ABSTRACT

This study explores the causes and covariates of perceived news credibility by Chinese audiences from following aspects. First, five antecedents are proposed on the basis of a thorough literature review: media location, geographic scope of media coverage, event location, content valence, and news topic. Both their main effects and interaction effects are tested. Second, a series of covariates are examined, namely, government credibility, skeptical disposition, ideological orientation, study specialty, and perceived frequency of inconsistent reports. In view of the practice of using a cover term of media credibility for news credibility, this study also provides an analysis of the differences between these two concepts.

A 2 (media locations) by 2 (geographic scopes) by 2 (event locations) by 2 (content valences) by 2 (news topic) unbalanced designed experiment is conducted, in which 24 treatment combinations are involved. In this design, media location, geographic scope of media coverage, event location, and content valence are treated as between-subjects factors, while news topic is used as a within-subjects factor. According to this design, 422 university students were randomly assigned to 12 groups, each of whom received 2 stimuli (reading articles). Afterward, subjects were required to finish a questionnaire in which both media credibility and news credibility were measured.

Three clusters of findings are found interesting. The first is that the five antecedents have significant impact on perceived news credibility including main effects of media location and content valence and interaction effects of event location by content valence and event location by news topic. The second is that
some attitudinal covariates: such as government credibility, skeptical disposition, preference for delayed democratic reform and communist value orientation has significant impact on news credibility. At last, there is a weak correlation between news credibility and media credibility.

These empirical findings are discussed in view of their contributions and limitations. Several suggestions for credibility research in the future are also proposed.