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SURFACE

Perceived Cultural Proximity and Perceived News Source Credibility in Puerto Rico

Camila Espina

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between interaction with the United States, perceived cultural proximity between Puerto Rican and American culture, and perceived source credibility of American news media. Existing literature on media credibility, cultural proximity, and acculturation was used to design an online survey. The sample of this study consists of three hundred and seventy two Puerto Ricans that resided in Puerto Rico at the time of data collection (N=372).

Data analysis procedures involved paired samples t-test as well as Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. The current study yielded three key findings. The first finding demonstrates that respondents perceive American news media as more credible than national news sources. Second, there is a relationship between levels of interaction with the United States and perceived credibility of American news media. Finally, there is also a relationship between perceived similarities between the Puerto Rican and American culture, and perceived credibility of American news media.

The main implication of the current study suggests that additional influential factors might emerge when exploring credibility perceptions from a broader scope or cross-national perspective. These factors are inherently intertwined to the political economic context of the nations in question. Further, the findings of this study imply that these factors may be of more significance than perceived source-receiver similarities during credibility evaluations.

PERCEIVED CULTURAL PROXIMITY AND PERCEIVED NEWS SOURCE
CREDIBILITY IN PUERTO RICO

By

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THESIS

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Introduction

Trust in media is of upmost importance. The government, news organizations, and other institutions use mass media as the means to inform and communicate with people. Moreover, people rely on media to provide information they are unable to gather for themselves, knowledge that is crucial for their successful function in democratic society (Ball-Rokeach, Power, Guthrie, Waring, 1990). The trustworthiness and believability of media has traditionally pertained to credibility research (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Interests in this area of study emerged during World War II and flourished throughout the following decades (Self, 1996). The onset of the Internet and ensuing sophistication of digital media platforms have rekindled concern for understanding the underlying factors that prompt trust or believability of information (Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, McCann, 2003).

Early interests in what makes a communicator credible are attributed to Aristotle (Delia, 1976; McCroskey & Teven, 1999), who claimed that the effectiveness of communication depends on the character of the speaker (ethos). Recent research in credibility illustrates that there is more to the concept than persuasion (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953); specifically, credibility has been linked with behavioral intentions regarding health-related decisions (Hu & Sundar, 2010), as well as voting intention (Yoon, Pinkleton & Ko, 2005). Presently, there are three dimensions in credibility research: medium, message, and source (Stamm & Dube, 1994).

Contemporary research regarding credibility takes a lot of elements into consideration when exploring the factors that contribute to higher credibility perceptions. Of specific importance to this project is the approach that understands credibility as a situational variable that stems from issues and group identification (Gunther, 1992). In other words, credibility is not an inherent message, medium, or source attribute, but an audience perception that

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depends on other elements outside of the content itself. Apart from group identification, previous research has also found that source-receiver similarity plays an important role in credibility perceptions (Atkinson, Brady, Casas, 1981; Hovland et al., 1953; Simons, Berkowitz & Moyer, 1970; Wang, Walther, Pingree & Hawkins, 2008; Wright, 2000).

Source-receiver similarity, for the most part explored in psychology research, goes under different nomenclatures such as 'identification' or 'homophily' (Cronkhite & Liska, 1976). The main idea behind the homophily principle is that sociodemographic, behavioral and intrapersonal similarities are the underlying factor of network connections (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001). The effects of these social similarities and connections are also explored in the mass communication field. Early research in persuasion operated under the assumption that communicators that are perceived as similar to their audiences are considered more credible, and thus, more likely to persuade (Simons et al., 1970).

Source-receiver similarity has been linked to online health information credibility in websites and discussion groups (Wang et al., 2008), selective exposure to information (Wheeless, 1974), as well as network ties and bonding in computer-mediated distributed teams (Yuan & Gay, 2006). Other recent communication studies have explored the relationship between racial affiliation and perceived credibility of ethnic group news coverage; results suggest that group identification plays an important role in credibility assessments (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005).

Despite the studies that take source-receiver similarity into consideration when measuring mass media credibility, scholars have stressed a pressing need for a cultural theoretical approach (Self, 2009). While homophily scales are used to measure perceived source-receiver similarity on an interpersonal level of analysis, cultural proximity is a construct that could be employed to assess a broader level of source-receiver similarity. Cultural proximity or distance is defined as the extent to which an individual perceives his or

her culture to be similar with another based on factors such as race, ethnicity, language, religion, social values, etc. (Wang, 2009). However, it is also conceptualized as a predilection for media content that is culturally similar (Pool 1977; Straubhaar, 1991, 2003).

Previous research in transnational mass communications has explored the relationship between cultural proximity and media use. In fact, a particular study exploring the reception analysis of local Ecuadorian versus U.S. imported media found that cultural proximity is a strong indicator of media preference (Davis, 2003). However, cross-cultural studies that have explored the influences of foreign media in different countries have not considered the inherent dynamic between local and foreign entities in a context where one country is politically and culturally tied to the country of imported media content. As such, this study aims to conciliate the gap in the literature by exploring the role of perceived cultural similarity in credibility assessments of local and imported news media in this unique context.

The U.S. currently maintains a complex political relationship with one of its unincorporated territories, Puerto Rico. Once a province of Spain, Puerto Rico was ceded to the U.S. as part of the 1898 Treaty of Paris, immediately following the Spanish-American War (Trías Monge, 1997). Since then, Puerto Ricans were granted American citizenship in 1917, and adopted Commonwealth status in 1952 (Trías Monge, 1997). Puerto Rico's current political status lacks sovereignty and independence, as most social, economical and governmental institutions fall under federal regulation (thefreedictionary.com, 2013).

American influence and culture are ubiquitous in Puerto Rico. Since the 1898 invasion, the United States has established federal, military, and entrepreneurial ventures that have become part of the Puerto Rican reality (Dietz, 1979). In addition, the bilateral flow of people between the Island and the United States mainland further adds to the constant reconfiguration of Puerto Rican cultural identity (Duany, 2003). These particular political, economic and cultural circumstances make media credibility assessments in Puerto Rico an

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interesting example that warrants study, as the dynamics and outcomes could apply to other countries in similar predicaments.

Purpose Statement

Previous research has demonstrated a relationship between source-receiver similarity and media credibility (e.g. Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Wang et al., 2008;). Meanwhile, cultural proximity plays a role in media use and predilection (Davis, 2003; Straubhaar, 2003). In light of this, it is legitimate to propose a connection between perceived cultural proximity and credibility assessments of foreign news media sources, meaning that audiences will rate news sources similar to themselves as more credible than foreign sources.

Although a number of cross-cultural studies have explored the influence of foreign media in different countries (Beadle, 2003; Chang, Himelboim & Dong, 2009; Davis, 2003; Payne, 2003; Thussu, 2007; Zaharopoulos, 2003), their focus has been on entertainment media in other European, Asian and Latin American countries that are not politically tied to the country from where the content is imported. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between perceived cultural proximity and source credibility assessments, specifically focusing on national and foreign news media. The study will employ a survey to compare perceived credibility of Puerto Rican and American news sources, with the hope of answering the following question: What is the relationship between perceived cultural proximity and perceived source credibility regarding local and foreign news media?

Justification

As previously mentioned, this study aims to add knowledge to the existing literature regarding media credibility research. To date, one of the most prevalent considerations for future studies in this particular area of research urges scholars to explore media credibility

using diverse populations, and to incorporate a cultural theoretical approach (Self, 2009). While developing a cultural theoretical approach to the study of credibility is out of the scope of this project, the results of this study can serve as an adequate starting point for this endeavor.

Hispanic Americans are the largest minority group in the United States – the estimated number of the Hispanic population is 52 million as of 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). While this population has different origins and backgrounds (i.e., Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban, etc.), the results of this study can help further describe the factors that influence media credibility. Understanding the relationship between media and culture is of considerable importance to a country with such a large community of ethnically and culturally diverse citizens. In addition, this study will make a contribution to cross-cultural and critical cultural studies.

The following chapter reviews the literature pertaining to media credibility, source credibility, source-receiver similarity, and cultural proximity. Previous research is examined in order to adequately design a research instrument for this study. Chapter three includes the definition of survey, the method chosen for this project, and a detailed summary of previous source credibility scales and measurements. Further, the method chapter includes the operational definition of the independent and dependent variables, as well as the statistical procedures to be used for analysis. Chapter four outlines the survey results. Finally, chapter five involves the discussion, theoretical and practical implications, study limitations, as well as considerations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There are four areas of research that are examined in this section. First, media credibility research is cited to illustrate the different findings that shape how contemporary mass communication scholars approach the study of medium and message credibility. It is followed by a thorough literature review of source credibility, the main focus of this project. Then, research concerning source-receiver similarity is presented to exemplify how this particular audience characteristic influences credibility perceptions. Finally, studies that have explored the role of cultural proximity are cited to support and suggest the premise that cultural similarities are intrinsically tied to media use, predilection, and especially in the context of this particular study, credibility.

Media credibility

As a construct, media credibility lacks an established definition across the literature, as well as a sound theoretical foundation. However, scholars have reached a general consensus regarding the complex multidimensional nature of credibility (Berlo, Lemert & Mertz, 1970; Burns Melican & Dixon, 2008; Hu & Sundar, 2010; Kiousis, 2001; Kohring & Matthes, 2007; Self, 2009). The underlying structure of credibility dates back to the Aristotelian conceptualization of ethos, which depends on the intelligence, character and good will of the communicator (Delia, 1976).

The first credibility empirical studies explored the characteristics of a communicator that prompt audience's acceptance or rejection of messages, as well as attitude modification (Cronkhite & Liska, 1976).

The general idea of the extent to which an individual perceives a source of information, message or medium as believable has been labeled as credibility or trust in media. In turn, most of the trust or credibility conceptualizations hinge on the operational definition of the construct. The Yale Communication Research group defined credibility by

the trustworthiness and expertise of the communicator (Hovland et al., 1953). Other dimensions commonly associated with credibility include authoritativeness and character (McCroskey, 1966), competence (Bowers & Phillips, 1967), reliability, intentions, dynamism and personal attraction (Giffin, 1967), professionalism and objectivity (Whitehead, 1968), as well as safety and qualification (Berlo, Lemert & Mertz, 1969).

Contemporary definitions of credibility include a combination of "believability, trust, perceived reliability, and dozens of other concepts and combinations of them" (Self, 2009, p.435). Emerging online information sources have rekindled academic interest in the process by which audiences evaluate information as credible or not (Metzger et al., 2003). Despite the myriad dimensions, definitions and conceptualizations of media credibility, there are five indicators that consistently emerge in the literature (Kiousis, 2001). These indicators point to perceived accuracy, financial motivation, people's privacy, public's best interest and trustworthiness of media.

There are three themes in the media credibility literature that focus on the presumed reasons that underlie the believability of information (Self, 2009). The first dimension focuses on the message source, which can be understood as an individual communicator, speaker or media organization (Golan, 2010). Another approach to credibility research concentrates on the medium – many studies have explored how credibility perceptions shift by different media platforms such as radio, television, newspapers and the Internet (Erksine, 1970-1971; Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001). The third dimension of media credibility research deals with the message itself, namely the structural and technological cues that point to content accuracy and veracity (Metzger et al., 2003). This section highlights the main findings of medium and message credibility.

Early cross media credibility research that began to incorporate the Internet and digital sources into the comparison found that online media tended to be perceived as more

credible than their traditional counterparts (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). An online survey of politically interested Web users found that online newspapers, magazines, candidate literature as well as political issue-oriented sources were considered more credible than their print counterparts. Another important finding from the Johnson and Kaye (1998) study highlights the role of media reliance in credibility perceptions, meaning that credibility is related to the extent to which people depend on a particular media source to obtain news.

More than a decade later, Johnson and Kaye (2010) published a longitudinal credibility study that focused on the 1996, 2000 and 2004 presidential election period. Online media was pitted against their print versions, but this time television and radio news were also explored. Results suggest that online and traditional media were evaluated somewhat similarly in 2000, but in the 2004 campaign online issue sources were the most credible and online broadcast TV news the least. Once again, media reliance was found to be important in credibility assessments. Johnson and Kaye (2010) suggest that as people become savvier Internet users, they are better equipped to ascertain online content accuracy and veracity.

A growing area of recent media credibility studies focuses on how credibility perceptions vary between different online media (Metzger et al., 2003). Burns Melican and Dixon (2008) conducted an online survey to assess credibility perceptions of traditional and nontraditional online news media. Traditional online news media were defined as the online websites of traditional media (i.e., cnn.com), whereas nontraditional Internet sources were understood as those that do not have counterparts in television or print and may not adhere to the same editorial practices and standards as traditional news media. Results suggest that people perceive traditional online news media as more credible than nontraditional sources. These findings are congruent with the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism's (2012) assertion of the growing allure of traditional news brands in the contemporary online media landscape.

With the emergence of different types of websites that provide users the opportunity to become active content creators, scholars have started to explore credibility assessments of these new types of online platforms, specifically blogs and social media. Johnson and Kaye (2008) conducted an online survey of politically interested blog users to explore how blogs compared to other online and traditional media in terms of credibility. Results suggest that blog users consider blogs as more credible than other online or traditional media sources. However, other studies that have explored information across digital platforms have found contradicting results.

A study conducted by Schmierbach and Oeldorf-Hirsch (2012) explored how the same information was judged across different digital platforms. Respondents in the study had to evaluate the credibility of a news story presented in one of three conditions: the long form, the complete article in the New York Times webpage; the short form, which includes the first paragraph of the article with a 'read story' link at the bottom; and a tweet about the news story from the official New York Times Twitter – a popular social media microblogging platform. Schmierbach and Oeldorf-Hirsch (2012) consistently demonstrated low source credibility assessments for the Twitter condition. These results highlight the complex process of online credibility perceptions, even for the same information coming from the same source.

The second perspective in media credibility research pertains to the extent audiences believe a message (Roberts, 2010). This approach focuses on message attributes and characteristics that influence the audience's perception of content or information's believabilit. According to the literature, the main dimensions of message features that underlie credibility include structure, content and delivery. In turn, these dimensions have been studied focusing on the organization of the content; information quality, language intensity and message discrepancy; as well as presentation style, respectively (Metzger et al.,

2003). With increasing access to all sorts of information on the Internet, message credibility gains considerable importance when dealing with content that lacks source attributions and veracity, especially concerning health information (Eastin, 2001; Hu & Sundar, 2010).

Studies regarding website content credibility have focused on the different elements, structures and features that might influence credibility assessments (Burkell, 2004; Hong, 2006; Rains & Donnerstein Karmikel, 2008). The Rains and Donnerstein Karmikel (2008) study found two important results. The first finding highlights a relationship between message characteristics, such as statistics and external references, and high website credibility assessments. The second result suggests that structural features of a website, like third-party endorsements and privacy policy statements, also play an important role in website credibility evaluations. While the credibility literature (see Metzger et al., 2003; Self, 2009) highlights three themes within the research, the lines separating each area overlap at times. Distinguishing between medium, source and message becomes increasingly difficult with online information.

The main takeaways of recent medium and message credibility studies point to several trends that illustrate people's relationship with media in the contemporary evolving landscape. First, people perceive different media platforms in various ways – a printed newspaper is not the same as its digital version, and credibility assessments vary accordingly (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001). Other factors affect these evaluations too, namely the extent to which people rely on these different media to obtain news (Johnson & Kaye, 2010), as well as the structural features of the platforms that underlie higher credibility perceptions (Burkell, 2004; Hong, 2006; Rains & Donnerstein Karmikel, 2008). However, it is important to stress that the popularity of social media and user-generated content has not diminished the demand for traditional news content associated with organizational and editorial standards (Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2012). In

fact, information originating from the same source may be judged differently depending on the digital platform it is presented in (Schmierbach & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2012). These studies reflect the complexity of credibility assessments, a process influenced by a number of factors that transcend the structural features of media platforms.

Source Credibility

The third theme of media credibility research focuses on the source of the message. In fact, the first media credibility empirical studies explored the influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness (Hovland & Weiss, 1951-1952). These early studies conducted by the Yale Communication Research group measured respondent's attitudes after being exposed to two conditions, a "trustworthy" source and a "untrustworthy" source. Examples of trustworthy sources include the New England Journal of Biology and Medicine, Robert J. Oppenheimer, Bulletin of National Resources Planning Board, and Fortune Magazine. Untrustworthy sources included a mass circulation monthly pictorial magazine, Pravda, a widely syndicated anti-labor "rightist" newspaper columnist, and an extensively syndicated woman movie-gossip columnist. In these studies, the trustworthiness of the source was assumed by the researchers, rather than ascribed by the respondents.

In the following studies, the Hovland group defined and conceptualized source credibility by the implied components of the construct, expertness and trustworthiness of the communicator (Hovland et al., 1953). The suggested characteristics that induce perceived expertness of the communicator include age, position of leadership within a group, and similarity between source-receiver. Likewise, the main characteristic proposed that suggests trust or mistrust towards the source of information depends on the perceived intention to persuade versus intention to inform.

Results of three different source credibility studies (Hovland & Mandell, 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951-1952; Kelman & Hovland, 1953) provide two significant

implications. First, cues of a communicator's intentions, as well as his or her expertness and trustworthiness affect the audience's reaction to a message. Second, audiences judge information provided by high credibility sources more favorably than those emanating from a low credibility source (Hovland et al., 1953). The general bulk of empirical credibility studies following the Hovland group publications made use of semantic-differential as well as Likert-type scales, and factor analyses to identify more dimensions of source credibility (Bowers & Philips, 1967). Noted major studies that employed this approach include McCroskey (1966), Bowers and Phillips (1967), Giffin (1967), Whitehead (1968), as well as Berlo, Lemert and Mertz (1969).

According to Metzger and colleagues (2003), criticisms of the factor analytic approach surfaced when different research findings pointed to inconsistent dimensions and factors of source credibility. Some of these major criticisms include random scale selection, excessive use of semantic differential scales, "incestuous" factor naming, the statistical procedures used, and "the abandonment of a straightforward functional definition and conceptualization of credibility" (Cronkhite & Liska, 1976, p.104). Despite these criticisms, proceeding studies still employed the factor analytic approach to the measurement of credibility. Consistency in media credibility research ensued after the development of broader scales in the 1980s, some of which are still currently employed because of proven internal and external validity (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Kiousis, 2001; Metzger et al., 2003; Meyer, 1988; Roberts, 2010).

With increasing access to vast information sources available through the Internet, contemporary credibility studies explore how audiences sift through content and assess credibility when the source of the information may be hard to ascertain. In order to better approach this emerging area of study, Sundar and Nass (2001) developed a typology of online media sources. The typology includes three categories: visible sources, technological

sources, and receiver sources. Visible sources are understood as the direct, easy to distinguish, origin of information (i.e., gatekeepers or reporters). Technological sources are the physical media from which the receiver perceives the information, like television sets or computers. The final category, the receiver as source, highlights the process by which audiences play an active role in selecting the content they consume (Sundar & Nass, 2001). An adequate example for receivers as sources is content curators; while they do not create content, they distinguish which content is worth consuming.

Several years later, Hu and Sundar (2010) expanded the Sundar and Nass (2001) digital media source typology. Said study evaluated the effects of different types of sources on credibility perceptions and behavioral intentions regarding online health information. Five different types of online information sources were examined, web sites, bulletin boards, blogs, personal home pages and the Internet. Results from the online experiment suggest that information from websites is more likely to affect behavioral intentions than other sources. Further, Hu and Sundar (2010) distinguish information completeness as a mediating factor in this effect. The typology was expanded to address the collective versus individual gatekeeping processes in visible sources. This distinction accounts for differences in perceived credibility as well as behavioral intentions.

In an effort to understand the implication of anonymity in computer-mediated group communication, Rains (2007) conducted an online experiment using an electronic meeting system. The study incorporated anonymous and identified sources, as well as strong and weak arguments. Perceived communicator credibility was measured using three dimensions – competence, trustworthiness and goodwill. The results of the study contend that source anonymity undermines the communicator's perceived credibility. These findings further illustrate the complex nature of credibility assessments in online environments.

As previously mentioned, credibility in social media platforms has been studied using a medium credibility approach (Schmierbach and Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2012). However, this topic has also been explored using a source credibility perspective. For example, Westerman, Spence and Van Der Heide (2012) conducted an online experiment to examine the role of social media system-generated cues on source credibility assessments. This study examined the role of the structural features of Twitter in credibility perceptions, namely the number of followers, the people who subscribe to the information source in the microblogging web site; and the number of follows, the different people the source of information is subscribed to. Results suggest that having too many or hardly any followers negatively affects source credibility judgments (Westerman et al., 2012).

Other aspects of online organizational source credibility assessments involve message presentation as well as the level of coorientation between the sender and receiver (Meyer, Marchionni & Thorson, 2010). In the context of Meyer and colleagues (2010) study, coorientation is understood as the extent to which audiences perceive similarities between themselves and the source of the message. The results of the study highlight that the strongest predictor of message and source credibility is the author's perceived expertise. However, the researchers suggest that the level of coorientation between the audience and source plays an integral role in perceived source expertise.

In light of recent studies exploring credibility in social media (Metzger et al., 2003; Schmierbach & Oeldorf-Hirsch; Westerman et al., 2012), other studies have focused on the cognitive heuristics involved in these evaluations (Metzger, Flanagin & Medders, 2010). Several focus groups revealed a series of emerging themes that illustrate new ways that audiences make sense of content, media and sources. Of special interest is the role of social networks in this process. Respondents in the Metzger and colleagues (2010) study highlighted different strategies for evaluating information from a collective approach: "social

information pooling, social confirmation of personal opinion, enthusiast endorsements, and resource sharing via interpersonal exchange" (p.420). Examples of social information pooling include reading product testimonials and reviews while evaluating whether to purchase something or not. Social confirmation of personal opinion involves searching and connecting with like-minded individuals that share similar beliefs and values. According to the researchers, these shared affinities increase trust and credibility perceptions. Relying on enthusiast endorsements means scouting out "noncredentialed experts who offer guidance via public forums, wikis, blogs, and testimonials" (Metzger et al., 2010, p.424). Finally, resource sharing via interpersonal exchange mainly entails obtaining information from friends and family in social networks.

Source credibility studies have come a long way from the Aristotelian conceptualization of ethos. Early findings illustrate that persuasion and attitude modification are related to the communicator's credibility, in other words his or her trustworthiness and expertness (Hovland et al., 1953; Hovland & Mandell, 1953; Hovland & Weiss, 1951-1952; Kelman & Hovland, 1953). With the emergence and growing accessibility to online information, credibility studies began to focus on this area (Metzger et al., 2003; Self, 2009). In an attempt to discern distinct online sources, communication scholars developed online media sources typologies (Sundar & Nass, 2001; Hu & Sundar, 2010). So far, we know that anonymity (Rains, 2007) and social media system-generated cues (Westerman et al., 2010) play an important role in online source credibility assessments. However, one dimension of source credibility research is of special importance to this study, source-receiver similarity. This section highlighted results from different studies that suggest the significance of this dimension, specifically focusing on coorientation (Meyer et al., 2010) and underlying cognitive heuristic processing of social network information (Metzger et al., 2010). The

following section delves into this topic by illustrating the past and contemporary research in this area as well as how it relates to credibility perceptions.

Source-receiver similarity

The study of perceived similarity and its ensuing effects has been an important area of research in both psychology and communications. There are several approaches that explore the role of perceived similarity during interactions between people. Of special interest for this study are homophily, involvement and identification. This section explores these three perspectives on source-receiver similarity as well as how each of them relates to perceived credibility.

Homophily is generally understood as the extent to which an individual perceives another one as similar (Chaffee, 1982; McCroskey, McCroskey & Richmond, 2006; Wheeless, 1974). These similarities fall into one of two categories: status and value homophily (Kandel, 1966; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; Marx & Spray, 1972). According to the literature, status homophily pertains to the ascribed positions of individuals within groups, whereas value homophily involves perceived value, belief, and attitude affinity. Similarities in race, ethnicity, age, religion, education, occupation and gender function as organizing principles within networks, meaning that people are more likely to interact and connect to those they perceive as similar to themselves based on these dimensions (Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001).

Early persuasive communication research operated under the assumption that sources that are perceived as similar to the audience are more likely to be perceived as experts. This perceived expertise added to the trustworthiness of a communicator, which in turn made him or her more credible (Hovland et al., 1953). Despite this underlying assumption in credibility research, most of the studies following the Hovland group publications that focused on emerging credibility dimensions disregarded this component (Cronkhite & Liska, 1976).

However, years later homophily played an important role in the argument that claimed people's supposed preference for interpersonal over mass media channels for obtaining information (Chaffee, 1982). However, as most communication scholars would conclude, credibility judgments of both information sources and messages are a situational process that takes many elements into consideration (Chaffee, 1982; Delia, 1976; Gunther, 1992; Salmon, 1986; Self, 2009).

In an attempt to provide an empirical basis for a theory addressing source-receiver similarity and credibility, Simons and colleagues (1970) synthesized and incorporated two distinct bodies of research: social attraction and credibility. The main premise of this source-receiver similarity and credibility theory suggests that audiences perceive similar sources as more attractive, respectable, trustworthy, and credible (Simons, Berkowitz & Moyer, 1970). These affinities are understood as attitudinal, pertaining to shared interests, beliefs and feelings; and membership-group similarities, involving shared demography, socioeconomic membership, and language. According to the authors, these similarities can be relevant or irrelevant, and this assessment largely depends on the situational context of the interaction.

Atkinson, Brady and Casas (1981) conducted a study to explore the effect of group membership and attitudinal similarity on perceived counselor credibility. This particular study involved an experiment where participants where asked to judge the expertness, trustworthiness and attractiveness of a counselor after being exposed to one of six conditions of a dyadic counseling session. The counseling sessions dealt with concerns regarding sexual preference. The sessions were the same except for the three sexual preference conditions (i.e., men, women or undisclosed) and stance on gay advocacy. The sample of this study included homosexual men, and the counselor as well as the client were male. The findings sugest participants rated the counselor as more expert, trustworthy and attractive when he stated a

sexual preference for men. These results further illustrate how similarities, in this case gender and sexual preference, play a significant role in credibility perceptions.

With the onset of online computer-mediated platforms, studies began to explore source-receiver similarity assessments and effects in the digital landscape. In order to examine the advantages of online support groups, Wright (2000) conducted a study that focused on social support network size and satisfaction, perceived homophily, as well as perceived source credibility. Participants were recruited from online support groups and an online survey was employed to assess perceived homophily, perceived source credibility, network size and satisfaction, as well as group interaction. Despite the fact that homophily may be difficult to ascertain due to the asynchronous text-based nature of online support groups, the findings of the Wright (2000) study suggest a correlation between perceived homophily dimensions and source credibility in online social support groups.

Despite consistent evidence of the relationship between perceived source-receiver similarity and source credibility assessments, recent homophily research has also explored the effect of intergroup similarities in other areas. For example, Yuan and Gay (2006) conducted a study to examine the role of gender, race, geographic location as well as group assignment similarity on the development of network ties.   Participants were selected from five groups of students from two different institutions that collaborated on a project using a distributed learning support system for a distance-learning course. A survey was employed to assess homophily between participants – based on gender, race, group assignment and location; instrumental and expressive relationships, which involved the task-related and non-task related extent of communication between participants, respectively; as well as bonding and bringing social capital, measured by the within- and across-group connectedness. Results suggest that similarities in group assignment and location had a significant impact on developing network ties, as opposed to race and gender homophily. The findings from the

Yuan and Gay (2006) study further support the premise that some similarities may be more salient in certain situations or contexts.

As previously mentioned, the veracity of online information and its influence on people's behavioral intentions are currently thriving topics in health communications. These studies explore the role of perceived source-receiver homophily in online source credibility assessments (Hu & Sundar, 2010). For example, Wang, Walther, Pingree and Hawkins (2008) conducted an experiment to examine the influence of perceived homophily and credibility of online health information sources on likelihood to act on the advice. Participants were exposed to one of eight experimental stimuli designed for the study, either a website or discussion board that varied by message style and content type. The study also involved a questionnaire designed to measure perceived credibility, perceived homophily, evaluation of health information and likelihood to act on the advice. The findings of the study contend that homophily induced credibility, and was the most influential factor in both websites and discussion boards. The authors conclude, "the role of homophily in information evaluation and utilization has been undervalued in prior research, especially with regard to the impact of homophily on credibility" (Wang et al., 2008, p.365).

Involvement, the second dimension of source-receiver similarity, stems from the social judgment approach. In early communication research, social judgment theory (SJT) was used to describe persuasion, specifically the acceptance or rejection of information (Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Salmon, 1986). SJT addresses the cognitive processes involved in judging information based on previously held attitudes, opinions or stances regarding the topic (Hammond & Stewart, 1975; Sherif, Kelly, Rodgers, Sarup & Tittler, 1973; Wheeless, 1974). The main premise of SJT contends that greater attitude salience translates into greater ego-involvement in a situation; in turn, greater ego-involvement entails increased persuasion difficulty (Salmon, 1986). The literature highlights three conceptual types of self-concepts

that are activated during interactions and ensue in involvement: "(a) their enduring values (*value-relevant involvement*), (b) their ability to attain desirable outcomes (*outcome-relevant involvement*), or (c) the impression they make on others (*impression-relevant involvement*)" (Johnson & Eagly, 1989, p.290).

Attitude and value similarity impact the extent to which people accept or reject messages, however other studies have examined the role of involvement in other areas. For example, Wheeless (1974) conducted an experiment to assess the effects of involvement, credibility and homophily on selective exposure to information. Subjects were asked to participate in a mock survey to assess desirable topic and sources for a communication departmental library. Respondents selected or rejected and left remaining items blank. Further, they answered questions for each topic or source regarding credibility, homophily, and attitude involvement. The results from the study illustrate that perceived source competence, homophily, and attitudinal involvement are the best predictors of selective exposure to information.

Research has also shown that involvement affects the way people perceive media coverage of issues. Vallone, Ross and Lepper (1985) conducted an experiment where pro-Israeli and pro-Arab partisans rated the content and fairness of major American network news television coverage of the Beirut massacre. After being exposed to the stimuli, both groups rated the content as unfairly biased towards their respective group or position. Further, both groups asserted that the media account in question was more likely to persuade neutral viewers to "turn against their side" (Vallone, et al., 1985, p.584) The results of this study illustrate what is known as the hostile media effect, a phenomenon where highly involved partisans perceive media coverage of themselves or the position they advocate as unfairly biased.

As illustrated by the Vallone and colleagues (1985) study, involvement can revolve around issue salience and stance as well as group membership. According to Gunther (1992), group membership is an adequate alternate definition for involvement: "membership in political, religious, ethnic, or other social groups carries with it attitudes, beliefs, and a personal stake in group concerns" (p.152). In order to explore the role of group involvement in media credibility perceptions, Gunther (1992) employed a survey to assess objective media attributes, perceived media attributes, demographic predictors, skepticism toward media, skeptical disposition as well as involvement. The findings of the study supported Gunther's (1992) claim regarding the role of involvement in credibility judgments. Further, the results indicate that group membership prompts the hostile media effect highlighted in the Vallone group (1985) study, leading to distrust in or skeptical outlook of media.

The third component of source-receiver similarity is identification theory, which stems from the early opinion formation and change literature. In an effort to conceptualize all the dimensions involved in persuasion, Kelman (1961) highlights identification as a key factor in the process. According to his theoretical conceptualization, identification occurs when group membership comprises a salient dimension in an individual's self-conception. As to how identification relates to opinion change, Kelman (1961) claims that individuals will adopt behaviors, opinions and stances "derived from another person or group because this behavior is associated with a satisfying self-defining relationship to this person or group" (p.63).

Research has explored the relationship between identification and media credibility. Beaudoin and Thorson (2005) employed a survey to assess news use, perceived news credibility, education, income, gender, age, and ethnicity. The study yielded several results that describe the way groups perceive media coverage about themselves. First, African-Americans and other minorities are more race-conscious than members of the majority. As

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such, media credibility judgments derive from racial cues in the coverage of the groups they identify with. Second, identification is related with lower credibility assessments of the coverage of that specific group, as opposed to coverage of other groups, which are judged as more credible. This finding somewhat reflects the hostile media effect described earlier. Finally, the authors suggest that race is the determining factor in news coverage of ethnic group credibility judgments, namely identification with a specific racial group.

All of these studies present a relationship between credibility and similarity. In communication research there are three areas of study that highlight similarities as influencing factors in credibility judgments: homophily, involvement, and identification. Homophily is an organizing principle that suggests people are more likely to interact and connect with individuals that share racial, ethnic, demographic, attitudinal, and socioeconomic similarities (Marx & Spray, 1972; Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001). Research has found a correlation between homophily and high credibility assessments of sources (Atkinson et al., 1981; Hovland et al., 1953). However, not every type of similarity entails high media or source credibility. Research has shown that strongly held beliefs and attitudes about issues prompt biased perceptions of media content regarding the same topic (Perloff, 1989; Vallone et al., 1985). This attitudinal engagement during interactions is known as involvement, and it stems from social judgment theory (Salmon 1986). Other theoretical conceptualizations of involvement have broadened the definition to include group-membership as a dimension of the engagement between people and media (Gunther, 1992). In turn, perceived group-membership is also part of identification theory. This final dimension of source-receiver similarity contends that self-defining concepts related to group-membership affect opinion formation and change, as well as perceived media credibility (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Kelman, 1961).

Research involving homophily, involvement, and identification has found a relationship between these factors and credibility – sometimes perceived similarities facilitate higher credibility perceptions (Atkinson et al., 1981; Hovland et al., 1953), other instances reflect that highly engaged attitudinal involvement or identification may actually result in distrust towards media (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Gunther, 1992; Kelman, 1961). This project is geared towards understanding the relationship between perceived similarities and interactions with another country and the perceived credibility of its media. While homophily explores perceived similarities, it is bound to an interpersonal level of analysis. Further, involvement and identification address the attitudinal and in-group membership factors that inform the theoretical backdrop of this project, but have not been applied at a broader level of analysis that takes into consideration the sociopolitical ties that underlie the relationship between two countries, and the ensuing media flow between them. In light of this, the present study incorporates a fourth body of research that explores perceived similarities, host-country identification, and media consumption predilections known as cultural proximity. The following section delves into this topic and illustrates how perceived similarities between two cultures affects media use.

Cultural Proximity

As the previous section explained, similarity plays an important role in the relationship between people and media. Similarities can be examined several ways, for example, at an interpersonal level of analysis (i.e., homophily), or as a factor in group-membership dynamics (Gunther, 1992). However, this study is concerned with understanding how similarities at a broader level of analysis may affect source credibility assessments. As such, this project takes cultural proximity as the means to explore perceived similarities between Puerto Rico and the United States. Cultural proximity is defined, conceptualized and

applied significantly different in various areas of research. For the purpose of this study, two cultural proximity perspectives are included in this section. The first perspective approaches cultural proximity as the extent to which people perceive similarities or differences between two cultures (Babiker, Cox & McMiller, 1980; Wang, 2009). The second approach stems from Pool (1977) and Straubhaar's (1991, 2003) work, which presents cultural proximity as the notion that people naturally prefer and will actively choose media that is culturally similar.

The first perspective of perceived cultural proximity in this study is incorporated from the cross-cultural adaptation literature. Several studies have examined the role of perceived cultural similarities in sojourner adjustments to foreign land (Babiker et al., 1980; Cox, 1988; Wang, 2009; Ward, 1997; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Yang, Noels & Saumure, 2006). In an effort to understand the relationship between perceived cultural distance and its relationship to medical consultations, symptomatology and examination of overseas students, Babiker and colleagues (1980) developed an index that measured the perceived similarities between two cultures based on the following characteristics: "climate, food, language, clothes, religion, educational level, material comfort, family structure and family life, courtship and marriage, leisure activities, and intergroup conflict" (p.109). This index was further modified and employed by Wang (2009) in order to explore the role of perceived cultural distance in Chinese international students' cross-cultural adjustment in the United States. The results of the Wang (2009) study suggest that perceived cultural distance is positively associated with sociocultural adjustment.

One of the most popular applications of cultural proximity or distance is attributed to Geert Hofstede's (1980) cultural index (Kirkman, Lowe & Gibson, 2006). This index involves five dimensions: individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and Confucian dynamism (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Bond, 1988). These dimensions range

from the closeness of social frameworks, acknowledgement of the inequality of power distributions amongst social institutions, adoption of preemptive measures to avoid deviant situations, and dominant as well as secular values in society (Kirkman et al., 2006). According to Fu and Govindaraju (2010), while this index has been employed in media flow, international trade, and marketing studies, it has also been used to explore the underlying dimensions of audience predilection of imported entertainment media, namely, cross-country audience preference for American films. The results of the Fu and Govindaraju (2010) study contend that countries that are more culturally similar to the United States will also resemble Hollywood film predilection.

While this application of perceived cultural proximity is prevalent in the tourism and inter-organizational collaboration literature (Knoben & Oerlemans, 2006), the concept is applied differently in communication research. However, even within the communications field, the construct is understood in various ways. One of the perspectives approaches cultural proximity as a dimension of newsworthiness (Zaharopoulos, 1990). The main idea behind this approach suggests cultural proximity is an influential factor when it comes to foreign news coverage, meaning that topics, people or events in countries that are culturally proximate or similar will receive more attention by journalists, news media and gatekeepers (Hester, 1971; Peterson, 1979). This study is concerned with the second perspective of cultural proximity in communication research, which mainly focuses on the dynamics of global media flow.

The final conceptualization of cultural proximity involves predilection for media content that is similar (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; Straubhaar, 2003). Concerned with the evolving media landscape of the time, Pool (1977) assessed the impact of new communication technology, development and exportation using concepts from anthropology and political sociology. Pool (1977) was particularly interested in the dynamics involved in

the global flow of televised entertainment content. Several case studies illustrated an interesting phenomenon: when presented with the option of choosing imported content, subbed or dubbed imported content, and local content, audiences gravitated towards the familiar. As such, the seminal claim from this work suggests, "other things being equal, consumers pick local products" (Pool, 1977, p.143). This predilection is based on language, social support, and cultural affinities.

Many credit Straubhaar (1991, 2003) for developing Pool's (1977) cultural proximity paradigm (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008). Building on media imperialism, dependency, and reception analysis frameworks, Straubhaar (1991) proposes several claims that describe audience's relationship with media content. First, people play an active role in television program selection, may that be international, regional or national shows. Second, this choice is mediated by "a search for cultural relevance or proximity" (Straubhaar, 1991, p.39). Third, national culture preference is not uniform across social classes. Lower and middle classes reflect a stronger attachment to local culture, while the elites demonstrate cosmopolitan interests when it comes to media content. Finally, cultural proximity largely depends on what Straubhaar (2003) identifies as cultural capital – understood as the sources of knowledge that inform people's media choices, for example, education, family income, social networks and religion.

Perceived cultural proximity is based on characteristics like shared language, food, clothes, religion and lifestyle (Babiker et al., 1980; Wang, 2009). Other perspectives approach cultural proximity by examining the closeness of social frameworks, power distributions, and societal values (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Kirkman et al., 2006). Previous studies have linked cultural proximity based on these dimensions with predilection for foreign entertainment media (Fu & Govindaraju, 2010). In communication research, cultural proximity also functions as a dimension of newsworthiness (Hester, 1971;

Peterson, 1979; Zaharopoulos, 1990). In addition, cultural proximity is also conceptualized as the inclination to choose regional or national media content over foreign entertainment (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; Pool, 1977; Straubhaar, 1991, 2003).

Research questions and hypotheses

The onset of the Internet and other factors contribute to an interconnected global exchange of information and media content. In this current media landscape, technology provides seemingly infinite choices when it comes to entertainment and news media. With new choices come new uses, predilections and relationship with content. As people gain increasing access to different sources of information, the credibility ascribed to local media may shift. However, this study is concerned with understanding the relationship between interactions with the United States, perceived cultural proximity and source credibility perceptions of American news media. Due to the particular political and economic ties that bind Puerto Rico to the United States, the prevalence and significance of imported news media is assumed to be of considerable importance to Puerto Ricans. As such, this study aims to answer the following research question:

RQ1: *Which news media source will respondents rate most credible, American news media or Puerto Rican news media?*

The previous section illustrated that source credibility has been associated with many dimensions that involve trustworthiness, expertness, intelligence, character, goodwill, believability, and reliability of the communicator (Delia, 1976; Hovland et al., 1953; Self, 2009; Whitehead, 1968;). More recent elaborations on how news media is perceived by audiences focus on perceived accuracy, financial motivation, disposition towards people's privacy, acting on behalf of the public's best interest, and trustworthiness (Kiousis, 2001). The literature suggests two explanations that might account for high source credibility

perceptions relevant to this particular research context – media reliance (Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2010) and source-receiver similarity (Atkinson et al., 1981; Hovland et al., 1953; Simons et al., 1970; Wang et al., 2008; Wright, 2000). As such, this study proposes the following hypothesis to address the first research question:

H1: *Respondents will perceive Puerto Rican news media as more credible than American news media.*

The first possible explanation regarding higher credibility of Puerto Rican news media involves reliance. People develop a dependency on news media to obtain information they need to live, work and thrive in society (Ball-Rokeach, 1989; Wanta & Hu, 1994). Recent studies have found a correlation between media reliance and source credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2010). As such, it is plausible to claim that Puerto Ricans depend on local media to keep track of news as well as obtain information regarding location-specific incidents and concerns – a need that cannot be fulfilled by international or foreign media (i.e., news coverage of local traffic accidents, local flash floods, etc.). According to the literature, this reliance on local media should translate into higher credibility ratings.

The second possible explanation as to why local media will be regarded as more credible than American media concerns source-receiver similarity. The importance of language has been highlighted when examining audience's predilection for media content (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008); the major claim of this area of research contends that audiences prefer content in or closest to their own language (Straubhaar, 2003). In turn, while English is ubiquitous in the Island, most of the Puerto Rican news media is in Spanish: the free (*El Vocero* and *Metro*) as well as national (*El Nuevo Día, Primera Hora* and *Claridad*) circulation newspapers, most Internet news websites (*Yastá, Noticel, Endi, Primera Hora, Diálogo Digital*, etc.), and broadcast media (*WAPA, WKAQ, WOSO, WUNO*). Thus, it is predicted that Puerto Rican news media will be perceived as more credible than American

news media because the sample of the study relies on the former to obtain location-specific news, and local media is topically and linguistically more proximate than American news media content.

In order to identify and describe the different factors that might be related to credibility perceptions of American media, this study explores respondents' level of interaction with the United States. Due to the particular political economic relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States, namely the bestowment of American citizenship, which has encouraged emigration from the Island to the mainland (Trías Monge, 1997); the presence of American businesses, corporations, and entertainment media (Dietz, 1979); and the constant reconfiguration of Puerto Rican national identity due to these factors (Duany), Puerto Rico enjoys a closer relationship to the United States than any other Latin American or Caribbean country. This study suggests American media credibility perceptions might be related to the different levels of experiences Puerto Ricans have accrued with the United States. The second research question addresses this possibility and reads as follows:

RQ2: *Will interaction with the United States be related to perceived source credibility of American news media?*

Previous research in acculturation has established a relationship between immigrants' interaction with a host country and their identification with it (Nesdale & Mak, 2000). In turn, the media credibility literature highlights identification as an underlying influence in high credibility assessments (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Kelman, 1961). In light of this, it is plausible to suggest that a variety of interactions with another country might result in increased levels of identification, which prompt higher perceived credibility of its news media. As such, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: *There is a statistically significant positive relationship between respondents' interaction with the United States and their perception of American news media credibility.*

In addition to the different interactions respondents might have with the United States, this study also takes into consideration perceived cultural proximity between the Puerto Rican and American culture. Previous research in transnational media use has identified an audience predilection for entertainment media that is culturally similar (Davis, 2003; Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; Pool, 1977; Straubhaar, 2003). While the previous cultural proximity studies in the international communication research area mainly focused on entertainment media, this study involves exploring this phenomenon concerning news media. Accordingly, this project aims to answer the following research question:

RQ3: *Will perceived proximity between the Puerto Rican and American culture be related to perceived source credibility of American news media?*

Despite the unique political economic relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States, Puerto Ricans maintain a strong national identity that has not seamlessly assimilated into the American mainstream (Duany, 2003). The Afro-Spanish heritage still remains despite more than a hundred years of association with the United States (Dietz, 1979). In light of this, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: *There is a statistically significant positive relationship between respondents' perceived cultural proximity with the United States and their perception of American news media credibility.*

The acculturation literature presents interaction with another culture in a different country as a constant negotiation between origin and host cultures, a process that does not negate one or the other, and results in a distinct interpretation of cultural norms based on an individual's level of involvement and interaction (Berry, 1980; Berry, Poortinga, Segall, Dasen, 1992; Tropp, Erkut, Coll, Alarcon & García, 1999).

Puerto Ricans that reside in the Island must also balance, reconfigure and manage plural identities that address their status as Puerto Ricans and American citizens (Duany,

2003). Further, previous research in sojourner acculturation has found a connection between cultural proximity with a host country and identification (Ward & Kennedy, 1993b; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). As previously mentioned, there is a relationship between identification and source credibility (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Kelman, 1961). As such, this study proposes a relationship between perceived cultural proximity with the American culture and credibility perceptions of American news media.

Chapter 3: Method

This study employed a survey to examine the relationship between perceived cultural proximity and news source credibility. This section details the identification of the sample, sampling procedures and variables used to operationalize the key concepts tested in the study.

Survey Design

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between perceived cultural proximity and credibility assessments of both Puerto Rican and American news sources. To this end, it employed a survey, "a research design in which a sample of subjects is drawn from a population and studied (e.g., via interviews or questionnaires) in order to make inferences about the population" (Vogt & Johnson, 2011, pp. 390-391). Using a questionnaire allows the researcher to provide a quantitative depiction of stances, opinions or attitudes of a specific sample, later generalized to that of a population (Creswell, 2009). Further, a survey is the preferred data collection procedure for this particular project, as most previous credibility studies have employed the same method for measuring the different dimensions of perceived media credibility (Self, 2009).

This is a cross-sectional study, meaning that the data was "collected at one point in time" (Creswell, 2009, p.146). An online survey was administered to collect data, specifically using SurveyGizmo software. Online data collection has many advantages including low cost, ease of data management, temporal convenience, and it allows the respondents more comfort when it comes to answering the questionnaire. However, the caveats of this method involve hardware and software requirements for participating in the study, the possibility of incomplete surveys, as well as increased participant recruitment difficulty.

The survey instrument designed for this study includes modified scales and items from previous studies, as well as original measurements developed specifically for this

project. The major content sections of the instrument include the consent form, the demographic and attitudinal items, and the closing instructions. Prior to collecting data, the survey instrument was pretested to ensure content validity, and that format as well as wording were adequate and in order. As the sample is Puerto Ricans currently residing in Puerto Rico, the instrument was translated into Spanish by the researcher. Considering that Spanish is the native language of the researcher, item linguistic integrity was not an issue.

The population, sample and sampling procedures

Since this is a project that aims to explore the factors that influence local and foreign news media sources, taking into consideration the social, political and economical ties that bide one country to another – Puerto Ricans currently residing in Puerto Rico were selected as the population for study. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, there are approximately 3.7 million people living in Puerto Rico (Hugo López & Velasco, 2011).

While there are an estimated 4.7 million Hispanics of Puerto Rican origin residing in the continental United States (Motel & Patten, 2012), this study involves Puerto Ricans currently residing in the Island. Although this measure limits the sample considerably, it strives to create uniformity for the purpose of quantitative analysis, as the current political relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States results in a variety of situations, identities and connections that could dramatically affect levels of interaction, perceived cultural proximity as well as news source credibility. For example, an individual residing in the mainland United States naturally has higher levels of interaction in addition to increased exposure to American culture and media. Further, someone that identifies as Puerto Rican but is second or third generation, might perceive his or her own cultural identity differently than someone currently living in the island. All of these circumstances and issues, while valid and pertinent to many academics that explore this topic (see Duany, 2003), are out of the scope of the present study.

The sample of this study consists of three hundred and seventy two Puerto Ricans that resided in Puerto Rico at the time of data collection (*N*=372). The respondents' age ranges from eighteen to eighty; the average age is 35.6 years, the median is 30. According to the Population Division of the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), the annual median age estimate for the Puerto Rico Commonwealth as of July 2012 is 37.9. As for gender, thirty-three percent of the participants are male and sixty-seven percent are female. This presents a considerable difference with the Puerto Rican Commonwealth population estimate presented by the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), which claims males comprise approximately forty-eight percent of the total population, while the approximate percent of females is fifty-two. Nearly half of the respondents (47.1%) identify as Roman Catholics, followed by other (18.1%), Agnostic/Atheist (12.6%), and Protestant (11.2%).

Due to budget and time constraints, the researcher collected data from a nonprobability, convenience and quota sample (Babbie, 1990). Snowball sampling, where an initial participant provides the researcher with assistance recruiting more eligible participants ("Snowball Sampling," 2008), was used to gain access to more participants. The researcher used her personal and professional contacts to find initial participants. Contact method included email invitations as well as social media promotion to take part in the study. Snowball sampling procedures have been used in other recent media credibility studies, including Metzger, Flanagin and Zwarun (2003), Walther, Wang and Loh (2004), Johnson and Kaye (2010), as well as Manafo and Wong (2012).

Data collection took place from May 28 2013 to June 9 2013. Questionnaire responses and data will be kept on file by the researcher until the end of the project. Participants were assured of anonymity and provided the option of discontinuing the survey at any moment. Since this study involved human participants, the researcher attained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Syracuse University Office of

Research Integrity and Protections prior to data collection. This measure ensured that participants were spared from possible, albeit unlikely, negative effects or discomfort from partaking in the study. Per IRB regulations, participants signed a consent document prior to accessing the online survey.

Measures

This study examines the relationship between interaction with the U.S., perceived cultural proximity, and perceived credibility assessments of American news media. The dependent variable is perceived source credibility, namely Puerto Rican and American news media. The independent variables in this study include perceived cultural proximity, interaction, religiosity, and media reliance, in addition to the demographic items, age, gender and religious affiliation.

Perceived Source Credibility is an ordinal variable that measures the extent to which an individual perceives media as credible. Source credibility measurements have come a long way from the early Roper and Associates' opinion of the news media polls, which asked respondents to choose which media they were inclined to believe the most if they encountered conflicting news stories (Erskine, 1970-1971). Early empirical studies focused on discovering dimensions of the construct through factor analyses: expertness and trustworthiness of the communicator (Hovland et al., 1953), authoritativeness and character (McCroskey, 1966), competence (Bowers & Phillips, 1967), reliability, intentions, dynamism and personal attraction (Giffin, 1967), professionalism and objectivity (Whitehead, 1968), as well as safety and qualification (Berlo, Lemert & Mertz, 1969). Stability and consistency in credibility measurements ensued after scholars began adopting broader assessments of the construct – of special interest are the Gaziano and McGrath (1986), and Meyer (1988) studies (Metzger et al., 2003).

Despite the variety of scales, items and operationalizations of the credibility construct, this study measures source credibility using the five indicators pointed out by Kiousis (2001), "how factual a medium is, the extent to which it is motivated by money, whether it invades people's privacy, what is its concern for the community, and whether it can be trusted" (p.389). There are three reasons as to why this particular scale was selected. First, these items measure medium credibility from a source perspective, similar to the object of analysis of this project. Second, while the Kiousis credibility scale is based on the Gaziano and McGrath (1986) items, one of the most widely used measures in this specific line of research, it is abbreviated to ensure the instrument is not too lengthy or redundant. Finally, the items in the Kiousis scale that include the community affiliation aspects addressed by Meyer (1988) as well as Wanta and Hu (1994), make this scale the most comprehensive and appropriate for this specific project.

Participants were asked to rate to what extent they agreed with the following statements regarding U.S. and Puerto Rican news media: "Is factual" "Is not concerned about making profits" "Respects people's privacy" "Is concerned about the community's well-being" "Is trustworthy" Responses ranged from *Strongly Agree* (5) to *Strongly Disagree* (1). This measure of media credibility is widely used in this line of research and is accepted as a valid measure of the concept. According to Roberts (2010) these measures are still currently employed in media credibility research in some form or another due to internal and external validity. Since the items were translated into Spanish, Cronbach's alpha was computed to assess the reliability of these measurements. The results demonstrate strong reliability for the Perceived Source Credibility scales, ($\alpha = .876$), as well as for each individual source explored in this study, Perceived Credibility of Puerto Rican News Media ($\alpha = .786$), and Perceived Credibility of American News Media ($\alpha = .844$).

Perceived Cultural Proximity is an ordinal variable defined as the extent to which an individual recognizes his or her own culture as similar to another one. This study explores the perceived similarities between Puerto Rican and American culture. The perceived cultural proximity items for this study were based on the Cultural Distance Index (CDI) developed by Babiker and colleagues (1981), later modified and employed by Wang (2009). However, the researcher took additional qualitative cultural proximity studies into consideration when developing the perceived cultural proximity items (Straubhaar, 2003). Most of the original CDI items were not incorporated into the questionnaire, as they are not pertinent to this specific study. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: "Puerto Rican culture is similar to U.S. culture" "Puerto Rican values are similar to U.S. values" "The Puerto Rican lifestyle is similar to the U.S. lifestyle" "The politics in Puerto Rico are similar to the politics in the United States" and "The communication style in Puerto Rico is similar to the communication style in the U.S." Likert-type scale responses range from *Strongly Agree* (5) to *Strongly Disagree* (1). Since most of these items were specifically developed for this study, Cronbach's alpha was computed to assess their reliability. Results yielded strong reliability of the Perceived Cultural Proximity scales, (α = .740).

Interaction is an ordinal variable defined as the experiential series of events that relate an individual to a country, specifically the United States. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: "In the last five years I have visited the U.S. many times" "Many of my friends and family members are currently residing in the U.S." "I keep track of major events in the U.S." "I speak English fluently" and "I consider myself American" Responses range from *Strongly Agree* (5) to *Strongly Disagree* (1). As the researcher developed all of these items, Cronbach's alpha was computed to assess

the reliability of these scales. Results demonstrate strong reliability of the Interaction scales employed, (α = .762).

The development of the interaction scale was based on the acculturation literature, which understands acculturation as a process where an individual negotiates between two cultures, and results in a unique interpretation of behavioral and attitudinal norms (Berry, 1980; Berry et al., 1992). According to Tropp and colleagues (1999), previous research in acculturation has focused on different factors such as behavioral preferences, language use, migration history, as well as ethnic self-identification.

As Puerto Rico enjoys a particular sociopolitical relationship with the United States that encourages migration and cultural assimilation (Dietz, 1979; Duany, 2003; Trías Monge, 1997), the researcher developed original interaction items that addressed these nuances. Two items, namely the perception of number of recent visits to the United States and the amount of friends and family currently residing in the mainland, pertain to migration history. In turn, language use was ascertained with the self-reported English language proficiency item. Since the 1917 Jones-Shafroth Act, Puerto Ricans are American citizens (Trías Monge, 1997); however, whether or not they identify as such is a complicated question. Thus, this study takes this reality into consideration by incorporating the ethnic-identification item, "*I consider myself American*."

While this study is mainly concerned with examining the influence of perceived cultural proximity on perceived news source credibility, previous research has found a connection between various factors and credibility. Thus, several variables were incorporated into the study and included in the questionnaire, as to be able to control for them during data analysis. The first variable is religiosity, the extent to which religion plays a salient role in people's lives – studies have shown a connection between religiosity and credibility (Golan & Day, 2010; Golan & Kiousis, 2010). The second incorporated variable is media reliance, as

previous research contends that depending on certain media affects how people perceive it in terms of credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 2002, 2013).

Religiosity is an ordinal variable that measures the role religion plays in respondents' lives. The modified items are based on previous religiosity and media credibility research, namely Alston (1975), Guth and Green (1993), Golan (2002) as well as Golan and Day (2010). Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: "Religion provides me with a great deal of guidance in my day-to-day life" "I attend religious services every week" and "Religion plays a great role in my life" Responses range from *Strongly Agree* (5) to *Strongly Disagree* (1). As the Religiosity items were modified and translated into Spanish, Cronbach's alpha was computed to assess the reliability of the measurements included in the study. Results suggest strong reliability of these scales, ($\alpha = .901$).

Media Reliance is an ordinal variable that measures the extent to which respondents depend on Puerto Rican and U.S. news media to obtain information. The media reliance item was modified and incorporated from previous research, specifically Johnson and Kaye (2013). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: "I generally depend on Puerto Rican news media to be informed about recent events" and "I generally depend on U.S. news media to be informed about recent events" Responses range from *Strongly Agree* (5) to *Strongly Disagree* (1).

In addition, demographic items were added to better describe the sample of the study. Participants were asked their age, gender and religious affiliation. Age is a continuous variable. Gender and religious affiliation are categorical variables.

Data analysis procedures

While this study involves the incorporation of previously used measurements that have been found to be reliable, the modification and translation of the items into Spanish

warranted careful reexamination of the scales' reliability. In order to assess the reliability coefficients of the scales employed in the study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated (Norusis, 2012) – "*alpha* ranges from .00 to 1.00, and the higher the coefficient, the more reliable the index is" (Shoemaker, Tankard, Lasorsa, 2004, p.34). In social science research, the internal reliability coefficient must be .70 or above to make sure each item is measuring the same concept (Shoemaker et al., 2004; Vogt & Johnson, 2011). Thus, the researcher computed Cronbach's alpha coefficients in order to estimate the reliability of each scale included in the questionnaire.

Upon data collection, the researcher employed a series of statistical tests to gauge the relationship between interaction with the U.S., perceived cultural proximity between the Puerto Rican and American culture, and the perceived credibility of Puerto Rican and American news media. After cleaning the data, the first step involved running descriptive statistics with IBM SPSS Statistics software to calculate means and standard deviations. Following this procedure, some of the variable items were included in a compute command to create an additive index of each (i.e., interaction index, religiosity index, perceived cultural index, and perceived source credibility index). According to Vogt and Johnson (2011), an index is "a composite measure (a group of individual measures) that, when combined, is meant to indicate some more general characteristic" (p.178).

Once the indices were created and their reliability assessed, the following procedure involved running a *t* test to ascertain whether the difference between means was significantly different (Norusis, 2012). Finally, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient, "an index of the degree and direction of linear association between two continuous variables" ("Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient", 2010, ¶2), was run to explore the relationship between interaction with the U.S., and perceived credibility of American news media; as well as

perceived cultural proximity between the Puerto Rican and American culture, and perceived

credibility of American news media.

Chapter 4: Results

This section includes the descriptive and inferential statistics pertaining to each of the variables in the study, perceived source credibility, perceived cultural proximity, interaction, religiosity, and media reliance. Further, the results of the hypotheses testing of the three research questions are presented.

Main analysis

Perceived Source Credibility

Respondents were asked to rate Puerto Rican and American news media based on a series of statements developed to measure source credibility. News media were defined as encompassing newspapers, broadcast news as well as digital news on the Internet, without specifically addressing particular media organizations. The average means and standard deviations for Puerto Rican news media credibility dimensions are as follow, factual (M = 2.83, SD = 1.09), not concerned about making profits (M = 1.89, SD = 1.06), respects people's privacy (M = 1.81, SD = .95), concerned with the community's well being (M = 2.68, SD = 1.12), and trustworthy (M = 2.58, SD = 1.04).

In turn, the average means and standard deviations for American news media credibility dimensions are as follow, factual (M = 2.96, SD = 1.04), not concerned about making profits (M = 2.01, SD = 1.09), respects people's privacy (M = 2.36, SD = 1.02), concerned with the community's well being (M = 2.85, SD = 1.02), and trustworthy (M = 2.82, SD = 1.05). Since all of the scales for Puerto Rican and American news media credibility yielded strong reliability coefficients, α = .786 and α = .844, respectively, an additive index was computed for each source: Puerto Rican news media credibility (M = 2.36, SD = .77) and American news media credibility (M = 2.60, SD = .82).

Perceived Cultural Proximity

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements regarding similarities between Puerto Rican and American culture. The average means and standard deviations for perceived cultural proximity dimensions are as follow, culture similarity ($M = 1.81$, $SD = 1.02$), values similarity ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.05$), lifestyle similarity ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.03$), political similarity ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.15$), and communication style similarity ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.13$). Since all of the scales for cultural proximity yielded a strong reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .740$), an additive index was computed for the cultural proximity variable ($M = 1.97$, $SD = 0.75$).

Interaction

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements concerning their level of interaction with the United States. The items address perceived amount of traveling ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.53$), amount of friends or family members currently residing in the mainland United States ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.35$), keeping track of major events ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.23$), English language proficiency ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.34$), and American identity ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.48$). Since all of the scales for interaction yielded a strong reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .762$), an additive index was computed for this variable ($M = 3.26$, $SD = .99$).

Religiosity

Respondents were asked the extent to which the agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the role of religion in their lives. The average means and standard deviations for the religiosity items are as follows, guidance in day-to-day life ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.49$), weekly religious service attendance ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 1.53$), and role in life ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.50$). As all of the religiosity scales yielded a strong reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .901$), an additive index was computed for this variable ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.38$).

Media Reliance

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements regarding general news media preferences. The average means and standard deviations for the media reliance items were as follow, depends on Puerto Rican news media to be informed about recent events (M = 3.19, SD = 1.33), and depends on American news media to be informed about recent events (M = 2.95, SD = 1.21).

Hypotheses Testing

The first hypothesis predicted that respondents would rate Puerto Rican news media as more credible than American news media. A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the credibility of both sources. The test revealed a significant difference between the mean number of Puerto Rican (*M* = 2.36, *SD* = .78) and American (*M* = 2.59, *SD* = .82) news media credibility; $t(353) = -6.29$, $\rho = .000$. This judgment held true for each individual credibility dimension as well as for the additive indexes. However, Puerto Rican news media was actually found to be less credible than American news media in all accounts. Thus, hypothesis 1 was not supported.

The second hypothesis stated that there would be a statistically significant positive relationship between respondents' level of interaction with the United Stated and their perception of American news media credibility. To test this hypothesis, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between variables. The results show a positive statistically significant correlation between interaction and American news media credibility, $r = .270$, $N = 360$, $\rho = .000$. Thus, hypothesis 2 was supported.

The third hypothesis claimed that there would be a statistically significant positive relationship between respondents' perceived cultural proximity with the United Stated and their perception of American news media credibility. To test this hypothesis, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between variables. The results show a positive statistically significant correlation between cultural proximity and

American news media credibility, $r = .209$, $N = 361$, $\rho = .000$. Thus, hypothesis 3 was also supported.

Data analysis yielded additional results that warrant acknowledgement. For instance, the Pearson's Correlation Coefficient results demonstrate a positive statistically significant correlation between interaction with the United States and Puerto Rican news media credibility, $r = .15$, $N = 358$, $\rho = .003$. In addition, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient results also show a positive statistically significant correlation between cultural proximity and Puerto Rican news media credibility, $r = .16$, $N = 357$, $\rho = .002$.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The current study aimed to identify whether national or foreign news media would be perceived as most credible in a particular context where one nation is politically, economically and socially intertwined with another country. An online survey was employed to assess perceived credibility of American and Puerto Rican news media, levels of interaction with the United States, perceived similarities between Puerto Rican and American culture, as well as demographic variables. Consequent data analyses yielded three key results that are presented and explained in this section.

The first research question focused on whether respondents would rate Puerto Rican or American news media as most credible. Anchored in the media credibility literature that claims source-receiver similarity is an influential factor in high credibility perceptions (Atkinson et al., 1981; Hovland et al., 1953; Simons et al., 1970; Wang et al., 2008; Wright, 2001), it was predicted that Puerto Rican news media would be rated as more credible than American news media. Respondents were not explicitly asked to rate one source against the other; instead, they rated each news media individually. Paired samples *t*-test results suggest a statistically significant difference between the two credibility assessments, however, not in the manner that was predicted. In fact, Puerto Rican news media (*M* = 2.36, *SD* = .77) was found to be less credible than American news media (*M* = 2.60, *SD* = .82).

With the exception of very few news organizations, Puerto Rican news media is mostly presented in Spanish, the main language of the Island. On the other hand, American news media is predominantly in English (with the exception of Univisión and others, which is addressed later on) – a language that 80.2% of the Island populations speaks "less than 'very well'" (Unites States Census Bureau, 2013). Language differences aside, national news media shapes the political reality of society and promotes engagement in civil life (McCombs

& Shaw, 1972; Moy, McCluskey, McCoy & Spratt, 2004), making national media relevant to those that live in the Island. In turn, this relevance suggests an extent of reliance, which has also been linked to higher credibility perceptions (Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2010). The breadth and depth of foreign news media does not provide Puerto Ricans currently residing in the Island with the information needed for day-to-day life (i.e., weather conditions, local traffic reports, etc.).

All of these considerations suggest that national news media is more similar and relevant to Puerto Ricans, which should, in theory, lead to higher credibility assessments. However, the results of this study suggest that Puerto Ricans perceive foreign news media as more credible than national sources. These findings challenge the body of work that claims source-receiver similarities prompt higher credibility perceptions. In order to address this discrepancy, two arguments are presented. The first suggestion entails the scope of the unit of analyses in this study and previous credibility studies. Credibility research has dealt with sources, mediums, platforms and messages from the same country-of-origin, whereas this study contrasts national and foreign news media sources. The second suggestion builds on the first one to claim that credibility perceptions are influenced by the sociopolitical and economical relationship between the different countries in question.

While a great deal of research has proven the correlation between source-receiver similarities and credibility perceptions, this project suggests an alternative argument when considering a broader level of analysis: the political, economical, social and cultural power dynamics between two countries could be a greater predictor of credibility. In order to theoretically support this claim, development theories are considered. This body of research consists of three main perspectives: modernization, dependency, and world-systems analysis, which simultaneously build upon one another but differ in some respects (So, 1990). The explication of the outcomes of the sociopolitical relationship between Puerto Rico and the

United States is informed by the dependency paradigm as well as the main concepts of world-systems analysis.

Dependency theory addresses the economic relationship and power dynamics between underdeveloped or developing countries, often known as the Third World, with advanced capitalist nations (So, 1990). According to Santos (1970), the main premise of this perspective claims that within a bounded system of countries, the economical development of the Third World is conditioned by and subjected to the growth and progress of another nation's economy. The new dependency conceptualizations put forth by Cardoso (1973, 1977) understand development and dependency as processes that are not mutually exclusive, meaning that a country could experience economical and infrastructural growth while still being subjected to the ebbs and flows of another capitalist economy (So, 1990).

In an effort to address the inadequacies of earlier dependency theories, and present the negative effects of an imperialist-dominated capitalist development venture, Dietz (1979) used Puerto Rico as a case study to portray this process and its outcomes. The main argument of the case study claims the economy flourished and the infrastructure of the Island thrived during the 1960-1970s, but the prosperity was shallow and soon became stagnant due to the structure of the imperialist-dominated capitalist development mechanisms. The aspects of the economic structure presented by Dietz (1979) include four phenomena which involve an economy mostly based on exports, increased importation of basic foods, high unemployment rates, and the growing role of the state as "employer, producer and financier" (p.25).

Far from resolved, the current service-based economy in Puerto Rico has exacerbated the issues and tendencies observed by Dietz (1979). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 45.6% of the Island residents currently live below the federal poverty line, much more so than the poorest state, Mississippi, which counts with 22.6% of its population living in poverty (Bishaw, 2012). As of April 2013, the unemployment rate in Puerto Rico stands at

48

13.7%, the highest of all U.S. jurisdictions according to the U.S. Department of Labor (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013). Further, the dire economic situation in the Island has resulted in what mainstream media call the "brain drain," a steep population loss (again, higher than any other state), mainly consisting of young and middle-aged educated professionals that emigrate to the continental United States in search of better and more alluring employment opportunities (El Nasser, 2012).

World-systems theory is a structure of analysis that employs broad spatial and temporal considerations when approaching the study of world-economies and world-empires (King, 1997; So, 1990; Wallerstein, 2004). Understood from this perspective, Puerto Rico would be considered a periphery or weak state, part of "administrative units that are defined as non-sovereign and fall under the jurisdiction of another state, normally distant from it," in other words, a colony (Wallerstein, 2004, p.55). While dependency theory adequately explains the economical ties that bind Puerto Rico to the United States, world-systems describes the mechanism by which colonial powers justify their assumption of authority. According to Wallerstein (2004), this power was achieved through a series of arguments regarding "cultural inferiority and inadequacy of the local populations; and self-justifying arguments about the "civilizing" role the colonial administration was performing" (p.56). These mechanisms and arguments are of considerable importance in a broader credibility analysis that takes sociopolitical ties into consideration.

The different experiences Puerto Rico has accrued with the United States since the 1898 invasion have changed the fabric of Puerto Rican identity (Duany, 2003). Due to the commonwealth status, possession of American citizenship, and the penetration of American culture in the Island, Puerto Ricans undoubtedly share a closer relationship with the United States than any other Latin American or Caribbean country. However, the association between Puerto Rico and the United States has not erased the remnants of the 500-year old

Hispanic cultural, linguistic and religious influence on the Puerto Rican culture. Further, previous studies have shown that social class and culture capital (i.e., education, family, networks, travel, etc.) play a decisive role in media choice and predilection (Straubhaar, 2003). Thus, despite the pervasiveness of American influence in Puerto Rico, not everyone has the same amount of access or is affected by American media and culture in the same way. The second research inquiry responds to this reality by questioning whether levels of interaction between Puerto Ricans and the United States are related to the perceived source credibility of American media.

Interaction with another country or culture has been explored in acculturation studies. This line of research explores the constant negotiation between origin and host cultures, a process that does not negate one or the other, and results in a distinct interpretation of cultural norms based on an individual's level of involvement and interaction (Berry, 1980; Berry et al., 1992; Tropp et al., 1999). According to previous acculturation studies, interaction with a host country encourages identification by members of immigrant groups (Nesdale & Mak, 2000). In turn, media credibility research contends that increased levels of source-receiver identification result in higher credibility assessments (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Kelman, 1961).

This study operates under the assumption that higher levels of interaction with a country induce a greater sense of identification, which results in higher credibility evaluations. Thus, it was predicted that there would be a statistically significant positive relationship between respondents' level of interaction with the United States and their perception of American news media credibility. Due to the sociopolitical relationship between both countries, the development of the interaction variable for this study was based on the continuing migration between the Island and the mainland (Duany, 2003), as well as the ongoing political status debate between remaining a commonwealth, becoming the 51st

state in the union, or outright independency (Trías Monge, 1997). A Pearson Correlation Coefficient test revealed a statistically significant relationship between the interaction index (*M* = 3.26, *SD* = .99) and perceived American news media credibility (*M* = 2.60, *SD* = .82), *r* = .270, *N* = 360, ρ = .000.

Apart from interaction with the United States, this study also explored the role of cultural proximity in foreign news media credibility evaluations. In line with interaction, previous acculturation studies have also linked cultural proximity with identification (Ward & Kennedy, 1993b; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999). This line of research approaches cultural proximity based on perceived similarities in language, food, clothes, religion, and lifestyle (Babiker et al., 1980; Wang, 2009), as well as closeness of social frameworks, power distributions, and societal values (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Kirkman et al., 2006). Transnational communication studies use cultural proximity to explain audience's predilection for entertainment media that is culturally similar (Fu & Govindaraju, 2010; Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; Pool, 1977; Straubhaar, 1991, 2003).

The third research question of this study examines the relationship between perceived similarities between American and Puerto Rican culture, and perceived credibility of American news media. Based on the media credibility literature that asserts source-receiver similarity prompts higher credibility perceptions at an interpersonal level of analysis (Atkinson et al., 1981; Hovland et al., 1953; Simons et al., 1970; Wang et al., 2008; Wright, 2001), it was predicted that there would be a statistically significant positive relationship between respondents' perceived cultural proximity with the United States and their perception of American news media credibility. A Pearson Correlation Coefficient test revealed a statistically significant relationship between the cultural proximity index (*M* = 1.97, *SD* = 0.75) and perceived American news media credibility (*M* = 2.60, *SD* = .82), *r* =

.209, $N = 361$, $\rho = .000$. Thus, the results of the study indeed suggest a relationship between cultural proximity and credibility assessments.

This finding is congruent with previous cultural proximity studies that have shown audiences' predilection for media content that is culturally similar (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; Lee Davis, 2003; Pool, 1977; Straubhaar, 2003). However, this study is concerned with news content as opposed to entertainment media, and credibility instead of predilection. While the results suggest higher credibility towards American media, whether or not these evaluations involve use and predilection is unknown. Thus, there is a possibility that respondents do not actually read, watch, or listen to American news media, but still perceive them to be more credible than national news sources.

Data analysis also yielded interesting results that imply a relationship between interaction with the United States, perceived cultural proximity with American culture, and Puerto Rican news media credibility. While the present study did not measure the respondents' socioeconomic status, this factor, as well as cultural capital might be responsible for this phenomenon. Previous research has demonstrated a relationship between socioeconomic status and media use and predilection (Katzman, 1974; McLeod & Perse, 1994; Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1970). Specifically, people with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to consume print media than broadcast media, and have a higher knowledge of public affairs. As for cultural capital, Straubhaar (2003) stresses the relationship between social class position, and experiences as well as interactions with foreign cultures and media. As such, it is legitimate to propose that respondents of certain socioeconomic statuses are more likely to both consume local news media as well as accrue more levels of interaction with the United States and American culture.

Theoretical implications

The current study yielded three key findings. The first finding demonstrates that respondents perceive American news media as more credible than national news sources. Second, there is a relationship between levels of interaction with the United States and perceived credibility of American news media. Finally, there is also a relationship between perceived similarities between the Puerto Rican and American culture, and perceived credibility of American news media. Further, these results have been discussed through a critical cultural lens that takes into consideration the political economic context between Puerto Rico and the U.S.

Despite the breadth of media credibility research, a need for studies from a critical cultural perspective has been expressed (Gunther, 1992; Self, 2009). The findings of this study contribute to this particular gap in the literature by exploring source credibility perceptions in a unique sociopolitical context while taking cultural proximity into consideration. In addition, the current study involved a culturally and ethnically diverse sample from a population that was yet to be exclusively focused on in this line of research.

The findings of this study result in three theoretical implications for media credibility and critical cultural research. The main implication suggests that additional influential factors might emerge when exploring credibility perceptions from a broader scope or cross-national perspective. These factors are inherently intertwined to the political economic context of the nations in question. Further, the findings of this study imply that these factors may be of more significance than perceived source-receiver similarities during credibility evaluations.

The remaining theoretical implications address the role of identification with another country in the credibility ascribed to its news media. According to the acculturation literature, a variety of interactions with another country encourage increased levels of identification with the host country (Nesdale & Mak, 2000). Based on the media credibility research that

claims a relationship between identification and higher credibility evaluations (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2005; Kelman, 1961) as well as the findings of the current study, the second theoretical implication proposes a correlation between levels of interaction and perceived source credibility. In other words, increased exposure to and experiences with another country and its culture prompt higher credibility perceptions regarding its news media.

The third theoretical implication involves the role of perceived cultural proximity in news source credibility evaluations. Previous research focusing on the impact of international entertainment media has presented cultural proximity as an audience tendency to opt for what is culturally similar (Lee Davis, 2003; Pool, 1977; Straubhaar, 2003). The results of this study further expand this line of research and incorporate elements from other areas of communication. Specifically, perceived cultural similarities seem to be connected to the credibility ascribed to foreign media.

Practical implications

The findings of the current study provide a number of practical implications to scholars and media practitioners alike. The media credibility scales developed by Kiousis (2001), translated and employed in a different setting, still proved to be reliable (α = .876). This implies that other scholars interested in replicating media credibility studies in Hispanic countries may use the translated scales and items used in this study. Further, interaction and cultural proximity scales were specifically developed for this project, but they also proved to be reliable, α = .762 and α = .740, respectively. Scholars interested in employing these scales in English or Spanish may use the items developed for the survey instrument.

International journalists and news organizations may be particularly interested in the findings of this study, as the credibility ascribed to foreign media may depend on the political economic relations between countries, as well as levels of interaction and perceived cultural

similarities. Practitioners interested in reaching particular audiences should structure content in a way that is culturally similar, appropriate and appealing.

Limitations

The current study counts with a number of limitations. As the recruitment method involved employing snowball-sampling procedures, the sample of the study is not representative to that of the Puerto Rican population currently residing in the Island. Relying on personal and professional contacts, as well as social media promotion implies that participants may share certain demographic and attitudinal aspects that could have affected the results of the study. In addition, opting for this particular research design (online survey, online contact method) limited prospective respondents, as certain access to technology and Internet was required to participate in the study.

Another important limitation to acknowledge is the gender distribution of the participants in the study. As previously mentioned, thirty-three percent of the participants identified as male and sixty-seven percent as female. This presents a considerable difference with the Puerto Rican Commonwealth population estimate presented by the U.S. Census Bureau (2013), which claims males comprise approximately forty-eight percent of the total population, while the approximate percent of females is fifty-two. This skewed gender distribution might account for differences in interactions with the United States, perceived cultural proximity between the Puerto Rican and American culture, as well as the perceived credibility of Puerto Rican and American news media.

Incidentally, news media were presented in a very general manner. Respondents were asked to rate the credibility of American and Puerto Rican news media. No distinctions were made between major news organizations, platforms or even languages, which could have resulted in certain difficulties making these evaluations, as Univisión could

be considered part of American as well as Puerto Rican news media. As the information was self-reported, there are no guarantees of accuracy and veracity.

Considerations for future studies

The main consideration for future studies includes testing the hypotheses of this study in different contexts. Potential research ideas include comparing national news media to several other foreign media, while still sampling the same population. The current study could be replicated in other countries, using different populations. Upcoming studies could test the hypotheses using another research design, namely controlled experiments, in-depth interviews or focus groups. In addition, future research should distinguish between media platforms and compare the influence of perceived similarities and identification between different media.

The first series of questions are concerned with understanding the different experiences in your life related to the United States.

Please answer the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
In the last five years I have visited the U.S. many times	1	2	3	4	5
Many of my friends and family members currently reside in the U.S.	1	2	3	4	5
I keep track of major events in the U.S.	1	2	3	4	5
I speak English fluently	1	2	3	4	5
I consider myself American	1	2	3	4	5

Please answer the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
Puerto Rican culture is similar to U.S. culture	1	2	3	4	5
Puerto Rican values are similar to U.S. values	1	2	3	4	5
The Puerto Rican lifestyle is similar to the U.S. lifestyle	1	2	3	4	5
The politics in Puerto Rico are similar to the politics in the U.S.	1	2	3	4	5
The communication style in Puerto Rico is similar to the communication style in the U.S.	1	2	3	4	5

The following questions are about your attitudes concerning general news media preferences. News media includes newspapers, broadcast news as well as digital news on the Internet.

Please answer the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I generally depend on Puerto Rican news media to be informed about recent events	1	2	3	4	5
I generally depend on U.S. news media to be informed about recent events	1	2	3	4	5

Please answer the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

Puerto Rican news media …	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
Is factual	1	2	3	4	5
Is not concerned about making profits	1	2	3	4	5
Respects people's privacy	1	2	3	4	5
Is concerned with the community's well-being	1	2	3	4	5
Is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5

Please answer the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

U.S. news media …	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
Is factual	1	2	3	4	5
Is not concerned about making profits	1	2	3	4	5
Respects people's privacy	1	2	3	4	5
Is concerned with the community's well-being	1	2	3	4	5
Is trustworthy	1	2	3	4	5

The last series of questions deal with basic demographic information and religion.

How old are you? _____

What is your gender? ☐ Male   ☐ Female

Please answer the extent to which you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
Religion provides me with a great deal of guidance in my day-to-day life	1	2	3	4	5
I attend religious services every week	1	2	3	4	5
Religion plays a great role in my life	1	2	3	4	5

You have completed the survey. Thank you for participating in the study!

Proximidad cultural y credibilidad de medios noticiosos cuestionario

La primera serie de preguntas está dirigida a entender tus opiniones y actitudes sobre los Estados Unidos.

Favor de contestar hasta qué medida está de acuerdo con las siguientes aseveraciones:

	Muy en desacuerdo	Algo en desacuerdo	Neutral	Algo de acuerdo	Muy de acuerdo
En los últimos cinco años he visitado los Estados Unidos muchas veces	1	2	3	4	5
Muchas de mis amistades y familiares viven en los Estados Unidos	1	2	3	4	5
Me mantengo al tanto de las cosas que pasan en los Estados Unidos	1	2	3	4	5
Hablo el inglés con fluidez	1	2	3	4	5
Me considero estadounidense	1	2	3	4	5

Favor de contestar hasta qué medida está de acuerdo con las siguientes aseveraciones:

	Muy en desacuerdo	Algo en desacuerdo	Neutral	Algo de acuerdo	Muy de acuerdo
La cultura puertorriqueña es similar a la cultura estadounidense	1	2	3	4	5
Los valores puertorriqueños son similares a los valores estadounidenses	1	2	3	4	5
El estilo de vida puertorriqueño es similar al estilo de vida estadounidense	1	2	3	4	5
La política en Puerto Rico es similar a la política en los Estados Unidos	1	2	3	4	5
El estilo de comunicación en Puerto Rico es similar al estilo de comunicación en los Estados Unidos	1	2	3	4	5

Las siguientes preguntas tratan sobre tus preferencias relacionadas a los medios noticiosos. Medios noticiosos incluyen periódicos, noticiarios televisivos, así como portales de noticias en el Internet.

Favor de contestar hasta qué medida está de acuerdo con las siguientes aseveraciones:

	Muy en desacuerdo	Algo en desacuerdo	Neutral	Algo de acuerdo	Muy de acuerdo
Generalmente dependo de los medios noticiosos puertorriqueños para mantenerme informado sobre eventos recientes	1	2	3	4	5
Generalmente dependo de los medios noticiosos estadounidenses para mantenerme informado sobre eventos recientes	1	2	3	4	5

Favor de contestar hasta qué medida está de acuerdo con las siguientes aseveraciones:

Los medios noticiosos puertorriqueños …	Muy en desacuerdo	Algo en desacuerdo	Neutral	Algo de acuerdo	Muy de acuerdo
Están basados en hechos	1	2	3	4	5
No están interesados en generar ganancias	1	2	3	4	5
Respetan la privacidad de las personas	1	2	3	4	5
Se preocupan por el bienestar de la comunidad	1	2	3	4	5
Son confiables	1	2	3	4	5

Favor de contestar hasta qué medida está de acuerdo con las siguientes aseveraciones:

Los medios noticiosos estadounidenses …	Muy en desacuerdo	Algo en desacuerdo	Neutral	Algo de acuerdo	Muy de acuerdo
Están basados en hechos	1	2	3	4	5
No están interesados en generar ganancias	1	2	3	4	5
Respetan la privacidad de las personas	1	2	3	4	5
Se preocupan por el bienestar de la comunidad	1	2	3	4	5

Son confiables	1	2	3	4	5

La última serie de preguntas incluye datos demográficos y religiosidad

Edad: _____

Género: ☐ Masculino ☐ Femenino

Favor de contestar hasta qué medida está de acuerdo con las siguientes aseveraciones:

	Muy en desacuerdo	Algo en desacuerdo	Neutral	Algo de acuerdo	Muy de acuerdo
La religión me provee una gran cantidad de dirección en mi diario vivir	1	2	3	4	5
Yo voy a servicios religiosos todas las semanas	1	2	3	4	5
La religión juega un gran rol en mi vida	1	2	3	4	5

Usted ha completado la encuesta ¡Gracias por participar en el estudio!

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Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Interaction, Cultural Proximity, and Demographic Variables, N = 372.

Variables	*M*	*95% CI*	*SD*	*n*
In the last five years I have visited the U.S. many times[a]	3.06	[2.9-3.2]	1.53	372
Many of my friends and family currently reside in the U.S.[a]	3.35	[3.2-3.4]	1.35	372
I keep track of major events in the U.S.[a]	3.63	[3.5-3.7]	1.23	370
I speak English fluently [a]	3.71	[3.5-3.8]	1.34	371
I consider myself American [a]	2.57	[2.4-2.7]	1.48	370
Puerto Rican culture is similar to U.S. culture [a]	1.81	[1.7-1.9]	1.02	372
Puerto Rican values are similar to U.S. values [a]	1.93	[1.8-2.0]	1.05	372
The Puerto Rican lifestyle is similar to the U.S. lifestyle [a]	1.88	[1.7-1.9]	1.03	369
The politics in Puerto Rico are similar to the politics in the U.S. [a]	2.06	[1.9-2.1]	1.15	371
The communication style in Puerto Rico is similar to the communication style in the U.S. [a]	2.19	[2.0-2.3]	1.13	371
Interaction additive index	3.26	[3.1-3.3]	0.99	368
Cultural Proximity additive index	1.97	[1.8-2.0]	0.75	368
Age (in years)	35.66	[34.2-37.10]	14.14	372

Note. [a]Responses were 5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Puerto Rican Media Credibility and American Media Credibility Variables, N = 372.

Variables	*M*	*95% CI*	*SD*	*n*
Puerto Rican news media is factual[a]	2.83	[2.7-2.9]	1.09	369
Puerto Rican news media is not concerned about making profits[a]	1.89	[1.7-2.0]	1.06	371
Puerto Rican news media respects people's privacy[a]	1.81	[1.7-1.9]	0.95	370
Puerto Rican news media is concerned with the community's well-being[a]	2.68	[2.5-2.7]	1.12	369
Puerto Rican news media is trustworthy[a]	2.58	[2.4-2.6]	1.04	369
American news media is factual[a]	2.96	[2.8-3.0]	1.04	368
American news media is not concerned about making profits[a]	2.01	[1.9-2.1]	1.09	371
American news media respects people's privacy[a]	2.36	[2.2-2.4]	1.02	372
American news media is concerned with the community's well-being[a]	2.85	[2.7-2.9]	1.02	371
American news media is trustworthy[a]	2.82	[2.7-2.9]	1.05	369
Puerto Rican media credibility additive index	2.36	[2.2-2.4]	0.77	361
American media credibility additive index	2.60	[2.5-2.6]	0.82	364

Note. [a]Responses were 5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*.

Table 3

Percentages for Gender and Religious Affiliation Variables.

Variables	%
Gender	
Male	32.5
Female	67.5
Total	100.0%
	($n = 369$)
What is your religious affiliation?	
Roman Catholic	47.1
Christian Protestant	11.2
Christian Evangelical	8.5
Jewish	.3
Muslim	.5
Buddhist	1.6
Agnostic/Atheist	12.6
Other	18.1
Total	100.0%
	($n = 365$)

Table 4

Paired-samples t-*Test for Puerto Rican and American Media Credibility Variables,*
N = 372.

	Puerto Rican Mean	American Mean	N	t	df	Sig.
Is factual	2.82	2.96	365	-2.38	364	.018
Not concerned about making profits	1.89	2.01	370	-2.00	369	.046
Respects people's privacy	1.81	2.36	370	-9.54	369	.000
Concerned with the community's well-being	2.67	2.85	368	-3.47	367	.001
Is trustworthy	2.58	2.81	366	-4.49	365	.000
Credibility additive index	2.36	2.59	354	-6.29	353	.000

Note. [a]Responses were 5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*

Table 5

Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for Interaction with the U.S., American Media Credibility, and Puerto Rican Media Credibility Variables, N = 372.

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7
	r	*r*	*r*	*r*	*r*	*r*
	(p)	*(p)*	*(p)*	*(p)*	*(p)*	*(p)*
	(n)	*(n)*	*(n)*	*(n)*	*(n)*	*(n)*
1. In the last five years I have visited the U.S. many times[a]	.49** (.000) (372)	.45** (.000) (370)	.50** (.000) (371)	.23** (.000) (370)	.17** (.001) (364)	.11* (.035) (361)
2. Many of my friends and family currently reside in the U.S.[a]	–	.52** (.000) (370)	.41** (.000) (371)	.28** (.000) (370)	.14** (.007) (364)	.06 (.250) (361)
3. I keep track of major events in the U.S.[a]		–	.57** (.000) (369)	.26** (.000) (369)	.18** (.001) (362)	.13** (.009) (360)
4. I speak English fluently [a]			–	.23** (.000) (369)	.11* (.024) (363)	.10* (.047) (360)
5. I consider myself American [a]				–	.32** (.000) (362)	.13* (.011) (359)
6. American media credibility additive index [a]					–	.63** (.000) (354)
7. Puerto Rican media credibility index [a]						–

Note. [a]Responses were coded 5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6

Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for Perceived Cultural Proximity with the U.S., American Media Credibility, and Puerto Rican Media Credibility Variables, N = 372.

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7
	r	*r*	*r*	*r*	*r*	*r*
	(p)	*(p)*	*(p)*	*(p)*	*(p)*	*(p)*
	(n)	*(n)*	*(n)*	*(n)*	*(n)*	*(n)*
1. Puerto Rican culture is similar to American culture[a]	.54** (.000) (372)	.50** (.000) (369)	.14** (.007) (371)	.24** (.000) (371)	.20** (.000) (364)	.08 (.110) (361)
2. Puerto Rican values are similar to American values[a]	–	.60** (.000) (369)	.26** (.000) (371)	.32** (.000) (371)	.21** (.000) (364)	.12* (.016) (361)
3. The Puerto Rican lifestyle is similar to the American lifestyle[a]		–	.28** (.000) (369)	.32** (.000) (368)	.15** (.004) (362)	.06 (.231) (358)
4. The politics in Puerto Rico are similar to the politics in the U.S.[a]			–	.44** (.000) (370)	.07 (.154) (363)	.11* (.036) (360)
5. The communication style in Puerto Rico is similar to the communication style in the U.S.[a]				–	.11* (.037) (363)	.18** (.000) (360)
6. American media credibility additive index [a]					–	.63** (.000) (354)
7. Puerto Rican media credibility index [a]						–

Note. [a]Responses were coded 5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7

Pearson's Correlation Coefficients for Cultural Proximity Index, Interaction Index, American Media Credibility Index, and Puerto Rican Media Credibility Index Variables, N = 372.

Variables	2	3	4
	r	*r*	*r*
	(p)	*(p)*	*(p)*
	(n)	*(n)*	*(n)*
1. Cultural proximity additive index[a]	.36**	.20**	.16**
	(.000)	(.000)	(.002)
	(365)	(361)	(357)
2. Interaction additive index[a]		.27**	.15**
	−	(.000)	(.003)
		(360)	(358)
3. American media credibility additive index[a]			.63**
		−	(.000)
			(354)
4. Puerto Rican media credibility index[a]			−

Note. [a]Responses were coded 5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *somewhat agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *somewhat disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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