

DIGITAL JOURNALISM CREDIBILITY STUDY



Digital Journalism Credibility

Highlights from Study

ONA Convention 10.26.01

Presented by

Howard Finberg

Martha Stone

Co-Directors

Digital Journalism Credibility Study

The project's sponsor

Directed by the Online News Association and funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

- ✓ Project directors
 - Howard Finberg
 - Martha Stone
- ✓ Project editor
 - Dianne Lynch



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Presentation agenda

Questions the study explored

Key study findings

- ✓ Review highlight or themes
- ▶ ✓ Explore in depth key results

More results will be in project report



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The project's mission

Investigate the challenges to media credibility in a digital environment.

- *What are the critical issues regarding the core ethics and values of traditional journalism across media delivery systems?*



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Issue of credibility has always been important to the media; today even more important given the news around us. Study was launched earlier this year to help online news sites understand 1. how the public sees them; 2. how other members of the media see online news

Study components

Interviews and case studies; 100+ interviews

Original research conducted by NFO WorldGroup

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Martha will give overview of findings for the study—generalizations



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The key survey question

Where are the perceptions of credibility for online news?

- ✓ Online consumers
- ✓ Media workers



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Among the questions we asked:

What is the relationship to traditional mediums?

Does the public see online news credibility to be as big of an issue as the media does? How does the media workers who took the survey view the credibility of their own print, online, broadcast products?

What are the story elements that contribute to perception of online credibility? What are the Web site elements that contribute to online credibility?

How concerned is the public about the blurring of editorial content and advertising

Survey scope

Conducted by NFO WorldGroup

Two groups surveyed

1. Consumers of online news
- ▶ 2. Online, print, broadcast professionals



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The public

Total of 1,027 interviews

Conducted between July 3rd and July 16th 2001

Median interview length of 14.28 minutes

Sampling error rate is $\pm 3\%$ at the 95% level of confidence

The online media

Total of 1,516 interviews

Filtered sample of 1,397

685 staff and 712 editors

Conducted between July 3rd and August 6th 2001

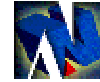
Median interview length of 20.54 minutes

Sampling error associated with a sample of this size is $\pm 2.5\%$ at the 95% level of confidence

Survey media participants

E-mail invitations

- ✓ Online News Association
- ✓ Society of Professional Journalists
- ✓ Radio-Television News Directors Association
- ✓ Associated Press Managing Editors
- ✓ Newspaper Association of America
- ✓ The Society for News Design
- ✓ Investigative Reporters and Editors



Web site links and listservs



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More than 10,000 invitations were issued; mostly via e-mail sent to association members; invited to follow link which took them directly to survey

What the survey is...

Snapshot of public online users

Snapshot of media workers who took the survey

- ✓ When we refer to *media workers* in this presentation we refer to the responses of those who participated



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--media workers

--media respondents

--representatives of media organizations

we're just reporting what they SAID on the survey; This can not be taken to mean that the answer represent all media workers or journalists

Survey results headline

Verdict on online news credibility is still out

- ✓ Online news credibility is not top of mind for the online public
 - Large number of neutral and unsure responses



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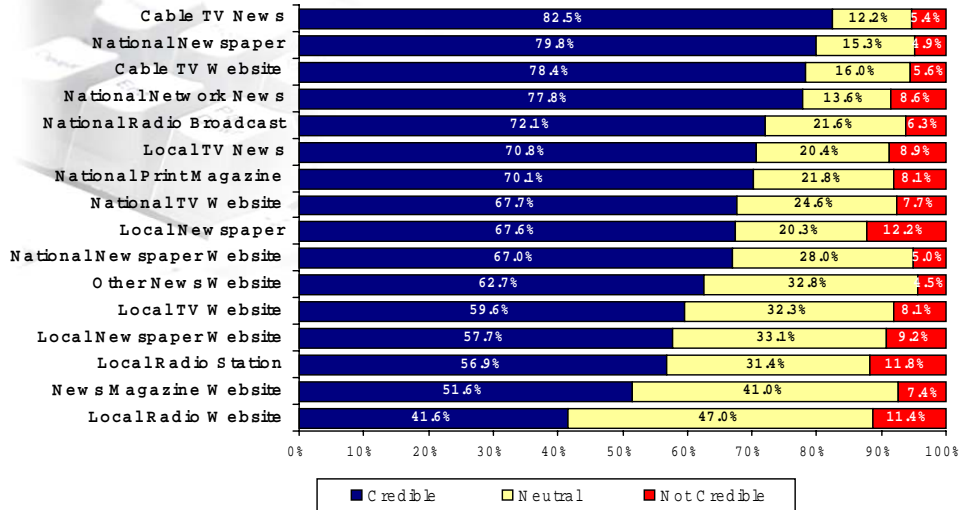
Opportunity to establish credibility's importance and differentiate online news from other sources.

Good news: Online news sites should not have an up-hill battle to convince the online public they are credible. It is easier to move from neutral and unsure to positive than from negative to positive

However, this might mean that online sites need to bring the issue to forefront: This might be an opportunity for online news sites – both from traditional and online only organizations – to communicate the value and benefits of credibility

This might be an opportunity to provide the public with evidence of credibility and difference

Online public credibility ratings

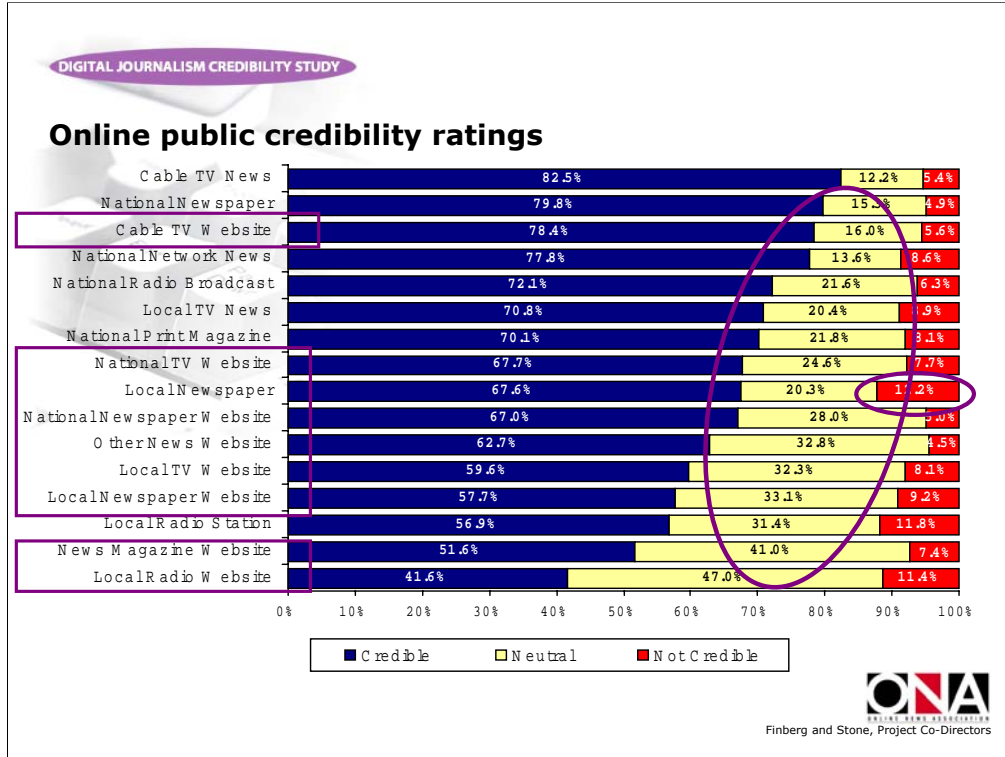


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Rankings of how the online public sees the credibility of various media, from the top, Cable TV News is seen as the most credible;

Read list from screen for those in the back of the room

--to next slide --

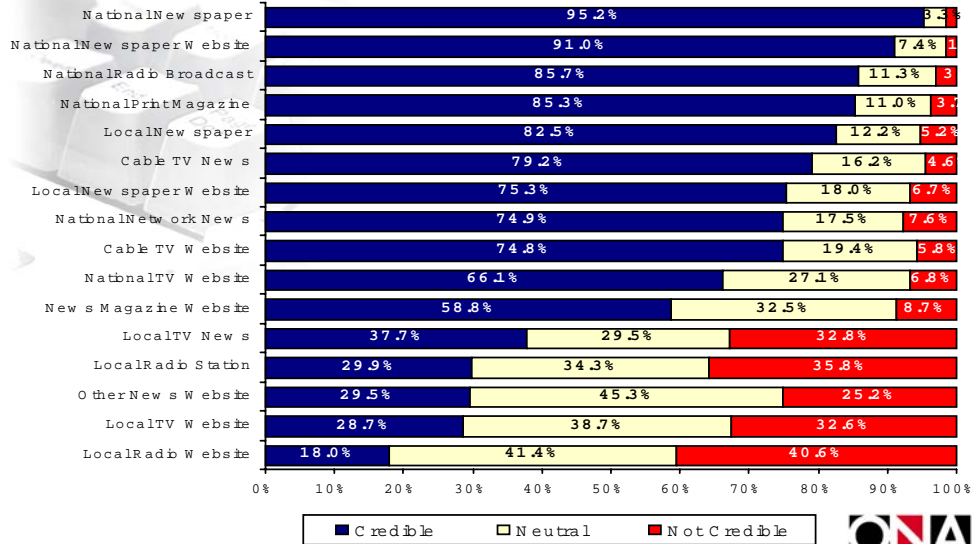


Highlighted are the Web sites

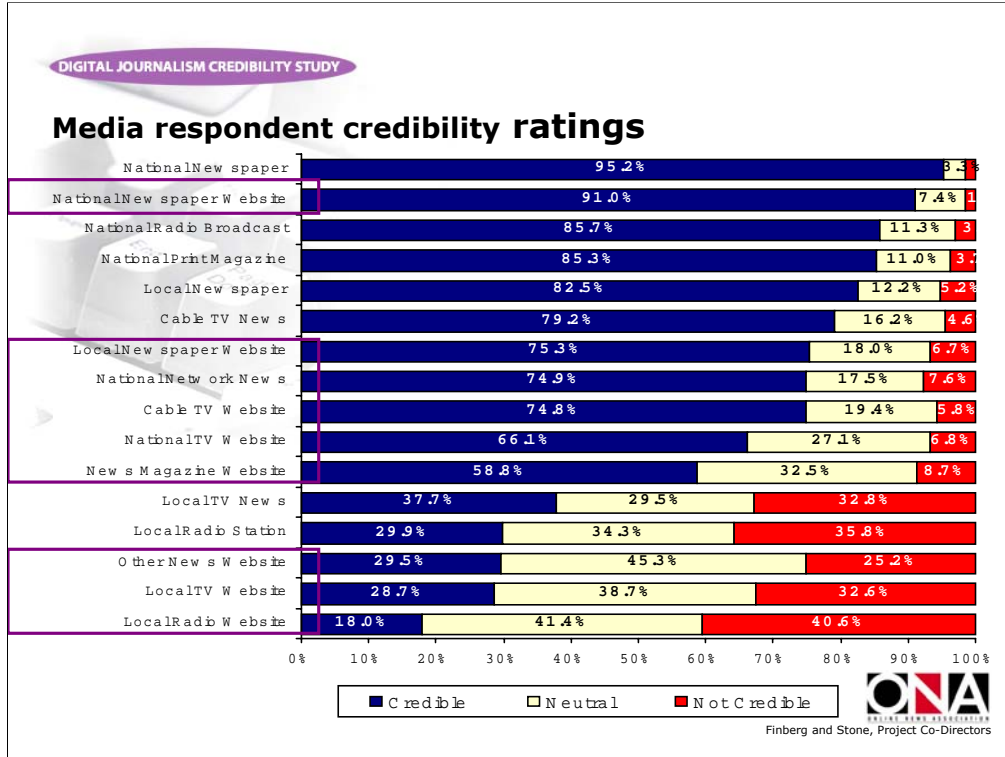
It is important to note the large NEUTRAL response; this is the area of opportunity.

The least credible medium Local Newspapers; this is consistent with other credibility studies

Media respondent credibility ratings



The media is much more sure of credibility issues
 Top rank National Newspapers followed closely by their Web sites
 Read rest of list for those in the back of the room;



Here are the online news sites highlighted

Other key areas of importance and difference include much higher rankings for local newspaper Web sites and much lower rankings for “Other News Web sites”

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Basics

Martha will talk about Basics anecdotes;



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Results: Story credibility

The most important drivers of online story credibility are very familiar to journalism

- ✓ Accuracy
- ✓ Completeness
- ✓ Fairness



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It is clear that the online public wants accurate facts and the whole story. Also important: fairly and they want to hear it from someone they trust in a timely manner. When members of the media think about a story from their own perspective, they too want accurate information reported fairly. More so than the public, they want the whole story from a trusted source with specific and detailed sourcing information. Neither the online public nor members of the media put much emphasis on the audio/visual presentation of the story or the story's entertainment value.

Credibility attributes of stories

Media respondents thought online public would respond a little differently

- ✓ Accuracy of the information
- ✓ Fairness of reporting
- ✓ The news source being a trusted one
 - Source matters less to online public

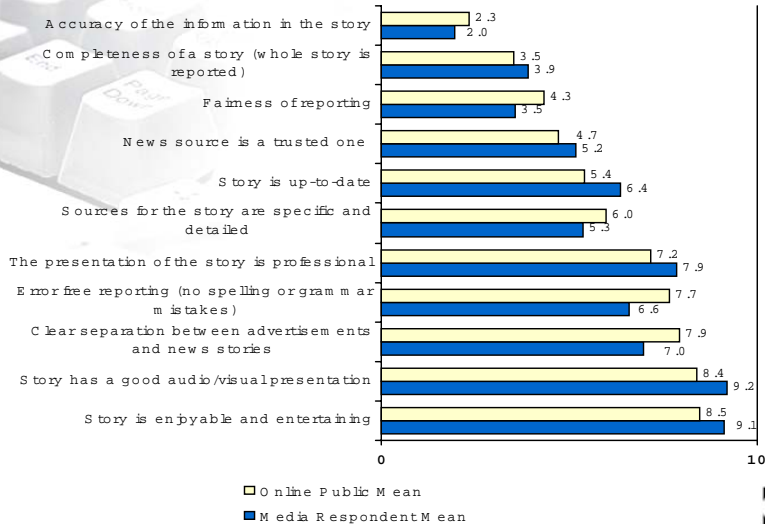


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When members of the media who responded to the survey think about this issue, they are very much like the online public, with a slight difference. More than the public, they want with specific and detailed sourcing information. Neither the online public nor members of the media put much emphasis on the audio/visual presentation of the story or the story's entertainment value.

Credibility attributes of stories

Mean Ranking of Story Attributes



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In looking at both the online public and media respondents, in order of importance [top to bottom, attributes for stories are very similar. Neither the online public nor members of the media responding put much emphasis on the audio/visual presentation of the story or the story’s entertainment value.

Results: Site credibility

Site attributes also contribute to its continued use of online news sites and perceived credibility of those sites



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Just as there are aspects to stories that affect the perception of credibility, there are also aspects to online news sites that affect how both consumers and media respondents view the credibility of those sites.

Site credibility attributes

The online public expects digital news to be constantly updated

- ✓ Timeliness is more important as a *site* credibility driver than *story* credibility driver
- ✓ Accuracy is next highest attribute for public



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Both groups are likely to say the reason they use a site is because the information on the site is constantly updated.

More than 25% of both groups; online public and media workers who responded said “Information on the site is constantly updated” as the top attribute of site credibility.

However, for the public, accuracy was next at 24%, difference in ranking is within margin of error within the margin of error

Site credibility attributes

Media respondents differ on accuracy as a driver for site credibility

- ✓ Accuracy as a credibility driver
 - Online public: 24.1 %
 - Media respondents: 14.3 %
- ✓ Brand recognition as site credibility driver
 - Online public: 16.4 %
 - Media respondents: 25.4 %



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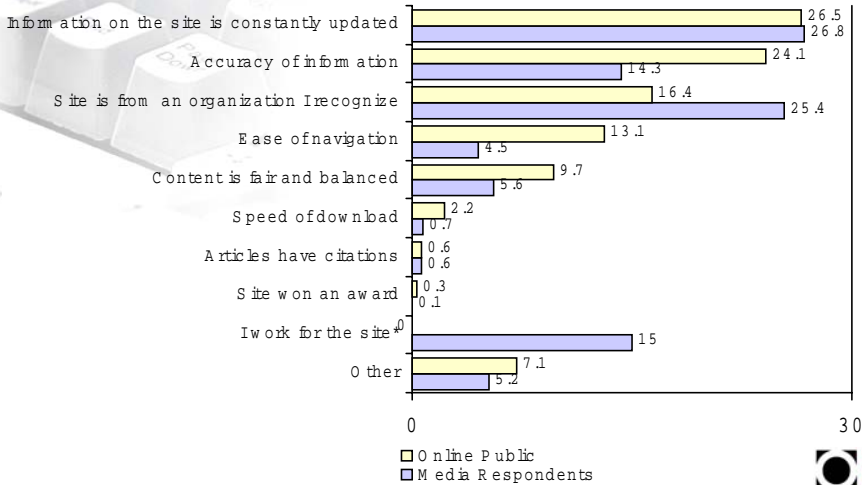
When it comes to site credibility, after the issue of timeliness, those from the media who responded said that brand is a more important attribute for site credibility than accuracy.

This is not to suggest that accuracy doesn't matter; it does. Rather it reflects the importance the media respondents had for getting information from sites they trust.

-- next slide has all of the attributes...

Site credibility attributes

Site Attributes as Key Driver; in percent



*only members of the media were asked if they worked for the site. Finberg and Stone, Project Co-Directors

Read for the back of the room...

Online public and media respondents: updating is key site driver;

Note difference on “branding” / site is from organization that I recognize; more important for media respondents.

Also important to public: Ease of navigation and fair and balanced content.

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Economics

Martha will talk about Economics cases;



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Results: Economic pressures

Separation of editorial and advertising

- ✓ Asked directly if the separation between advertising and editorial content matters to a news source's credibility, the public overwhelmingly (95.9 %) said **YES**, it matters.



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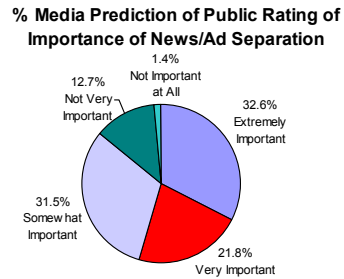
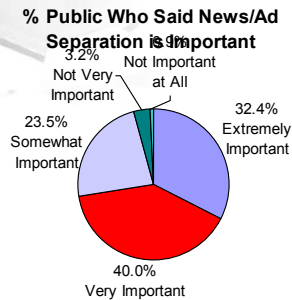
The issue of separation between advertising content and news content is even more important in the online environment. However, in terms of the public's perception of credibility, clear delineations of advertising and news content are not as important as the other drivers – accuracy, fairness – discussed earlier.

When ranked with wide array of variables affecting credibility – including accuracy, fairness, completeness and timeliness – and the public ranks the church-state divide well down on the list

When asked as a stand-alone question, however, (95.9%) said news/ad separation was important

Separation: editorial, advertising

The media respondents underestimated the importance the public gives to topic



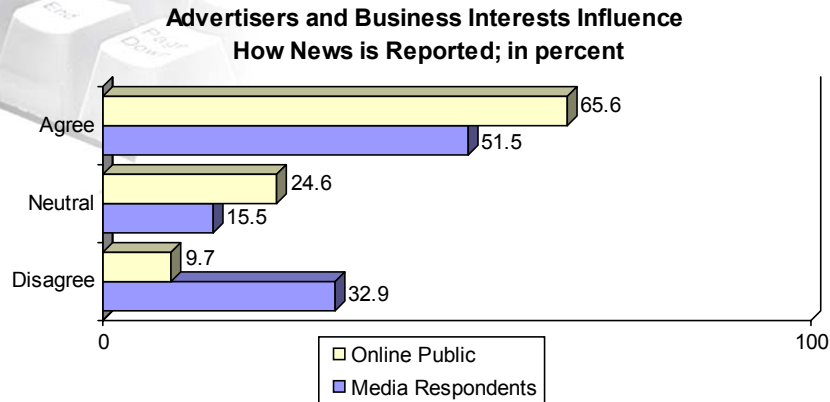
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When members of the media who were asked about HOW the public would RATE the importance of the separation of editorial and advertising, the media respondents clearly underestimated the public's response. This is an important area for the public.

However, age does affect how respondents viewed this issue:

Younger members of the *public* are more likely to say online news is credible and less likely to express concern about the separation of news and advertising content than are their older counterparts

Influence of business interests



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There is a clear indication that online public (66%) is worried about advertisers and business interests influencing how news is reported. This group is also concerned about the issue of separation of news and advertising content.

Of this group --those WHO RESPONDED that they agree with the statement, more than three quarters, 75.5%, also feel it is extremely or very important that a clear separation between news and advertising content be maintained

Influence of business interests



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Of those WHO RESPONDED, more than three quarters, 75.5%, also feel it is extremely or very important that a clear separation between news and advertising content be maintained

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Interactive:

Martha will give anecdotes



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Our challenge

Online public is more comfortable with the idea of online news than the media workers who responded to survey



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Results: Is it complete news?

The public yet to pass judgment

- ✓ 47.9% remaining neutral
- ✓ 17.9% agree online news sites provide the most complete picture of the news

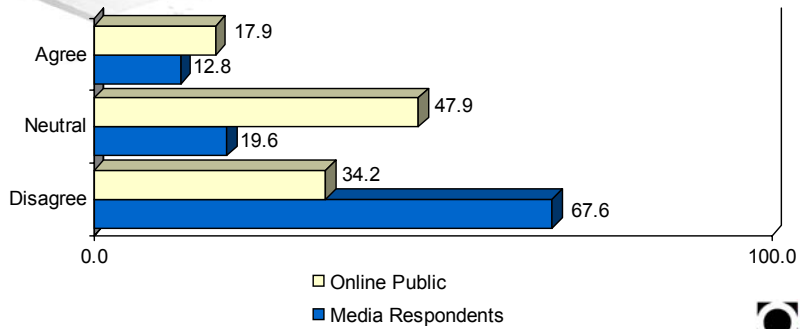


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Online news as most complete

Media respondents strongly disagree

Percent Who Say Online News Sites Provide the Most Complete Picture of the News

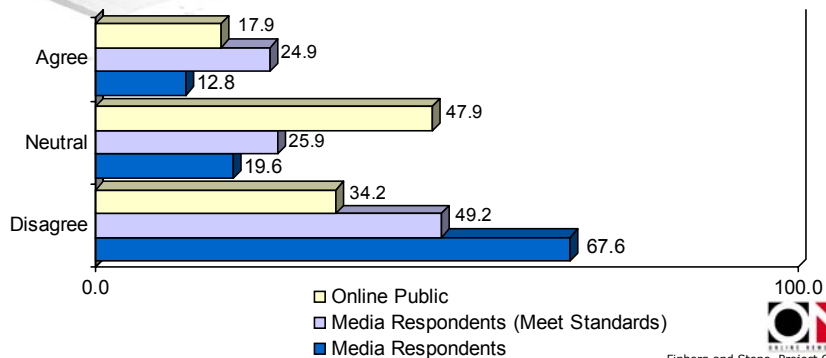


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Online news as most complete

Media respondents that believe that online news meets standards are closer to public view

Percent Who Say Online News Sites Provide the Most Complete Picture of the News

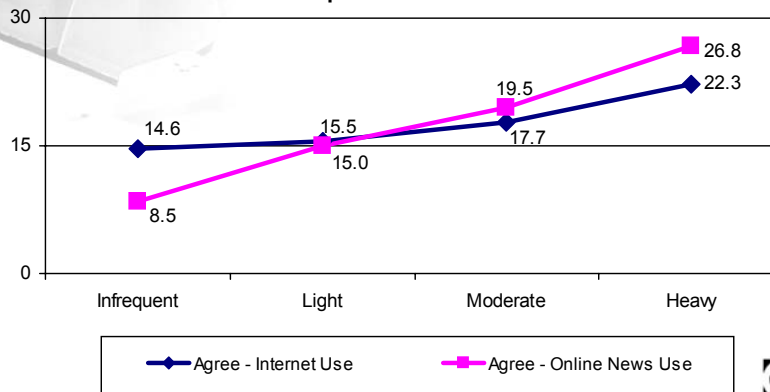


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Online news as most complete

Familiarity is important

Percent of Public Who Says Online News Provides the Most Complete Picture of the News



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Familiarity with the online world and online news sites indicates that a user is more likely to agree that agree online news sites provide the most complete picture of the news.

The more the online public spends online – light, moderate, heavy usage – the higher the belief that online is has the most complete news. This is even more true for those who spend more time with online news sites than the Internet as a whole.

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Conclusions:



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This has been a brief look

We have presented only some of the findings
More results will be in the full report to be
released later this year



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Thank you

Now, on to a panel discussion about this topic



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