parties or with the policy choices the parties provide. This was a central argument in Miller's (1974) early influential articles.

Considering the foregoing literature review, this study proposes a flow of influence diagrammed in Figure 1.

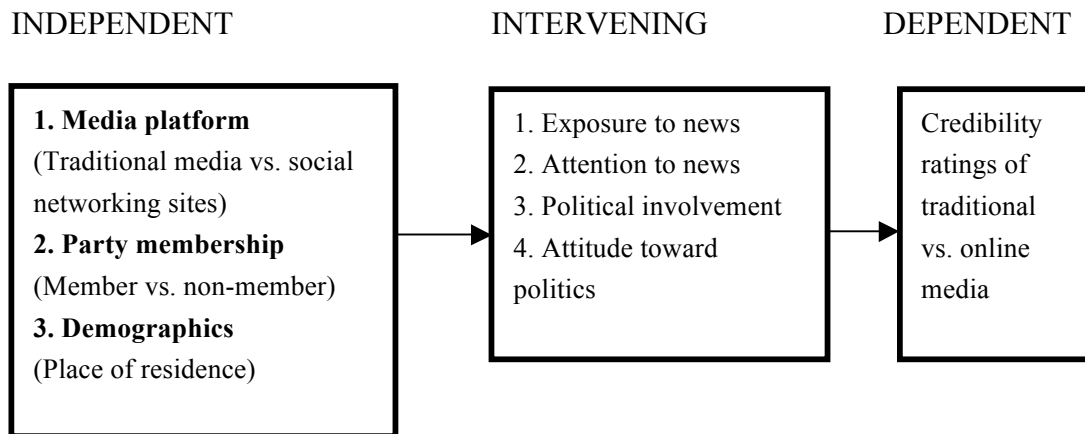


Figure 1. The study's conceptual framework

### Research Questions

Based on the foregoing literature, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: What sources (traditional media and their electronic versions vs. online media, specifically social networking sites, hereinafter referred to as online sources) do Chinese college students depend on for information regarding current national political news?

RQ2: Is there a difference in the credibility ratings of traditional versus online sources in their coverage of current national political news?

RQ3: Is there a difference between college students from urban and rural areas in terms of the credibility they assign to traditional versus online sources of national political news?

RQ4: Is there a difference among Party members, Youth League members, and non-members in terms of the perceived credibility of traditional versus online sources of information about national political affairs?

RQ5: What is the relationship between exposure to news and the credibility ratings for traditional and online sources?

RQ6: What is the relationship between attention to news and the credibility ratings for traditional and online sources?

RQ7: What is the relationship between political involvement and the credibility ratings for traditional and online sources?

RQ8: What is the relationship between attitude toward politics and the credibility ratings for traditional and online sources?

RQ9: Does the media platform (traditional vs. online) influence credibility perceptions after controlling for exposure to news, attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics?

RQ10: Does place of residence (rural vs. urban) influence credibility perceptions after controlling for exposure to news, attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics?



RQ11: Does Party/League membership influence credibility perceptions after controlling for exposure to news, attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics?

RQ12: Which demographic variables (place of residence, party membership, gender), politics-related factors (political involvement and attitude toward politics), and media-related variables (media platform, exposure to news, attention to news) were the most powerful predictors of credibility perceptions?

## CHAPTER 3. METHOD

### The Research Design

An online survey of college students in China was conducted to gather data for this study. This method was chosen because the research questions require a considerably large sample size to be able to detect differences. An online survey also eliminates interviewer bias or error.

The questionnaire in the Chinese language was pretested on a convenience sample of 20 Chinese students to determine the reliability of the indices developed and to ensure that the questions and instructions were clear. Suggestions on how to improve the phrasing or wording of questions were solicited. The final survey website also contained information about confidentiality of responses and informed consent. The potential respondents were directed to the survey's webpage through active links in universities' electronic bulletin board systems (BBS). Links to the study's survey website also were posted in the universities' official micro-blogs and other online forums.

### Sampling

This study relied on a non-probability sample of college students in China due to unavailable sampling frames. The participants must be students enrolled in a Chinese university during the last academic terms and were at least 18 years old at the time of data gathering.

To recruit respondents, permission to post a link to the survey on the BBS of universities was solicited. BBSs are electronic message centers that serve a wide range of interest groups. Once logged in, users can upload and download software and data, read

news and bulletins, and exchange messages with other users either through email or in public message boards, allowing users to interact with each other more instantaneously. According to a survey conducted by China Education, 40% of university students throughout the country in 2005 used their colleges' or universities' BBS frequently.

### **Variables and Their Measure**

**Traditional vs. online sources.** This study examined the perceived credibility of two general sources of national current affairs news: traditional and online sources. For the purposes of this study, traditional sources refer to the print and online editions of newspapers and magazines, television, and radio. Online sources refer to blogs (e.g., Sina Blog, Sohu Blog, Blog Bus, Blogger), micro-blogs (e.g., Sina, Sohu, Tencent), social networking sites (e.g., Renren, Kaixin, Douban), websites that are not social networking sites (e.g., qq, 163, Sohu, Sina, ifeng), BBSs (e.g., Tianya, Mop, Sohu Club).

**News credibility index.** The dependent variable in this study was the credibility ratings of traditional media and online sources. News credibility has two dimensions, trust and expertise. Gaziano and McGrath (1986) identified 12 aspects of newspaper and television news credibility that encompass these two dimensions. They include fairness, bias, completeness, accuracy, respect for privacy, having the people's interests in mind, concern for community, ability to separate facts from opinion, trust, concern for public interest, being factual, and reporters' level of training. In order to measure students' credibility perceptions, nine five-point semantic differential scales were used following Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) original 12 credibility dimensions. Three dimensions were deleted because of the close similarity of their meaning in Chinese. These bipolar

items are: Concerned about the community's well-being—Are not concerned about the community's well-being, Separate fact from opinion—Does not separate fact from opinion, and Are factual—Are opinionated.. Thus, the resulting credibility index includes assessments of whether news coverages (1) Are fair—Are unfair; (2) Are biased—Are unbiased; (3) Tell the whole story—Do not tell the whole story; (4) Are accurate—Are inaccurate; (5) Invade people's privacy—Respect people's privacy; (6) Do watch after reader's interests—Don't watch after readers' interests; (7) Can be trusted—Cannot be trusted; (8) Have well trained reporters—Have poorly trained reporters; and (9) Are concerned about the public interest—Are not concerned about the public interest at all. If respondents agreed with an item, they were told to circle "1." If they felt very negatively about the item, they were asked to circle "5." Credibility was measured by computing for the average of the respondents' answers to the nine items listed above.

The reliability and internal consistency of the credibility index and the succeeding indices developed in this study were determined by computing for Cronbach's alpha. In the social sciences, an index that produces a Cronbach's alpha of at least 0.60 is considered acceptable (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

**RQ1: What sources (traditional vs. online) do college students depend on for information regarding current national political news?**

To answer this research question, the student-respondents were asked the extent to which they depend on a number of sources for national affairs information on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means "do not depend at all" and 5 means "depend a great deal."

These sources are grouped into two broad categories: (1) traditional media and (2) the

online media. The answers were summed and averaged for each of the two categories of information sources.

Descriptive statistics were analyzed to answer this research question.

**RQ2: Is there a difference in the credibility ratings of traditional versus online sources in their coverage of current national political news?**

To answer this research question, the respondents were asked to rate the same sources in terms of perceived credibility using the semantic differential scales listed above. The credibility judgments for traditional and online sources were compared using independent samples t-test.

**RQ3: Is there a difference between college students from urban and rural areas in terms of the credibility they assign to traditional versus online sources of national current affairs information?**

Students were asked whether their family's household was registered in a rural or an urban area, the current study's determinant of place of residence. An independent samples t-test was conducted to answer this research question.

**RQ4: Is there a difference among Party members, Youth League members, and non-members in terms of the perceived credibility of traditional versus online sources of information about national political affairs?**

Students were asked about their party affiliation (Party member, League member, or non-member). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test were conducted to answer this research question.

**RQ5: What is the relationship between exposure to news and the credibility**

### **ratings for traditional and online sources?**

Exposure to traditional media news sources was measured by asking the number of hours spent reading about, watching, or listening to domestic affairs information through the traditional media (television, radio, print and online newspapers and magazines). Exposure to online news sources was measured by asking the number of hours spent reading about, watching, or listening to domestic affairs information through social networking sites, blogs, micro-blogs, BBS, and other online sources.

This research question was answered by conducting two separate Pearson correlation tests.

### **RQ6: What is the relationship between attention to news and the credibility ratings for traditional and online sources?**

Attention to domestic affairs content received from the two categories of sources was measured by asking students how closely they pay attention news reports received from traditional and online information sources listed above. The response options ranged from 1 (no attention at all) to 5 (as closely as I can).

This research question was answered by conducting two separate Pearson correlation tests.

### **RQ7: What is the relationship between political involvement and the credibility ratings for traditional and online sources?**

In this study, involvement was measured by asking respondents seven semantic differential items taken from the Personal Involvement Inventory (PII), a scale intended to assess an object or a person's perceived relevance based on personal needs and

interests (Zaichkowsky, 1985). To measure political involvement, students were asked to select the adjectives that best describe their involvement in Chinese political affairs and/or issues. The seven five-point semantic differential scales have the following endpoints: (1) Important—Unimportant, (2) Irrelevant—Relevant, (3) Useless—Useless, (4) Beneficial—Not beneficial, (5) Uninterested—Interested, (6) Unexciting—Exciting, (7) Appealing—Unappealing. The average reported reliability for this index, which has been used in previous studies, was 0.92 (Zaichkowsy, 1985). The responses were summed to form an overall measure of involvement ranging from a low of 7 to a high of 35. The responses to these items were averaged to measure involvement in politics.

This research question was answered by conducting two separate Pearson correlation tests.

**RQ8: What is the relationship between attitude toward politics and the credibility ratings for traditional and online sources?**

The eight semantic differential scales used to measure attitude toward politics were taken from Spangenberg, Voss and Crowley's (1997) Hedonic and Utilitarian Consumer Attitudes Scale. To measure attitude toward politics, students were asked to select the adjectives that best describe what they think and feel toward Chinese current affairs in general. The semantic differential scales have the following endpoints: (1) Unimportant—Important, (2) Harmful—Beneficial, (3) Boring—Interesting, (4) Unappealing—Appealing, (5) Useful—Useless, (6) Sensible—Not sensible, (7) Helpful—Unhelpful, and (8) Productive—Unproductive. This index, previously applied, showed a reliability estimate of 0.91.

This research question was answered by conducting two separate Pearson correlation tests.

**RQ9: Does the media platform (traditional vs. online) influence credibility perceptions after controlling for exposure to news, attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics?**

**RQ10: Does place of residence (rural vs. urban) influence credibility perceptions after controlling for exposure to news, attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics?**

**RQ11: Does Party/League membership influence credibility perceptions after controlling for exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics?**

To answer RQ9-RQ11, a series of analysis of covariance tests (ANCOVA) were conducted.

**RQ12: Which factor (media platform, place of residence, exposure to news, attention to news, political involvement, attitude toward politics, or party membership) is the most powerful predictor of credibility?**

A multiple regression test was conducted to answer this question.



## CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to determine Chinese young people's perceptions of the credibility of the traditional news media and online news as conveyors of national political information. It also examined whether urban and rural residents as well as members and non-members of the Communist Party and the Communist Youth League differ in their assessments of the credibility of these two major types of information sources. The study also assessed the impact of media platform, place of residence, and Party/League membership on perceptions of source credibility given the potential intervening influence of exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitude toward politics.

### The Sample

A total of 668 questionnaires were collected from an online survey of Chinese college students. Of these, 44 were incomplete and were discarded. A total of 624 valid questionnaires were analyzed.

Table 1 shows the respondents' demographic characteristics, including their gender, year in school, major field of study, place of registered residence, family income, and Party and/or League membership. A total of 337 males and 287 females participated in this survey, with the male respondents accounting for 54% of the sample. Most of the respondents were college juniors, about 28% of the total. The 38 graduate students constituted 6.1% of those who returned valid responses. About 27.6% reported an annual household income that was less than RMB25,000 (1US\$=6.22RMB) in 2012; 28.5% earned RMB25,000 to 49,999 the same year. A large majority of the respondents (87.7%)

were Communist Youth League members; 19.7% were Party members. Those who do not fall under any of these two categories, called non-members, comprise 12.3% of the sample. Of the Party members, 41 (33.3%) reported having been a member for less than a year, and 40 (32.5%) have been members for one or two years. Twelve (9.8%) said they joined the Party more than four years ago.

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (N=624)**

	Frequency	%
<b>Gender (mode=male)</b>		
Male	337	54.0
Female	287	46.0
<b>Grade (mode=junior)</b>		
Freshman	120	19.2
Sophomore	141	22.6
Junior	175	28.0
Senior	119	19.1
Graduate student	38	6.1
Other	31	5.0
<b>Major (mode=Professions and applied sciences)</b>		
Humanities	71	11.4
Social sciences	89	14.3
Natural sciences	95	15.2
Formal sciences	73	11.7
Professions and applied sciences	183	29.3
Others	113	18.1
<b>Registered residence (mode=rural)</b>		
Rural	357	57.2
Urban	267	42.8
<b>Family income (median=RMB25,000 to RMB49,999)</b>		
Less than 25,000	172	27.6
25,000 to 49,999	178	28.5
50,000 to 99,999	133	21.3
100,000 to 149,999	77	12.3
150,000 to 199,999	35	5.6
200,000 to 249,999	19	3.0

More than 250,000	10	1.6
<b>Table 1. (continued)</b>		
	Frequency	%
<b>Party affiliation (mode=Youth League member)</b>		
Party member	123	19.7
Youth League member	424	67.9
Non-member	77	12.3
<b>Duration of Party membership (mode=less than 1 year)</b>		
Less than a year	41	33.3
1-2 years	40	32.5
2-3 years	23	18.7
3-4 years	7	5.7
More than 4 years	12	9.8
Total	123	

### Media Use Habits

In general, the sample of Chinese college students spent more time on the new media to get national political news. Of the 624 respondents, 148 (23.7%) generally spent one to two hours a week getting news through the traditional media, while 127 (20.4%) spent two to three hours a week on the new media (Table 2). The respondents also reportedly paid a fair amount of attention to both platforms as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics for exposure and attention to traditional and online media**

Exposure (hours/week)	Traditional media		Online media	
	(mode=3)		(mode=4)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
0	10	1.6	10	1.6
0-0.99	120	19.2	57	9.1
1-1.99	148	23.7	99	15.9
2-2.99	107	17.1	127	20.4
3-3.99	69	11.1	88	14.1

<b>Table 2. (continued)</b>				
4-4.99	68	10.9	93	14.9
<b>Exposure (hours/week)</b>	<b>Traditional media</b>	<b>Online media</b>	<b>Traditional media</b>	<b>Online media</b>
	<b>(mode=3)</b>	<b>(mode=4)</b>	<b>(mode=3)</b>	<b>(mode=4)</b>
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
5-4.99	45	7.2	66	10.6
6-6.99	27	4.3	34	5.4
7-7.99	17	2.7	23	3.7
More than 8 hours	13	2.1	27	4.3
<b>Attention</b>	<b>mode=3</b>		<b>mode=3</b>	
No attention at all	59	9.5	48	7.7
Very little attention	152	24.4	153	24.5
Fair attention	285	45.7	231	37.0
Close attention	101	16.2	142	22.8
As closely as I can	27	4.3	50	8.0
Total	624	100.0	624	100.0

### **Media Dependence**

RQ1 asks: What sources (traditional vs. online) do Chinese college students depend on for information regarding current national political news?

The respondents were asked the extent to which they depend on a number of sources for national political news on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means “do not depend at all” and 5 means “depend a great deal.” The results, shown in Table 3, indicate that Chinese students relied on micro-blogs the most for national political news (M= 3.22), followed by non-social networking sites (3.17), social networking sites (3.04), and television (2.92). Although the top three platforms when it comes to dependability fell under the general rubric of new media, television still asserted its strong role as a source of political information in the lives of young people. The blogs’ popularity as news

outlets considerably waned with the emergence of their abbreviated counterparts, the micro-blogs, in 2009. Micro-blogs allow users to publish short text updates or “microposts” using a number of services, including instant messaging, email, or Twitter that enhance interactivity. Celebrities use them incessantly, part of the reason why micro-blogs have captured the interest of young people. Radio lagged at the bottom of the list (M=2.44).

**Table 3. Rank order of mean scores for dependence on media platforms**

Rank	Media sources	Mean	Std. dev.	Mode
1	Micro-blogs (e.g., Sina, Sohu, Tencent)	3.22	1.11	4
2	Non-social networking sites (e.g., qq, 163, Sohu, Sina, ifeng)	3.17	1.11	3
3	Social networking sites or SNSs (e.g., Renren, Kaixin, Douban)	3.04	1.11	3
4	Television	2.92	1.04	3
5	Print and online magazines	2.77	1.03	2
6	Bulletin board systems or BBSs (e.g., Tianya, Mop, Sohu Club)	2.76	1.07	3
7	Blogs (e.g., Sina Blog, Sohu Blog, Blog Bus, Blogger)	2.73	1.12	3
8	Print and online newspapers	2.65	1.00	2
9	Radio	2.44	1.08	2

### Credibility Ratings

RQ2 asks whether there is a difference in the credibility ratings of traditional versus online sources in their coverage of national politics. To answer this question, the sources were grouped into two broad categories: (1) traditional media, which includes the print and online editions of newspapers and magazines as well television shows, radio programs and their online outlets; and (2) online media, which specifically refers to micro-blogs, social networking sites or SNSs, non-social networking sites (excluding the

online versions of traditional media outlets), bulletin board systems or BBSs, and blogs. The credibility index was composed of nine items. Overall credibility was measured by averaging the responses for the traditional (Cronbach's alpha=.85) and online sources (Cronbach's alpha=.84). The mean values for traditional and online sources were 3.34 (SD=0.75) and 3.67 (SD=0.70), respectively, suggesting that college students generally perceived online sources as more credible than traditional sources.

### Demographic Influences

#### Place of Residence

RQ3 asks if there is a difference between college students from urban and rural areas in terms of the credibility they assign to traditional versus online sources of national political news. To answer this question, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results show no significant difference between the two groups (Table 4). In other words, students from rural areas did not differ from their urban counterparts in terms of how they assessed the credibility of both platforms in delivering news about national political affairs.

**Table 4. T-test testing the difference between students from urban and rural areas in terms of news credibility ratings**

Media platform	Residence	N	Mean	Std. dev.	t	df	p
Traditional	Rural	357	3.33	0.76	-.344	622	.731
	Urban	267	3.35	0.74			
Online	Rural	357	3.68	0.71	.574	622	.566
	Urban	267	3.65	0.67			

#### Party Membership

RQ4 asks whether Party members, Youth League members, and non-members

differ in terms of the perceived credibility of two platforms of information about national political affairs. To answer this question, an ANOVA test was conducted. The results, shown on Table 5, indicate no difference in the three groups' evaluations of the credibility of traditional media ( $F=2.060$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.128$ ). However, there was a significant difference in their credibility ratings of online platforms ( $F=7.289$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.001$ ). The descriptive statistics show that Party and Youth League members produced means (3.67 for Party members and 3.72 for Youth League members) that were higher than that of non-members (3.39). A Tukey post hoc test (Table 5) reveal significant differences between Youth League members and non-members ( $p=.000$ ) and between Party members and non-members ( $p=.017$ ) in how they rated the credibility of online media.

**Table 5. Results of an ANOVA test to determine differences in credibility ratings among Party members, Youth League members, and non-members**

		N	Mean	Std.dev.
Traditional media	Party member	123	3.30	0.77
	Youth League member	424	3.38	0.71
	Non-member	77	3.20	0.90
	Total	624	3.34	0.75
Online media	Party member	123	3.67	0.70
	Youth League member	424	3.72	0.66
	Non-member	77	3.39	0.80
	Total	624	3.67	0.69

		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Traditional media	Between groups	2.295	2	1.147	2.060	.128
	Within groups	345.824	621	.557		
	Total	348.119	623			
Online media	Between groups	6.901	2	3.450	7.389	.001
	Within groups	289.985	621	.467		
	Total	296.886	623			

## Tukey post-hoc comparisons

Membership categories		Mean difference	Std. error	Sig.	95% Confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
Communist Party members	Communist Youth League members	-.05267	.06998	.732	-.2171	.1117
Communist Party members	Non-members	.27273*	.09930	.017	.0394	.5060
Communist Youth League members	Non-members	.32540*	.08465	.000	.1265	.5243

### Factors Related to News Credibility Assessments

Research Questions 5-8 examine the relationships between credibility assessments and four variables (exposure to political news, attention to political news, political involvement, and attitude toward politics) hypothesized to have a bearing on credibility ratings. Bivariate Pearson correlation tests were conducted to answer these questions.

#### Exposure to Political News

RQ5 sought to determine the relationship between exposure to news and the credibility ratings of traditional and online sources. The results of Pearson's correlation tests show no statistically significant relationship between news credibility ratings and exposure to the two platforms, which means that the amount of time spent on traditional and online sources did not have a bearing on credibility assessments (Table 6).

#### Attention to Political News

RQ6 asks: What is the relationship between attention to news and the credibility ratings for traditional and online sources? Pearson's correlation results revealed a



statistically significant positive relationship between news credibility and attention to the two platforms, which indicates that the more attention young people paid to traditional and online news sources, the more likely they perceived those sources as credible. The correlation between attention to online news and the credibility ascribed to these sources was particularly strong ( $r=.748$ ).

### **Political Involvement**

RQ7 aims to determine the relationship between political involvement and the credibility ratings for traditional and online sources. Political involvement was measured by averaging the answers to seven semantic differential scale items (Cronbach's  $\alpha=.94$ ). As expected, the relationship between political involvement and credibility ratings for the two types of sources, although moderate ( $r=.553$  for traditional and  $r=.546$  for online sources), were significant (Table 6).

### **Attitude toward Politics**

RQ8 examines the relationship between attitude toward politics and the credibility ratings for traditional and online sources. Attitude toward politics was measured by averaging the responses to eight semantic differential scale items (Cronbach's  $\alpha=.95$ ). The results reveal a moderate but significant relationship between attitude toward politics and the credibility ratings for the two types of sources (Table 6).

**Table 6. Pearson's correlation results**

Variables		Pearson correlation (r)
Exposure (Traditional)	Credibility (Traditional)	.017
Exposure (Online)	Credibility (Online)	.067
Attention (Traditional)	Credibility (Traditional)	.377**
Attention (Online)	Credibility (Online)	.748**

Table 6. (continued)		
Variables		Pearson correlation (r)
Political involvement	Credibility (Traditional)	.553**
Political involvement	Credibility (Online)	.546**
Attitude toward politics	Credibility (Traditional)	.599**
Attitude toward politics	Credibility (Online)	.577**

### The Influence of Covariates

Research Questions 9-11 aim to test the influence of media platform, place of residence, and Party/League membership on perceptions of news credibility controlling for the influence of the four variables analyzed above (exposure to news, attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics).

#### Media Platform

RQ9 asks whether the media platform used the most (traditional vs. online) influenced credibility perceptions after controlling for the combined effect of exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics. A new variable was created to represent the media platform most used in terms of exposure. To do this, those who spent more time on the traditional media (27.1%) were coded as 1; those who spent more time on the online media (72.9%) were coded as 2.

To answer this research question, a univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) test was conducted with credibility ratings of the traditional media as the first dependent variable, media platform as the fixed factor (or grouping variable), and the four intervening variables as covariates. The results outlined in Table 7 show that media platform did not significantly influence credibility perceptions [ $F(1, 428)=.023, p=.880$ , and  $\eta^2=.000$ ]. In the case of traditional media credibility, the Levene's test indicates equal variance among groups and the interaction among the four controlling variables was

not significant. Although media platform had no significant impact when the influence of the four variables combined were taken into account, the results suggest that three of the four covariates—exposure to traditional media, attitude toward politics, and involvement—significantly mediated perceptions of traditional news credibility.

**Table 7. ANCOVA results testing the influence of media platform use on traditional media credibility ratings with exposure, attention, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates**

Levene's test of equality of error variances (traditional media credibility)

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.093	1	434	.761

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta squared
Corrected model	93.387 <sup>a</sup>	7	13.341	35.844	.000	.370
Intercept	3.658	1	3.658	9.828	.002	.022
platform * attention * attitude * involvement	2.062	2	1.031	2.770	.064	.013
<b>Platform</b>	<b>.008</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.008</b>	<b>.023</b>	<b>.880</b>	<b>.000</b>
Attention	.072	1	.072	.194	.660	.000
Exposure	2.876	1	2.876	7.728	.006	.018
Attitude	15.001	1	15.001	40.305	.000	.086
Involvement	3.216	1	3.216	8.640	.003	.020
Error	159.300	428	.372			
Total	5172.235	436				
Corrected Total	252.686	435				

As shown in Table 8, when online credibility was treated as the dependent variable, the results also show no significant influence of media platform use after

controlling for exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics [ $F(1, 429)=.083$ ,  $p=.773$ , and  $\eta^2=.000$ ]. The Levene's test indicates equal variance among groups and the interaction among the four control variables was not significant. Although media platform had no significant impact when the influence of four variables combined were taken into account, the results suggest that three of the four covariates—exposure to traditional media, attitude toward politics, and political involvement—significantly mediated perceptions of online news credibility. These three covariates also were found to be significant mediators of traditional media credibility.

**Table 8. ANCOVA results testing the influence of media platform use on online news credibility ratings with exposure, attention, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates**

Levene's test of equality of error variances (online media credibility)

F	df1	df2	Sig.
2.494	1	434	.115

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta squared
Corrected model	71.098 <sup>a</sup>	6	11.850	37.016	.000	.341
Intercept	.651	1	.651	2.034	.155	.005
platform * attention * attitude * involvement	.840	1	.840	2.625	.106	.006
<b>Platform</b>	<b>.027</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.027</b>	<b>.083</b>	<b>.773</b>	<b>.000</b>
Attention	1.031	1	1.031	3.220	.073	.007
Exposure	1.296	1	1.296	4.050	.045	.009
Attitude	14.070	1	14.070	43.954	.000	.093
Involvement	8.057	1	8.057	25.169	.000	.055
Error	137.332	429	.320			
Total	6095.494	436				

## Place of Residence

RQ10 asks whether place of residence (rural vs. urban) influenced credibility perceptions after controlling for the same four intervening variables. First, a univariate ANCOVA was conducted with credibility ratings score as the dependent variable, place of residence as the fixed factor (or grouping variable), and exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates.

An analysis of the descriptive statistics suggested no substantial difference in traditional and online credibility ratings given urban and rural residents (Table 9). Consequently, the ANCOVA findings show that place of residence did not significantly influence traditional media credibility perceptions after controlling for exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as shown in Table 10 [ $F(1, 617)=.306, p=.581, \text{ and } \eta^2=.000$ ]. As expected, exposure, political attitude and involvement significantly mediated perceptions of traditional media news credibility.

The same results were recorded using online credibility as the dependent variable (Table 11). The ANCOVA test showed that place of residence did not significantly influence online media credibility perceptions after controlling for the combined impact of the four variables [ $F(1, 617)=2,425, p=.120, \text{ and } \eta^2=.004$ ]. In this case, however, the covariates attention, attitude and involvement were shown to be significant mediators.

**Table 9. Traditional and online media use according to place of residence**

Place of residence	Mean		Std. dev.		N
	Traditional	Online	Traditional	Online	
Rural	3.33	3.68	0.76	0.71	357
Urban	3.35	3.65	0.74	0.67	267
Total	3.34	3.67	0.75	0.69	624

**Table 10. ANCOVA results testing the influence of place of residence on traditional news credibility ratings with exposure, attention, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates**

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta squared
Corrected model	143.918 <sup>a</sup>	6	23.986	72.476	.000	.413
Intercept	2.437	1	2.437	7.364	.007	.012
place * attention * attitude * involvement	1.554	1	1.554	4.695	.031	.008
<b>Place of residence</b>	<b>.101</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.101</b>	<b>.306</b>	<b>.581</b>	<b>.000</b>
Attention	.281	1	.281	.850	.357	.001
Exposure	2.751	1	2.751	8.312	.004	.013
Attitude	20.753	1	20.753	62.705	.000	.092
Involvement	7.630	1	7.630	23.054	.000	.036
Error	204.201	617	.331			
Total	7302.951	624				
Corrected Total	348.119	623				

**Table 11. ANCOVA results testing the influence of place of residence on online news credibility ratings with exposure, attention, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates**

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta squared
Corrected Model	115.467 <sup>a</sup>	6	19.245	65.450	.000	.389
Intercept	.849	1	.849	2.888	.090	.005
place * attention * attitude * involvement	.552	1	.552	1.879	.171	.003
<b>Place of residence</b>	<b>.713</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.713</b>	<b>2.425</b>	<b>.120</b>	<b>.004</b>
Attention	1.843	1	1.843	6.268	.013	.010
Exposure	.826	1	.826	2.808	.094	.005
Attitude	20.868	1	20.868	70.971	.000	.103
Involvement	12.492	1	12.492	42.485	.000	.064

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta squared
Error	181.419	617	.294			
Total	8696.000	624				
Corrected Total	296.886	623				

### **Party Membership**

RQ11 asks: Does Party/League membership influence credibility perceptions after controlling for exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics? A univariate ANCOVA was again employed with media credibility scores as the dependent variable, party membership as the grouping variable, and with exposure to news, attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates.

Table 12 lists the means of news credibility ratings for both platforms as assessed by the three groups. In all cases, these figures were higher for online news, but the means produced by League members (traditional=3.30, online=3.72) and Party members (traditional=3.30, 3.67) were higher than those elicited from non-members (traditional=3.20, online=3.39). The results of the ANCOVA test (Table 13) indicate that party affiliation did not significantly influence the credibility ratings of the traditional media after controlling for the combined effect of the four intervening variables [ $F(2,624)=2.522$ ,  $p=.081$ ,  $\eta^2=.008$ ]. This time, none of the covariates were found to be important mediators of traditional media credibility ratings.

However, the results were significant in terms of online news credibility [ $F(2, 616)=5.985$ ,  $p=.003$ ,  $\eta^2=.019$ ] as shown in Table 14. Thus, party membership significantly influenced online news credibility perceptions after accounting for the

combined impact of the four intervening variables. Except for exposure, all covariates were found to be significant mediators of online credibility evaluations.

**Table 12. Descriptive statistics for party affiliation**

Membership status	Mean		Std. dev.		N
	Traditional	Online	Traditional	Online	
Party member	3.30	3.67	0.77	0.70	123
League member	3.38	3.72	0.71	0.66	424
Non-member	3.20	3.39	0.90	0.80	77
Total	3.34	3.67	0.75	0.69	624

**Table 13. ANCOVA results for the influence of Party/League membership on traditional media credibility ratings with exposure, attention, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates**

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta squared
Corrected Model	144.413a	8	18.052	54.499	0	0.415
Intercept	36.638	1	36.638	110.613	0	0.152
party * attention * attitude * involvement	29.264	3	9.755	29.45	0	0.126
<b>Party/League membership</b>	<b>1.671</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.836</b>	<b>2.522</b>	<b>0.081</b>	<b>0.008</b>
Attention	11.323	1	11.323	34.185	0	0.053
Exposure	1.255	1	1.255	3.788	0.052	0.006
Attitude	0.863	1	0.863	2.605	0.107	0.004
Involvement	203.706	615	0.331			
Error	7302.951	624				
Total	348.119	623				

**Table 14. ANCOVA results for the influence of Party/League membership on online media credibility ratings with exposure, attention, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics as covariates**

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta squared
Corrected Model	118.225 <sup>a</sup>	7	16.889	58.232	.000	.398



<b>Table 14. (continued)</b>						
Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta squared
Intercept	.844	1	.844	2.912	.088	.005
party * attention * attitude * involvement	.558	1	.558	1.923	.166	.003
<b>Party/League membership</b>	<b>3.471</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.736</b>	<b>5.985</b>	<b>.003</b>	<b>.019</b>
Attention	1.796	1	1.796	6.194	.013	.010
Exposure	.765	1	.765	2.639	.105	.004
Attitude	20.062	1	20.062	69.172	.000	.101
Involvement	12.260	1	12.260	42.271	.000	.064
Error	178.661	616	.290			
Total	8696.000	624				
Corrected Total	296.886	623				

### **The Most Powerful Credibility Predictor**

RQ12 asks which demographic variables (place of residence, party membership, gender), politics-related factors (political involvement and attitude toward politics), and media-related variables (media platform, exposure to news, attention to news) were the most powerful predictors of credibility perceptions. Two multiple regression tests were conducted to answer this question. The first considered traditional media credibility ratings as the dependent variable; the other used online credibility ratings.

The results, shown in Table 15, indicate that 37.1% of the variance in traditional media credibility was explained by the line-up of predictor variables. However, attitude toward politics (standardized beta=.393;  $p < .001$ ) and political involvement (standardized beta=.21;  $p < .001$ ) were the two most powerful determinants of traditional media credibility perceptions. These were followed by gender (standardized beta=.091;  $p < .05$ ),

attention (standardized beta=.089;  $p < .05$ ), and exposure to political news (standardized beta=.078;  $p < .05$ ). The findings suggest that individual political characteristics and media-related factors significantly influenced traditional media credibility assessments.

Gender was the only demographic variable found to exert an influence.

**Table 15. Multiple regression results showing the influence of demographic, political, and media variables on traditional media credibility perceptions**

Multiple regression model summary

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
1	.609 <sup>a</sup>	.371	.359	.61007

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	93.762	8	11.720	31.490	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	158.924	427	.372		
	Total	252.686	435			

Model		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
		Beta		
1	(Constant)		1.218	.224
	<b>Attitude</b>	<b>.393</b>	<b>7.227</b>	<b>.000</b>
	<b>Involvement</b>	<b>.210</b>	<b>3.946</b>	<b>.000</b>
	<b>Gender</b>	<b>.091</b>	<b>2.347</b>	<b>.019</b>
	<b>Attention</b>	<b>.089</b>	<b>2.040</b>	<b>.042</b>
	<b>Exposure</b>	<b>-.078</b>	<b>-1.973</b>	<b>.049</b>
	Platform	-.038	-.982	.327
	Party affiliation	.033	.848	.397
	Place of residence	-.003	-.084	.933

All predictor variables contributed 34% of the variance in online credibility assessments as shown in Table 16. However, only attitude toward politics (standardized beta=.359;  $p < .001$ ) and involvement in politics (standardized beta=.258;  $p < .001$ ) were

significant predictors of online credibility. Thus, only the political variables were found to be powerful antecedents of online credibility. Media-related and demographic factors failed to exert significant influence.

**Table 16. Multiple regression results showing the influence of demographic, political, and media variables on online media credibility perceptions**

Multiple regression model summary

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
1	.583 <sup>a</sup>	.340	.328	.56745

ANOVA

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	70.937	8	8.867	27.538	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	137.492	427	.322		
	Total	208.430	435			

Model		Standardized coefficients	T	Sig.
		Beta		
1	(Constant)		4.240	.000
	<b>Attitude</b>	<b>.359</b>	<b>6.470</b>	<b>.000</b>
	<b>Involvement</b>	<b>.258</b>	<b>4.766</b>	<b>.000</b>
	Exposure	.057	1.311	.191
	Place of residence	-.042	-1.062	.289
	Party affiliation	-.039	-.972	.332
	Attention	.039	.880	.379
	Gender	-.012	-.308	.759
	Platform	.007	.188	.851

## Summary of Findings

Chinese college students were found to spend more time on the online media from which they reportedly gather national political information. Among the online platforms at their disposal, micro-blogs were most used for national political news, followed by non-social networking sites. Of the traditional media sources, television still remains a major source of political information for these young adults.

The online sources were most used perhaps because they were also seen as more credible than traditional sources. Aware that the traditional news media are subject to considerable external control, young adults tended to resort to online media sources, which were perceived to be less constrained by regulations regarding the conduct of the journalism profession and thus allow a freer expression of comments and opinion.

There were no significant differences found in the traditional and online credibility assessments based on registered official residence (urban vs rural) areas. However, Communist Party/Youth League members and non-members differed in their assessments of the credibility of these two major types of information sources. In general, Party and/or League members perceived online news to be more credible than non-members, but the differences were not significant for traditional media credibility perceptions.

How did the credibility ratings for these two media platforms relate to exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitude toward politics? The results of bivariate correlation tests show that attention to news, political involvement, and attitude toward politics have positive relationships with the credibility ratings of both platforms.

Only exposure to news did not correlate significantly with the credibility ratings for traditional and online sources. This may be because many audience members tend to spend time on media sources they do not necessarily trust, accessing them as just as a matter of habit.

Party and/or Youth League membership was found to have influenced online credibility perceptions after controlling for the impact of exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics using ANCOVA tests. This was not the case when the influence of Party/League affiliation on traditional media credibility ratings was tested using the same four factors as covariates. When media platform used the most and place of residence were employed as the fixed or grouping factor, no significant influence in traditional and online credibility was detected.

The results of multiple regression tests to determine the most powerful predictors of credibility assessments indicate that individual political characteristics (political attitude and involvement) and media-related factors (exposure and attention) were strong determinants of traditional media credibility; gender was the only demographic variable found to have a significant influence. Only attitude toward politics and political involvement exerted significant influence on online credibility perceptions.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to determine young people's perceptions of the credibility of the traditional news media and online news as conveyors of national political information. It also examined whether urban and rural residents as well as members and non-members of the Communist Party and the Communist Youth League differ in their assessments of the credibility of these two major types of information sources. The study also assessed the impact of media platform, place of residence, and Party/League membership on perceptions of source credibility given the intervening influence of exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitude toward politics. To answer the research questions, an online survey of Chinese college students was conducted. .

### **The Findings and their Implications to Theory and Professional Practice**

The survey results show that young Chinese adults relied more on the online news media to be informed about national political affairs, primarily micro-blogs. A microblog differs from a traditional blog in that its content is typically smaller in both actual and aggregate file size, allowing users to exchange small elements of content such as short sentences, individual images, or video links (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2011). They are limited to the exchange of short, 140-character text messages. These small messages are sometimes called "microposts" (Lohmann et al., 2012). In China, Weibo is the most popular micro-blog. It uses a format similar to its American counterpart. Its most visited sites are Sina Weibo, followed by Tencent Weibo and Sohu Weibo. CNNIC (2012) reports that by the end of 2011, there were 250 million micro bloggers in the mainland, a figure that rose by a whopping 296% compared with that at the end of 2010. Kaplan and

Haenlein (2011) posit that the success of micro-blogs is due to the specific set of characteristics they possess: “(1) the creation of ambient awareness, (2) a unique form of push-push-pull communication, and (3) their ability to serve as a platform for virtual exhibitionism and voyeurism” (p. 105).

According to the findings, one reason why respondents preferred online sources is because they perceived them as more credible than their traditional counterparts. Scholars have already examined the reasons behind such a perception. Kim and Masiclat (2007), for example, hypothesized that three characteristics of online communication enhance audiences’ assessments of expertise and trustworthiness. These are the personal significance and social significance of the topics discussed in online venues, and interactivity factors. They suggest that people tend to ascribe greater credibility to the online media because they are seen as delivering news important to society and relevant to their individual needs. The web’s interactive features also generally lead to higher expertise evaluations. Media channels with these characteristics were judged as current, up-to-date, and timely; those having less of these attributes were evaluated as presenting incomplete and biased information.

In the Chinese context, it may be that young adults perceived the online media to be less constrained by regulations regarding the conduct of the journalism profession and thus allow a freer expression of comments and opinion. Ironically, the blocking of Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and most major blog sites (Bass, 2009), may have further heightened the personal and social significance value of these sites where content is predominantly user-generated. These restrictions were in addition to government

regulations (Ding, 2009) and censorship principles (Kenji, 2010) to which the traditional media have long been subjected. The Chinese equivalent of many of these sites (i.e., Youku, the Chinese version of Youtube or Xiaonei, the Chinese version of Facebook), however, remain available and popular. The choice to block major foreign sites and not their domestic equivalents may have been brought about by the Chinese government's prime concern about international criticism, about which it worries more than internal tension. Nonetheless, the popularity of online sources attest to the level of regard the public holds about their utility.

Despite the primacy of the online sources, the respondents' credibility assessments only slightly fluctuated across media. The closeness of credibility ratings also can be interpreted to mean that young adults are somewhat apprehensive about all channels. This is buttressed by the finding that media exposure did not correlate significantly with the credibility ratings for traditional and online sources. Other than the lingering apprehension, this may be because audience members tend to spend time on media sources they do not necessarily trust, accessing them more as a matter of habit. Nevertheless, communication practitioners should still take advantage of the interactive capabilities of the online media to deliver national political news.

As expected, individual characteristics related to politics (political involvement and attitude toward politics) reveal a moderate but significant relationship with the credibility ratings for the two types of sources, a finding that is in line with those of previous studies (e.g., Gunther, 1992; Judd & Milburn, 1980). Involvement with politics and attitudes toward politics were found to be the most powerful predictors of credibility



perceptions even in the presence of other influential determinants, such as demographic variables (place of residence, Party/League membership, gender) and media-related variables (media platform used, exposure and attention to news). This means that the extent to which people are involved with national affairs and the degree to which they see national political news as important to their lives tend to drive the credibility ratings of information sources.

The present study failed to support Yang's (2002) contention that the widening gap in the socioeconomic conditions of rural and urban residents may have affected the source credibility evaluations of people in these two groups. Rural residents, it was hypothesized, may be less inclined to find online sources credible due to the absence or lack of exposure to the new media. In 2011, rural Internet users stood at 136 million, accounting for only 26.5% of the overall online audience (CNNIC, 2012). In the current study, students from rural areas gave the same credibility ratings to both platforms as their urban counterparts. This may be because regardless of place of residence, college students have sufficient access to computers and online services.

The study also examined whether members and non-members of the Communist Party and the Communist Youth League differ in their assessments of the credibility of these two major types of information sources. The results indicate no difference in the three groups' evaluations of the credibility of traditional media, which indicates that today's college students seek Party and/or League membership primarily because they see the advantages of membership in future job searches and career advancement (Guo, 2005) rather than the notion that any information following Party lines is believable. However,

there was a significant difference in the three groups' credibility ratings of online platforms. That is, Youth League members found online sources to be more credible than non-members. The same is true when Party members were compared with non-members. This may be because Youth League and Party members perceive online news sources as having greater freedom in performing their functions.

Whether audiences used the online or traditional media did not seem to have any bearing on credibility ratings even when the influence of exposure and attention to news, political involvement, and attitudes toward politics, were taken into account. This finding suggests that one's predisposition toward politics and level of involvement with it hold a greater sway on how the credibility of sources is assessed.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has taken a step toward illuminating the factors that drive media credibility perceptions. Although the results have theoretical and applied implications on the determination of credibility perceptions, certain limitations should be drawn. First, the use of a non-probability sample of college students registered in Chinese universities severely limits the generalizability of this study's findings. Because the study made use of an online survey, the responses were confined to students who have access to computers and Internet service. The results may also be skewed by the fact that young people are known to be "digital natives," with a propensity to favor online channels due to their socialization process. A representative and heterogeneous sample of young Chinese adults will provide a more accurate picture of media habits and source credibility evaluations.

Second, this study assumes that content is equal across media platforms. Indeed, there may be a wide variance across outlets in terms of quantity and quality of national affairs coverage.

Third, the sample size may have been too small to detect differences. It is best to test whether the results will hold for a bigger sample of young media users.

Fourth, most of the variables of interest in this study were ascertained through self-reports. Self-reports, however, are based on personal memory that easily degrades and are prone to bias. As such, data distortions may be present.

Lastly, the original questionnaire was in English; some cultural meanings might have been lost in the translation to Mandarin, and in the reversed direction.

### **Suggestions for Future Study**

The expanding popularity of online sources of national political affairs news in China makes it imperative for communication scholars to closely examine the factors that impinge on the public's credibility assessments. In doing so, future studies may choose to examine the influence of other factors, cultural or otherwise, that are unique to the Chinese context. For instance, the effect of government vs. private ownership of media outlets bears close scrutiny. There are two big categories of newspapers in China—national newspapers and regional newspapers. Although all newspapers are virtually under government control, those of national circulation (e.g., *China Daily*, *People's Daily*, *China Economic Times*, *PLA Daily*, which is the official organ of the People's Liberation Army) are generally more Party-oriented than regional newspapers. Among the latter, the *Southern Daily* and *Southern Metropolis Daily*, which are parts of

the giant Southern Media Group, are known for superior reporting and a higher level of frankness than the mainstream press. Because these newspapers have a reputation for their relatively fearless approach, especially in investigative reporting, people may perceive news from these regional outlets to be more credible.

It is also important to document whether traditional and online media sources have become increasingly open and responsive to public demand. Corollary to this, it is pertinent to monitor the public's perception of the credibility of the media system to which it is constantly exposed to serve as a measure of changes or improvements in media performance. The findings of studies that employ longitudinal designs using, for example, time series analyses, will inform not just media managers but also those who plan for social and economic reforms.

The impacts of demographic variables on people's perceptions of news credibility are worth further exploration. For instance, do younger and older age groups rate the credibility of traditional and online news differently? Identifying regional characteristics or propensities of news audiences that have a bearing on their patterns of use also will yield data that will be of great utility to communication strategists. For example, young audiences in Beijing, the capital and political center of the country for much of the past seven centuries, may have different perceptions of news credibility compared to those in Shanghai.

With the growth of audience members who perform multiple tasks as a routine, it has become increasingly important to understand and measure perceptions of news credibility under conditions of simultaneous media use. Examining the synergistic effects

of cross-platform media use could help recast the debate about media credibility so that the realities of online developments are adequately taken into account. Most audience members do not stop using a source as heavily relied upon as television just because a new medium arrives; instead, their media options may have broadened and become more varied. Emerging patterns of media use, therefore, should be examined with respect to their impact on credibility estimates.

The nature of content varies; so do the modes of presentation and the quality of reporting, which were not taken into consideration in this investigation. If online sources are indeed considered more credible, it is important to ascertain the information processes triggered by different types of information available through these channels. For instance, does cognitive processing differ when people peruse blog postings as opposed to hard news emanating from traditional news organizations? Does this have a bearing on media credibility evaluations? Future studies should therefore validate the present study's results by focusing on content and examining audience reactions to different types of online media messages.

Ultimately, it appears that the converging media are not only shaping content, but are also tied to people's perceptions of media performance. Thus, professional journalists and mass communication researchers should find the overall mediocre assessments of news credibility observed in this study rather disconcerting. It is important to ascertain whether this observation is confined to this study to determine if the ascendancy of the online media, in general, has indeed modified public perceptions of traditional news credibility.

In general, the study detected moderate impacts of demographic variables (place of residence, Party and/or League membership, gender), politics-related factors (political involvement and attitude toward politics), and media-related variables (media platform, exposure to news, attention to news) on Chinese young people's perceptions of the credibility of traditional and online news sources. Data gathered from a probability sample will be able to strengthen these observations.

## APPENDIX A. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE (IN CHINESE)

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

#### 知情同意书

#### 大学生对于中国国内新闻来源可信度的调查

感谢您参与这次关于国内新闻来源可信度的调查。请您花一些时间完成之后的网上问卷。如果您不愿意回答其中的某些问题或项目，您可以随时省略或跳过。

您必须年满 18 岁或者以上，并且是国内在校大学生才能自主参与这次研究。

#### 过程描述

请您花 10 到 15 分钟完成此项调查问卷。它包括了提供个人基本信息和对于新闻可信度的评分。

#### 好处

如果您决定参与这项研究，有可能对您没有直接的好处。但是研究结果可望加强研究人员和学者对中国新媒体和传统媒体新闻可信度的了解。

#### 危害

参加这项调查没有任何可预见性危害。

#### 费用及补偿

您不用承担参与本次研究的任何费用。

#### 参与者权力

您在这次研究项目的参与是完全自愿的。您可以随时拒绝参加或离开本次调查，不会受到任何处罚或不良后果。

#### 保密原则

您的答案会被保密。为确保保密，在法律允许的范围内，将采取以下措施，以确保通过本研究收集的数据：一旦数据被收集，这些材料将在一个安全的服务器

中。当数据收集完成时，您的信息将被删除。如果结果公布，您的身份将严格保密。

## 联系信息

如果您需要对此进一步研究的资料，请与美国爱荷华州立大学格林利新闻传播学院研究生山晨艳联系，电话：515-817-3937；电子邮件：[shan126@iastate.edu](mailto:shan126@iastate.edu)。

露露 罗德里格斯，美国爱荷华州立大学格林利新闻传播学院研究导师，电话：

515-294-0484，电子邮件：[lulurod@uastate.edu](mailto:lulurod@uastate.edu)。如果您对研究对象的权利或对研究

有关的伤害有任何疑问，请联系爱荷华州立大学的机构审查委员会管理员，电话

515-294-4566；电子邮件：[IRB@iastate.edu](mailto:IRB@iastate.edu)。

诚挚地感谢您的协助！



## SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE (IN CHINESE)

### 大学生对于国内新闻来源可信度的调查

#### I. 媒介依赖性

1. 你会从哪些渠道获取国内的政治新闻？

请对不同媒体的依赖性进行评分（打钩），从 1 到 5，1 代表完全不依赖，5 代表完全依赖，

媒体	1 完全不依赖	2 轻度依赖	3 中度依赖	4 重度依赖	5 完全依赖
报纸，包括报纸的电子版新闻					
电视					
广播					
杂志，包括电子杂志					
微博（例如，新浪、腾讯、搜狐微博）					
社交网站（例如，人人，开心，豆瓣）					
非社交网站（例如，腾讯，163，搜狐，新浪，凤凰网）					
论坛（例如，天涯，猫扑，搜狐社区）					
博客（例如，新浪博客，搜狐博客，博客大巴）					

#### II. 媒体使用习惯

你大约花费多少时间从电视，广播，报纸和杂志获取国内政治新闻？ **传统媒体**

2.

\_\_\_\_\_小时（平均每天）

a. 0   b. 0-10 分钟   c. 11-20 分钟   d. 21-30 分钟

e. 31-40 分钟   f. 41-50 分钟   g. 51-60 分钟

3.

\_\_\_\_\_小时（平均每周）

- a. 0 b. 0-1 小时(不包括 1 小时) c. 1-2 小时 d. 2-3 小时 e. 3-4 小时  
f. 4-5 小时 g. 5-6 小时 h. 6-7 小时 i. 7-8 小时 k. 超过 8 小时

4. 你在看新闻的时，对以上这些媒介的注意力有多少？（请打钩）

当你通过电视，广播，报纸和杂志获取国内政治新闻时，对这些媒介的关注度达到什么程度？

1	2	3	4	5
完全不关注	轻度关注	中度关注	高度关注	极度关注

5. 你大约花费多少时间从各类社交网站，博客，微博，论坛和其他网络资源获取国内政治新闻？ **新媒体**

5.

\_\_\_\_\_小时（平均每天）

- a. 0 b. 0-10 分钟 c. 11-20 分钟 d. 21-30 分钟  
e. 31-40 分钟 f. 41-50 分钟 g. 51-60 分钟

6.

\_\_\_\_\_小时（平均每周）

- a. 0 b. 0-1 小时(不包括 1 小时) c. 1-2 小时 d. 2-3 小时 e. 3-4 小时  
f. 4-5 小时 g. 5-6 小时 h. 6-7 小时 i. 7-8 小时 k. 超过 8 小时

7. 当你通过网络获取国内政治新闻时，对这些媒介的关注度达到什么程度？

完全不关注，轻度关注，中度关注，高度关注，极度关注

1	2	3	4	5
完全不关注	轻度关注	中度关注	高度关注	极度关注

### III. 政治参与性与对政治的态度

8. 以下哪个形容词可以最好的描述你对我国政治的态度？

	1	2	3	4	5	
1. 不重要的						重要的
2. 有害的						有利的
3. 无聊的						有趣的
4. 不吸引人的						吸引人的
5. 无用的						有用的
6. 不明智的						明智的
7. 毫无帮助的						有帮助的
8. 没有成效的						富有成效的

9. 以下哪些形容词能较好的描述你对政治性活动的参与程度？

	1	2	3	4	5	
a) 不重要						重要
b) 与我无关						与我息息相关
c) 无用的						有用的
d) 对我无利的						对我有利的
e) 无法令人产生兴趣的						能令人产生兴趣的
f) 无法令人激动的						激动人心的
g) 不吸引人的						吸引人的

#### IV. 新闻可信度评分

10. 请对我国**传统媒体**的新闻可信度进行评分（打钩），并选出最接近你的评价的答案。

	1	2	3	4	5	
1. 不公平的						公平的
2. 有偏见的						无偏见的
3. 报道事件不完整						完整报道事件
4. 不准确						准确的
5. 侵犯个人隐私						维护和尊重个人隐私
6. 不关注读者和观众的兴趣点						关注读者和观众的兴趣点
7. 不可信赖的						可信赖的
8. 记者专业素质差						拥有训练有素的记者
9. 不关注大众感兴趣的话题						关注大众感兴趣的话题

11. 请对我国**新媒体**的新闻可信度进行评分，内容与上题相同

	1	2	3	4	5	
1. 不公平的						公平的
2. 有偏见的						无偏见的
3. 报道事件不完整						完整报道事件
4. 不准确						准确的
5. 侵犯个人隐私						维护和尊重个人隐私
6. 不关注读者和观众的兴趣点						关注读者和观众的兴趣点
7. 不可信赖的						可信赖的
8. 记者专业素质差						拥有训练有素的记者
9. 不关注大众感兴趣的话题						关注大众感兴趣的话题

## V. 个人基本信息

12. 您的性别

男 [    ] 女 [    ]

13. 所在年级\_\_\_\_\_

a. 大一

b. 大二

c. 大三

d. 大四

e. 研究生（包括硕士、博士、博士后）

f. 其他

14. 您的专业\_\_\_\_\_

a. 人文科学（历史、语言、文学、哲学、行为艺术、视觉艺术等）

b. 社会科学（人类学、考古学、质学、社会学、心理学、经济、政治等）

c. 自然科学（化学、物理、生命科学、地球与空间科学等）

d. 形式科学（数学、系统科学、逻辑学、统计学、计算科学等）

e. 专业性和应用科学（建筑、设计、商科、法学、教育、工程、新闻）

f. 其他

15. 您的户籍所在地\_\_\_\_\_

a. 农村

b. 城市

16. 您的家庭年收入是多少? \_\_\_\_\_

a. 少于 ¥25,000

b. ¥25,000 to ¥49,999

c. ¥50,000 to ¥99,999

d. ¥100,000 to ¥149,999

e. ¥150,000 to ¥199,999

f. ¥200,000 to ¥249,999

g. 超过 ¥250,000

17. 您的政治面貌? \_\_\_\_\_

a. 党员

b. 团员

c. 群众

18. 如果您是党员的话, 您成为一名党员多久了?

a. 少于一年

b. 一到两年 (不包括两年)

c. 两到三年

d. 三到四年

e. 四年以上

f. 非党员不适用

非常感谢您的参与!

**APPENDIX B. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE (IN ENGLISH)  
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

**College Students' Perceptions of the Credibility of  
Chinese National Political News Sources**

**I. Media dependence**

1. What sources do you depend on for information regarding current Chinese national political news? Please indicate the degree to which you depend on each of the sources listed below on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “do not depend at all” and 5 means “depend a great deal.”

a. Print and online newspapers

1	2	3	4	5
Do not depend at all	Depend a little	Depend moderately	Depend considerably	Depend a great deal

b. Television

1	2	3	4	5
Do not depend at all	Depend a little	Depend moderately	Depend considerably	Depend a great deal

c. Radio

1	2	3	4	5
Do not depend at all	Depend a little	Depend moderately	Depend considerably	Depend a great deal

d. Print and online magazines

1	2	3	4	5
Do not depend at all	Depend a little	Depend moderately	Depend considerably	Depend a great deal

e. Micro-blogs (e.g., Sina, Sohu, Tencent)

1	2	3	4	5
Do not depend at all	Depend a little	Depend moderately	Depend considerably	Depend a great deal

f. Social networking services (e.g., Renren, Kaixin, Douban)

1	2	3	4	5
Do not depend at all	Depend a little	Depend moderately	Depend considerably	Depend a great deal

g. Websites that are not social networking sites (e.g., qq, 163, Sohu, Sina, ifeng)

1	2	3	4	5
Do not depend at all	Depend a little	Depend moderately	Depend considerably	Depend a great deal

h. BBS (e.g., Tianya, Mop, Sohu Club)

1	2	3	4	5
Do not depend at all	Depend a little	Depend moderately	Depend considerably	Depend a great deal

i. Blogs (e.g., Sina Blog, Sohu Blog, Blog Bus, Blogger)

1	2	3	4	5
Do not depend at all	Depend a little	Depend moderately	Depend considerably	Depend a great deal

## II. Media use habits

1. In an average day, about how many minutes do you spend reading about, watching, or listening to domestic affairs information through television, radio, print and online

newspapers and magazines? \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

2. In an average week, about how many minutes do you spend reading about, watching, or listening to domestic affairs information through television, radio, print and online

newspapers and magazines? \_\_\_\_\_ hours

3. When accessing domestic affairs information through television, radio, print and online newspapers and magazines, how closely do you pay attention to them? *Please choose*

*only one answer.*

1	2	3	4	5
No attention at all	Very little attention	Fair attention	Close attention	As closely as I can



4. In an average day, about how many hours do you spend reading about, watching, or listening to domestic affairs information through social networking sites, blogs, micro-blogs, BBS, and other online sources? \_\_\_\_\_ minutes
5. In an average day, about how many hours do you spend reading about, watching, or listening to domestic affairs information through social networking sites, blogs, micro-blogs, BBS, and other online sources? \_\_\_\_\_ hours
6. When you access domestic affairs information through online sources, how closely do you pay attention to them? *Please choose only one answer.*

1	2	3	4	5
No attention at all	Very little attention	Fair attention	Close attention	As closely as I can

### III. Political involvement and attitude toward politics

2. Which of the adjectives below comes closest to your perception of Chinese politics?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unimportant						Important
Harmful						Beneficial
Boring						Interesting
Unappealing						Appealing
Useless						Useful
Not sensible						Sensible
Unhelpful						Helpful
Unappealing						Appealing

3. Which of the adjectives below best describes your involvement in political affairs and/or issues?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unimportant						Important
Irrelevant						Relevant
Useless						Useful
Not beneficial						Beneficial

Uninterested						Interested
Unexciting						Exciting
Unappealing						Appealing

#### IV. Credibility rating

1. Please rate the **traditional media** (television, radio, print and online newspapers and magazines) in terms of the adjective pairs listed below. Please choose the answer that comes closest to your evaluation.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Is fair						Is unfair
Is biased						Is unbiased
Tells the whole story						Does not tell the whole story
Is accurate						Is inaccurate
Invades people's privacy						Respects people's privacy
Does watch after reader's interests						Doesn't watch after readers' interests
Can be trusted						Cannot be trusted
Has well-trained reporters						Has poorly-trained reporters
Is concerned about the public interest						Is not concerned at all about the public interest

2. Please rate the online sources (SNS, blogs, microblogs, BBSs) in terms of the adjective pairs listed below. Please choose the answer that comes closest to your evaluation.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Is fair						Is unfair
Is biased						Is unbiased
Tells the whole story						Does not tell the whole story
Is accurate						Is inaccurate
Invades people's privacy						Respects people's privacy
Does watch after reader's interests						Doesn't watch after readers' interests
Can be trusted						Cannot be trusted
Has well-trained reporters						Has poorly-trained reporters

Is concerned about the public interest						Is not concerned at all about the public interest
--	--	--	--	--	--	---

## V. Personal information

*Please tell us a little about yourself.*

1. What is your gender?

Male [     ]     Female [     ]

2. What year are you in school?

a. Freshman

b. Sophomore

c. Junior

d. Senior

e. Graduate student

f. Other

3. What is your major?

a. Humanities

b. Social sciences

c. Natural sciences

d. Formal sciences

e. Professions and Applied sciences

f. Others

4. Before you took the university entrance examination, where did your family register your household?

a. Rural area

b. Urban area

5. What is your family income?

a. Less than ¥25,000

b. ¥25,000 to ¥49,999

c. ¥50,000 to ¥99,999

d. ¥100,000 to ¥149,999

e. ¥150,000 to ¥199,999

f. ¥200,000 to ¥249,999

g. More than ¥250,000

6. What is your party affiliation?

a. Party member

b. Youth League member

c. Non-member

7. How long have you been a member of the Communist Party?

a. less than 1 year

b. 1-2 years

c. 2-3 years

e. 3-4 years

f. more than 4 years

g. not applicable

*Thank you for participating in this study!*

**APPENDIX C. CODE BOOK: COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
THE CREDIBILITY OF  
CHINESE NATIONAL POLITICAL NEWS SOURCES**

No.	Variable name	Variable label	Values
1	id	Respondent's id number	
2	Dpnewp	To what extent do you depend on print and online newspaper for information?	1=Do not depend at all 2=Depend a little 3=Depend moderately 4=Depend considerably 5=Depend a great deal
3	Dptv	To what extent do you depend on television newspaper for information?	
4	Dpradio	To what extent do you depend on radio for information?	
5	Dpmag	To what extent do you depend on print and online magazine for information?	
6	Dpmicro	To what extent do you depend on micro-blog for information?	
7	DpSNS	To what extent do you depend on SNS for information?	
8	Dpsite	To what extent do you depend on Websites for information?	
9	DpBBS	To what extent do you depend on BBS for information?	
10	DpBlogs	To what extent do you depend on Blogs for information?	
11	trditimeD	In an average day, about how many mins do you spend reading about, watching, or listening to domestic affairs information through television, radio, print and online newspapers and magazines?	

			7=51-60 8=1-2 hours 9=more than 2 hours
12	trditimeW	In an average week, about how many hours do you spend reading about, watching, or listening to domestic affairs information through television, radio, print and online newspapers and magazines?	1=0 2=0-1h (not including 1 hour) 3=1-2h 4=2-3h 5=3-4h 6=4-5h 7=5-6h 8=6-7 9=7-8h 10=more than 8 hours
13	trdiatt	When accessing domestic affairs information through television, radio, print and online newspapers and magazines, how closely do you pay attention to them?	1=No attention at all 2=Very little attention 3=Fair attention 4=Close attention 5=As closely as I can
14	SNStimeD	In an average day, about how many mins do you spend reading about, watching, or listening to domestic affairs information through television, radio, print and online newspapers and magazines?	1=0 2=0-10mins 3=11-20 4=21-30 5=31-40 6=41-50 7=51-60 8=1-2 hours 9=more than 2 hours
15	SNStimeW	In an average week, about how many hours do you spend reading about, watching, or listening to domestic affairs information through television, radio, print and online newspapers and magazines?	1=0 2=0-1h (not including 1 hour) 3=1-2h 4=2-3h 5=3-4h

				6=4-5h 7=5-6h 8=6-7 9=7-8h 10=more than 8 hours
16	SNSatt	When you look at domestic affairs information through SNS, how closely do you pay attention to them?		1=No attention at all 2=Very little attention 3=Fair attention 4=Close attention 5=As closely as I can
17	Involve1	Which of the adjectives below best describes your involvement in political affairs and/or issues?	Unimportant-Important	1= strongly unfavorable to the concept 2= somewhat unfavorable to the concept 3= undecided 4= somewhat favorable to the concept 5= strongly favorable to the concept
18	Involve2		Irrelevant-Relevant	
19	Involve3		Useless-Useful	
20	Involve4		Not Beneficial-Beneficial	
21	Involve5		Uninterested-Interested	
22	Involve6		Unexciting-Exciting	
23	Involve7		Unappealing-Appealing	
24	Attid1	Which of the adjectives below comes closest to your perception of Chinese politics?	Unimportant-Important	1= strongly unfavorable to the concept 2= somewhat unfavorable to the concept 3= undecided 4= somewhat favorable to the concept 5= strongly
25	Attid2		Harmful-Beneficial	
26	Attid3		Boring-Interesting	
27	Attid4		Unappealing-Appealing	
28	Attid5		Useless-Useful	

29	Attid6		Not sensible-Sensible	favorable to the concept
30	Attid7		Unhelpful-Helpful	
31	Attid8		Unproductive-Productive	
32	Credi1	Please rate the traditional media (television, radio, print and online newspapers and magazines) in terms of the adjective pairs listed below. Please choose the answer that comes closest to your evaluation.	Are fair-Are unfair	1= strongly unfavorable to the concept 2= somewhat unfavorable to the concept 3= undecided 4= somewhat favorable to the concept 5= strongly favorable to the concept
33	Credi2		Are biased-Are unbiased	
34	Credi3		Tell the whole story-Do not tell the whole story	
35	Credi4		Are accurate-Are inaccurate	
36	Credi5		Invade people's privacy-Respect people's privacy	
37	Credi6		Do watch after reader's interests-Don't watch after readers' interests	
38	Credi7		Can be trusted-Cannot be trusted	
39	Credi8		Have well-trained reporters-Have poorly-trained reporters	
40	Credi9		Are concerned about the public interest-Are not concerned at all about the public interested	
41	Credi1	Please rate the online sources (SNS, blogs, micro-blogs, BBSs) in terms of the adjective pairs listed below. Please choose the answer that comes	Are fair-Are unfair	1= strongly unfavorable to the concept 2= somewhat unfavorable to the concept 3= undecided 4= somewhat favorable to
42	Credi2		Are biased-Are unbiased	
43	Credi3		Tell the whole story-Do not tell the whole story	
44	Credi4		Are accurate-Are inaccurate	



45	Credi5	closest to your evaluation.	Invade people's privacy-Respect people's privacy	the concept 5= strongly favorable to the concept
46	Credi6		Do watch after reader's interests-Don't watch after readers' interests	
47	Credi7		Can be trusted-Cannot be trusted	
48	Credi8		Have well-trained reporters-Have poorly-trained reporters	
49	Credi9		Are concerned about the public interest-Are not concerned at all about the public interested	
50	Gender	What is your gender?		1=Male 2=Female
51	Year	What year are you in school?		1=Freshman 2=Sophomore 3=Junior 4=Senior 5=Graduate student 6=Other
52	Major	What is your major?		1=Humanities 2=Social sciences 3=Natural sciences 4=Formal sciences 5=Professions and 6=Applied sciences 7=Others
53	Residence	Before you took the university entrance examination, where did your family register your household?		1=Rural area 2=Urban area
54	Income	What is your family's annual income?		1=Less than ¥25,000

			2=¥25,000 to ¥49,999 3=¥50,000 to ¥99,999 4=¥100,000 to ¥149,999 5=¥150,000 to ¥199,999 6=¥200,000 to ¥249,999 7=More than ¥250,000
55	Membership	What's your party affiliation?	1=Party member 2=Youth League member 3=Non-member
56	Duration	How long have you been a member of the Communist Party?	1=less than 1 year 2=1-2 years 3=2-3 years 4=3-4 years 5=more than 4 years 6=not applicable

## APPENDIX D. IRB APPROVAL LETTER

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board  
Office for Responsible Research  
Vice President for Research  
1138 Pearson Hall  
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207  
515 294-4566  
FAX 515 294-4267

**Date:** 12/14/2012

**To:** Chenyan Shan  
64 Schilleter Village Unit C  
Ames, IA 50011

**CC:** Dr. Lulu Rodriguez  
214 Hamilton Hall

**From:** Office for Responsible Research

**Title:** College Students' Perceptions of the Credibility of Chinese Political News Sources

**IRB ID:** 12-562

**Study Review Date:** 12/14/2012

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
  - Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
  - Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**
- **You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application.** Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

Non-exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

**Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form.** A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

## REFERENCES

- Aarts, K., & Semetko, H. A. (2003). The divided electorate: Media use and political involvement. *Journal of Politics*, 65, 759–784.
- Agence France-Presse (AFP). (2012, March 31). China microblogs block users from posting comments. Retrieved from <http://news.malaysia.msn.com/top-stories/article.aspx?cp-documentid=6054024>.
- Arpan, L., & Raney, A. (2003). An experimental investigation of news source and the hostile media effect. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 80(2), 265-281.
- Bass, S. (2009, July 8). China's Facebook status: Blocked. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2009/07/chinas-facebook-status-blocke>.
- Bracken, C. C. (2006). Perceived source credibility of local television news: The impact of television form and presence. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 50(4), 723-741.
- Branigan, T. (2009, May 20). Young, gifted and red: The Communist Party's quiet revolution. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/series/china-at-the-crossroads>.
- Brehm, J., & Rahn, W. M. (1997). Individual-level evidence for the causes and consequences of social capital. *American Journal of Political Science*, 41(4), 999–1023.
- Cassidy, W. P. (2007). Online news credibility: An examination of the perceptions of newspaper journalists. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(2),

478-498.

Chaffee, S. H., & Schleuder, J. (1986). Measurement and effects of attention to media news. *Human Communication Research, 13*(1), 76–107.

Chan, J. M., Lee, F. L. F., & Pan, Z. D. (2006). Online news meets established journalism: How China's journalists evaluate the credibility of news websites. *New Media & Society, 8*(6), 925-947.

Chang, W. H. (1989). *Mass media in China: The history and the future*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.

China Education. (2011). Do you know about BBS of colleges and universities?

Retrieved from

[http://www.edu.cn/lt\\_7981/20110523/t20110523\\_619573.shtml](http://www.edu.cn/lt_7981/20110523/t20110523_619573.shtml)

China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC). (2012). Statistical report on Internet development in China. Retrieved from

<http://www1.cnnic.cn/uploadfiles/pdf/2012/2/27/112543.pdf>.

China Internet Network Information Center. (2009). Statistics: China Internet users.

Retrieved from [http://www.chinatoday.com/data/china\\_internet\\_users.htm](http://www.chinatoday.com/data/china_internet_users.htm).

China Mall, China University Guide. (n.d.). What is Project 211 in China? Retrieved from

<http://news.at0086.com/China-University-Guide/What-is-Project-211-in-China.html>.

Choi, J. H., Watt, J. H., & Lynch, M. (2006). Perceptions of news credibility about the

war in Iraq: Why war opponents perceived the Internet as the most credible

medium. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 12*(1), 209-229.

Cobbey, R. (1980). Audience attitudes and readership. *ANPA News Research Reports*, 29, 8–9.

Council on Foreign Relations (n.d.). The Communist Party of China. Retrieved from <http://www.cfr.org/china/communist-party-china/p14482>.

Crovitz, L. G. (2011, August 8). Information age: Beijing's crash course in news censorship. *Wall Street Journal* (Eastern edition), p. A13.

Deuze, M. L. (2003). The web and its journalisms: Considering the consequences of different types of news media online. *News Media and Society*, 5(2), 203-230.

Ding, S. (2009). Informing the masses and heeding public opinion: China's new Internet-related policy initiatives to deal with its governance crisis. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 6(1), 31-42.

Flanagin, A., & Metzger, M. (2000). Perceptions of Internet information credibility. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 77(3), 515–540.

Flanagin, A. J., & Metzger, M. J. (2007). The role of site features, user attributes, and information verification behaviors on the perceived credibility of web-based information. *New Media & Society*, 9(2), 319-342.

Flanagin, A. J., & Metzger, M. J. (2008). Digital media and youth: Unparalleled opportunity and unprecedented responsibility. In M. J. Metzger & A. J. Flanagin (Eds.), *Digital media, youth, and credibility* (pp. 5-27). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Freedom House. (2005). New report details China censorship mechanisms. Retrieved from

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/article/freedom-house-new-report-details-china-censorship-mechanisms?page=70&release=329>.

- Gaziano, C., & McGrath, K. (1986). Measuring the concept of credibility. *Journalism Quarterly*, 63(3), 451-462.
- Gaziano, C., & McGrath, K. (1987). Newspaper credibility and relationships of newspaper journalists to communities. *Journalism Quarterly*, 64(2), 317-328.
- Gunther, A. C. (1992). Biased press or biased public? Attitude toward media coverage of social groups. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 56, 147-167.
- Gunther, A. C., & Chia, S. (2001). Predicting pluralistic ignorance: The hostile media precept and its consequences. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78(4), 688-701.
- Guo, G. (2005). Party recruitment of college students in China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 14(43), 371-393.
- Hays, J. (2011). Urban life in China. Retrieved from <http://factsanddetails.com/china.php?itemid=151>.
- Hilligoss, B., & Rieh, S.Y. (2007). Developing a unifying framework of credibility assessment: Construct, heuristics, and interaction in context. *Information Processing and Management*, 44, 1467-1484.
- Hovland, C. I., Janis, I. L., & Kelley, H. H. (1953). *Communication and persuasion*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Howkins, J. (1982). *Mass communication in China*. London: Longman Inc.
- Ickovic, C., Lane, C., & Jones, M. (2006). Censorship in China. *East Asia Gate*, 4(12),

1-6.

- Infante, D. A. (1980). The construct validity of semantic differential scales for the measurement of source credibility. *Communication Quarterly*, 28(2), 19-26.
- Johnson, T. J., & Kaye, B. K. (1998). Cruising is believing? Comparing Internet and traditional sources on media credibility measures. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 75(2), 325–340.
- Johnson, T. J., & Kaye, B. K. (2002). Webelievability: A path model examining how convenience and reliance predict online credibility. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 79(3), 619–642.
- Judd, C. M., & Milburn, M.A. (1980). The structure of attitude systems in the general public: Comparisons of a structural equation model. *American Sociological Review*, 45, 627-643.
- Kan, M. (2012, January 18). China to expand real-name registration for Twitter-like microblogs. Retrieved from [http://www.pcworld.com/businesscenter/article/248393/china\\_to\\_expand\\_realname\\_registration\\_for\\_twitterlike\\_microblogs.html](http://www.pcworld.com/businesscenter/article/248393/china_to_expand_realname_registration_for_twitterlike_microblogs.html).
- Kang, C. Y. (2009). Communication technologies: Diffusion of online news use and credibility among young web users in the information age. (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Nevada-Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV.
- Kaplan, M., & Haenlein, M. (2011). The early bird catches the news: Nine things you should know about micro-blogging, *Business Horizons*, 54(2), 105-113.
- Kazee, T. A. (1981). Television exposure and attitude change: The impact of political



- interest. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45(4), 507-518.
- Kenji, M. (2010). China bans reporting on 18 subjects. Retrieved from <http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201003250329.html>.
- Kim, J. Y., & Masielat, S. (2007, August). Perceived credibility of online news media: A study of social significance, personal significance, and interactivity factors. Paper presented at the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, DC.
- Kiousis, S. (2001). Public trust or mistrust? Perceptions of media credibility in the information age. *Mass Communication and Society*, 4(4), 381-403.
- Lasica, J. D. (2002). Online news on a tightrope. Retrieved from <http://www.ojr.org/ojr/business/1017788416.php>.
- Li, L. (2004). Political trust in rural China. *Modern China*, 30(2), 228-258.
- Lohmann, S., Burch, M., Schmauder, H., & Weiskopf, D. (2012). Visual analysis of microblog content using time-varying co-occurrence highlighting in tag clouds. Paper presented at the International Working Conference on Advanced Visual Interfaces (AVI 2012). New York, NY.
- Lou, J. J. (2011). Transcending an urban–rural divide: Rural youth’s resistance to “townization” and schooling: A case study of a middle school in Northwest China. *International Journal of Qualitative*, 24(5), 573-580.
- Malek, A., & Kavoori, A. P. (2000). *The global dynamics of news: Studies in international news coverage and news agenda*. Stamford, CT: Ablex Publications.
- Markham, D. (1968). The dimensions of source credibility of television newscasters.

*Journal of Communication, 18, 57-64.*

McCroskey, J. C., & Jenson, T. A. (1981). Image of mass media news sources. *Journal of Broadcasting, 19, 169-180.*

McLeod, J. M., & McDonald, P. G. (1985). Beyond simple exposure: Media orientations and their impact on political processes. *Communication Research, 12, 3-33.*

McQuail, D. (2008). *Mass communication theory* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). London: Sage Publications.

Metzger, M., Flanagin, A., & Zwarun, L. (2003). College students' web use, perceptions of information credibility, and verification behavior. *Computers & Education, 41, 271-290.*

Miller, A. H. (1974). Political issues and trust in government: 1964-1970. *American Political Science Review, 68, 951-972.*

Mobley, M. F., Bearden, W. O., & Teel, J. E. (1988). An investigation of individual responses to tensile price claims. *Journal of Consumer Research, 15, 273-279.*

Mulder, R. (1981). A log-linear analysis of media credibility. *Journalism Quarterly, 58, 635-638.*

National Bureau of Statistics. (2007). China's TV audience surpasses 1.2 billion.

Retrieved from <http://www.china.org.cn/english/entertainment/236288.htm>.

National College Education. (2003). More college students joining Communist Party.

Retrieved from

[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-10/28/content\\_1147438.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2003-10/28/content_1147438.htm).

Newhagen, J., & Nass, C. (1989). Different criteria for evaluating the credibility of newspapers and TV news. *Journalism Quarterly, 66, 277-284.*

- Norris, P. (1996). Does television erode social capital? A reply to Putnam. *Political Science & Politics*, 29(3), 474-480.
- Organization Department, CPP Central Committee. (2011). China's Communist Party members exceed 80 million. Retrieved from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-06/24/c\\_13947698.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-06/24/c_13947698.htm).
- Pew Research Center. (2006). Young Americans and their attitudes toward the Web. Retrieved from <http://www.journalism.org/node/1331>.
- Pew Research Center. (2009). Press accuracy rating hits two decade low: Public evaluations of the news media, 1985-2009. Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2009/09/13/press-accuracy-rating-hits-two-decade-low/>.
- Sargent, L. (1965). The dimensions of source credibility. *Journalism Quarterly*, 42, 35-42.
- Schmitt, K., Gunther, A., & Liebhart, J. (2004). Why partisans see mass media as biased. *Communication Research*, 31(6), 623-641.
- Spangenberg, E. R., Voss, K. E., & Crowley, A. E. (1997). Measuring the hedonic and utilitarian dimensions of attitude: A generally applicable scale. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 24(1), 235-241.
- Sundar, S. S. (1998). Effects of source attribution on perception of online news. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 75, 55-68.
- USC US-China Institute. (2011, July 10-20). Talking points. Retrieved from <http://china.usc.edu/ShowArticle.aspx?articleID=2461&AspxAutoDetectCookieS>

upport=1.

Westley, B. H., & Severin, W. J. (1964). Some correlates of media credibility. *Journalism Quarterly*, 41, 325–335.

Whitney, D. C. (1986). *The media and the people: Surroundings from two communities*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2006). *Mass media research: An introduction*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Inc.

Wines, M., Lafraniere, S., & Ansfield, J. (2010, April 7). China's censors tackle and trip over the Internet. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/08/world/asia/08censor.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/08/world/asia/08censor.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2).

Xinhua News Agency. (2008). The basic information of the Communist Youth League. Retrieved from [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqgj/2008-06/10/content\\_6749472.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqgj/2008-06/10/content_6749472.htm).

Xinhua News Agency. (2010). China's urban, rural income gap widens. Retrieved from [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2010-01/22/content\\_9361049.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2010-01/22/content_9361049.htm).

Xinhua News Agency. (2011). China's Communist Party members exceed 80 million. Retrieved from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-06/24/c\\_13947698.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2011-06/24/c_13947698.htm).

Xinhua News Agency. (2012). Brief introduction to Xinhuanet. Retrieved from [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/special/2011-11/28/c\\_131274495.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/special/2011-11/28/c_131274495.htm).

Yang, B. J. (2006). *The real news*. Beijing: Renmin University of China Publications.

- Yang, D. T. (2002). What has caused regional inequality in China? *China Economic Review*, 13, 331-334.
- Zaichkowsky, J. L. (1985). Measuring the involvement construct. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12(3), 341-352.
- Zhongshi, S. G., & Li, L. (2011). Perceptions of media functions and processing of news: Analysis of audience in a Chinese metropolis. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 21(1), 47-68.
- Zhu, Y. P. (2000). The historical development and insights of Party-building work in institutions of higher education since the founding of PRC. *Journal of Chongqing College of Post and Telecommunications (Social Science edition)*, 1(3), 54.

## ACKNOWLEDEMENTS

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my major professor, Dr. Lulu Rodriguez, who helped nurture my research ability. She devoted a lot of time and effort in guiding me toward the right research path. Her guidance helped me in the conduct and writing of this thesis. I could not have imagined having a better major professor and mentor for my Master's study.

I also would like to thank Professor Thomas Beell and Dr. Tongli Li, who are members of my program of study committee. Professor Beell gave me a lot of constructive suggestions and encouragement. Professor Li gave insightful comments on my questionnaire and helped to refine the Chinese-language version.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family—my parents Qiufen Yang, Guohua Shan, and my cousin, Weiyi Shan, for supporting me spiritually and otherwise throughout my life.