

HOW GENERATION Z EVALUATES NEWS ACROSS MULTIPLE SCREENS: A FOCUS GROUP STUDY OF NEWS CONSUMPTION AND VERIFICATION PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The advancement of digital technology has changed how Generation Z absorbs, assesses, and verifies news information. Unlike preceding generations, Gen Z uses multiple devices to access the news, such as smartphones, laptops, tablets, television, and social media, producing a multi-dimensional media setting. This research examines Generation Z's methods of assessing news credibility through different screens, and the techniques that they employ for verification. It utilizes qualitative research methodology through conducting focus groups among graduate students aged between 18 and 26 years. Two focus groups with ten respondents each were organized. The analysis employed thematic analysis. The results of the study show that Gen Z's respondents consume news mostly through social media even though they are doubtful about the information available online. The common verification methods applied are cross-checking, assessing the credibility of sources, using fact-checking sites, and debating with peers. Most importantly, factors related to digital literacy, media literacy, and trustworthiness of a specific media outlet indicate major importance when it comes to verification methods.

Keywords: Generation Z, Multiple Screens, News Consumption, News Verification, Media Literacy, Focus Groups, Digital Media

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital revolution has changed how news is disseminated today. Mass media, including newspapers, radio, and television, is no longer the only way to access news. Instead, more news is accessed by people through digital devices as well as through social media networks. The term Generation Z generally refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012 and describes the very first generation that grew up in a fully digitally connected world. The rapid development of

mobile phones, tablets, notebooks, and social media made it possible for people to access information at the same time through different screens. At the same time, the increase of false information, fake news, and altered content poses major obstacles. As the information is spread mainly by social media, it demands new ways of thinking and verifying the data before accepting it as a credible source. Generation Z is said to be technology-wise; however, being digital

savvy does not imply being skilled in news literacy as well. Hence, the understanding of the way Gen Z conducts the evaluation and verification process is necessary to strengthen the level of media literacy and democratic involvement.

However, the growing prevalence of misinformation, fake news, and manipulated content presents serious challenges. As news is increasingly distributed through social media algorithms, users are required to evaluate information critically and engage in verification practices before accepting news as credible.

Generation Z has particularly faced this transformation phenomenon. The audience in this age has personalized its media habits in an environment packed with smartphones, social networks, targeted news feeds, short videos, algorithms, and connections. Prior studies described young people as devoted towards mobility and dependent on a multitude of carrier networks, whereas recent data demonstrate the growth of the role of social networks and video platforms as means of news acquisition among youngsters. The 2026 Digital News Report shows further proof of this phenomenon. Across the globe, social and video networks appear to have become the primary channels of online news, surpassing the news outlets in their own websites.

Generation Z is often considered technologically competent; however, digital competence does not necessarily translate into effective news literacy. Therefore, understanding how Gen Z evaluates and verifies news across multiple screens is essential for strengthening media literacy and democratic participation. This type of movement presents its participants with both possibilities and difficulties. The different screens allow users to access a lot of information and compare several interpretations of a single event. At the same time, the surfing of the internet for lots of information becomes more difficult because the user has to figure out what data can be defined as true, false, incomplete, misleading, or altered. The same story can be told in various ways on different platforms, while the algorithms can emphasize emotional, controversial, or attractive materials. This becomes necessary considering the fact that Generation Z people receive news in the

conditions when professional journalism, amateur content, commentaries, entertainment, advertisements, and political messages are mixed. The post on social media can restate journalistic information, as well as simplify or misinterpret or even twist the original messages. The activities of influencers or content people can also be called news even though the information is given without adhering to the principles of journalism. Credibility is defined by the presence of certain qualities, like correctness, objectivity and honesty, completeness and unbiased character of the reporting, all these have traditionally been linked to news credibility. Based on the classic works, the concept of credibility is a multidimensional property instead of an independent quality. For example, Gaziano and McGrath's research proved that the credibility comprises of various aspects by which an audience assesses information and its credibility to receive or deny any information on. And studies have proved that accuracy and perceived bias are significant dimensions through which an audience measures a credibility.

The study on on-line credibility assessment and criteria have proved more sophisticated when an on-line user needs not just to evaluate an organization, but also a website, an account, a message, a picture or a video, a hyper link, a poster of the article and so on, the situation and surrounding, which are relevant to certain information, information format, on-line platform and the content.

Verification is one important behavior in this context. Basically, what it refers to is that one person will try to assess whether any information is accurate, real, true or has evidence supported by doing verification on it. In practice, he/she will verify it by searching for another information institution for comparing, searching for a primary report, asking or searching from a primary source, examining the validity of photographs/videos, accessing official websites etc..

Verification doesn't necessarily have to be a completely formal or systematic method of searching for relevant proof, it could be a spontaneous decision and quick judgment.

Online users often make their decisions by using “social and cognitive “ heuristics, rather than systematically “hard work” for every bit of news they come across. These shortcuts that are used are simple, time efficient and sometimes rely on a user’s personal belief – if the reported news confirms one’s beliefs, then users might believe this info faster. For example, a recent work shows young generations have high likelihood to read only headlines and trust visual information faster because of their usage to digital information environment with information overloaded with visual elements and quick changes.

So it comes to a more important topic – how multi-screens affect user's verifying practices? One might assume, more windows can make verification easier - you can just quickly compare what they say on one screen to another. But the flip side, however, is that having more platforms might introduce more conflicting information – one user could get the same news on his computer screen, on her mobile screen, on their table with even more sources but feels even less sure of the information after reviewing the conflicting message sources. In that case, merely opening many windows cannot guarantee a user can successfully differentiate good information from bad one. It depends on how this user perceives and utilizes his own multiple-window browsing habit and the criteria applied for evaluation during using different resources simultaneously.

2. Literature Review

Generation Z and Digital News Consumption

Generation Z is known for its heavy use of technology and social network. Studies have shown that Gen Z people prefer fast, thought-provoking and easy-to-understand formats of news compared to more traditional forms of news reporting. Young people often turn to platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube for information. “Multi-screening” is a term used to indicate the practice of using multiple devices at the same time. Research indicates that young people can watch TV and use their cell phones at the same time or check social media accounts while reading news online.

Multi Screening and News Consumption

News credibility in the era of digital technology
News credibility can be defined as the extent to which the audience believes the information to be true. Traditionally, newspapers and airtime media have been seen as trustworthy sources of information but new trends in digital technology have changed this perception.

Multi screening refers to the simultaneous use of a secondary device, typically a smartphone or tablet, while watching television or engaging with another primary media source. Studies such as Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2015) argue that other screens promote active engagement with political content and increases incidental news exposure. However, scholars such as Wohn & Bowe (2016) caution that second screening can lead to fragmented attention, superficial content processing, and reduced retention. Yet, its potential for enhancing political discourse and community engagement remains significant when mediated by social interaction (Lin & Chiang, 2017).

According to Flanagin and Metzger(2008), perceptions of on-line information credibility vary according to the nature of information type and online medium, meanwhile their study demonstrated that perceived credibility are associated with verification behaviors, experience level, website features and contents, depth of content and so on when analyzing news on-line.

Nee (2019) examined young people's usage of social media as a news source as well as their reaction towards the information in evolving digital context of news reporting. Young users' use of the latest social media channels and their methods of verifying the news was a primary focus of the research. The researcher concludes that young people turn to social media channels which are more visual and conversational for news rather than relying on the traditional news outlets. The findings suggest that methods of verification depend on the age, media context, and social media channels used. Overall, this research provides a useful framework for the current research due to the fact that the research shows that young people's news consumption and

verification are getting increasingly integrated into the social media context.

Fake News and Verification Practices

The factors determining the credibility of a piece of news include: Reputation of the source of information Quality of journalism The proof provided Consistency of the information across the channels The truthfulness of the pictures in various media Social media platforms create avenues for spreading wrong information as this type of media lacks an editor.

Credibility of the News

Credibility of the news is the extent to which people believe how trustworthy, accurate, fair, objective, and dependable news information or news source is. Credibility has many aspects and can be assigned to the source, message, platform, journalist, or company. In the digital era, credibility assessment includes various factors such as reputation of the source, evidence, accuracy of information, design of the resources, completeness, consistency of the information, and perceived bias. Flanagan and Metzger describe that when it comes to online credibility, perception of information as well as features of the online environment may have an impact.

Verification of News

Verification of news is the set of actions performed in order to check whether or not the piece of information is accurate. Such actions may include verifying various resources, searching for the first publications on the topic, checking official resources, checking evidence, and checking different conflicting sources. It is important to note that verification has some relation to credibility perception. According to the previous studies, the existence of link between the experience and credibility perception has been discovered.

Media Literacy and Media Efficacy

Media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content. Media efficacy refers to individuals' confidence in

their ability to understand and assess media information.

Media efficacy can be defined as the individual perception of one's ability to comprehend, interpret and apply media in one's interest. Bandura (2001) writes that the very idea of efficacy influences behavior since it creates motivation and determination in the process of making decisions and overcoming difficulties by using different screens for information. Coming back to the media context, media efficacy is important in understanding how users decode and respond to media messages. According to Koc-Michalska et al, 2018).

Higher levels of media literacy and efficacy improve critical thinking and reduce susceptibility to misinformation.

3. Research Questions

RQ1: How does Generation Z consume news across multiple screens?

RQ2: What criteria does Generation Z use to evaluate news credibility?

RQ3: What factors influence news verification behaviors among Generation Z?

3. Methodology and Measures

The qualitative focus group method was adopted in the present research so as to investigate the consumption, evaluation, and verification of news by members of Generation Z when using several screens to get news items. A focus group of 10 students from the Riphah International University Faisalabad from the department of Media Studies were arranged for this research and the students were informed about the purposes of the study and the goals to be achieved prior to the beginning of the discussion. The students were also informed about the key topics that were to be discussed as well as the questions that would be asked during the session, thus allowing students to consider the subject prior to providing answers to the research questions. All the focus group members were oriented towards the subject of the discussion and were motivated to take part in the research process. The session was characterized by active participation of all 10 members of the group, and

everyone was eager to share their opinions, thoughts, and attitudes concerning the topic. This session turned out to be interactive as the participants were free to express their views not only in response to the questions posed by the researcher but also to share their opinions. The participants' identity was kept anonymous keeping the ethical standards in mind.

The discussion covered numerous different viewpoints about news consumption, credibility evaluation, verification of information, screen usage, and social media exposure. Participants were provided enough time for expressing their positions. The researcher ensured that the discussion kept in line with the purpose of the study and goals of the research. The focus group discussion was recorded with the permission of the participants and later transcribed for analysis. Once the discussion was over, the transcript was reread many times in order to get the data familiar. The analysis procedure involved fetching

certain points out of the responses of the participants and labeling them for further analysis. Similar codes were combined together into larger categories, and similar answers were discovered. The analyst studied the categories in order to determine the major topics in terms of research goals. The process of coding focused on the pattern of news consumption, usage of different screens, views regarding the news credibility and source evaluation.

The final themes were reviewed against the original transcripts to make sure that they accurately represented the participants opinions and perspectives rather than the researcher's assumptions. The qualitative data were therefore analyzed through a systematic process of transcription, familiarization, coding, categorization, theme development, and interpretation, providing an in depth understanding of Generation Z's news evaluation and verification practices.

Table 1 Study Participants (n=10)

Sr#	Participants	Gender	Age
1	Participants 1 (P1)	F	23
2	Participants 2 (P2)	M	22
3	Participants 3 (P3)	F	25
4	Participants 4 (P4)	M	22
5	Participants 5 (P5)	M	25
6	Participants 6 (P6)	F	24
7	Participants 7 (P7)	M	25
8	Participants 8 (P8)	F	26
9	Participants 9 (P9)	M	23
10	Participants 10 (P10)	F	23

Note: Participants' identity was not disclosed, they were kept anonymous.

4. Results and Analysis

This chapter provides the findings and analysis of the focus-group study which explored the consumption, evaluation and verification of news by Gen-Z in multiple screens and digital platforms. The analysis processes the discussion, experiences, perceptions and practices of the participants around the research questions that guide the study, and focuses on aspects of contemporary news consumption. Special focus is paid to where news is found on smartphones, laptops, tablets, and other screens; how they

determine if news is credible and reliable; and how they check news before accepting or sharing it. The findings here are not an examination of how news is consumed, but how Generation Z is an active consumer that compares sources, identifies potentially misleading, fabricated news, and forms judgements about news credibility. The focus-group discussions are analysed thematically and patterns, similarities, differences and significant views of the participants are identified and interpreted against each research question. In turn, the chapter transitions from

participants' news consumption across screens, to assessing the credibility of news and then to verifying news, offering a holistic view of how Generation Z engages with and understands news in a complex digital media landscape

RQ1: How does Generation Z consume news across multiple screens?

The discussion was among of 10 Gen Z participants from Riphah International University Faisalabad. This discussion indicates that multiple or alternate screening is a regular and routine source of information for the participants. According to the participants 1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9 now multiscreen or alternative media is no more a second screen. Additionally, mostly social media applications such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, X/Twitter, and YouTube were repeatedly mentioned as important platforms for obtaining information. Participants did not describe these platforms merely as entertainment spaces rather, they used them for news, education, politics, social issues, and follow-up information.

Participant 1 identified Instagram as a preferred platform when I use my smart mobile , while Participant 9 reported using TikTok because it provides videos and information that may not appear on television news. Participant 6 preferred Twitter/X because of the perceived presence of official accounts and authentic information.

"I use Twitter because the ratio of authentic news material is higher there, suggesting it is more authentic"(P4).

The first research question examined how participants use various screens to access news. The focus group discussion showed that Generation Z's news consumption methods are characterized by digital, mobile, flexible, and cross-platform features. Multi-Screen News Consumption Participants admitted that smartphones work as an essential and convenient screen for news consumption. They let the respondents meet the news at once through social media feeds, notifications, search engines, or news apps. At the same time, the discussion also revealed that Generation Z does not use smartphones exclusively. Social media was

identified as a significant factor in the initial exposure of news. News is often encountered when participants are not specifically looking for it, as they may be engaged in social media for entertainment or communication purposes. This confirms that the younger audience mostly receives news through indirect or "side-door" methods.

RQ2: What criteria does Generation Z use to evaluate news credibility?

The focus group does not directly measure participants repeatedly discussed behaviors that reflect their perceived ability to evaluate, compare, verify and judge media content.

P4 explained that information on Facebook can be examined through posts, comments, groups, and other evidence to determine whether a story represents actual news, agenda-setting, or a rumor. P 5 ,6,7,8 10 stated that using multiple platforms provides different opinions, allowing users to compare conflicting accounts and reach a better understanding of the truth.

"We get different opinions. Like, if we are using Facebook, there might be one opinion, while on Instagram, we might find a different".(P7)

The results show that Generation Z assesses news trustworthiness by combining several criteria, namely the source, the content, and the context. This supports the idea that credibility is multidimensional. Research shows that the audience assesses news based on its honesty, objectivity, and balance rather than only on whether news is credible. The significance placed on the source reputation indicates that, even in the fragmented digital environment, the issue of institutional identity remains relevant. Young people may come across news through social networks, but it does not mean that they disregard the identity of the news provider. The research on headings is important in light of platform-oriented news. The competition for the audience in social media is very intense; headlines, pictures, and clips affect whether the user will stop scrolling. Evidence of the participants' mistrust towards exaggerated headlines shows that young people understand that digital content may be aimed at attracting attention rather than just delivering the

information.

RQ3: What factors influence news verification behaviors among Generation Z?

Several interconnected factors emerged. According to all Participants Information diversity explained that multi screens allow multiple types of content to be accessed from one platform. P1 to 10 contrasted television with Instagram and Facebook, explaining that television provides a more restricted news experience, whereas social media provides comedy, dramas, movies, information and political debates within the same environment.

“The shift from second screening toward alternative media use with the accessibility of smartphones, dissatisfaction with mainstream media, exposure to diverse viewpoints, and the interactive nature of digital platforms” (P5).

The outcomes of RQ3 suggest that verification does not occur automatically for all news. Generation Z seems to make selective choices

regarding the necessity for verification. Such a finding is significant, considering how difficult it is for users to verify every piece of information they find online with the amount of information available on the Internet.

The significance of the particular piece of information becomes one of the major accompanying factors. For example, the participants might not spend considerable effort on verifying routine information, at the same time, the politically important or controversial information might lead to additional checking.

Familiarity with the source of information plays an equally significant role. Being familiar with the source can serve as a shortcut for many users as it allows for instant credibility appraisal of the information. However, previous studies indicate that knowing the source does not guarantee the credibility of each and every message provided by that source.

Table 2 Summary of Qualitative findings

RQ	Major Theme	Categories	Summary of Qualitative findings	Participant Evidence
RQ1	Multi Screen News Consumption patterns, Social Media as a News Gateway	Smartphone usage ,social media platforms ,laptops, television ,switching multi screen and instant news access	Participants reported that they engage with news through multiple screens, particularly smartphones, social media platforms, television, and laptops. Smartphones and social media were commonly described as convenient sources for immediate news exposure, while other screens were used for detailed information, confirmation, or follow-up. Participants frequently moved between platforms depending on the type and importance of the news.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
RQ2	Cross checking information	Reputation of news source; recognized news organizations; journalist credibility; source identity	Participants considered the credibility and reputation of the source when deciding whether news was trustworthy. Recognized news organizations and identifiable sources were generally viewed as more reliable than unknown social media accounts or unverified posts.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10

			Comparing sources; multiple reports; Google/search engines; official sources; confirmation Participants emphasized the importance of checking information through more than one source. When news appeared doubtful, controversial, or important, participants reported comparing different reports before accepting or sharing the information. Cross-checking therefore emerged as an important verification practice among participants.	
RQ3	Reliability of information through multiple sources	Comparing sources; multiple reports; Google/search engines; official sources; confirmation	The credibility of source material was key to participants' assessments of the credibility of news. Established news agencies and recognizable sources were more likely to be regarded as trustworthy than anonymous social media profiles or unverified articles. Checking multiple sources; comparing reports; use of Google; official information; and verification. Participants stressed the need for verification through multiple sources. In instances when information was perceived as doubtful, controversial, or significant, participants stated that they would compare multiple reports confirming or rejecting the information.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10

5. Discussion:

The qualitative findings that emerged from conducting the focus group study made it clear that the Generation Z cohort is embedded in a multi-screen news environment characterized by digital communication.

The data that emerged as a result of RQ1 confirmed that smartphones and online social media are key media for acquiring information. This is consistent with what was proposed by Newman et al. (2023) who pointed out the reliance of digital natives on the mobile-first environment. The participating individuals mentioned that they encountered the news incidentally while scrolling their social media feed, which is consistent with the concept of

"news finds me" suggested by Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2017). Hence, this implies that new consumption is no longer conscious and is now algorithm based and embedded in one's digital life.

The results show that news consumption for Gen Z is shifting towards multi-screen and multi-platform consumption, meaning that they are not using a single platform or screen to consume news. The use of the smartphone and social media outlets was mostly for immediate information about news; television and laptop were used more for more detailed information, follow-up, or confirmation. This trend mirrors the evolving media landscape in Pakistan, where

smartphones play a significant role in accessing the news for young and tech-savvy users. Social media can also be a way for people to come across breaking news almost immediately before they actively look for it on traditional news organizations. But the movement of the participants from screen to screen indicates that convenience doesn't necessarily mean absolute dependence on social media. Rather, the various screens seem to be playing different roles in the news-consuming experience. Smartphones and social media enable awareness quickly, and television, laptops, search engines, and more enable further investigation and confirmation. Therefore, the news consumption among Pak Pakistani generation Z can be deciphered as a multi-platform phenomenon where users switch platforms depending on the urgency, relevance and authenticity of the news.

RQ2 conclude that the corresponds to the findings of Tandoc) et al (2018), who argued that audiences are now paying attention to the combinations of both institutional trust and platform-based signals. Participants also showed mistrust toward sensationalist headlines and clickbait and became more aware of misinformation strategies. According to Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), it can be concluded that emotional and misleading content leads to the reduction of credibility in the eyes of the audience.

This finding is particularly important in the context of the Pakistani media as the country has undergone a significant shift from traditional television and newspaper print media to digitally mediated and socially shared news. News is increasingly being consumed by the young Pakistani audiences through media that offer a space where there is a mix of professional journalism, citizen news, political opinion, influencers and unverified information. Therefore, when participants come across news on social media platforms, they do not automatically believe it to be true. The focus-group discussions indicate that there are two phases in the news consumption process—exposure and acceptance. The participants may be introduced to a news story via a social media

post or a Smartphone notification but then switch to a different platform or source if they feel the information is significant or ambiguous. This multi-screen movement is a type of active news engagement where audiences navigate through various media settings to help them gain a better understanding of an event.

In terms of RQ3, verification behavior can be affected by various aspects, such as the reputation of the source, social influences, and the ambiguity of content. There were opportunities for participants to cross-check the information across different platforms because of providing them with headlines associated with political and controversial news. This information complies with the statement by Vosoughi et al. (2018) saying that fake information spreads faster than true information and people's reactions to it, which forced them to develop verification habits. At the same time, the influence of peers and selection of influencer-driven content are also seen to be important in making verification decisions.

The results also show that the source credibility and reputation plays a significant role in the assessment of news by Generation Z in Pakistan. Throughout the sessions, participants were able to tell the difference between known and recognised news sources and between anonymous posts on social media and unknown news sources. Participants tended to see recognised news sources as more trustworthy because they were seen as having a professional nature, identifiable institutional identity, and accountability. On the other hand, anonymous posts and accounts received more doubts. This is significant as the rise of social media has significantly blurred the lines between professional news producers and regular users as information producers. Many times, in the Pakistani context, when political and social issues are discussed in digital media, one can find conflicting claims on television channels, newspapers, journalists, political figures, influencers and common people with the same environment. This is important because participants' focus on the reputation of the source indicates that source identity is a heuristic

element in their way of processing information abundance.

Limitation:

This conclusion aligns with the results found by Tandoc et al. (2018), who state that nowadays, it is believed that audiences make use of institutional trust and platform-based signals. Likewise, some participants were doubtful about eye-catching headlines and clickbait and thus showed some awareness of misinformation methods. Likewise, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) note that emotional and misleading content undermines the credibility of the message among digital audiences. Even though useful results were obtained, the study has its disadvantages. First, the number of participants was limited to 10 persons from Generation Z which makes it difficult to generalize the results.

The analysis is limited in several ways. The first limitation is that the focus group comprised only a limited number of participants and, thus, the conclusion should not be generalized statistically to the entire cohort of Generation Z. Second, the participants' statements about their verification activities are based on their self-reported practices, meaning that they may be biased and might over-report how often they verify information. Third, the study is focused on the participants' perceptions, rather than capturing their verification activities in the course of the study. Future studies should incorporate digital diaries, screen-recording techniques, or other experimental approaches to study the verification practices of participants directly.

Next, the research only used focus groups which has social desirability bias where a participant might change his/her answers depending on the rest of the group specially when speaking of sensitive subjects like fake news and politics. Individual interviews would have allowed people to reflect in a more intimate manner. However, on the other hand, it also increased the risk of getting false or misleading information. As a result, the capability of verifying the information becomes more critical.

Conclusion

The current research analyzed the way Generation Z consumes, perceives and verifies news information in the digital world characterized by multiple screens at one's disposal. The results show that the audience is receiving news through smartphones, social media, TVs, computers and other devices. Social media is usually the first point of contact with the news that participants are exposed to, then they would switch to different resources to gather more information. The research also provides evidence that Generation Z assesses news credibility based on different factors like the reputation of the source, fact-checking, supporting material, characteristics of headlines, bias and clarity checking among others. All these indicators determine whether participants trust the news they receive and if they need verification. Verification actions are influenced by such factors as the source of the message, significance of the news in question, sensationalism, conflicting information, political implications of the story, social pressure, media literacy level, and self-trust in verification abilities. Therefore, verification behavior depends on the situation.

Thus, while multi-screen settings offer some threats, they give young people more options for fact checking at the same time. The key issue is finding out whether young people have the willingness, knowledge and self-confidence to put these opportunities to maximum good use. This research comes to the conclusion that to really understand Gen-Zers and their ways of getting news, it is necessary to stop thinking about how young people get news and start asking the questions about how they evaluate the news they receive, when they become doubtful, and what they do in order to verify the credibility of the information.

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