

## ***Credibility in the Digital Landscape: Analysis of News Distribution by YouTube to Millennial Women of Kolkata***

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**Dr. Reshmi Naskar\***  
**Sayantika Dutta\***

### **Abstract**

*Social media platforms have grown as a result of digitization, which has made it easier for people to communicate, reach a wider audience, and create more demand for user-generated content. This resulted in a change in screen space from television displays to mobile frameworks, which altered how people interacted and consumed information. India's market is mobile-centric, and the shift is evident now as most people use social media sites like YouTube to access news videos. With the vicious spell of credibility, this change in the journalism industry has its own drawbacks. Credibility is frequently assessed using the source's perceived reliability and credibility. Therefore, the digital media platform employs tactics used by people and organizations to improve the credibility, context, and depth of their digital presence in order to gain the youth's trust and credibility. This paper aims to understand the credibility of online news videos along with user-engagement pattern.*

### **Introduction**

Technological advancements have transformed how people interact, communicate, and engage, leading the growth of social media and increasing demand for user-generated content. Digital media has changed how we receive news, watch movies, and play video games, turning consumers from passive viewers into active participants. Millennials have been key drivers in the rise of social media platforms like Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and Reddit. Globally, around 3.6 billion users-

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\* Assistant Professor \*\*Research Scholar, Department of Mass Communication  
St. Xavier's University, Kolkata.

49% of the population-actively use these platforms for engagement, knowledge, and information (Kempers, 2020).

This shift has pressured traditional media to establish a digital presence. Initially, broadcast TV was the primary source of video content, but digitization has enabled print media to also produce video news, competing with video-sharing platforms like YouTube and Facebook. This has shifted viewership from television screens to personalized mobile and tablet devices.

Newsroom convergence has introduced tensions, as media organizations adapt to multi-media demands, blending print and broadcast roles once considered opposing (Brannon, 2008; Usher, 2012). YouTube, now the second largest search engine, exemplifies this trend, with rising female millennial users (Statista, 2022). Social media blurs lines between news sources, producers, and consumers, lacking traditional gatekeeping and raising concerns about credibility (Heinrich, 2012; Hermida, 2013).

Credibility is subjective, defined by how viewers perceive believability and coherence (Adler & Rodman, 2000). It depends on message credibility (content quality and language), source credibility (personal judgment and popularity), and medium credibility (trust in the communication channel) (Metzger et al., 2003). While television once held higher credibility, digital media's real-time updates and multimedia reporting now rival traditional broadcast news.

### **Aims and objective of the study**

This study aims to understand how the millennials women attach credibility to the YouTube news videos. It also helps to understand the varying degree of credibility attached to YouTube channels of established news organizations as against the independent sources

The following will be the major objectives of the study:

- To understand the difference in credibility among the independent sources and established news organization source channels.
- To analyze if demographic variables such as area of residence & occupation have any association with the credibility factors.
- To analyze the user engagement pattern, while watching news videos from independent sources and established news organization source channels.

## **Review of literature**

### **Early Credibility Studies**

In 1996, Charmy G. Sabigan noted that early research on media credibility focused on identifying which medium—newspapers, radio, or television—was deemed most trustworthy. This was crucial for advertisers deciding where to invest. Historically, newspapers were seen as the most credible, followed by radio and television. Chanthika Pornpitakpan (2004), in her review of five decades of credibility research, argued that early studies were influenced by the hypodermic needle and agenda-setting theories, which viewed audiences as passive recipients of media influence. Audiences then tended to accept media sources with little resistance, attributing higher credibility to them. In contrast, contemporary audiences are more active, engaging in discussions and news dissemination themselves.

### **Dimensions of Credibility**

Tsfati (2008) emphasized that perceived credibility strongly influences media choices and audience reactions to news. Weibull et al. (2008) and Robinson and Kohut (1988) further suggested that the age and gender of journalists affect credibility perceptions. Older male reporters are often viewed as more credible, likely due to assumptions about experience and authority. Thus, credibility judgments depend not only on the information but also on the journalist's perceived expertise and persona.

### **Credibility Perspective Studies**

Metzger et al. (2003) studied students' perceptions of online information credibility, finding a preference for internet sources over traditional ones due to easy access. However, many users rarely critically evaluate source credibility, influencing long-term news consumption habits. Demographic factors such as age and education impact how credibility is assessed; older and more educated individuals tend to be more critical, while younger and less educated users are more trusting (Mulder, 1981; Robinson & Kohut, 1988). Young adults (18-24) especially rate news media highly credible, contributing to evolving media literacy that includes life experience and analytical skills.

A Pew Research Center (2004) study highlighted the rise of misinformation with social media growth (Cassidy, 2007). Kiouisis

(2001) found newspapers rated as the most credible news source, followed by online news and television. Credibility perceptions often correlate across media forms, meaning trust in one medium can influence others.

### **Credibility of TV News Channels in India Compared with Social Media Platforms**

The limitations of television news became evident during major events such as the Gujarat riots. Under pressure to compete with real-time digital platforms, TV journalists prioritized speed over accuracy, compromising principles like truth and fairness (Ibrahim, 2009). During the Mumbai terror attacks, social media-especially Twitter-played a vital role in informing the public quickly, while TV coverage was criticized for sensationalism and potential risks to public safety (Gokul, 2011). Despite lacking formal gatekeeping, social media managed rapid information dissemination while maintaining some journalistic standards during crises.

However, there remains a lack of research comparing the credibility of TV news channels' YouTube content with digital news agencies. This study aims to address this gap by assessing credibility in the evolving digital news landscape.

Thus the Research Questions that will help to constitute the basis for analysis are:

RQ1: Is there any difference in credibility among the independent sources and established news organization source channels?

RQ2: Does credibility of the video affect the user engagement pattern?

RQ3: Does demographic variables such as age, gender, area of residence, occupation have any relationship with the credibility factors?

### **Research method**

This study investigates how various credibility parameters influence millennial women's perceptions of YouTube news videos from independent digital news agencies versus established news organizations. It also explores the impact of demographic factors like age, residence, and occupation on credibility perceptions. A survey was conducted to achieve these goals, preceded by identifying four news video themes: election campaigns, urban riots, natural

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disasters, and human rights. Each category was defined with specific criteria, and real-world incidents were reviewed to select appropriate videos.

The survey targeted millennials aged 25 to 45 living in Kolkata, West Bengal, chosen for their experience with both traditional media and digital platforms such as YouTube. A structured questionnaire of 18 mandatory questions was distributed online via Google Forms to 150 voluntary respondents who accessed news through social media, specifically YouTube.

Participants viewed eight YouTube videos across the themes, comparing content from established channels like Times Now, CNN, NDTV, and India Today with independent outlets including The Print, Scroll, The Quint, and Unscripted. All videos were authentic news stories from official media channels such as Associated Press, Reuters, and BBC.

After watching, respondents answered questions evaluating trustworthiness, credibility, and the potential influence of the videos, including intentions to follow up or share content. Additional questions assessed perceptions of photojournalistic ethics. The study's structured approach ensured comprehensive insight into how millennial women perceive the credibility of digital news video content.

#### **Data analysis**

The survey has been responded to by 150 people residing in Kolkata. Since the survey was filled up voluntarily and circulated online, to avoid sampling error certain control parameters were set. Certain questions that would pertain to the entire population who took the survey were asked wherein, Figure 1 clearly indicates that respondents between age of 30-35 have been more active on the social media platforms comprising a total of 34% of the population. The data analysis of the survey is explained by a graphical representation, for better understanding.

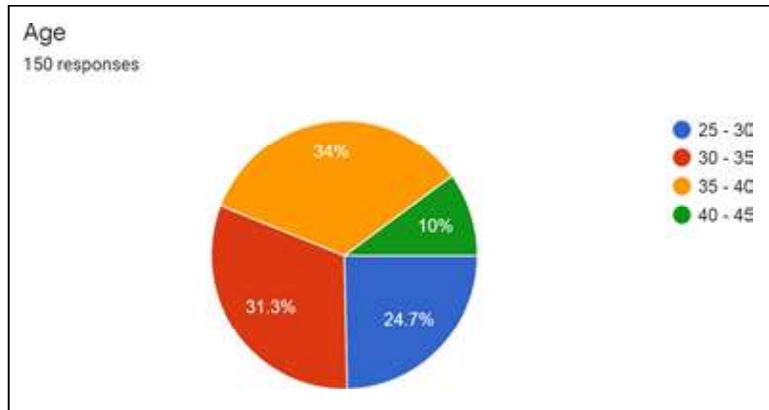


Figure 1

As shown in Figure 2, the respondents were next asked, 'Do you use any of the following social media sites for watching videos?' to which 88% of the respondents use YouTube, 58% use Facebook, 52.7% use Twitter and 36% use Instagram.

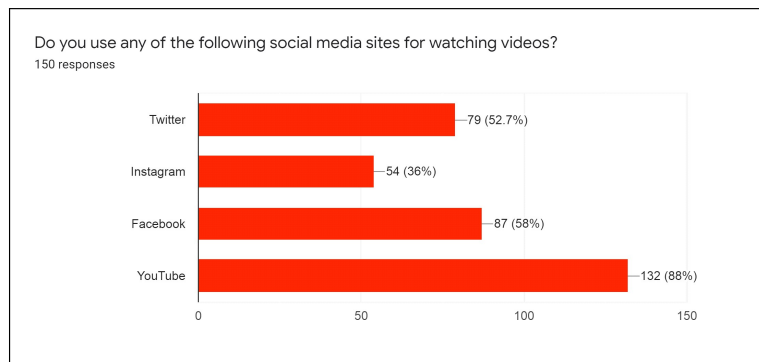
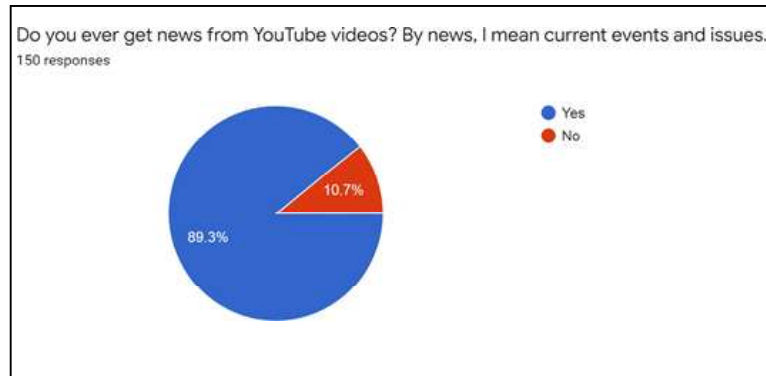


Figure 2

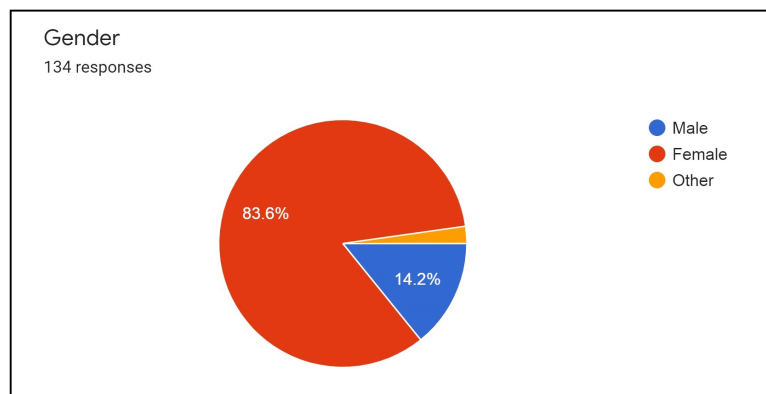
Since respondents could choose more than one preferred social media platform of their own choice, a filtering question was asked, 'Do you ever get news from YouTube videos? By news, I mean current events and issues.' where the 89.3% of the respondents that answered 'Yes' to the question moved forward in the survey and the rest 10.7% were asked to submit the form. (see Figure 3)

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**Figure 3**

Since the survey focuses on understanding the credibility of YouTube news videos it is important to continue the survey with those who use this platform to access the news. Also, the study targeted only the millennial women hence another filtering question was asked about the gender of the respondents. Figure 4 clearly indicates that the women users of the YouTube platform are increasing and it accounts for 83.6% of the respondents here, as compared to the male users that accounts to 14.2% and others include 2.2%. The survey was continued with the female respondents only and the rest were asked to submit the form.



**Figure 4**

Considering the research objectives, the next two demographic factors form important tools of assessment in order to understand

their relationship with the credibility sources. Figure 5 and Figure 6 clearly indicate that, out of the filtered 112 respondents 79.5% are working professionals, 20.5% are homemakers; 81.3% reside in the urban area and 18.8% reside in the sub-urban area.

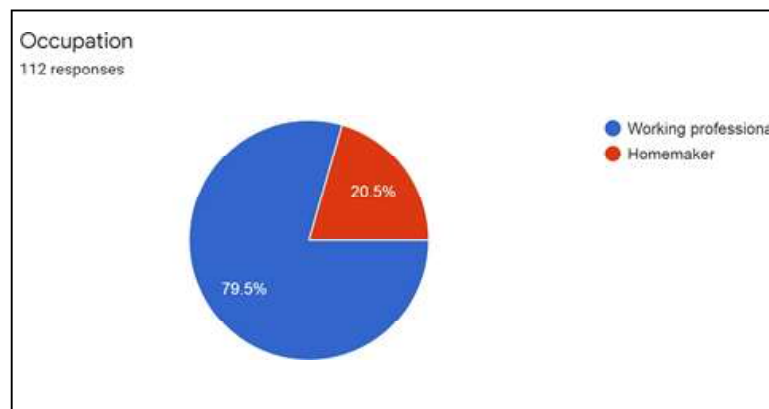


Figure 5

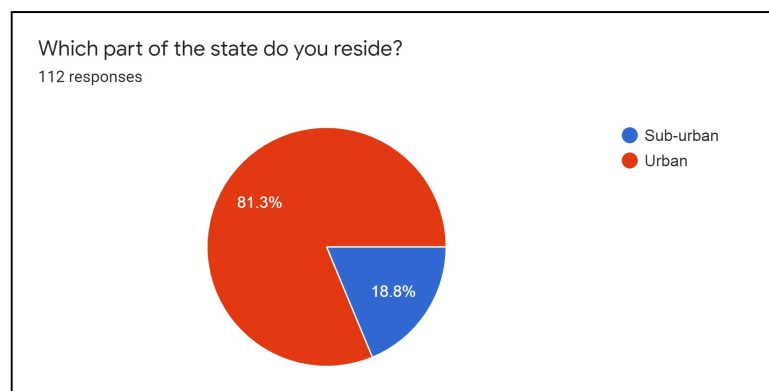


Figure 6

Next the respondents were asked 'How often do you watch news videos on YouTube?' to which 53.6% of the respondents regularly watch news and 25.9% of the respondents, watch only when there is something important or a breaking news story. 16.1% of the respondents watch news videos 5-6 times a day and 4.5% of the respondents, watch news videos 2-3 times a day, as clearly shown in Figure 7.

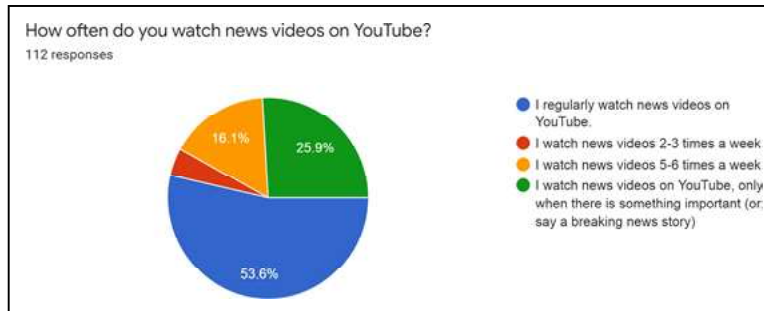


Figure 7

The next two questions were asked keeping in mind how the platform can better gratify the needs of the respondents (or, users in general). Figure 8 and Figure 9 clearly indicate that, out of the filtered 112 respondents 80.4% get news alerts from YouTube while 19.6% do not. Similarly, for 59.8% of the respondents news viewing pattern is not affected by the length of the video, while 40.2% responded that their viewing pattern is affected by the length of the video.

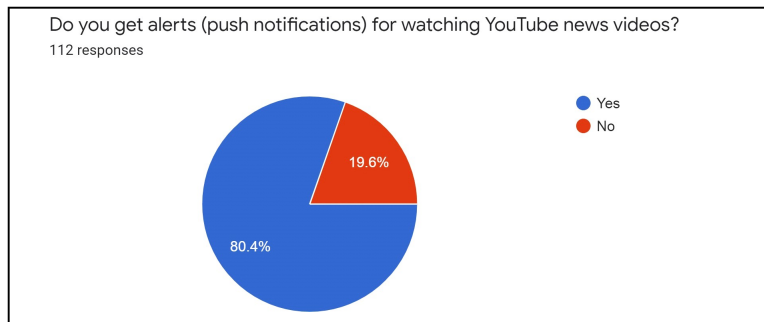


Figure 8

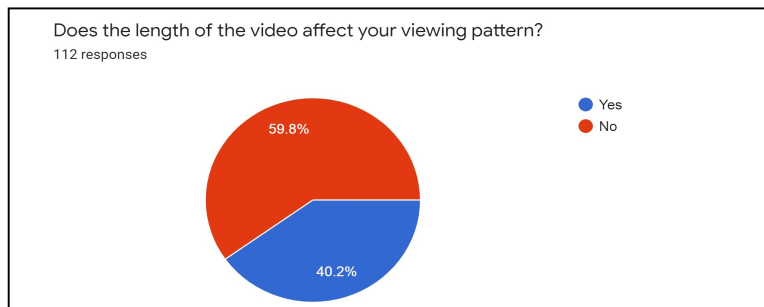


Figure 9

As the study tries to assess the credibility of YouTube videos produced by the established news organizations and independent sources (i.e., the digital news agencies) so the respondents were asked, 'When you get news on YouTube which sources do you prefer' to which 73.2% of the respondents selected digital news agency, 16.1% of the respondents selected established news media outlets and 10.7% selected YouTubers not affiliated to any media outlets. (see Figure 10) The 10.7% of the respondents were requested to submit the form and the rest 100 respondents were carried forward through the survey.

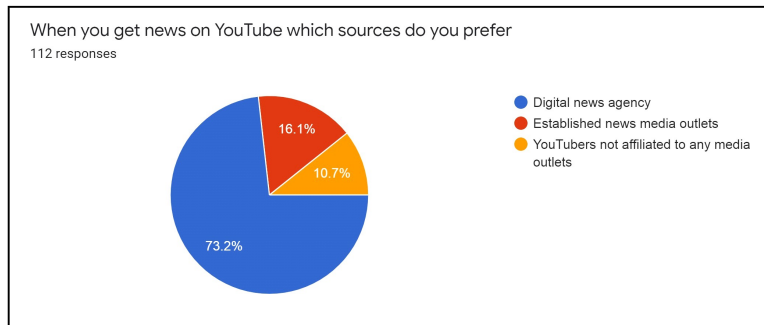


Figure 10

Table 1: Correlation among source credibility, occupation and area of residence of the user

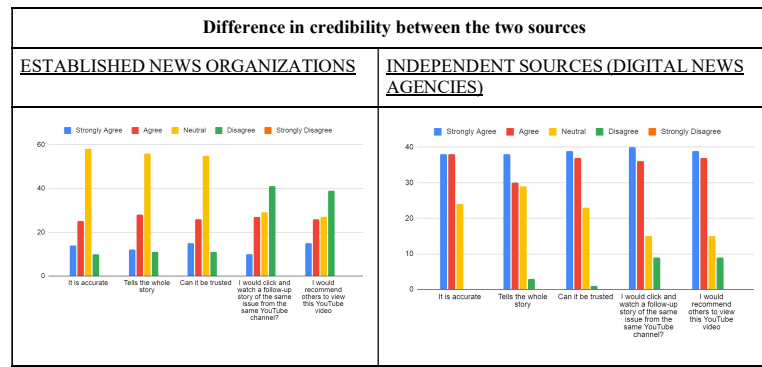
Correlation	Occupation (Homemaker/ Working Professional)	Area of residence (Rural/Urban)	Source Credibility
Occupation (Homemaker/ Working Professional)	1	0.68	0.89
Area of residence (Rural/Urban)	0.68	1	0.72
Source Credibility	0.89	0.72	1

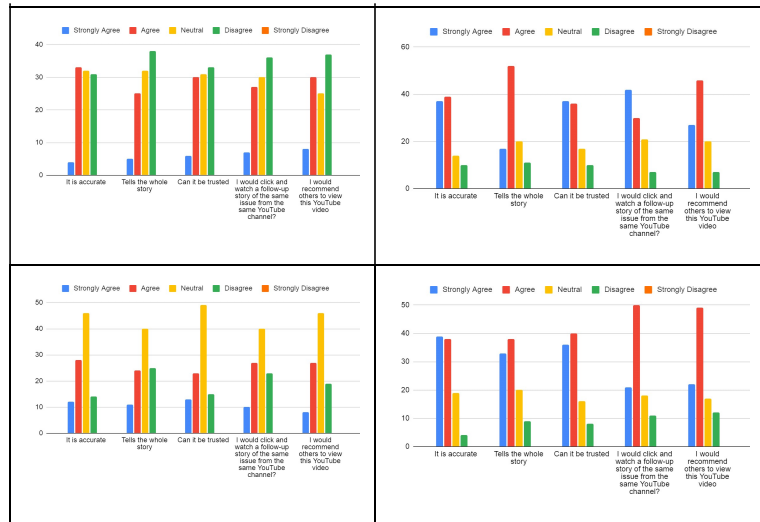
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In order to test the relationship between source credibility, occupation and area of residence of the user a correlation test was run. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (also referred to as Pearson's  $r$ , or simply  $r$ ) was used to determine the relationship between the variables, and the results are presented in Table 1. Results indicate that there exists a strong relation between source credibility and the occupation of the user, which was statistically significant ( $r = 0.89, r < 1$ ). Similarly there exists a strong relation between the source credibility and the area of residence of the user (rural/urban), which was statistically significant ( $r=0.72, r < 1$ ). But there exists a moderate positive relation between the occupation of the user and their area of residence (rural/urban), which was statistically significant ( $r = 0.68, r < 1$ ).

The desired samples were now exposed to a series of eight videos, two from each theme chosen earlier and asked a series of questions. For every video viewed the viewers were presented with several cues so that they could attach their credibility and assess the statements accordingly. The source of the video published was mentioned and the medium used was displayed. The video itself formed part of the message credibility and all in all the three credibility frames were analyzed.

Table 2: A cumulative representation of the credibility assessment divided as per the source of the video

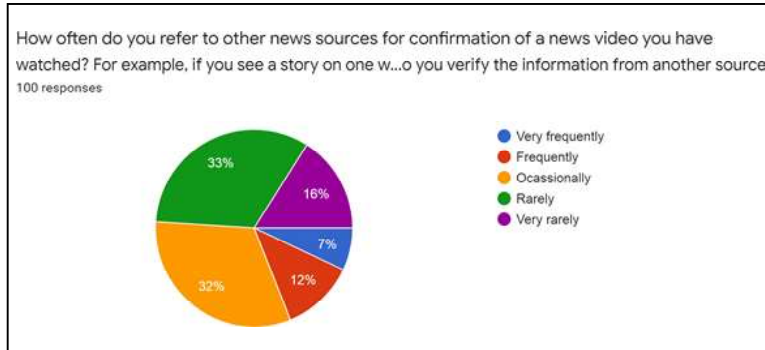




Analyzed carefully, the credibility factor is assessed through statements like - 'It is accurate', 'Tells the whole story', 'Can it be trusted' (Meyer, 1988). This credibility scale was developed by Meyer (1988) to measure the perceived credibility of the media. It clearly indicates that the independent sources, digital news agencies were considered more credible by the respondents as opposed to the established news organization channels. Two other statements were even asked, 'I would click and watch a follow-up story of the same issue from the same YouTube channel?' and 'I would recommend others to view this YouTube video' in order to understand the user-engagement pattern of this particular social media platform. Clearly shows that credibility has a direct impact on the user-engagement pattern.

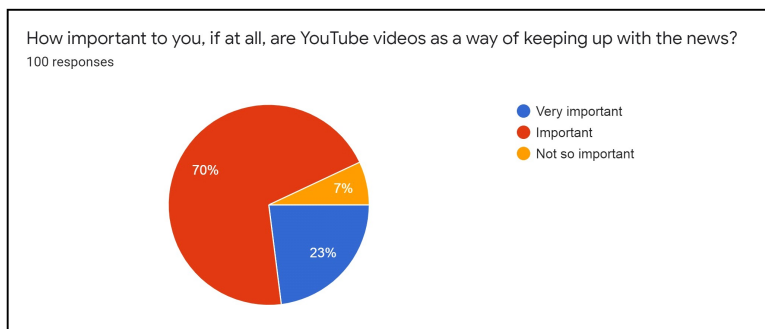
Furthermore, the respondents were asked an important question--whether they fact-check the information they access to. To this, 33% of the respondents replied as Rarely, 16% as Very Rarely, 32% as Occasionally, 12% as Frequently and only 7% as Very Frequently. (see Figure 11)

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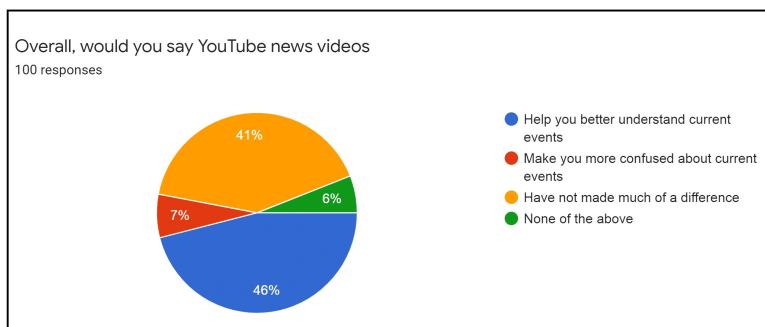


**Figure 11**

Lastly, the respondents were asked three questions regarding their feedback while using this social media platform which is clearly shown in Figure 12, Figure 13 and Figure 14 respectively.



**Figure 12**



**Figure 13**

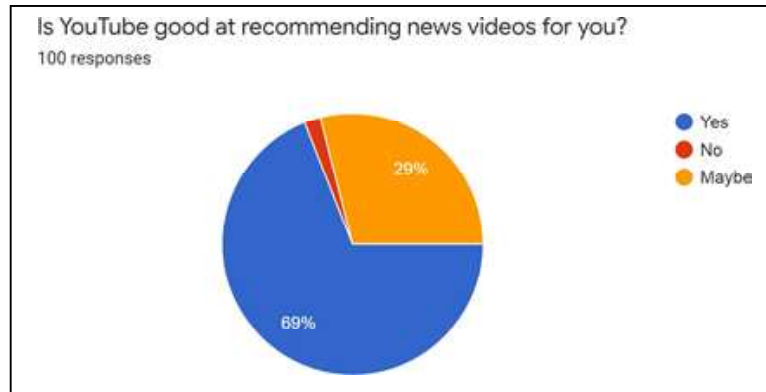


Figure 14

Thus, one can say that YouTube as a platform is very important (70%, Figure 12) for users while accessing the news. It helps in better understanding of the current events (46%, Figure 13) and definitely it is good in recommending news (69% - 'Yes', Figure 14)

#### Findings and discussion

The survey was conducted focussed on millennial women, and was controlled through certain clauses. The results reflect that while YouTube remains the popular medium chosen by the millennials for watching news videos - they in fact watch news videos regularly. The survey holds testimony that the length of these videos does not affect the viewing pattern of the millennials and they prefer reports from 'Digital News Agencies' as against the 'Established News Organization' channels and 'YouTubers who are not affiliated to any media outlet'.

The respondents were exposed to a series of eight images of which four major incidents were chosen. Of those each news event chosen two video stories were displayed one by an established television news channel who has its YouTube presence and another by the digital news agency. The incidents were shortlisted keeping in mind the themes that were pre - decided. It has been also found that the respondents occasionally verify the video stories of the news events shared on this social media platform. YouTube in fact, helps millennial women users in recommending the correct video-stories to keep up with the day's news and better understand current events.

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Based on the survey analysis, it is clear that RQ1 - 'Is there any difference in credibility among the independent sources and established news organization source channels?' has been answered. From the analysis above, the digital news agencies seem to be assessed as more credible than the established news organization channels. The credibility scale developed by Meyer (1988) helped in assessing this. Kioussis (2001), had contended that the people attach high rates of credibility to the online news channels as against the television news. The respondents in this study were purposefully exposed to the sources of news, which acted as "news cues," and thereby influenced their level of believability and credibility (Callaghan & Schnell, 2009). The medium used to deliver the message was such that the preferred and the news-video recorded served as an independent aspect of understanding the credibility of the message. Hence, the three types of credibility - source, message and media has also been evaluated.

As far as RQ2 is concerned - 'Does credibility of the video affect the user engagement pattern?' - the survey answers that as well. Credibility, indeed, has a direct and positive impact on the user-engagement pattern. The higher the credibility of the message the more likely are the users' to share the same story with others, and also read a follow-up story from the same channel. Lai & Lui (2020) claim that the content credibility is an active precursor of social media engagement and the engagement stems from the readiness of the user to accept the message that is disseminated.

As audiences watch the news, some cognitive and psychological processes take place. The experience or knowledge of the past contribute additional factors as to how they interpret the news. As a result, the communication process employed in this study did not only influence the perceptions of the participants in evaluating mediated news. Moreover, their political stance, personal biases, and presuppositions might also have affected their perceptions. Thus, it is impossible to describe totally and comprehensively mediated news credibility when all of these factors are loaded in one measure.

A correlation test was run to determine the relationship between source credibility, occupation and area of residence of the user, which

in turn answers the RQ3 - 'Does demographic variables such as age, gender, area of residence, occupation have any relationship with the credibility factors?' very clearly. The test indicates that there exists a strong relation between source credibility and the occupation of the user. Similarly there exists a strong relation between the source credibility and the area of residence of the user (rural/urban). But there exists a moderate positive relation between the occupation of the user and their area of residence (rural/urban).

#### **Limitations and scope for future study**

This study has several limitations. First, the sample consisted only of millennial women aged 25-45 residing in Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Millennials from other cities or countries may produce different results, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future research could include participants from other locations, age groups, or genders. Second, the study focused solely on millennial women using YouTube, whereas examining other social media platforms could provide broader insights into credibility perceptions. Finally, the research analyzed video content from established media and digital news agencies; future studies could explore citizen journalism and its perceived credibility among audiences.

#### **Conclusion**

An important factor of credibility has arisen especially in this infomedic era of digital sharing platforms. The study shows that urban working women attach more credibility and believability to the digital news agencies having their YouTube channels as against the established news organizations. It also provides a clear understanding that the source credibility of the news clearly impacts the social media engagement pattern on the millennials. The higher the credibility the more likely they are to click and read a follow-up story as well as share the same news videos with others. The findings of this study hold practical implications as to how the traditional broadcasting channels can improve their ways of news reporting and recording, as the content impacts people and drives maximum audience engagement in this digital era.

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