

## ❖ **Source Credibility and Attitude Change in Readers of Foreign News**

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### **Abstract**

*As receivers of information from the media, we are constantly determining what sources are and are not credible. Research suggests people are more motivated to think about the information provided by a high credibility source because they are more induced to examine what an expert has to say (Gilling & Greenwald, 1974; Hass, 1981; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983). The relationship between newspaper credibility and attitude is not linear however, and it is essential to consider what other factors are efficacious in causing attitude change in message receivers apart from the credibility of a source. The current study investigates 462 university students in south-east Queensland for their current views of which newspapers they found to be of high and low credibility, and then exposed to news messages in these sources. Their changes in attitude as a result of these news sources were then examined through a range of data collection techniques. Unlike the majority of previous research in the field of media credibility and attitude change, a non-controversial issue was selected. The results are discussed in terms of how readers' background knowledge and involvement in an issue contributes to their change in attitude when receiving news from high- and low-credibility news sources.*

### **Introduction**

As receivers of information from the media, we are faced with the constant problem of determining what sources are and are not credible. Given that much of what we know of the world around us comes directly from the media (Lippman, 1922), as receivers of messages from the media we realise how important the credibility of a news source is. Many of the attitudes that we form about a wide range of issues in society are formed as a direct result of the coverage we receive through the media, although there are numerous other factors involved such as issue involvement, intensity and closure (eg Guttman, 1954).

Taking into consideration the degree to which we depend on the media for forming attitudes about a large proportion of issues in the world, it is not surprising that media credibility studies have attracted a lot of attention. Traditionally a large number of studies have argued that a high-credibility source is more effective in causing attitude change than a low-credibility source (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Kelman & Hovland, 1953; Bochner & Insko, 1966; McGuire, 1981). Other experimental research examining the interaction between source credibility and other variables have however, indicated that there are other factors which have an important

mediating effect on the impact of source credibility. For instance, Johnson and Schilleppi (1969) investigated male high school students who received either a plausible or implausible message from a high or low credibility source under high-ego (ie where subjects were informed their opinion was important) or low-ego (ie where subjects were informed their opinion was not important) involvement conditions. The results indicated there was in fact less attitude change under high ego-involvement conditions, in addition to less attitude change in regard to low-credibility sources and less attitude change in regard to implausible messages. The study suggested then, that effects of attitude change for high-credibility sources cannot be generalised to when receivers believe that their opinion is important (Johnson & Schilleppi, 1969; Hass, 1981; Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981; Sparks, 2006).

Other factors have also been associated with differences in attitude change, such as when people have a great deal of prior knowledge about a topic, or are more involved in the issues. In such cases, it is difficult to find an effect of source credibility (Rhine & Severance, 1970; Hass, 1981). This means that when involvement and prior knowledge increase, the message content becomes a more important influence on persuasion because people are more motivated to examine the content rather than the source (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979; Burton, 2005). Although the effects of source credibility would be minimal for an issue with high-involvement and prior knowledge, people would be more motivated to think about the information provided by a high-credibility source because people are more induced to examine what an expert has to say (Gilling & Greenwald, 1974; Hass, 1981; Petty & Cacioppo, 1983; Sparks, 2006). Thus, research has suggested that the relationship between newspaper credibility and attitude is not linear. It is essential then to consider what other factors are efficacious in causing attitude change in message receivers apart from the credibility of a source.

The degree of a receiver's involvement in a specific issue and prior knowledge about the issue would predict trust in media judgments for that issue. A low-involved receiver regarding an issue has little or no motivation to think about the issue, no anchor and no stable attitude position from which to judge content. Therefore, the receiver decides his or her evaluative attention on the issue depending on the characteristics of message source (status, credibility and so on) as the focus of trust assessment. Accordingly, the receiver pays more attention to credibility of the media than the content of the media regarding the issue. Secondly, a receiver who is moderately involved in an issue does not strongly hold an opinion about the issue, but instead has a tendency to look for information and ideas actively. Therefore, the source which provides a more useful message to the receiver would have a favourable evaluation from the receiver. Finally, a highly involved receiver has strong motivation to think about the issue, has a strong anchor and rigidly holds an opinion, and has more self-perceived expertise on the issue, thus has a very stable attitude position from which to judge content. Therefore, the content of the message regarding an issue is more important than credibility of the media to him or her (Sherif & Hovland, 1953; Sherif et al., 1965; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Gunther & Lasorsa, 1986; Tankard et al, 1991; Siero & Doosje, 1993; Gunther, 1992; Petty & Wegener, 1999).

It is evident that measurement of attitude change is not only based on media performance but also on receiver variables. It can indeed be said that 'it is what audiences do with news, as well as what newspeople do with news, that accounts for judgments of trust in mass media' (Gunther, 1992, p.163). The literature has shown however, that there is a lack of empirical evidence to demonstrate the relationship between newspaper credibility, receiver involvement in an issue — especially an uncontroversial issue — and changes in receiver attitude. While

there have been studies which have shown the relationship between attitude extremity and the credibility of a news source, there appears to be little investigation into how exposure to news messages in sources which are viewed by receivers to be of varying degrees of credibility will affect the attitudes of the receivers.

Given the fact that a significant proportion of the issues that affect our daily lives and that we learn about through the media are not controversial, the lack of research in this area could be seen as a great shortcoming in our understanding of the effect of the media on our daily lives. Thus, it is the objective of this paper to investigate message receivers who have differing levels of involvement in certain news issues that appear in the news media in sources that they perceive to be either credible or not credible to identify whether credibility of the source will cause any attitude change in the receivers.

University students in south-east Queensland were investigated for their current views about which newspapers they found to be of high and low credibility, and then exposed to news messages in these sources. Their changes in attitude as a result of these news sources were then examined through a range of data collection techniques, as are described later. For the news message, South Korean news coverage in Australian domestic newspapers was selected. There were several reasons to select South Korean news coverage. Firstly, most people are heavily dependent on the media for information about foreign affairs. The nature of international news to many may be exemplified by a study by Pratt (1981), who showed that US students were interested in international news as a means of acquiring knowledge of foreign countries for their own personal interests such as broadening their potential travelling destinations and so on rather than in the issues raised in the coverage. Except for the students who already have pre-knowledge of, or experience with, South Korea, most would only have indirect experience through the media. Therefore, it can be said that the media can play an important role in shaping or forming receivers' perceptions of South Korea and South Koreans.

From this viewpoint, using international news (South Korean coverage) might clarify the relationship between the degree of receivers' involvement in, or pre-knowledge of, the issue and the evaluation of media credibility. Gunther (1987, p.42) argues that a highly involved person is likely to maintain his/her existing opinion, meaning that the degree of involvement will be a greater factor in evaluating media credibility rather than the strength of personal opinion in an issue such as abortion. The choice of a comparably uncontroversial issue — such as the majority of the coverage of South Korea — where receivers are more likely to be influenced in the information provided in the news, allows for a clearer picture of involvement and news credibility than controversial issues like abortion, where people strongly maintain their attitude, thus possibly affecting their perceptions of media credibility.

It is unlikely that the majority of articles that we read in the newspaper we would consider as being controversial. Of course, there are a percentage of articles on specific topics which would be controversial to different readers, but in general most articles that receivers read in the newspaper are more informative-type articles than persuasive. In this sense, the selection of international news as a type of non-controversial issue is perhaps more indicative of the bulk of information that receivers get from newspapers. As a result, the choice of non-controversial international news may be more representative of a 'real world' topic than the controversial topics that tend to be the focus of most experimental type studies. Additionally, it should be noted that there have been no enduring or episodic critical issues or conflicts at the time of this study. South Korea is a non-controversial topic to Australian students and little knowledge or salience was assumed.

To determine whether credibility of the news source will cause attitude change toward Korea 1

among the news readers, the following specific research questions were posed.

- RQ1: How do Australian university students perceive the image of Korea after exposure to Korean news in the newspapers that *supported* their original attitude?
- RQ2: How do Australian university students perceive the image of Korea after exposure to Korean news in the newspapers that *differed* from their original attitude?
- RQ3: Is there any relationship between Australian university students' perceived image of Korea after exposure to the news (which supported or differed from their original attitude) and their degree of involvement toward Korea?

## **Method**

In order to determine high and low credibility sources to be used in the study, a convenience sample of 462 university students in south-east Queensland was surveyed in early 2003, and two newspapers were assigned as the high-credibility and low-credibility sources respectively. The students came from five different universities in the Brisbane–Gold Coast area, with over two-thirds in Brisbane, and the remaining third on the Gold Coast. Just over half of the students were female, and the remainder male, and they represented an age range from under 20 through to over 50 years of age, although predominantly at the younger end of the scale. Over 330 of the students were under 20, a further 62 were in the 21–25 bracket, 34 in the 26–30 age bracket, 19 from 31–40, four from 41–45, three from the 46–50 bracket, and two were over 50 years old. In order to obtain a variety of data, the questionnaire was administered to students from different faculties such as humanities, social sciences, education, linguistics, engineering, science, business and law.

To determine respondents' high and low credibility ratings of Australian newspapers, respondents were asked: If you read different reports of the same event from different newspapers, which one would you be *most* inclined to believe? And: If you read different reports of the same event from different newspapers, which one would you be least inclined to believe? To avoid revealing to respondents that they were being asked about newspaper credibility, the terms *most* inclined to believe and *least* inclined to believe were used instead of the words credible, trustworthy or believable.

In addition, through the survey the questionnaire was also used to measure the respondents' experience and 15 statements about Korea were provided to measure the students' knowledge of Korea. This was aimed to identify respondents' level of involvement, as well as their initial (pre-experimental) attitudes toward Korea. Volunteers for the experiment were sought from the survey respondents. From the 462 students who responded to the survey, 203 volunteered to participate in the experimental stage of the study, of which 108 were selected. The 108 participants were selected as follows. Firstly, the 203 students were sorted into three categories depending on their initial (pre-experimental) attitudes toward Korea. Of the 203 students who volunteered, there were 77 students who were judged to have a positive attitude, 74 with a neutral attitude, and 52 with a negative attitude, based on the results of the survey.

Then, after investigating the level of involvement of the participants depending on their initial (pre-experimental) attitudes toward Korea, it was decided that 36 subjects in each category would be chosen to take part in the experiment, totalling 108. This figure was decided on due to the fact that the smallest category of involvement (negative attitude with high involvement) included only 12 students, which was multiplied by three to give a figure of 36. Students for each of the categories where there were more than 12 students were selected according to those who demonstrated the characteristics most indicative of the group (ie of 29 students in the high-involvement group with a positive original attitude, the 12 students with the highest

positive attitudes and involvement were chosen).

Based on the results of the survey, 30 news articles were selected from the high-credibility newspaper and the low-credibility newspapers. These 30 news articles were selected as follows: five news articles with a *positive* tone, five news articles with a *neutral* tone and five news articles with a *negative* tone, each from the high- and low- credibility newspaper. The definitions of positive, neutral and negative used in this study are described as follows:

**Positive tone** – An article was coded as positive if it conveyed a favourable impression of Korea. Positive articles supported or justified the act or actors, or contained quotes by individuals who approved of the action.

**Neutral tone** – An article was coded as neutral if it was neither portrayed Korea favourably nor unfavourably, neither justified nor condemned the act or actors.

**Negative tone** – An article was coded as negative if it had a negative meaning toward, or would have, in all probability, caused the reader to form a negative opinion about Korea. Negative articles would contain unfavourable descriptions of the act or actors, or condemn the act or actors involved.

Approximately four weeks later, three groups of subjects were investigated on the basis of their original attitudes toward Korea. The groups were constructed based on the results of the survey.

In the experiment, subjects were categorised into three different groups depending on their original attitudes toward Korea in the survey: a *positive* original attitude = Category 1; a *neutral* original attitude = Category 2; and a *negative* original attitude = Category 3. Within each category, subjects were further divided into three sub-groups (A, B, and C) depending on their involvement in Korea (high, middle and low) as measured in the survey: high involvement = A; middle involvement = B; and low involvement = C).

The sub-groups A, B, and C were numbered from 1 to 6 (e.g., A1, A2, A3,...,A6, B1, B2,...,B6 and C1, C2,...,C6). Subjects 1 to 3 in each sub-group A, B, and C (e.g., A1, A2, A3, B1,...,C3) were exposed to two news articles each about Korea from the high credibility newspaper. Each subject was exposed to two news articles. The two news articles they were exposed to both had the same tone, that is, positive, neutral or negative: A1, B1, C1 = positive tone in the high credibility; A2, B2, C2 = neutral tone in the high credibility; and A3, B3, C3 = negative tone in the high credibility. Subjects 4 to 6 in each sub-group A, B, and C (e.g., A4, A5, A6, B4.....C6) also received two news articles about Korea in the low credibility newspaper in the same way as subjects 1 to 3. A summary of the experiment groups is as follows (Table 1, 2, and 3).

**Table 1**

Category 1 (36 people who had a positive original attitude toward Korea)

Sub group	Involvement	Newspaper	Provided Articles of Korea
A: A1 (n=2)	High-involvement	High-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone
<del>Table 2</del> Category 2 (36 people who had a <i>neutral</i> original attitude toward Korea)	with Korea		2 news articles with neutral tone

<b>Sub group</b>	<b>Involvement</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Provided Articles of Korea</b>
A: A1 (n=2)	High-involvement	High-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone
A2 (n=2)	with Korea		2 news articles with neutral tone
A3 (n=2)			2 news articles with negative tone
A4 (n=2)		Low-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone
A5 (n=2)			2 news articles with neutral tone
A6 (n=2)			2 news articles with negative tone
B: B1 (n=2)	Middle-involvement	High-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone
B2 (n=2)	with Korea		2 news articles with neutral tone
B3 (n=2)			2 news articles with negative tone
B4 (n=2)		Low-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone
B5 (n=2)			2 news articles with neutral tone
B6 (n=2)			2 news articles with negative tone
C: C1 (n=2)	Low-involvement	High-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone

C2 (n=2)	with Korea		2 news articles with neutral tone
C3 (n=2)			2 news articles with negative tone
C4 (n=2)		Low-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone
C5 (n=2)			2 news articles with neutral tone
C6 (n=2)			2 news articles with negative tone

**Table 3**

Category 3 (36 people who had a *negative* original attitude toward Korea)

<b>Sub group</b>	<b>Involvement</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Provided Articles of Korea</b>
A: A1 (n=2)	High-involvement	High-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone
A2 (n=2)	with Korea		2 news articles with neutral tone
A3 (n=2)			2 news articles with negative tone
A4 (n=2)		Low-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone
A5 (n=2)			2 news articles with neutral tone
A6 (n=2)			2 news articles with negative tone
B: B1 (n=2)	Middle-involvement	High-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone

B2 (n=2)	with Korea		2 news articles with neutral tone
B3 (n=2)			2 news articles with negative tone
B4 (n=2)		Low-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone
B5 (n=2)			2 news articles with neutral tone
B6 (n=2)			2 news articles with negative tone
C: C1 (n=2)	Low-involvement	High-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone
C2 (n=2)	with Korea		2 news articles with neutral tone
C3 (n=2)			2 news articles with negative tone
C4 (n=2)		Low-credibility	2 news articles with positive tone
C5 (n=2)			2 news articles with neutral tone
C6 (n=2)			2 news articles with negative tone

After the subjects read the two news articles, they were presented with a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to measure three issues: 1) whether their attitude toward Korea changed or not, 2) the direction of the change (if any), and 3) in order to measure respondents' attitude changes, the 15 statements used to measure respondents' initial attitudes toward Korea in the survey were provided.

### **Results and Discussion**

Firstly, it is pointed out that in this paper, the students with a neutral original attitude were excluded because the current study focussed only on students who were exposed to news which *supported or differed* from their original attitude.

RQ1: How do Australian university students perceive the image of Korea after exposure to Korean news in the newspapers which *supported* their original attitude?

Table 4 shows pre- and post-reading attitudes after exposure to the article which *supported* respondents' original attitude toward Korea. The top part of the table represents students with positive original attitude and the bottom part students with negative original attitude. Even though the difference in the pre- and post-reading attitudes was not large, a one-way repeated measures ANOVA revealed that it was significant at  $F(1,35) = 465.64, p = .001$ .

A total of 36 students were exposed to two news articles which supported their original attitudes. In all cases, each student was provided with two articles that were of the same tone in the same newspaper (eg two positive tone articles in the high credibility newspaper). No students were ever given a mix of articles varying in tone or from the other newspaper. As Table 4 shows, 36% of the 36 students changed their attitude after they were exposed to news which supported their original attitude. In addition, all of these students changed their original attitude in a positive or negative way following the tone of news in the article they were presented. That is, the students with a positive original attitude reinforced their attitude toward Korea after they were exposed to news with positive tone about Korea. The results of the one-way repeated measures ANOVA confirmed that this was significant at  $F(1,17) = 26.13, p = .001$ . In particular, the results also suggested that this tendency for attitude change was greater when the students were exposed to news articles with a positive tone in their high-credibility newspaper. A similar result was obtained for the 18 students with a negative original attitude who were exposed to reports with a negative tone. They reinforced their original negative attitude toward Korea after they were exposed to news with negative tone, and this tendency was greater with their high-credibility newspaper. That is, the students with a positive original attitude who were exposed to news with a positive tone, strengthened their original positive attitude toward Korea in the post-reading measurement when compared with the pre-reading measurement. The students with a negative original attitude who were exposed to news with a negative tone, also strengthened their original negative attitude toward Korea in the post-reading measurement. The results of the ANOVA comparing their pre- and post-reading attitude change were significant at  $F(1,17) = 83.42, p = .001$ . This effect was stronger with the high-credibility newspaper, with only a few students showing a change in attitude with the low-credibility newspaper.

When totalling the results for the high- and low-credibility newspapers, in all 50% of the students with a positive original attitude reinforced their original attitude when they were exposed to news articles which *supported* this attitude. A far greater proportion of students (83%) who were exposed to news which supported their original attitude in their high-credibility newspaper showed this tendency compared with students exposed to their low-credibility newspaper (17%). In contrast, students with a negative original attitude were less likely to reinforce their original attitude after they were exposed to news with a negative tone, with only 33% of the students showing an attitude change. As with the positive results, there was a marked difference between the high- and low-credibility newspapers with 50% of subjects exposed to negative tone news which supported their original attitude reinforcing their attitude compared with just 17% in the low-credibility newspaper. This is most likely due to the fact that the content of a message is made more believable and acceptable by its link with a high-credibility newspaper. The students' tendency to strengthen their original attitude after they were exposed to pro-attitudinal news in the high-credibility newspaper may also be explained by the fact that they confirmed and justified their original attitude toward Korea through the news articles in the high-credibility newspaper.

**Table 4**

Pre- and post-reading attitudes after exposure to articles which *supported* respondents' original attitude toward Korea

<b>Original Attitude</b>	<b>Newspaper Credibility</b>	<b>Type &amp; Tone of News</b>	<b>Pre-reading Mean Attitude</b>	<b>Post-reading Mean Attitude</b>	<b>Attitude Difference (Absolute)</b>
Positive	High	Pos Pos	2.13	2.13	-
(n=18)		Pos Pos	1.93	1.87	0.06
		Pos Neu	1.53	1.53	-
		Pos Pos	2.33	2.20	0.13
		Pos Pos	2.13	2.07	0.06
		Pos Neu	2.07	2.07	-
		Pos Pos	2.47	2.33	0.14
		Pos Pos	2.53	2.40	0.13
		Pos Neu	2.40	2.33	0.07
	Low	Pos Pos	2.27	2.27	-
		Pos Pos	1.67	1.67	-
		Pos Neu	1.80	1.80	-
		Pos Pos	2.60	2.53	0.07
		Pos Pos	2.13	2.13	-
		Pos Neu	2.47	2.53	(0.06)
		Pos Pos	2.67	2.67	-

		Pos Pos	2.40	2.40	-
		Pos Neu	2.40	2.40	-
Negative	High	Neg Neg	3.67	3.67	-
(n=18)		Neg Neg	3.53	3.60	(0.07)
		Neg Neu	3.53	3.53	-
		Neg Neg	3.47	3.53	(0.14)
		Neg Neg	3.73	3.73	-
		Neg Neu	3.67	3.67	-
		Neg Neg	4.13	4.13	-
		Neg Neg	3.93	4.00	(0.07)
		Neg Neu	4.00	4.00	-
	Low	Neg Neg	3.53	3.53	-
		Neg Neg	3.47	3.47	-
		Neg Neu	3.53	3.53	-
		Neg Neg	3.73	3.73	-
		Neg Neg	3.93	3.93	-
		Neg Neu	3.80	3.87	(0.07)
		Neg Neg	4.00	4.00	-
		Neg Neg	3.87	3.93	(0.06)
		Neg Neu	3.87	3.87	-

\* In this table, 1 means strongly positive attitude and 5 means strongly negative attitude. Accordingly, a low mean indicates that students have a positive attitude.  
 \*\* "Pos Pos" refers to positive news with a positive tone in the newspapers.  
 \*\*\* "Neg Neg" refers to negative news with a negative tone in the newspapers.  
 \*\*\*\* "Pos Neu" refers to positive news with a neutral tone in the newspapers.  
 \*\*\*\*\* "Neg Neu" refers to negative news with a neutral tone in the newspapers.  
 \*\*\*\*\* Figures in parentheses represent a negative change.

- RQ2: How do Australian university students perceive the image of Korea after exposure to Korean news in the newspapers which *differed from* their original attitude?

Table 5 shows the figures for pre- and post-reading attitudes after exposure to articles which *differed from* respondents' original attitude toward Korea. A total of 36 students with a positive or negative original attitude were exposed to two news articles which *differed from* their original attitude in either the high- or low-credibility newspaper. That is, 18 students with a positive original attitude were exposed to two negative news articles with a negative tone (Neg Neg) or with neutral tone (Neg Neu), half in the high-credibility newspaper and half in low-credibility newspaper. The other 18 students with a negative original attitude were exposed to two positive news articles with a positive tone (Pos Pos) or with a neutral tone (Pos Neu) in either the high- or low-credibility newspaper. Although the mean changes were very small, overall the one-way repeated measures ANOVA revealed that pre- and post-reading attitude change was significant at  $F(1,35) = 493.14, p = .001$ .

**Table 5**

Pre- and post-reading attitudes after exposure to articles which *differed from* respondents' original attitude toward Korea

Original Attitude	Newspaper Credibility	Type & Tone of News	Pre-reading Mean Attitude	Post-reading Mean Attitude	Attitude Difference (Absolute)
Positive	High	Neg Neg	2.00	2.00	-
(n=18)		Neg Neg	2.13	2.20	(0.07)
		Neg Neu	2.33	2.33	-
		Neg Neg	2.53	2.67	(0.14)
		Neg Neg	2.13	2.20	(0.07)
		Neg Neu	2.33	2.40	(0.07)
		Neg Neg	2.40	2.47	(0.07)

		Neg Neg	2.27	2.33	(0.06)
		Neg Neu	2.53	2.53	-
	Low	Neg Neg	2.47	2.47	-
		Neg Neg	2.53	2.53	-
		Neg Neu	2.07	2.07	-
		Neg Neg	2.33	2.40	(0.07)
		Neg Neg	2.40	2.40	-
		Neg Neu	2.27	2.27	-
		Neg Neg	2.53	2.60	(0.07)
		Neg Neg	2.33	2.33	-
		Neg Neu	2.53	2.53	-
Negative	High	Pos Pos	3.47	3.47	-
(n=18)		Pos Pos	3.47	3.47	-
		Pos Neu	3.53	3.53	-
		Pos Pos	3.67	3.67	-
		Pos Pos	3.87	3.80	0.07
		Pos Neu	3.73	3.67	(0.06)
		Pos Pos	4.00	3.87	0.13
		Pos Pos	3.80	3.67	0.13
		Pos Neu	3.93	3.87	0.06

	Low	Pos Pos	3.47	3.47	-
		Pos Pos	3.67	3.67	-
		Pos Neu	3.47	3.40	0.07
		Pos Pos	4.00	3.93	0.07
		Pos Pos	3.93	3.93	-
		Pos Neu	3.80	3.80	(0.06)
		Pos Pos	3.80	3.80	-
		Pos Pos	3.87	3.87	-
		Pos Neu	3.93	3.93	-

\* In this table, 1 means strongly positive attitude and 5 means strongly negative attitude.

Accordingly, a low mean indicates that students have a positive attitude.

\*\* "Pos Pos" refers to positive news with a positive tone in the newspapers.

\*\*\* "Neg Neg" refers to negative news with a negative tone in the newspapers.

\*\*\*\* "Pos Neu" refers to positive news with a neutral tone in the newspapers.

\*\*\*\*\* "Neg Neu" refers to negative news with a neutral tone in the newspapers.

\*\*\*\*\* Figures in parentheses represent a negative change.

As Table 5 shows, in all (including neutral and counter-attitudinal news), 16 out of 36 students (44%) changed their attitude after they were exposed to news which *differed from* their original attitude. Comparing with exposure to news which supported respondents' original attitude (36%), surprisingly more students showed an attitude change with news which *differed from* their original attitude. None of the respondents changed their attitude contrary to the news tone in this study. For example, students with a positive original attitude changed their attitude negatively after they were exposed to news with a negative tone, and students with a negative original attitude changed their attitude positively after they read news with a positive tone. That is, even though they were exposed to news which differed from their original attitude, of the students who showed attitude change, no one further enforced or asserted their original attitude, instead, all changed their attitude following the tone of the news.

The students showed particularly more marked attitude change with the high-credibility news. A total of 67% of the 12 students who changed their attitude after they were exposed to counter-attitudinal tone news (i.e., excluding neutral tone news) showed changes in their attitude with their *high-credibility* newspaper. This tendency was present in both the students with a positive (83%) or negative original attitude (50%). Compared to this, in the *low-credibility* newspaper, only 25% of subjects changed their attitude with news that differed from their original attitude, with changes evident in only 33% of students with a positive

original attitude and 17% of students with a negative original attitude. This result supports the argument that a high-credibility source is more persuasive, especially when the content is informative and not directly related to the readers.

It is believed that one of the main reasons why the readers clearly changed their attitude following the high-credibility newspaper both in cases when they were exposed to news which supported and differed from their original attitude was the topic or content of the news. That is, the topic was about international news, namely Korea, which is unlikely to be directly related with subjects' daily lives, is not controversial, and is not a high ego-involvement topic. Thus, it can be said that the content in high-credibility newspapers is often more acceptable and trustworthy to readers, and hence is more effective in inducing readers' attitude change following the tone of the news in the high-credibility newspaper, especially when the content of the news is only peripherally related to the reader (low salience).

With the low-credibility newspaper, based on the literature, it was expected that some students would reinforce their original attitude in contrast to the content of news after they were exposed to news which differed from their original attitude in the low-credibility newspaper. However, even though the number of students who changed their attitude was very small, all still changed their attitude following the tone of news even in the low-credibility newspaper. Again, it is believed that this result is related to the characteristics of the topic of the news. Because the subjects were generally unlikely to have relatively strong or fixed opinions about Korea, when the content of news was persuasive or of interest to them, they were influenced by the news, even regardless of general newspaper credibility.

- RQ3: Is there any relationship between Australian university students' perceived image of Korea after exposure to the news (which supported or differed from their original attitude) and their degree of involvement toward Korea?

In order to investigate the relationship between change in the readers' perceived image of Korea and their level of involvement it was necessary to compare the 72 individual students' original attitudes toward Korea (36 students with a positive original attitude, and 36 students with a negative original attitude) and their attitudes after exposure to news about Korea. Firstly, to analyse the relationship between students' perceived image of Korea after exposure to the news and their degree of involvement toward Korea, it was necessary to investigate pre- and post-measurements for the high-, middle- and low-involvement students' attitudes toward Korea, depending on their original attitude in the survey. As was suggested above, and as Table 6 shows, the students with *high-involvement* with Korea quite rarely changed their attitudes after exposure to the news which *supported* their original attitude, regardless of the credibility of the newspaper (the mean of the absolute attitude change was 0.01). In cases where the students were exposed to news which *differed* from their original attitude, they also exhibited very little change from their original attitude toward Korea regardless of the credibility of the newspaper (Table 7). In addition, they did not receive any noticeable influence from the high-credibility newspaper, that is, they did not show more attitude change with the high-credibility newspaper than with the low-credibility newspaper.

According to the literature, a highly involved receiver has a strong anchor and rigidly holds an opinion, and has high self-perceived expertise of an issue, thus has a very stable attitude position from which to judge content. In this study as well, the students with *high-involvement* with Korea showed a very stable attitude position from which to judge content. Whether the content of the message was pro-attitudinal or counter-attitudinal, they rarely changed their original attitude toward Korea.

That the highly-involved subjects did not strongly reinforce their original attitude after they were exposed to news which supported or differed from their original attitude toward Korea is believed to be due to the nature of the content of the news. That is, news about Korea as international news is an example of a more unobtrusive issue (topics for which the media may be people's predominant source of information) to readers. In addition, international news issues are generally not related to receivers' direct experience, nor do they typically fit into the category of high-ego involvement. Such news content might not cause subjects to show a strong reaction with news about Korea, unlike debatable, controversial or obtrusive issues (topics for which people have direct personal experience and either strong existing opinions or a need for decision-making).

Regarding attitude change caused by the characteristic of the message, Chaiken (1980) argued that attitudes of high-involvement subjects' were affected mostly by the number of issue-relevant arguments in the message, and that stronger arguments effected significantly more attitude change than weaker ones. However, in this study, a total of four highly-involved students changed their attitude after they read news which *supported or differed* from their attitude toward Korea. In addition, with highly-involved students, there appeared to be little influence from news with the reporter's own opinion (tone) on their attitude as shown by the small number of subjects demonstrating a change in attitude.

**Table 6**

Pre- and post-reading attitudes of *high-involvement* respondents after exposure to articles which *supported* their original attitude toward Korea

<b>Original Attitude</b>	<b>Newspaper Credibility</b>	<b>Type &amp; Tone of News</b>	<b>Pre-reading Mean Attitude</b>	<b>Post-reading Mean Attitude</b>	<b>Attitude Difference (Absolute)</b>
Positive	High	Pos Pos	2.13	2.13	-
		Pos Pos	1.93	1.87	0.06
		Pos Neu	1.53	1.53	-
	Low	Pos Pos	2.27	2.27	-
		Pos Pos	1.67	1.67	-
		Pos Neu	1.80	1.80	-
Negative	High	Neg Neg	3.67	3.67	-
		Neg Neg	3.53	3.60	(0.07)

		Neg Neu	3.53	3.53	-
	Low	Neg Neg	3.53	3.53	-
		Neg Neg	3.47	3.47	-
		Neg Neu	3.53	3.53	-

\* In this table, 1 means strongly positive attitude and 5 means strongly negative attitude. Accordingly, a low mean indicates that students have a positive attitude.

\*\* Figures in parentheses represent a negative change.

**Table 7**

Pre- and post-reading attitudes of *high-involvement* respondents after exposure to articles which *differed from* their original attitude toward Korea

<b>Original Attitude</b>	<b>Newspaper Credibility</b>	<b>Type &amp; Tone of News</b>	<b>Pre-reading Mean Attitude</b>	<b>Post-reading Mean Attitude</b>	<b>Attitude Difference (Absolute)</b>
Positive	High	Neg Neg	2.00	2.00	-
		Neg Neg	2.13	2.20	(0.07)
		Neg Neu	2.33	2.33	-
	Low	Neg Neg	2.47	2.47	-
		Neg Neg	2.53	2.53	-
		Neg Neu	2.07	2.07	-
Negative	High	Pos Pos	3.47	3.47	-
		Pos Pos	3.47	3.47	-
		Pos Neu	3.53	3.53	-
	Low	Pos Pos	3.47	3.47	-

		Pos Pos	3.47	3.40	0.07
		Pos Neu	3.67	3.67	-

\* In this table, 1 means strongly positive attitude and 5 means strongly negative attitude. Accordingly, a low mean indicates that students have a positive attitude.

\*\* Figures in parentheses represent a negative change.

Table 8 shows the pre- and post-reading attitudes for students with *middle involvement* of Korea after they were exposed to news which *supported* their original attitude. As Table 8 shows, there was a consistent change in respondents' attitude (absolute M = 0.03) from both the high- and low-credibility newspaper. That is, a total of six students changed from their original attitude; three students showed a change in attitude with the high-credibility newspaper and the other three students with the low-credibility newspaper. Therefore, it could be said that the students with *middle-involvement* of Korea showed relatively consistent changes in attitude with exposure to news which *supported* their original attitude. In addition, this change was evident with not only the high-credibility newspaper but also with the low-credibility newspaper.

**Table 8**

Pre- and post-reading attitudes of *middle-involvement* respondents after exposure to articles which *supported* their original attitude toward Korea

Original Attitude	Newspaper Credibility	Type & Tone of News	Pre-reading Mean Attitude	Post-reading Mean Attitude	Attitude Difference (Absolute)
Positive	High	Pos Pos	3.13	3.07	0.06
		Pos Pos	3.13	3.07	0.06
		Pos Neu	2.93	2.93	-
	Low	Pos Pos	2.60	2.53	0.07
		Pos Pos	2.13	2.13	-
		Pos Neu	2.47	2.53	0.06
Negative	High	Neg Neg	3.47	3.53	(0.14)
		Neg Neg	3.73	3.73	-

		Neg Neu	3.67	3.67	-
	Low	Neg Neg	2.93	2.93	-
		Neg Neg	3.00	3.07	(0.07)
		Neg Neu	2.80	2.80	-

\* In this table, 1 means strongly positive attitude and 5 means strongly negative attitude.

Accordingly, a low mean indicates that students have a positive attitude.

\*\* Figures in parentheses represent a negative change.

When students with *middle-involvement* with Korea were exposed to news which *differed* from their original attitude, their attitude changed in the direction of the articles' tone (see Table 9). Seven of the 12 students changed from their original attitude following the counter-attitudinal news; five in response to their high-credibility newspaper and two in responses to their low-credibility newspaper. These changes were greater following exposure to the high-credibility newspaper than the low-credibility newspaper (see Table 9). However, when compared with the high- and low-involvement students, there were slightly more middle-involvement students who showed attitude changes after exposure to the low-credibility newspaper. This result can be supported by the literature into credibility assessment and belief change (Slater & Rouner, 1996), which argues that middle-involvement respondents do not hold their own extreme opinion, but rather will be receptive to a broad range of information and ideas. That is, middle-involvement subjects had enough knowledge or motivation or interest in Korea to read news about Korea. Their knowledge or motivation or interest was different from that of the highly-involved subjects. They were ready to seek and obtain information about Korea in order to assess and revise their own opinion toward Korea unlike those subjects who had a firm or polarised attitude. Accordingly, the middle-involvement subjects showed change in their attitude following the tone of the news articles in not only pro-attitudinal news but also counter-attitudinal news. In addition, this tendency was present in both the high- and low-credibility newspapers. Because they had a narrow latitude of rejection and a wider range of non-commitment, they showed greater change even with counter-attitudinal news or news from the low-credibility newspaper.

**Table 9**

Pre- and post-reading attitudes of *middle-involvement* respondents after exposure to articles which *differed from* their original attitude toward Korea

Original Attitude	Newspaper Credibility	Type & Tone of News	Pre-reading Mean Attitude	Post-reading Mean Attitude	Attitude Difference (Absolute)
Positive	High	Neg Neg	2.53	2.67	(0.14

		Neg Neg	2.13	2.20	(0.07)
		Neg Neu	2.33	2.40	(0.07)
	Low	Neg Neg	2.33	2.40	(0.07)
		Neg Neg	2.40	2.40	-
		Neg Neu	2.27	2.27	-
Negative	High	Pos Pos	3.67	3.67	-
		Pos Pos	3.87	3.80	0.07
		Pos Neu	3.73	3.67	(0.06)
	Low	Pos Pos	4.00	3.93	0.07
		Pos Pos	3.80	3.80	-
		Pos Neu	3.93	3.93	-

\* In this table, 1 means strongly positive attitude and 5 means strongly negative attitude. Accordingly, a low mean indicates that students have a positive attitude.

\*\* Figures in parentheses represent a negative change.

Regarding the students with *low-involvement* with Korea, overall they showed attitude change after they were exposed to news which either *supported* or *differed from* their original attitude, especially with the high-credibility newspaper.

Table 10 shows pre- and post-reading attitudes of low-involvement respondents after exposure to news which *supported* their original attitude. Five of the 12 students reinforced their original attitude, with four of these five in response to their high-credibility newspaper. In particular, the students with a positive original attitude (3 of 4) changed from their original attitude with the high-credibility newspaper.

**Table 10**

Pre- and post-reading attitudes of *low-involvement* respondents after exposure to articles which *supported* their original attitude toward Korea

Original Attitude	Newspaper	Type & Tone of News	Pre-reading Mean Attitude	Post-reading Mean Attitude	Attitude Difference (Absolute)
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Positive	High	Pos Pos	2.47	2.33	0.14
	Credibility	Pos Pos	2.53	2.40	0.13
		Pos Neu	2.40	2.33	0.07
	Low	Pos Pos	2.67	2.67	-
	Credibility	Pos Pos	2.40	2.40	-
		Pos Neu	2.40	2.40	-
Negative	High	Neg Neg	4.13	4.13	-
	Credibility	Neg Neg	3.93	4.00	(0.07)
		Neg Neu	4.00	4.00	-
	Low	Neg Neg	4.00	4.00	-
	Credibility	Neg Neg	3.87	3.93	(0.06)
		Neg Neu	3.87	3.87	-

\* In this table, 1 means strongly positive attitude and 5 means strongly negative attitude.

Accordingly, a low mean indicates that students have a positive attitude.

\*\* Figures in parentheses represent a negative change.

As Table 11 shows, the students with low-involvement also showed rather large variation in their attitude changes after they were exposed to news which *differed* from their original attitude. A total of six of the 12 students changed from their original attitude following the tone of news, five of these in response to the high-credibility newspaper. Counter-attitudinal news in the high-credibility newspaper showed more effect than pro-attitudinal news in either high- or low-credibility newspapers and low-involvement students exhibited greater changes from their original attitude after exposure to news in the high-credibility newspaper than the low-credibility newspaper.

This result can be explained by cognitive response theory which predicts that a receiver decides his or her evaluative attention regarding an issue depending on the characteristics of the message source (status, credibility and so on) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Stamm & Dube, 1994; Severin & Tankard, 2000). The low-involvement subjects were relatively uninterested or less knowledgeable about Korea, thus they did not have enough motivation to seek or obtain information about Korea actively. In addition, the low-involvement subjects changed their attitude more after they were exposed to news which *differed* from their original attitude and only in the *high-credibility* newspaper. This is explained by the fact that they did not have a

strong opinion about Korea, therefore they had no stable attitude position from which to judge such content. Accordingly, although the low-involvement subjects changed their attitude, they only followed the high-credibility newspaper without judgement of content in the news, most likely because they did not have enough knowledge to judge the news in low-credibility newspaper. This tendency has also been explained by agenda effect. Just as the agenda effect is the strongest in less interested and more uncertain audiences, less interested and more uncertain low-involvement subjects showed greater change in the high-credibility newspaper.

**Table 11**

Pre- and post-reading attitudes of *low-involvement* respondents after exposure to articles which *differed from* their original attitudes toward Korea

Original Attitude	Newspaper	Type & Tone of News	Pre-reading Mean Attitude	Post-reading Mean Attitude	Attitude Difference (Absolute)
Positive	High	Neg Neg	2.40	2.47	(0.07)
	Credibility	Neg Neg	2.27	2.33	(0.06)
		Neg Neu	2.53	2.53	-
	Low	Neg Neg	2.53	2.60	(0.07)
	Credibility	Neg Neg	2.33	2.33	-
		Neg Neu	2.53	2.53	-
Negative	High	Pos Pos	4.00	3.87	0.13
	Credibility	Pos Pos	3.80	3.67	0.13
		Pos Neu	3.93	3.87	0.06
	Low	Pos Pos	3.80	3.80	-
	Credibility	Pos Pos	3.87	3.87	-
		Pos Neu	3.93	3.93	-

\* In this table, 1 means strongly positive attitude and 5 means strongly negative attitude. Accordingly, a low mean indicates that students have a positive attitude.

\*\* Figures in parentheses represent a negative change.

## Conclusion

The current study looked at credibility in terms of particular receiver variables: involvement in the broader area of the subject of the newspaper story (including knowledge or direct and indirect experience), attitudes toward the broader area (Korea and Koreans), and attitude congruence with the tone of newspaper stories. Unlike previous studies which have mainly dealt with controversial or plausible/implausible issues, this study was related to international news (about South Korea) which was considered as non-controversial, unobtrusive, and not high in ego involvement. Thus the study aimed to investigate informative issues which most people would gain mainly through the news media, which would realistically be considered as comprising the majority of what readers are exposed to in the news media. While of course there is always a proportion of articles on topics which would be controversial to different receivers, in general most news coverage includes informative-type articles from which receivers can gain information or experience indirectly. Therefore, the significance of this paper lies in the fact that it aims to shed light on the issues of media credibility and attitude change as a result of informative articles as opposed to controversial issues.

Regarding the relationship between the degree of receiver involvement in an issue and attitude change, this study generally confirmed the result of previous studies. However there were some differences in the results of this study compared with these studies as well, in particular with regard to high involvement receivers, who did not reinforce their original attitude after they were exposed to counter attitudinal news. Instead, the results suggested that they received some influence on their attitude from news containing the reporters' own opinion.

This result could be explained by the characteristic of the issue as non-controversial. With this type of non-controversial or informative issue, even high-involvement receivers may be aware of their lack of knowledge of the issue or have less interest toward the issue, and as such, are less critical toward news coverage with a counter attitudinal position and are more flexible in accepting information or the reporter's opinion.

In addition, with low-involvement receivers, there were unexpected results when compared with the outcomes of previous studies. Contrary to the belief that low-involvement people in general depend on source credibility because of their lower knowledge of, interest in or lack of motivation to think about the issue, they gave a more favourable evaluation of credibility for the low-credibility newspaper if they agreed with the tone of the stories presented.

Therefore, this study supported the view that the degree of receiver involvement in an issue has a strong influence in the judgement of media credibility and on attitude change. However, with non-controversial or more informative issues such as international news, the media has a continual influence on receivers' attitudes toward the issue as well as their credibility judgements of the news source regardless of their degree of involvement with the issue.

That is to say, unlike more controversial issues, message receivers do not hold their opinions when the news is informative and were more likely to doubt their own existing knowledge and change their attitudes following the content of the media reports. This study suggests that we must also consider the importance of the issue itself, given that we perceive the coverage of media issues differently depending on the controversial or non-controversial nature of what we are exposed to in the media.

Given that the majority of what we read in the news media is informative news coverage, there is a need to consider how large the influence of attitude change prompted by controversial issues really is in the general scope of our daily intake of news coverage, thus research into

change of attitudes of controversial research is of limited application to the greater proportion of news that receivers are exposed to, and more investigation into non-controversial issues is vital. In a changing world where access to media sources is becoming increasingly easy over time, a responsibility falls on the shoulders of media practitioners to show caution in the way in which they present not only controversial issues, but also non-controversial ones. Given the ease by which receivers of news are likely to change their attitudes according to media coverage for non-controversial issues, consideration must be given by providers of news to ensure that they do not inadvertently create negative images in the minds of these receivers.

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#### **Footnotes**

"Korea" refers to South Korea, South Koreans, or both, depending on the context. It did not refer to North Korea. Back

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