

Perceived Credibility of Radio News Broadcasters:  
An Analysis in Profit and Nonprofit Settings

A Senior Project

presented to

The Faculty of the Journalism Department  
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Science in Journalism

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March 2019

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# Chapter 1

## *Introduction*

### **Statement of the Problem**

Radio is everywhere. It follows us into our cars, our homes, and even sneaks its way into our pockets through the powers of online streaming and smart phones. Aside from music programs, news programs are, and have been for the last century, prominent fixtures on the airwaves. But why should we believe what we hear on news radio? After all, those broadcasters are employed due solely to their support of the folks who financially back them; their sponsors. If my news, my daily dose of facts and true-life stories, is coming from the mouth of a man or woman who's also encouraging me to buy shoes from Sal's Shoe Emporium down the street, how can I trust that this anchor isn't trying to fool, persuade, or mislead me throughout the entirety of the broadcast, not just when talking about Sal's? Is public radio, devoid of commercials by nature, the only truly objective platform from which I can cultivate the day's happenings via audio transmissions?

The presence of advertisements in radio news broadcasts can be better integrated with news content in order to protect the credibility of radio news broadcasters.

### **Background of the Problem**

Credibility in a news anchor, reporter, or host is essential. Conveying authority over a set of known facts is worthless to a receiver if the deliverer cannot be trusted or depended upon. News media, including news radio, has been reduced to dishonest and incompatible work in the eyes and ears of men and women today. This downfall may perceivably be linked to the political biases perpetuated in specific news outlets, but further damage may be caused when the

credibility of an anchor, host, or reporter is harmed through voicing commercials in concurrence with delivering the news.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study is intended to clearly analyze the effects of commercial advertising on radio broadcasters' perceived credibility, while exploring the ethical implications that arise by mixing the distribution of news with the conveyance of advertisements in a radio broadcast. With news becoming more and more accessible on differing platforms and in differing mediums, the burden falls on the deliverers of news to ensure that their service is presented in a clear and concise manner whilst maintaining journalistic integrity.

By studying the effect that advertising has on the perceived credibility of radio news broadcasters, one can use the information gathered and analyzed to reconstruct the way he or she consumes news. When applied in a newsroom setting, this information can be utilized to better structure advertising around news programming to enhance the integrity of news radio broadcasts.

### **Setting for the Study**

This study will be completed with the use of data collection from past literature relating to the subject matter and related subject matters, in addition to data collection from several personal interviews with subjects ranging from industry professionals to avid radio news consumers.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were crafted to analyze the extent to which advertising in news radio detracts from the trustworthiness and authority of the news reporter, anchor, or host delivering said news:

1. How is anchor/host/reporter credibility established in news radio?
2. To what extent do commercials or advertisements hinder anchors/hosts/reporters' credibility?
3. How are journalistic ethics compromised by blending advertising into news?
4. How is public, or nonprofit, radio viewed in terms of trustworthiness when compared with for-profit radio?
5. How might commercials or advertisements be successfully implemented into news radio broadcasts without intersecting with the deliverer of the news?

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined to clarify several of the terms surrounding the topic of credibility in radio news and to assist the reader and provide context to the remainder of the study:

Credibility: The believability, trustworthiness and or authenticity that exudes, or fails to exude, from an individual (Rubin, 2000; Brewer and Pritchard, 2008).

News Radio: Audio broadcast of news.

Anchor/Host/Reporter: The man or woman delivering the radio news, based on the US model.

Journalistic Ethics: The professional integrity with which a journalist operates, including (but not limited to) the following features: truthfulness, fairness, honesty, independence, and accountability (Griffiths & Goodman, 1989).

Public Radio: For the purposes of this study, radio outlets whose primary function/mission is public service. Funding for this type of media typically stems from a mixture of government, private, or public funds, based on the US model.

Parasocial Interactions: The relationship experienced by an audience with their entertainer (in this case, radio reporter/anchor/host). This interaction occurs through mediated encounters, in which one side, the listener, extends energy and time to the host, who is unaware of the listener's existence (Rubin, 2000; Horton and Wohl, 1956).

## **Organization of Study**

Chapter 1 included a background of this study, its purpose, and term definitions. Chapter 2 will take a look at existing literature that tackles various topics relating to the subject matter of this study. In Chapter 3, the methodology driving the data collection, which was used to assess the above stated research questions, and define each data source selected, will be described. Chapter 4 covers an analysis of the data collected during the process described in Chapter 3. Chapter 5 will then strive to suggest ways in which one may solve the problems raised in this paper and summarize and conclude the study as a whole.

## Chapter 2

### *Literature Review*

The review of literature focuses on existing literature that examines news radio listeners and their predisposition towards news deliverers, methods for measuring credibility and what credibility is composed of, the conflict of interest for radio news reporters and anchors who voice commercial advertisements, and the dynamic association between radio news broadcasters and audio advertisements.

### **Establishing Interpersonal Communication**

According to Brewer and Pritchard (2008) the health of radio news depends upon the trust that anchors and reporters establish with a station's listeners (p. 124). If the perceived credibility of the broadcaster is low from an audience perspective, media usership stands the potential to decline. The burden of developing trust between the deliverers and receivers of news falls almost exclusively on the deliverer. Many listeners may also implicitly judge a broadcaster simply based on how he or she represents himself or herself on air, and if the broadcaster's general ideas ring true with the listener (p. 126). This concept of validating personal values with the media one consumes supports the uses and gratification theory, which asserts that people are active users of media and personally select how they will use the media they consume, for example, corroborating their identity with the personalities they hear on the radio.

With radio being considered the most intimate form of media usage (Rubin, 2000, p. 635), the personality behind the microphone is a key deciding factor for listeners choosing to engage. When a perceivably trustworthy news deliverer engages in the conveyance of advertisements, then, they face the possibility of being seen as violating journalistic codes of



ethics, which is inherently distrustful (Griffiths & Goodman, 1989, 605). Griffiths and Goodman (1989) go so far as to suggest that the decline of radio credibility hinges on a lack of strong, clear understanding and commitment to journalism ethics on the part of reporters; the basic ingredient employed to formulate credibility (p. 601).

### **Source Credibility in Journalism**

The media environment we exist in today is everchanging and encompasses most everyone (Fisher, Magee & Mohammed-Baksh, 2015, p. 305.) Because of the constant influx of news that media consumers experience, society has become increasingly aware of the credibility of news sources (p. 305). Credibility, then, is an important factor for listeners to consider when weighing their listening options. According to Cynthia B. Meyers (2013), “Credibility and sincerity depend on announcers’ emoting rather than reciting” (p. 77). Often times, then, the use of an anchor to deliver advertising in radio news is ineffective anyways, due to their polished delivery (p.77).

Adding an extra layer of nuance, radio news directors and varying RTDNA members in Griffiths and Goodman’s study (1989) were certain that the credibility of their anchors and reporters would be jeopardized if the anchors and reporters were involved with commercials and spot announcements, whether the commercials or sports were performed in a traditional manner within the news programming or not (pp. 604-605). And as elucidated in Martín-Santana’s (2017) work, credibility could also largely hinge on the manner in which radio news broadcasters present themselves, in regard to how voice qualities influence listeners. This work is in congruence with Meyers’. Martin-Santana asserts that personal factors such as gender, vocal pitch, accent, and posed interactions with the audience impact the extent to which listeners will

buy into their host (p. 151). Credibility, then, revolves around the manner in which reporters and anchors present themselves. But what each listener is intending to get out of his or her time listening to a radio news program plays an increasingly integral role in radio news listenership and anchor or reporter credibility overall (Rubin, 2000, p.635).

### **Listening Motivation and Attraction**

In the words of Alan M. Rubin (2000), the most salient reason for individuals to listen to a talk radio host is that they are seeking excitement or enjoyment (p. 635). Rubin also explains, through his study that explores the measurement of radio news listener satisfaction and motivation for listening, that listeners tend to turn their radio knob in an attempt to pass time, or simply out of habit. (p. 635). But here's the catch; whether out of a need to be entertained or out of habit, the radio news listeners in Rubin's study were significantly more likely to engage in a news program lead by a host (either reporter or anchor) who tended to be more similar to, friendly with, and empathetic towards the listener (p. 635). As Rubin puts it, "parasocially interacting with a talk radio host predicted planned and frequent listening to the host, treating the host as an important and credible source of information, and feeling that the host influenced attitudes and actions about societal issues" (p. 635).

From the listeners' perspectives, under the conditions of assumed credibility mentioned above, talk radio hosts are seen as credible "relational partners" (p.635). Horton and Wohl (1956) suggest in a prior study that PSI's (parasocial interactions) are comparable to establishing genuine and concrete social relationships with others, though they may be one-sided (p. 215). Rubin's study supports that view, while also connecting to the uses and gratification theory; the listeners engaging in PSI's are attracted or loyal to the hosts they choose based on how

trustworthy the host may be perceived. That trust is linked, through Rubin's study, to how comfortable a host makes his or her listener feel, among other less notable factors.

## **Chapter 3**

### *Methodology*

This chapter explains the methods used to collect data for the study, including data sources, collection and presentation of the data, and delimitations.

#### **Data Sources**

The focus of interest for this study, which was tailored by the feasible study scope, was a small group ( $n < 10$ ) comprised of former radio news reporters, broadcast educators, and radio news consumers. Both expert and nonprofessional opinions were deliberately sought in this study to account for variability in the collected data. Each participant completed an entirely verbal in-person interview. Participants included Journalism Department Chair Mary Glick, Assistant Professor and KCPR Advisor Patti Piburn, Associate Professor Patrick Howe, Journalism Department Broadcast Engineer Thomas Morales, and Journalism student and KCPR radio news reporter Maya MacGregor.

#### **Interview Design**

Prior to any questions being posed, all participants were asked to reflect on their experiences listening to and engaging with both commercial and noncommercial news radio in order to prime their memories for accurate data retrieval. Glick was determined to be a listener of both commercial and public radio, with an emphasis on public radio; Piburn was determined to be a listener of public radio; Howe was determined to be a listener of public radio; Morales was determined to be a listener of commercial radio; and MacGregor was determined to be a listener of public radio.

The questions posed in each interview were held constant and were derived from Alan Rubin's journal entry on the impact of motivation, attraction, and parasocial interaction on talk radio listening. Participants were asked to what extent they agreed with the statements posed (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree, Don't Care) regarding their listening experiences with commercial and noncommercial news radio. Rubin's statements were sampled with few to no alterations made, and read as follows:

1. The news radio anchor/host/reporter I listen to could be a friend of mine.
2. The news radio anchor/host/reporter I listen to seems to understand the important things in life.
3. The news radio anchor/host/reporter I listen to entertains me.
4. The news radio anchor/host/reporter I listen to is a credible source.
5. I can trust the news radio anchor/host/reporter I listen to.

At the completion of each question/statement, participants were asked to explain their selected agreeability in greater depth, and the free responses were recorded verbatim.

### **Data Collection**

Five total individual interviews were conducted with the participants listed above, with no replacement or duplication. The interviews took place in-person during the third and fourth weeks of February 2019 and spanned 15 minutes on average. Participants were exposed to the statements above and were prompted to provide a rating and explanation for each rating given. This method allowed for insight to be drawn from commonalities among free responses, as the quantifiable portion (rating) of the statements was not conducted on a grand enough scale to be analyzed and tested for statistically significant patterns.

## **Data Presentation**

The qualitative data collected during each interview was documented through audio recordings using the iPhone voice recording application. Precise written notes were logged as well both during and after each interview to highlight additional information that could clarify the context of each free responses. Through the use of transcripts produced from audio recordings and careful notes, the data was presented in as impartial and comprehensive of a manner as is possible with qualitative data.

## **Delimitations**

Due to the type of data collected and the interview processes themselves, some limitations of the collection method employed in this study must be noted before analysis can occur. This data collection and overall study was conducted solely to gain insight into how experts and laymen alike interpret the credibility, or believability, of radio news broadcasters in the context of news and commercial delivery. The opinions expressed by the participants in this study are descriptive and ultimately opinion-based. Because of the subjectivity of this method, data cannot and should not be generalized to a larger population.

One additional limitation to note in this study is its small sample size. The small nature of this sample renders the inference drawn from its data incapable of approximating any larger population. Also, a small sample size diminishes the power of any extrapolation of the data and increases the study's margin of error to a nearly incomprehensible point. This does not mean that the study itself, or any inference that may be drawn from its findings, are completely meaningless. Though it is fact that a study with low statistical power is weak in detecting population effects, small sample sizes are not congruent with low power, and therefore may be

beneficial in interpreting the insight of each interviewee on an individual and group basis if repetition is somehow implemented in a follow-up study.

## Chapter 4

### *Data Analysis*

Chapter 4 will summarize all respondents' answers to each statement posed during the interviews as well as respondents' feedback to each statement. Direct quotations from each interviewee will be used to represent their positions. The answers will then be analyzed, looking strictly for patterns or discrepancies among the lot, and will be compared with the original research questions in Chapter 1 and the literature examined in Chapter 2.

#### **Question 1: Friendliness and Relatability**

After having been briefed on the nature and organization of the study and having reflected in their recent news radio listening experience, each interviewee was first posed this state:

The news radio anchor/host/reporter I listen to could be a friend of mine.

The interviewees rated the extent to which they agreed with this statement and addressed their dispositions. The purpose of this question was to assess the degree to which relatability and friendliness impact the credibility of an anchor, host or reporter. The following qualitative data was gathered from each interviewee:

- Mary Glick: Agree: "The people I listen to as hosts are informed, intelligent, and articulate, and I would hope to put myself in that category."
- Patti Piburn: Agree: "I'm a journalist; you can imagine the people I listen to would be people I can associate with because I've been in newsrooms for so many years. I probably have a little bias, but part of it too is that I think the people I



listen to strive to sound very personal, informal and conversational. That's part of why I can imagine this is someone I could hang out with."

- Patrick Howe: Agree: "I'm making judgements about the people I listen to regarding their voice, the tone of their language, and definitely if it is pleasing or not pleasing to me. I'm expecting certain conventions that are rational and relatable."
- Thomas Morales: Strongly Agree: "Demeanor on the air, inflection, voice, and differing elements of presentation matter to me when I'm listening to someone on the air. It should be almost like we're having a conversation."
- Maya MacGregor: Neutral: "Rather than a friend, I would like to think of the host or anchor I listen to as a mentor or teacher. When I listen to radio, I like to listen for aspects that the host or reporter does well, like their tone of voice or even incorporating natural sounds into their wraps."

Among the answers given above, a general pattern arose where interviewees agreed with the statement due to their ability to see a reflection of themselves in the anchors, hosts, and reporters they've listened to. Glick directly projects herself on the personalities she witnesses on the air, hoping to categorize herself with them. Piburn, Howe, Morales and MacGregor all mention the importance of vocal delivery and conversational tones.

It seems that these responses, where each interviewee is validating their personal values with the media they're consuming, supports the uses and gratification theory and Brewer and Pritchard's study involving the implicit judgement of broadcasters (p. 126). The interviewees are all active users of media and seem to corroborate their identity with the personalities they hear on the radio. The average response to this statement was: Agree.

## Question 2: Worthy Priorities

This next statement aimed, again, at assessing the perceived credibility of the anchors, hosts and reporters that each interviewee listens to, based on what the interviewees deemed the anchors, hosts and reporters purported to be important in life. The statement read:

The news radio anchor/host/report I listen to seems to understand the important things in life.

The interviewees rated the extent to which they agreed with this statement and addressed their dispositions. The following qualitative data was gathered from each interviewee:

- Mary Glick: Agree: “I agree with this mostly because of the emphasis that they put on the impact of the stories that they’re telling.”
- Patti Piburn: Strongly Agree: “The programs I listen to are representative of things that I feel are important...I think that’s implied in my choice to listen. If they were covering things I thought were irrelevant, I probably wouldn’t waste my time listening.”
- Patrick Howe: Agree: “This is less something I would make a conscious judgement about. What they choose to present should be important to society as a whole, yes, but I don’t make a conscious decision on how they lead their own lives.”
- Thomas Morales: Agree: “They report on items of civic significance and areas of importance to society. They should be unbiased in presenting information of importance for the general community. And based on how they present that information, they do give off an aura of importance.”

- Maya MacGregor: Strongly Agree: “If I didn’t think the anchor understood or reported what was important or interesting to me, I probably wouldn’t tune in. To a degree, the anchor has the freedom to choose what they think is newsworthy or important in life, but in general, the stations I listen to seem to understand what qualifies as newsworthy and important. But there are stations I don’t particularly tune to that direct their choice of news to a different audience, making other topics important for them to report.”

Among the answers given above, interviewees seemed to approach statement number 2 in the same manner in which statement (or question) number 1 was responded to. Interviewees projected themselves onto the anchors, hosts, and reporters they listen to in order to assess whether the things the news programs were covering were important to the interviewee specifically, connecting further with Brewer and Pritchard’s report.

Another common theme seen in the answers to the second statement was relating the host, anchor, or report’s judgement of importance to the societal impact of the news they delivered. The ability to deliver news of general civic importance may be a contributing factor to the overall perceived credibility of the anchors, hosts, and reporters. It may also be interesting to note here that two of the three self-proclaimed public radio listeners of the group *strongly* agreed with this statement, perhaps suggesting that people who listen to radio news that lacks anchor/host/reporter commercials may determine their anchors, hosts, and reporters to be better arbitrators of the importance of news. The average response to this statement was:

Agree/Strongly Agree.

### Question 3: Entertainment

This statement was used to judge whether an entertainment factor played a strong role in whether or not interviewees determined an anchor, host or reporter to be credible. The statement read:

The news radio anchor/host/report I listen to entertains me.

The interviewees rated the extent to which they agreed with this statement and addressed their dispositions. The following qualitative data was gathered from each interviewee:

- Mary Glick: Agree: “This is hard to define. They come across as human, sometimes with a sense of humor, or they can be not combative but assertive, and that can be entertaining.”
- Patti Piburn: Neutral: “I don’t necessarily feel entertained. I would say...engaged, interested...I think what draws me to the shows is that I think what they’re talking about is important. I don’t feel like entertainment is part of it.”
- Patrick Howe: Neutral: “Some do, some don’t. It wouldn’t be a requirement for me to continue listening to them.”
- Thomas Morales: Agree: “One of the stations I listen to, KFI, totally entertains me. But that host does news and talk, so some things are funny when they’re able to take off the news hat and be a part of the team as a whole. But then you may question if the news is true, if it’s legitimate; are they journalists at that point?”
- Maya MacGregor: Agree: “Again, if I was not entertained, I would not tune in. Now, I do have access to any station in the world, so I can pick and choose which ones entertain me and then just listen to those stations specifically. There are

some exceptions, where some stories in specific don't necessarily entertain me, but in general, the shows I listen to do."

Overall, the interviewees struggled to provide feedback on why they rated their agreement with this statement in the way that they did, when compared with their willingness to provide feedback to the first two statements. Most feedback to statement number 3 was specified hesitantly, and the phrases "this is hard to define" or "this is not necessarily applicable" came up in 4 out of 5 interviews. This interest among interviewees of the separation of news and entertainment supports research question number 1, helping to determine which factors actually contribute to the perceived credibility of news deliverers.

But the lack of ability in participants to clearly argue their agreement rating contradicts Rubin's 2000 study, where he determines the "entertainment factor" to be a significant predictor of listenership and believability or credibility. Rubin says a significant motivation for listeners is that they are "seeking excitement or enjoyment" (p. 635), but it is clear through the responses that comprise this specific set of data that entertainment was not explicitly important to the interviewees, collectively. With the exception of MacGregor, interviewees did not clearly attribute the entertainment factor to their likelihood to discontinue or continue listenership.

It is interesting to note here that regardless of whether the interviewees were consumers of public or commercial radio, each individual interviewee struggled to relate entertainment to news, which may imply that other miscellaneous additions to news programming, like advertising, may not matter at all when it comes to judging the credibility of hosts, anchors, and reporters. This information helps to answer research questions 2, 3 and 4, which all break down credibility, trustworthiness, and journalistic ethics in commercial versus public radio settings. The average response to this statement was: Neutral/Agree.

#### **Question 4: Credibility**

Now, each interviewee was posed this statement, which was intended to get at the heart of the research questions presented in this paper:

The news radio anchor/host/reporter I listen to is a credible source.

The interviewees rated the extent to which they agreed with this statement and addressed their dispositions. The following qualitative data was gathered from each interviewee:

- Mary Glick: Strongly Agree: “The kind of reporting I listen to is based on facts, and attributed to the source, and it seems believable based on my knowledge of the world and the way the story is presented.”
- Patti Piburn: Strongly Agree: “I’m seeking out programs that I like, and they’re talking about topics I think are important and relevant, and, again, I wouldn’t waste my time if I thought the topics were irrelevant and not pertaining to me. But even more so, if I didn’t think they were credible, I certainly wouldn’t be listening. Most of what I listen to is NPR content, and I think of them as a highly credible source of information.”
- Patrick Howe: Neutral: “I don’t consider them a source, but rather a vehicle of communication. I can’t think of them as illogical, flakey or untrustworthy if I want to listen to them.”
- Thomas Morales: Agree: “They seem to have researched and done their preliminary verifying of facts when I listen. Statements and soundbites from real people, real sources, add to the credibility. And I don’t hear a lot of opinions, just keeping it to the facts of the story with no sense of rushing inaccurate information to the air.”

- Maya MacGregor: Strongly Agree: “Whenever I listen to news radio or read the news, I make sure the host is a credible source. You’re getting all your news and information from this anchor, so you want them to be credible, and always hope they are. Right?”

Among the answers given above, we can see that most interviewees resorted back to their feedback from statement number 2, regarding the importance of the news material that was broadcast, to decide whether or not a source was credible. Interviewees cited verification of facts, use of soundbites, and relevance of the information communicated as variables contributing to the credibility of the personalities they listen too, as is consistent with Martin-Santana’s study. The single outlier in this particular statement is Howe, who dives to a neutral standing regarding the credibility of his anchors, hosts, and reporters. But when looking into Howe’s specific statements (provided above), it can be concluded that his doubt lies not in the credibility of his sources, but in the definition of a source itself, and therefore his answer cannot be seen as significantly different from the other four as it does not hold consistent with the grounds or structure needed to conduct comparisons.

It is interesting to note here again that, much like statement number 3, responses regarding the perceived credibility of the anchors, hosts, and reporters did not significantly differ between the five interviewees, regardless of their listening to public or commercial radio. It is becoming increasingly noticeable through this specific set of data that the presence of commercials, voiced-over by news radio personalities, may not have any impact on the credibility of the hosts, anchors, or reporters themselves. The average response to this statement was: Agree/Strongly Agree.

## Question 5: Trustworthiness

I thought it was important to measure if there was a difference in the perceived credibility and perceived trustworthiness of radio news anchors, hosts, and reporters, and aimed to do so by posing the following concluding statement:

I can trust the news radio anchor/host/reporter I listen to.

The interviewees rated the extent to which they agreed with this statement and addressed their dispositions. The following qualitative data was gathered from each interviewee:

- Mary Glick: Agree: “If I didn’t agree, I wouldn’t be listening to them. I’m not there to just listen to someone who I wouldn’t trust, simply to bash that person. You could, if you like the idea of combat talk radio, that might be a place where you don’t really trust the people you listen to and you’re tuning in more for entertainment value if you like to get riled up and raise your blood pressure. The news is dramatic and disturbing enough without the additional confrontation.”
- Patti Piburn: Strongly Agree: “Again, as with the credibility, I’m seeking out a source that I find credible, that I think talks about things that are important to me, but certainly trustworthiness is high on that list because, again, I would feel like I was wasting my time if I had some question about their veracity. So, I definitely find them to be trustworthy.”
- Patrick Howe: Strongly Agree: “I don’t need to trust that they’d pay me back if I loaned them money, but I need to think that they’re taking care with their job and presenting truthful, accurate information to the best of their abilities.”
- Thomas Morales: Agree: “They seem to have done their jobs fleshing out the story, and like I mentioned before, they can back up their claims with soundbites.”



- Maya MacGregor: Strongly Agree: “Similar to how I answered the last question, I think you have to trust the people you get your news from. With radio in particular, you usually only hear a specific segment once or twice, so it’s hard to fact check every sentence they say. The anchors have to realize that their audience is trusting them to provide accurate facts.”

Through asking the interviewees to explain their agreeability with this statement, it became increasingly clear that trustworthiness was inherently linked to credibility. Four out of five interviewees requested that I refer to their previous answer to statement number 4 to answer statement 5. Words and phrases that were frequently correlated with trustworthiness included “backing up” a story, “taking care” with their presentation, and providing “accurate information.”

Of particular interest was Glick’s response to this statement. As stated above, all five interviewees called on their answers to statement number 4 in order to answer statement number 5; but Glick’s idea broke the pattern in a particular manner. She touched on an aspect of news radio that she believes causes a breakdown in trustworthiness, an aspect that we attempted to address prior with statement number 3: entertainment.

Based on Glick’s response to statement number 3, it is clear that she is confused with the purpose of the presence of entertainment in news. And now here in this particular statement, she has attributed the deterioration of trust in a news anchor, host, or reporter to their employment of an entertainment factor, predominantly a “combative talk” style of entertainment, in their broadcasts. Could it not be considered then that the presence of advertising, or any additional entertaining audio distractors that the hosts, anchors, or reporters take part in, deviate from the news and hinder their perceived credibility? Griffiths and Goodman (1989) address this exact

dilemma, suggesting that a declination in radio credibility centers on a lack of clear understanding and commitment to the journalism (p. 601).

The average response to this statement was: Agree/Strongly Agree.

## Chapter 5

### *Discussion and Recommendations*

#### **Summary**

This study was performed to gain insight on how credibility of news radio anchors, hosts, and reporters is determined in the minds of their listeners. In the current cultural of the country, news media has been degraded and reduced to opinion rather than fact on many occasions, making it ever-important to detect sources that are credible and worthy of listening to. To find more information on how credibility is currently being perceived in commercial and public radio settings, several radio news consumers, ranging from former professional broadcasters to avid radio news consumer college students, were interviewed based on a single set of statements designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How is anchor/host/reporter credibility established in news radio?
2. To what extent do commercials or advertisements hinder anchors/hosts/reporters' credibility?
3. How are journalistic ethics compromised by blending advertising into news?
4. How is public, or nonprofit, radio viewed in terms of trustworthiness when compared with for-profit radio?
5. How might commercials or advertisements be successfully implemented into news radio broadcasts without intersecting with the deliverer of the news?

Each question posed to the interviewees, in an attempt to gather data to answer those research questions, was taken directly, or altered slightly, from Rubin's original study on the impact of motivation, attraction, and parasocial interaction on talk radio listening. This was done to create appropriate questions for the interviews that would lend themselves to receiving data

that could be used to accurately assess the project's research questions. The interviews provoked a variety of responses, though most could be connected in some way, that also related to the existing literature on anchor, host, and reporter credibility both in commercial and non-commercial settings.

## **Discussion**

By analyzing the data presented in Chapter 4, connections made between interviewees' feedback provided during the interview process, and the existing literature found in Chapter 2, it is possible to make conclusions regarding the following original research questions.

**Research Question 1:** How is anchor/host/reporter credibility established in news radio?

Each of the five statements that were assessed by the interviewees in this study played a role in unearthing an answer to this research question. From the responses gleaned, which have been analyzed in Chapter 4, it may be possible to conclude that credibility in news radio is established by fostering a personal connection with the audience in which similar values are expressed, omitting entertainment factors unrelated to news content, and providing proof such as sound bites to corroborate factual information.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent do commercials or advertisements hinder anchors/hosts/reporters' credibility?

Statement number 3 in part answers this research question. Regardless of whether the interviewees were consumers of public or commercial radio, each individual interviewee struggled to relate entertainment to news, which might indicate that other assorted additions to news programming, like commercials or advertisements, may not matter when it comes to judging the credibility of hosts, anchors, and reporters. It should be noted that due to the

unoriginal or repeated nature of the five statements themselves (adapted from Rubin's 2000 study), information could not be gathered specifically in relation to attitude towards advertisements or commercials in news radio programs, therefore resulting in a conceptual conclusion attributed to association for this research question.

**Research Question 3:** How are journalistic ethics compromised by blending advertising into news?

This is the question that I struggled to properly address throughout the study. As Glick mentioned in her response to statement number 5, it seems that involving myriad entertainment factors in a show, like advertising, hinders the listener's ability to discern between paid content and the news show itself. Whether advertising by the host, anchor, or reporter can be distinguished from entertainment factors, such as the quality of the news deliverer's voice, could not clearly be separated and examined in this study, though Griffiths and Goodman (1989) have offered that ethics crumble in the presence of anchors, reporters, and hosts' involvement in commercials and spot announcements, whether the commercials or sports are performed in a traditional manner within the news programming or not (pp. 604-605). This research question requires further testing.

**Research Question 4:** How is public, or nonprofit, radio viewed in terms of trustworthiness when compared with for-profit radio?

When questioned regarding perceived trustworthiness in reporters, anchors, and hosts, all interviewees, regardless of whether they consumed nonprofit (public) or for-profit (commercial) radio news, readily linked trustworthiness to credibility. Four out of five interviewees used their answer to statement number 4 to also answer statement number 5, which were separate prompts encompassing credibility and trustworthiness. Therefore it may be

decided that both public and commercial radio are equally trustworthy to their consumers. Irrespective of the type of station, trustworthiness was correlated with “backing up” stories, “taking care” with the presentation of news, and providing “accurate information”, through the use of sound bites.

**Research Question 5:** How might commercials or advertisements be successfully implemented into news radio broadcasts without intersecting with the deliverer of the news?

Rather than omitting commercial or advertising material altogether in news programming, it seems that simply cutting any unnecessary entertainment factors may enhance the delivery of the radio news, as is mentioned in the discussion of Research Question 2. In place of reiterating specifics surrounding this research question, further suggestions to address the essential programming question will be offered in the following section below; Recommendation for Practice.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

After completing this study, adequate data has been collected and analyzed on the topic of perceived radio news anchor, host, and reporter credibility in commercial and non-commercial settings. With the information received, though it is limited, it is important to highlight the most significant content and present it for future radio news industry professionals. Some recommendations for practice include defining entertainment and self-promotion as opposed with paid advertising, and enhancing fact-finding missions and their use to improve credibility.

### **Cut the Unnecessary.**

Personality is within every human being, and all beings are slightly unique when compared with each other. This suggestion is not implying that the personality of an anchor, host, or reporter must be stifled; but rather that their sole mission be paid more attention: delivering the news. Certain radio programming does mix news, talk, advertising, and more in one cohesive show, but from the general findings of this study, it may be best for true radio news outlets, boasting radio news shows, to cut any unnecessary entertainment factors out of delivering the news.

With that being said, it must not be forgotten that commercial stations operate on the money they make from advertisers. Often times, it is not lucrative or even feasible for the anchor to cease delivering those advertisements, lest the station desires to crumble. So though this suggestion for best practice may hint at doing away with commercials, it is certainly not commanding the downfall of commercial radio news stations. Perhaps commercials or advertisements may be better-placed within a broadcast. For instance, rather than having the current or acting host, reporter, or anchor perform a live-read of a commercial, have the anchors, hosts, or reporters who typically voice the commercials prerecord them. Then, the pre-recorded commercial material of one radio news personality may be played during the other hosts, anchors, and reporters' broadcasts, so as to separate the immediate connection of the current host, anchor, or reporter with the advertisements being aired during his or her segment.

### **Back it Up.**

When considering credibility across the board, all interviewees reported that the addition of evidence in radio newscasts almost ensure the credibility of the reporter, anchor, or host is

intact, whether they broadcast on a commercial radio station or a public radio station.

Interviewee Morales contributed to this idea greatly when he suggested that credible anchors, hosts, and reporters seem to have researched and done their preliminary verifying of facts, and that statements and soundbites from real people only add to their credibility. Interviewee MacGregor echoed this sentiment and added that the proper and effective use of natural sounds in radio stories enhance their believability, and therefore contribute to the growing credibility of the anchor, host, or reporter.

Overall, rushing information to the mics in any station, commercial or not, does not appear to enhance the credibility or trustworthiness of any news deliverers. Therefore, a way to cultivate credibility in both commercial and public radio settings may be to shift the priority of “having the news first” to “reporting it the most accurately.”

## **Study Conclusion**

In conclusion, given the overall findings of this study, more research should be conducted to unearth additional intricate layers that contribute to the credibility of news radio anchors, hosts, and reporters, especially when attempting to draw comparisons between the credibility of news deliverers on non-profit radio and for-profit radio. This particular study collected and presented the opinions of five individuals ranging from industry experts, to former radio hosts and reporters, to student news radio consumers. It also took a deeper look into the preexisting literature that has attempted to address the topic of news personality credibility. It should be noted that each opinion offered in this study is individualized and not representative of a statistically significant whole. But the study does serve as an educational tool for any radio news directors, radio station general managers and program directors, broadcast journalism professors,



and broadcast journalism students who are interested in exploring the perceived credibility of radio news broadcasters. It may also be used as a base to build future research upon in this area of study.

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