Source Credibility as a Catalyst: Unraveling its Role in Shaping Strategic Communication Acceptability (SCA)

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Abstract
In crisis situations, public trust in information sources is crucial. While expertise is important for professionalism and technical accuracy, trustworthiness is fundamental for effective crisis communication. These insights underscore the need for careful selection of credible sources. Organizations must prioritize choosing reliable sources and providing high-quality information that builds trust. This approach not only enhances public engagement but also helps protect their reputation during crises. This study is critically important in today's fragmented, hyper-mediated information landscape, where trust in institutions and media is eroding globally. In times of crisis, trustworthiness becomes a strategic imperative rather than a mere "soft" asset. Organizations and institutions that emphasize transparency, empathy, and consistent communication are better equipped to handle crises, maintain stakeholder loyalty, and reduce long-term reputational damage. A narrative literature review was used in this article to highlight the significance of source credibility in strategic communication specialism. The findings revealed that source credibility plays a significant role in shaping positive message behavior. This concept remains underexplored in strategic communications. The complexity of the digital, human, and corporate information space requires heightened attention from scholars regarding source credibility. In the era preceding digitalization, individuals had access to a restricted array of sources for acquiring information and risk messages. The advent of the Internet has substantially altered the quantity and character of available sources, prompting a revival of scholarly interest in source credibility. Source credibility is essential in crisis and strategic communication, yet its role in enhancing the acceptability and believability of information remains underexplored, particularly in the age of social media. This concept, however, has posed challenges in terms of precise definition

and operationalization. This present article posits that source credibility, rather than being viewed as a variable, should be construed as a domain of research concerned with the impact of sources on communicative outcomes, encompassing shifts in attitudes and, more recently, the processing of misinformation. Regrettably, there is a dearth of research on the conditions under which sources wield influence. In a crisis, stakeholders seek reassurance more than expertise or technical knowledge. They want information from trusted sources, not just experts. Distrust can quickly undermine even the best advice provided by experts or professionals.

Keywords: Source Credibility, Strategic Communication, Trustworthiness, Information Perceptions, Crisis Response Strategies

Contribution/Originality

This study significantly contributes to the existing body of literature by integrating the influential role of source credibility in enhancing comprehensive compliance and acceptability of vital strategic information while fostering public relationships and trust. The research underscores the essential relevance of source credibility by integrating it into various communication studies. Notably, this study is one of the limited inquiries delving into the dynamic interplay between source credibility and message acceptability.

Introduction

This study is critically important in today's fragmented and hyper-mediated information landscape, where global trust in institutions and media is declining. In an information-saturated world, trust has become a significant issue. People are overwhelmed by information from various sources, many of which may not be reliable. Strategic communication, whether it comes from governments, corporations, or NGOs, heavily relies on being accepted by the target audience (Clendenin, 2017). The message will likely be ignored or dismissed if the source lacks credibility.

This concern ties into various fields, including crisis communication, public health campaigns, marketing, and the work of communication professionals such as PR specialists and marketers. Academics and researchers in communication studies, policymakers who regulate communication and media, and the general public, as information consumers, all have a vested interest in understanding and leveraging source credibility to enhance communication effectiveness (Van Zoonen & Van Der Meer, 2015).

The relationship between source credibility and strategic communication is not just an academic issue; it is a societal imperative. For communicators, the challenge is to build credibility while maintaining ethical standards and inclusivity. For audiences, it necessitates critical engagement in an era where credibility can serve as a weapon and a shield. Stakeholders must work together to create environments where credible voices, especially those of marginalized individuals can thrive, ensuring that strategic communication serves the public good rather than partisan agendas (Dominic et al., 2023).

The concept of credibility has three primary dimensions: expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Wang & Scheinbaum, 2018). However, trustworthiness is argued as the most relevant factor in determining source credibility (Dominic et al., 2023). Research shows that a trustworthy source is more credible, and trustworthiness is the most significant factor

affecting the credibility of information sources during a crisis (Lowry et al., 2014; Seiler & Kucza, 2017; Ecker & Antonio, 2021; Dominic et al., 2024). Source credibility pertains to the extent to which individuals place belief and confidence in the information conveyed by other individuals or organizations regarding a specific topic. According to scholars, stakeholders are more susceptible to persuasion when the information source is perceived as credible (Hovland et al., 1951; Pornpitakpan, 2004).

People had limited sources for obtaining information and risk messages in the past. The Internet has significantly increased the number and types of sources available. As a result, there is a renewed interest in understanding source credibility. This concept has been difficult to define and study. This article argues that source credibility should be seen as a research area focused on how sources affect communication outcomes, such as attitude change and the processing of misinformation. However, there is little research on the specific circumstances in which sources are influential.

Strategic information is the most crucial resource during a crisis. The credibility of the source significantly impacts the quality of information, which in turn has a positive relationship with perceived benefit and the believability of crisis response (Sha & Wei, 2022). Again, Source credibility is an important element in crisis communication (Zakaria & Mustaffa, 2014). During a crisis, trustworthiness embedded in the response source is an important mechanism that shapes stakeholders' post-crisis perception of corporate reputation (Singh, Crisafulli, & Xue, 2020). It is important to note that an organization's reputation is influenced by the response strategy chosen and delivered via credible sources (Tkalac, Verčič, & Coombs, 2019).

Although source credibility in crisis communication has not been extensively studied, scholars have found that it plays a vital role in ensuring compliance with crisis response strategies. It also has the persuasive power to change stakeholders' opinions and protect reputation during crises. Source credibility focuses on the trustworthiness of crisis information sources (Kim & Park, 2017; Dominic et al., 2024; Dominic, 2023).

Source credibility is a crucial element in crisis and strategic communication, and its importance in increasing the acceptability and believability of information has not been thoroughly investigated, particularly in the age of social-mediated communication (Park & Cameron, 2014; Dominic et al., 2023). Source credibility is the trustworthiness and reliability of information sources. In times of crisis, understanding source credibility is crucial for effective communication and response. It plays a critical role in message receptiveability and acceptability (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Kyngäs et al., 2020).

Literature Review
Source credibility refers to how trustworthy, knowledgeable, and reliable a source is perceived. Strategic communication involves purposeful communication by an organization aimed at achieving its goals. In this context, acceptability likely refers to how willing the audience is to accept or agree with a message. For instance, during a crisis, a company with high credibility is likely to recover faster because its communications are trusted (Shah & Wei, 2022). In the digital age, sources of information are diverse, including social media influencers. The credibility of these influencers can depend on their specialized knowledge

and perceived authenticity. This raises questions about how their credibility affects strategic communication campaigns (Wasike, 2022).

Another important aspect is the impact of misinformation. When sources lack credibility, their messages may be dismissed or, even worse, contribute to the spread of false information. (Philipp-Muller, Lee & Petty, 2022). Therefore, building source credibility serves as a shield against misinformation. Challenges in maintaining credibility can arise. If a source makes a mistake, it can affect future communications significantly. This highlights the importance of consistency and transparency (Allchin, 2023).

However, source credibility has dimensions: Expertise refers to a source's technical knowledge or experience (e.g., scientists in health campaigns). Trustworthiness: This reflects a source's honesty and ethical integrity (e.g., NGOs with transparent operations). Goodwill: This is a source's perceived concern for the audience's welfare (e.g., brands engaging in community initiatives). Dynamism: This encompasses the charisma and delivery style of the source, which is particularly relevant in digital contexts (e.g., influencers). Trustworthiness is more impactful in strategic communication (Serman & Sims, J. (2023; Dominic et al., 2024). Source credibility Impacts strategic communication at various levels: Crisis Management: Organizations with high credibility (e.g., Johnson & Johnson during the Tylenol crisis) tend to recover more quickly due to trusted messaging. Digital Influence: Micro-influencers tend to thrive due to their niche expertise and authenticity, often outperforming traditional celebrities in targeted campaigns. Misinformation Mitigation: Credible sources serve as a defense against misinformation, as demonstrated by public health campaigns during COVID-19.

Based on the contextual and cultural Nuances, source credibility has 'cultural variability': In hierarchical cultures (e.g., East Asia), authority-based credibility is favored, while egalitarian cultures (e.g., Scandinavia) prioritize earned trust. Considering challenges and ethical Considerations it has 'credibility erosion': Scandals (e.g., Volkswagen's emissions fraud) can diminish trust, necessitating long-term reputation repair. Again, 'ethical dilemmas': Misuse of credibility for manipulative purposes (e.g., exploitative marketing) underscores the need for ethical guidelines.

Some critical analyses and debates about source credibility are on trustworthiness vs. expertise: This distinction is context-dependent; for medical advice, expertise is prioritized, while political messaging often hinges more on trustworthiness (Zheng, 2023). Strategic communication denotes a specialized methodology for the dissemination and reception of information. It encompasses the effective transmission of targeted messages through appropriate channels to the pertinent audience at the opportune moment. The ensuing feedback from this process is instrumental in sustaining alignment with organizational objectives (Zerfass et al., 2020).

Strategic communications function as structured blueprints for the dissemination of information about specific issues, events, situations, or audiences. Strategic communication epitomizes a calculated, premeditated, and sustained initiative undertaken by organizations to fortify their standing and mitigate discord, ultimately fostering an exceptional milieu for the marketing of the organization's goals. Strategic communication is fundamentally about

the proficient provision of information to clients, employees, the public, and other stakeholders to realize the company's aims and objectives (Hallahan et al., 2007).

The fundamental function of strategic communication in times of crisis is to stabilize and propel the organization forward through the cultivation of confidence, the establishment of trust, and the active engagement of stakeholders. Strategic communication management, also known as strategic public relations and corporate communication, requires source credibility for effective efficacy. Strategic communication entails the deliberate and coordinated utilization of messaging to attain predetermined objectives. This process encompasses the formulation, generation, dissemination, and assessment of messages that adhere to an organization's vision, mission, values, and goals (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). The foundation of effective strategic communication begins with a credible source, fosters positive messaging behavior, and supports organizational objectives, goals, reputation, and stakeholder relationships.

The concepts of source credibility and strategic communication play a pivotal role in effective communication, persuasion, and influence. The sources of communication have a direct impact on stakeholders' perception of corporate reputation. The interplay between source credibility and strategic communication can be summarized as follows. Credible sources significantly enhance the effectiveness of strategic communication. 2. Strategic communication can establish and maintain source credibility. 3. Credible sources have the potential to enhance the impact of strategic communication endeavors. 4. Effective strategic communication can effectively mitigate potential credibility issues.

However, some of the major factors influencing source credibility are (1) Authority: This entails the expertise of the source or organization, not forgetting the qualifications and experience of the message source. (2) Accuracy: This comprises the factual correctness of the information and the consistency with other reputable sources. (3) Bias: This encompasses the presence of any potential biases or conflicts of interest in the information source and possibly the objectivity in presenting information. (4) Reputation: This refers to the historical reliability of the source and its recognition by the public, stakeholders, or industry leaders. (5) Transparency: It refers to the clarity of sources of information, including the availability of supporting evidence or data. It could also entail confidence in demonstrating professionalism in message delivery. (6) Personal connection: This refers to sources' competence in relatability and stakeholders' control. (7) Clarity and Consistency: Clear, well-structured messages with consistent information enhance credibility. (7) Citations and References: Credible sources often cite other reputable sources, which adds to their trustworthiness. (8) Contextual Factors: Medium of Communication: The platform (social media, traditional media, etc.) can influence perceived credibility. (9) Audience Characteristics: Individual biases, prior knowledge, and attitudes affect perceived source credibility. (10) A credible source of message or information provides (up-to-date) current information on the chosen subject of deliberation. (11) Unbiased analysis and Impartial examination of the subject matter (i.e. the author considers multiple perspectives on the issue).

However, in responding to risk or crises, effective crisis response strategies are essential for managing and mitigating crises. The effectiveness of managing a crisis or infodemic situation can be strengthened using credible sources (Dominic et al., 2021).

It is vital to note that crisis response has key strategies such as Preparation: The organizations develop a crisis communication plan, and conduct regular training and simulations. Rapid Response: Quickly acknowledge the crisis and provide timely updates to stakeholders. Clear Messaging: This entails using clear and concise language, and addressing the audience's concerns directly. Transparency: It is undoubtedly vital that crisis management share accurate information openly, admit mistakes, and correct misinformation. Engagement: A good source of crisis or risk response should listen to stakeholders and respond to their needs- rebuilding and accommodative style. Again, utilize social media and other platforms for timely interaction. Monitoring: Crisis and risk managers need to track public sentiment and media coverage, and adjust strategies based on feedback and evolving situations. Post-Crisis Evaluation: At this point, the crisis, risk managers should assess the effectiveness of the response strategies and identify lessons learned for future crises. This is important because, no organization is immune to crisis, risk, and infodemic situations.

However, understanding source credibility and implementing (crisis management model) effective crisis response strategies are vital for organizations, the public, and individuals facing crises. By emphasizing authority, accuracy, and transparency in communication, along with preparedness and rapid response, one can navigate crises more effectively, protect reputation, and maintain trust with stakeholders (Pornpitakpan, 2004; Tkalac et al., 2019).

A crisis management model necessitates the inclusion of source credibility for its efficacy. Unfortunately, this concept has not been thoroughly examined in the context of crisis/risk communication. Regardless of the crisis model implemented, an incredible, unreliable, and unconvincing information source weakens the model's effectiveness and may lead to misconceptions in strategy development.

A crisis management model is a conceptual framework for all facets of crisis preparedness, prevention, response, and recovery. By applying a model to events, crisis managers, gain contextual understanding and can better apply best practices.

Consequently, "crisis management theory" and "crisis management model" are often used interchangeably. It is important to note, that a crisis management model primarily concerns the representation of the structure or application of crisis management. Crisis management theory deals with more abstract concepts. Crisis management theory involves developing a plan to address sudden events that may disrupt an organization and impact its employees and operations. They are formulated to explain, predict, and understand phenomena, often challenging and extending existing knowledge within critical assumptions. The (table 1) below outlines a crisis management model 3-7.

Crisis management theory refers to the academic frameworks, principles, and conceptual explanations that describe why crises occur, how they develop, and the dynamics of effective crisis response. It is rooted in research and aims to explain causal relationships, behaviors, and outcomes associated with crises. On the other hand, a crisis management model is a practical framework that outlines the steps, processes, or phases for managing crises. It is prescriptive and action-oriented, serving as a roadmap for implementation.

In summary, crisis management theory focuses on understanding crises from an academic perspective, while crisis management models provide structured processes for effectively managing crises. Both are essential: theories help prevent the reinvention of solutions, while models ensure preparedness and responsiveness in real-world situations

Table 1
Key Differences

Aspect	Crisis Management Theory	Crisis Management Model
Focus	Explains *why* crises happen and how they are resolved	Outlines *how* to manage crises step-by-step
Nature	Conceptual, analytical, and research-based	Practical, procedural, and applied
Function	Informs understanding and research questions	Guides implementation and decision-making
Examples	SCCT, Chaos Theory, Image Repair Theory	4Rs Model, PPRR Model, Mitroff's Five-Stage Model
Output	Insights into causality, behavior, and communication	Checklists, timelines, communication protocols

Interplay Between Theory and Model
The few important ways of making distinctions are (1) For Researchers: Theories drive academic inquiry and hypothesis testing. (2) For Practitioners: Models provide executable plans to manage crises. (3) For Organizations: Combining both ensures that strategies are evidence-based (theory) and actionable (model). Theories inform models: For example, Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) underpins the messaging strategies recommended in many crisis communication models.

Models operationalize theories: A model may translate theoretical principles, such as stakeholder trust, into actionable steps like transparency protocols.

Table 2
Crisis Communication Management Model

Table 1 crisis management model

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Model Crisis Models						
Coombs (1999)	Fink (1986)	Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt (1995)	Mitroff (1994)	Burnett (1998)	Relational Model Jaques (2007)	Albert Robert (1991)
3-stage	4-stage	4-stage	5-stage	6-steps	4-cluster	7-model
Pre-crisis	Prodromal	Issues management	Signal detection	IDENTIFICATION goal formation	Crisis preparedness	Plan and conduct a thorou biopsychosocial and lthalit imminent danger assessme
Crisis	Acute	Planning-prevention	Probing, prevention	IDENTIFICATION environmental anlysis	Crisis prevention	Make psychological contact rapidly establish the collaborative relatrionshi
Post-crisis	Chronic	Crisis	Containment	CONFRONTATION strategy formulation	Crisis event management	Identify the major problen including crisis precipitan
	Resolution	Post-crisis	Recovery	CONFRONTATION strategy evaluation	Post-crisis management	Encourage an exploration feelings and emotions
			Learning	RECONFIGURATION srategy implementation		Generate and explore alternatives and new copii strategies
				RECONFIGURATION srategy control		Restore functioning throug implementation of an actio plan
						Plan follow-up and booste sessions

Derived from the Literature

One critical element that has been consistently overlooked in these models is the concept of response source credibility (RSC). It is imperative to address this deficiency to enhance the effectiveness of crisis and strategic communication. Consequently, RSC should be meticulously considered in the management of crisis communications and corporate messaging.

Most importantly, source credibility is a variable in communication research. In the realm of crisis communication, source credibility plays a crucial role and is perceived as a variable. It represents an objective judgment about the source of strategic crisis response rather than a subjective characteristic. Despite extensive research over the years, defining this concept has posed significant challenges. According to Hovland et al. (1953), credibility is a blend of the source's "expertness," which refers to the perceived competence in making valid assertions, and "trustworthiness," which pertains to the level of trustworthiness the audience places in the source to convey the most valid information. According to Dominic et al. (2024) in crisis research, source credibility is more about trustworthiness than expertness.

In times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, those seeking strategic information are faced with a wide variety of sources, which can make navigating the information landscape

more difficult (Metzger et al., 2003). This, in turn, can impact how information is received and how reputations are formed (Dominic et al., 2023). According to studies, there is a tendency to mix up source credibility as an independent variable with the outcome it affects. For example, some researchers state that "the more credibility the communicator is perceived to have, the more likely the receiver is to accept the information" (Berlo et al., 1969: 562). However, other scholars view source credibility as a mediating variable that strengthens the relationships between the exogenous and endogenous constructs (Alsheikh et al., 2021; Shin et al., 2011; Dominion et al., 2022).

Again, the question of why source credibility comes to mind. It is essential to effectively manage misinformation and communication behaviors to optimize message receptivity. When individuals are evaluating the credibility of encountered information, particularly in online environments, they must discern the source of the information. Various scholarly investigations juxtapose sources emanating from traditional or established media outlets with those originating from digitally native platforms (Dominic et al., 2023). Source credibility enhances information processing, sufficiency, acceptability, compliance, believability, and behavioral intentions to act on a provided message (Nan, 2013).

The assessment of source credibility encompasses two perceptual dimensions, indicating that while source credibility may be associated with message accuracy and believability, they are distinct yet interrelated constructs. Other scholars have similarly distinguished between information accuracy and perceived credibility, asserting that credibility is a matter of perception rather than a direct measure of information accuracy (Metzger et al., 2015; Hocevar et al., 2017). Dominic et al., (2024) argued that source credibility is a reliable and established outlet or channel with a capacity to generate trust, confidence, sureness, and build reputation among stakeholders.

Although both accuracy and credibility are pivotal in crisis and risk messaging, it is imperative to recognize that credibility research revolves around the perceptions of believability, shaped by beliefs regarding source trustworthiness. These perceptions may or may not align with the factual accuracy of the conveyed messages (Lin et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2022). Yet, trustworthiness in response or message source strengthens the relationships between the information itself and information intention acceptance (IIC).

The consideration of source credibility whether it is an organization or an individual spokesperson, holds significant importance in the dissemination of health risk messages or crisis risk information to the general public. In addition to presenting compelling evidence, the trustworthiness of the communicator plays a pivotal role in assisting individuals in navigating ambiguous and potentially perplexing situations related to crisis risk assessments and any requisite measures they may need to undertake (Zakaria et al., 2014; Spence et al., 2020).

Narrowing it to crisis communication, health risk information, Para-crisis information, political information, organizational communication, online communication, etc., source credibility can significantly influence public perceptions of the message, acceptance of the message, and increase the effectiveness of the message penetration and efficacy of the information. This concept should be considered indispensable in gaining public trust and maintaining

reputation (Lu et al., 2024). The concept of information source credibility has consistently demonstrated a significant and more robust impact across various domains including instruction, knowledge, intelligence, risk response, and the perceptions of both the source and the receiver's intention and behaviors. Source credibility reinforces message persuasion and can resolve or disentangle the problem of misinformation or doubt that might arise in the topic being discussed (Dominic et al., 2023).

Furthermore, let's consider the impact of source credibility on the infodemic. An infodemic refers to the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, particularly in the context of health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Source credibility plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception, behavior, and response during such events (Rathore & Farooq, 2020). Some of the key impacts of source credibility on infodemic are highlighted: (first) Public Trust in Information which entails Credible Sources: Information from reputable health organizations and experts is more likely to be trusted by the public, and Distrust in Non-Credible Sources: Misinformation from unreliable sources can lead to skepticism and confusion, undermining the trust in accurate information.

The second is Behavioral Responses which entails Adherence to Guidelines: Individuals are more likely to follow health guidelines and recommendations from credible sources than unreliable sources, and Resistance to Misinformation: Credible information can mitigate the effects of false claims, prompting individuals to question dubious content.

Thirdly is the spread of misinformation which entails a Viral Nature: Information from non-credible sources can spread rapidly through social media, leading to widespread misconceptions, Echo Chambers: Non-credible sources often reinforce existing biases, creating echo chambers (an environment that validates a limited set of ideas or information) that perpetuate false narratives.

Fourthly is public health Outcomes which talk about Informed Decision-Making: Credible information enables better public health decisions, reducing the spread of disease, and Crisis Management: Authorities can effectively manage crises when the public trusts the information being disseminated. The impact of source credibility on the infodemic is profound. Enhancing the credibility of information sources can significantly reduce the spread of misinformation, improve public trust, and lead to better health outcomes. Addressing the challenges posed by the infodemic requires a concerted effort to promote credible information and educate the public on discerning reliable sources. Trustworthy sources have been shown to decrease the public's perception of risk and foster more positive perceptions among stakeholders (Patwa et al., 2021).

There are philosophical rationales for source credibility. It is imperative to utilize credible sources when furnishing solution information, as this enhances the persuasiveness of our argument and fosters trust with our audience. The quality of information is contingent upon the credibility of its source, which significantly influences public reception and acceptance of messages as truthful and reliable. The credibility of a message's source is paramount, serving as a reflection of the trustworthiness of the individual or group responsible for disseminating the information on a given subject (Kang & Namkung, 2019). The concept of source credibility holds substantial significance within the field of communication studies, exerting a profound

influence on the dissemination, reception, and interpretation of information, particularly in today's media-saturated landscape.

Consequently, source credibility in communication studies is very significant. (1) It influences Persuasion: Credible sources wield a heightened capacity to persuade audiences, thus constituting indispensable assets in domains such as advertising, public relations, and political communication. (2) Misinformation Mitigation: Profound comprehension of source credibility serves as a potent tool in combatting the proliferation of misinformation and counterfeit news. (3) Audience Engagement: Credible sources foster heightened audience engagement and trust, thereby engendering more efficacious communication outcomes.

In the same light, source credibility has implications for communication professionals. (1) Strategic Messaging: A profound understanding of source credibility empowers communication professionals to artfully craft messages that resonate with their target audience. (2) Crisis Communication: During periods of crisis, credible sources assume a pivotal role in disseminating accurate information and upholding public trust. (3) Media Literacy: Professionals are tasked with the duty of promoting media literacy to facilitate audiences, in critically evaluating sources.

Furthermore, within the realm of communication studies, source credibility profoundly shapes the conveyance and reception of information. By comprehending the implications for communication practices, professionals can augment their efficacy across diverse contexts. As the media landscape continues to undergo evolution, the ascendancy of source credibility underscores the imperative for both communicators and audiences to exercise discernment in their assessments.

In communication research, source credibility is often treated as a critical variable that influences various outcomes, such as audience perception, response compliance, message acceptance, and behavioral intentions. Fig1. Explain some areas where source credibility is applicable to maintain sustainable communication value and efficacy. These bailiwicks can strengthen their communication effectiveness and acceptability using credible sources, thus, maintaining public relationships and their reputation (Dominic et al, 2023).

Individuals are more susceptible to persuasion when the information originates from a credible source. For researchers, the credibility of each published paper is intrinsically linked to the reputation of the journal in which it appears. If a journal lacks credibility in terms of quality and acceptability, it can significantly diminish the impact and value of the paper, thereby undermining its contribution to knowledge. This underscores the critical importance of source credibility in contemporary society.

Credibility holds significant importance for business professionals, as unreliable data can lead internal and external stakeholders to question the legitimacy of decisions and resort to personal opinions rather than factual information. The credibility of a source serves as a critical indicator of information quality and should be a guarantee of information acceptability (Moore, 2022). Key considerations encompass: Currency (timeliness of the information and website updates relevant to the topic), Reliability (nature of information, balance, provision of references or sources), Authority (credentials of the creator or author, background

information, reputation of the publisher or sponsor, and any vested interests), and Purpose (distinction between fact and opinion, presence of bias or agenda, and transparency regarding sales motives). Effective public relations-driven strategic communication strategic communication necessitates a foundation of source credibility for optimal impact.

Fig1

Coined from existing literature
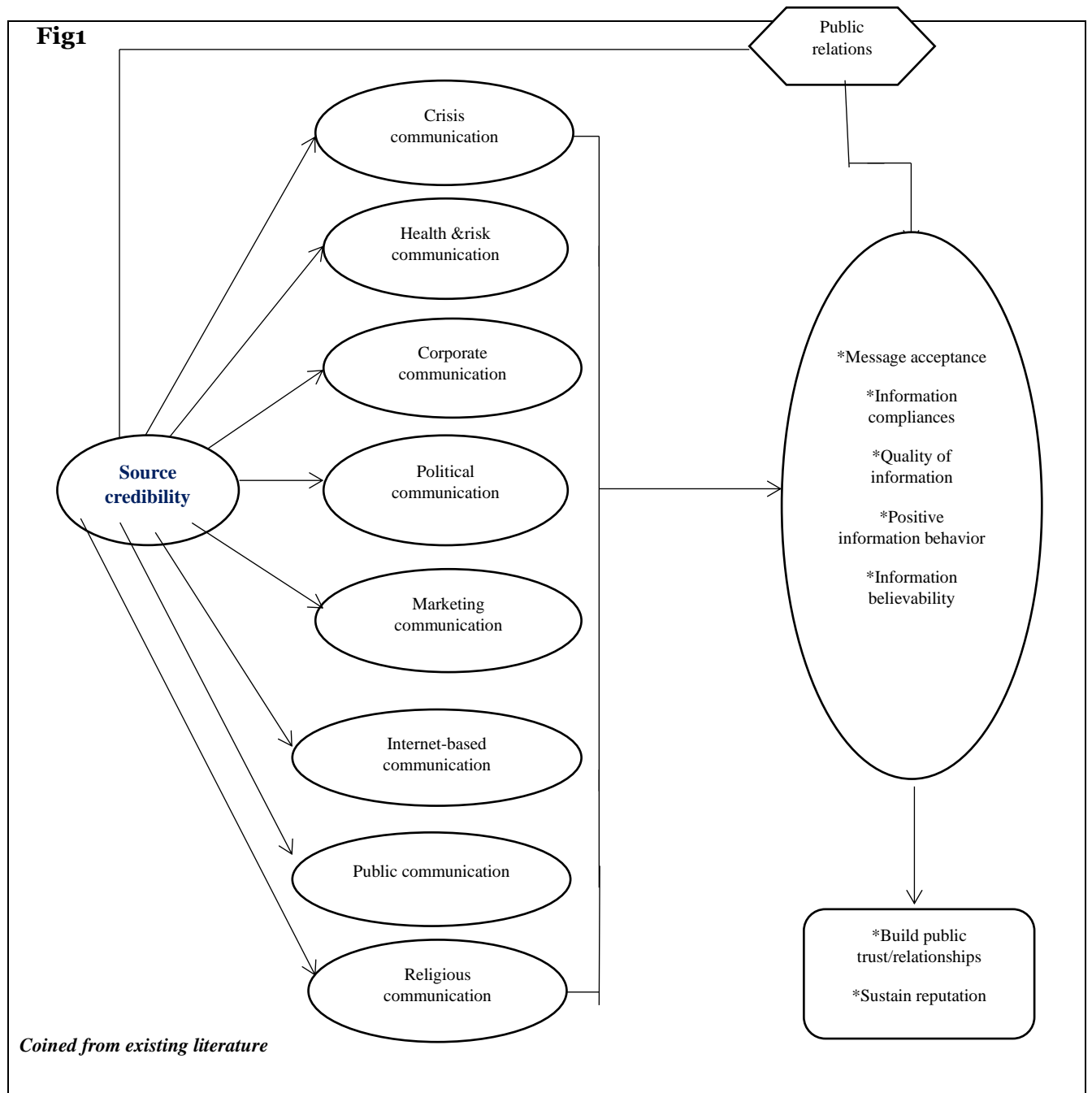
Organizations such as schools, universities, transportation systems, chemical plants, and critical infrastructure like power, water, and communications are susceptible to crises and negative situations. The rapid pace of business, technological advancements, and globalization have compelled companies to more frequently deal with new and unexpected crises, such as workplace violence or global pandemics. This highlights the importance of source credibility in managing the overwhelming amount of information accompanying these crises.

Source credibility is a vital construct in today's research focus. The efficacy and credibility of a source are contingent upon how the message is conveyed (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Source credibility, an essential variable, permeates diverse disciplines, as depicted in Figure 1 (Dominic et al., 2023). It assumes heightened significance in research about the acceptance of information and the persuasive impact of messages. For example, this construct is notably absent in the realm of political communication, thus engendering public mistrust and diminishing message effectiveness (Li, 2015).

In the contemporary landscape of global politics, the scarcity and inadequacy of source credibility have significantly eroded citizens' confidence in governmental institutions (Flanagin & Metzger, 2017). Notably, in the United States trust in the government plummeted from 77% in the 1960s to 54% in 2001 and subsequently declined to 17% in 2019 (Dominic et al., 2023). This phenomenon is not confined to the United States, as similar trends have been observed in Asia and Africa (Marshall, 2013). The reliability of political source credibility stands as a cornerstone of democratic legitimacy. Within the European Union, trust levels decreased from 60% in 2004 to 36% in 2015.

The recent erosion of public confidence in governmental entities is attributed to the dearth of credible political sources (Foster & Frieden, 2017). The scientific investigation of this construct (source credibility) will change the narrative of communication reception behaviors among the public in various fields of study.

The importance of source credibility in research cannot be overemphasized. These include (1) Persuasion: Research indicates that higher source credibility leads to greater persuasive effects on audiences (Tormala, Briñol, & Petty, 2006). (2) Message Processing: Audiences are more likely to engage in systematic processing of messages from credible sources (Hocevar, Metzger, & Flanagin, 2017). (3) Behavioral Intentions: Credible sources can influence behavioral intentions, such as purchasing decisions or adopting health practices (Visentin et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2022). (4) Message compliance: source credibility can affect message compliance and believability (Pornpitakpan, 2004). (5) Message validation: The credibility of the information source significantly influences the perception and validation of critical information, particularly in scenarios involving at-risk responses (Wertgen, Richter & Rouet, 2021). This underscores the crucial role of source credibility in the validation processes (Wertgen & Richter, 2020). (6) Message quality: The credibility of a source can significantly influence the quality of information and foster trust among the public, particularly during the dissemination of critical information (Kang & Namkung, 2019).

still, in research, the operationalization of source credibility entails (1) Measurement Tools: Rating Scales: Surveys often use Likert scales to assess perceived expertise and trustworthiness (Whitehead, 1968; Newell & Goldsmith, 2001), and Content Analysis: Analyzing the characteristics of sources (e.g., qualifications, affiliations) in media content (Wong et al., 2020).

Considering methodological considerations for source credibility, one emphasizes the following Experimental Designs: Researchers often use experiments to manipulate source credibility and observe effects on message acceptance (Ecker & Antonio, 2021). Surveys: Cross-sectional surveys can assess how source credibility correlates with audience attitudes

and behaviors (Erku et al., 2021; Padhye & Hastak, 2024). Longitudinal Studies: Examining changes in perceptions of source credibility over time, especially in evolving media landscapes (Erku et al., 2021).

Source credibility has implications for communication research. Examples are Media Literacy: Understanding source credibility can inform media literacy programs aimed at helping audiences critically evaluate information. Crisis Communication: Research on source credibility can enhance strategies for effective communication during crises, where trust is paramount. Public Relations: Insights into source credibility can guide PR professionals in building and maintaining trust with audiences

Consequently, source credibility is a pivotal variable in communication research, influencing how messages are perceived and received by the audience. Thus, by understanding its measurement and implications, researchers can gain valuable insights into effective communication strategies across various contexts. As the landscape of information continues to evolve, the study of source credibility remains essential for fostering informed and engaged audiences.

Establishing (SC) trust in the media is another context to be investigated. The emergence of the Internet has brought about a fundamental shift in the nature and function of sources. Previously, sources relied on being referenced by traditional media gatekeepers, such as politicians or citizens, whereas they can now directly engage with the public. The accessibility of establishing a website or social media presence has democratized the role of sources, leading to a significantly broader and more diverse array of information outlets. Consequently, individuals are confronted with a more intricate information landscape, potentially rendering it more challenging to navigate (Metzger et al., 2003). This, in turn, may give rise to the misrepresentation of information. Social media source credibility management (SMSCM) is a crucial component of crisis management.

The dissemination of misinformation via social media platforms exerts a substantial influence on public perceptions of news credibility. Establishing source credibility emerges as an essential mechanism for traditional media to reestablish trust within the contemporary social media landscape and to cultivate positive compliance with information behaviors (Pornpitakpan, 2004; Dominic et al., 2024). The existence of source credibility contributes to the establishment of media credibility and accuracy. Source credibility plays a significant role in validating messages during social media, advertising, marketing, and risk communication. The credibility of the information source is associated with a greater propensity for positive communicative attitudes.

Methodology
A narrative literature review is a scholarly synthesis that summarizes, interprets and critically evaluates existing research on a specific topic. Unlike systematic reviews or meta-analyses, which adhere to strict methodological protocols to minimize bias, narrative reviews are more flexible. They offer a qualitative, thematic exploration of the literature. Narrative reviews are commonly used to provide context, identify trends, or highlight gaps in knowledge, making them prevalent in fields such as social sciences, humanities, and applied disciplines. A narrative or traditional literature review entails a comprehensive, impartial analysis of the

existing knowledge about a specific subject (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Narrative reviews offer distinct advantages, characterized by flexibility. Its primary function is to identify and summarize previously published works, playing a crucial role in establishing a theoretical framework and providing contextualization for the research and practicality, resulting in a coherent and relevant synthesis of diverse literature. They are particularly beneficial for educational purposes, offering a broad overview of an area of study (Rother, 2007). A narrative literature review holds significant value and is widely accepted in the social sciences (Baumeister & Leary, 1997).

Furthermore, these reviews are instrumental in guiding future research endeavors by interpreting the literature, pinpointing gaps in the literature, highlighting future research, and critically assessing existing research. This review underscores the limited exploration of the concept of source credibility, particularly in the domains of crisis communication, political communication, and health risk communication. The findings revealed that source credibility plays a significant role in shaping positive message behavior. This concept remains underexplored in strategic communications.

Findings
Research shows that source credibility is essential for effective strategic communication. Below is a summary of key findings organized by themes in classic and contemporary studies.

Theoretical Foundations of Source Credibility
Hovland's Source Credibility Model
Carl Hovland's Yale Attitude Change Approach (1953) identified three components of source credibility: expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill. He established that credible sources—those perceived as knowledgeable, trustworthy, and acting in the audience's best interest—are more persuasive. This triad remains foundational in communication studies.
Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)
According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986), source credibility serves as a peripheral cue in low-involvement contexts, influencing message acceptance when audiences lack the motivation or capacity to process information deeply.

Crisis Communication and Reputation Management
Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)
Coombs (2007) demonstrated that organizations with high credibility experience less reputational damage during crises. Transparent communication from credible sources helps reduce blame attribution.
Image Repair Theory
Benoit (1997) argued that in post-crisis communication, trustworthiness—such as demonstrating honesty—is often more crucial than expertise for restoring public confidence.

Digital and Social Media Contexts
Influencer Credibility
Freberg et al. (2011) found that micro-influencers, who possess niche expertise, are perceived as more credible than celebrities in targeted campaigns, resulting in higher engagement.
Misinformation Combat

Pennycook and Rand (2021) showed that messages from credible institutions (e.g., the CDC, WHO) are more effective in correcting misinformation, especially when audiences lack prior knowledge.

Health and Science Communication
COVID-19 Pandemic
A study by Austin et al. (2021) found that public compliance with health guidelines correlated strongly with trust in medical experts (e.g., Dr. Fauci) rather than political figures.
Vaccine Hesitancy
Larson et al. (2018) identified trust in healthcare providers and scientists as the strongest predictor of vaccine acceptance, outweighing demographic factors.

Cultural and Contextual Nuances
High- vs. Low-Context Cultures
Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) observed that hierarchical cultures (e.g., Japan) prioritize institutional authority, while egalitarian cultures (e.g., the U.S.) place greater value on transparency and rapport.

Internal Communication
Men (2014) found that employees perceive leaders as credible when they demonstrate both competence and empathy, which fosters alignment with organizational goals.

Ethical and Strategic Implications
Credibility Erosion
Schleuder et al. (2021) indicated that organizations that lose credibility (such as Facebook during the Cambridge Analytica scandal) face long-term skepticism and may require years of consistent efforts to rebuild trust.

Ethical Persuasion
Johansen and Nielsen (2021) caution that over-relying on credibility as a persuasive tool risks manipulation, emphasizing the need to align practices with ethical frameworks like the TARES test (Truthfulness, Authenticity, Respect, Equity, Social Responsibility).

In conclusion, the scholarly consensus reveals that source credibility is multidimensional, with expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill being integral components. The impact of credibility is context-dependent, varying across cultures, types of crises, and media platforms. Furthermore, even credible sources may falter if their messaging is inconsistent or unethical. Finally, while digital media democratizes credibility, it also poses challenges that can accelerate credibility erosion.

The authors conducted a systematic literature (limited to Scopus database only) review from 2019 to 2024, focusing on keywords such as source credibility, crisis response strategies, strategic communication, and reputation. The findings indicated that source credibility was not extensively explored across various contexts during this period. As a result, there is a need to investigate the role of source credibility in strategic communication and reputation management more thoroughly. The results are below:
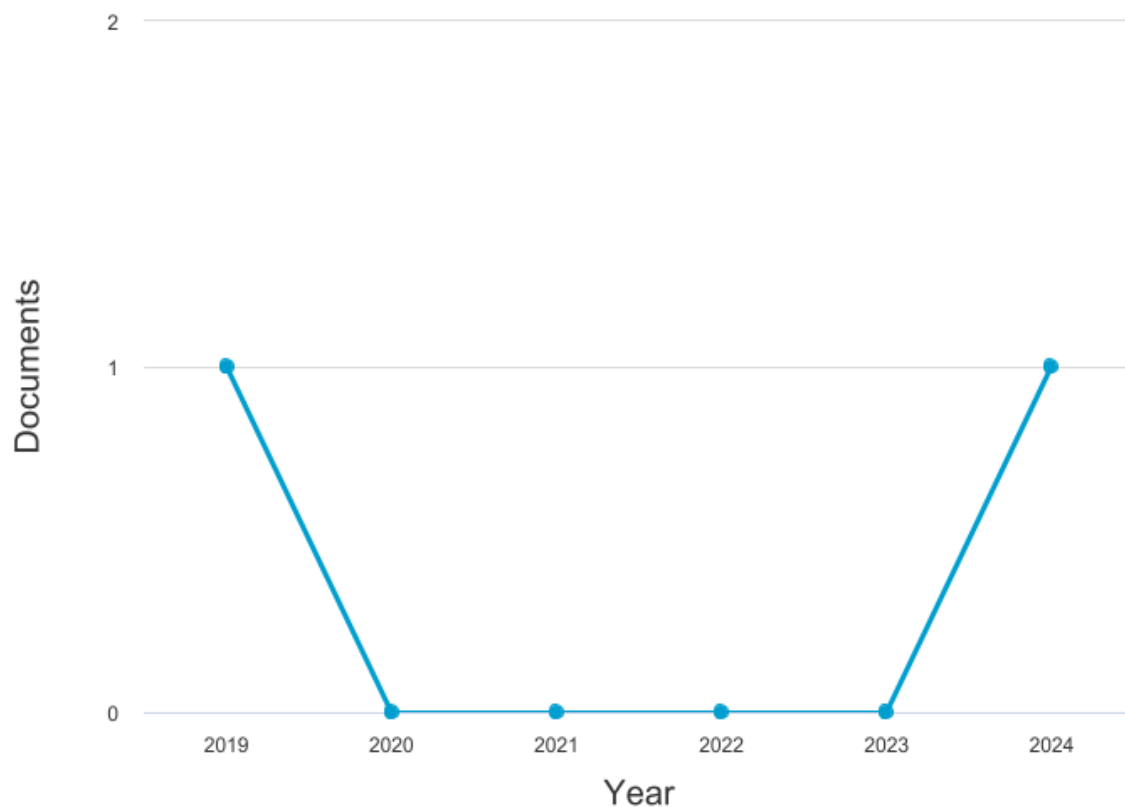
In recent years, the study of source credibility in crisis and strategic communication has seen a significant increase from 2020 to 2023. One reason for this trend could be the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, there was a surge of information, misinformation, and conflicting messages from various sources, including governments, health organizations, media outlets, and social media. As a result, researchers began to focus more on how these sources were perceived in terms of credibility and how that perception affected public behavior. Another contributing factor is the rise of social media and the spread of fake news, which became particularly problematic during the pandemic. Prior to 2020, misinformation was already a concern, but it intensified during this time. Additionally, political polarization in many countries led to growing distrust in institutions. For example, in the United States, there were heated debates regarding election integrity and pandemic measures.

Technological advancements, such as AI, may also play a role in this phenomenon. Beyond the pandemic, other crises emerged during this period, including climate change-related disasters, political unrest (such as the Capitol riot in 2021), and the outbreak of the Ukraine war in 2022. Public health campaigns, particularly vaccine rollouts, heavily relied on public trust, prompting studies to investigate how the credibility of different sources (such as doctors compared to celebrities) influenced vaccine uptake.

Furthermore, organizations and governments may have invested more resources into research on effective communication strategies after 2020. Grants related to pandemic response could have included aspects of communication, contributing to the rise in studies in this area. Here's a clearer list of possible factors:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying infodemic.
2. The proliferation of misinformation on social media.
3. Political polarization and a growing distrust in institutions.
4. The rise of AI which complicates the assessment of credibility.
5. Multiple concurrent global crises that require effective communication.
6. The role of influencers and alternative information sources.
7. Challenges in public health communication, particularly regarding vaccination.
8. Academic and funding priorities driven by real-world needs.
9. Psychological factors that influence crisis information processing.
10. Changes in communication technologies and platforms.

The convergence of a global health crisis, technological disruption, and socio-political turbulence created a "perfect storm" that highlighted the significance of source credibility. Organizations and researchers prioritized the need to establish trust in an era characterized by skepticism, rapid information dissemination, and fragmented media landscapes, resulting in a substantial increase in research during this time. This study includes contributions from Universiti Putra Malaysia, along with several other countries.

Documents by affiliation
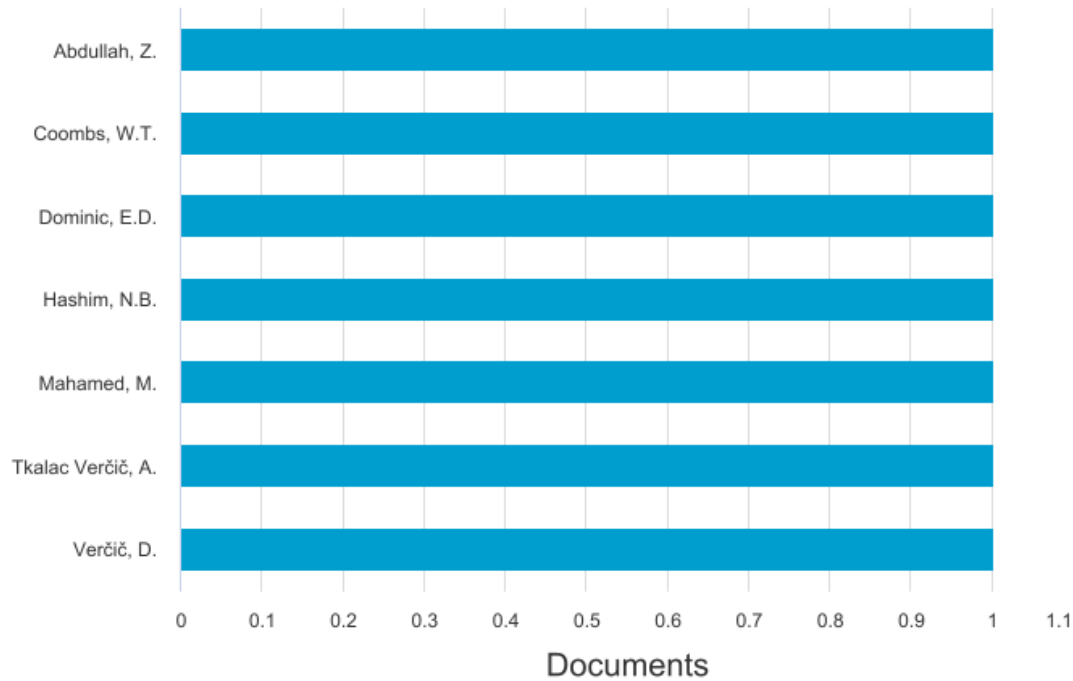Compare the document counts for up to 15 affiliations.
Scopus
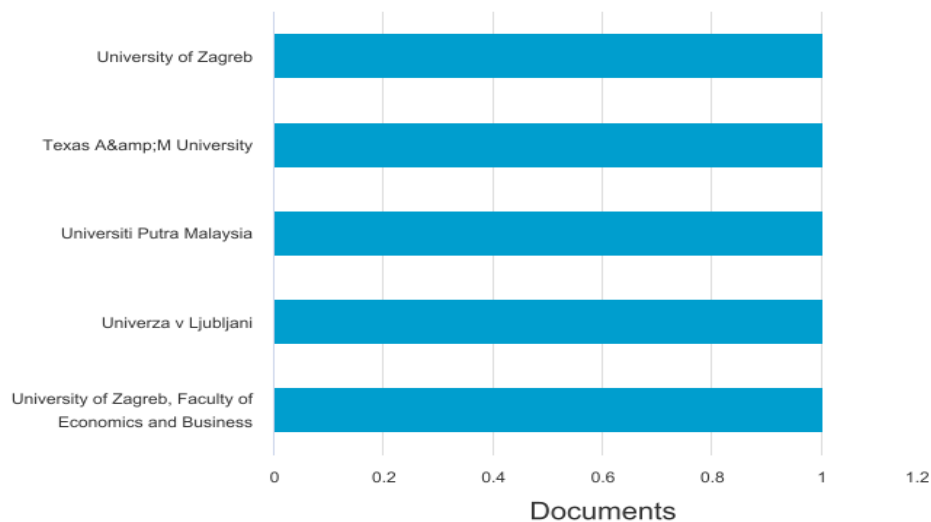
Documents by author

Compare the document counts for up to 15 authors.

Documents by country or territory

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.
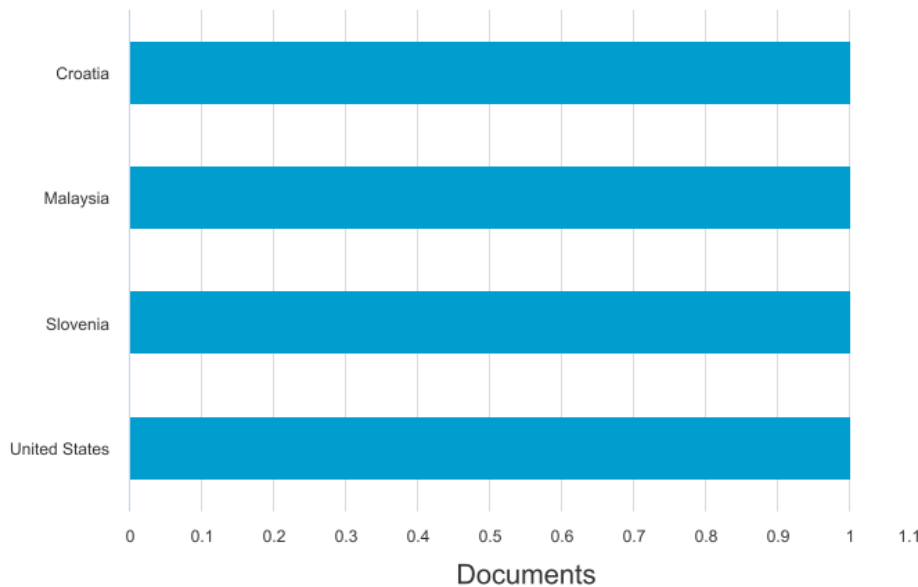
Future Directive

The digital era has facilitated the entry of numerous information sources into the information ecosystem, leading recipients to encounter many unfamiliar sources. This phenomenon has

given rise to information crises and infodemic. Given the intricate nature of the digital information space, scholars are now directing heightened attention toward source credibility. Comprehending source credibility as a variable necessitates addressing the absence of a widely accepted conceptualization and measurement. Furthermore, a more constructive approach to understanding source credibility entails viewing it as a research topic concerned with the influence of sources on communicative outcomes. Subsequent scholars should investigate the impact of source credibility on information acceptance across various domains, including crisis management, health risk communication, government or political information, news or media messages, and other information dissemination channels. Again, qualitative and quantitative studies should be conducted to further advance this concept across various fields of study. Considering information source credibility (ISC) in diverse contexts is essential for upholding trust and ensuring consistent results.

Conclusion

This article explores the importance of source credibility in maintaining trust and efficacy in communicating solutions to the public. It discusses examples of how credibility impacts the public's perception of news sources, crisis responses, health risk information, marketing information, and organizational communication and the potential consequences of misinformation. Additionally, it also delves into strategies for news organizations to establish and maintain credibility with their audiences. Source credibility is a variable that impacts information processing and positive compliance. The credibility of the information source is positively associated with the development of favorable attitudes and enhanced information quality, which results in message acceptance.

To avoid infodemic, information sources ought to be credible to attract believability and message acceptability. This is more applicable to crisis communication and health risk communication. In corporate communication and public relations, source credibility increases public trust and sustains reputation. In communications studies, information lacking a credible source results in the proliferation of diverse, often unsubstantiated enlightenment or instruction about a crisis, controversy, or event. This information disseminates rapidly and uncontrollably, posing significant challenges in effectively managing the narrative.

The article highlights the significance of source credibility in communications studies. Source credibility is a potent form of social influence. People are more inclined to trust and believe information from credible sources than less credible ones. The lack of this variable has led to an infodemic and the spread of misleading messages in many organizations, resulting in crises, public distrust, and negative stakeholders' perceptions. Effective crisis management and strategic communication happen when an organization uses skillful planning and a proactive response to prevent a crisis altogether, minimize its impact and duration, or even turn it into an opportunity. Thus attracting trust, message positive behavior, and strengthening stakeholder relationships via credible sources.

The authors proposed a crisis management model that emphasizes the importance of trustworthiness/source credibility. The model includes the following key components: (SE5CP)

1. Selection of Credible Sources
2. Early Warning Signals
3. Crisis Preparedness
4. Crisis Proactive Prevention
5. Crisis Strategic Management
6. Crisis Evaluation and Recovery
7. Crisis Resolution and Recovery
8. Perception of Crisis Lessons

No organization is free from the possibility of a crisis (Chang & Rim, 2024). These components work together to manage and learn from crises effectively. Effective crisis management models and response strategies are essential for establishing trustworthiness among relevant stakeholders. The primary objective is to cultivate public trust, facilitate the acceptance of messages, sustain reputation, and uphold robust public relationships (Dominic, Mahamed, Maledo, Erica, & Obaro, 2024).

Credible information sources are essential in crisis management, health communication, corporate communication, and public relations because they significantly influence trust, decision-making, and public perception. For examples:

1. Crisis Management
Prevents Misinformation: During a crisis, such as a natural disaster or security threat, false or unreliable information can lead to panic, confusion, and poor decision-making.
Builds Public Trust: Authorities must provide clear, accurate, and timely updates to maintain credibility and ensure public safety.
Supports Effective Response: Emergency responders, governments, and businesses depend on credible sources to coordinate their responses and allocate resources efficiently.
2. Health Information
Ensures Public Safety: Inaccurate health information, such as fake cures or misleading vaccine data, can result in harmful choices.
Encourages Compliance with Guidelines: People are more likely to follow medical advice from trusted experts, like the WHO or CDC.
Reduces Misinformation Spread: False health claims can spread rapidly, making it crucial to rely on verified sources to counteract these myths.
3. Corporate Communication
Protects Brand Reputation: Misleading statements or unreliable sources can damage a company's credibility, affecting stock prices and consumer trust.
Maintains Stakeholder Confidence: Investors, employees, and customers rely on transparent, accurate communications during company developments or crises.
Supports Crisis Recovery: A company that consistently shares truthful information can recover from crises more quickly and achieve long-term success.
4. Public Relations (PR)
Influences Public Perception: A PR campaign based on credible sources is more persuasive and effective in shaping public opinion.
Prevents Backlash and Legal Risks: Spreading false or misleading information can lead to lawsuits, damaged credibility, and strained relationships.
Strengthens Media Relations: Journalists and media outlets prefer working with credible sources, resulting in better coverage and increased trust. By prioritizing credible information,

organizations can enhance trust, improve decision-making, and foster a positive public perception across various fields.

5. Political Communication

Builds Public Trust: Politicians, governments, and media must rely on credible sources to maintain trust and legitimacy.

Prevents Misinformation and Manipulation: False political information can mislead voters, create instability, and damage democracy.

Shapes Public Opinion and Policy Decisions: Credible sources help ensure informed decision-making by citizens and policymakers.

6. Marketing Communication

Enhances Brand Reputation: Consumers trust brands that provide accurate and honest messaging.

Increases Consumer Confidence: Credible claims about products and services influence purchasing decisions.

Avoids Legal and Ethical Issues: Misleading marketing can result in legal penalties and loss of customer trust.

7. Internet-Based Communication

Combats Fake News and Disinformation: The rapid spread of information on the internet makes credibility crucial to avoid misinformation.

Improves Online Reputation: Businesses, influencers, and content creators must verify their sources to maintain credibility.

Encourages Responsible Digital Citizenship: Trustworthy sources foster a more informed and responsible online community.

8. Religious Communication

Maintains Faith and Belief Integrity: Religious leaders must use credible theological sources to guide their followers accurately.

Prevents Misinterpretation and Extremism: False religious claims can lead to misunderstandings or harmful ideologies.

Strengthens Religious Authority: A credible religious communicator earns trust and respect from their audience.

9. Public Speaking and General Communication

Increases Speaker Persuasiveness: Audiences respond more favorably to well-researched, fact-based presentations.

Builds Personal and Professional Credibility: A speaker perceived as reliable earns long-term trust and authority.

Prevents the Spread of False Information: Public speakers have a responsibility to share accurate information.

Messages/information sources' credibility ensures that messages are trusted, impactful, and ethically responsible. Whether influencing voters, consumers, online users, religious communities, or public audiences, credible sources build trust and prevent misinformation.

Source credibility is essential in strategic communication, but its effectiveness varies based on context and complexity. Future research should explore digital transformations, cultural intersections, and ethical frameworks to enhance their implementation in a more fragmented media landscape.

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