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Article

The Pillars of Determining Information Credibility

Aisha Adhamjonovna Ro'yiddinova*[1]

1. PhD Candidate at the Academy of Public Policy and Governance under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
*Correspondence: Jamshidjon.R@xb.uz

Abstarct: This article analyses the issues of determining the credibility of information in the contemporary digital information environment. It examines the importance of reliable information in the context of the growth of global information flows, the popularisation of social networks, and the widespread dissemination of such phenomena as disinformation, misinformation and malinformation in shaping public opinion. In the course of the study, theoretical approaches to assessing the credibility of information are examined, and on the basis of international experience and fact-checking practices, five pillars of information verification are proposed. These are: assessing the credibility of the source, cross-checking through independent sources, verification of visual content, distinguishing fact from opinion, and verification of statistical and empirical data. The findings of the research contribute to strengthening the role of reliable information in shaping public opinion, ensuring information security, and improving the effectiveness of institutional communication.

Keywords: reliable information, public opinion, fact-checking, media literacy, information security, institutional mechanisms, digital communication.

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Introduction

In the third decade of the 21st century, the profound transformational processes taking place in the global information space, the rapid penetration of digital technologies into the life of society, and the unprecedented growth of information flows have fundamentally changed the processes of shaping public opinion [1]. The institutional monopoly of traditional mass media has been broken, and its place is being taken by social networks and digital platforms based on algorithmic governance. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2025, global trust in news stands at only 40 per cent and has remained at a stable low level over the past three years. At the same time, the share of social platforms in the consumption of information has increased sharply: Facebook (36%), YouTube (30%), Instagram (19%), WhatsApp (19%), TikTok (16%) and X (Twitter) (12%) are becoming the principal sources of information worldwide [2].

Under such conditions, "fake news", disinformation and manipulation technologies pose a serious threat to public opinion. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer 2025, 61 per cent of the world's population feels a moderate or high level of grievance towards

social institutions. In particular, trust in government (52%) and the media (52%) is lower than trust in business (62%) and non-governmental organisations (58%) [3]. What is most alarming is that, among the population segment with a high level of grievance, trust in government has fallen to as low as 25 per cent. This testifies to a crisis of communication between the state and society.

Not every published item of information may be considered reliable; in today's era of advanced technology, several stages are required in order to determine this. In earlier times, when only a limited number of mass media outlets existed, their level of credibility was considered high, since every publishing house felt responsible for the information it disseminated — although we cannot claim that such information was entirely free from a manipulative tone. Today, however, information is not only manipulated; inaccurate data, data far removed from the truth, and even entirely non-existent information are presented to the public without verification. There are various theories and studies by scholars on what reliable information should be, on its essence, structure and significance. Some scholars emphasise the importance of sources for the credibility of information, while others advance the view that reliance on evidence and verification is of paramount importance. Stevenson University identifies four main criteria for determining reliable information: the authority of the author, the accuracy of the information, its coverage, and its currency [4]. With the help of these criteria, the genuineness and reliability of a source can be assessed. In doing so, the following questions must be answered: Who is the author of the information? Is he or she a specialist in the field, and does he or she possess academic standing and experience? Is the information based on evidence, and has it undergone statistical or empirical verification? Has the subject been fully covered, or has it been interpreted only from one side? Is the information up-to-date, and is it based on contemporary research and facts? The Harvard Guide to Using Sources sets out criteria for identifying reliable information that are similar to those above but contain certain distinctive features: in addition to the four aspects mentioned, it also adds objectivity, emphasising that information must be free from bias and unaffected by the personal interests or ideology of the author.

Methods

This study employs the **Pillars of Information Credibility (PIC) Method** to evaluate the credibility of information sources in digital media environments. The method is based on five key criteria: **authority, accuracy, objectivity, currency, and verifiability**. These criteria were selected because they are widely recognized in information literacy and media studies as essential indicators of trustworthy information.

The research follows a qualitative analytical approach. Information sources were examined according to the PIC framework. First, the authority of each source was assessed by identifying the author's expertise, institutional affiliation, and reputation. Second, accuracy was evaluated through the presence of evidence, references, and factual consistency. Third, objectivity was analyzed by examining potential bias, persuasive intent, and balance of viewpoints. Fourth, currency was determined by reviewing publication dates and the relevance of information to current events. Finally, verifiability was assessed by checking whether claims could be confirmed through independent and reliable sources.

The collected data were compared across these five pillars to determine the overall credibility level of each information source. This methodological framework provides a systematic approach for identifying reliable information and distinguishing it from misinformation, disinformation, and low-quality content [5].

Results and Discussion

In the modern information space, the probability of the rapid spread of fake news and disinformation is high, whereas reliable information breaks through the shell of falsehood and creates the opportunity to bring clarity to a situation. As a result, information security is ensured. When information in society is reliable, stability is guaranteed. Social conflicts diminish, citizens begin to trust social institutions, significant changes occur in science, the creation of new knowledge is facilitated, the quality of the educational process improves,

and scientific conclusions become accurate. As a simple example, if we take a researcher conducting a scholarly study, in his or her empirical research he or she may conduct a survey; even in this process, cases of artificially inflating the number of participants or of adding fabricated data may be observed [6]. In the contemporary information space, the process of shaping public opinion has become more complex, shifting from the classical mass media to digital and algorithmic systems. This situation has caused public opinion to take on a changeable, indeterminate and multi-source character. For this reason, the effective functioning of institutional mechanisms is of great importance for the stable, reliable and purposeful shaping of public opinion. Studies show that, in situations where the information policy of institutions is not clearly defined or where their system of accountability is weak, a "legitimation crisis" arises in society — that is, a decline in trust in institutions. For this reason, the role of institutions is determined not only by the transmission of information but also by ensuring its credibility, transparency and intelligibility. If institutions do not possess prompt mechanisms for monitoring, analysing and responding to information, the shaping of public opinion may slip out of their control — for example, through false data, manipulation or emotional waves [7].

When we discuss for what purpose data are disseminated, who uses them and for what reason, and the cases of influence on people through information, it is first necessary to enumerate the types of inaccurate information. In the world of information, false and harmful information does not denote a single concept. In scholarly sources there exist such notions as misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. Each of these has a different meaning. For example, the term "misinformation" refers to inaccurate information or information that does not correspond to the truth, which is disseminated not deliberately but through ignorance or error. In this case, the person disseminating the information may not be aware that it is inaccurate [8]. For instance, sharing an unverified old statistical figure on social networks is considered misinformation. This type of information is most often spread as a result of people circulating data without checking it. In disinformation, by contrast, the information is fabricated and disseminated deliberately . Its main purpose is to manipulate public opinion, mislead people, or achieve specific political, economic or social interests. For example, spreading false information about a rival candidate during electoral processes, creating fabricated statistical data, or producing manipulative content all fall under the category of disinformation. This type of information may often serve propaganda or information warfare. Malinformation is information that is based on truthful data but is altered and disseminated with the aim of causing harm or manipulation. For example, the unauthorised disclosure of a person's private correspondence or photographs, the presentation of an event taken out of its full context, or the creation of a false impression through the partial provision of information are all considered malinformation [9].

According to the recommendations of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), the European Journalism Centre and the UNESCO media literacy guidelines, the verification of information is based on the following five criteria:

Identifying the origin of the information and assessing the credibility of the source.

Comparing the same information across several independent sources.

Determining the authenticity of an image or video.

Distinguishing whether the information is based on fact or on personal opinion.

Verifying figures and statistics [10].

Identifying the origin of information is the first and most important stage. Who is the author (is he or she an expert or anonymous?)? Does the website belong to an official organisation? Are its previous materials reliable? According to the principles of the International Fact-Checking Network, the origin of every item of information must be open and verifiable. If a news item is published by Reuters or the BBC, its level of credibility is higher; if, however, it is published on an unidentified Telegram channel, it should be treated with caution.

The same information should be checked in at least two or three independent sources. By means of the method known as cross-checking, various sources (state mass media, international agencies, independent media) are compared with one another. According to

the recommendations of the European Journalism Centre, reliance on a single source is not sufficient. Indeed, if a sensational item that generates great excitement has been published in only one outlet, this very fact gives grounds for suspicion, since important information is highly likely to be reported in many sources [11].

In order to determine the authenticity of an image or video, attention must first of all be paid to the source; identifying the website on which it was first published makes the task easier. At the next stage, the visual indicators should be analysed: whether the direction of the light and the shadows is consistent, whether the surrounding text or signs have been altered, and whether the images in the video or photograph have been examined frame by frame. Material that was previously photographed in another setting may now appear alongside an entirely different image, which can also mislead the viewer. Most importantly, it must be determined whether or not there are traces of artificial intelligence. In images or videos created using artificial intelligence, hands and fingers may appear distorted, faces and eyes may seem unnatural, and details may be altered. These are among the very first signs to look for in determining the credibility of information. In verifying materials, one may use such platforms as FactCheck.org, Snopes, AFP Fact Check and Reuters Fact Check [12].

The next stage is distinguishing fact from personal opinion. This process is one of the essential skills of media literacy. A fact is information that corresponds to reality and that can be checked and proven, whereas a personal opinion arises on the basis of a person's view, evaluation, feeling or conclusion. For example, the statement "Tashkent is the capital of Uzbekistan" is a fact. If we say, "Tashkent is the most beautiful city in Central Asia," this is a personal opinion. If an utterance contains evaluative words such as "the most," "wonderful," "bad," or "perfect," it bears the marks of a personal opinion [13].

The next stage is the verification of figures, statistics and research data. The following example demonstrates the necessity of checking the source of statistical information:

"90 % of the population supported this decision."

"According to a 2025 survey by the Statistics Agency, 90 % of respondents supported this decision."

Here attention is drawn to who, or which organisation, is the source of the figure [14].

Another important point is whether the figures have been taken out of context. The same figure may have very different meanings. If a news report states that "the number of crimes has increased by 50 %", in certain cases this may mean that the figure has risen merely from two to three, which still constitutes a 50 % increase. For this reason, it is recommended that absolute numbers and percentages be considered together [15].

Conclusion

The expansion of the digital space has complicated the process of shaping public opinion. As a result, ensuring the credibility of information has become one of the key tasks of state institutions, the mass media and civil society. The five pillars of determining information credibility — assessing the credibility of the source, cross-checking, visual verification, distinguishing fact from opinion, and verifying statistical data — may serve as one of the practical and institutional mechanisms for creating a reliable information environment in the shaping of public opinion. These criteria carry significant theoretical and practical importance in ensuring information security, combating disinformation, and raising the level of media literacy in society.

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