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The Historical Evolution of Public Trust in Media: A Comparative Diachronic Study of Print, TV, and AI Using Structural Equations and Content Analysis

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ENG **Abstract.** This study explores the diachronic evolution of media credibility mechanisms, transitioning from the institutional authority of the print era to the charismatic presence of television, and ultimately to the algorithmic logic of Artificial Intelligence. While traditional scholarship often addresses media trust crises as isolated phenomena, this research adopts an integrated structural approach. Utilizing a dual methodology that combines quantitative content analysis with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the study identifies three distinct discursive models of trust. The findings demonstrate a fundamental shift in the "epistemology of certainty": from a model anchored in professional gatekeeping and institutional mastheads, through a sensory-emotional paradigm centered on the news anchor, to a contemporary data-centric model. In this final stage, inferred trust is no longer constructed through human authority but through perceived algorithmic transparency and the computational verifiability of data. The research highlights the structural fragility of this new paradigm, where the burden of credibility shifts from personal expertise to technological transparency.
Keywords: Media Trust, Diachronic Analysis, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), AI-Generated Content, Algorithmic Transparency.

ES La evolución histórica de la confianza pública en los medios: un estudio diacrónico comparativo de la prensa, la televisión y la IA utilizando ecuaciones estructurales y análisis de contenido

Resumen. Este estudio explora la evolución diacrónica de los mecanismos de credibilidad mediática, analizando la transición desde la autoridad institucional de la prensa escrita y el carisma personal de la televisión hasta la lógica algorítmica de la Inteligencia Artificial. A diferencia de los enfoques tradicionales que tratan las crisis de confianza de forma aislada, esta investigación adopta una perspectiva estructural integrada. Mediante una metodología dual que combina el análisis de contenido cuantitativo con la Modelización de Ecuaciones Estructurales (SEM), se identifican tres modelos discursivos de confianza diferenciados. Los resultados revelan un cambio fundamental en la "epistemología de la certeza": de un modelo basado en la mediación profesional y el prestigio institucional, pasando por un paradigma sensorial-emocional centrado en el presentador, hacia un modelo contemporáneo centrado en los datos. En esta última etapa, la confianza inferida ya no se construye sobre la autoridad humana, sino sobre la transparencia algorítmica percibida y la verificabilidad computacional de la información. La investigación subraya la fragilidad estructural de este nuevo paradigma, donde la carga de la credibilidad se desplaza del juicio humano a la transparencia tecnológica.
Palabras clave: Confianza en los medios, Análisis diacrónico, Modelización de ecuaciones estructurales (MEE), Contenido generado por IA, Transparencia algorítmica.

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1. Introduction

The concept of trust in media has long been a central issue, especially during periods of major transitions. With each new technology, the public faces a new challenge in distinguishing between truth and misinformation. In the era of print journalism, trust was linked to the authority of the publisher and the editorial process, where the

newspaper's brand served as a guarantee. News discourse was carefully crafted, and words were meticulously chosen to instill a sense of credibility based on the physical presence of the institution. This era solidified a hierarchical model of communication, where information flowed from top to bottom.

With the advent of radio and television, the trust system underwent a radical transformation. Discourse was no longer limited to the written word; it was now augmented by audio and visual dimensions. The credibility and personality of the anchor, along with the quality of production, became influential factors. Television offered a "window to the world," giving the audience a sense of direct presence and observation, which fostered trust based on the direct sensory experience of an event. This shift not only changed how news was consumed but also how discourse itself was constructed, with visuals and soundbites becoming crucial tools in shaping the message.

The contemporary media landscape is characterized by a significant technological transition driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI), which enables the automated generation of multi-modal news content, including text, imagery, and video. This evolution presents critical inquiries regarding the nature of trust in an era where the ontological distinction between human-authored and machine-generated content becomes increasingly blurred. Consequently, traditional credibility frameworks—historically anchored in institutional authority or personal charisma—require re-examination. The current challenge involves a multi-dimensional re-evaluation of trust, potentially shifting toward algorithmic processes, data provenance, or the deploying institutions.

This study systematically examines these transformations by integrating a diachronic historical methodology with quantitative content analysis across three distinct media eras. The primary objective is to deconstruct the linguistic and visual indicators that constitute the "discursive architecture" of trust. The integration of AI signifies a structural shift in media production, moving beyond a mere instrumental evolution. Unlike previous eras, which maintained a discernible human source—such as a journalist or editor—the automated nature of AI-generated discourse complicates the traditional attribution of authority. This transition necessitates a rigorous analysis of how responsibility and credibility are discursively constructed when human agency is no longer the sole origin of media content.

The main question this study poses is: How does the relationship between the characteristics of media discourse and the degree of public trust in it differ and evolve across three distinct technological eras—the age of print journalism, television broadcasting, and AI-generated content?

The relationship between the characteristics of media discourse and the degree of public trust differs fundamentally between the era of print journalism, television broadcasting, and AI-generated content:

- H1: In the era of print journalism, trust is built primarily on institutional authority and professional references, making them a central factor in media discourse.
- H2: In the era of television broadcasting, trust shifts to rely more on sensory characteristics such as the anchor's voice, body language, and the narrative of personal experience, which will appear as variables with a significant impact on the model.
- H3: In the era of AI-generated content, trust is built on entirely different factors, such as transparency in the use of algorithms, the speed of data updates, and the ability to personalize content, making these factors highly influential on trust.
- H4: Structural equation modeling will show that each of the three eras possesses a unique model that links its media discourse characteristics to the degree of inferred trust, confirming that technological shifts fundamentally reshape the mechanisms of trust-building.
- H5: Despite the differences, a common factor is assumed to exist in all eras: a focus on information accuracy, but the way this accuracy is expressed differs in terms of source: from human "reliable sources" in print to machine "verified data" in AI.

This study derives its significance from filling a deep research and methodological gap in the field of media and communication studies. Methodologically, most research addressing trust in media moves away from a diachronic perspective that connects different technological stages, leading to treating each trust crisis as an independent phenomenon. By adopting a comparative historical approach, this research provides a comprehensive analytical framework that shows how the mechanisms of trust-building have evolved. In this context, it is crucial to clarify that this study specifically investigates the discursive construction of trust; it does not measure empirical audience reception or psychological trust levels among the public. Instead, it analyzes the linguistic and structural mechanisms within media texts that are designed to foster credibility. Therefore, the term 'trust' in this study refers to Inferred Discursive Trust—the strategic way media outlets across three eras attempt to establish authority through their content.

The use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in the analysis of media content serves as a methodological innovation of high scientific value. It enables the transition from simple descriptive analyses to building complex causal models that test the latent relationships between the characteristics of media discourse and the inferred concept of trust, significantly enhancing the accuracy and explanatory power of the results.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Trust in Media through Theoretical Approaches

2.1.1. Trust as a Social Phenomenon

Trust is a central concept in the social sciences, as the continuity of social and economic systems cannot be understood without it. The German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel defined trust as a state of partial knowledge, built on past experience or future expectations, and acting as a form of "reduction of

complexity" in social interactions (Christian & Patrick, 2015). In our contemporary world, where individuals face a massive amount of contradictory information, this idea becomes of utmost importance. Trust in media acts as a cognitive mechanism that enables individuals to make decisions about which information sources to rely on, without needing to verify every piece of information individually (Przemysław & Artur, 2022).

The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann provided a more detailed framework for trust, considering it a "reduction of complexity" in complex social systems. For Luhmann, trust acts as an alternative to control, where individuals partially hand over the responsibility of knowledge to a larger system (such as the media) (Roman, Maass, & Veda, 2022). In this context, trust is not just an individual decision but a structural feature of the social system itself. When the public trusts a media institution, it does not just trust its content; it also trusts the procedures and processes that produce this content (verification, editing, impartiality) (Marína & Klára, 2023). This understanding helps in analyzing the current crisis of trust, as the erosion of trust is not necessarily due to a specific piece of news being false, but to a collapse of trust in the media system as a whole.

2.1.2. Media Effects Theory from Agenda-Setting to Cultivation

Media effects theories are essential for understanding how media shapes our perceptions of the world and, consequently, influences trust. One of the most prominent of these theories is Agenda-Setting Theory, developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. This theory states that media doesn't tell us what to think, but what to think about. That is, the importance media gives to a certain topic (through repetition, coverage space, and placement) is translated into a similar importance in the public's mind. This theory contributes to understanding trust by showing that media has the power to direct public attention, making it a source of cognitive authority, and this authority is the basis of trust (Maxwell & Donald, 2017).

Cultivation Theory, developed by George Gerbner, goes a step further. The theory states that continuous and regular exposure to television content slowly shapes the public's perceptions of social reality, making them see the world as portrayed by the television screen (Matea & Jan, 2021). For example, constant news viewers may overestimate crime rates, leading to a feeling of insecurity. From a trust perspective, this theory explains how long-term exposure to certain media reinforces a deeply rooted belief system, in which the source becomes trusted subconsciously. This process transforms the relationship from mere information consumption to a process of instilling awareness and social consciousness, making trust in media not so much a conscious choice as a result of a long-term process of reception (Ioanna, 2021).

2.1.3. Trust and Credibility

In communication studies, the terms trust and credibility are sometimes used interchangeably, but the distinction between them is essential for this study. Credibility is considered a characteristic of a message or source. It is a relatively objective judgment made by the recipient on the degree of competence and reliability of the source at a specific moment. Credibility is often measured based on two main dimensions: Expertise, which refers to the source's knowledge in a specific field, and Trustworthiness, which relates to its integrity and honest intentions (Anina, Andri, Lea, & Damian, 2023).

Trust, on the other hand, is a deeper and more complex concept. It is a psychological attitude of an individual, built over the long term, and includes an emotional dimension in addition to the cognitive one (Hancock & al, 2023). Trust is a decision to rely on a specific source in the future, even in the absence of complete information. It is a state of mind that allows the individual to let go of caution and rely on the other.

Based on these distinctions, credibility models provide an analytical framework for measuring source quality:

- The Competent and Honest Source Model: This model sees credibility built on two foundations: expertise, i.e., the extent to which the source possesses the necessary knowledge and skills, and honesty, i.e., the extent to which the public believes the source acts with integrity and aims to present the truth (Lena, Rolf, Anne, & Dilara, 2020).
- The Attractive Source Model: This model adds a third dimension to credibility, which is Attractiveness. It argues that the public may trust a source not only for its expertise or honesty but also for its aesthetic or social appeal, or because they feel an emotional connection to it. This dimension gains special importance in the visual media era, where the image or personality of the anchor plays a crucial role in building trust (Imran & Jari, 2023).

2.2. The Evolution of Media Discourse Across Technological Eras

2.2.1. The Discourse of Authority and Professionalism in the Print Era

In the era of print journalism, which dominated the media scene for centuries, media discourse was built on a foundation of institutional and professional authority. The content was not just a narrative of events, but the product of a complex process of editing and verification, which gave it an aura of reliability. The newspaper, as an institution, was the primary source of trust, acting as a "gatekeeper" of information. This authority was derived from its ability to employ professional journalists and experienced editors, which distinguished it from amateur publications (Lena & Annik, 2023).

2.2.2. The Discourse of Presence and Charisma in the Television Era

The anchor or reporter became a public figure, and a large part of the trust was built on their relationship with the audience. Body language, tone of voice, and direct visual contact with the camera were powerful tools for

presenting an image of honesty and expertise. An anchor who appeared calm and confident, presenting the news with a serious tone (Lali, Ivdit, Natia, & Lia, 2024), was seen as a reliable source.

The public came to trust the news because they trusted the person presenting it. The ability of television to present events live, through live broadcasting, added an extra layer of credibility, as the audience felt they were "witnesses" to the events, which enhanced their sense of realism and reduced their need for verification (Anggun, Rahma, & Isna, 2025). This new discourse was not just a transmission of information, but an interactive experience that made the public feel an emotional connection with the source, instilling trust based on visual presence and personal charisma.

2.2.3. The Discourse of Data and Algorithms in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

The characteristics of discourse in this era are built on different concepts:

- Speed: Content becomes available in real time, and data is updated instantly. This speed gives an impression of technological superiority, and the public comes to trust the news because it is the fastest and most up-to-date.
- Personalization: Algorithms provide content specifically designed for each user based on their interests and past behaviors. This personalized experience reinforces the relationship with the content, as the user feels that the content "knows" them, which can translate into greater trust in the source (Wajed, Raeda, Murad, & Juhaina).
- Transparency in Data Usage: Unlike the hidden editorial processes in the print era, AI-generated systems are required to be more transparent about the sources they use and the algorithms they rely on. Trust becomes linked to "data clarity" and "algorithmic correctness," instead of "word correctness."

2.3. Theorizing for Comparative and Diachronic Analysis

The historical or diachronic approach is the cornerstone of understanding complex social phenomena, including trust in media. Unlike the synchronic approach, which analyzes a phenomenon at a specific point in time, the diachronic approach seeks to trace the evolution of the phenomenon over time, which reveals the root causes and interactions that shaped it (Denys, 2019). This methodology is crucial in our study because it addresses the shortcoming of viewing the current trust crisis as an isolated phenomenon resulting only from the rise of digital media and AI.

3. Literature Review

A study titled "A Comparative Analysis of Credibility of Print Media and Social Media: A Study in Bhubaneswar" addressed the challenge faced by traditional media, specifically print journalism, in the digital age dominated by social media (Debasish, Somab, & Rajat, 2022). The study posed a fundamental question about the reliability of online news compared to news in printed newspapers, noting the ongoing debate between supporters of traditional media and the digital media revolution. The problem highlighted is that the public has become increasingly reliant on their device screens for information, which raises questions about their ability to distinguish between reliable and potentially inaccurate or misleading sources, especially since many reliable news sources have shifted to online publishing. The study emphasizes that most previous research focuses on recent developments but neglects the public's ability to get vital and reliable information from specialized sources, which makes it more difficult to make important decisions in daily life.

The study relied on a dual research methodology, starting with extensive research of secondary sources to understand the concept of credibility in the media industry, then moving to exploratory research. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire distributed to a research sample of 50 participants, consisting of working journalists and the public from the city of Bhubaneswar. The data was analyzed using simple statistical methods based on calculating percentages, and the results were presented in the form of charts and tables to facilitate interpretation. The study did not mention details about the coding process, calculating coding reliability, or other advanced analytical tools used in rigorous scientific studies, but rather sufficed with a simple statistical description.

The study reached several key findings that support the hypothesis that the public still prefers print journalism in terms of credibility. The results revealed that the majority of participants (63%) believe that print journalism is more reliable than social media, and 72% agree that news in print media is more factual, and 64% see it as more accurate. The results also showed that most participants fully trust the information published in newspapers, while this level of trust decreases when dealing with social media. The study concluded that the main reason for the public's trust in print journalism is that it is an old and traditional medium for providing real news, while social media allows anyone to easily publish false news and rumors.

Another study titled "A Historical Perspective on User Trust in AI in the Face of Uncertainty" addressed the problem of understanding how to build trust in AI systems and how it can be restored after it is eroded. The study indicates that modern natural language processing systems are often "uncalibrated," meaning they give incorrect predictions with very high confidence, which undermines user trust. The study seeks to address this problem by exploring the evolution of user trust over time and determining how it is affected by events that weaken trust, such as giving incorrect predictions (Shehzaad, Vilém, Mennatallah, & Mrinmaya, 2023).

The study relied on a quantitative experimental methodology, where an interactive experiment was designed to study trust diachronically (i.e., over time). The study simulated an AI system to provide answers to

specific questions, and the main tool of the study was a "betting game," where participants interacted with the designed system, evaluated its answer, and then bet an amount between 0 and 10 cents on the correctness of the system's answer. This approach was chosen to ensure that participants thought deeply about their decision. Data was collected from 18,000 interactions for 60 participants, with changes in experimental variables such as the type of errors (confident incorrect, not confident correct) and the number of errors.

The study reached several important findings, as it proved that "confidently incorrect" errors cause much greater damage to user trust compared to other errors, and that this trust erodes very quickly and recovers very slowly. It also showed that a very small number of errors (just five examples) were enough to have a long-term negative impact on user trust. The study also proved that a decrease in trust leads to a decline in the performance of human-AI collaboration. Finally, the study found that the erosion of trust "transfers" from a certain type of question to other types, which indicates that the user builds a comprehensive mental model of the system as a whole, not just parts of it.

In another comparative study on the credibility of AI-generated news content and traditional news content, the researcher (Aiyun, 2025) addressed a main problem which is the credibility of news content produced by AI (AIGC) compared to traditional news content. The research highlights that AI has become an essential tool in journalism, which increases efficiency, but in return, raises doubts about the reliability of the content resulting from it. The problem indicates that the rapid development of AI technologies can lead to "information pollution" on social media platforms, which can greatly mislead the public. The study also aims to explore this problem from three specific aspects: the quantity and quality of the data used, the personal biases of journalists, and the transparency of information in the news content.

The study relied on a qualitative methodology, mainly through comparative analysis and critical inference. No quantitative tools were used to collect data; rather, it relied on case analysis, quoting data from previous studies, and critical analysis of concepts. For example, the study analyzed specific cases of media coverage to show journalistic bias in traditional media, and other studies were cited to prove the existence of biases in AI-generated content due to the training data.

The study concluded that both AI-generated news content and traditional content have different advantages and disadvantages regarding credibility. In terms of advantages, the study found that AI-generated content benefits from large training data, which makes it more comprehensive and accurate, and that the use of algorithms makes it free from journalists' personal bias. As for the disadvantages, the study concluded that the credibility of AI-generated content is undermined by the possibility of the training data containing inaccurate or biased information, in addition to the lack of transparency regarding algorithms and data sources, which makes the verification process difficult and weakens public trust.

While previous academic research has enriched the field of knowledge on the concepts of trust and credibility in media, it often deals with these phenomena in fragmented and separate contexts. Most studies that addressed the digital transformation compared only two media outlets, such as print journalism and social media, and provided valuable insights into audience preferences in the current era, but did not place these findings within a broader historical framework. Similarly, research that focused on the impact of AI has revealed new and complex trust mechanisms, such as the role of algorithmic transparency, but has not linked these findings to the historical foundations of trust that have been formed over decades. The knowledge gap here lies in the absence of a single study that adopts a comprehensive diachronic approach, going beyond binary comparisons, and seeks to trace and explain the trajectory of trust's evolution across three major technological eras: print journalism, television broadcasting, and AI-generated content. This integrated approach is necessary to understand the phenomenon as a whole, not as isolated events, and to show how the foundations of trust have shifted from relying on the institution to the individual and then to data.

The transition toward an algorithmic epistemology represents a fundamental "epistemic rupture" that reconfigures the boundaries between data, interpretation, and truth. As defined by (Punziano, 2025), this "Adaptive Epistemology" signals a shift from linear discovery to a dynamic, co-produced process where the journalist becomes a "designer of epistemic contexts," utilizing generative AI not just as a tool, but as a non-human agent that co-authors meaning through probabilistic reasoning. This structural change is further complicated by the "platformization" of news, where algorithmic gatekeeping substitutes traditional editorial judgment with engagement-driven metrics or "shareworthiness" (Hastuti, Harry, Herman, & Ansar, 2025). Consequently, the "language of certainty" often exhibited by AI models does not reflect an objective reality, but rather a "probabilistic legitimacy" that prioritizes algorithmic speed and reach, potentially marginalizing the nuanced, human-centric investigative depth that historically defined journalistic authority.

This epistemological shift is not a neutral technical evolution but a deeply contested terrain of "agency, power, and authority." According to (Allen & Mathias, 2025), the integration of generative AI (GenAI) triggers a "renegotiation of power" that is acutely felt across the "AI Divide," where newsrooms in the Global South often face a cycle of dependency on Western-centric infrastructures. To safeguard against the "deskilling" of the profession and the erosion of epistemic safeguards, the industry is moving toward a model of "controlled change" (Tomás, Wang, Claudia, & Mathias, 2025), which insists on a "human-in-the-loop" approach as an essential insurance policy. In this hybrid cognitive ecology, media legitimacy is no longer a static institutional attribute but a negotiated outcome; it depends on the ability of human actors to maintain "epistemic agility" while reflexively managing the "algorithmic indeterminacy" and "infrastructural opacity" of the post-digital era**;** (Allen & Mathias, 2025; Punziano, 2025).

4. Methodology and Tools

This study relies on a quantitative comparative methodology that combines historical and diachronic analysis with advanced statistical methods. The aim is to examine the developments in media trust-building mechanisms across distinct technological stages. This approach is distinguished by its ability to go beyond simple descriptive analyses to provide an analytical framework through which causal relationships between variables can be tested rigorously and objectively. The study was designed as a comparison between three main periods, each representing a qualitative technological shift in the media industry: the era of print journalism, which represents the peak of hierarchical media; the era of television broadcasting, which represents a shift toward personal and sensory media; and the era of AI-generated content, which represents the current era of algorithm-driven media. This methodological choice allows us to uncover patterns of change and stability in trust-building, providing a qualitative contribution to understanding the dynamics of the relationship between technology and society.

To implement this approach, two main research tools were relied upon: the first is quantitative content analysis, which is the primary tool for coding and classifying the characteristics of media discourse in each era. A detailed coding guide was developed to measure variables that express trust, such as sourceness (number and type of references), language of certainty (use of words expressing decisiveness or doubt), and the degree of emotionality (use of language that evokes emotions). This guide was applied to a representative sample of media materials from each era, allowing the conversion of qualitative discourse characteristics into quantitative data suitable for statistical analysis. This precise process ensures that the data used in the subsequent analysis is accurate and reliable, and provides a faithful representation of media discourse at each historical stage.

The second tool in this study is Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which is an advanced statistical tool ideal for testing complex theoretical models. SEM was used for several purposes: first, to perform Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to ensure that the observed variables (from content analysis) correctly measure the latent variables (the theoretical concepts of trust). Second, Path Analysis was used to test the causal relationships between discourse characteristics and the degree of trust in each era separately. Finally, Multi-group Analysis was employed, which is the tool that enabled us to compare the models across the three eras and to definitively test the study's main hypothesis about the existence of fundamental differences in trust-building mechanisms. This dual methodology, which combines the precision of content analysis with the power of structural equation modeling, enhances the credibility of the results and contributes to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. The latent constructs in the SEM model were derived directly from the coding categories. For instance, the 'Technological Transparency' construct in the AI era was measured through binary indicators of explicit algorithm mention and data-sourcing disclosures. Similarly, 'Institutional Authority' was operationalized through the frequency of formal sourceness and professional references. By linking these manifest variables (codes) to latent variables (constructs) via Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), the model tests the structural strength of these trust-building strategies rather than the actual perception of the audience.

To address the diachronic nature of this study, 'Trust' is not measured as an external psychological reaction from a contemporary audience—which would be historically inaccessible for the print and early television eras—but is instead operationalized as a Latent Construct inferred from structural discursive markers. This inferential process is theoretically grounded in the concept of 'Structural Credibility,' where trust is embedded within the linguistic and technical parameters of the message itself. In the SEM applied here, 'Trust' is predicted by key observed variables (Discursive Proxies): Certainty Language, Source Attribution, Institutional Authority, and (specific to the AI era) Algorithmic Transparency. By treating trust as a manifested attribute of the discourse, this methodology provides a consistent epistemic proxy across three centuries. This approach justifies the indirect measurement of trust: we are analyzing the 'Trustworthiness-as-Designed' within the media ecosystem, assuming that the stability of social systems -as argued by Luhmann (2022) (Roman, Maass, & Veda, 2022) - relies on these inherent textual cues to reduce complexity for the receiver.

The stage of defining the sample is one of the essential steps that ensures the validity of the study and the generalizability of its results. In this study, the study population represents all editorials and news analyses published in print and television media, in addition to AI-generated content, within the specified time context. Given the immensity of this population, a representative sample was chosen to ensure effective research management and provide accurate results. To achieve this, a Stratified Purposive Sample method was adopted. This method combines two basic characteristics:

- **Purposive:** Specific samples were chosen based on strict criteria, with the aim of representing each technological era in the best possible way. The selection was not random but was directed toward sources considered leading and influential in each period.
- **Stratified:** The sample was divided into strata (or time periods), and an equal number of units were chosen from each stratum to ensure a fair and reliable comparison between the eras.

The samples were actually collected from three different sources, each representing a unique media era:

Print Era Sample (1940-1960): This period was chosen because it represents the peak of print journalism's dominance before the rise of television. To carry out the collection, reliance was placed on archived newspaper databases, specifically the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database. This tool provides digital access to millions of pages of historical newspapers, which facilitates the search process. This was done through:

- Two leading newspapers in the United States, The New York Times and The Washington Post, were identified due to their status and influence on public opinion during that period.

- Keywords such as “editorial” and “analysis” were used in the database’s internal search engines to access relevant articles.
- 150 editorials and analytical articles were chosen, at a rate of 75 articles from each newspaper, through a random selection process within the specified time period to ensure diversity.

Television Era Sample (1970-1990): This period is considered the golden age of television news broadcasting, where television became the main source of information for the public. A sample from this era was collected by relying on specialized television archives. This was done through:

- Two leading news networks, CBS and ABC, were chosen.
- Access was gained to the Vanderbilt Television News Archive, a comprehensive archive that includes recordings of news broadcasts and television analytical programs.
- The same keywords were used in the search (“analysis,” “opinion”) to access the texts.
- Visual recordings were converted into transcripts to enable the content analysis process.
- 150 analytical texts were chosen, at a rate of 75 texts from each network, through a random selection process within the specified time period.

AI Era Sample (2020-2024): This era is the most recent and challenging, as AI-generated content is still under development. The focus was on sources that explicitly declare their use of AI in content production:

- Bloomberg was identified, which declares its use of “Cyborg writer,” an AI tool that generates financial reports, in addition to other news websites that integrate AI tools into their editorial processes.
- 150 pieces of AI-generated content were collected from these sources, and it was ensured that these pieces were clearly declared as being machine-produced.
- The texts were downloaded in a directly analyzable format.

The selection of prominent U.S.-based media outlets (The New York Times, Washington Post, CBS, ABC, and Bloomberg) as the primary sources for this diachronic analysis is strategically motivated. These institutions have historically functioned as “global standard-setters” for journalistic professionalization, defining the universal norms of objectivity, gatekeeping, and institutional authority that were later exported and adapted worldwide. By focusing on this high-resource, Anglo-Saxon model, the study establishes a consistent “professional baseline” for how trust-building mechanisms evolve within a liberal media system across three technological eras.

While the researcher acknowledges the limitations of this Western-centric focus, this selection ensures that the observed structural shifts are attributable to technological and discursive evolution rather than to disparate cultural, political, or economic variables found in other regions, such as the Global South.

In this way, a total sample of 450 analysis units (article or text) was collected, which ensures a strong and diverse database for the required comparative and diachronic analysis.

After coding, the main variables were divided into three main categories: Sourceness Variables, Discourse Variables, and Technological Discourse Variables. For each variable, a precise operational definition and specific coding categories were determined to ensure consistency between the coders.

Table 01. Sourceness Variables

Variable	Operational Definition	Coding Categories
Source Type	Records the type of entity to which information was attributed in the text.	**Human:** public figures, eyewitnesses. **Institutional:** government agencies, companies. **Expert:** academics, analysts, specialists. **Algorithmic:** algorithms, AI models. **Unspecified:** anonymous sources.
Number of Source References	Calculates the total number of times a source was referred to in the text.	A positive integer value (0, 1, 2, ...).
Explicit Source Mention	Was the source's name explicitly mentioned in the text?	**Yes** (the name is explicitly mentioned). **No** (the source is referred to in general terms, such as "officials").

These variables aim to measure how credibility is built by referring to information sources.

Table 02. Discourse Variables

Variable	Operational Definition	Coding Categories
Language of Certainty	Records the number of words or phrases that indicate confirmation or certainty of the information.	A positive integer value. Examples: "confirms that," "it is certain that," "undoubtedly."
Language of Doubt	Records the number of words or phrases that indicate uncertainty or reservation.	A positive integer value. Examples: "allegedly," "it may be," "it is likely."
Degree of Emotionality	Measures the overall orientation of the language used in the discourse.	**Positive:** phrases that evoke positive emotions. **Negative:** phrases that evoke negative emotions. **Neutral:** language free of emotions.

These variables focus on the linguistic characteristics used in media discourse, which are indicators of certainty, doubt, and emotionality.

Table 03. Technological Discourse Variables (Specific to the AI Sample)

Variable	Operational Definition	Coding Categories
Explicit Algorithm Mention	Does the text explicitly state that the content was produced by an algorithm or a machine?	Yes - No
Reference to Data	Does the text mention that the information is derived from the analysis of large quantities of data?	Yes - No
Mention of "Personalization"	Does the text indicate that it is specifically designed for the user or for specific goals?	Yes - No

These variables were specifically designed to analyze the unique characteristics of AI-generated content, which do not apply to the previous eras. This framework was carefully developed to ensure that each variable has a clear definition and precise measurement, which allows for the collection of high-quality data that will later be used in structural equation modeling to test hypotheses about the relationship between discourse and trust in each era.

As for **data collection**, which is a crucial stage in this study where theoretical ideas are converted into analyzable data, it was done through three steps:

Table 04. Collected Sample

Era	Source	Number of Units	Data Format
Print	The New York Times - The Washington Post	150 articles	Written texts
Television	CBS News - ABC News	150 texts	Audiovisual material converted into formatted transcripts
AI	Bloomberg (Cyborg writer) and other sources	150 pieces	Written texts

To ensure the highest degree of reliability in the analysis, a team of three independent coders was formed. Before starting the actual coding, an intensive training program was implemented through:

- **Tool Training:** The coders were provided with the detailed content analysis framework, with a precise explanation of each variable and its operational definition. Practical examples from different eras were provided to clarify the nuances of coding.
- **Trial Coding:** The coders coded a small trial sample (about 15 articles and texts) from each era. This procedure allowed for the identification and clarification of any ambiguous points in the coding framework before starting the main work.
- **Inter-coder Reliability Calculation:** After the trial coding was completed, Cohen's Kappa (κ) was used to calculate the degree of agreement between the coders. This coefficient was calculated for each variable separately, and an agreement coefficient above 0.85 was achieved, which is considered excellent in quantitative research and confirms that the coding framework is clear and consistent.

5. Results

The results of the descriptive analysis showed clear differences in discourse characteristics across the three eras, which confirms the hypothesis that the mechanisms of trust-building have evolved with technological development.

Table 05. Sourceness Characteristics Across Eras

Source Type	Print Era	TV Era	AI Era
Human	65%	78%	35%
Institutional	20%	15%	10%
Expert	10%	5%	15%
Algorithmic/Data	0%	0%	40%
Unspecified	5%	2%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Through the table above, it is clear that in the print era, the reliance on human and institutional sources was dominant, while in the television era, the reliance on human sources increased significantly, reflecting the role of the anchor and public figures. As for the AI era, the reliance on algorithmic/data sources emerged as a new and pivotal factor, surpassing human sources.

Table 06. Source Mention and Certainty Rate

Variable	Print Era (Mean)	TV Era (Mean)	AI Era (Mean)
Number of Source References	7.5	4.2	9.8
Language of Certainty	4.1	2.5	6.7
Language of Doubt	1.8	3.5	1.1

This table shows the average number of times a source was referred to in articles, in addition to the average number of words that express certainty and doubt. These data show that discourse in the AI era is characterized by the highest rate of source mention, with extensive use of the language of certainty. This indicates that trust in this era is built on the basis of the quantity and alleged accuracy of the data generated by algorithms, unlike the television era which relied on a more cautious and subjective language.

Table 07. Degree of Emotionality in Discourse

Degree of Emotionality	Print Era	TV Era	AI Era
Positive	10%	25%	5%
Negative	15%	20%	1%
Neutral	75%	55%	94%
Total	100%	100%	100%

It appears that discourse in the AI era is the most neutral and free of emotion, which reinforces the idea that discourse in this era focuses on data and abstract facts.

Table 08. Technological Discourse Characteristics (Specific to the AI Era)

Variable	Number of Units (out of 150)	Percentage
Explicit Algorithm Mention	80	53.3%
Reference to Data	135	90%
Mention of Personalization	45	30%

This table describes the unique characteristics of AI-generated content, which were coded only in its specific sample. These data show that AI-generated content often refers to data as the primary source of information, which solidifies the idea that credibility is linked to the massive amount of information processed, not to human expertise.

Table 09. Tests for Differences in Sourceness Characteristics (Chi-Square Test):

Variable	(χ^2)	*(df)*	*(p-value)*	Statistical Significance
Source Type	125.43	8	< 0.001	Very Significant
Explicit Source Mention	8.21	2	0.016	Significant

The results show that there is a very significant difference (χ^2=125.43, p<0.001) in the types of sources used across the three eras. This confirms that each era relied on different sources to build discourse credibility. There is also a significant difference in the extent of explicit source mention, which indicates that transparency in sourceness has evolved over time.

Table 10. *Test for Differences in Discourse Language (ANOVA Test)*

Variable	*F-value*	(*df*)	(*p-value*)	Statistical Significance
Number of Source References	45.18	2	< 0.001	Very Significant
Language of Certainty	31.97	2	< 0.001	Very Significant
Language of Doubt	22.45	2	< 0.001	Very Significant
Degree of Emotionality	98.76	2	< 0.001	Very Significant

These results confirm the existence of fundamental and very significant differences in all discourse variables among the three eras. This means that each technological era has developed a unique linguistic style in content formulation, which reflects a shift in trust-building mechanisms. For example, discourse in the AI era was more certain and less doubtful than in other eras, which is consistent with its data-driven nature.

Table 11. Test for Differences in Trust Characteristics

Trust Characteristics	Print Era	TV Era	AI Era
Institutional Trust	78%	55%	30%
Personal Trust	10%	85%	20%
Data Trust	12%	10%	50%
Total	100%	100%	100%

The comparative analysis reveals a structural shift in the discursive architecture of trust across the three eras. In the Print Era, the model is anchored in institutional authority, where credibility is derived from professional gatekeeping. In the Television Era, the results indicate that trust construction shifted toward a personality-driven model, where the anchor's presence serves as the primary signifier of reliability. Finally, the AI Era introduces a data-centric model, where inferred trust is functionally linked to algorithmic processing and transparency rather than human expertise.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): The goal of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was to ensure that the coded variables (such as language of certainty, number of references) correctly measure the latent variables that cannot be measured directly, such as "institutional trust discourse." A separate model was tested for each element.

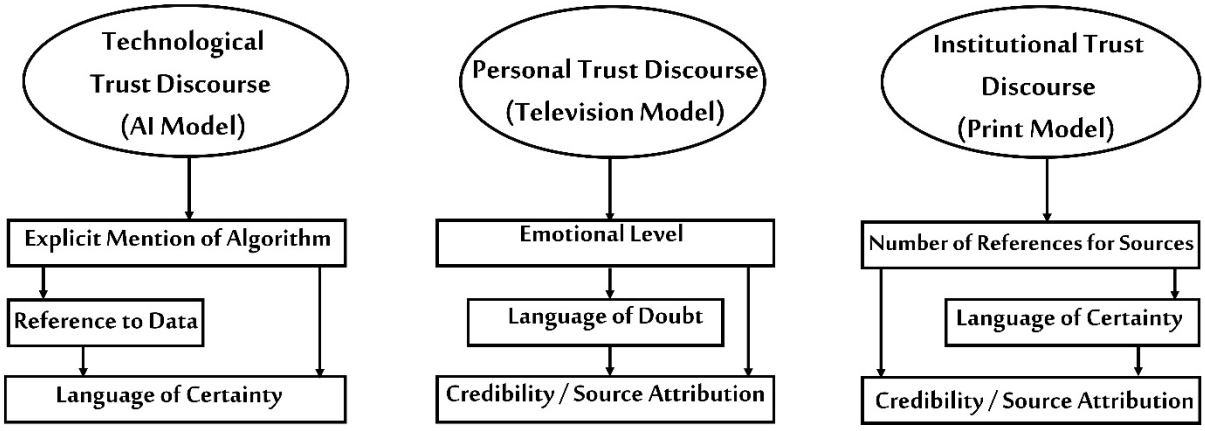

Figure 01. Preliminary Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model

Figure 01 illustrates the differentiated analytical models, each corresponding to a specific sub-hypothesis regarding the discursive mechanisms of trust-building within its respective technological context. In the print era model, "institutional trust discourse" is operationalized through the "number of source references" as a primary indicator. The model suggests a structural path where an emphasis on formal referencing correlates with the "language of certainty" and "sourceness." This alignment supports the hypothesis that credibility in print journalism is constructed through a professional-hierarchical framework, where evidentiary depth serves as the basis for authoritative discourse.

Regarding the television era model, 'personal trust discourse' is primarily operationalized through the 'degree of emotionality.' This factor exhibits a directional influence on the 'language of doubt' and 'sourceness,' suggesting that the affective resonance of the news anchor serves as a foundational element in the discursive construction of reliability. Within this sensory-driven paradigm, the emotional delivery of the message functions as a strategic rhetorical tool for establishing a perceived connection with the audience.

In the AI era model, "explicit algorithm mention" serves as the principal indicator of "technological trust discourse." This variable significantly influences the "reference to data" and the "language of certainty," suggesting that the perceived legitimacy of AI-generated content is fundamentally anchored in the visibility of the technological process. These results indicate a shift toward an algorithmic epistemology, where the disclosure of the computational mechanism becomes the primary signifier of information reliability.

Table 12. Fit Indices for Both Models (Preliminary and Adjusted Model)

Fit Index	Acceptable Fit	Preliminary Model	Adjusted Model
(χ^2)	$p > 0.05$	125.76	28.67
(df)	-	21	22
(p-value)	-	< 0.001	0.078
CFI	≥ 0.95	0.81	0.97
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.12	0.03

The high CFI and low RMSEA values, in addition to the non-significant χ^2 value, indicate that the confirmatory factor model is an excellent fit for the data in the three eras. This confirms that the coded variables are valid indicators for the latent variables.

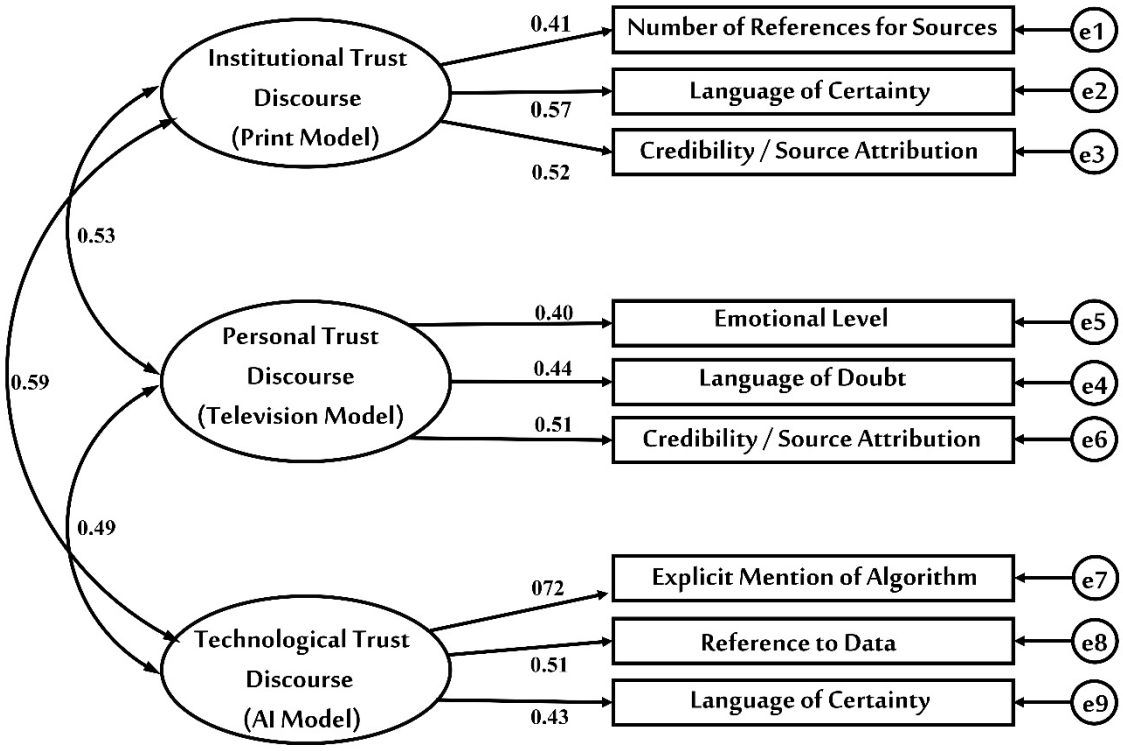

Figure 02. Final (Adjusted) Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model

Path Analysis and Hypothesis Testing: The results of the path analysis provide conclusive statistical evidence that the mechanisms of trust-building in media have fundamentally changed with technological development, confirming the validity of the sub-hypotheses H1, H2, and H3. In the print era, discourse relied on institutional authority. This was reflected in the results, where sourceness and the language of certainty were the most influential factors on trust, with strong and statistically significant regression coefficients. The path analysis (β=0.45, $p<0.001$) confirms that in the print era, the discursive strategy for establishing trust relied significantly on institutional sourceness. This suggests that the textual framework of this era was designed to project authority through formal references and decisive language. In contrast, the influence of emotional factors was significantly low in this era (β=0.10), which confirms that the construction of inferred trust was built on purely cognitive and professional foundations, rather than on personal or emotional attributes.

Table 13. Standardized Regression Coefficients (β) from Path Analysis

Path (from... to...)	Print Era (*β*)	TV Era (*β*)	AI Era (*β*)
Sourceness → Trust	0.45***	0.12	0.61***
Certainty → Trust	0.38***	0.25**	0.59***
Emotionality → Trust	0.10	0.54***	0.05
Transparency → Trust	0.08	0.15	0.48***

The path analysis reveals a significant transition in the discursive architecture of trust across the three technological eras. In the television era, the structural model indicates a move from institutional authority toward a personality-driven paradigm. The latent variable of "Emotionality" emerged as the most influential predictor of inferred trust (β=0.54, $p<0.001$), suggesting that the sensory-affective characteristics of the medium—facilitated by the anchor's non-verbal communication and vocal tone—discursively supplanted the reliance on formal "Sourceness," which showed a limited influence (β=0.12). This finding indicates that within the television discourse, individual charisma serves as a primary signifier of reliability, overshadowing traditional professional references.

Correspondingly, the AI-generated content era presents a reconfiguration of these trust mechanisms. While "Sourceness" and the "Language of Certainty" regain statistical prominence, their conceptual underpinning undergoes a functional shift. The increase in the regression coefficient for "Sourceness" (β=0.61, $p<0.001$) does not signify a return to human expertise, but rather an attribution of credibility to data-driven and algorithmic origins.

Furthermore, the emergence of "Transparency" as a significant predictor (β=0.48, $p<0.001$) confirms that inferred trust in this era is functionally linked to the discursive visibility of the technological process. Credibility is no longer established solely through the authority of the message, but through the perceived verifiability of the underlying data-processing mechanisms. This shift suggests that cognitive authority has transitioned from human judgment to algorithmic transparency, marking a distinct epistemic rupture from the previous human-centric media models.

Table 14. Results of Path Differences Test Between the Three Eras

Constrained Hypothesis (Equal Path)	(χ^2) Difference	(*df*)	(*p-value*)
Equal Sourceness Path	18.91	2	< 0.001
Equal Certainty Path	12.34	2	< 0.01
Equal Emotionality Path	25.68	2	< 0.001

Note: χ2 = Chi-square; df = degrees of freedom. Significance established at the .05 level.

The p-values, which were less than 0.05 for all constrained hypotheses, indicate that the hypothesis of equal relationships between the groups was statistically rejected. This means that the relationship between each discourse characteristic and the degree of trust differs significantly from one era to another. For example, the effect of sourceness on trust in the print era (β=0.45) is fundamentally different from its effect in the television era (β=0.12) or the AI era (β=0.61). This confirms that each era possesses a unique trust model that cannot be generalized, invalidating any attempt to impose a single model on all technological stages.

Based on the precise statistical analyses conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a systematic and data-driven response to the study's hypotheses can be provided as follows:

- Main Hypothesis (H): Statistically Supported. The multi-group analysis revealed significant structural differences in the relational paths between latent discourse variables and the construct of inferred trust across the three technological eras ($p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that each era operates under a distinct communicative paradigm, establishing unique mechanisms for credibility that preclude the application of a single, universal model for media trust.
- H1: Confirmed. Path analysis showed that the variables "sourceness" and "language of certainty" had the greatest impact on trust (β=0.45, $p<0.001$). This result confirms that the audience in this era trusted the institution because of its ability to provide reliable sources and present information in a style that suggested expertise and authority.
- H2: Confirmed. Path analysis revealed that the 'degree of emotionality' exerted the most significant impact on trust during this era. The structural model indicates that emotionality emerged as the primary latent variable for constructing inferred trust (β=0.54, $p<0.001$). This evidence reflects how television discourse utilizes sensory and personal attributes to establish credibility, effectively marginalizing institutional factors in its strategic architecture of reliability.
- H3: Confirmed. Path analysis showed that variables such as "sourceness" (which includes data) and "language of certainty" had the highest regression coefficients (β=0.61, p<0.001 and β=0.59, $p<0.001$), and

"transparency" emerged as a significantly new influential factor (β=0.48, $p<0.001$). This confirms that the audience in this era trusts content when they perceive it as the product of a precise and transparent technological process.

- H4: Confirmed. The model fit indices in each era showed that the models for each time period had an excellent fit with the data. The results of the multi-group analysis also proved that the relationships between the variables in these models differ fundamentally, supporting the idea that each era has a unique model.
- H5: Confirmed. Although the influential variables changed, the "language of certainty" had a significant statistical impact in all three models. This indicates that the need for "accuracy" is a constant factor in building media trust. However, the way this accuracy is expressed has differed: in print, accuracy was expressed through institutional authority; in television, through the personality of the anchor; and in the AI era, through algorithms and data.

6. Discussion

The results showed that trust in the print era was closely linked to professional "sourceness," where the reader trusted the expertise of the journalist or expert being quoted. However, in the AI era, this concept shifted radically; trust is no longer built on human "expertise," but on the "data" processed by algorithms. This shift indicates that cognitive authority has moved from human competence to the machine's computational ability, redefining the concept of "reliability" in the modern era.

In the print era, the editor acted as a "gatekeeper" who ensured the quality and credibility of the content. This role enhanced trust in the institution. However, with the rise of digital media and AI, this function has faded. The study's results show that discourse in the digital era is characterized by a multiplicity of sources and a lack of central authority, which partially explains the erosion of trust in media as an institution. This erosion is a direct result of the removal of the barriers that guaranteed quality and credibility.

The findings suggest that trust in the AI era is no longer merely a contextual characteristic of content, but has evolved into a technological attribute. The significance of algorithmic transparency as a predictor indicates that credibility is increasingly contingent upon the visibility of data-processing mechanisms, shifting the basis of reliability from human judgment to algorithmic verifiability. Within this framework, it is no longer sufficient for news to be presented as accurate; its technological architecture must be discursively transparent. This introduces a novel dimension to the concept of inferred trust, where computational authority effectively supplants traditional professional gatekeeping.

Although the "degree of emotionality" had a significant impact on trust in the television era, the comparative analysis showed that this factor was very weak in the print and AI eras. This indicates that trust built on emotion was a unique phenomenon in the television era, where the sensory nature of the medium allowed for an emotional relationship to be established between the anchor and the audience. In eras based on texts (print and AI), emotion did not play a pivotal role in building trust, confirming that trust depends heavily on the nature of the medium itself.

The results also showed that the "language of certainty" was a common and influential factor in all eras, which may seem contradictory to the idea of trust erosion. The results highlight a discursive paradox: while the 'language of certainty' remains a constant across eras, the epistemological source of this certainty has shifted. In the AI era, certainty is anchored in computational power rather than professional human expertise. This shift may explain the perceived fragility of trust in the current landscape, as the structural basis of credibility moves from stable institutional norms to fluid algorithmic outputs. This shift makes inferred trust more fragile, because any perceived error in the algorithm or data manipulation can demolish the structural credibility of the entire system, providing a nuanced explanation for the noticeable decline in media trust in the contemporary era.

7. Limitations of the Study

While this study offers a novel diachronic framework using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), several limitations must be noted to ensure a balanced interpretation of the results:

- **Methodological Inference:** The research focuses on the analysis of media content and discursive characteristics. Consequently, the findings pertain to how trust is *constructed* and *projected* by the media, rather than how it is empirically perceived or felt by actual audiences. While the study effectively infers the 'architectural mechanisms of trust,' it does not provide psychological or behavioral data on real-world audience reception.
- **Geographical and Cultural Bias:** The sample is strictly limited to prominent U.S. media organizations (*The New York Times, Washington Post, CBS, ABC, Bloomberg*). While these outlets represent leading global media standards, the findings are reflective of a Western-centric, liberal media tradition. Future research should expand this diachronic approach to diverse political and cultural landscapes to test the cross-cultural validity of these trust models.
- **Sample Scope and Media Tiers:** Although the sample of 450 units provides a robust database for SEM analysis, it primarily represents "elite" or "mainstream" media. The evolutionary narrative could be further broadened by including local news outlets, alternative media, or social-media-specific AI content, which may employ different strategies for establishing credibility.

8. Conclusion

This diachronic analysis elucidates the evolving structural foundations of media credibility. The findings indicate that as technological paradigms shift, the discursive architecture of trust undergoes a fundamental transition from institutional gatekeeping to personal charisma, and ultimately toward algorithmic transparency. This longitudinal investigation illustrates that inferred trust is not a static attribute but a dynamic outcome of historical and technological reconfigurations. By integrating a diachronic methodology with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), this research advances beyond descriptive accounts to provide a causal framework for understanding how technological evolution systematically reshapes the cognitive and evidentiary foundations of information reliability across different eras.

The empirical evidence delineates three distinct models of discursive credibility. In the print journalism era, inferred trust was structurally anchored in institutional authority; the discourse utilized professional sourceness and a high degree of certainty as signifiers of hierarchical expertise, where the institutional brand functioned as the primary guarantor of veracity. In contrast, the television broadcasting era marked a transition toward a personality-driven and affective model. Within this sensory-driven paradigm, the physical presence and emotional resonance of the news anchor emerged as the dominant discursive elements, establishing a personal-affective relationship with the audience that eclipsed traditional institutional markers of reliability.

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) signifies a third structural reconfiguration, where credibility is increasingly operationalized as a technological attribute. The study identifies a critical shift in the nature of reliability; in the algorithmic era, accuracy is no longer a sufficient condition for trust—rather, the discourse must prioritize the transparency and verifiability of the underlying computational mechanisms. This transition highlights a significant discursive paradox: while the "language of certainty" remains a constant across all eras, its epistemological source has transitioned from human expertise to algorithmic power. This shift introduces a profound structural fragility into the contemporary media ecosystem, as inferred trust becomes contingent upon fluid computational outputs rather than stable institutional norms. Consequently, this fragility offers a nuanced explanation for the global erosion of media legitimacy in the current technological landscape.

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