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<b>Article:</b>	<b>Mapping Credibility Scale of Sources of Political News Stories Through Perception Lenses of Pakistani Youth: Analysis of Governmental vs. Non-Governmental and Conflicting Political News Sources</b>
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### **Abstract**

Research was designed to evaluate the credibility perception of youth regarding different mainstream and new media sources of political news. This study adopted questionnaire survey method as a research design of the study. The sample was drawn using probability proportional to size (PPS) and random sampling techniques. For the purpose of investigation, 375 respondents from Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan's approved universities/degree awarding institutions (DAIs) were selected for the purpose of data collection. The findings of the study revealed that in case the respondents are encountered with the conflicting version of political news stories, they considered traditional TV news channels and newspapers as first and second most credible political news sources respectively. Additionally, it was also found that the majority of the youth perceived live streaming of traditional TV news channels and news websites that are associated with the mainstream news sources (traditional TV news channels and newspapers) as first and second most credible online sources of political news respectively. Additionally, this research also found that the majority of the respondents considered non-governmental sources of political news as most credible. Overall, the study concluded that the respondents still perceived traditionally delivered political news as highly credible sources of political news.

**Key Words:** Media Credibility, Political News, Credibility Perception, Mainstream Media, New Media.

**Introduction & Background:**

Aristotle concept of ethos is dominating since the last 2,500 years which is considered as the Greek foundation of source credibility. Ethos is one of the three major ways by which the sender can persuade the audience members (Griffin, 2009). Credibility is a concept which has broader scope and multiple dimensions. Aristotle definition of credibility describes it as character, intelligence and goodwill. Whereas, according to the other researchers, credibility is a construct that consists of several variables and dimensions. For instance the research of (Haiman, 1949) regarding the effects of credibility on persuasion concluded that reputation and competence are significant variables in the construct of source credibility. Furthermore, researchers have provided different definitions explaining the concept of credibility with regard to the mass media. It can be defined as reliability, trustworthiness or perceived credibility and also it also consists of the combinations of other concepts (Self, 1996).

In order to understand the phenomena of credibility of media, researchers from the Yale University, Hovland and his associates Janis and Kelly (Hovland, 1953) studied communication of Second World War and revealed that expertise, trustworthiness and intentions as major credibility variables. Following the footprints of these communication researchers, many studies were conducted in the domain of public and group communication. In addition to it, Carl I. Hovland and other researchers defined the concept of credibility as the trust on media along with it's expertise. Furthermore, the researchers have concluded that the credibility of news is a construct which can be defined as acceptance of communicated message by the receivers (Metzger, 2007). From that point, many media scholars have measured the credibility perception of the source and the message. Since 1950s onward, the competitions between newspaper and television have pushed the scholars to focus on how the consumption of news by a specific medium or channel can affect the perceived credibility of the news (Abel, 1977).

The attention in the area of media credibility was increased in 1930s during the Second World War when the greater trustworthiness of the radio news gave the set back to the newspaper audience. This rapidly growing attention was increased further in 1950s when the newly invented medium of mass communication, television pushed the social scientists to investigate which medium of news is perceived highly reliable by the news audience. The researchers differentiated between the source and medium credibility. The findings of the research concluded that people differentiated between the credibility of medium and source (Kiouis, 2001). Besides, in the early years of research regarding source credibility, many studies have suggested that the sources having high level of credibility are more effective in changing attitude of the receiver than the sources of information having low source credibility (Hovland, 1953).

Furthermore, media credibility can also be defined as the trustworthiness of news medium or channel. It is different from the concept of source credibility, which only focuses on characteristics of the person or group communicating the message. Also, the focus of media credibility is not related to the characteristics of the individual communicator like expertise and trustworthiness (Bucy, 2003).

Media credibility is defined as the construct of the given concepts: honesty, believability, trustworthiness, fairness, unbiased, objectivity, verifiability, accuracy, being up-to-date, timeliness and reporting of the whole story. The focus of past media credibility research was traditional media and these researches have ignored the internet. However, the internet audience trusts the internet medium for seeking information. But still it has to be discovered whether the online medium is meeting the expectations of users or not. In spite of the fact that there are serious concerns regarding the dissemination of fabricated or misleading news and information on internet, the strength of the online news audience is rapidly growing (Hilligoss, 2008).

**Statement of Problem:**

Credibility has been remained a significant feature for all forms of old and new media news commodities. Certain questions are being raised by the media academicians regarding credibility of news and information disseminated by alternative media channels. Since, the last decade the research scholars from the multi-disciplines have undertaken research projects to explore credibility phenomena in context of mainstream and alternative media. In the result of proliferation of massive news and information from the multiple mainstream and alternative sources has given birth to the critical issue of credibility, believability and trustworthiness of news and information. Additionally, due the heavy dependence of the audience on new media sources of news and information, the danger of misinformation and rumors is also highly increased. It is also evident from the literature that the importance of mainstream news media channels specially television and newspaper is not faded. In addition, the internet and other new media channels of news and information dissemination e.g. Facebook, Whatsapp and Twitter are new to the users in the developing countries which are now heavily being utilized by young users.

In order to address this significant and rapidly emerging issue of the credibility of news sources, it is the need of the time to investigate the perception of youth and to discover which mass medium of national political news they consider as highly credible. The focus of this study is youths as they are the most frequent users of the Internet and social networking media in Pakistan. This research is important due to the fact that a few researches were conducted in Pakistan in the past to understand the credibility perception about the mainstream and alternative sources of political news. The study would address the important questions concerning the credibility of news sources in Pakistan as well it would also pave the way for the future researchers to investigate many other important dimensions of

credibility of mass media. This research is theoretically linked with the source credibility theory.

### **Literature Review:**

The current study intends to investigate the credibility perception of the youth of Punjab-Pakistan regarding different mainstream and new media sources of political news. In this connection, the review of relevant literature would surely support in understanding and identifying important concepts and variables related to the phenomena of credibility. Although there have been many studies conducted by the researchers in order to measure and evaluate the credibility perception of mainstream and new media sources of news. The current literature would present the most significant and directly relevant researches that would spotlight on researches regarding the credibility of mainstream and new media sources of political news.

Shan (2013) concluded that that micro-blogs were regarded as most credible news sources by the Chinese students. (Elareshi, 2012) found that the news services provided by pan-Arab news channels were regarded more credible than Libyan local television news services. Similarly, a study conducted in Egypt during the pre-election stage to evaluate the credibility perception of the audience towards different media channels concluded that overall, television was perceived as highly trustworthy medium after newspaper and internet (Hamdy, 2013). In addition, regarding the credibility of public vs. private media, (Singh, 2009) concluded that on balance, public media is considered as highly trustworthy as private media. Moreover, those Individuals who were unsatisfied with the performance of the president or doubtful about honesty of the government officials, trust the private media channels. Likewise, a media credibility survey found that the young audience in Malaysia still considers mainstream news media as highly credible. Moreover, regarding the credibility of media type (Zhou, 2014) investigated the media type credibility of Chinese sources of

news. The findings indicated that the medium of television secured top position and is regarded as most trustworthy medium of news in China. Whereas, in terms of news medium credibility, the newspapers, websites and radio stood on second, third and fourth position respectively.

### **Research Questions:**

This study has been designed to answer the following research questions:

1. Which political news sources are perceived by the respondents as credible when conflicting versions of same political news stories are disseminated by different type of media?
2. Between the governmental and non-governmental political news sources which sources are perceived by the youth as credible?

### **Methodology:**

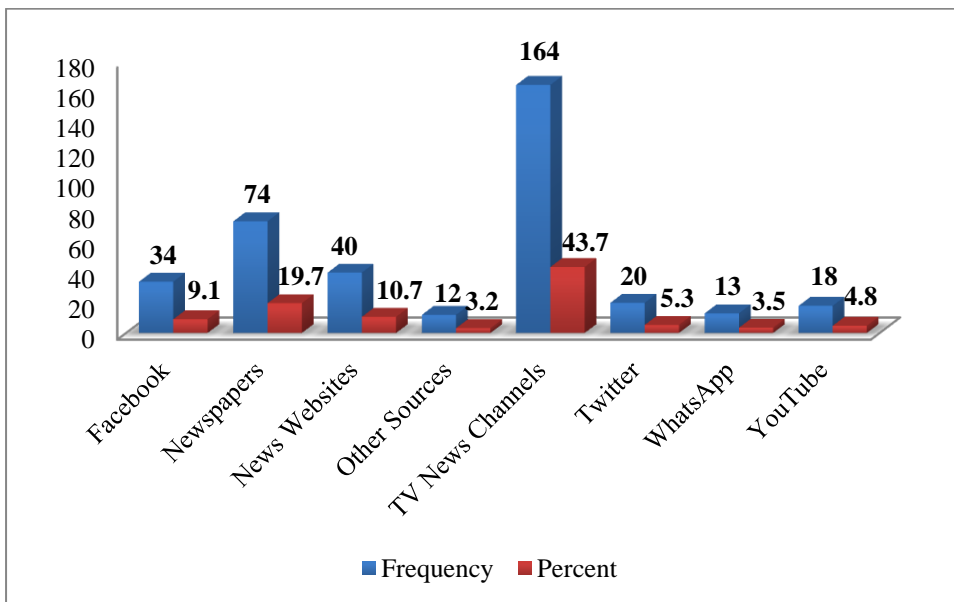
This study adopted questionnaire survey method as a research design of the study. The sample was drawn using probability proportional to size (PPS) and random sampling random sampling techniques. For the purpose of investigation, 375 respondents, (52.8%) males and (47.2%) females belonging to different higher educational institutions (HEIs) of province Punjab (Pakistan) were selected. The list of Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan's approved universities/degree awarding institutions (DAIs) was utilized for the purpose of data collection. The researcher has visited shortlisted universities in province Punjab (Pakistan) to get the questionnaire filled form the respondents. In order to evaluate the credibility perception of youth regarding sources of political news, source credibility measurement scale was utilized in the light of the previous researches e.g. (Johnson, 2004) & (McGrath, 1986). This study is theoretically linked with source credibility theory. In order to achieve the objectives of the research, pre-constructed questionnaire was prepared which comprised of 37 close ended questions of multiple choices to gauge the perception of youth

regarding news sources. The respondents indicated on a 5-point scale which includes the factors of believability, fairness, accuracy, and depth of each source. These four measures were then combined into a credibility index. The coded data was prepared and organized for the purpose of analysis using SPSS and different statistical procedures (e.g. chi-square and t-test) were performed to analyze the collected data.

**Findings:**

Figure: 1.1 Responses of Participants Regarding Conflicting Political News Stories & Medium Trust:

Conflicting Political News Stories & Medium Trust

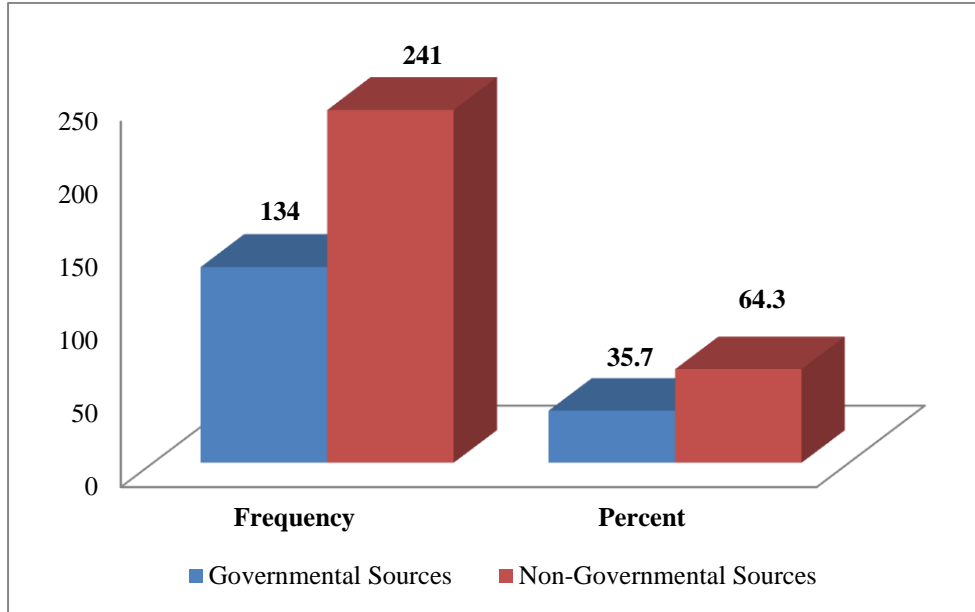


The above figure clearly shows the responses of the university students regarding the source of political news they would trust when they are encountered with the conflicting versions of same political news stories. The majority of the respondents (43.7%) ranked TV news channels most credible medium for getting credible political news stories. In addition, the survey participants ranked traditional newspapers (19.7%) as second most believable source of political news. Moreover, internet news websites were ranked as third most trustworthy source of political news.



Figure: 1.2 Responses of Participants Regarding the Credibility of Governmental & Non-Governmental Sources of Political News:

### Governmental & Non-Governmental News Sources & Youth's Trust



The above figure shows the perception of the university students regarding the political news source they trust. It is very clearly evident from the above given figure that the clear cut majority (64.3%) of the participants shared their opinion that they considers non-governmental source of political news as most trustworthy political news source.

### Discussions & Conclusions

This research was designed to evaluate youth's perception about the credibility of mainstream and new media sources of political news in province Punjab-Pakistan. The major focus of current research was to unearth the respondent's credibility perception about the sources of national political news which they were utilizing. In order to achieve the objectives of the study and to unearth highly credible and lesser credible sources of political news, survey was used as research design for the measurement of youth's credibility perception about mainstream and new media sources of news.

The findings of our research endorse the results of (Moehler, 2009) and (Elareshi, 2012). It was revealed that the overwhelming majority of the respondents were of the view that they consider non-governmental/private owned sources of political news as most credible. It was found that Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV), which runs under government control, is perceived by the youth as less credible traditional TV news channel as compared to mainstream private TV news channels. Private TV news channels were granted permission by Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), Government of Pakistan under PEMRA ordinance 2002 for broadcasting satellite TV news channels in Pakistan.

Over the years, mainstream TV news channels are being watched by the majority of the audience for news bulletin, news analysis programs, political debates and talk shows as well as for watching other important news. Mainstream news audience is accustomed to, familiar with and feels comfortable with the news of traditional TV news channels. In addition to it, the medium of Television has certainly many features which cannot be replaced by the online news websites or social media sites. The adoption of new media technology for disseminating and receiving news and information has assembled both news organizations and the audience with diverse features but still the audience considers mainstream news sources as credible.

The major reason behind these results might be the frequent exposure, availability and convenience of the audience for watching traditional TV news channels. In addition, television is perceived by the youth as most credibility political news sources due to its more serious, critical and well-researched political news and information programs which are beautifully presented for the audience in the timely manner. Youth watch different mainstream TV news channels for the sake of political news and the next day the newspapers reports more or less the same political news which they have already watched through the

traditional and online broadcast of TV news channels. Consequently, that also may be the reason that youth did not differentiate between the credibility perceptions about political news reported through the medium of traditional/online TV news channels with the traditional newspapers.

Secondly, mainstream news media also shares hourly news bulletin, breaking news and similar news content with the audience which is then re-shared through alternative means of news dissemination e.g. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc. On the other hand, it is important to understand that the traditional TV news broadcast is the master piece of well composed, organized and attractive combination of images, sounds and footages of the events which summarizes almost every aspect of the reported news stories. So in this context, the characteristic of the mediums itself as well as the team work greatly influence the minds of the audience in context of credibility. Usually, the youth read those online newspapers, watch those TV news channels which they read and watch through the traditional source of political news.

In addition, It is also important to note that there can be many different reasons and factors which certainly play an important role in strengthening the credibility perception about TV news channels as well as other news organizations. These factors may include the number of years of experience in the news industry, research on news and information, association of well-known journalists/analysts with the organization, technology and expertise of news content production, strength and network of reporters/correspondents in the country and abroad, popularity of the news and talk shows, number of social media followers and subscribers and website visitors and the most importantly the powerful network of the authentic sources of news and information which certainly enable the news organization to break the news story before any other news organization that certainly increase the TRP and credibility. Similarly, (Sabigan, 2007) found that there were three main factors which have


contributed towards the perceived credibility of mediated news. The research concluded that news credibility, medium credibility, and reporters' credibility directly influence the credibility of the communicated news both on television and online news. Whereas, individual reporter's credibility is directly associated with the individuals intelligence, expertise, education, authoritativeness and trustworthiness. Moreover, the medium of television is evaluated by its comprehensive nature, fairness, and taking care for the public interest whereas the internet is evaluated on the basis of its objectivity, public interest as well as credibility. Besides, the yard stick for measuring the credibility of news for both the sources was objectivity and trustworthiness. These are the some of the important reasons which give the confidence to the news audience to depend on a specific TV news channels, newspapers over the other. Likewise, (Schweiger, 2000) also found that television news channels and newspaper were perceived as most authentic sources of news due the fact that TV was regarded as more serious, critical and well-researched.

Moreover, user's selection of news sources on the social media environment is also a significant factor which determines the credibility and authenticity of the news. As the social media has lesser checks and media gatekeeping process is not followed like in case of mainstream media, any one with just an email address can instantly create the account on social media. Duplicate and unverified social media pages of newspapers and TV news channels is another issue the social media users may encounter which assessing the credibility of communicated news and information. The analysis of social media pages of mainstream Pakistani newspapers and TV news channels revealed there are more than one social media pages of the one and the same news organization. It is alarming that thousands of the users are the subscribers/followers of these unverified/fake news pages. Such pages must be reported by actual news organization to the authorities for closure and necessary actions. Monitoring and observation of social media channels e.g. Facebook, Twitter and

WhatsApp exposed another, significant aspect which must not be ignored in any case by the users that is the habit of sharing and re-sharing unverified news and information. So, it is important that before subscribing any news source one must check and verify the authenticity of the sources of news. Usually, TV news channels frequently shares their social media account details with their audience. Mainstream TV news channels in Pakistan frequently shares the snapshot of news headlines, video news bulletin and various news and information programs for their social media audience. Furthermore, there are many credible internet/social media based news organization disseminating the news and information for thousands of subscribers.

Credibility is the significant feature of journalism and communication. The current research has thrown light upon the broader picture of the phenomena of credibility perception of the youth. The characteristics of mainstream media are different from the new media. To understand the issue of credibility deeper and to pin point the other factors and reasons which contributes towards the development of credibility perception, a separate comprehensive research is required to explore and analyze every source of news and information individually. In addition, to evaluate the credibility of traditional TV news channels, there are other aspects which need to be investigated.

Additionally, the other factors of TV news channels include access and availability, frequency of use and dependence, quality of broadcast e.g. HD transmission, coverage of the news stories, past experience with the source, breaking news etc. On the other hand, to measure the credibility of new media sources of news like websites of traditional TV news channels and newspapers, social media sites of newspapers, TV news channels, political parties and personalities, news blogs, political parties' websites, it is important to focus on other dimensions to explore which factors are the most significant contributor of credibility online. For instance, these additional factors of online sources credibility may include,

availability & access, professional and attractive page design, performance & presentation, website organization and navigation, absence of broken links and errors, interactivity of website, multimedia support, news search feature, frequency of news dissemination, strength of subscribers & followers, blue verification badge , fast download speed, domain name, absence of advertisements, links reputable news organization, presence of security and privacy policies, multi language support, social media following support, latest/breaking news tickers, notification subscription, live news streaming, availability of Android/IOS news apps. news sharing feature and “About news organization” link etc.

In addition to it, the factors regarding news organization and author may include: Identification, qualification and credentials of author or news communicator, contact information, reputation, association with media groups, presence on mainstream media etc. Whereas, the news itself is also very important which can be studied using the factors of Timeliness, accuracy and depth of the news, availability of date stamp showing the currency of news, links to external sites, video support, Professional quality and clear writing etc. Finally, the news receiver evaluates the news and information on the basis of above mentioned possible factors which certainly contributes in developing the credibility perception. The credibility evaluation at the end of the receiver may vary from individual to individual due to the past experience with the source, prior knowledge & attitude, personal expertise, medium dependency, experience of using internet & trust, age, gender, education, political party affiliation and income level.


An important step is already taken to tackle with the serious issue of systematic spread of fake notifications, political news, disinformation, political propaganda and other content of similar nature on social media, the newly elected government of Pakistan has launched a Twitter account 'FakeNewsBusterMoIB' to expose and deal with such news and information. This account was launched by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on

the instruction of minister of information and broadcasting Fawad Choudhary. According to the Tweet by information minister the 'FakeNewsBusterMoIB' account will be used to give the official response to the false propaganda in timely manner. In addition, he added in this Tweet that this twitter account will also be used to identify the users involved in spreading fake news as well as to report it to the authorities to take action against such users. Such measures are good but not enough to counter such negative activities in the complex internet environment. For self-assessment/evaluation and differentiating the real news stories and information from the fake, here are some important recommendations.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **How to Identify Fake News?**

- Examine the news headlines wisely. Usually, the sensationalism technique is utilized to attract the attention of the reader but don't panic because the shared news or information can be misleading.
- Don't trust solely on the news headline and initially read 100-200 words to understand more deeply.
- Pay attention to the date and time of news. News stories usually resurface on the internet and social media and can be provide wrong information.
- Research and investigate the author of the news. Reputed news sources / organizations often provide the information regarding the author and expertise of communicator.
- Have a look on the homepage of the news websites; fake news websites have the ability to look like real site which seems original.
- Evaluate the URL of the news site. The URLs of the fake news sites are very similar to the original popular news websites that consist of additional word or different domain.

- Look for the different hyperlinks of the website and try to analyze the other news stories.
- Identification of the source is must. Ensure that the news story is originally disseminated by the news organization you trust. If the source of the story is unknown or unfamiliar visit their “About” section to learn more about it.
- The fake or misleading news can also be identified by observing the unusual formatting and awkward layouts. Most of the false news website has mistakes in the spellings and grammar. Carefully identify such signs.
- Carefully examine the photos and videos on the internet. Fake news stories are usually supported by the photoshopped and manipulated images and videos which have nothing to do with the reality. Some of the photos are real but are presented out of the context.
- Moreover, with the use of video editing software the real videos can also be manipulated closely by joining the parts of entirely different videos and adding new voice over which is in fact not real.
- Think critically concerning the news stories you read, share only those news stories that you believe to be authentic.
- If you think that the news story seems suspicious or fake then go for the alternative sources to verify the news like traditional TV news channels and official news websites of the famous news organization which you regularly utilizes for getting credible news and information.
- Facebook, Twitter and YouTube assign the blue verification badge  that allows the audience to know that the profile or page is authentic. Only eligible media organization, public figures and brands can apply for the verification badge. If the



news page has this badge it means the material being provided on the page is authentic.

- Only subscribe and follow the official news and information sources. TV news channels disseminate the information about the official websites, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube of the news organization.
- It is recommended that mainstream media organizations should establish a specialized monitoring cell to verify the news and information disseminated by different unverified Facebook and other social media pages.
- Anonymity and no identification checks of social media is the major cause which leads to the lesser believability and credibility of disseminated news and information. Anyone can create an email and Facebook account in some minutes without real identifications.
- To counter this issue it is recommended that social media organization should form a proper mechanism of official identification of social media pages and accounts with the support of relevant government ministries and institutions like ministries of information technology, interior, information and broadcasting and law enforcing agencies working in the different countries.
- Mass media organizations itself should search and report the fake news pages to Facebook, Twitter etc. It would help to eliminate the mirror/duplicate social media pages of real news organization.
- The government's institutions dealing with law making and enforcement should make strict laws, rules and regulations to control the dissemination of fabricated news, political propaganda, disinformation and other related acts.
- Social media users interested in seeking credible news and information through online channels should follow and subscribe only to the official sources of news

organization. Mainstream news organization i.e. traditional TV news channels and newspapers frequently inform the audience and share the information about their official address of their websites, Facebook, Twitter , YouTube and other social media pages.

- The official social media news sources are regularly updated and provide news and information to their subscribers. Most of the traditional TV news channels shares their hourly news bulletin for their Facebook, Twitter and YouTube news audience. The list of the most of the official mainstream news sources is also part of this thesis.
- News organizations and smart phone companies together should develop and provide built-in news application software to their users which consist of all the official mainstream and alternative sources of news.
- To facilitate the news audience to enjoy live transmission of traditional TV news channels on their smartphones, it is recommended that all traditional TV news channels should develop smart phone news apps. that provide the uninterrupted and error free live news transmission to the consumers.
- Before sharing and re-sharing, liking and commenting on the news and information. It is recommended that the individual must initially verify the authenticity of the communicated news and information.

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