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# Markers of Credibility on Citizen Journalism Websites

# Kirsten Johnson

#### Abstract

Credibility in mainstream media continues to wane, giving rise to new forms of journalism supported by the Internet. One of these new forms of journalism is citizen journalism. This is a form of journalism in which content is produced by ordinary citizens, usually on websites. One of the most popular citizen journalism websites in the world at this time is OhMyNews. com. Like mainstream media, this site, as well as ones like it, have credibility obstacles to overcome. In this study the researcher tests whether or not the presence of information about a writer and sources used to write a story on a citizen journalism website affects the perceived credibility of the story.

One hundred and twenty subjects were asked to read three stories from OhMyNews.com and then rate those stories in terms of their perceived credibility. Some of the subjects were presented with information about the writer's background and a picture of the writer, some were able to follow hyperlinks imbedded in the story to verify information contained in it, and others were presented with both. The results from the groups were compared to see if the additional information given to subjects had an impact on their perceived credibility of the story. This research will help online journalists understand how to increase the credibility of the stories they write, and will add to the understanding of the factors that influence perceptions of information credibility.

# Why Important?

- Citizen journalism is growing in popularity
- Trust in mainstream media is declining
- Citizen journalists need ways to add credibility to their news stories

#### Research Questions

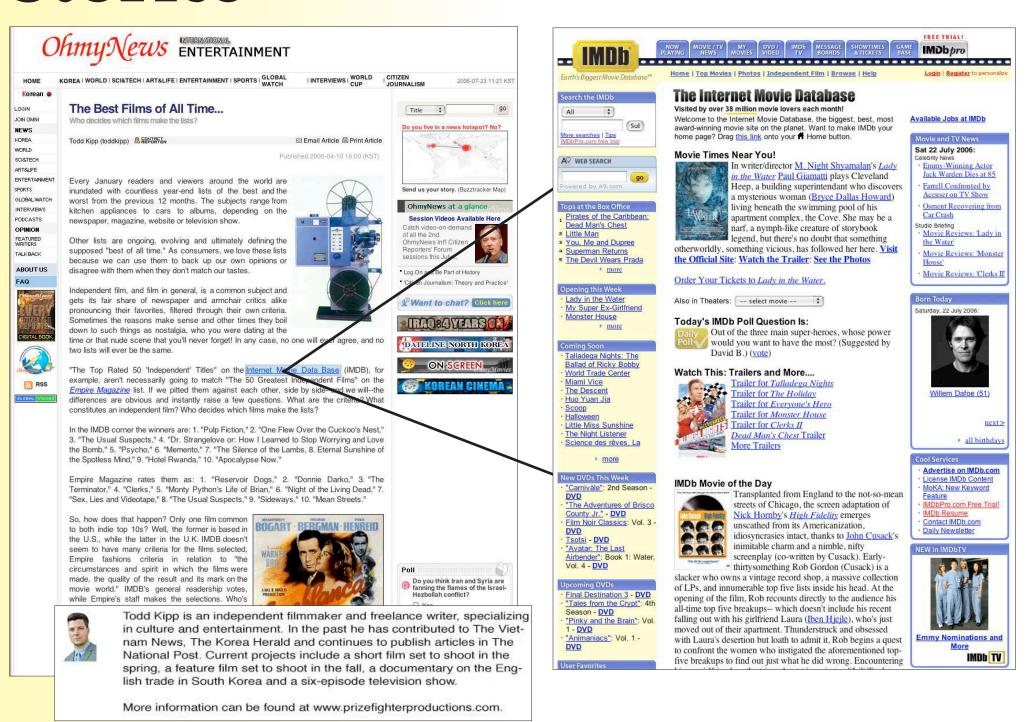
RQ 1: To what extent does providing information about a writer's background and providing a picture of the writer on a citizen journalism site affect the perceived credibility of the story?

RQ 2: To what extent do hyperlinks that allow users to verify information contained in a story on a citizen journalism site affect the perceived credibility of the story?

RQ3: To what extent does providing information about a writer's background, a picture of the writer, and hyperlinks that allow users to verify information contained in a story on a citizen journalism site affect the perceived credibility of the story?

Group	What Participants See	
Green	Story Only	
Red	Story +Writer Information	
Yellow	Story + Hyperlinks	
Blue	Story + Writer Information + Hyperlinks	

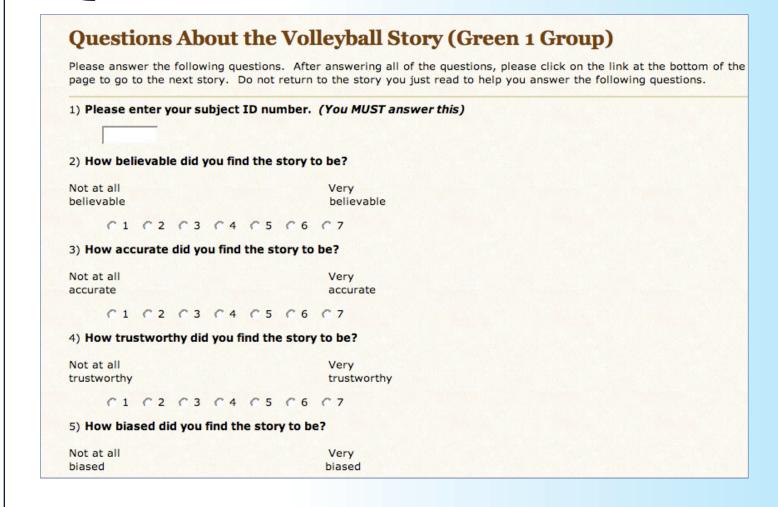
#### Stories

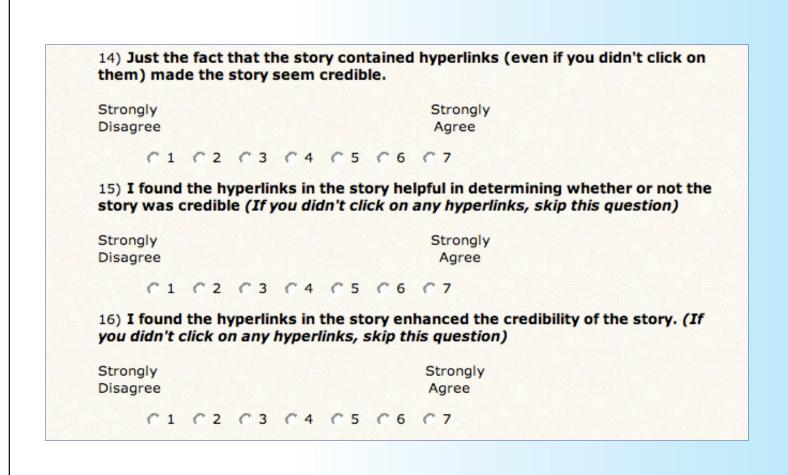




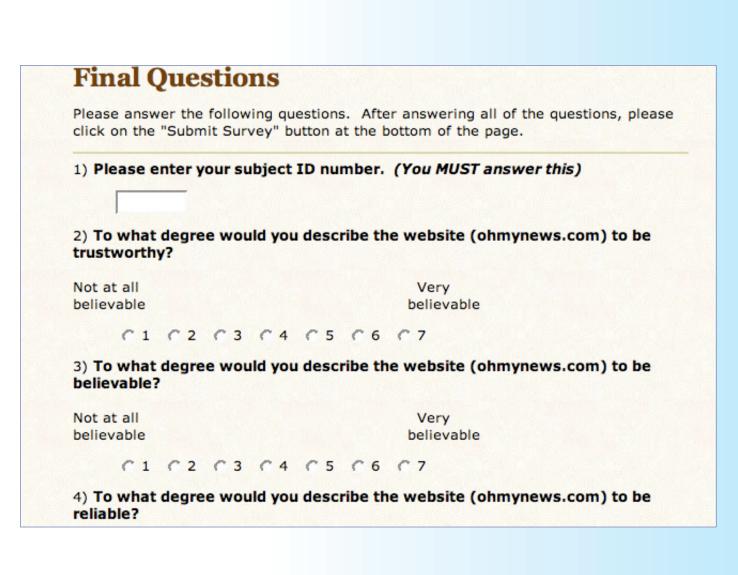


# Questionnaires





11) The information on the whether or not the story wa	vriter's background was helpful in determining is credible.
Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree
C1 C2 C3 C4	C 5 C 6 C 7
12) I found the picture of the story was credible.	e writer to be helpful in determining whether or no
Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree
C1 C2 C3 C4	C 5 C 6 C 7
13) I thought the writer in t	ne picture looked credible.
Strongly Disagree	Strongly Agree
C1 C2 C3 C4	C 5 C 6 C 7
14) What is the main idea o	the story you just read?
World Trade Organization	ans are charged after protesting against the on (WTO)



# **Key Findings**

- If writer and hyperlink information is included in a story the perceived credibility of the story is higher than when that information is not included.
- Markers of credibility increase perceived credibility more when included in hard news, as opposed to feature stories.
- Writer information plays a larger role in perceived credibility than hyperlinks. The average number of hyperlinks subjects clicked on was .42.
- There is a significant positive correlation between whether or not subjects thought the writer in the picture looked credible and their perceived credibility of the story.

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