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**PICTURE VERSUS NEWS REPORTS: AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF MEANS
OF REPORTING CREDIBLE NEWS**

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ABSTRACT

Attaining credibility in news has been a huge discourse among scholars, journalists and media audience. This study sought to find out audience perception of credible means of reporting news between pictures and news stories. To achieve the objectives of this study, purposive sampling method was employed to gather data from respondents using a structured questionnaire. Findings from the study indicated that majority of the respondents agreed that pictures and news are both good means of reporting credible news, however, majority of respondents agreed that the use of pictures to complement news reports, authenticates a story more compared to when a story appears alone. The paper concluded that when media organizations embrace the practice of accompanying news stories with pictures, they have a better chance of improving organizational credibility, source credibility and message credibility which in turn endears the news organization to media audiences. The paper therefore recommended that pictures should accompany news reports as this strengthens the credibility of news stories. Also, it is important to indicate 'archive' on pictures and news video that are not recent but are used to accompany news stories.

Key words: Credibility, News Reports, Pictures, Audience, and Perception

INTRODUCTION

In the world of journalism, credibility is a fundamental professional value. Researchers have suggested that without credibility, journalism cannot exist (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Although scholars and journalists disagree about what constitutes credibility, they however agree that it relates primarily to the truthfulness and accuracy of the facts that journalists report (Payne and Dozier, 2013; Tsfati, 2008).

One of the key functions of media in society is to survey and report events happening in the society, therefore, news report is expected to present facts and analysis that allow citizens to make informed decision in a complex, information-saturated society (Barnett, 2008). However, credibility of news reports has been a problem which has created a huge interest and worry among scholars. Studies (Barnett, 2008; Tsfati, 2008) reveal that there is a crumbling faith in journalism and an emergence of news media skeptics.

Therefore, to determine that a news report is credible, scholars say there must be evidence of facts in the news (Henke, Leissner & Möhring, 2020). Herein lays the role of pictures; after all, as the saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words”. The power of picture to present facts in news writing and reporting is a major discourse among scholars. Dobernig and Lobinger (2010) posit that pictures tell stories, create empathy, as well as aid news reports by helping news users verify the information that is contained in a news report. Cummins and Chambers (2011) also suggest that visual news presentation might offer better news credibility than other forms. Andaleeb, Rahman, Rajeb, Akter, and Gulshan (2012) indicated that the quality of audiovisual elements contributed to audience perceptions of news credibility.

On the other hand, Wheeler (2002) and Ui (2013) assert that picture on its own might have some credibility issues. Wheeler (2002) also noted that picture is not absolute reality, unqualified truth and it is not purely objective. While Wheeler argues that picture can be manipulated, Ui (2013) asserts that the emergence of digital technology has further worsened the credibility dilemma of picture with the emergence of digital picture and Adobe Photoshop in 1988 which allows for easy manipulation.

This research therefore seeks to investigate audience perception of credible means of reporting news between pictures and news stories.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To determine the means of reporting credible news as perceived by media audience
2. To find out what media audiences perceive to be more credible between news reports and news pictures.
3. To establish media audiences perception of best means of reporting credible news.
4. To find out if pictures can change media audiences perception of news report.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY

The Uses and Gratification theory was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch in 1974 (Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso; 2008). Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) cited in Umar, Wilson and Rejoice (2019), summarises the main thrust

of the theory as the existence of a conceived active audience, the media competes with other sources of satisfaction, the goals of mass media use are derived from data supplied by individual audience members themselves and suspension of value judgments about cultural significance of mass media while audience orientations are explored on their own terms.

Sherwood (2015) highlights the core assumptions of the theory as:

1. The audience is active and its media use is goal oriented.
2. The initiative in linking need gratification to a specific medium choice rests with the audience membership
3. The media compete with other sources for need satisfaction.
4. People have enough self-awareness of their media use, interests, and motives to be able to provide researchers with an accurate picture of that use.
5. Value judgments of media content can only be assessed by the audience.

The theory is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. A core assumption of the Uses and Gratification Theory is that media users are goal-oriented and play an active role in selecting and using the media to best fulfil their individual needs (Mogambi, 2016). The Uses and Gratification theory assumes that the media users have a variety of choices to satisfy their needs and each medium can have different functions. It looks at how people use the media to gratify a range of needs – including the need for information, education, personal identity, integration, social interaction, entertainment, and escapism (Wikipedia, 2020). It also shifts the emphasis of media studies from media effects perspective to an audience perspective. It is built on a user/audience-centred approach.

In line with the assumptions of the theory, it can be inferred that the audience perception of pictures and news reports relies heavily on the gratification media audience obtain from both of them. As U&G theory explains, it is the human need that determines which medium is deemed more credible.

CREDIBILITY IN NEWS

A news organization is said to be a credible source of information if such medium reports events truthfully and objectively. By implication for a new medium to be regarded as credible, it must have consistently in its daily reports present facts without favour or fear. This is why Payne and Dozier (2013:700) noted that credibility “has been defined variously as the perception of news messages as plausible reflections of the events they depict, and as a global evaluation of the objectivity of a given story”. Rasha (2019) went a step further to investigate the components of credibility from a variety of media and the result indicated that perceptions of credibility varied by news source; while story balance, honesty, and currency were important in newspaper content; fairness and currency were identified as important factors in determining news credibility in television; and trustworthiness, timeliness, and bias were considered vital in determining online news credibility.

On the other hand, Armstrong and Collins, (2009) examined credibility of news from three perspectives namely; source credibility, news credibility and message credibility. Source credibility according to Armstrong and Collins (2009) targets four dimensions of

credibility—knowledge, trustworthiness, attractiveness, and dynamism. News credibility examines the credibility of the medium or the particular industry i.e. T.V, radio, newspaper amongst others, while message credibility examines the believability of the message content. The factors are interrelated

The perception that a news medium is credible makes audiences to trust the medium for information on any matter in the society. Generally speaking, credibility is an issue of image of a medium and not an aspect of a medium content. For instance an aspect of a medium content can be credible, but if the medium is generally perceived not to be credible, it may eventually rub off on the only aspect that is credible, this will make media audience doubt whatever comes from the station or newspaper. Thus it is important to a news medium to gain audiences' trust by present facts in its reports. Audience trust in a medium to provide credible information is dependent the medium ability to present accurate information and present balance report by presenting all sides to an issue without an element of bias in the reports. Just as trust plays a vital role in how an audience perceived a news medium, it equally plays a vital role in source credibility. According to Ampofo et al. (2010) trust and prominence plays a vital role in source credibility and it is believed that credible and trusted source will provide credible information (Trumbo, 20013); and that source credibility has huge impact in message credibility (Wathen, 2002).

The issue of credibility of news arose out of the crumbling faith that media audience have in the media. In the case of the British media, Barnett (2008) identified four factors that are responsible for the crumbling faith in British journalism. Although Barnett examined the British media, the factors he identified are peculiar to media in developing nations too. According to Barnett the factors are: the drip-drop effect, the dog-eat-dog effect, the bandwagon effect, the universal skepticism effect. The drip drop explains the distrust in journalism as a result of commercial and partisan interests while the dog eat dog effect explains the distrust in journalism from unhealthy competition in the industry as a result of lack of support and being the first to break the news. The bandwagon effect explains distrust in journalism from lack of fact checking, plagiarism and lazy journalism. The universal skepticism explains the distrust in journalism from the perception of the audience who now view the media as a propaganda tool.

THE ROLE OF PICTURES IN JOURNALISM

According to Mortensen, Allan and Peters (2017), journalism appears to be increasingly driven by visuals. Quinn (2012) states that visual materials are recognised as click generators in internet publications, as well as entry points in newspaper. In support of Quinn's (2012) assertion, Adigun (2013) opines that without photography to hold attention, a reader who has no more than a passing or general interest, will just take a sweeping glance at a page and turn to the next one. He noted that there are people whose main interest in a page or even the whole newspaper is photography. Furthermore, he believes that most people, especially the not-too-educated are always enthused to read a story, if relevant portraits or feature photographs are used to illustrate it.

Dobernig and Lobinger (2010) state that the noticeable increase in the number of news images in the current media landscape stems from various factors, such as today's media audiences who mostly prefer messages that are easy to consume and process, as time is scarce and attentiveness limited. Dobernig and Lobinger (2010) also credit the increase in

news images to digitalization of media technologies which they argue has pushed the diffusion of visual texts stating further that images are nowadays highly available and easily accessible for the public in general and news journalists in particular.

CREDIBILITY DILEMMA ON THE USE OF PICTURES IN JOURNALISM

Ui (2013) states that the advent of digital technology has upset the credibility factor of pictures in journalism. He points out that there was a time when photography could guarantee reliance in articles; when a photograph in an article made people believe that the article was genuine. Ui (2013) argues that the invention of Adobe Photoshop in 1988 has however, allowed for imprudent manipulation of photography and its misuse has been often done in journalism causing questions of credibility in digital photography and further photojournalism. Wheeler (2002) argues that picture is a manipulation of light. According to Wheeler:

Any discussion of “manipulated” photography must begin with the recognition that photography itself is an inherent manipulation—a manipulation of light, a process with many steps and stages, all subject to the biases and interpretations of the photographer, printer, editor, or viewer. Photography is not absolute “reality.”... Indeed, many of its earliest practitioners were more concerned with concocting fantasy than documenting reality. They were artists, not journalists. (Wheeler, 2002:5).

To Ui (2013) there are three factors causing picture mistrust: picture manipulation, picture recycling and framed picture.

Picture Manipulation: This includes photoshopped pictures such as background switching and object removing from pictures. Picture manipulation in journalistic use may confuse and mislead the public. Photo manipulation in journalistic use may confuse and mislead the public.

Picture Recycling: Using photos used by previous story and pretending it as new one. Recycling is a form of fake photography which confuses audience by using a photography which is used in different coverage in the same issue and sometimes in totally different theme. The recycled fake photography is often disclosed in war coverage; there have been recycled fake photographs from Afghanistan warfare to Syria civil war & Gaza conflict issue

Framed Pictures: Intentionally framed to drag out intended emotions or certain public opinion. Ui (2013) says it causes certain way of thoughts and feeling that hinders objective determination.

Empirical Review

In the study titled “Photo Credibility and News Reporting: Individual Reception Tendency”, Ui (2013) sought to investigate how people connect photography to the news article and how they are dependent to the photography to understand news articles. He also sought to find out whether distrusted/fake photojournalism affects the whole news article or not. Findings from the study indicated that the study sample use pictures to understand context of the article, and sometimes photography itself creates context of the whole article; this means pictures takes huge role in understanding news articles. The study

showed that respondents are more sensitive to the direct visual deception rather than contextual such as framing.

Hameleers, Powell, Van Der Meer, and Bos (2020), conducted a study on “A Picture Paints a Thousand Lies? The Effects and Mechanisms of Multimodal Disinformation and Rebuttals Disseminated via Social Media”. The study sought to investigate the credibility of textual

versus multimodal (text-plus-visual) disinformation, and the effects of textual and multimodal fact checkers in refuting disinformation on school shootings and refugees. Findings from the study showed that indicate that, irrespective of the source, multimodal disinformation is considered slightly more credible than textual disinformation. Fact checkers can help to overcome the potential harmful consequences of disinformation. We also found that fact checkers can overcome partisan and attitudinal filters – which points to the relevance of fact checking as a journalistic discipline.

In the study titled, “How can Journalists Promote News Credibility? Effects of Evidences on Trust and Credibility”, Henke, Leissner, & Möhring (2020) sought to investigate how the use of different forms of evidences affects the credibility and quality evaluation of news stories, as well as the reading experience from the audience’s perspective. To this effect they conducted an online experiment to detect the influence of the presence of scientific sources, statistical information, and their visualization in an online article. Findings from the study indicate that these evidences increase the perceived credibility. At the same time, it indicates that adding scientific sources, statistical data and, visualizations to an article does not lessen its reading enjoyment but improves its perceived vividness in the view of news users.

METHODS

Study Group:

177 staff of Redeemer’s University Ede participated in this study. The respondents comprised of 67.7% male and 33.3 % female. Further breakdown of respondents showed that, 51.3% of academic staff and 48.7% of non-academic staff who have access to news. As at the time this study, the total number of staff members of the university is 316.

Study Design:

Descriptive survey was conducted using members of staff in Redeemer’s University purposively selected by the researchers. Redeemer’s University staff members were chosen as the study group. Also, the questionnaires were distributed via emails because the study was conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria. Also, we considered that with the chosen respondents’ level of maturity in age, reasoning and educational status, they could sensibly state their perception on means of reporting credible news between pictures and news stories.

Instrument of data gathering:

The researchers adopted e-questionnaire structured using close-ended questions to elicit the various opinions of the respondents on the subject matter. To ensure validity of instrument, the face validity was done by submitting a drafted copy of the research instrument to a senior academic in mass communication that went through it and vetted the contents. She confirmed that the instrument was valid enough to measure the opinions that would correctly answer the research questions for the study.

Administration of instrument:

Convenience sampling technique was used to select the participants. The e-questionnaire was distributed via the official school email platform to all staff of Redeemer's University. Participants filled the e-questionnaire after which the researchers received their response automatically at the back-end of the platform used. The questionnaire was designed to capture answers on respondents' demographics, their perceived opinion on the means of reporting credible news between pictures and news stories.

Sample:

Taro Yamane's formula was used to determine the sample size of this study; $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$

where:

n= sample size

N = population

e = margin of error (0.05)

In the light of the above, the sample size for this research purpose is shown below:

$$= \frac{316}{1+316(0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{316}{1+ 316(0.0025)}$$

$$= \frac{316}{1 + 0.79}$$

$$n = 176.5 \approx 177$$

Method of Analysis:

Data elicited based on research questions are presented using the Likert scale and analyzed using the SPSS statistical tool. Responses are either accepted or rejected based on the value of the weighted mean for each response. A mean of 3.51 and above is accepted, a mean of 3.50 to 2.50 is indifferent, while a mean of 2.51 and below is rejected.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

The age range of the respondents was between 18 – 58 years and above. This is an indication that the respondents are matured enough to participate in the study. From the data obtained, male respondents were 109 (62%) while the female respondents were 68 (32%). Only 2.5% made up the population of respondents that fall within the age bracket of 18-27 years of age ($n=4$), while 21.5% made up the number of respondents that fall within the age bracket of 28-37 ($n= 38$), majority of the respondents were from the age bracket of 38 – 47 years of age ($n=92$, 52%), while 16.5% made up the number of respondents that fall within the age bracket of 48-57 ($n=29$) and the age range of 58+ ($n=13$, 7.5%). The majority of the respondents had a P.hD ($n=65$, 37%), while 55 (30.9%) had a Masters degree (Msc.). 46 respondents (25.9%) had a Bachelors degree or HND, while 4 respondents (2.5%) had Ordinary National Diploma (OND) and 7 (3.7%) reported a secondary education.

In terms of occupation, majority 91 (51.3%) are lecturers, while 65 (36.8%) constitute administrators, 12 (6.7%) indicated that they are medical professionals, 5 (2.7%) indicated that they are accountants and 4 (2.5%) indicated others such as librarian.

Research Objective 1: To determine what news consumers perceive to be more credible between news reports and pictures.

Table 1: Audience Perception of means of reporting Credible News between News Reports and Pictures

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Decision
News report cannot be manipulated	20	39	7	55	56	2.50	Indifferent
News report can be subjective	96	72	4	0	5	4.44	Agreed
News reports provide facts and analysis even without pictures as evidence	94	61	9	0	13	4.26	Agreed
Regardless of editorial judgment news reports still give factual account of events and tell the story accurately	107	62	5	0	3	4.53	Agreed
Picture don't lie	2	11	24	68	72	1.89	Disagreed
Pictures can be manipulated as such they cannot tell the story alone without news reports	57	55	35	18	12	3.72	Agreed
Regardless of editing,	28	57	28	18	46	3.02	Indifferent

pictures still tell the story better than news reports							
I believe the use of pictures in news reports authenticate a story	48	107	9	4	9	4.02	Agreed

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2020

The result of the analysis showed that 20 of the respondents strongly agreed that News report cannot be manipulated, 39 of the respondents agreed, 7 were neutral, 55 disagreed and 56 strongly disagreed. The mean of 2.5 implies that majority of the respondents were indifferent about the statement that news report cannot be manipulated.

The result showed that 96 of the respondents strongly agreed that news report can be subjective, 72 agreed, 4 were neutral, none of the respondents disagreed and only 5 strongly disagreed. The mean of 4.4 implies that majority of the respondents agreed that news report can be subjective.

Also, 94 of the respondents strongly agreed that news reports provide facts and analysis even without pictures as evidence, 72 agreed, 4 were neutral, none of the respondents disagreed and 13 strongly disagreed. The mean of 4.26 indicated that majority of respondents agreed with the statement that news reports provide facts and analysis even without pictures as evidence.

The result indicated that 107 of the respondents strongly agreed that regardless of editorial judgment news reports still give factual account of events and tell the story accurately, 62 agreed, 5 were neutral, none of the respondents disagreed and only 3 strongly disagreed. The mean of 4.53 implies that majority of the respondents agreed with the statement that regardless of editorial judgment, news reports still give factual account of events and tell the story accurately.

The result showed that only 2 of the respondents strongly agreed that pictures don't lie, 11 agreed, 24 of the respondents decided to be neutral, with 68 disagreed, and 72 strongly disagreed. The mean of 1.89 indicated that majority of the respondents disagreed with the statement that pictures don't lie.

The result showed that 57 of respondents strongly agreed that pictures can be manipulated and as such they cannot tell the story alone without news reports, 55 agreed to the statement, 35 of the respondents decided to be neutral, while 18 respondents disagreed, and 12 strongly disagreed with the statement. The mean of 3.72 implies that majority of the respondents agreed that pictures can be manipulated and that as such they cannot tell the story alone without news reports.

The result showed 28 of respondents strongly agreed that regardless of editing, pictures still tell the story better than news reports, 57 of the respondents agreed to the statement, 28 stayed neutral, while 18 disagreed, and 46 strongly disagreed. The mean of 3.02

indicated that majority of the respondents are indifferent about the statement that regardless of editing, pictures still tell the story better than news reports.

The last result on audience perception of means of reporting credible news between news reports and pictures showed 48 strongly agreed to that the use of pictures in news reports authenticate a story, 107 respondents agreed to the statement, 9 stayed neutral, while 4, and 9 disagreed and strongly disagreed. The mean of 4.02 indicated that majority of the respondents agreed with the statement that the use of pictures in news reports authenticates a story.

Research Objective 2: To establish news consumers’ perception of best means of reporting credible news

Table 2: Audience Perception of Best Means of Reporting Credible News

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Decision
News reports are a better means of reporting events than pictures	48	37	46	31	15	3.41	Indifferent
Pictures are the best means of reporting	28	92	18	2	37	3.36	Indifferent
Pictures compliment news reports and as such both are a good means of reporting events	47	57	42	13	18	3.58	Agreed
Pictures and News are both means of reporting credible news	39	59	42	22	18	3.50	Agreed

Source: Researchers’ Field Survey, 2020

The result of findings from audience perception on best means of reporting credible news revealed that 48 of the respondents strongly agreed that news reports are a better means of reporting events than pictures, 37 agreed, 46 were neutral, 31 disagreed, and 15 strongly disagreed. The mean of 3.41 implies that majority of the respondents are indifferent about the statement that news reports are better means of reporting events than pictures.

The result on pictures being the best means of reporting showed that 28 strongly agreed, 92 agreed, 18 were neutral, 2 disagreed, and 37 strongly disagreed to this statement. The mean of 3.36 implies that majority of the respondents were indifferent about pictures being the best means of reporting.

The research result showed 47 respondents strongly agreed that pictures compliment news reports and as such both are good means of reporting events, 57 agreed to the statement, 42 were neutral, 13 respondents disagreed, and 18 respondents strongly disagreed. The mean of 3.58 implies that majority of the respondents agreed that pictures compliment news reports and as such both are a good means of reporting.

The research result showed 39 respondents strongly agreed that pictures and news are both means of reporting credible news, 59 agreed to the statement, 42 were neutral, 22 respondents disagreed, and 18 respondents strongly disagreed. The mean of 3.50 implies result implies that majority of the respondents agreed with the statement that pictures and news are both means of reporting credible news.

The result showed 48 of respondents strongly agreed that News reports are a better means of reporting events than pictures, 37 agreed to the statement, 46 were neutral, 31 disagreed, and 15 strongly disagreed. The mean of 3.41 indicated that majority of the respondents are indifferent about the statement that news reports are a better means of reporting events than pictures.

Research Objective 3: To find out if pictures can change media audience perception of news report

Table 3: Audience perception on whether pictures change their views of news reports

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Decision
Pictures are important and helpful to tell story in news articles	74	87	8	4	4	4.26	Agreed
A news report must contain at least one picture	35	77	26	18	21	3.50	Agreed
Generally Picture in news article shapes atmosphere of whole story	57	88	26	4	2	4.10	Agreed
Pictures report the actual news than news reports alone	50	66	36	7	18	3.70	Agreed

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2020

The result of the analysis showed that 74 of the respondents strongly agreed that picture are important and helpful to tell story in news articles, 87 of the respondents agreed, 8 of the respondents were neutral, while only 4 disagreed and strongly disagreed each. The mean of 4.26 implies that majority of the respondents agreed that pictures are important and helpful to tell story in news articles.

The result showed that 35 of the respondents strongly agreed that a news report must contain atleast one picture, 77 agreed, 26 were neutral, 18 of the respondents disagreed and 21 strongly disagreed. The mean of 3.5 implies that majority of the respondents agreed that a news report must contain at least one picture.

Also, 57 of the respondents strongly agreed that generally, picture in news article shapes atmosphere of whole story, 88 agreed, 26 were neutral, 4 of the respondents disagreed and 2 strongly disagreed. The mean of 4.10 implies that majority of respondents agreed that generally, picture in news article shapes atmosphere of whole story.

Finally, 50 of the respondents strongly agreed that pictures report the actual news than news reports alone, 66 agreed to the statement, 36 were neutral, 7 of the respondents disagreed and 18 strongly disagreed. The mean of 3.70 implies that majority of the respondents agreed that pictures report the actual news than news reports alone.

Discussion of Findings

The study investigated audience perception of means of reporting credible news between pictures and news reports. The findings indicate that pictures and news are both good means of reporting credible news. It showed that pictures are important and helpful to tell a story in news articles. The analysis of result further revealed that most respondents believe that the use of pictures in news reports authenticates a story. The results of the current study are consistent with the submission of Hameleers, Powell, Van Der Meer, and Bos (2020) that, irrespective of the source, multimodal (text-plus-visual) disinformation is considered slightly more credible than textual disinformation. This finding is also in conformity with Ui's (2013) observation that people use pictures to understand context of articles, and sometimes photography itself creates context of the whole article; this means pictures takes huge role in understanding news articles.

The result of the data analysis in the present study also revealed that there was a significant positive relationship between pictures and news articles. However, the result showed that pictures can be manipulated as such they cannot tell the story alone without news reports. This is consistent with Ui's (2013) findings that respondents chose the manipulation as the most unacceptable and the most affective one to the credibility of news coverage.

CONCLUSION

The results from this study established audience perception that the best means of reporting credible news is when news stories accompany news reports. This is because what audience reads about in the papers or listening/viewing on radio and television are authenticated by the pictures or news video that accompany them. Moreso, when a news medium embraces the practice of accompanying news stories with pictures, such news organization stand a better chance of improving its organization credibility, source credibility and message credibility which will in turn endeared the news organization to

media audiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. News reports should be complemented with pictures as this will strengthened news stories credibility;
2. It is important to indicate 'archive' on pictures and news video that are not recent but are used to accompany news stories.
3. Journalists should endeavour to check and recheck information to ensure source credibility.

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