



Perceived Credibility in the Digital Information Era: A Systematic Literature Review on Dimensions, Determinants, and Behavioral Outcomes

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Abstract. The rapid expansion of digital platforms has intensified concerns about how users evaluate online information credibility, impacting misinformation spread, health communication, and public trust. Despite growing empirical attention, the literature remains fragmented across disciplines, platforms, and outcomes, with no systematic cross-disciplinary synthesis available for the 2021–2026 period. This study systematically reviewed and synthesised empirical research on perceived credibility in digital environments, addressing three research questions: the dimensions and frameworks used across disciplines; the individual, source, and contextual determinants; and the associated behavioral outcomes. A systematic search of Scopus retrieved 420 records. Following screening, relevance scoring, full-text assessment, and quality appraisal using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool 2018 (75% threshold), 55 high-quality studies were retained for narrative synthesis and thematic analysis in accordance with PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Trustworthiness and expertise emerged as cross-disciplinary core dimensions of perceived credibility, while secondary dimensions diverged by discipline. User demographics and emotional states were the most studied determinants; platform and contextual factors remain underexplored. Engagement was the dominant behavioral outcome, followed by attitude change and decision-making. Information sharing and misinformation belief received limited empirical attention. Perceived credibility is anchored by a stable two-dimensional core but shaped by platform-contingent determinants and consequential for various behavioral outcomes. Future research should prioritize AI-generated content, longitudinal designs, cross-platform comparisons, and the integration of platform design variables as primary constructs.

Keywords: perceived credibility; information credibility; source credibility; digital information; social media.

1 Introduction

The proliferation of digital information platforms over the past decade has fundamentally transformed how individuals encounter, evaluate, and act upon information. Social media, online news websites, health information portals, and increasingly AI-generated content environments now constitute the primary information ecosystems for a significant proportion of the global population. Within these environments, the question of whether information is credible has become one of the most consequential evaluative judgements individuals make on a daily basis. The stakes of this judgement extend beyond personal information literacy: inaccurate credibility assessments contribute to the spread of health misinformation, the amplification of fake news, and the erosion of institutional trust in ways that carry measurable societal costs [3, 33].

Perceived credibility, broadly defined as the subjective assessment of the trustworthiness and expertise of an information source or message, has been studied across communication, psychology, marketing, and information science for several decades. However, the transition to digital and social media environments has introduced structural features that complicate classical credibility frameworks: algorithmic curation, heuristic engagement cues, influencer-mediated communication, and the emergence of AI-generated content all constitute conditions for which pre-digital credibility models were not designed [17, 46, 58]. The result is a rapidly growing but fragmented body of empirical literature that addresses credibility dimensions, determinants, and behavioral consequences from disciplinary vantage points that rarely engage with one another systematically.

Existing reviews of credibility research have tended to focus on specific platform types, particular outcome variables such as misinformation belief, or single disciplinary traditions. No systematic synthesis has yet examined how conceptual frameworks and dimensions of perceived credibility converge or diverge across disciplines simultaneously, what factors determine credibility perception across different platform contexts and user demographics, and how these perceptions translate into behavioral outcomes such as engagement, information sharing, and decision making. This gap is consequential both theoretically, as it limits the development of generalisable credibility models, and practically, as it constrains evidence-based design of platforms, communication strategies, and media literacy interventions.

The present systematic literature review addresses this gap by synthesising empirical research published between 2021 and 2026 on perceived credibility in digital information environments. Three research questions guide the review. First, what dimensions and frameworks of perceived credibility have been proposed across disciplines, and to what extent do they converge or diverge in digital information contexts? Second, what individual, source, and contextual factors determine perceived credibility of digital information, and how do these determinants vary across platforms and user demographics? Third, how does perceived credibility of digital information influence user behavioral outcomes such as information sharing, decision making, and trust formation? These questions were developed using the PICO framework and validated against the FINER criteria to ensure scholarly rigour and practical relevance.

The review contributes to the literature in three respects. It provides the first cross-disciplinary synthesis of credibility dimensions spanning marketing,

communication, health information, and computer science research published in the 2021 to 2026 period, a timeframe that encompasses substantial growth in influencer-mediated communication [23, 35, 53], the emergence of AI-generated content as a credibility challenge [17, 46], and heightened public concern about digital health misinformation [20, 21, 43]. It additionally maps the determinant landscape of credibility perception across platform types and user characteristics, identifying underexplored contextual variables. Finally, it consolidates evidence on the behavioral consequences of credibility perception, establishing an empirical foundation for future intervention research. The remainder of this article is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the methods, Section 3 presents the results organized by research question, Section 4 discusses the findings and their implications, and Section 5 concludes with recommendations for future research.

2 Methods

2.1 Protocol and Study Registration

This systematic literature review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines [41]. The review protocol was developed prior to data collection and encompasses the formulation of research questions, definition of eligibility criteria, search strategy, screening procedures, quality assessment, and data synthesis approach. The research questions were structured using the PICO framework and validated against the FINER criteria to ensure feasibility, interest, novelty, ethical soundness, and relevance.

2.2 Search Strategy

A systematic search was conducted on the Scopus database in 2026. Scopus was selected as the sole database owing to its comprehensive indexing of peer-reviewed journals across social sciences, communication, computer science, psychology, and marketing disciplines, which correspond directly to the interdisciplinary scope of this review. The search string was constructed using three conceptual clusters: (1) credibility constructs, encompassing terms such as "perceived credibility," "information credibility," "source credibility," "online credibility," and "digital credibility"; (2) digital platform contexts, including "social media," "online information," "digital media," and "information environment"; and (3) analytical dimensions, covering "dimensions," "determinants," "antecedents," "behavioral outcomes," "trust," and "decision making." The clusters were combined using Boolean AND operators, with synonymous terms joined by OR. The search was restricted to journal articles, English-language publications, final publication stage, and articles published between 2021 and 2026. The initial search returned 420 records.

2.3 Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility criteria were established a priori following the PICO framework. Inclusion criteria required that articles: (I1) explicitly addressed perceived credibility, information credibility, source credibility, or online credibility in digital information contexts; (I2) identified dimensions, determinants, or conceptual frameworks of digital information credibility; (I3) measured the impact of credibility on user behavioral outcomes; (I4) were peer-reviewed journal articles in English; (I5) were published between 2021 and 2026; and (I6) provided a complete abstract for screening purposes. Exclusion criteria eliminated articles that: (E1) addressed

credibility exclusively in non-digital contexts such as print media, television, or face-to-face communication; (E2) treated credibility solely as a control variable without substantive examination; (E3) were editorial, commentary, letter, or book review formats; (E4) lacked a clearly described research methodology; (E5) were duplicate publications; and (E6) had inaccessible full-text after reasonable retrieval attempts.

2.4 Screening Process

Screening was conducted in two sequential stages. In the title and abstract screening stage, a three-cluster keyword matching protocol was applied, requiring that each article simultaneously satisfy all three conditions: the credibility construct must appear in the article title; digital or platform context keywords must appear in the combined title and abstract; and analytical dimension, determinant, or outcome keywords must be present in the text. This stage reduced the corpus from 420 to 129 records. A relevance scoring system was subsequently applied, assigning weighted scores on a scale of 0 to 8 points based on the specificity and positioning of keyword matches across title, abstract, and author keywords. Articles scoring below 6 out of 8 were excluded, yielding 112 records for full-text screening. In the full-text screening stage, abstracts were assessed for methodological clarity and the presence of reported findings or outcomes, reducing the corpus to 102 records prior to quality assessment. Figure 1 presents the complete screening flow in accordance with PRISMA 2020 reporting standards.

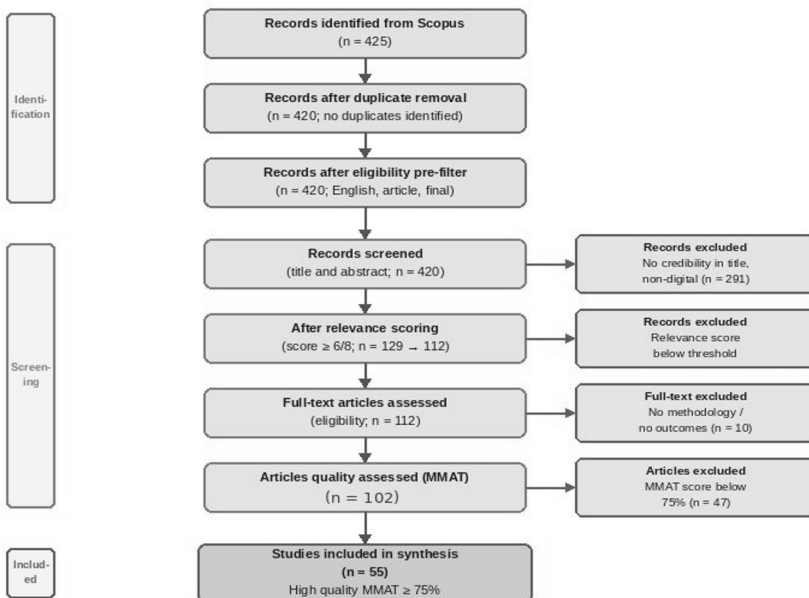


Fig. 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

2.5 Quality Assessment

Quality appraisal was performed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) 2018 [26], which provides a validated framework for assessing studies across five methodological designs: quantitative descriptive, quantitative randomised controlled

trials, quantitative non-randomised, qualitative, and mixed methods. Each article was classified by study type based on methodological indicators in the abstract, and the corresponding MMAT criteria were applied. Scores were expressed as percentages of criteria met, with a threshold of 75% applied for final inclusion. Of the 102 articles assessed, 55 met the high-quality threshold and were retained for synthesis.

2.6 Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data were extracted systematically from the 55 retained articles using a standardised extraction template comprising 19 fields: bibliographic information, study type and MMAT score, study objective, research method, sample characteristics, platform context, credibility dimensions identified, key determinants, behavioral outcomes, theoretical framework, key findings, and research question mapping. Synthesis followed a narrative synthesis approach [44] supplemented by thematic analysis [13]. Convergent themes were defined as those appearing in more than 30% of articles addressing a given research question, while divergent themes were defined as those appearing in fewer than 15% of relevant articles.

3 Results

3.1 Study Characteristics

The final corpus comprised 55 studies published between 2021 and 2026. Publication volume showed a consistent upward trend, with 5 articles in 2021, 7 in 2022, 6 in 2023, 13 in 2024, 14 in 2025, and 10 in 2026, reflecting growing scholarly attention to perceived credibility in digital information contexts. Quantitative descriptive designs dominated the corpus ($n = 44$, 80%), followed by qualitative studies ($n = 6$, 11%), quantitative randomised designs ($n = 4$, 7%), and mixed methods ($n = 1$, 2%). Survey and questionnaire methods were the most prevalent data collection approach ($n = 35$, 64%), followed by empirical studies with unspecified methodology ($n = 14$, 25%), qualitative interviews or focus groups ($n = 4$, 7%), and experiments ($n = 2$, 4%). Social media constituted the predominant platform context ($n = 51$, 93%), with Instagram emerging as the most studied specific platform ($n = 11$), followed by YouTube and Facebook ($n = 3$ each). Health information platforms and e-commerce contexts each appeared in two studies. Studies were distributed across marketing and business ($n = 18$), communication and media ($n = 14$), and other interdisciplinary fields ($n = 23$).

3.2 RQ1: Dimensions and Frameworks of Perceived Credibility

Forty-seven of the 55 studies (85%) addressed RQ1 concerning the dimensions and frameworks used to conceptualise perceived credibility across disciplines.

Theme 1.1: Core dimensions and cross-disciplinary convergence. A strong cross-disciplinary convergence emerged around two core dimensions of perceived credibility. Trustworthiness was identified in 34 of 47 articles (72%), consistently appearing across communication, marketing, and health information studies. Expertise and competence constituted the second most prominent dimension, appearing in 22 articles (47%). Together, these two dimensions formed a foundational dyad present across all disciplinary clusters in the corpus, suggesting their status as universal anchors of credibility perception in digital environments regardless of platform or population studied.

Theme 1.2: Secondary dimensions and discipline-specific divergence. Beyond the core dyad, secondary dimensions exhibited notable divergence across disciplines. Reliability appeared in 9 articles (19%), predominantly in communication and

journalism studies where editorial consistency and factual accuracy are central concerns. Objectivity was identified in 6 articles (13%), similarly concentrated in news and media literacy research. Transparency and source cues each appeared in 3 articles (6%), primarily within human-computer interaction and platform design literature, reflecting an interface-level operationalisation of credibility. Accuracy ($n = 2$), believability ($n = 1$), and bias ($n = 1$) appeared sparsely, suggesting these dimensions are frequently subsumed under trustworthiness in quantitative measurement instruments rather than treated as distinct constructs.

Theme 1.3: Theoretical frameworks. Framing Theory was the most frequently employed theoretical framework ($n = 15$, 32%), particularly in studies examining how credibility perceptions are shaped by narrative presentation and message construction on social media platforms. Uses and Gratifications Theory appeared in 3 articles (6%), primarily in studies linking credibility assessment to user motivations and platform selection behaviour [9]. The Elaboration Likelihood Model, Heuristic-Systematic Model, Signaling Theory, and Information Processing Theory each appeared in a single article, indicating limited but present application of dual-process and cognitive frameworks to credibility research. Established credibility models were explicitly invoked in one article, suggesting that classical credibility frameworks are referenced but not systematically tested across the contemporary digital literature.

3.3 RQ2: Determinants of Perceived Credibility

Forty-nine of the 55 studies (89%) addressed RQ2 concerning the individual, source, and contextual factors that determine perceived credibility in digital information environments.

Theme 2.1: Individual-level determinants. Individual-level factors constituted the most frequently examined category. User demographics, encompassing age, gender, and education level, emerged as the single most studied determinant [8], appearing in 30 of 49 articles (61%). Emotional state was the second most prominent individual-level factor, identified in 18 articles (37%), with studies demonstrating that affective arousal, anxiety, and general mood moderate how users evaluate information credibility, particularly in crisis communication and health information contexts. Media literacy appeared in 2 articles (4%) and, while infrequently studied as a primary variable, was consistently reported as a protective factor against credibility misjudgement.

Theme 2.2: Source and message-level determinants. Source characteristics were identified in 17 articles (35%), constituting the second most studied determinant category. Studies in this cluster examined how source identity, perceived expertise, institutional affiliation, and verification status shape credibility assessments across social media platforms. Heuristic cues, such as like counts, comment volumes, and follower numbers, appeared in 3 articles (6%), primarily in experimental designs, with findings indicating that these peripheral signals exert significant but potentially misleading influences on credibility perception. Message quality appeared in 2 articles (4%), generally as a moderating variable rather than a primary predictor [14].

Theme 2.3: Platform and contextual determinants. Platform and contextual determinants represented the least studied category. Social influence appeared in 3 articles (6%), and platform design variables were implicitly referenced but rarely operationalised as independent constructs [34]. Among specific platforms, Instagram ($n = 10$) was the most studied context for determinant research, followed by YouTube,

Facebook, health information platforms, and e-commerce environments, each of which showed distinct patterns in how source and heuristic cues influenced credibility judgements [18].

Theme 2.4: Cross-platform variation. Comparative analysis across platform contexts revealed meaningful variation in determinant salience. On visual and influencer-driven platforms such as Instagram, aesthetic presentation and influencer credibility characteristics carried greater weight than on text-based or institutional platforms [11]. In health information and e-commerce contexts, source expertise and institutional credibility signals were more prominent determinants than engagement metrics, suggesting that credibility determinants are platform-contingent rather than universal [54].

3.4 RQ3: Behavioral Outcomes of Perceived Credibility

Forty-seven of the 55 studies (85%) addressed RQ3 concerning how perceived credibility influences user behavioral outcomes.

Theme 3.1: Engagement as the primary outcome. Engagement was the most frequently studied behavioral outcome, appearing in 24 of 47 articles (51%), encompassing likes, comments, shares, and continued platform interaction. Studies consistently demonstrated positive associations between perceived credibility and engagement behaviour. A recurring pattern was the bidirectional nature of this relationship: while credibility drove engagement, high engagement volumes were also found to serve as heuristic credibility cues, creating a reinforcing cycle with implications for the amplification of both credible and non-credible information.

Theme 3.2: Attitude change and decision making. Attitude change appeared in 17 articles (36%), with credibility perceptions found to significantly predict attitudinal shifts toward information sources, brands, public health recommendations, and political figures [25, 37, 47]. Decision making was examined in 12 articles (26%), primarily in e-commerce and health information contexts, where perceived credibility functioned as a key mediator between information exposure and behavioural intention [42, 45]. Several studies reported that credibility perceptions were more predictive of decision outcomes than objective information quality, underscoring the subjective nature of credibility evaluation.

Theme 3.3: Information sharing and misinformation. Information sharing intention appeared in 5 articles (11%), with high perceived credibility consistently predicting greater forwarding and reposting intentions. The implications for misinformation propagation are significant, as users who inaccurately perceive low-credibility content as credible are more likely to amplify such content. Misinformation belief was examined in only 2 articles (4%), representing a notable gap given the centrality of credibility to the misinformation literature.

Theme 3.4: Adoption and acceptance. Technology and information adoption or acceptance appeared in 4 articles (9%), primarily in studies applying the Technology Acceptance Model framework to digital health platforms and information systems. In these studies, perceived credibility functioned as an antecedent to perceived usefulness, positioning credibility as an upstream variable in adoption processes rather than a direct predictor of use behaviour.

4 Discussion

4.1 Interpretation of Findings Across Research Questions

The findings of this review collectively suggest that perceived credibility in digital information environments is a multidimensional, context-sensitive construct whose formation and consequences are shaped by a complex interplay of individual, source, and platform-level factors. Across the three research questions, several interpretive observations merit attention.

With respect to RQ1, the strong cross-disciplinary convergence on trustworthiness and expertise as core credibility dimensions confirms that the foundational two-dimensional model of source credibility retains its explanatory power in digital contexts. Credibility has consistently been operationalised through these two dimensions across marketing, communication, and influencer research contexts [4, 15, 23, 35, 50, 53, 56], lending empirical weight to their cross-disciplinary centrality. However, the discipline-specific divergence observed for secondary dimensions such as reliability, objectivity, and transparency indicates that the construct is operationalised differently depending on the scholarly community studying it. Communication research tends to emphasise factual consistency and editorial independence, while HCI and platform design research foregrounds interface signals and transparency cues [31, 40, 49, 58]. This divergence has practical consequences: measurement instruments developed within one disciplinary tradition may not transfer cleanly to another, potentially producing incomparable findings across studies and limiting cumulative knowledge-building. The dominance of Framing Theory as a theoretical framework, appearing in nearly one third of RQ1 articles [23, 27, 43], further suggests that the literature conceptualises credibility as substantially shaped by how information is presented rather than by the intrinsic properties of the information itself.

With respect to RQ2, the prominence of user demographics and emotional state as determinants reveals that credibility perception is as much a function of who is evaluating information as it is of the information or source being evaluated. The finding that emotional state moderates credibility judgements across multiple studies [23, 27, 36, 50, 57] has particular relevance for high-stakes information contexts such as health crises and political communication, where affective arousal is elevated and credibility misjudgements carry serious consequences. The relative underrepresentation of platform design variables as studied determinants is a significant interpretive gap, given that algorithmic curation and interface affordances structurally mediate what information users encounter and how it is presented. Heuristic cues such as engagement counts and verification indicators were found to exert significant but potentially misleading influences on credibility perception [16, 22], suggesting that platforms operating at scale effectively shape credibility judgements through design choices that individual-level studies routinely hold constant.

With respect to RQ3, the finding that engagement is the most studied behavioral outcome reflects the social media orientation of the corpus but may simultaneously obscure more consequential outcomes. The bidirectional relationship between credibility and engagement identified in the literature [16, 22] complicates causal interpretation: engagement amplifies perceived credibility through social proof mechanisms, which in turn increases further engagement, creating feedback loops that can operate independently of actual information quality. The comparatively low

frequency of studies examining information sharing and misinformation belief as outcomes is theoretically notable. High perceived credibility was found to significantly predict sharing intention [7, 38, 51, 52], while limited but important evidence indicates that inaccurate credibility judgements are associated with misinformation belief [1, 32], a finding with direct public interest implications that warrants substantially more empirical attention than the current literature provides.

4.2 Cross-Cutting Themes

Several themes cut across the three research questions and warrant separate interpretive attention. First, the overwhelming concentration of studies within social media contexts, particularly Instagram and influencer-driven platforms, reflects the platform landscape of the early-to-mid 2020s but simultaneously limits the generalisability of findings. Credibility dynamics involving AI-generated and virtual influencer content represent an emerging frontier that the corpus has only begun to address [2, 17, 46, 58]. Credibility frameworks developed for human influencers on public social media may require fundamental revision as AI-generated content becomes increasingly indistinguishable from human-authored material.

Second, the methodological homogeneity of the corpus, with 64% of studies using survey or questionnaire designs, introduces systematic limitations [29]. Self-reported credibility assessments are subject to social desirability effects and the well-documented gap between stated and actual information behaviour. Reliance on student samples in specific institutional contexts [12, 28, 48] raises questions about the transferability of findings to broader adult populations. The near-absence of longitudinal designs means that the literature captures credibility as a static evaluation rather than as a dynamic process that evolves with repeated platform exposure over time.

Third, the geographic and cultural concentration of the corpus warrants attention. The dominance of Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, and Western European platform contexts [5, 10, 19, 24, 30, 39] suggests that credibility norms identified in the reviewed literature may not generalise uniformly across Global South populations, where distinct media ecosystems, institutional trust levels, and digital literacy conditions shape credibility perception in ways not yet captured by existing frameworks.

4.3 Research Gaps and Future Agenda

Six substantive research gaps emerge from this review. The first and most pressing is the need for studies examining perceived credibility in AI-generated content environments. The cues and heuristics users employ to assess credibility in these environments are structurally different from those applicable to human sources, and existing frameworks require empirical extension to accommodate this shift [17]. The second gap concerns longitudinal research designs: virtually all reviewed studies capture credibility as a cross-sectional snapshot, leaving unanswered how credibility perceptions form, stabilise, and change over time or following credibility-relevant events such as fact-checks or source corrections.

Third, cross-platform comparative studies using consistent measurement frameworks are needed to move the field beyond platform-specific findings. The contrast between credibility dynamics on visual influencer platforms such as Instagram [23, 35] and those on health information and news platforms [24, 48] underscores the inadequacy of universal models. Fourth, the underrepresentation of non-Western contexts calls for deliberate sampling strategies to ensure credibility

models reflect diverse media environments and cultural trust norms. Fifth, private and semi-private digital spaces, including messaging platforms and closed online communities, remain unstudied despite their prominent role in information circulation. Sixth, the integration of platform design variables, including algorithmic ranking, visual interface design, and transparency labelling, as primary independent variables in credibility research would bridge the persistent gap between the individual-centred orientation of most reviewed studies and the structurally mediated nature of digital information environments [40, 49, 59].

4.4 Practical Implications

The findings carry concrete implications for three groups of stakeholders. For platform designers and developers, the evidence that heuristic cues such as engagement counts and verification badges exert disproportionate influence on credibility perception [16, 22] suggests that interface design choices are not neutral with respect to information quality. Platforms that prominently display engagement metrics without contextual quality signals may inadvertently reward virality over credibility, and redesigning these cues to incorporate source transparency indicators represents a structurally effective intervention that individual-level media literacy programmes cannot replicate at scale.

For policymakers and public communicators, the finding that emotional state significantly moderates credibility judgements across numerous studies implies that high-arousal communication contexts require heightened attention to how credibility signals are packaged. Institutional sources relying exclusively on expertise-based appeals may be less effective under conditions of elevated affect, as suggested by crisis communication and health communication evidence [6, 20, 55].

For educators and media literacy practitioners, the identification of media literacy as a protective factor against credibility misjudgement [12, 24, 48] reinforces the case for targeted digital literacy interventions. However, the evidence collectively suggests that media literacy alone is insufficient in the absence of complementary structural interventions at the platform and policy level.

4.5 Limitations

This review is subject to several limitations. First, the search was restricted to a single database, Scopus, which, while comprehensive, may have excluded relevant studies indexed exclusively in other databases such as Web of Science or PsycINFO. Second, the screening and quality assessment processes relied primarily on abstract-level data, as full texts were not systematically retrieved, introducing the possibility that relevant methodological details or nuanced findings were missed during the synthesis phase. Third, the temporal restriction to 2021 to 2026 for the Scopus query, while ensuring contemporary relevance, excludes foundational empirical work published prior to 2021. Fourth, the automated nature of the relevance scoring and MMAT assessment, conducted programmatically from abstract and keyword data, introduces approximation error relative to manual expert screening, and findings should be interpreted accordingly.

5 Conclusion

This systematic literature review synthesised 55 high-quality empirical studies published between 2021 and 2026 to address three research questions concerning perceived credibility in digital information environments. With respect to RQ1, the review found strong cross-disciplinary convergence on trustworthiness and expertise

as the core dimensions of perceived credibility, while secondary dimensions including reliability, objectivity, and transparency exhibited discipline-specific divergence, reflecting the different priorities of communication, marketing, and HCI scholarship. Framing Theory emerged as the dominant theoretical framework across the corpus, suggesting that the field conceptualises credibility formation as substantially presentation-dependent rather than intrinsic to information quality. With respect to RQ2, individual-level factors, particularly user demographics and emotional state, were the most extensively studied determinants, while platform and contextual factors remained comparatively underexplored despite their structural significance in shaping information exposure. With respect to RQ3, engagement was the most frequently studied behavioral outcome, though the bidirectional relationship between credibility and engagement complicates causal inference, and higher-consequence outcomes such as information sharing and misinformation belief received insufficient empirical attention relative to their societal importance.

The theoretical contribution of this review lies in its identification of both the cross-disciplinary convergence that anchors perceived credibility research and the divergences that currently prevent cumulative knowledge-building. The two-dimensional core of trustworthiness and expertise provides a stable foundation for interdisciplinary dialogue, while the divergence in secondary dimensions and the absence of consistent platform-level constructs point toward a second-generation research agenda that must move beyond individual-level survey designs toward comparative, longitudinal, and experimentally grounded investigations. Practically, the findings highlight that credibility is not solely a cognitive product of individual evaluation but is also structurally conditioned by platform design choices, algorithmic curation, and heuristic cues that operate largely below the threshold of conscious deliberation. Interventions that address only the individual dimension of credibility literacy, without attending to the platform and structural conditions that shape information environments, are unlikely to produce durable improvements in the quality of credibility judgements at population scale.

Future research should prioritise six directions identified in this review: empirical examination of credibility in AI-generated content environments, longitudinal tracking of credibility perception over time, cross-platform comparative studies using consistent measurement frameworks, deliberate inclusion of non-Western and Global South contexts, investigation of credibility dynamics in private and semi-private digital spaces, and integration of platform design variables as primary independent constructs in credibility models. As digital information environments continue to evolve with the rapid diffusion of generative AI, synthetic media, and algorithmically curated feeds, the frameworks and evidence base established by the studies reviewed here provide an essential but necessarily provisional foundation. The scholarly community's capacity to keep pace with these structural transformations will depend on its willingness to work across disciplinary boundaries, diversify its methodological toolkit, and engage directly with the platform architectures that increasingly determine what information people see, trust, and act upon.

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