Trust or Bust?: Questioning the Relationship Between Media Trust and News Attention

Ann E. Williams

This article establishes the theoretical significance of media trust and explores the relationships between individuals’ levels of media trust and news attention. Three distinct types of media trust are introduced: 1) trust of news information, 2) trust of those who deliver the news, and 3) trust of media corporations. The findings indicate that these different types of media trust relate to news attention in distinct ways, specifically when examined across medium. The theoretical significance of the findings are discussed and contextualized in light of an evolving media environment.

Trust is an element of public engagement (Almond & Verba, 1963; Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Fukuyama, 1995; Grovier, 1997; Hanifan, 1920; Jacobs, 1961) that drives civic beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (e.g., Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Davidson & Cotter, 1989; Paxton, 1999; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000). Studies that examine the relationships among trust, media use, and civic engagement are abundant (e.g., Capella, 2002; Putnam, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Uslaner, 1998, 1999). Measures of trust employed in these studies typically capture an over-arching trust in people, i.e., “social trust,” however, the forms of trust that individuals assign to specific sources of civic information are important aspects of public engagement (Williams, 2004) that warrant more attention from researchers (for related discussion see Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001).

This article develops, conceptualizes, and operationalizes a specific form of trust—media trust. Related research questions then explore how media trust relates to audience engagement with multiple forms of mediated news outlets, including the attention that individuals give to newspaper coverage, television news broadcasts, and Web-based, online news sources. The article speaks to theory in multiple ways:

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Firstly, it builds on social capital theory to introduce a theory-driven conceptualization of media trust, and secondly, it draws from communication theory to examine substantive ties between media trust and the level of attention that audiences give to different news mediums.

Three distinct types of media trust are introduced: 1) trust of news information, 2) trust of those who deliver the news, and 3) trust of media corporations. The first is a form of media trust that applies to content; the second is a form of interpersonally based media trust of the individual actors working within the media industry; and, the third is a form of institutionally based media trust in the organizational structure of media establishments. These conceptualizations are used to approach four related research questions: 1) How does trust of news information relate to attention given to news media (i.e., print newspaper coverage, television news broadcasts, and Web-based, online news sources)? 2) How does trust in those who deliver the news relate to attention given to news media? 3) How does trust in media corporations relate to attention given to news media? and, 4) Do measures of media trust relate differently to the level of attention audiences give to traditional, offline media than to the level of attention that audiences give to Web-based, online news sources?

To respond to these research questions, the review of the literature focuses on three related areas of research: the first introduces trust as an important aspect of community building; the second underscores the importance of recognizing and conceptualizing multiple different forms of trust— including media trust—which is central to the study’s research questions and analysis; and, the third provides theoretical impetus for exploring the relationships between media trust and audience attention patterns.

**Trust as an Important Aspect of Community Building**

Many scholars identify trust as a force vital to community-building and the sustenance of social ties (Bourdieu, 1983; Hanifan, 1920; Jacobs, 1961). In description of the creation, reinforcement, and institutionalization of social networks, social capital theory situates trust as a foundational element of community cohesion (Bourdieu, 1983). Similarly, studies of social organization suggest that social capital is borne not directly within the individual, but rather is facilitated via networks of interpersonal trust that allow for transference of information, cultivation of norms, and formation of interpersonal relationships (Coleman, 1990). Further highlighting the importance that trust plays in building social synergy, the theory of social capital is based on the premise that institutional and social trust promote communal connection and collective action (Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b).

The existence of trust within a social system plays a vital role in developing societal cooperation and community involvement. Scholars repeatedly find support for the claim that trust promotes civic and political engagement (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Davidson & Cotter, 1989; Paxton, 1999; Putnam, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Shah,
McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). In a rejuvenation and popularization of social capital theory, Robert Putnam (1993) identifies trust as a key ingredient of community interaction, dubbing it the “lubricant of cooperation” (p. 171). This description is in keeping with research documenting that trust in others aids individuals’ decisions to interact with people in social and civic settings (Davidson & Cotter, 1989) and that trust facilitates the formation of social bonds that motivate people to become more involved in their communities (Almond & Verba, 1963; Huckfeldt, 1979; Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974; Sampson, 1988; Uslaner, 1998).

Recognizing and Conceptualizing Different Types of Trust

Trust has been examined, classified, and explained in multiple ways by multiple researchers. The social capital literature provides conceptual labels for two distinct types: social trust and institutional trust. The former refers to trust in other people, the latter refers to trust in public and private establishments including government agencies and corporate entities (Barber, 1983; Fukuyama, 1995; Grovier, 1997; Luhmann, 1979). While these categories have been conceptually outlined in empirical research projects, they are sometimes blurred in empirical analyses (e.g., Putnam 1995a, 1995b, 2000). Lack of attention to the theoretical difference between trust in specific individuals, i.e., “interpersonal trust,” and trust in abstract groups of unknown others, i.e., “social trust” may threaten the conceptual and empirical validity of related analyses. While trust of a collective, abstract other provides the basis for theories of social capital, interpersonal trust of known others can have a direct impact on civic engagement (Shah, 1998; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). It has also been noted that studies highlighting specific measures of interpersonal trust have been largely neglected in past empirical work and warrant more attention (for related discussion see Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001; Williams, 2004). Likewise, assessments of social capital related to system-directed institutional trust have been limited, concentrating primarily on trust in governmental institutions (e.g., Paxton, 1999) without thorough study and evaluation of other social institutions, such as mainstream media outlets.

In addition to institutional trust and interpersonal trust, studies of communication and social capital need also consider informational trust as a possible determinant of audience engagement. Related communication research documents significant relationships between media credibility and media use (e.g., Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Meyer, 1988; West, 1994), however studies of media credibility often focus most centrally on specific news values (i.e., accuracy, objectivity, believability, etc.), while overlooking the core concept of trust that is rooted in theories of public engagement (Almond & Verba, 1963; Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Fukuyama, 1995; Grovier, 1997; Hanifan, 1920; Jacobs, 1961). Because trust is a deep-seeded form of individual investment, it is particularly important to explore trust as a distinct and foundational driver of engagement.
Broad, conceptual categories of trust are classified according to the forms of trust identified in the chart below.

### Conceptual Categories of Trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Trust</th>
<th>Scope of Trust</th>
<th>Manifestations of Trust (examples of Media Trust)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Trust</td>
<td>Person-to-Person</td>
<td>Trust of news reporters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Trust</td>
<td>Person-to-System</td>
<td>Trust of news corporations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational Trust</td>
<td>Person-to-Content</td>
<td>Trust of news content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interpersonal trust (person-to-person) is exemplified as trust between a news consumer and a news reporter. Trust of a news corporation, such as the trust one assigns to a specific news agency, is a person-to-system form of institutional trust, and trust of the content of a news story serves as a person-to-content form of informational trust.

### Media Trust and Audience Attention Patterns: The Underlying Theory

Media trust is uniquely situated from other forms of trust. As such, it is essential to consider how these unique types of investment relate to media attention patterns. The theory of uses and gratifications provides a relevant theoretical framework. The theory suggests that individuals seek out media content to satisfy personal objectives (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Swanson, 1987). Work in this area defines individuals’ choices to attend to particular media channels or types of content in terms of the gratifications they expect to gain as a result of their interactions with media (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Rosengren, Wenner, & Palmgreen, 1985; Swanson, 1987; Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). By viewing audiences as thinking consumers of media who consciously make media consumption decisions, the uses and gratifications theory positions audience members as individuals who actively use certain media to fulfill certain needs (Katz et al., 1974). According to this approach, audiences are aware of the alternatives available to fulfill their needs and actively choose the information channels that can best serve their needs over other competing sources of need satisfaction. This means that they often choose to use certain media outlets over others (Cowles, 1989; Katz et al., 1974; Rosengren et al., 1985).

Research suggests that media use patterns may also be influenced by perceived source credibility. Much work has documented that the perceived credibility of a news source relates to patterns of use, selective exposure, and selective attention. Research in the area focuses primarily on how the perceived utility of content...
relates to exposure and attention patterns (Atkin, 1973, 1985; Katz et al., 1974) and on how the credibility of a media source relates to the attention given to that source (Knobloch, Dillman, & Zillmann, 2003; Swanson, 1987).

Because audiences are not capable of paying continuous attention to all information at all times, they must inevitably choose which sources of information will provide them with the greatest benefits. Research on selective exposure suggests that when audiences find information lacks credibility, they will seek information elsewhere (Chaffee & McLeod, 1973). Likewise, in assessing the value of a source, audiences tend to choose sources they trust over sources they distrust (Hawkins et al., 2001; Wheeless, 1974; Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). With respect to use of different news sources, research shows that audiences tend to direct more attention to material of higher utility while dismissing material of lower utility (Knobloch et al., 2003). Therefore, the level of attention that one gives to a source that s/he deems highly credible may be higher than the level of attention paid to a source s/he is skeptical about.

Building on the premise that media credibility is a key determinant of media use, researchers have explored how audience skepticism plays into the use of news media. Tsfati and Cappella (2003) examine news exposure patterns with respect to the levels of skepticism that individuals assign to mainstream and non-mainstream news outlets, documenting that the relationship between media skepticism and media use differs with respect to media type and form. Their findings suggest, more specifically, that media skepticism is negatively associated with mainstream news exposure but positively associated with non-mainstream news exposure.

Tsfati and Cappella (2003) also note that while past research on media credibility has succeeded in theoretically distinguishing between different forms of credibility and fairness (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Meyer, 1988; West, 1994), it has failed to empirically differentiate between the value judgments that can be assigned to different aspects of the media production and consumption process.

Despite the frequent use of general, unqualified measures of media confidence, a large body of social capital literature gives theoretical impetus to focusing on trust, as a strong form of individual investment and key driver of public engagement. Motivated by this theoretical rationale, a renewed focus on media trust is forwarded here. In exploration of potential empirical differences that may exist between forms of media trust, the following analyses examine audience members’ evaluations of content as well as their interpersonal and institutional evaluations of content providers. The purpose of this study is to provide a focused view of trust, outside of traditional measures of media confidence and media credibility that arguably confound audience assessments of content, content gatekeepers, and content disseminators.

**Research Questions**

The literature provides four over-arching takeaways that inform the research questions: 1) trust manifests in many ways, 2) trust in media can manifest as in-
terpersonal trust, institutional trust, and informational trust, 3) audiences attend to media channels that they perceive to be trustworthy, and 4) the relationship between media trust and media attention may vary with respect to different types of media channels. The following research questions are introduced, with news media classified as print newspaper coverage, television news broadcasts, and Web-based, online news sources.

RQ1: How does trust of news information relate to attention given to news media?
RQ2: How does trust in those who deliver the news relate to attention given to news media?
RQ3: How does trust in media corporations relate to attention given to news media?
RQ4: Do measures of media trust relate differently to the level of attention audiences give to traditional, offline media than to the level of attention audiences give to Web-based, online media?

Method

Sample

To address the above research questions, data collected via random digit dialing (RDD) telephone interviews was employed. Respondents were selected to participate in the survey on the basis of probability sampling techniques that account for unlisted telephone numbers. The cooperation rate, calculated in accordance with the standard definitions developed by the American Association for Public Opinion Research, was 40%. The sample (N ~ 400) was drawn from a region of the United States population with demographics that closely match those of the broader U.S. population. Key demographic characteristics of the sample strongly resembled the profile of the regional and national population at the time the survey fielded, with respect to education, race, median household income, and home ownership.

Analytic Procedures

OLS regression models are employed to assess the relative association that each measure of media trust holds with attention to certain news outlets after controlling for a host of demographic variables. Three different models are formed to assess three types of media attention, including: 1) level of attention given to newspaper news; 2) level of attention given to television news; and 3) level of attention given to Web-based, online media (Internet news).
Measures

**Criterion Variables: Attention to News Media.**

To measure the degree of respondents’ media involvement, news attention measures are created for newspapers, television, and online news sources. For each type of information channel, respondents are asked on 10-point scales how much attention they pay to three categories of news content: international affairs; national government and politics; and local government and politics. Additive use indexes are then created for each information channel: Web-based news (Cronbach $\alpha = .90$), television news, (Cronbach $\alpha = .85$), and newspapers (Cronbach $\alpha = .89$).

**Exogenous Variables: Media Trust.**

To address the central questions, three types of media trust are introduced: 1) trust of news information; 2) trust of those who deliver the news; and 3) trust of media corporations. The first is a form of media trust that is defined by audience perceptions of news content; the second is a form of interpersonally based media trust that is defined by audience perceptions of the individual actors working within the media industry; and the third is a form of institutionally based media trust that is defined by audience perceptions of the organizational structure of media establishments. For each measure of trust, 10-point numerical rating scales are employed. Additive indexes are summated with two indicators for both scales of trust in news reporters (Cronbach $\alpha = .85$) and trust in news institutions (Cronbach $\alpha = .76$). Two individual indicators of informational trust, trust in traditional media news content and trust in Internet news content, are scaled independently.

**Control Variables: Demographics.**

Demographic variables of age, education, and income have been found to hold positive associations with social trust and have also been identified as significant predictors of public engagement (Rothenbuhler, Mullen, DeLaurell, & Ryu, 1996; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Therefore, in this analysis, age (Mean: 41.8; SD: 16.41), education (Mean: 16.3 years; SD: 3.33), income (Median: $50,001–70,000), sex (57% female), and length of residency are included as demographic controls.

**Results**

**Audience Attention to Newspaper News**

In line with past research suggesting that newspaper use increases with age and that those of higher socioeconomic status are more avid news consumers than those of lower socioeconomic status, results show that age, education, and income
are positively correlated with newspaper attention (Table 1). After controlling for key demographic variables, trust of news reporters still holds a significant, positive association with attention paid to newspaper news ($B = .520$, $p < .03$). Perceived trustworthiness of content, however, is not a significant predictor in the model, nor is trust of the institutional gatekeeper of the news. Rather, the personal source of information dissemination, the individual reporter, is a significant factor of decisions to consume newspaper news. This form of person-based trust, which is directed from one individual toward another, is the most prominent determinant of newspaper news attention in the model.

**Audience Attention to Television News**

As in the model of newspaper attention, the model of television attention indicates that income holds a positive association with television news attention (Table 2). Length of residency is also a determinant of television news attention, perhaps because increased community attachment fosters a desire for increased community awareness and for information that can be introduced in interpersonal exchanges to enhance social ties (e.g., McLeod, 2000). Unlike the model of newspaper attention, however, trust of media reporters holds no significant relationship with attention paid to television news. Rather, trust of the corporate sponsorship projecting the
Table 2
OLS Regression Analysis of Media Trust on Audience Attention to Television News

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Controls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.045</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>-.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.163</td>
<td>.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (high = female)</td>
<td>-.285</td>
<td>1.021</td>
<td>-.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>.867</td>
<td>.332</td>
<td>.184**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Residency</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.156#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Trust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust of News Reporters</td>
<td>-.109</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>-.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust of News Institutions</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>.181</td>
<td>.180*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust of News Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News content from traditional media</td>
<td>.848</td>
<td>.344</td>
<td>.212*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News content from Internet</td>
<td>-.610</td>
<td>.291</td>
<td>-.161*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>231</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10, **p < .05, ***p < .01, ****p < .001.

Content is the significant determinant (B = .380, p < .04). In the model of attention to television news, perceived trustworthiness of the content itself is also a predictor of news attention (B = .848, p < .02). And, interestingly, as trust of Web-based news content increases, attention to television news decreases. On the other hand, trust of traditional news content maintains a strong positive tie to the attention audiences give to television news. Such outcomes could be reflexive of increased migration to online news sources, but may also highlight the continued embrace of television news among groups who are distrustful of online news content.

Audience Attention to Internet News.

A model of audience attention to Internet news is introduced in light of past findings that suggest trust of alternative media sources may displace attention given to traditional news sources (for related discussion see Tsafati & Cappella, 2003). While this model cannot address displacement hypotheses directly, it does suggest that forms of media trust that are significantly associated with attention to traditional media sources show no significant association with Internet news attention (Table 3).

This result is not a direct indication that people are more or less confident in and/or skeptical of Internet news content. It does, however, signal the possibility that audiences use different assessment tools to evaluate the trustworthiness of online media. In fact, past studies of Internet news suggest that consumers eval-
Table 3
OLS Regression Analysis of Media Trust on Audience Attention to Internet News

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic Controls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.626</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td>.257***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (high = female)</td>
<td>−1.501</td>
<td>1.053</td>
<td>−.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td>.340</td>
<td>.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Residency</td>
<td>−.0001</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>−.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media Trust</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust of News Reporters</td>
<td>−.007</td>
<td>.218</td>
<td>−.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust of News Institutions</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.186</td>
<td>.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust of News Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News content from traditional media</td>
<td>.512</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News content from Internet</td>
<td>.365</td>
<td>.298</td>
<td>.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.136</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>224</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

...uate Internet news credibility more critically than news distributed via traditional sources (Knobloch et al., 2003). It may also be more difficult for audiences to assess the trustworthiness of Web-based media, in terms of gate-keeping institutions and individual gate-keepers, because both factors are less transparent online than they are offline (Castells, 2009). Additionally, online news maintains a transient point on continuums of transparency and scope, as news reports are often indeterminately sourced and point-to-point as well as point-to-many.

**Discussion**

**Summary and Significance**

Social capital theory makes a distinction between social trust and institutional trust. It has been previously argued that these are not only theoretically distinct concepts, but that they also hold unique associations with social capital outcomes, including public engagement. This article expands the distinction between trust in people and trust in institutions that has been made within the realm of social capital production and applies refined conceptualizations of media trust to an essential aspect of media engagement—audience attention. Three distinct types of media trust are introduced: 1) trust of news information; 2) trust of those who deliver the news;
and 3) trust of media corporations. The first is a form of media trust that applies to content; the second is a form of interpersonally based media trust of the individual actors working within the media industry; and, the third is a form of institutionally based media trust in the organizational structure of media establishments.

The results confirm that these three different types of media trust relate to news attention in distinct ways, when examined across medium. Specifically, the outcomes show a significant positive relationship between trust in those who deliver news and the attention that audiences pay to news, however only with respect to attention given to newspapers; the relationship between reporter trust and attention given to television news is not significant. When measuring trust in the corporate entity that sponsors the news, a significant positive relationship between media trust and news attention also exists, however only with respect to attention given to television news; the relationship between institutional trust and attention given to newspaper news is not significant. Furthermore, when assessing the relationships between media trust measures and attention given to Internet news, no significant associations are found.

Why is this the case? In the arena of newspaper news, audiences’ perceptions may be driven by the traditional news reporting values that individual reporters promote or violate (Schudson, 1978). This perspective is also in keeping with past research that suggests adherence to news values plays a role in determining audience confidence in traditional newspaper reporters (Fuller, 1996). Another foundational factor that may come into play here is the ability of audiences to discern ownership structure across medium. Arguably, institutional interests are most visible on television, where news and advertising interests are inter-woven and where political interests and ideological slants are increasingly transparent (for further discussion on the social implications of advertising and target marketing, see Turow, 1997). Whereas, on the Web, clear-cut delineation of ownership structure and industry standards may be more difficult for audiences to recognize and discern (for further discussion relating to audience perceptions of media ownership structures on and off the Web, see Castells, 2009).

Findings concerning television can be further contextualized by examining the nature of television news viewing (Graber, 2001). Since television news viewers are able to easily select and control their networks of choice and because reporters delivering coverage can easily change from one segment to the next, viewers may direct trust to the network they have selected rather than to individual reporters. These explanations of course warrant further examination in future study.

Implications and Future Research

Ultimately, the findings affirm that media trust is an important factor of news attention decisions. They also suggest that the relationship is quite nuanced. Continued study of the determinants of media trust may be particularly useful to future investigations of news use, social capital, and civic engagement. In light of findings
which suggest that attention to news media can have a potentially positive influence on community building (e.g., Eksterowicz & Roberts, 2000), this work raises questions about the forces that drive assessments of perceived trustworthiness. As media scholars continue to question what factors play into audiences’ decisions to consume news, additional determinants of news attention and audience engagement should also be considered. Such factors may also vary across channel. For instance, individuals’ decisions to attend to news that they perceive to be of varying levels of trustworthiness could be motivated by individuals’ desire to critically evaluate the information landscape—i.e., critical consumption (Williams, 2011). As such, the conditions underlying critical consumption decisions warrant further exploration in future studies.

Furthermore, results of insignificant relationships between media trust and attention given to Internet news usher in the need for a more detailed look at online news reading preferences and patterns as well as an examination of the primary influences that drive individuals to embrace their preferred online news sources. In continued research, more robust assessment of media processes and effects could be captured by simultaneously assessing multiple dimensions of audience and media engagement, particularly by employing measurement batteries that simultaneously capture attention to different content forms and habitual media use patterns (Williams, 2006). Such measurement techniques may provide a stronger estimate of communication processes and effects (Williams, 2011).

In an evolving digital and networked media environment, news is increasingly produced and disseminated by individuals and agencies that act outside of traditional media establishments (for related discussion see Castells, 2009). As a result of such changes, traditional news-making practices and methods are in flux (for related discussion see Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). Therefore, it is particularly important for media practitioners to remain attentive to changes in news audiences’ attention patterns and assessments of media trustworthiness. The findings of this study further underscore the power that traditional media hold in connection with perceptions of trustworthiness, and point to the continued importance that print journalists play in maintaining the trust and attention of audiences.

Future research should continue to assess the concept of media trust within networked domains and in connection with assessments of social networks and opinion leadership. The typology of media trust, presented in this article, is informed by past research, which demonstrates that interpersonal trust can manifest with respect to known and unknown others (Williams, 2004). In terms of media trust, interpersonal forms of trust may also manifest with respect to unknown actors (i.e., news reporters) or with respect to known actors (i.e., news disseminators that act within an individuals’ social or informational network). This distinction could be considered more fully, in continued research, by differentiating between trust of the news disseminators that one knows in an offline, unmediated reality and those that one knows only within the scope of a mediated environment.

Further understanding of media trust, particularly as it is linked to news attention directed toward high profile issue topics, is of social and normative importance.
This includes applications in spheres of politics and policymaking. Contemporary societal issues surrounding health initiatives, environmental concerns, and aspects of economic development constitute relevant domains.

In summary, the outcomes of this study show that distinct types of media trust relate to news attention in distinct ways, specifically when examined across medium. This underscores the importance of conceptually and operationally distinguishing between different types of media trust in studies of social capital, audience engagement, and media effects. With respect to social capital theory, and in consideration of the broader social implications of this work, media trust and news attention patterns may factor into aspects of community building and civic involvement, which ultimately play a vital role in sustaining the health of a participatory, democratic society.

Appendix

Demographic Variables

Gender: Gender of respondent: [0] male [1] female
Age: What was your age on your last birthday?
Education: How many years of school have you completed?
Income: Please estimate your combined household income.
[0] $10,000 or less; [1] $10,001 to $30,000; [2] $30,001 to $50,000; [3] $50,001 to $70,000; [4] $70,001 to $90,000; [5] $90,001 or more

Attention to Newspaper News
When you come across the following types of stories in newspapers, how much attention do you pay to these kinds of stories? Here, one means little attention, and ten means very close attention, how much attention do you pay to . . .
   News about International affairs?
   News about national government and politics?
   News about local government and politics?

Attention to Television News
When you come across the following types of news content on TV, how much attention do you pay to them? Here, one means little attention, and ten means very close attention, how much attention do you pay to . . .
   News about International affairs?
   News about national government and politics?
   News about local government and politics?

Attention to Internet News
When you come across the following types of news content on the Internet, how much attention do you pay to them? Here, one means little attention, and ten means very close attention, how much attention do you pay to . . .
News about International affairs?
News about national government and politics?
News about local government and politics?

**Media Trust**
Using a 10-point scale, where one means strongly disagree and ten means strongly agree, I would like to ask about your feelings toward the news media.

**Trust of News Information**
- News content from traditional media
  - I trust the information that I get from the news media

- News content from Internet
  - I trust the information that I find on the Internet

**Trust of News Reporters**
- Individuals reporting news stories are helpful to others
- Individuals reporting news stories can be trusted

**Trust of News Institutions**
- Media corporations can be trusted
- Media corporations help solve social problems

**References**


