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Artículo de investigación científica y tecnológica

Between truth and doubt: The credibility of social networks, an analysis of perceptions of truthfulness

Entre la verdad y la duda: la credibilidad de las redes sociales, un análisis de las percepciones de veracidad

Carlos Enrique Carrillo-Cruz [1], Laura Fernanda Ramos-Garzón [2]

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of user perceptions on the credibility of social media information in Bogotá, Colombia, a context shaped by post-2021 National Social Strike dynamics. Through an exploratory mixed-methods approach, it analyzes users' views on the reliability of content shared on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Data were collected via documentary analysis of 25 scientific articles, focus groups, and a survey of 456 respondents. Findings reveal that credibility is influenced by factors such as information presentation, source reliability, and user engagement, with age-based differences shaping trust. This research deepens understanding of the complex interplay between social media content and user trust in Bogotá's digital landscape, underscoring the need for media literacy initiatives to combat misinformation.

Keywords: information; perceptions; decision-making process; credibility; social media.

RESUMEN

Este artículo aborda el impacto de las percepciones, creencias y pensamientos de un grupo de personas sobre la credibilidad de la información en el contexto de las redes sociales en Bogotá, Colombia. En el presente documento se expone un estudio exploratorio sobre las redes sociales, el cual analiza y considera las opiniones de los usuarios de plataformas sociales con respecto a la confiabilidad del contenido divulgado en estas. La recolección de datos se llevó a cabo a través de análisis documental, grupos focales y una encuesta. Los hallazgos iniciales muestran que la credibilidad sufre una alteración debido a diferentes factores o patrones que afectan el proceso de toma de decisiones, algunos de estos factores incluyen la forma en que se presenta la información, la fuente de la información y el nivel de interacción de otros usuarios. En resumen, esta investigación proporciona una comprensión más profunda de estos puntos de vista, destacando la relación intrincada entre el contenido de las redes sociales y la confianza del usuario dentro de un contexto cultural específico.

Palabras clave: información; percepciones; proceso de toma de decisiones; credibilidad; redes sociales.

1. PhD(c). Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Bogotá, Colombia. e-mail: cecarrilloc@udistrital.edu.co - https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3278-4845
2. B.A. Student in English. Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Bogotá, Colombia. e-mail: lframosg@udistrital.edu.co - https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9165-4565

INTRODUCTION

The credibility of information disseminated through social media is a critical concern with profound implications for trustworthiness in digital environments (Nadarevic et al., 2020). Factors such as source credibility, repeated exposure, and presentation format shape users' truth judgments, yet their combined effects remain underexplored. Investigating these dynamics in social networks is essential to foster informed decision-making and enhance the reliability of information shared across online communities.

This study examines social media credibility perceptions among 456 users in Bogotá, Colombia, a context shaped by economic disparities and social unrest following the 2021 National Social Strike. Employing a mixed-methods approach—comprising documentary analysis, focus groups, and surveys—it analyzes how users assess the reliability of news on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, considering factors like information presentation, source authenticity, and user engagement. The post-COVID-19 period amplified citizens' skepticism toward news, driven by economic inequalities, necessitating a deeper exploration of trust in social media news dissemination.

Information credibility serves as a pivotal metric for evaluating the reliability of digital content, directly influencing users' decision-making processes (Tseng & Fogg, 1999). As the volume of accessible information grows, its perceived reliability becomes crucial for informed choices. However, the multifaceted nature of credibility, encompassing source, media, and message dimensions, poses challenges for consistent evaluation (Alrubaian et al., 2019). Understanding how users assess information reliability on social media is vital to addressing these complexities.

The advent of Web 2.0 has transformed global communication, shifting from the one-way dissemination of Web 1.0 (e.g., static websites akin to newspapers or television) to interactive platforms fostering collaboration and user-generated content (Jenkins et al., 2020). This evolution has democratized information sharing but introduced challenges in verifying content authenticity, as social media enables widespread interaction without traditional editorial oversight.

Misinformation on social media not only undermines credibility but may also contribute to social and psychological issues, such as adolescent depression linked to excessive platform use (Ivie et al., 2020). This suggests a need for critical evaluation skills to mitigate the impact of unreliable content, particularly among younger users who may accept online information uncritically. Addressing these challenges requires understanding the interplay between trust and misinformation in digital contexts.

This study provides critical insights into news reliability perceptions among Colombian users, contributing to a broader understanding of social and psychological factors shaping public opinion. By examining credibility assessments in Bogotá's digital landscape, it underscores the urgent need for media literacy initiatives to empower users to critically evaluate online content, fostering a more discerning and informed society.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this mixed research was to delve into the insights of media consumers' perspectives about social networks reliability. Hafsa (2019) highlighted that in a convergent parallel mixed method, the researcher may approach a holistic view since the main aspects of both quantitative and qualitative research join together towards phenomena's understanding. Similarly, Halcomb & Hickman (2015) stated that mixing methods refer to the likely incorporation of elements or techniques connected by quali-quantitative

indicators in order to go further within the exploration of users' views concerning a specific research problem. Marcoulides (1998) states that exploratory approaches are valuable when a researcher's goal is to recognize a set of factors that could explain the relationships or correlations between a set of observed variables. It is particularly vital to advance this line of inquiry in settings where social platforms increasingly mediate everyday understanding of public events. It makes visible how people, in their daily scrolling and sharing, weigh cues like source identity, tone, and peer endorsement when deciding what to trust. It brings to the surface the tensions between immediacy and accuracy that ordinary users navigate when news breaks and narratives shift quickly. It offers grounded evidence to recognize how lived experiences—marked by social unrest, inequality, or institutional skepticism—color judgments of credibility. It helps illuminate why the same post may be read as persuasive by some and dubious by others, depending on community norms and prior beliefs. It supports the design of practical, context-sensitive responses to misinformation that respect users' perspectives rather than pathologize them. It, ultimately, centers the human side of credibility, acknowledging that trust online is as much about relationships and meanings as it is about metrics and verification.

This approach enhances researchers' ability to provide detailed insights into key aspects of the study, thereby improving the interpretation of results and contributing to the broader understanding of the topic. Swedberg (2020) emphasizes the value of complementary, non-exploratory research designs that avoid redundant or repetitive findings, thus strengthening the study's originality. By carefully selecting appropriate research instruments, investigators ensure the reliability and validity of the collected data while gaining a deeper understanding of the research problem (Mazhar et al., 2021).

For this article, three research instruments were employed: documentary analysis, focus groups, and surveys. The first phase consisted of a documentary analysis designed to establish the conceptual and empirical baseline of the study. To this end, twenty-five peer-reviewed scientific articles addressing mass media perceptions, credibility assessment, misinformation dynamics, and user trust on social platforms were systematically compiled. The selection prioritized works that examined credibility as a multidimensional construct (source, message, and medium) and that situated users' judgments within specific socio-cultural contexts comparable to Bogotá. Research Rabbit was used to organize, codify, and map the literature, enabling the identification of recurrent constructs (e.g., endorsement cues, truth-bias, heuristics), methodological tendencies (e.g., experimental vs. survey designs), and reported gaps (e.g., age-related differences and platform-specific effects). The coding process followed an iterative approach, with preliminary categories refined through constant comparison to ensure reliability and analytic coherence. This documentary groundwork informed the design of the qualitative prompts and survey items, aligning the subsequent data collection with the most salient variables and relationships reported in the literature.

The second instrument involved was a focus group, according to Rabiee (2004) it is a technique that involves the use of in-depth group interviews in which participants are selected because of their representative role in a specific population. This is a necessarily representative sample of a particular population group, and it is known as the focus on a certain topic, so the participants in this type of research are selected on the basis of the need of saying something about the phenomenon, features may be grouped by associations, similar social settings shape their profile and the will of contributing by comfortability is part of acknowledging the research area. Therefore, the type and scope of data generated by group social interactions are often deeper and richer than data obtained from one-to-one interviews. It is essential to address that Focus groups can give information about the range of ideas and feelings that individuals have about different issues, as well as highlighting differences in opinion between groups of individuals.(Tümen Akyildiz & Ahmed, 2021) This instrument is useful for this research due to nearly all

people spending time on social networks, it means all these people have something to say about the topic and focus groups provide valuable insights into users' experiences and opinions on trustworthiness in digital platforms.

Focus groups are a valuable qualitative method for collecting data through group interactions, as they facilitate the efficient gathering of diverse insights (Dos Santos Marques et al., 2021). Typically, focus groups involve face-to-face discussions among six to eight participants, guided by a moderator and audio-recorded for subsequent analysis. Key advantages include the ability to collect substantial data in a short time, the moderator's capacity to explore related topics dynamically, and the use of straightforward sampling techniques. Despite potential limitations, such as group dynamics influencing responses, focus groups remain a robust method for qualitative data collection, serving either as a standalone approach or as a complement to quantitative studies (Scheuren, 2004).

Surveys, a widely used research instrument, enable data collection from a sample of individuals representing a subset of the population under study (Scheuren, 2004). Unlike a census, which includes all population members, surveys target a smaller sample, with the sample size determined by the population size and research objectives. Surveys are particularly valuable when studying an entire population is impractical, offering a practical alternative for gathering representative data. López-Roldán and Fachelli (2016, as cited in Cruz et al., 2023) emphasize that surveys are essential for uncovering reliable insights about the sample, enhancing the validity of research findings. Furthermore, Scheuren (2004) suggests that combining surveys with qualitative methods, such as focus groups, can yield more comprehensive results by integrating rich quantitative data with in-depth qualitative insights.

Thus, On the one hand, this combination of methods facilitated both a qualitative understanding of the context as well as a quantitative assessment of the insights, yielding a rigorous examination of the research problem. On the other hand, employing varied data collection methods enhances the credibility of the research findings and provides a nuanced perspective on the ways in which users engage with and relate to news content in the context of social media. This methodological framework not only adds to the study's credibility but0020also works as a reference exploring similar digital and social phenomena. It strengthens confidence that the results reflect real patterns in how people encounter, judge, and share information online. It acknowledges that users' judgments emerge in moments of uncertainty and pressure, where speed and social validation often compete with careful verification. It captures subtleties that a single instrument might miss, such as the emotional textures of doubt and the small cues that tip trust one way or another. It enables clearer connections between what participants say, what they do, and what the broader literature predicts in similar contexts. It keeps the analysis anchored to everyday practices—who people listen to, which posts they linger on, and how discussions with friends shape their views. It invites replication and adaptation in other cities or moments of heightened social tension, allowing comparative insights to accumulate over time. It, ultimately, offers a balanced pathway for studying credibility as a lived, contextual process rather than a static attribute of content.

RESULTS

The data analysis revealed that a new trend concerning the understanding of credibility encompasses a complex set of emerging connections. Trust in social media is not a static, unitary, or simple concept, but should be viewed as a multifaceted construct influenced by various social, cultural, and technological factors as it is shaped by evolving user interactions, source validation, and personal judgment.

This analysis reveals that social media users are becoming skeptical regarding the accuracy of the information provided. Older elements like the genuineness of the source and the information's truthfulness are still important, but social participation, content sharing tendencies, and platform features are emerging as significant influencers of trust. This change indicates that credibility is now influenced by the provider of the information, as well as the audience's engagement with the content.

It further indicates that endorsement cues such as likes, shares, and comments, along with the perceived reputation of intermediaries including friends, influencers, and community pages, function as credibility proxies that can reinforce or erode trust. It suggests that algorithmic curation prioritizes particular content types and narratives, shaping first exposure and, consequently, perceived plausibility. It highlights that visual formats such as memes, short videos, and infographics heighten persuasive impact while compressing evidentiary depth, thereby amplifying heuristic processing. It reveals age-differentiated weighting of cues: middle-aged users tend to privilege relational endorsements, whereas younger users emphasize style, virality, and creator identity. It shows that situational context, including periods of social tension, local events, and institutional announcements, modulates thresholds for skepticism or acceptance. It, overall, portrays credibility as a dynamic negotiation in which platform design, social signals, and prior beliefs jointly calibrate users' judgments of truth.

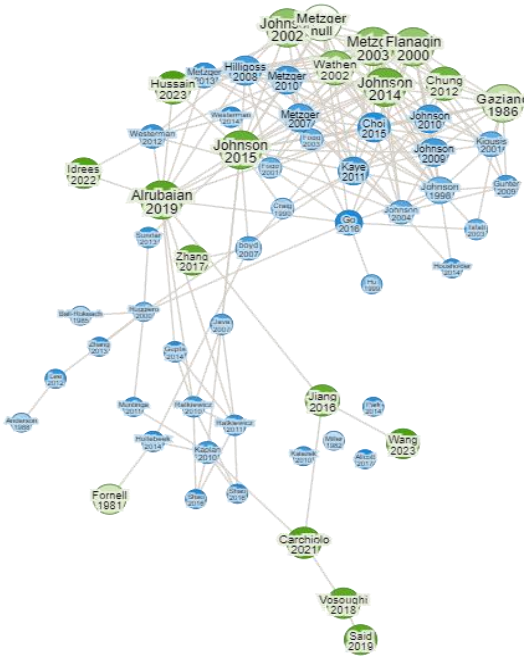

Figure 1. Research rabbit complex matrix of data analysis.
Note. Self-authorship through Research rabbit.

The analysis revealed that a majority of antecedents indicated that social networks' credibility is being increasingly questioned and redefined. These connections include not only the traditional aspects of information reliability, such as source authenticity and accuracy, but also new aspects like user interaction and user's validation or their opinion. In the social media context, trust is perceived by how content is shared among users, reflecting a shift towards a more dynamic and participatory process of trustworthiness. This evolving landscape of credibility suggests that users are increasingly relying on a combination of personal judgment, social ideas, and platform mechanics to assess the believability of information.

Therefore, the focus group demonstrated users age is a pivotal aspect to consider referring to reliability of social media trustworthiness. Elders seem to believe in the information delivery without questioning the nature of broadcasting while middle aged people constantly doubt not only about the nature, but about the inner intention of powers beyond a news report. Youth instead combined a really critical perspective in which positioning themselves on a side of the discussion is extremely related to their principles and beliefs. While the survey determined important aspects for this article the focus group facilitated the corroboration of patterns associated with age and scenery. The survey collected the answers of 456 people, most of the people surveyed were between 18 and 25 in which the use of social media is more recurrent and 55% of the sample were women. Middle aged and elders who were part of the survey between 30 and 55 years were only 13% of the sample. The survey consisted of 5 questions related to the information presented on social media.

First, as researchers we inquired about the ways people access information and we could appreciate that currently, Facebook was the most popular way to get data or daily news, 249 interviewees out of 456 choose social media over other regular media, such as radio or television concerning news broadcasting. In parallel, it is important to recognize that these patterns are situated within a rapidly evolving media ecosystem, where platform affordances and content formats change faster than traditional research cycles can capture. While Facebook emerged as the most common gateway for daily news among our respondents (249 of 456), emerging behaviors—such as short-form video consumption on TikTok and Instagram Reels, personalized newsfeeds curated by opaque algorithms, and the integration of AI-driven recommendation systems—may quickly reconfigure access pathways and credibility cues. Generative AI further complicates the landscape by enabling the swift production of synthetic or partially automated content, thereby blurring source boundaries and increasing verification demands for ordinary users. Consequently, findings anchored to a specific platform hierarchy should be interpreted as time-bound, with an expectation of drift as new features, moderation policies, and content creators reshape attention flows. This temporal sensitivity underscores the value of longitudinal follow-ups and adaptive measurement strategies to track how technological shifts alter both where people encounter news and how they judge its trustworthiness.

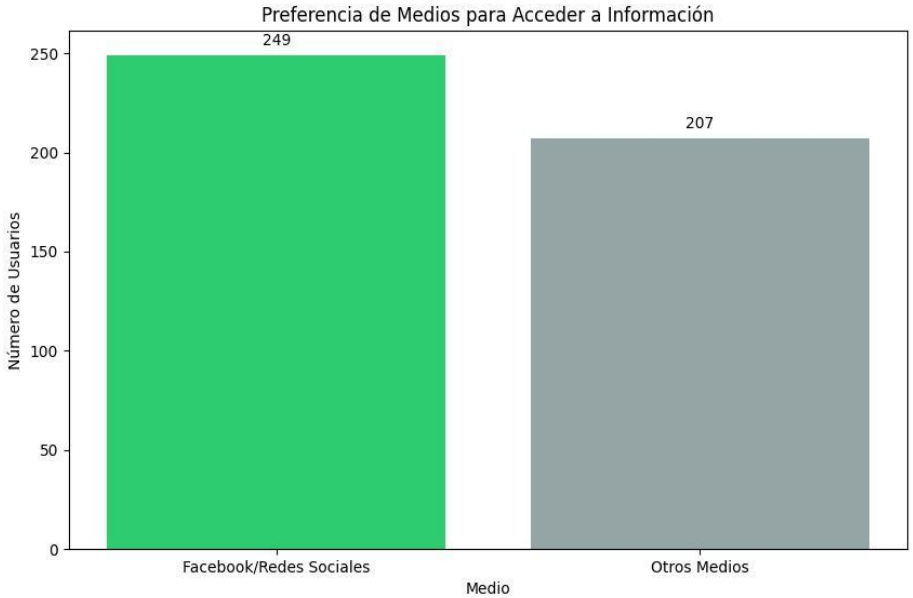

Figure 2. Survey analysis to the first question.
Note. Self-authorship through Google forms.

Second, users' credibility in social media, especially related to facebook showed that 42.3% express they believe in the information presented on this social media, notwithstanding the majority (57.7%) shared that they do not trust the information displayed there.

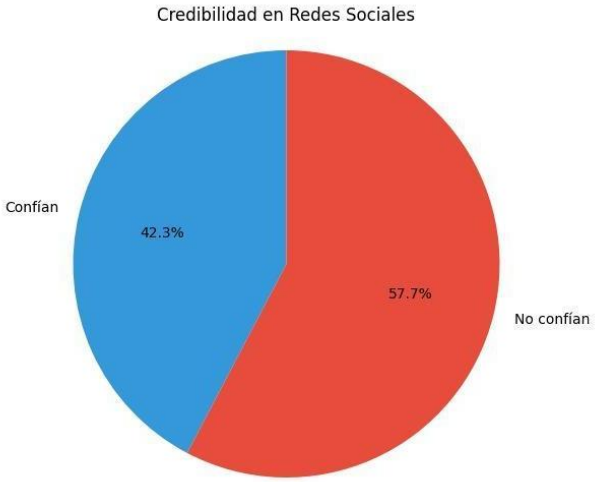

Figure 3. Survey analysis to the second question.
Note. Self-authorship through Google forms.

Henceforth, people stated that easy access to news broadcasting was essential, being able to access information at any time and anywhere is very useful, nevertheless some others mentioned Instagram is and tiktok are the most used social networks at the moment. Nonetheless, considering those are not reporting to news broadcasting but short content disclosure may project a future deviation of news broadcasting as a result of ICT's evolutions as mass media trending sources for users.

It was found that the experience of gathering information to be highly meaningful from the establishment of comparisons allowed us to be more cautious at the moment of the focus groups discussions. The interviewees' answers rectified significant data researched throughout the whole document and gave us the opportunity to clearly recognize some aspects delimiting the nature of social networks and the kind of content users expect to get from the cloud. These findings underscore the importance of ongoing research and discussions on credibility in social media. They also highlight the benefits of educating users to identify truthful information and reliable sources by addressing the uncertainty surrounding the authenticity of shared content and promoting the development of critical thinking skills. So then, it is possible to enhance the quality of information in the digital environment and strengthen users' trust in the content they consume on social platforms.

The results of the survey revealed that many users enjoy having access to a wide variety of content on social media; however, many expressed uncertainty about how to identify reliable information. Several admitted to lacking the knowledge needed to assess the truthfulness of posts and doubted their ability to distinguish trustworthy sources from unreliable ones.

Credibility and user age

During the process of the focus group discussions, age-related differences in perceptions of credibility were

highlighted. Older adults tend to trust information without critically questioning its origins, nevertheless middle-aged users exhibit skepticism, questioning both the content and the external influences behind news reports. Young users, on the other hand, adopt a highly critical approach, often filtering information by doing a more detailed process through their ideological perspectives and personal beliefs. The survey results reinforced these observations. Among the 456 respondents, 55% were women, and the majority (87%) were between 18 and 25 years old, reflecting the demographic group most engaged with social media. On the contrary, only 13% of the people who did the survey were between 30 and 55 years old.

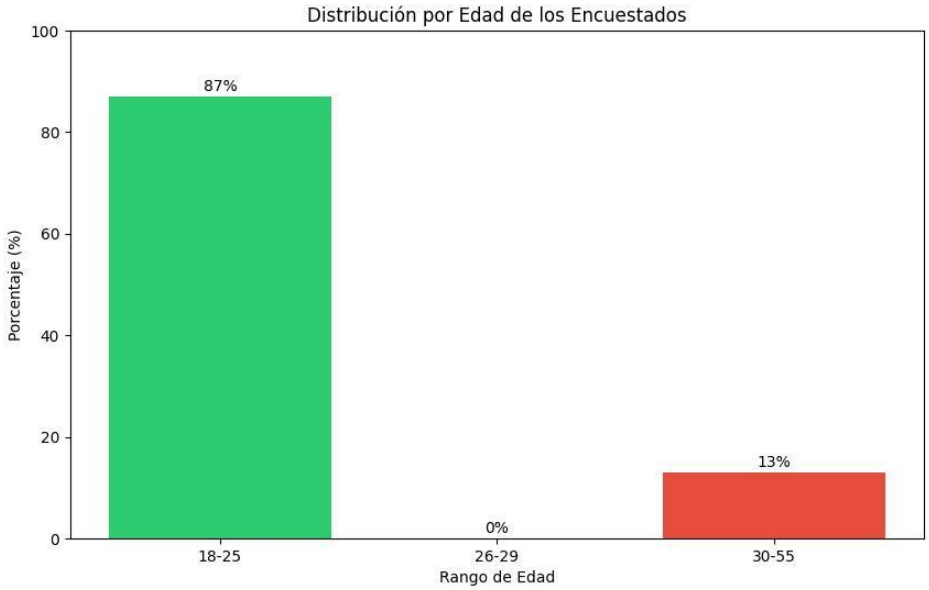

Figure 4. Survey analysis of the age.
Note. Self-authorship through Google forms.

Preferred information sources

The survey indicated that Facebook remains the primary platform for accessing news, with 249 out of 456 participants (approximately 55%) selecting social media over traditional media such as radio, television, or newspapers. However, the credibility of Facebook as a news source remains controversial, from one perspective 42.3% of users trust the information displayed on Facebook, nonetheless the majority (57.7%) express distrust, showing a gap between accessibility and perceived reliability. Additionally, some participants noted a growing preference for Instagram and TikTok, nevertheless these platforms are not traditionally associated with news dissemination, their increasing popularity alerts about a potential shift in the way younger audiences consume information; a situation or trend that may have implications for the future of news presented in social media, as bite-sized content and visually engaging formats are gaining extravagance attraction over conventional news sources.

Challenges in identifying reliable information

One of the most significant findings was the widespread uncertainty about how to assess credibility. In fact, many users admitted struggling to differentiate between trustworthy and unreliable sources, first, the focus groups confirmed that personal biases, lack of media literacy, and algorithm-driven content exposure contribute to this uncertainty. Thereby, a necessity to help users develop critical thinking skills when evaluating online content was manifested, that necessity may be covered by digital literacy programs

specially developed for this. Addressing these gaps in media literacy could strengthen users' ability to navigate the digital world, reducing their susceptibility to misinformation.

The results highlight the evolving nature of trust in social media and the urgent need for strategies to enhance information credibility. They also reinforce the importance of equipping users to critically analyze online content, promoting the adoption of fact-checking tools, and encouraging greater platform accountability to mitigate the spread of misinformation. Importantly, emerging usage trends not fully captured within the study window indicate that Facebook is increasingly oriented toward middle-aged adults, whereas younger cohorts are migrating to short-form, visually driven platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram Reels). This demographic reconfiguration has credibility implications: middle-aged users may rely more on legacy social connections and longer-form posts as trust cues, while younger users weigh audiovisual style, virality signals, and influencer reputations more heavily. Such divergences suggest that interventions should be tailored by platform and age segment, aligning media literacy content, verification prompts, and interface nudges with the dominant credibility heuristics of each group. In short, fostering a more informed and critical audience can enhance trust in digital environments, provided that strategies remain adaptive to shifting platform demographics and the rapid diffusion of new content formats and recommendation technologies.

DISCUSSION

Initial findings from the document analysis highlight the growing role of social media as a primary source of information. Online social networks (OSNs) attract millions of users daily across diverse demographics, with platforms like Facebook (2 billion users) and Twitter/X (640 million users) generating vast amounts of data through user activities (Alrubaian *et al.*, 2019). These activities include sharing opinions, personal thoughts, and discussions on social issues, reflecting the platforms' role in shaping public discourse. However, this abundance of user-generated content (UGC) introduces challenges, such as spam, rumors, and fake news, which users often struggle to identify (Alrubaian *et al.*, 2019).

Social media usage varies significantly by age, with 84% of adults aged 18–29 and 81% of those aged 30–49 reporting regular use, compared to 73% of those aged 50–64 and only 45% of those aged 65 and older (Auxier and Anderson, 2021). These findings suggest that younger generations are more engaged with social media, while older users are increasingly adopting these platforms, raising concerns about their ability to critically evaluate online information.

The rise of UGC has transformed information verification. Unlike the pre-internet era, where individuals relied on personal experience or trusted experts, social media enables anyone to share content without traditional oversight, increasing the risk of misinformation (Pasi and Viviani, 2020). This shift underscores the need for robust credibility assessment, which Pasi and Viviani (2020) outline through three key aspects:

- Users within virtual communities: Evaluating the reliability of contributors and their content.
- User-Generated Content (UGC): Assessing the accuracy and trustworthiness of shared information.
- Social connections: Analyzing how interactions influence information spread.

These aspects highlight the complexity of credibility, encompassing source, media, and message credibility, as well as related concepts like trust and reputation (Alrubaian *et al.,* 2019). In this study a review of 22 studies, encompassing 25 research analyses, identified Facebook and Twitter/X as the primary platforms for

news dissemination as follows: on Facebook, personalized content benefits from longer posts and friend-based connections, enhancing credibility. In contrast, Twitter/X's character limit and public nature favor concise, often anonymous updates, which can reduce credibility but enable rapid information sharing (Jenkins et al., 2020). Factors such as online language usage, expertise heuristics, and bandwagon heuristics also shape credibility perceptions across platforms.

The proliferation of misinformation—exacerbated by spammers, fake accounts, and rumor dissemination—underscores the need for effective solutions. Automated tools, such as algorithms for detecting opinion spam, fake news, and health-related misinformation, are critical for helping users navigate echo chambers and assess information credibility (Pasi and Viviani, 2020). To address these challenges, the following strategies are recommended:

- Enhancing media literacy: Equipping users to critically evaluate online content.
- Developing AI-driven tools: Improving detection of misinformation and spam.
- Promoting responsible content sharing: Encouraging users to verify information before sharing.

Thus, Ensuring credibility requires a collaborative effort among platform developers, researchers, and users to foster a more informed increasing online community featured by specific aspects. First, the socio-technical fabric in which credibility is negotiated is inherently uneven, with age groups displaying distinct reliance on heuristics and social cues that shape their judgments of truthfulness. Middle-aged users often privilege relational trust—friends' endorsements and longer, context-rich posts—whereas younger users weigh audiovisual style, virality, and creator identity more heavily, frequently within fast-moving short-form ecosystems. Beyond the scope of our survey period, platform analytics and public reports indicate an impressive acceleration in follower accumulation for content creators, a dynamic that can amplify perceived legitimacy independently of content accuracy. This follower-driven credibility, coupled with algorithmic curation, risks confounding expertise with popularity, thereby intensifying exposure to persuasive yet unverifiable narratives. The heterogeneity of these credibility pathways suggests that interventions must be segment-sensitive, addressing the distinct cognitive shortcuts and platform practices of each demographic.

Second, cultural context plays a decisive role: in many territories, devices and apps are woven into intimate social networks—family groups, neighborhood chats, school cohorts—so that information flows are inseparable from communal belonging and local norms. These embedded arrangements can strengthen verification through collective scrutiny, yet they can also entrench rumor cycles when group loyalty supersedes external fact-checking. As a result, credibility becomes a situated construct, co-produced by platform architectures, group identities, and lived experiences of institutional trust or skepticism. Taken together, these dynamics underscore a remarkable lack of certainty in the digital era: even as tools for detection improve, the velocity of content production, the diversification of platforms, and the cultural rooting of information practices produce shifting, age-differentiated reliability landscapes. Addressing credibility therefore requires not only technical and educational responses, but also culturally attuned strategies that recognize how social ties, local narratives, and device-mediated communities determine what counts as believable.

Henceforth, it is essential to acknowledge the ongoing efforts of national governments and international organizations seeking to establish frameworks that ensure transparency, equitable access, and ethical governance in the digital communication sphere. As Alrubaian *et al*. (2019) and Pasi and Viviani (2020) argue, credibility and accountability must evolve alongside technological innovation, particularly as

societies transition from the interactive affordances of Web 2.0 to the emergent, immersive features of Web 3.0 ecosystems. These advancements bring not only opportunities for engagement but also new responsibilities in the educational field, where media literacy and digital citizenship should be prioritized to empower users as critical interpreters of online discourse. Governments can contribute by promoting inclusive policies that foster the creation of reliable "informative capsules" or verified micro-posts on social networks, ensuring that technological growth benefits diverse populations rather than deepening informational divides. At the same time, as Auxier and Anderson (2021) highlight, differentiated access and competence among age groups call for adaptive communication strategies that reflect citizens' varied relationships with technology. Therefore, a clearer, regulatory use of digital content—balancing innovation with ethical constraints—appears increasingly necessary to prevent misinformation from dominating information channels and to safeguard transparency in governmental actions. In doing so, public institutions, educators, and technology developers share a collective mandate: to harness digital media's transformative capacity without compromising the veracity, inclusiveness, and social trust that underpin democratic communication.

CONCLUSION

This study illuminates the complex perceptions of news credibility among social media users in Bogotá, Colombia, a context shaped by post-2021 National Social Strike dynamics and economic disparities. Through a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach—encompassing documentary analysis of 25 scientific articles, focus groups, and a survey of 456 respondents—key insights emerged about how users evaluate information reliability on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Machine learning, via Research Rabbit, facilitated pattern identification in user engagement and content credibility, while focus groups and surveys revealed nuanced demographic differences.

Findings indicate that Facebook remains the primary news source for 55% of respondents, predominantly young adults (18–25, 55% women), yet 57.7% express distrust in its content, reflecting a gap between accessibility and perceived reliability. Credibility is heavily influenced by social validation, with users trusting information endorsed by friends or family, particularly when aligned with personal beliefs. However, this trust varies by age: older adults (30–55) accept content uncritically, middle-aged users question underlying intentions, and youth filter information through ideological lenses. Emerging preferences for Instagram and TikTok suggest a shift toward bite-sized, visually engaging content, potentially reshaping news dissemination in Bogotá's digital landscape.

These results underscore the multifaceted nature of credibility, driven by source authenticity, content presentation, and user interactions (Alrubaian *et al.*, 2019; Pasi and Viviani, 2020). The pervasive uncertainty in distinguishing reliable sources, exacerbated by biases and algorithmic content curation, highlights an urgent need for enhanced media literacy. To address these challenges in Colombia's socio-cultural context, stakeholders must prioritize media literacy programs, AI-driven verification tools and platform accountability. By integrating these strategies, policymakers, educators, and social media developers might strengthen Bogotá's digital ecosystem, empowering users to navigate misinformation and fostering a more informed society resilient to the complexities of online information.

It is clear from this convergent mixed-methods inquiry that credibility on social networks is a lived, relational process—emerging at the intersection of source signals, message design, platform architectures, and community norms. By integrating documentary analysis, focus groups, and surveys, the study connected what the literature anticipates (Marcoulides, 1998; Halcomb and Hickman, 2015) with how users

in Bogotá actually weigh identity, tone, endorsement, and immediacy in practice. The pattern mapping supported by Research Rabbit helped align salient constructs from prior work—such as heuristics, truth-bias, and endorsement effects—with age-differentiated experiences in a post-strike context, where inequality and institutional skepticism color judgments of veracity. It follows that credible communication cannot be reduced to static checklists; instead, it requires context-sensitive strategies that honor users' perspectives while addressing how algorithms, feed design, and social validation shape attention and trust.

It is equally evident that the terrain is shifting quickly. The migration toward short-form, visually driven platforms and the accelerating role of AI in content curation and generation heighten both opportunity and risk, widening the gap between accessibility and reliability if media literacy and platform accountability do not keep pace. In line with the broader discussion (Alrubaian *et al*., 2019; Pasi and Viviani, 2020), it is prudent to pair educational interventions with design standards that foreground provenance, context, and verification cues in user-friendly "informative capsules." National efforts toward transparency and equitable access will matter most when they are locally grounded—responsive to the cultural embedding of devices and apps within family, neighborhood, and peer networks—and when they recognize demographic differences in credibility heuristics (Auxier and Anderson, 2021). Ultimately, a measured regulatory approach to digital content, coupled with inclusive pedagogy and responsible platform design, can help ensure that misinformation does not become central to information channels, while strengthening public trust in both media and governmental actions in Colombia's evolving digital landscape.

DECLARATION ON CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no financial support or funding for this research, with Carlos Enrique Carrillo Cruz and Laura Fernanda Ramos Garzón both affiliated with the Universidad Distrital in Colombia. They confirm no conflicts of interest that could potentially bias the study "Between truth and doubt: The credibility of social networks, an analysis of perceptions of truthfulness", and affirm that the research was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines, with data available upon request. The manuscript represents an honest, transparent account of their academic investigation into social network.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Carlos Carrillo Cruz is the leader of the institutional project, managed data analysis, text guidance and text development in each component. Laura Ramos Garzón is a junior researcher attached to the Project who compiled references, mapped out main ideas to disclose in the text, developed different components of the text and submitted the final version to the journal.

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