Factor affecting internet information credibility: The moderating effect of gender

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C H R O N I C L E	**A B S T R A C T**
	This study provides an analytical view of the correlation between several factors that influence the credibility of information available through various sources on the Internet. The most critical factors include information quality, source credibility, argument strength, message credibility, and average credibility. Additionally, the study explores the impact of gender and years of experience as demographic variables on the nature and size of these relationships. The study relied on a critical review of previous related literature. In addition, it adopted an analytical approach using a sample of 300 Internet users through a questionnaire designed based on the study hypotheses. Most of these relationships were found to be at an average level, except for the relationship between source credibility and information credibility. No statistical indicators were observed. Consequently, the researchers acknowledge the need for caution when generalizing these results to society. The study also found that the gender of the recipient and the number of years of experience did not necessarily play a mediating role in the relationship between the tested factors and the credibility of information received via the Internet.

1. Introduction

Information is considered a double-edged sword. While it represents a source of integrated understanding about a specific issue, product, or commodity, it can also constitute a source of serious concern and generate aversion to a particular product or commodity- especially if the information is misunderstood or presented within Its incorrect context or in the wrong place (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Regarding websites, information plays a major role in building trust among both users and customers, especially in the overall success of the website and fosters loyalty to the site as a result (Mcknight & Kacmar, 2006). Information credibility significantly impacts customer confidence, whether related to goods or services. The importance of brand credibility is particularly emphasized in the context of electronic goods (or services) marketed via the Internet and websites (Mcknight & Kacmar, 2006). Insufficient studies on the credibility of information, particularly electronic websites, have hindered a comprehensive understanding of the process for evaluating its reliability (Li & Suh, 2015). Certain researchers view information credibility as closely linked to the quality of the outcomes derived from that information (Mcknight & Kacmar, 2006). This underscores the importance of analyzing the relationship between information quality and credibility. After all, information serves as the foundation for transforming knowledge and skills into tangible real-life products (Alá & Černá, 2013). One of the things that is supposed to greatly affect the information credibility is the argument strength, which is considered an important factor that determines this credibility. The argument strength constitutes an important determinant

of the credibility of information, and the argument strength is considered one of the most important central aspects that must be greatly focused on to achieve a positive position (Li & Suh, 2015). The stronger the argument, the greater the recipient's ability to be convinced by the information and messages contained in this information, which supports his position and decision based on it (Winarko et al., 2019; Alhammadi & Alshurideh, 2024). On the other hand, the credibility of the information and the message it targets also plays an important role in message acceptance. The goal of message credibility is to enhance the recipient's acceptance of the information contained in this message (Andersson et al., 2019). The credibility of information varies depending on the source. In an era when the Internet's role as the most important source of information is increasing, other sources—such as television and newspapers—must also be evaluated for credibility (Mcknight & Kacmar, 2006). Verifying the credibility of the source is equally important to verifying the other two factors (the credibility of both the message and the medium) to achieve the final goal of information credibility (Factors Influencing Information Credibility on Social Media) (Li & Suh, 2015).

Based on all the above, the credibility of information depends on several factors, with the most important being the quality of the information and the credibility of the message and the source in addition to the argument strength. Additionally, the study examines the relationship between information credibility and its influencing factors, including the significance of users' experience and gender. Both the user's gender (as the recipient) and their experience serve as mediating variables between information quality and the factors affecting it.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual framework.

2.1.1 What does information credibility means?

Information is a collection of facts and data that is organized and presented to achieve specific goals, and it plays a major role in the knowledge economy (Howard & Klopper, 2011). From the point of view of persuasion scholars, the credibility of Internet sites can be inferred through the quality of the information they provide and their ability to establish trust among customers. They believe that the credibility of information provided through the Internet decreases when customers or recipients are unwilling to verify the authenticity of its source. Trust and trustworthiness are the most prominent criteria adopted in evaluating the credibility and quality of information provided by websites (Choi et al., 2022). The credibility of information can be defined as the extent to which people believe it. People's attitudes toward the information—whether it pertains to knowledge or products—can be estimated, especially through collaborative interactions among individuals on the Internet (Li & Suh, 2015). Information credibility is considered the most important element of persuasion in its early stages. Therefore, companies should analyze the factors affecting information credibility in relation to consumers' purchasing decisions before enhancing content from approved sources. This ensures that the presented message is acceptable and gains the trust of recipients based on both argument strength and credibility (Adoption and Purchase) (Daowd et al., 2020; Al Kurdi & Alshurideh, 2023).

2.1.2 Why information credibility is important?

Several studies have shown that the most important determinants of the credibility of information are credibility and its dimensions, the power argument and its dimensions, in addition to the credibility of the message, which ultimately produces fundamental effects on e-shopping trends (Farhadpoor & Dezfuli, 2021a). Several studies have shown that the most important determinants of information credibility include its dimensions and the strength of the argument, in addition to the credibility of the message. Ultimately, this impacts e-shopping trends (Farhadpoor & Dezfuli, 2021b). The credibility of information is important for many reasons. Providers of online services heavily rely on the credibility they establish with customers through the information they provide to achieve revenues. Therefore, the credibility of information and its associated factors are considered crucial for revenue generation. Unless customers trust the validity and credibility of the information provided, they cannot request these services. Consequently, an unreliable source reflects negatively on the site owner (Mcknight & Kacmar, 2006). Some researchers believe that information credibility plays a major role in ensuring and alleviating accusations of greenwashing. This positive impact extends to capital spending, especially concerning sustainability and sustainable development, ultimately benefiting more powerful companies in the future (Baier et al., 2022). The adoption by recipients (whether consumers or ordinary people) represents an indicator of their orientation and the decisions they are expected to make. The credibility of the information provided can significantly impact recipients' opinions, beliefs, and behavior, ultimately influencing their purchasing decisions or their requests for services. This influence depends on various sources, most notably the Internet and websites (Fanoberova & Kuczkowska, 2016) The quality of information is affected by how well it relates to the intended message for its recipients. Additionally, it should fully represent the desired goals while ensuring ease of interpretation and understanding. Furthermore, it should be easily accessible without unnecessary effort, time, or cost (Howard & Klopper, 2011).

2.2 Development of hypotheses

2.2.1 The Impact of Information quality on information credibility

Jiang and others analyzed the relationship between the quality of information content and the importance of the benefit it brings to recipients. The aim was to determine the extent of recipients' readiness to adopt this information and the messages

it contains, which ultimately reflects in their purchasing behavior (Jiang et al., 2021). Despite rapid developments in technological tools and digital media, assessing the credibility of information and its sources remains challenging. This assessment is particularly crucial, especially in the field of electronic shopping (Fanoberova & Kuczkowska, 2016). To clarify the relationship between information quality and its credibility, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₁: *Information quality positively influences information credibility.*

2.2.2 The impact of argument strength on information credibility

According to Winarko et al. (2019), argument strength is the extent to which a message receiver views that argument to be Sufficient or valid in supporting its attitude. Argument strength strongly correlates with the credibility of the message. Since the sincerity of the message is a key dimension of information truthfulness, the current paper aims to demonstrate the role of argument strength in information credibility (Winarko et al., 2019). The following hypothesis has been formulated:

H₂: *Argument strength positively influences information credibility.*

2.2.3 The impact of message credibility on information credibility

Li and Suh used the Detailed Probability Model to predict the credibility of information provided by social networking sites. They reviewed previous research and studies to define the dimensions of credibility, including average credibility (Li & Suh, 2015a). Li and Suh (2015) also proposed that the credibility of the message reflects the expected credibility of the information in the minds of recipients. She extracted three factors from the average credibility dimension: average reliability, interactivity, and average transparency. Additionally, they considered two factors derived from the credibility of the message: the strength of the argument and the quality of the information (Li & Suh, 2015; Hamadneh et al., 2024). The following hypothesis has been formulated:

H₃: *Message credibility positively influences the information credibility.*

2.2.4 The impact of medium credibility on information credibility

Winarko et al. (2019) relied on marketing communication theories to develop a model that enabled them to analyze the factors affecting the electronic marketing process for small and medium-sized companies. This model allowed them to examine the relationship between the credibility of information and several other variables. They concluded that both the medium and the message fundamentally affect the credibility of the information. Additionally, they found that the credibility of the information did not impact the use of social networking sites to obtain this information. Accordingly, in light of the objectives of the current study, which seeks to test the extent to which the credibility of information is affected by the credibility of the medium (Winarko et al., 2019; Abu Zayyad et al., 2021). the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₄: *Medium credibility positively influences information credibility.*

2.2.5 The impact of source credibility on the information credibility

Li and Suh considered that the credibility of information can be verified based on its relationship to the credibility of the medium, the message, and the source. They also found that the credibility of the source is influenced by the type of source's experience. It has been shown that people do not greatly care about the credibility of the information they receive via Facebook for example (Li & Suh, 2015a; Nuseir et al., 2024). Considering the objectives of the study, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₅: *Source credibility positively influences the information credibility.*

2.2.6 The impact of (Information quality, Argument strength, Message credibility, Medium credibility and Source credibility) on information credibility is mediated by User experience.

In the study of Yu, he shows that the experiences of users and information recipients fundamentally affect their evaluation of the information they receive from the Internet, which influences their purchasing decisions. Since the current study examines the mediating effect of years of experience on the relationship between information credibility and influencing factors (Yu, 2016; Abu-Rumman et al., 2024), the following hypothesis was formulated:

H₆: *User experience mediates the influences of (Information quality, Argument strength, Message credibility, medium credibility and Source credibility) on information credibility.*

2.2.7 the impact of (Information quality, Argument strength, Message credibility, Medium credibility and Source credibility) on information credibility is mediated by User gender.

In his study, Lankes examined the relationship between gender and the desire to follow websites as a source of information. Gender, as a demographic variable, significantly influences the credibility of information received online (Lankes, 2008) .The current study aims to test the mediating effect of gender on the relationship between information credibility and other relevant variables, so the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H₇: *User gender mediates the influences of (Information quality, Argument strength, Message credibility, Medium credibility and Source credibility) on information credibility.*

3. Methodology

To test the hypotheses of the study and achieve its objectives, it relied on a critical review of previous literature related to the study. In addition, it adopted an analytical approach using a sample of 300 Internet users. This approach was based on the Partial Least Squares (PLS) methodology, which can be used for both formative and reflective purposes.

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

The study relied on an initial sample of 310 Internet users of both genders and with varying levels of experience. Data was collected from the sample members through a questionnaire designed based on the study hypotheses. Ten of the questionnaires distributed to the study sample were excluded due to missing data. Therefore, the final sample used in the analysis consisted of 300 items, resulting in an actual response rate of 96.7%.

3.2 Study instrument

As a result of reviewing previous literature and in line with the study's goals and hypotheses, the study included six dimensions. One dimension represented the dependent latent factor (credibility of information), while the other five represented independent latent factors, namely credibility of the message, strength of the argument, credibility of the source, quality of information, and medium credibility. Therefore, the questionnaire designed to test the study hypotheses included six latent factors, each containing five variables. Additionally, two demographic variables—gender and number of years of experience—were divided into three categories: five years of experience or less, more than five years of experience but less than 11 years, and more than 10 years of experience. Additionally, the variables that represented the six factors were measured through a three-way Likert scale with three answers: (strongly agree, neutral, and strongly disagree).

4. Results

This section presented the results of the study which were obtained by analyzing the study data using SPSS 26 and Smart PLS. The first section includes a presentation of descriptive statistics of participants' demographic data, while the second section includes testing the study hypotheses using the PLS approach.

4.1 Demographic data for respondents

The following table presents descriptive statistics for respondents' demographic data (gender, experience) including the frequency and percentage for each of them:

Table 1
Descriptive statistics of demographic data for respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	145	48.3%
	Female	155	51.7%
Experience	Less than 5 years	84	28%
	5–10years	73	24.3%
	More than 55 years	143	47.7%

Table1 shows the distribution of the study sample according to the two demographic variables (gender and experience). The table indicates that the percentage of males in the sample was (48.3%) compared to (51.7%) for females. Regarding the number of years of experience, the largest percentage was for those with experience (more than 10 years) at (47.7%), while the lowest percentage was for those whose number of years of experience was (5-10) (24.3%)

4.2 Internal consistency of reliability

Internal consistency indicates that the variables loading on each latent factor consistently measure that factor. One of the most common indicators of internal consistency analysis is Cronbach's alpha coefficients, especially in the case of questionnaires that include multiple factors. In the current study, it was found that Cronbach's alpha coefficients were not in the high range, which suggests that the scale used could be improved by considering other variables or factors, or by modifying the study population or sample. The following table shows the results of the internal consistency analysis based on Cronbach's alpha indicators and the EVA value, in addition to the loading values of the variables on their latent factors that represent the objectives of the study.

Table 2
Reliability and internal consistency results

Factor	Item Name	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha >.7	Composite Reliability (Cr) >.7	AVE >.5
IC (Information credibility)	IN-accurate	0.411	0.49	0.70	0.33
	In-believable	0.686			
	IN-trustworthy	0.698			
	In- authentic	0.627			
	IN- reliable	0.385			

Table 2
Reliability and internal consistency results (Continued)

Factor	Item Name	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha >.7	Composite Reliability (Cr) >.7	AVE >.5
IQ (information quality)	IQ- consistent	0.226	0.54	0.73	0.37
	IQ- no bias	0.723			
	IQ- inte	0.706			
	IQ- expertise	0.575			
	IQ- transparent	0.662			
AR (Argument)	AR- clear	0.69	0.51	0.71	0.39
	AR- convincing	0.55			
	AR- strong	0.64			
	AR- persuasive	0.41			
	AR- reasonable	0.59			
Massage	MC- logically sound	0.6	0.62	0.77	0.40
	MA- compelling	0.74			
	MA- supported	0.65			
	MA- reasoned	0.51			
	MA- plausible	0.63			
SC (source credibility)	So- reputable	0.48	0.43	0.67	0.31
	So- expertise	0.41			
	So- based	0.019			
	So- unbiased	0.77			
	So- transparent	0.74			
Med C- (medium credibility)	MedC- credible	0.45	0.46	0.68	0.31
	MedC- trustworthy	0.68			
	MedC- reliable	0.64			
	MedC- accurate	0.64			
	MedC- credible	0.45			
	Med- authentic	0.27			

According to Table 2, the variables that were least saturated on their latent factors were (IQ- consistent variable, saturated on the information quality factor, Med- authentic, saturated on the medium credibility factor, based, saturated on the source credibility factor, and reliable, saturated on the information credibility factor).

4.3 Discriminant Validity

An essential test of the quality of the scale is associated with discriminant validity, implemented to determine the existence of additional variables which are not needed in the factor structure. The Fornell and Likert test is one of the most popular tests implemented to examine discriminant validity in PLS models.

4.4 Variable correlation using the Fornell–Likert criterion

The following table shows the results of the discriminant validity test through the correlation coefficients between each pair of factors (two-fold). The discriminant validity is revealed by comparing the values of these correlation coefficients with the values of the (AVE), so that this validity increases whenever the value of AVE is higher than the values of the two-factor correlation coefficients.

Table 3
Reliability and internal consistency results (continuation)

	AR CRE	IN CRE	IN QU	MA CRE	MED CRE	SO CRE
AR CRE	0.582					
IN CRE	0.653	0.578				
IN QU	0.614	0.579	0.607			
MA CRE	0.583	0.539	0.575	0.632		
MED CRE	-0.310	-0.362	-0.312	-0.311	0.558	
SO CRE	0.196	-0.264	-0.249	-0.293	0.564	0.557

Based on the results of Table 3, discriminant validity appears to be acceptable in association to the dichotomies:

Credibility of the source - strength of the argument,

Credibility of the information - credibility of the source,

Credibility of the source - credibility of the message,

However, this validity decreases in relation to the other dichotomies.

4.5 Hypotheses Testing (Path Coefficient)

In the next section, the study hypotheses are discussed based on the path coefficients (impact values) between each pair of independent latent factors and the information credibility factor. These values are shown in the following table (4) (also shown in Fig. 1).

Table 4
Hypothesis testing of model

	Original sample(O)	Sample mean	STDEV	T statistic	P Value	Decision
IN QU→ IN CR	0.21	0.21	0.055	3.76	0	Supported
AR RE→IN CR	0.40	0.40	0.056	7.128	0	Supported
MA→ IN CR	0.14	0.14	0.06	2.277	0.023	Supported
SO CRE→ IN CR	0.027	0.041	0.053	0.514	0.607	Not- Supported
MED CRE→ IN CR	0.113	0.113	0.054	2.081	0.037	Supported

Notes: Significant level at α=0.05

Table 4 shows the evaluation of the model with all its factors (independent and dependent), and through the values of (p-value), it is noted that the effect is significant between all the independent factors and information credibility as a dependent factor. The values of (p) were lower than the approved critical level of significance (0.05). However, the factor (source credibility) is excluded, which shows the value of (p = 0.607) is higher than the critical level of significance. This means that the relationship between this factor and the credibility of the information was not statistically significant.
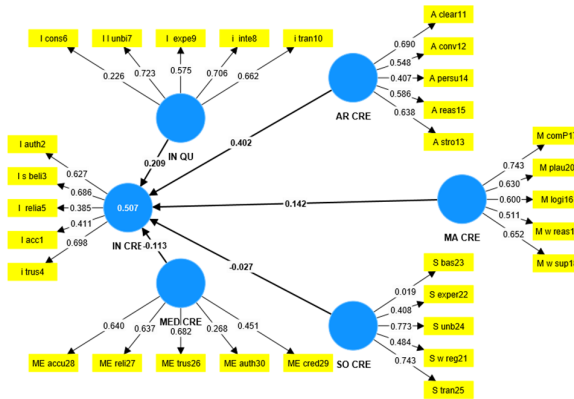

Fig. 1. PLs outputs for the research model

In addition to the five main hypotheses, the study tested the mediating role of the variables of gender and years of experience in the relationships between the five independent factors and the dependent factor (credibility of information). The following table shows a comparison of the effect values between the five independent factors and the dependent factor in two cases:

The first case without a role for the mediating variable, which are the values that appeared previously.

The second case in the presence of the mediating variable each time (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).
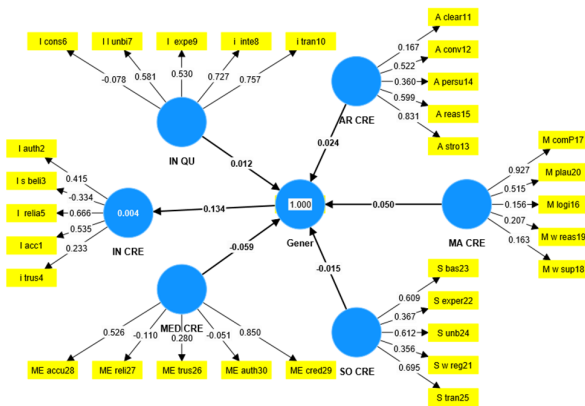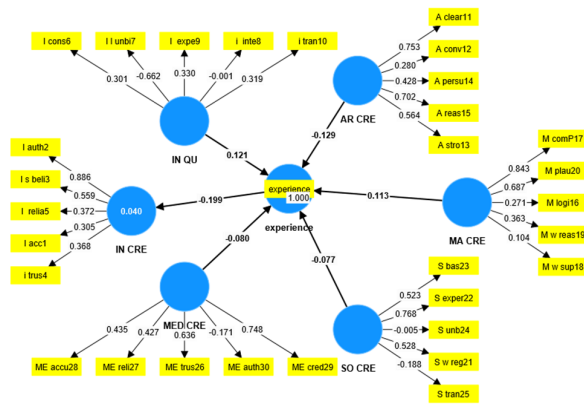

Fig. 2. PLs outputs for gender mediating

Fig. 3. PLs outputs for experiments mediating

Table 5
Mediating effect for demographic variables

	Effect size without mediating	Effect size with gender mediating	Significant role of mediator	Effect size with experience mediating	Significant role of mediator
IN QU→ IN CR	0.21	0.0016	Not supported	0.002388	Not supported
AR RE→IN CR	0.4	0.0032	Not supported	0.025671	Not supported
MA→ IN CR	0.14	0.0067	Not supported	0.022487	Not supported
SO CRE→ IN CR	0.027	0.0020	Not supported	0.015323	Not supported
MED CRE→ IN CR	0.11	0.0079	Not supported	0.01592	Not supported

From Table 5, it appears that the indirect effect coefficients between the independent factors and the dependent factor (credibility of information) were not significant as they were all lower than the values of the direct effect coefficients. Therefore, it can be said that the variables of gender and years of experience did not affect the relationship between each of the five independent factors and the information credibility factor as a dependent factor.

5. Conclusions and discussion

This study presented an analysis of the assumed relationship between the credibility of information received via the Internet as a dependent variable and five independent factors represented by the quality of the information, the strength of the argument, the credibility of the source, the credibility of the message, and the average credibility, as variables that are assumed, as previous studies have shown, to fundamentally affect the credibility of the information. It turns out that in some cases, there is a large interaction between the study factors (such as the interaction between the credibility of the information and the credibility of the message). This was explained accurately to the members of the study sample due to the repetition of some variables in front of more than one factor (such as accuracy, for example). However, it was clear to the sample members that the accuracy of the information differs from the accuracy of the message. This information is conveyed (as well as other factors such as the credibility of the source, the quality of the information, etc.).

The study showed that the extracted factors could be developed, because of what was shown by tests of internal consistency, validity, and reliability of the scale. By analyzing the loading values of each variable on the independent factors, the study showed that the variables that loaded most heavily on their factors were the variables that were saturated on the message credibility factor, while the factors that were least saturated on their variables were that saturated on the source credibility factor. As for the other factors, their degree of saturation with their variables was close. The study has shown that the size of the effect between the independent factors and the dependent factor varied depending on each factor. In general, the argument strength factor was the factor most closely related to the credibility of the information, as the value of the direct effect factor reached 0.4. This was followed by the information quality factor with a maximum effect of 0.21. Next, the credibility factor of the message had an impact effect of 0.14. The medium credibility factor had an impact value of 0.11. However, the credibility of the source did not show a significant impact on the credibility of the information, as the value of the impact factor did not exceed 0.027, with a high p-value. Therefore, the factor that has the greatest impact on the trustworthiness of online information is the strength of the argument, while the factor that has the least significant impact is the medium credibility.

On the other hand, the study showed that the mediating effect of the variables of gender and number of years of experience was not significant, as the mediation of these two variables did not cause a significant change in the size of the effect between any of the independent factors and the dependent factor (credibility of information). The results of the product of the values of the correlation coefficients between each factor were independent and the mediating variable, times the value of the correlation coefficient between the mediating variable and the credibility of the information being lower than the values of the direct impact coefficients, which shows the insignificant mediation of the sex variables for the relationship between the independent factors and the dependent factor.

6. Limitations and implications for future research.

Although the results of the study are not very close to the assumed theoretical bases (the significant effect between the credibility of the information and its accuracy, for example, or the assumed relationship between the credibility of the source and the credibility of the information, the effect of a mediator of years of experience or gender in the relationship between the credibility of the information and various factors), these results may be attributed to some limitations. The most important of these limitations is the expansion of the study community to a huge number, as there is hardly a person around the world who does not obtain their information from the Internet. On the other hand, these relationships may differ depending on the difference in society (geographical, intellectual, and even cultural environment). This difference may be the reason behind the low internal consistency values. Therefore, the study recommends addressing other factors that are more comprehensive and less affected by the lack of homogeneity in the study population, considering many demographic variables, most importantly cultural level, intellectual affiliation, and age groups.

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