

Title: A Columnist's Call to Action: Audience Perceptions of Credibility and Authority
Online vs. in Print

Running Head: A Columnist's Call to Action

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Abstract

This web experiment, with closed-and-open-ended items, uses the columns, video and blog of *New York Times* reporter Nicholas Kristof to examine whether journalists are achieving the enhanced credibility and authority they aim to accomplish online. The main findings indicate that people perceive Kristof as being credible whether or not they read his column, comment on his blog, or watch his video. However, those who saw Kristof in his videos found his sources to be more credible than Kristof himself – often to the detriment of Kristof's reputation. People who read the column perceived Kristof to be more authoritative than those who watched him in the video. These people were more likely to accept and reiterate his advocacy stance – that the United States should intervene in Darfur. One sub-finding revealed that people who commented on Kristof's blog tended to answer the open-ended questions by employing more emotive language, using the first person, and referring to their own experience -- in other words, relating this foreign news to their own worlds. These findings have significant implications for journalists (as well as any strategic communication professional) as publishers figure out where to best utilize resources in an online world if they want to preserve their message credibility and authority over information.

Keywords: Journalism, credibility, authority, modality, interactivity

As *The New York Times* perfects its online product, its editors and journalists aim to extend the well-branded authority of the nation's premier newspaper into cyberspace (Dube 2004; Robinson 2007). As part of their efforts, *Times* journalists pair multimedia tools and interactive features with their news stories. More and more, these Internet-specific attributes are becoming journalistic packages in their own right, often at the expense of any written product (Robinson, 2007). *New York Times'* columnist Nicholas Kristof has been one of the more proactive journalists utilizing online products to enhance the stories he wants to tell. In particular, he and multimedia producer Naka Nathaniel have traveled to Darfur, reporting on the Sudanese genocide there via stories across multiple platforms, including audio, videos, and his "On the Ground" blog. They want to reach more people, provide evidence, and offer a different experience with these web accompaniments (Kristof 2005; Robinson 2007).

As journalists have expanded their product to the Internet, media scholars have started to look at issues of authority and credibility in online news (Buhy 2003, 2004; Kiouisis 2006; Robinson 2006). Other theorists have touched on what kind of impact multimedia and interactivity might have on perceptions of information quality in general (Cover 2004; McMillan 2000; Sundar 2000). This research builds on these bodies of literature with a web experiment and questionnaire containing both closed and open-ended items about Nicholas Kristof's textual, multimedia, and interactive products produced during a trip to Darfur in November 2006. Using both quantitative and qualitative methodology, this article examines whether journalists are achieving the enhanced credibility and authority they aim to accomplish online. These findings have

significant implications for journalists (as well as any strategic communication professional) as publishers figure out where to best utilize resources in an online world if they want to preserve their message credibility and authority over information.

Literature Review

Some Definitions

For the purposes of this article, credibility is defined as perceived reliability and accuracy. Authority is defined as the implied and inferred 'power' of someone to relay information, at least as it is perceived by news consumers. It is the audience's perception of the press as being a credible authority over information that in part makes it an entrenched political institution, according to Cook (1998). This authority allows journalists to serve as guides for society, establishing universal morals and values, for example (Gans 1979).

Two more definitions need to be quickly made as well: Modality and multimedia are used interchangeably – both refer to content being relayed using multiple information channels such as text or video. Interactivity occurs when people are able to change the content in those channels in some manner beyond merely turning the page or stopping the video. An example of interactivity is article commentary or database searching.

Modality, Interactivity

Contradictory research exists about the information medium's effect on people's perceptions of credibility and, as an extension, authority over information. Some researchers have found that modality does make a difference in credibility perceptions (Bucy 2003; Ibelema and Powell 2001; Metzger et al. 2003). When people can watch the reporter in a video, they may feel as if that reporter is more trustworthy (Ibelema and

Powell 2001) and they seem to pay more attention to the source of information rather than the content (Pfau et al. 2000).

Other studies, however, showed little difference (Kiousis 2006; Sundar 2000). For example, Kiousis (2006) found that modality in general had no effect on people's perceptions of the content's credibility but that source credibility increased if people were forced to interact with the multimedia. He concluded, "Making changes in the type of content that is available to online users is probably not enough to influence evaluations of credibility... To impact their assessments, viewers must become actively engaged with the content" (Kiousis 2006: 355). But Kiousis was looking at *source* credibility as opposed to author credibility – the focus of this study. Furthermore, he did not examine authority in any way, defined "interactivity" as mere *use* of multimedia rather than actual participation and, finally, used raw footage of the news event itself, rather than one that was produced by a journalist who is the narrator and a character in the story.

Interactivity, on the other hand, has generally been shown to enhance people's evaluation of the trustworthiness of the content, if more confusing (Bucy 2004). The attribute gives people control over information, increases self efficacy, empowers them to acquire knowledge and redefines the relationship between authors and audiences (Cover 2004; McChesney 2007; McMillan 2007; Pavlik 2001). In news specifically, interactivity will turn journalists into "gatewatchers" and create "networked journalism" that mandates audience participation to the point that people feel a sense of ownership over societal information (Bruns 2005; Jarvis 2006; Singer 2006). Thus, some have posited that the news media are losing their influence (i.e. their authority) in part because of credibility issues (Bennett et al, 2007).

Yet the Internet might be a panacea for better news, more credible information, and an invigorated and improved press (Gans 2003; McChesney 2007; Overholser 2007). Indeed, in in-depth interviews with journalists, Robinson (2007) found that the press intended to use the Internet to improve perceptions of the newsgathering's credibility and enhance publications' reputation. One editor told her, "We wanted people to see that we were not making this stuff up. It was an offensive move on our part" about the paper's decision to offer audiotapes, video, and pdf documents online during a news investigation (Robinson 2007: 316).

This research set out to test the assumption that audiences respond positively toward the journalist as a credible authority in the new multi-modal, interactive medium. The researcher used the news narrative about the Sudanese genocide, produced by Kristof of *The New York Times*, to investigate this topic. Journalists produce web accompaniments so that their audiences will consider the news to be more credible and their news organization more authoritative (Robinson, 2007). Thus, several hypotheses are offered:

H1a: Those people who read the blog and are forced to comment will feel the author is more credible than those who do not have this opportunity.

H1b: Those people who watch the video with Kristof as a character will feel that the author is more credible than those who only read the column.

H2a: Those people who read the blog and are forced to comment will feel Kristof embodies more authority to tell this news story than those who did not have this opportunity.

H2b: Those people who watch the video will think Kristof is more authoritative than those who read the column.

To go one step farther, the research explored whether scholars are right that utilizing all of the Internet's attributes should produce more compelling news, perhaps leading to a desire for more democratic participation. Audiences' perceptions of an information source's credibility and authority affect their attitudes and civic involvement (Besley et al 2006; Fleming et al. 2006; Moy and Scheufele 2000). Besley et al. (2006) found that people changed their perception of local scientists' authority in their community because of media use. And, consider for example, Dewey 1927, Hume 2000, Novek 1999, Rosen 1990 and the like, who wrote about how engagement with journalism leads to a more vibrant public sphere, more community service and more community knowledge. The medium by which that content is delivered matters in how audiences emotionally respond as well. For example, news became an emotive propaganda "weapon" during World War II because of the audience's perceived personal relationships with "well respected journalists" (Socolow, 2007: 126). In contrast, children responded much more emotionally after *reading* crime news than watching crime news footage (Smith and Wilson 2000); this last implies that the written word remains powerful in terms of message relay compared to other forms of media.

But perhaps the Internet's unique mix of multimedia and interactive attributes -- particularly the ability of audiences to have some power over the news creation and form -- ultimately enhances the journalist's overall message and affects people's responses. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3a: Those people who believe Kristof to be more credible will be more apt to accept and advocate Kristof's main premise that the United States must get involved in the Darfur situation.

H3b: Those people who believe Kristof to be more authoritative will be more apt to want the United States to get involved in the Darfur situation.

Method

To test these hypotheses, this research employed a web experiment with a 2 (interactivity: blog participation vs. no blog participation) x 2 (modality: text vs. video) design. Participants were randomly assigned to four conditions: One group was exposed to two text-only columns written by Kristof that told the story of some victims on Darfur. One group read these columns and then was exposed to Kristof's blog about the reporting (published the same day as the columns with comments from readers). These participants had access to live links off the site (limited to two-clicks deep, though only one accessed the links), and then were required to post a comment to the blog. A third group was only exposed to the corresponding multimedia video published the same days as the columns and relaying the same stories; finally the fourth group received the video and blog, again with the active links and the comment requirement.

Kristof's narrative was chosen as the stimulus material for several reasons. One, the research needed to replicate as natural a news narrative as possible; two, Kristof writes in a narrative manner (he tells a story rather than merely advocating a stance); and three, Kristof very nearly replicates that content in multimedia form.

A convenience sample of undergraduate students at a large midwestern university was used in order to have as homogenous a population (in terms of age, Internet

familiarity, and understanding of Darfur) as possible. In all, 328 students completed the experiment from their own computers; each condition contained about 80 randomly assigned students. The sample was skewed toward women (71% vs. 29%) who were between 18 and 25 (96%, $M=21$, $SD=3.4$), reflecting the gender distribution of the School. Respondents identified themselves as moderates on a political spectrum ($M=3.6$ with 1 being “very liberal”, $SD=2.1$).

All the participants answered questions in a pre-test that measured their cognitive and modality tendencies (such as whether they were visual vs. aural learners), their familiarity with the particular news topic of Sudanese genocide, and their general Internet use and level of interaction. On average, participants rarely contributed to blogs ($M=1.4$, $SD=.8$), considered themselves slightly more of a visual learner than a textual one ($M=4.5$, $SD=1.5$), and were only slightly familiar with the Sudanese genocide ($M=2.5$ with 1 being “not at all familiar,” $SD=1.2$). All of the scales were done on a 1-7 agreement scale.

After the experiment ended, the data – both closed and open-ended questions using 7-point agreement scales – were both quantitatively analyzed (using ANOVAs and linear regression analyses) and qualitatively interpreted. Two indexed dependent variables were created using factor analysis and linear regression -- *perceived credibility of Kristof* ($M=5$, $SD=.97$) and *perceived authority of Kristof* ($M=4.6$, $SD=.92$).

Perceived credibility of Kristof

For the first index, three dimensions of news credibility were tested: accuracy, believability, and reliability, adapting Kisisis' index of credibility (who drew from Bucy 2003, Gaziano and McGrath 1986, Johnson and Kaye 2002, and Sundar and Nass, 2001).

(Kisosis included objectivity and bias measures, but this research did not test those dimensions; Kristof is an opinionated columnist, meant to be biased and not objective). In all, four items – with one reverse coded – formed a new variable with a Cronbach's alpha of .81.

Perceived authority of Kristof

For the second index, authority was broken down into the audience's perceptions of authority ("Kristof seems to be an authority on this topic"), appropriateness of authorship ("Kristof is the best person to tell this story"), strength of authorial agency or power ("Kristof made me rethink my position on Darfur"), and perceived role ("I think of Kristof as a teacher or a guide"). For this indexed variable, seven items (two reverse coded) created a variable with a Cronbach's alpha of .80.

Hypotheses were then tested with 2 x 2 ANCOVA models, using modality and interactivity as the independent variables. Gender, prior perception of Kristof, cognitive modality preference, and foreign relation desires (such as whether the respondent held an 'isolationist' attitude) were entered in the analysis as covariates. (On average, individuals reported little familiarity with the Darfur situation; $M=2.51$, $SD=1.2$). The cognitive modality preference was measured using a scaled variable ($r=.47$) of two items ("I would rather watch the news on television than read a newspaper" and "I find that I learn better when I can watch a video or movie, as opposed to just reading about the topic"); foreign relation desires was measured using a scaled variable ($r=.40$) of two items ("I think the U.S. needs to stay out of other countries' affairs no matter what" and "The U.S. has an obligation to help other countries in need" – recoded).

The researcher turned to the open-ended questions to determine whether the longer responses supported what the participants recorded in the agreement scales. Four open-ended questions were asked: “What impression do you have of Nicholas Kristof?” “What impression do you have of *The New York Times*?” “What do you think is the most important information you should be taking away from the story?” And, “which of these individuals do you find most credible and why?” These answers – which ranged from one-word answers to several paragraphs for each question – were textually analyzed according to condition to (a) identify perception of authorial agency, (b) distinguish level of personal engagement with the stories through use of first-person, (c) note use of emotive language, and (d) consider through their language how they were considering Kristof and his message. For example, the researcher content analyzed Question 4 by counting how many times per condition the participant named Kristof as being the most credible person, and further, how that answer was qualified (i.e. was Kristof named in relation to *The New York Times* as a brand or on his own merits as a humanitarian?). Only 10 of 328 individuals failed to write in comments.

Findings

Credibility

Neither H1a nor H1b, which stated that modality and interactivity would affect perception of Kristof's credibility, was supported. Indeed, it did not make a difference whether people watched Kristof in a video, participated in a blog, or read his information in the column; all thought he was credible ($M=5.05$ with 7 being they “strongly agree”; $SD=.97$). However, their answers to the open-ended questions permitted more nuanced analysis.

One question in particular was striking: The question, “Which person in these stories did you find most credible?” was followed by a list of all the characters who appeared in the narrative, including Kristof, with a sentence descriptor for easier recall. Almost half of those in the column-only and the column-plus-blog condition responded that they thought Kristof was the most credible of all the people depicted. This was particularly interesting since these people never *saw or heard* Kristof, only read his byline. “I would hope Kristof is the most credible because if he isn’t then who knows if the others are even real,” wrote one. Note that those people who only read Kristof tended to instill a certain trust in Kristof simply because he is a journalist associated with a well-known brand: “I find Kristof most credible. As a writer for the largest national newspaper, his abilities can generally be trusted in my opinion.” This might indicate *channel* credibility issues, addressed in the discussion section.

By contrast, only a handful of people in the video-only and video-plus-blog conditions named Kristof as being the most credible person. Note that this was *in relation* to other people in the news story, and that these same people said they “somewhat agreed” Kristof was generally credible in the quantitative items. But when asked to elaborate, they determined that Kristof was “only a reporter who was probably not a 100% knowledgeable in this area.” In fact, many people described the author as being the *least* credible in their open-ended responses. Some participants in the video and video-plus-blog conditions wrote visceral, anti-Kristof comments that related to his particular persona; (in a pre-test, the respondents reported that they had held generally neutral opinions of Kristof, $M=4$). People watching the video described Kristof as someone who is “annoying,” “sensational,” and “arrogant,” and who “talks in a monotone voice.”

Instead, these people consistently named the other characters in the narrative as being the most credible. Furthermore, the medium in particular factored into their determination. “I find the elderly man to be more credible because I can see that he has some burn marks all over his body,” and “I especially find the elderly man credible as we saw evidence of the burns.” On the one hand, this supports what the *Times* had hoped (Robinson 2007): People believed the story more because Kristof's video provided proof. On the other hand, it appears the multimedia product backfired to some extent. Seeing and hearing Kristof made some people recoil, instead of boosting his credibility.

Authority

H2a, which stated that interactivity would affect perceptions of authority of Kristof, was not supported. An ANCOVA on the scaled variable of Kristof's authority demonstrated that the blog does not seem to make Kristof any more authoritative than those who were exposed only to the column. Even controlling for several other variables, such as those who regularly write in blogs, did not make a difference.

H2b, which stated that those people who watched the video would think Kristof is more authoritative than those who read the column, was not supported either. Yet its opposite was true. The ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for textual modality ($F=4.27, p<.04$). People who read Kristof's column found him to be more authoritative than those who watched him in the video. See Table 1.

Table 1. Perception of Kristof's Authority

	Text Only	Video Only
Mean degree of Kristof's authority	4.71	4.49

SD	.9	.93
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Note. These means represent the average on an agreement scale of 1-7, with 7 being strongly agree that Kristof is authoritative. A t-test ($t=2.1$) showed a significant difference ($p<.04$).

The open-ended answers of those in the text conditions reinforce the data results that people who read Kristof (as opposed to viewing him in the video) have a sense that he is particularly authoritative, or at least influential as a strategic communicator. This can be seen in their word choices for their impression of Kristof: committed, expert, advocate, activist and other descriptors that suggest they think of Kristof as something more than a primary source for information. Compare this to descriptions in the video condition, such as “he covers international news,” “I see Kristof as a man who is using journalistic pursuits to help spread a message,” and “a dedicated journalist” – in other words, references that tend to relate to his role as a secondary-source newsgatherer, rather than as an expert. In addition, participations in the text conditions tended to write about the *events* in Darfur as opposed to Kristof’s *coverage* of Darfur, which those in the video conditions referenced more. This suggests that in the column Kristof becomes absent, his content taken at face value and authority taken for granted. His video, though, instills another layering of content –the newsgathering. These open-ended responses imply that people who saw Kristof working actually considered his level of authority, as opposed to merely engaging with the content.

A Call to Action

The last hypotheses, H3a and H3b, tested whether any of the above made any difference on whether people bought into Kristof’s overall point: The United States should intervene in Darfur. First, an index using three items (such as “The United States

should intervene in Darfur”) was created, with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .64 (M=5.4; SD=.96). A regression analysis was used to predict significant predictors of call to action. (The researcher notes that the level of one’s empathy for the victims depicted in the stories was the best predictor of whether a person wanted the U.S. to intervene in Darfur, explaining some 23 percent of the variance.) The index of Kristof’s credibility was a significant predictor ($\beta=.30$, $p=.00$), as was the index of Kristof’s authority ($\beta=.31$, $p=.00$), with the two together accounting for a third of the variance in A Call To Action ($R=.274$). See Table 2:

Table 2. Predictors of Call to Action: Perception of Kristof’s Authority/Credibility

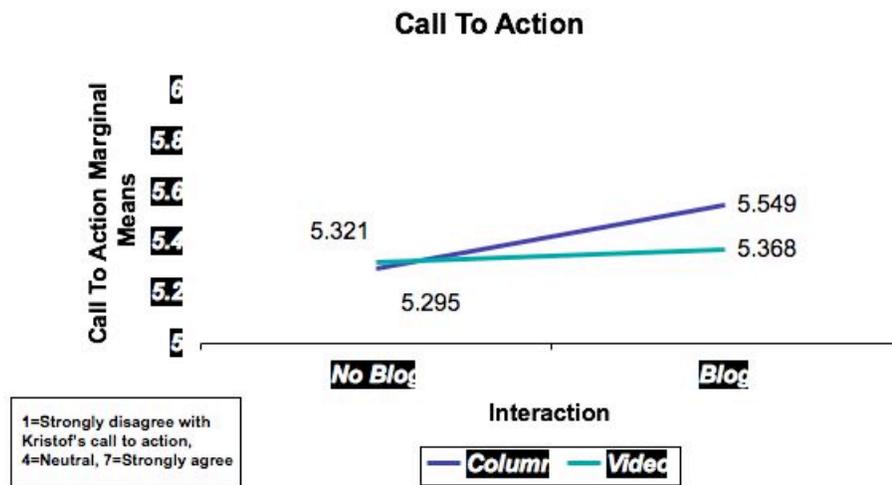
	Kristof’s Authority	Kristof’s Credibility
Call To Action R2	.274	
Call To Action β	.31	.30
Call To Action p	.000	.000

Indeed these two variables alone – the perception of Kristof’s credibility and authority – accounted for nearly a third of the variance of the desire to get involved with Darfur. Thus, both H3a and H3b were supported, confirmed with ANOVAs that showed significant main effects ($F = 5.45$, $p < .000$ for the credibility, and $F = 3.36$, $p < .000$ for authority).

Furthermore, regression analysis showed that, in particular, those people who read the column and then were asked to read and comment upon the blog were significantly

more likely to support Kristof's call to action ($\beta=.88$, $p<.05$), though modality had no significant predictor value on call to action, at least not directly. See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Call To Action Interaction, Modality and Interactivity



The open-ended questions contained some interesting disparities regarding modality, though all support the quantitative data. People in the video conditions placed more emphasis on the surveillance function of Kristof's column (i.e. "He is concerned about the welfare of the people in Darfur and wishes to enlighten his audience to the issues there"). Many of these answers referred to Kristof the journalist in some way, rather than the news of Darfur. Compare this to the text conditions where people were more adamant about taking action (i.e. "The need for the US to be involved in poorer countries affairs [sic]").

When the open-ended data were sifted according to interactivity (blog vs. no blog), the comments revealed different levels of emotion in the responses to the most important information in the Darfur narrative. Very few people used the first-person in either the column-only or video-only condition or felt a personal call to action for Darfur (as Kristof desired). Yet, those who were required to comment employed the use of “we,” “I” and “me” much more frequently, as in “We must do something to stop the situation in Darfur!” In addition, those people who blogged personalized their responses to the open-ended questions as well: “...that is exactly what I would do with my journalism degree if I could,” “I’ve followed Kristof for a number of years...” and “I have seen situations that don’t measure up to genocide but are still pretty terrible.” They also laced their comments in a much more emotive way, “I found all their stories credible which makes me sad because I wish I couldn’t believe that people could be so inhumane,” wrote one person who read the column and then commented on the blog. The implications of this and the other findings are explicated in the next section.

Discussion

This research yielded a number of interesting findings for journalists as they refine their online products and shift their missions for their journalism. The main findings indicate that statistically, people perceive Kristof as being credible whether or not they read his column, comment on his blog, or watch his video. However, those who saw Kristof in his videos about Darfur found the news sources to be more credible than the author – often to the detriment of Kristof’s reputation – compared to those who read the column. Furthermore, significant main effects were found in relation to the audience’s perception of Kristof’s authority to tell this story: People who read the column (especially

those who commented on his blog) found Kristof to embody much more authority than those who watched him in the video. Finally, those who found Kristof to be credible and authoritative (i.e. those who read his column and commented on his blog) were much more likely to accept his overall point – that the United States should intervene in Darfur.

One sub-finding revealed that people who commented on Kristof's blog tended to answer the open-ended questions by employing more emotive language, using the first person, and referring to their own experience -- in other words, relating this foreign news to their own worlds. And, these same people tended to feel more strongly that the United States should intervene in Darfur.

Thus, the data indicate that journalists should not discount the power of constructing a written narrative in building their authority to tell the story. Adding multimedia such as a video might not enhance that authority as much as a journalist might hope (though this is not to say that a video doesn't contribute to the narrative in other ways – fodder for another paper). In addition, writing a blog and asking readers to contribute does nothing to enhance either authority of the author or increase the sense that the associated news story is credible. In fact, individuals consuming both the video and the blog seemed to develop a more negative opinion of the journalist in this situation, according to the open-ended question responses. This contradicts what journalists have reported they want the multimedia and interactive features to achieve online (Robinson 2007).

It could be that people who read the text become immersed in the news story, as Smith and Wilson (2000) found with the children reading crime news. These findings indicated that column readers seem to think of Kristof -- who writes first-person but is

not generally participating in the story -- as a narrator rather than as a character. In this sense, people who read Kristof consider him to be an omniscient being telling the story as a principled activist; this was supported by the comments to the open-ended questions of the column-only condition. In contrast, people who watch Kristof interviewing his sources and witness him running all over the Sudan as his voiceovers narrate the victims' tales have more of an opportunity to consider Kristof as a person and a reporter, and thus, to judge him accordingly (and more harshly, it seems). This would indicate a certain level of channel credibility distinction. Still, it's surprising that people who witnessed the newsgathering or read Kristof's accounts of that newsgathering in the blog wouldn't find the content more credible, even if they didn't like him because of the video. Also, it's not clear whether this means that people who find the characters more credible than the author also find those characters more authoritative. This needs to be measured in other experiments – with different reporters and news accounts – to check on the findings' reliability.

In addition, if people who read the column consider Kristof to be more authoritative, and the people who find Kristof more authoritative buy into his call to action, then these findings suggest that a columnist might continue to put as much effort into writing. This might also have implications for public relations and others practicing strategic communication. This supports what other researchers have found in that if communicators want to enhance people's perception of their power and credibility, they should add content that people must interact with (Kioussis, 2006). But these results advance prior scholarship by indicating that multimedia alone – despite its promise – will

not only *not* augment the producer's reputation, but might also undercut it. Of course, this depends in part on the on-camera skills and persona of the print reporter.

Finally, the open-ended questions yielded one more fascinating dichotomy between the blog and no-blog conditions. It appears that people who commented on Kristof's blog feel a more personal, emotive connection to this foreign news story than those who did not have to comment. This might offer at least a partial answer to the oft-lamented dilemma of journalists: do they give people what they should know about or give them "news they can use." By making people participate, journalists might help people find a connection with otherwise seemingly distant or irrelevant events, inspiring global action or invigorating democracy. This could be overstating the finding, but there is potential significance to be further explored.

This research entailed a number of limitations. Included in these limitations were the sample and sample size. Though the use of college students allowed for a homogenous population, such a sample makes it difficult to generalize across the varied and eclectic population of *New York Times* readers, Kristof's fans, blog commentators, and online video watchers. Secondly, the experiment did not allow people to review the text, videos, or blogs while they were answering the questions. Thus, recall (or, rather, inability to remember specific characters, for example) may have biased some of their answers. In real life, people would have been able to refer back to the stories. Thirdly, the choice of Kristof affected the perceptions of credibility and authority, as evidenced by the answers to the open-ended questions. Ideally, this research should be replicated using at least two other narratives from other, perhaps less well-known, newspapers and about less familiar news stories. And finally, the operationalization of both multimedia and

interactivity is limiting. Multimedia could have also entailed slideshows, photo galleries, and animated graphics. Interactivity can be exercised in a myriad of ways online, including databases, graphics, polls, and the like. Forcing people to comment on the blog does not reflect the 'real world' where the vast majority of people might skip that step. However, video is certainly a popular medium for journalists, and people are becoming more accustomed to adding their voices to the journalistic product.

Yet this research does offer a dual qualitative-quantitative approach that some researchers have demanded as being necessary when studying online material (such as Kiouisis, 2006). These findings suggest that journalists might want to rethink their mission online, if their current intentions are not really manifesting themselves. Journalists may be undermining their efforts to retain authority in this new information world. Ultimately, this has implications for what journalists are trying to say, how they say it, and the reception those messages may be having from audiences.

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Appendix

The following items were used to measure authority and credibility via a 7-point agreement scale:

- Kristof seems to be an authority on this topic.
- I am confident that Kristof is an appropriate person to tell this story.
- The people of Darfur know what is best for them.
- Kristof has made me want to help the Sudanese.
- Kristof's plea to help the Sudanese seems contrived.
- I think someone else could have told this story better than Kristof.
- I would recommend this news story as it is composed to a friend.
- These news stories could have been presented much better.
- I strongly dislike Kristof.
- I think of Kristof as a teacher or guide.
- Kristof is a good representative for the United States.
- Kristof made me rethink my position on Darfur.
- I feel as if I played a role, or contributed in some way, in these stories.
- These news stories made me feel powerless.
- The individuals in these stories seem powerless.
- I felt as if Kristof was talking at (rather than to) me.
- I felt as if I were part of a conversation.
- I had no voice in these stories.
- I felt a sense of empowerment after these news stories.
- Kristof seemed the most active person in the stories.
- Kristof plays an important role in the events of the story.
- The individuals in these stories seem passive.
- The individuals made me want to help them.
- The individuals in these stories seem authentic.
- The facts presented seem true.
- I trust that Kristof's information is accurate.
- Kristof seems to be self promoting.
- I feel more informed about the events going on in Darfur.
- Kristof appears to be an expert on Darfur.
- Kristof is exaggerating in his reporting.
- I wonder whether these facts really happened as Kristof is presenting them.
- I still do not really understand what is going on in Darfur, despite the material given to me.
- I trust that the individuals in these news stories are telling the truth.
- I do not have confidence that the information in here is correct.
- The people relaying information in these stories seem more credible than Kristof.
- The information conveyed seems reliable.
- There were no real 'facts' in these stories.