

The Media Freedom-Credibility Paradox

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Abstract

Three sacrosanct roles have been ascribed to a free media in democratic states. First, by disseminating information, it helps citizens make informed social decisions. Second, it provides a discursive space where people from different segments of the society converge and deliberate on issue pertinent to the society and nation. Third, by playing the role of a watchdog, a free media exposes the hubris of the centres of power in the society. According to the libertarian theory of the press, a free press will naturally lead to greater pluralism of information and opinions when it is allowed to work in a laissez-faire environment.

An assumption made in systems where the media are free - as opposed to authoritarian or communist states where media are used by governments for social control - citizens will have a high opinion of the media's honesty, integrity and responsibility. Such an assumption may account for the lack of studies that examine the relationship between media freedom and media credibility. However, recent polls challenge this assumption. In the US, Gallup polls indicate that citizens' trust in media is low despite the freedom accorded to the media. The lowest was in 2012 when polls revealed that only 40% have trust and confidence in the mass media – newspapers, TV and radio – to report the news fully, accurately, and fairly. Studies conducted by media scholars shed light on possible reasons for the paradox, among them, one's political ideology, trust in government and fellow citizens, perceptions of the economy's role, and growth of bottom-up online news sites.

The paper focuses on what we call “The Media Freedom-Credibility Paradox” of media globally. Using international scales from the Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, Media Sustainability Index and the Gallup poll, our analysis shows that there is no positive correlation between various global rankings of media freedom and rankings of credibility and trust in media. While greater human development and better governance were linked to more media freedom, the same relationship did not exist for media credibility. This paper discusses these counter-intuitive findings and put forth other variables that impact media credibility.

Introduction

Three sacrosanct roles have been ascribed to a free media in democratic states. First, by disseminating information, it helps citizens make informed social decisions. Second, it provides a discursive space where people from different segments of the society converge and deliberate on issue pertinent to the society and nation. Third, by playing the role of a watchdog, a free media exposes the hubris of the centres of power in the society. According to the libertarian theory of the press, a free press will naturally lead to greater pluralism of information and opinions when it is allowed to work in a laissez-faire environment. A common assumption is that in a system where media is free - as opposed to authoritarian or communist states where media have been used by governments for social control citizens will have a high opinion of the media's honesty, integrity and responsibility.

However, recent polls challenge this assumption. In the US, Gallup polls indicate that citizens' trust in media is low despite the freedom accorded to the media. The lowest was in 2012 when polls revealed that only 40% have trust and confidence in the mass media – newspapers, TV and radio – to report the news fully, accurately, and fairly. Studies conducted by media scholars shed light on possible factors which help explain the paradox, among them, one's political ideology and partisanship, trust in government and fellow citizens, and one's view of the economy's role. Other scholars posit that the proliferation of bottom-up online news sites have not just challenged media monopoly but also increased people's scepticism of what they read, hear and see on mass media.

The abovementioned trends are problematic because in order for a free media achieve its objectives, it has to be perceived as free, believable or trustworthy by its users. The paper focuses on what we call “The Media Freedom-Credibility Paradox” of media globally. It will follow this structure: We first examine the constructs of media freedom and media credibility, why media freedom and credibility are important, and the factors that influence both media freedom and media credibility. In so doing, we will establish the existing lacunae in these two enduring fields of research: while assumptions have been made that a free media would naturally engender perceptions of its credibility, there is a stark absence of empirical analysis that validates this relationship.

Following which, we explain the methodology which involved correlational analyses of scales by the Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, Gallup and the Media Sustainability Index. We also included World Bank's World Governance Index and United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index to determine if governance and human development were linked to media freedom and credibility. In so doing, we consider other measurements which may have bearing on the relationship between media freedom and credibility. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications for existing measurements.

Press Freedom a Vanguard of Democracy

The media wields immense power over public perceptions, shaping a society's political and social ethos. Researchers have examined the effects of news reporting, specifically the presentation and framing of news and issues, on audience's cognitive and affective responses. One key finding that resonates through current literature is that media plays an important role in shaping public perception and opinion (Cappella & Jamieson, 1996; Entman, 1989). Scholars from the libertarian school of thought have drawn an inextricable connection between an independent media and democratization, with a free media system being an integral component of a thriving democracy.

Weaver (1977), Picard (1985) and Curran (1996) decomposed what media freedom means, specifically press freedom. The construct is indeed a complex one, evident from how press freedom is operationalized, ranging from institutional dimensions (e.g. relative absence of government and non-governmental control and the existence of conditions that enable the press to disseminate diverse ideas and opinions to audiences), to individual-level (ability of members of the public to access media) and societal-level ones (e.g. ability to mediate conflict between social groups in society and redress imbalances in the society). Scales developed by prominent organizations such as Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders and the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) include many dimensions and shed light on the varying degrees of freedom the media enjoy in different regimes. These indices have also been used by different stakeholders to judge the consequences of and need for media reform (Becker, Vlad & Nusser, 2007).

A free media is commonly held to be the apex of media development and political advancement. One underlying assumption is a free media, when unshackled by constraints or pressures, promotes transparency in policy-making and holds a government accountable to its people. Citing a panel study involving 98 countries from 1994 to 2005, Pal (2011) found that that the freedom of media positively correlates with socio-political stability. The former was operationalized as freedom from government control and the latter measured by ethnic tensions, external and internal conflicts, crime and disorder, military participation in government and religious tensions. Although his analysis could only establish a correlation and not causation, Pal argued that free media exert pressure on governments to act in their citizens' interests instead of their own, hence are essential for socio-political stability.

Besides compelling those in power to be more transparent and accountable, a free media also empowers individuals to be part of the democratic process. A democratic system requires the participation of an electorate who has a "voice" in national and local governance. Their participation ranges from casting a vote for a candidate or party, showing their support (or rejection) of a policy through various mechanisms, to pursuing civic agendas that shape the society. In order for members of a polity to deliberate and discuss issues pertinent to their and sometimes others' lives, they need to be kept sufficiently informed about public affairs and what others think of the same issues. Thus the media has the important function of providing

a platform for the expression of diverse views among the polity and fostering informed participation among citizens (Moy & Scheufele, 2000).

Despite the above libertarian rhetoric, the reality is that the media in different parts of the world face constraints. While libertarian scholars have argued for the powerful influence a free media wields over those in authority, the latter more often than not determines the amount of freedom the press enjoys. Nam and Oh (1973) found that the press freedom reflects the freedom present in the political system. In some cases, states that guarantee communication freedom in their legal documents do not necessarily provide more freedom to their media (Breunig, 1994). Other constraints further limit the ability of the press to perform the role of a watchdog and an effective public sphere. For example, analyses on economic development and press freedom point to a rather tenuous relationship between the two. While Weaver (1977) found that increases in economic productivity led to less stress in the political system, which in turn engendered increased press freedom, his subsequent study (Weaver et al., 1985) showed that increases in economic productivity in developing countries may exert a negative effect on press freedom rather than a positive one.

Other than institutional conditions, individual factors further complicate an individual's perception of what constitutes a free media and how media a press is. One's educational level, reliance on the specific media, evaluation of media and state performance, and regime support play a key role in shaping perceptions about media freedom (Nisbet & Stoycheff, 2011). One might question the relevance of perceptions in the context of media freedom. Jones (2004) posited that:

“..the vitality of a representative democracy rests in large part on a voting public that is sufficiently informed about public affairs...Where citizens get their information—and particularly how they view their information sources—is thus a crucial element of understanding the health of a democratic system” (p.60).

People's perceptions of the how free the media affect their receptiveness and trust in the media, which in turns affect their participation in the democratic process. Perceived media bias and too much bad news are among the public's greatest concerns (Carroll, 2005). The next section examines the concept of media credibility, why it is important and the factors which affect media credibility.

Media Credibility the Missing Link

In the earlier section, we identified the key assumptions behind the theory of a free media and highlighted some of the challenges that impede the ability of media to function freely. A free media on its own may not lead to greater democracy; another imperative condition is for people to perceive and believe that the media is free. Low confidence in the media is detrimental to the proper functioning of a democracy because the public are less likely to seek out media outlets which they think are not trustworthy. Mistrust of media will

lead to avoidance and reduce the number of information sources people they can turn to. Such avoidance will affect people's ability to develop informed opinion about political groups, policies, important issues of the day, and worse, be unable to discern truths from falsehoods (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Jones, 2004). Such a problem would be more pronounced in systems where there are few media or a small number of media outlets. What constitutes credibility has been a key focus in the study of persuasion in various disciplines, such as political communication, organizational and interpersonal communication, and media studies. Researchers have studied three types of credibility— source credibility, news credibility and message credibility. While source credibility refers to the expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness and dynamism of a source such as a speaker (White & Andsager, 1991), message credibility deals with characteristics of the message and the believability of the message content (e.g. a newspaper article, an advertisement or a radio broadcast) (Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus & McCann, 2003; Sundar & Nass, 2001).

Since this paper examines press credibility, we will focus on media credibility which refers to the believability of a particular media industry or medium. Media credibility has been defined in different ways, ranging from trustworthiness, bias, accuracy, fairness, media interests and reporters' qualifications (Armstrong & Collins, 2009). The study of media credibility has been fraught with complexities and the lack of clarity, in part due to the confluence of measurements. For example, a common problem cited in the study of press freedom is the conflation of measurements for the news article, the journalist and newspaper (Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus & McCann, 2003). Another common problem with the study of media credibility is how different forms of media are melded together, particularly the newspapers and television (Carter & Greenberg, 1965). This is problematic because different media have distinct characteristics and engender very different responses among users. For example, Carter and Greenberg argued that the visual nature of the television medium leads to users giving it a higher score for believability compared to the newspaper medium. The conflation of various media on the same scale diminishes the reliability of the measurement as respondents may have different media in mind. In the case of broadcast news in the US, people have different points of reference, such as national network news for "television news" and local newspaper for "newspaper news" (Gantz, 1981; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986).

Scholars who study the construct from users' perspective have shown that perceptions concerning the media's reliability and trustworthiness are more often than not, shaped by factors beyond the control of the media. One of these factors is the nature of the media. Several studies established that media credibility is strongly linked to nature of the news medium, lending credence of McLuhan's thesis on "the medium is the message". Research conducted in the 1960s and 1970s found that, contrary to popular assumptions, television ranked higher than newspaper in terms of credibility. This was attributed to the visual nature of the medium which accords it higher realism and authority (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Respondents chose television over newspapers as the medium they would believe for reports of conflict, if they were limited to just one source of news, and judged television to be more

reliable for local, state and national/international news (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). “Television’s brevity” also works to its advantage as its conciseness in reporting led users to think it is more fact-based than value-based (Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus & McCann, 2003, p.308). However, in more recent study conducted by Kiouisis (2001), when people were asked to rank news credibility for television, newspapers, and online news, they were generally sceptical of all three media but rated newspapers with the highest credibility, followed by online news and television news. Despite conflicting findings, what is evident is people have different perceptions of credibility for different media.

Research that analysed the relationship between industry structure and media credibility yielded some interesting results which suggest that freedom may work to the media’s disadvantage. Until 2000 in the US, the broadcasting act prohibited broadcasters from making explicit their editorial positions on issues or candidates. On the other hand, newspapers did not face the same regulatory constraint. The lack of regulation of newspapers compared to their broadcasting counterpart may have given rise to unfavourable ratings for newspapers which faced a bigger credibility issue (Edelstein, 1978; Stamm & Dube, 1994). Others have posited that as television is accountable to larger and more diverse audiences and advertisers, it cannot afford to be biased in its news coverage (Carter & Greenberg, 1965; Chang & Lemert, 1968).

The nature of the “market” also has bearing on the level of trust consumers have in the media product. Moehler & Singh’s (2011) study of post-authoritarian African democracies challenges the prevailing assumption that independent media engender greater trust and support. Their analysis of Afrobarometer data from 16 countries uncovered that factors such as low political sophistication, illiberal attitudes and support for incumbents account for people’s higher trust in government-owned media than in private broadcast media. Their findings highlight that more critical citizens, besides quality reporting and press freedom, is needed for a thriving independent media industry. In the case of Singapore, George (2007) advocated that the mainstream media’s predictable bias, general reliability, political parallelism and spin role account for why its “credibility deficit” (p.898) is more tolerable to the audience and does less damage to the industry than expected.

Besides the nature of the medium and structural factors, demographic variables also come into play. One of these variables is one’s political leaning or ideological position (Eveland & Shah, 2003; Becker, Vlad & Nusser, 2007). In a poll conducted by Gallup in 2005, close to half of the Americans surveyed felt that the news media is too liberal. Compared to Democrats, Republicans are much less likely to express confidence in the media and are much more likely to perceive bias in the news media (Carroll, 2005). Among the Republicans, 31% said they have a great deal or fair amount of trust and confidence in the media, while 69% said they have very little or no trust in the media. On the other hand, 70% of Democrats expressed a great deal or fair amount confidence in the media and 30% said they have very little or no confidence. Perceptions of news bias were stronger among Republicans than Democrats (Eveland & Shah, 2003).

More recent studies suggest that media users adhere to certain internalized standards when judging the trustworthiness of a news medium. Sundar (1998) found that news stories with source attribution were perceived to be significantly more believable and objective than those stories without. While his study focused on online news, he observed that online news users pay attention to quotes and source attribution in news stories in a manner similar to offline news consumption. His findings were supported by Greer (2003) who compared The New York Times online, a high-credibility source, with a personal home page, a low credibility source. Respondents' rating of the credibility of the news story was positively linked to the news organization's source of the story.

Another body of literature connects audience-based factors such as gender, income and education to perceptions of media credibility (see for example, Bucy, 2003; Mulder, 1981; Robinson & Kohut, 1988). A common finding is that males, individuals with high education and income levels, and those with high levels of media use are more sceptical of the media (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Ethnic minorities are more likely than ethnic majorities to observe a bias towards portrayal of their own ethnic group in news coverage (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005). Meyen and Schwer (2007) studied media consumption habits in East Germany and posited that people's expectations towards the media depend more on their working and living conditions than on political/ media systems or media content. For instance, those holding subordinate positions in their careers tend to use media for relaxation instead of for political news and information; women who had less spare time than men and occupied lower rungs of the career ladder had little interest in information that did not relate directly to their daily lives. Their different needs and motivations resulted in them placing different premium on the quality of the media. People's interpersonal communication with others also exerts an influence in their perceptions of press credibility (Eveland & Shah, 2003; Kioussis, 2001). While more interpersonal communication leads to lower credibility perceptions for television, the same relationship did not apply to newspapers and online news (Kioussis, 2001). Interaction with ideologically similar others are strongly related to perceived hostile bias, especially among Republicans compared to Democrats (Eveland & Shah, 2003).

Existing literature explicates the importance of press freedom and credibility, and establishes why press credibility is essential for an informed citizenry and a functioning democracy. A large body of work addresses conditions that mitigate the development of press freedom and press credibility. However, there is a stark lacuna in current studies – no empirical analysis has been conducted to directly establish the connection between the two constructs. This study seeks to find the missing link between press freedom and credibility. Our analysis was guided by the following hypotheses:

- H₁: There is a positive correlation between media freedom and media credibility – The freer the media is, the more credible it is perceived to be.
- H₂: There is a positive correlation between human development and free media – The higher human development is, the freer the media.

- H₃: There is a positive correlation between human development and credible media – The higher human development is, the more credible media is perceived to be.
- H₄: There is a positive correlation between governance and free media – The higher governance is, the freer the media.
- H₅: There is a positive correlation between governance and credible media – The higher governance is, the more credible media is perceived to be.

Methodology

To determine the relationship between media freedom and media credibility, and to establish if other factors influence media credibility, we conducted bivariate correlational analysis among various ranking scales using Pearson's correlation measures. The scales selected for this analysis included Freedom House for media freedom, International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) - Media Sustainability Index (MSI) (for media quality and independence), Reporters Without Borders (for freedom of mainstream and online media), the Gallup poll (for people's confidence in the quality and integrity of their media), World Bank's World Governance Indicator (WGI) (for governance), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Human Development Index (HDI) (for human development). The following details the definitions and measurements for the six scales.

Freedom House - Freedom of The Press ratings

Freedom House is an independent watchdog organization¹ based in the US which conducts research and advocacy on democracy, freedom and citizen empowerment. It measures global media independence and has collected data since 1980. Its yearly report seeks to “measure the ability of print, broadcast, and internet-based media and journalists to operate freely and without fear of repercussions”². It rates over 190 countries as “Free,” “Partly Free,” or “Not Free” based on total scores from zero (most free) to 100 (least free) using 109 legal, political and economic indicators. Over 60 in-house analysts determine the ratings using information from experts, and reports by international groups and news media. We included the Freedom House scale as the study covers many countries and focuses on press freedom. Our analysis used the reports for the years 2007 to 2012 and we reversed the score (i.e. 0 means the least and 100 the most free).

International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) - Media Sustainability Index (MSI)

Based in the US, IREX is an international nonprofit organization which seeks to build a vibrant society with quality education, independent media and strong

¹ <http://www.freedomhouse.org/about-us#.U8dE7ZSSz7F>

² http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press-2014/methodology#.U1Uq6PldW_E

communities³. Together with the United States Agency for International Development, it started the MSI to assess the development of media systems. When MSI was first launched in 2001, it covered only the Europe and Eurasian regions. The Middle East and North Africa regions were included three years later. Countries excluded from the MSI are the United States and Western European countries. The MSI measures the media system⁴ based on the following five criteria:

- i. Legal and social norms protecting and promoting freedom of speech and access to public information
- ii. Professional standards of quality in journalism
- iii. Availability of multiple news sources that provide citizens with reliable, objective news
- iv. Presence of editorial independence and management of media
- v. Role of supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media

It rates more than 70 countries as “Sustainable”, “Near sustainable”, “Unsustainable mixed system,” or “Unsustainable, anti-free press” based on scores ranging from zero (“Unsustainable, anti-free press) to 4 (Free, professional and sustainable). The scores were determined by local experts and the IREX⁵. We included the MSI scale addresses other dimensions of journalistic practice in addition to press freedom.

Reporters Without Borders (RWB) - Press Freedom Index (PFI)

RWB is a non-profit organization in France which monitors the censorship of the Internet and new media. The PRI examines the level of freedom of information in 180 countries, the degree of freedom that journalists, news organizations and netizens enjoy in each country, and the efforts made by the authorities to respect and ensure respect for media freedom⁶. The PFI takes into account pluralism, media independence, environment and self-censorship, the legislative framework, transparency and infrastructure. The scores range from zero (best possible score) to 100 (worst possible score), and are calculated based on questionnaire responses from RWB’s 18 partner organizations in five continents, and 150 network correspondents, journalists, research workers, lawyers and human rights activists. PFI does not address at human rights violations in general and quality of media⁷.

FH and RWB have comparable global rankings on press freedom and independence. We included RWB’s PFI to validate both measurements.

³ <http://www.irex.org/about-us>

⁴ <http://www.irex.org/resource/media-sustainability-index-msi-methodology>

⁵ <http://www.irex.org/resource/media-sustainability-index-msi-methodology>

⁶ http://rsf.org/index2014/data/2014_wpfi_methodology.pdf

⁷ http://rsf.org/index2014/data/2014_wpfi_methodology.pdf

Gallup Poll

The poll is conducted by Gallup Incorporation which provides research and analytic services to private and public sector organisations worldwide. Gallup polls measure public opinion and attitudes on political, social, and economic issues⁸. The 2007 Gallup poll asked residents from 128 countries whether they have confidence in the quality and integrity of their media. The options given to respondents were “Yes”, “No” and “Don’t know/Refused” and the poll was conducted through telephone and face-to-face interviews in 2005 and 2006 with approximately 1,000 adults aged 15 and above. The results for each option were represented in percentages⁹. We included this poll as it provided an indication of how credible people thought their media were.

The second Gallup poll included in our analysis was the 2012 poll on media freedom. It asked residents from 133 countries whether they thought the media in their country was free. The options given to the respondents were “Yes”, “No” and “Don’t know/Refused”. Similar to the 2007 poll, the 2012 poll was conducted via telephone and face-to-face interviews with approximately 1,000 adults aged 15 and older. We compared the 2012 Gallup data with 2012 media freedom rankings from Freedom House and other scales.

World Bank – World Governance Indicator (WGI)

Established in 1944, the World Bank provides financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world and aims to reduce poverty and support development¹⁰. Since 1996, its WGI carries out annual analysis of the state of governance in 214 countries. The six dimensions included in the WGI are:

- i. Voice and accountability
- ii. Political stability and absence of violence
- iii. Government’s effectiveness
- iv. Regulatory quality
- v. Rule of law
- vi. Control of corruption

WGI gathers information from surveys of households and firms, commercial business information providers, non-governmental organizations, and public sector organizations. Data related to governance from various sources are taken into consideration and the WGI provides an estimated score for all six dimensions for governance within the range of -2.5 (weak governance) to 2.5 (strong governance). In addition, it provides rankings in percentages for all countries (from zero for lowest to 100 for highest).

⁸ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/101905/gallup-poll.aspx>

⁹ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/103300/quality-integrity-worlds-media-questioned.aspx>

¹⁰ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/about/what-we-do>

In our analysis, we calculated the average of the scores for the six dimensions. We included this measurement to determine if governance is related to media freedom and credibility.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – Human Development Index (HDI)

The UNDP partners with 170 countries to help them meet Millennium Development Goals such as poverty reduction, democratic governance, crisis prevention and recovery, and environment and energy for sustainable development. The HDI encompasses different dimensions ranging from life expectancy, education to income indices¹¹. The scores for the various dimensions are then aggregated into a composite index. It rates countries on a scale of “Very high human development,” “High human development,” “Medium human development” to “Low human development”. We included the HDI scale to assess whether human development was linked to media freedom and credibility. Data was available for the years 2005, 2009, 2011 and 2012.

For our correlational analysis (using Pearson’s correlation), we used the indicators for the same year as far as possible. In cases where data was not available for a specific year, we used data from the next nearest year before or after. Since the Gallup credibility indicator was available only for 2007, we used that year as the ‘base’ year for all the other indicators when running correlation tests. The exceptions are correlations with the Gallup freedom indicator which was available only for 2012 - correlation tests were done with indicators for 2012 where available. We ran correlational analysis for the following:

- i. Freedom indicators
- ii. Credibility indicators
- iii. Freedom and credibility indicators
- iv. Development and governance indicators
- v. Freedom and development indicators
- vi. Credibility and development indicators
- vii. Freedom and governance indicators
- viii. Credibility and governance indicators

We also divided countries included in various scales into two groups: MSI and non-MSI countries. The years for the indicators were appended to the scales. For example, “FH2007” refers to FH indicators for the year 2007, and “FHxMSI2007” refers to FH indicators for non-MSI countries for the year 2007. The indicators used are denoted as: FH (Freedom House), RWB (Reporters Without Borders), Gallup credibility indicator (GallupC), Gallup freedom indicator (GallupF), Media Sustainability Index (Criterion) (e.g. MSI(4) for MSI Criterion 4), WB and UNDP.

¹¹ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-1-human-development-index-and-its-components>

Findings & Discussion

Freedom indicators

Correlational analysis was conducted for all freedom indicators – FH, RWB, MSI(4) (“Presence of editorial independence and management of media”) and GallupF2012. From the five MSI criteria, we selected MSI(4) as we took “presence of editorial independence and management of media” to represent media freedom from external influences. See Table 1 for the findings.

Table 1: Freedom indicators

	RWB2007	MSI2007(4)	GallupF2012 (Yes)	GallupF2012 (No)	GallupF2012 (Do Not Know/Refused)
FH2007	0.843**	0.641**			
RWB2007		0.530**			
FH2012			0.701**	-0.597**	-0.449**
RWB2011/12			0.565**	-0.415**	-0.493**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Consistent with findings of other studies¹², indicators of media freedom correlated significantly with one another. The strongest relationships were between FH2007 and RWB2007 at $r=0.843$, repeating that of other studies. The correlations for FH2007 and MSIF2007, and RWB2007 and MSIF2007(4) ($r=0.641$ and $r=0.530$ respectively) were weaker. This is probably because MSIF2007(4) did not measure freedom exclusively and included both editorial independence and quality of management of media enterprises. FH2012 and RWB2012 correlated positively with GallupF2012 ($r=0.701$ and $r=0.565$). Overall, the findings indicate that these indicators are very much measuring the same thing about media across the globe. The correlations between FH2012 and RWB2012 and the GallupF2012 “No” and “Don’t Know/Refused” were negative. This could be due to the fact that people were more discerning of possible biases among different media outlets. Thus they said “no or “did not know” or refused to answer because credibility for them could have depended on specific outlet(s) which the scale did not capture.

¹² Lee B. Becker, Tudor Vlad and Nancy Nusser, “An evaluation of press freedom indicators.” *The International Communication Gazette*, 2007, 61 (1): 5-2

Credibility indicators

The three measures of credibility/trust correlated significantly with one another. MSI(2) (“journalism meets professional standards of quality”) and MSI(3) (“multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news”) correlated at $r=0.837$. However MSI(2) and MSI(3) did not correlate as strongly with GallupC2007 ($r=0.395$ and $r=0.458$ respectively). See Table 2.

Table 2: Credibility indicators

	GallupC2007 (Yes)	GallupC2007 (No)	GallupC2007 (Do Not Know/Refused)
MSI2007(2)	0.395**	-0.347**	-0.117
MSI2007(3)	0.458**	-0.400**	-0.154

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

These findings suggest that either quality and reliable/objective of news were similar concepts or were separate concepts but that tend to exist together in news organizations or national media systems. The findings also suggest that GallupC indicator measures some of the same aspects as the MSI indicators, and that quality and reliability and/or objectivity come into play in people’s assessment of the credibility of media, but they do not constitute the whole picture. Overall, the positive correlations point to the reliability of the measures.

Correlations between indicators of freedom and credibility

The findings in this section answer to the first hypothesis of this paper, namely the relationship between freedom and the credibility and quality of media. Indicators of freedom (FH, RWB and MSIF) and GallupC2007 were not correlated (see Table 3).

Table 3: Freedom and credibility

	GallupC2007 (Yes)	GallupC2007 (No)	GallupC2007 (Do Not Know/Refused)
<i>All Countries</i>			
FH2007	-0.108	0.248**	-0.329**
RWB2007	-0.042	0.184	-0.305**
MSI2007(4)	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
<i>MSI Countries</i>			
FH2007	0.124	-0.058	-0.112
RWB2007	0.233	-0.158	-0.110
MSI2007 (4)	0.177	-0.214	0.084

<i>Non-MSI Countries</i>			
FH2007	-0.325**	0.474**	-0.411**
RWB2007	-0.260*	0.402**	-0.384**
MSI2007(4)	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Hence the findings do not support hypothesis H_1 as there is no relationship between freedom and credibility of media across the globe. Furthermore, FH is positively correlated with the GallupC2007 “No” answers. This means that freedom was antithetical to credibility. This finding is counter-intuitive and it shows that free media were not necessarily seen as credible by the public. FH and RWB were also negatively correlated with the GallupC2007 “Do Not Know” answers. This means that in countries with freer media, people were more likely to be certain about or willing to express their opinion on the credibility of their media. A possible reason could be countries with freer media would generally be freer politically, so people would not have fear about expressing their opinions about the state of the media. In addition, a free media environment allows for a greater variety and greater number of media outlets, and exposure of citizens to diverse media may engender greater self-confidence and critical assessment when judging the media.

We then separated FH countries into two groups – those that were on the MSI list and those which were not. We also separated RWB countries in a similar way into MSI countries and non-MSI countries. FH and RWB indicators for the MSI countries did not correlate significantly with the GallupC2007 indicators. However, FH and RWB indicators for the subgroup of non-MSI countries were negatively correlated with the GallupC2007 indicator. That is for the non-MSI countries, the freer media, the less credible the media was. Furthermore FH and RWB indicators for the non-MSI were negatively corrected with the GallupC2007 answers “No”. These last two findings are counter-intuitive, as it shows that greater media freedom among the non-MSI countries are in fact detrimental to perceptions of the credibility of the media. Non-MSI countries were more developed than MSI countries. Hence the abovementioned reasons may similarly account for the inverse correlations for non-MSI countries.

Correlations between indicators of development and governance

The correlations between development and governance were significantly positive (see Table 4). The findings suggest that development and governance are closely linked, as expected, since good governance would lead to development, vice versa or have a positive interaction. Nevertheless, there are differences between the two as demonstrated by the difference in correlations between these two factors and media freedom (as presented in the following sections).

Table 4: Development and governance

	WB2007	WB2009	WB2011	WB2012
HDI2007	0.727**			
HDI2009		0.589**		
HDI2011			0.698**	
HDI2012				0.750**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Correlations between indicators of freedom and development

All freedom indicators correlated positively with the development indicator UNDP HDI (see Table 5). Thus H₂ was supported. This is probably because greater freedom leads to greater development, vice versa, or there is an interaction between them. When we separated the countries into MSI and non-MSI countries, the correlation between freedom and development was stronger for non-MSI countries.

Table 5: Freedom and Development

<i>All Countries</i>	UNDP 2007	UNDP 2012
FH2007	0.447**	
RWB2007	0.272**	
MSI_Obj4_2007	0.333**	
Gallup2012(yes)		0.442**
<i>MSI Countries</i>	UNDP 2007	UNDP 2012
FH2007	-0.081	
RWB2007	-0.036	
MSI_Obj4_2007	0.356**	
Gallup2012(yes)		-0.190
<i>Non MSI Countries</i>	UNDP 2007	UNDP 2012
FH2007	0.611**	
RWB2007	0.490**	
MSI_Obj4_2007	N.A.	
Gallup2012(yes)		0.618**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Correlations between indicators of credibility and development

Table 6 shows that there were no correlations between the development indicator UNDP HDI and Gallup credibility. H_3 was not supported. There was a weak correlation between UNDP HDI and Gallup “No” ($r=0.182$). For MSI countries, the GallupC2007 indicator also did not correlate with development measured by UNDP HDI, but there was a positive correlation between UNDP and GallupC “Do not know/Refused” ($r=0.435$). For non-MSI countries, GallupC2007 “Yes” and “Do not know/Refused” correlated negatively with development while GallupC2007 “No” correlated positively with development.

In non-MSI countries which are more developed than MSI countries, the relationship between development and media credibility was inverse. The more developed MSI countries were, the more likely citizens would think that the media was not credible. The previous finding stated that the media in more developed countries were freer. Such environments would see a greater diversity of players. There is a possibility that in such environments, citizens’ assessment of media credibility may be influenced by what they perceived to be ideological bias or the production “bad news” for financial gains (Carroll, 2005).

Table 6: Credibility and development

	UNDP2007 (Combined)	UNDP2007 (MSI)	UNDP2007 (Non MSI)
GallupC2007 (Yes)	-0.124	0.000	-0.334**
GallupC2007 (No)	0.182*	-0.125	0.479**
GallupC2007 (Do Not Know/Refused)	-0.099	0.435**	-0.413**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Correlations between indicators of freedom and governance

The freedom indicators correlated positively and strongly with governance as measured by WB, supporting H_4 (see Table 7). This is intuitive as a freer press could be argued to engender better governance. However, it should be acknowledged that media freedom is a part of WB’s governance indicator (i.e. “voice and accountability”). The presence of voice and accountability meant that a country’s citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, freedom of expression, freedom of association and a free media¹³. Weaver (1977) found that greater economic performance led to less stress in the political system and increased media freedom. One of the dimensions of the WB governance indicator is government effectiveness which encompasses business environment and infrastructure.

¹³ World Bank Governance Indicators (<http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#doc>)

Table 7: Freedom and governance

	WB2007	WB2012
FH2007	0.785**	
RWB2007	0.667**	
GallupF2012 (Yes)		0.679**
MSI2007(4)	0.544**	

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Correlations between indicators of credibility and governance

The GallupC2007 indicator did not correlate with governance as measured by the WB indicator (see Table 8), though the GallupC2007 “Do Not Know/Refused” answers correlated negatively with governance ($r=-0.308$). Therefore H_5 was rejected. For MSI and non-MSI countries, the GallupC2007 indicator correlates positively with governance, though the correlation is stronger for the MSI countries.

Table 8: Credibility and governance

	WB2007 (MSI)	WB2007 (Non MSI)	WB2007 (Combined)
Gallup2007 (Yes)	0.397**	-0.245*	0.029
Gallup2007 (No)	-0.345*	0.391**	0.171
Gallup2007 (Do Not Know/Refused)	-0.017	-0.379**	-0.308**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Conclusion

We set out to establish if there was a media freedom and media credibility paradox globally. By correlating international scales from the Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, Media Sustainability Index and the Gallup poll, we found that such a paradox exists – free media is not necessarily a credible media. Our findings point to an inverse relationship. When we compared the rankings across all countries, people in countries where the media was rated free did not think the media was credible. Although existing studies have sought to compare media freedom and media credibility, this study advances the analysis in two ways – we compared less developed (MSI) and more developed (non-MSI) countries and included human development and governance. When we compared MSI and non-MSI countries, we found that the media freedom and media credibility paradox was significant in more developed countries. In addition, we established that higher human development and better

governance were linked to media freedom. However, the same relationship was not observed for human development and media credibility.

One limitation of our analysis is its scope. Due to the paucity of data, it was confined to the years 2007 and 2012 when data sets for different scales were available. Despite the limitation, this study challenges assumptions underpinning media freedom and media credibility. It also brings to the fore potential issues regarding the operationalisations and measurements of key constructs, in particular media freedom and media credibility, which could have influenced the correlations or lack thereof. One of which is the measurement of freedom which till date focuses mainly on the media's freedom from government regulation and censorship, but not from corporate pressures. Also, media in its various formats and forms are conflated in most measures. As argued by scholars such as Carter and Greenberg (1965), and Gantz (1981), this is problematic as people have different points of references and hence expectations when considering "media".

Another potential issue with measurements of media freedom lies with the sources used for the rankings. Freedom House relies on in-house analysts who draw on information from experts and reports by international groups. Similarly, Reporters Without Borders develops rankings based on input from partner organisations and professions (e.g. network correspondents, journalists, activists and lawyers). On the other hand, the Gallup poll relies on citizens' responses. Different data sources – insiders versus outsiders and specialty/professional versus mass audience – may exert an influence on ratings for the scales. With the exception of MSI, the operationalization of media credibility tends to be opaque. The ratings could be confounded by people's different definitions of and expectations for media which in turn affects their perceptions of its credibility. Finally, most measures are Western-centric (e.g. Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders and IREX) and are defined by organizations which base "freedom" on the western libertarian model. The variance in political and cultural conditions in developed and non-developed countries further complicates analyses. Greater skepticism among the polity may exist in a more developed country - more media diversity (i.e. more media outlets and media companies) confounds perceptions of media credibility as there is a higher possibility of people having different reference points when considering credibility. In less developed countries, the media may suffer less "credibility deficit" with a polity that accepts nation-building or supporting role ascribed to the media.

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