Source Credibility, Persuasion, and Culture: A Literature Review

Jose Carlos Garcia de Pano
University of the Philippines, Baguio

ABSTRACT

This review of related literature centers on the dynamics between source credibility and culture. The first part provides an overview of source credibility's nature, structure, and operations. It begins with its roles in persuasive communication, then, eventually moves forward to its definitions and facets. The second section presents the debates and conflicting views on its dimensions. It builds the basis for the need to reexamine the concept, and contribute to the current conversations that interrogate the elements and components that are argued to constitute ethos. Finally, the third segment centers on how cultural variables could play a part in honing the factors that influence source credibility.

Keywords: source credibility, ethos, persuasion, culture

Locating the Issue: Source Credibility, Persuasion, and Culture

Source credibility, also referred to as ethos, is regarded as one of the most influential factors of persuasion (McCroskey, 1986). In fact, Rosenthal (1966) argues that it could be considered the most dominant of all the three artistic persuasive devices, allowing it to stand on its own, independent of pathos (appeal to emotions) and logos (appeal to reason). It is further claimed that its power to convince message receivers should place it at a different plane or level of classification, detaching it from its triadic association with the two other means of persuasion (Rosenthal, 1966). Despite the arguments dismissing this assumption, and instead advancing the idea that any form of separation of the three would be superficial as they are supposed to function together and enhance each other (Cheng, 2012), many scholars agree on ethos' capacity to affect one's persuasive ability in a wide array of communication contexts (e.g., Brahnam, 2009; de Pano, 2016; McCormack, 2014; Teven, 2008; Umeogu, 2012). In other words, regardless of the controversies on many of its aspects, source credibility continues to be an important component of persuasive communication.

Aside from the conflicting standpoints on whether it should be treated as an independent element of persuasion, source credibility faces many other conceptual issues that mainly stem from its structure and dimensions. For example, contrary to Aristotelian conceptualization, Ohanian (1990) presupposes that source credibility is composed of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness. Even without explicitly stating it, this model evidently excludes goodwill (the third ethos factor in Aristotle's rhetoric) as a determinant of source credibility. Considering this, the previously mentioned question on ethos' position in relation to pathos and logos, and its critical role in the realm of persuasion; a reexamination of its features, dynamics, and elements is certainly warranted. Therefore, this paper aims to focus on problematizing source credibility not to settle the continuous debates on its definitions and dimensions (as these may be perpetual), but instead to offer some insights that may spark the interests of scholars to launch more in-depth investigations into its conceptual progressions.

Perhaps what makes this paper distinct from other articles that attempt to scrutinize the various aspects of source credibility is that in the process of problematizing it, a certain focus on culture is incorporated. That is, culture serves as one basis of analysis for the

possible controversies that revolve around the concept of ethos. This is primarily based on the argument that source credibility may be interpreted as a function of culture (Bulan & de Leon, 2002); that it is honed by practices, traditions, values, and virtues celebrated by members of a particular cultural space (Halloran, 1982).

Although empirical, interpretive, social constructionist, or even rhetorical methodologies may be employed in examining source credibility, this paper presents a review of related studies for two reasons. First, it can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how source credibility is interpreted and interrogated by many communication scholars (coming from different research traditions), and thus, may lead to a broader appreciation of the construct. Second, compared with other techniques of inquiry, literature review can address and discuss more abstract and philosophical questions (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). Because the problematization of ethos may be considered to be a conceptual or theoretical dialogue, reviewing essays and articles that center on source credibility, persuasion, and culture may be the most appropriate way to answer the following questions: (1) *How could source credibility, as a persuasive apparatus, be defined and operationalized?* (2) *What could be the link between some cultural variables and varying conceptualizations of source credibility?*

To answer the aforementioned questions, the first part of the paper delivers an overview of source credibility's functions and operations. It begins with its roles in persuasive transactions; then, ultimately moves forward to its fundamental conceptualizations. The second section presents the debates and conflicting views on ethos' facets. It sets the stage for the need to revisit the concept, and join the ongoing conversations that examine the elements that are presumed to make up its structure. Finally, the third segment centers on how culture (i.e., cultural differences and cultural variables) could possibly play a part in honing the factors that influence source credibility.

It must be emphasized that this review of related literature does not account for the historical developments of source credibility. Rather, it attempts to provide a relatively encompassing picture of its conceptual maturation by synthesizing and analyzing what other researchers have found in the past. The articles probed in this paper were derived from different academic journals, and not necessarily limited to communication studies alone since source credibility has been a well-studied area in many other related fields and disciplines. Keywords such as "source credibility," "credibility," "ethos," "ethos dimensions," and

"source credibility and culture" were utilized to gather relevant pieces from Google scholar and other academic webpages.

Despite the above-cited limitations, it may still be contended that the paper has unignorable theoretical and methodological significance. At the theoretical level, mapping the evolutions of source credibility may open avenues for eventual expansions of existing theories and models that explain its capacity to affect one's persuasiveness. In terms of methodological contribution, the analyses and conclusions laid down in this paper may possibly lead to construction of more accurate and more reliable measures of source credibility that encompass cultural variations, especially because up to this point, the two most widely used ethos instruments—McCroskey and Teven's (1999) and Ohanian's (1990)—do not specifically include cultural indicators. While this definitely requires more rigorous investigations, the suppositions drawn from the paper may initially push for the formulation of new source credibility gauges which are grounded in more relevant frameworks.

Aside from theoretical and methodological implications, the paper's pragmatic value may not be underrated since ethos is empirically determined to be correlated with many other important communication variables like voting patterns (e.g., de Pano, 2016; Relao, 2011; Teven, 2008), interpersonal compliance (e.g., Florentino, 2010), likeability and believability (e.g., Teven, 2008), and parasocial behaviors (e.g., Relao, 2011) among others. This means that by having a good grasp of source credibility's structure and dimensions (i.e., factors that constitute ethos), one becomes equipped with the knowledge to find ways to influence people's attitudes and dispositions effectively. More importantly, through comprehending how source credibility is inevitably linked with culture, it becomes a prerequisite for any source of communication to have a good level of cultural sensitivity prior to engaging in any transaction that transpires in a certain cultural environment.

In sum, although the current paper may be largely seen as a theoretical piece, it must be emphasized that its importance transcends the level of theory. Its methodological and practical contributions undoubtedly offer very concrete justifications for doing a reassessment of ethos' conceptual bases and essential components, especially in relation to culture.

Building the Foundations:Structure and Dimensions of Source Credibility

Defined as "the attitude toward a source of communication held at a given time by a receiver" (McCroskey & Young, 1981, p. 24), ethos or

source credibility is argued to change over time (Bulan & de Leon, 2002). Even the scales that are employed to gauge it are also predicted to undergo revisions periodically (Applbaum & Anatol, 1973). The temporality of ethos, to a certain extent, speaks loudly about its fluidity in the sense that how it is assessed at one point may differ from how it is evaluated at another given period. This may be the reason, it is often divided into three stages: (1) extrinsic or initial, (2) intrinsic, derived, transactional, or produced, and (3) terminal (Bulan & de Leon, 2002; McCroskey, 1986). The first phase is influenced by the information about the communication source made available to the message receivers even before the actual interaction; while the second is largely shaped by the content, organization, and arguments of the given message; finally, the third stage is presumed to be the sum total of the first two (Bulan & de Leon, 2002). The terminal level of ethos may be deemed to be the most important because it can determine the source's initial ethos in future communication acts (Bulan & de Leon, 2002).

Apart from being associated with time, source credibility is also deemed to be affected by situation and geographic location (McCroskey, 1986). Additionally, it is contend that because it is a product of perception, the factors that determine it may also vary from individual to individual, or from group to group (Bulan & de Leon, 2002). Following this line of thought, there is reason to believe that it is highly subjective. It should be noted though that this subjectivity does not necessarily rest on the speaker, but rather on the message receivers (McCroskey, 1972). Therefore, ethos should not be seen as an inherent trait, attribute, or characteristic of the source; it is more appropriate to see it as a form of response coming from the audience based on the information they process about the speaker (Gunther, 1992, as cited in Bracken, 2006).

Relating source credibility with interpersonal trust, Giffin (1967) posits that the former is more than just a subjective construct since it could be influenced by majority's opinions. That is, perceptions of source credibility are formed not solely based on individual judgments, but by collective evaluations; hence, it is subjective and intersubjective. The subjectivity and intersubjectivity of source credibility, however, do not expressly denote that it cannot be objectively assessed since it has indicators that allow for measuring it. These indicators are most of the time tagged as dimensions.

In Aristotle's rhetoric, the dimensions of ethos are defined as good sense, good moral character, and goodwill (Niu & Ying, 2016). These facets are confirmed by more contemporary theorizations but labeled them as competence or authoritativeness, trustworthiness or

character, and goodwill or caring (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). The dimension of good sense (competence or authoritativeness) pertains to the speaker's characteristics that demonstrate intelligence, training, expertise, competence, brightness, and being informed; while the dimension of good moral character (trustworthiness) centers on the communicator's honesty, morality, trustworthiness, honor, ethics, and genuineness (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). Lastly, the dimension of goodwill (caring) is often described in terms of the speaker's understanding, sensitivity, selflessness, care and concern for the message receiver, and identification with the audience (McCroksey & Teven, 1999). Although these three facets and their respective components seem to be quite comprehensive in the sense that they can cover almost all the important characteristics of a credible communication source, there are other concepts associated with ethos that are found in the literature.

Some examples of the constructs referred to above include objectivity (Applbaum & Anatol, 1972; Whitehead, 1968), excellence (Brahnam, 2009), reputation (Demirdogen, 2010), truth processing (Eisend, 2006; Tormala & Petty, 2004), reliability (Giffin, 1967), reliability of motivation (McGuire, 1985), speaker's involvement (Bracken, 2006), perceptiveness (Singletary, 1976), and purposefulness (Singletary, 1976). Although they are termed differently, scrutinizing them more closely may lead to the assumption that they are just mere reiterations of the central themes of the three facets originally theorized by Aristotle. Objectivity and excellence would belong to good sense dimension; reputation, truth processing, reliability, and reliability of motivation would be part of good moral character dimension; and speaker's involvement, perceptiveness, and purposefulness would be within the scope of goodwill dimension. The figure below presents a graphical representation that clarifies how they are connected with the three ethos facets forwarded by the classical rhetorical theory.
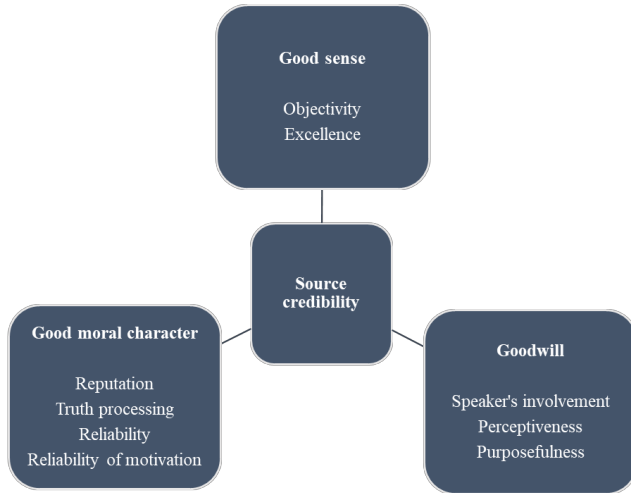
Figure 1. *Other Concepts Associated with Source Credibility Dimensions Theorized by Aristotle*

In addition to those subcomponents, readability and completeness of information (Bates, Romina, Ahmed, & Hopson, 2006); accuracy, bias, and depth of information given (Johnson & Kaye, 1998); and majority opinion (Giffin, 1967) are also observed to be integral aspects of ethos. What separates them, however, from the other constructs presented previously is that their manifestations are exemplified not necessarily in the source of communication, but instead, in the other elements involved in the communication process. For instance, readability and completeness of information are associated with the communication platform being the Internet. On the other hand, majority opinion may be a reflection of the quality of interpersonal relations between and among the receivers of the message.

Whether reflected in the source or in the other elements of the communicative act, it is clear at this point that source credibility is an indispensably vital ingredient in persuasive communication interactions. In fact, Brahnam (2009) argues that it "is an unavoidable component of dialogue and forms the basis for believing and being persuaded by another's speech" (p. 9). Moreover, it is also seen as the key factor that allows a speaker to catch and sustain the audience's attention (Umeogu,

2012); and without it, it would be difficult to convince people and influence their minds since ethos could be described as one's "willingness to trust what other person says or does" (Stewart & Moss, 1974, as cited in Singletary, 1976, p. 316).

Even if the functions of source credibility are more pronounced in public communication settings that require persuasion (e.g., Alsamydai & Al Khasawneh, 2013), its operations absolutely cross the boundaries that seemingly separate the levels and branches of human interaction. That is, it is also deemed to be essential in interpersonal communication (e.g., Giffin, 1967), organizational communication (e.g., Conley, 2010l; Vyas, 2013), mass communication (e.g., Singletary, 1976), mediated or technology-based communication (e.g., Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Xie, Miao, Kuo, & Lee, 2011), instructional communication (e.g., McCroskey, Holridge, & Toomb, 1974), political communication (e.g., McCormack, 2014; Mshvenieradze, 2013; Teven, 2008), and even marketing communication (e.g., Eisend, 2006; Pornpitakpan, 2004). The rich literature on source credibility's movements in various situations would only indicate that it is not exclusive to only one specific level or one particular area of communication. Indeed, there is no doubt that ethos' significance as a persuasive tool surpasses the disciplinal parameters that differentiate the fields and areas of communication.

In more practical contexts, source credibility's authority as an apparatus of persuasion is seen to influence voting behaviors (Alsamydai & Al Khasawneh, 2013; de Pano, 2016), purchase intention (Pornpitakpan, 2004), opinion change (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), job acceptance (Conley, 2010), student learning (Johnson & Miller, 2002; Zhang, 2009), and even environmental concern and protection (Higgins & Walker, 2012). It is interesting to note that even amidst the technological advancements that gave birth to newer communication modes and channels, source credibility still manages to maintain and articulate its significance. As a proof, ethos is seen to affect consumers' perceptions of the quality of health information displayed online (Bates et al., 2006). Another instance is how ethos takes part in people's decision-making process after reading ambivalent online reviews about a product or a service (Xie et al., 2011). All these examples only attest to the broad applicability of ethos, its strength to hone attitudes and dispositions, and most notably, its pragmatic worth in a wide array of communication situations. Whether in face-to-face interactions or in online transactions, source credibility remains to be a prominent artistic means of persuasion.

Taking into account all the articles reviewed and the explanations included in this section, four main points may be drawn

about the nature, structure, and dimensions of source credibility. First, although it is primarily subjective and intersubjective (as it is a product of perception, and is affected by many other factors like time, culture, and geographic location), it can still be objectively assessed through its indicators, more commonly referred to as dimensions. Second, its non-unidimensional structure makes it very challenging to come up with a universal set of ethos facets that can work across various cultures and communication phenomena. Third, its multidimensionality may be interpreted as both a strength and a weakness. It is its strength since it partly demonstrates its complexity as a communication construct; but it becomes a liability presumably because it appears like it would be almost impossible to capture its entirety. That is, whether scholars favor Aristotle's conceptualizations or the more recent theorizations, it would seem as if some parts of its conceptual frame are left behind. Fourth, because of its functions and operations, it cannot be boxed into only one specific domain of human communication. This suggests that its power undoubtedly goes beyond the demarcations between and among the levels and branches of communication as a discipline. In the final analysis, it should be underscored that none of the studies examined here would debunk the power of source credibility when it comes to its persuasive faculty.

Interrogating the Controversies: Conflicting Views on Source Credibility's Dimensions

Good moral character or trustworthiness may be assumed to be the most consistent of all the three dimensions forwarded by the classical rhetorical theory rooted in Aristotelian tradition (Kennedy, 2007, as cited in Niu & Ying, 2016). Surprisingly, even those perspectives that do not completely uphold Aristotle's principles seem to accept that trustworthiness is an imperative element of source credibility (e.g., Applbaum & Anatol, 1972; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McCroskey et al., 1974; Patzer, 1983). Often, these models partner it with other ethos determinants such as dynamism (Wanzenried & Powell, 1993), or professionalism and objectivity (Whitehead, 1968). Even in non-traditional communication platforms like the Internet, it is also employed together with perceived truthfulness, readability, and completeness of information given in evaluating message credibility (Bates et al., 2006); or with realness of the communication source (Xie et al., 2011). Additionally, it is trustworthiness that is determined to significantly affect opinion change (Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

Like trustworthiness, competence or authoritativeness is as well seen to be a concrete gauge of ethos. O'Keefe (2002), for instance, points out that

> a communicator who knows what is correct (has expertise) but who nevertheless misleads the audience (is untrustworthy, has a reporting bias) produces messages that are unreliable guides to belief and action, just as does the sincere (trustworthy) but uninformed (low expertise, knowledge-biased) communicator. (p. 184)

Although different terminologies are used to depict said dimension of source credibility, it is clear that it steadily retains its position in the realm of persuasion. From this argument, it may be supposed that both good sense and good moral character are necessary in building a good level of source credibility.

Among the three facets, then, it is goodwill that may be considered to be the most contentious since its validity to measure source credibility is challenged by scholars who put forward the notion that dynamism could serve as a more accurate gauge of ethos (Sereno & Hawkins, 1967; Tuppen, 1974). This claim centers on the argument that manner of delivery or self-presentation, being at the core of dynamism, may be a more important speaker's characteristic (than goodwill) which is evaluated by the audience as they assess his/ her ethos level. In other words, observable behaviors (i.e., technicalities of message delivery) may create stronger impact on source credibility than intentions (i.e., goodwill).

Apart from dynamism, another element that seems to replace goodwill's locus is reflected in the model defining source credibility as "inclination toward truth (will tell the truth), potential of truth (knows the truth), and presentation of truth (appears to tell the truth)" (Eisend, 2006, p. 23). The first two categories in this framework mirror the Aristotelian dimensions of good sense (potential of truth) and good moral character (inclination toward the truth). They are as well aligned with the more recent interpretations mentioned earlier which present good sense as competence, and good moral character as trustworthiness. It is noticeable though that the third category—presentation of truth or appearing to tell the truth—does not display the basic characteristics of goodwill; and on the contrary, points to more overt expressions of ethos.

While the issues surrounding source credibility are more apparently connected with goodwill, it must be clarified that there are greater debates on its composition. That is, different theories offer

different takes on what exactly composes ethos (Niu & Ying, 2016). In fact, there are several other concepts associated with source credibility that do not seem to fall into any of the three dimensions based on Aristotelian rhetoric stated in the preceding section. These are activeness (Giffin, 1967), attractiveness and/ or physical appearance (Conley, 2010; Demirdogen, 2010; Giffin, 1967; McGuire, 1985; Patzer, 1983), believability (Johnson & Kaye, 1998), composure (McCroskey et al., 1974), confidence (Singletary, 1976), dynamism (Applbaum & Anatol, 1972; Singletary, 1976; Wanzenried & Powell, 1993; Whitehead, 1968), effectiveness (Singletary, 1976), extroversion (McCroskey et al., 1974), frankness (Singletary, 1976), liking for communicator (Patzer, 1983), manner of delivery (Demirdogen, 2010), professionalism (Singletary, 1976; Whitehead, 1968), and sociability (McCroskey et al., 1974).

Table 1. *Other Source Credibility Concepts that are not Parallel with Aristotelian Dimensions*

activeness	dynamism	manner of delivery
attractiveness	effectiveness	physical appearance
believability	extroversion	professionalism
composure	frankness	sociability
confidence	liking for communicator	

Based on the enumerated constructs, it appears that Aristotle's theorizations of source credibility are continuously implicitly challenged by more recent scholarships that operationalize ethos through factors that are not parallel with those of the classical rhetorical tradition. On the surface, it is quite easy to assume that the different (and somewhat contradicting) stands on what composes ethos weaken it as a concept. However, looking at these issues more critically would support the argument that they could actually serve as its strength for three reasons: (1) they certainly communicate the concept's complexity, which, in turn, argues its progressions and developments; (2) the opposing views on ethos' facets only imply that it is a well-studied construct, contending its meaningful role in persuasive communication; and (3) these varying perspectives offer foundation to the fundamental definition of source credibility anchored in perception, subjectivity, and intersubjectivity.

Although it might be futile to settle the controversies on ethos' facets as its very nature entails constant and perpetual problematizations of its conceptual framings, it is nevertheless interesting to look for

possible explanations as to why there are varied conceptualizations and operationalizations of its dimensions. Because it is defined as a function of culture (Bulan & de Leon, 2002); and hence, it is honed by cultural variables (Halloran, 1982), it makes sense to review the findings of past studies directly examining the interactions between source credibility and certain cultural characteristics. Despite the fact that there has been dearth of literature that explored and tested their connections, it is still worthwhile to look at the available ones.

Finding Tentative Explanations: Source Credibility and Culture

In analyzing the rhetoric of one of the former presidents of the Philippines, Cristobal (2002) found that in addition to the three dimensions advanced by Aristotle, there were two other traits—charisma and use of English language—that were important for Filipino voters in choosing their presidential bets. The use of English language as a barometer of source credibility in the Philippines may be a product of the country's colonial history and Filipinos' neocolonial mentality. In other words, those who speak the language fluently are perceived to be more credible since they are seen to belong to the higher strata of the society. It also communicates their educational attainment. In a country where tertiary learning is more of a privilege than a right, it is not surprising that those who finish college (and thus, are well-versed in speaking the English language) are perceived to have higher ethos. On the other hand, the finding that charisma could enhance politicians' source credibility might be anchored in the idea that voters identify more with charismatic leaders. Because the Philippines is characterized by a collectivistic culture, it is somehow expected that political leaders who exhibit more personal (and interpreted to be genuine) interactions with the people are assigned positive source credibility ratings.

The notion of personal interaction is not unique to the Filipino setting as Pornpitakpan (2004) observed that attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise (being facets of ethos) could all affect purchase intention of Singaporean consumers because they could feel the connections between them and the celebrities endorsing the products they intended to buy. The author (Pornpitakpan, 2004) wrote that

> due to collectivists' emphasis on connectedness and blending with others, they need to feel the sense of interpersonal trust before such connectedness can happen and last. The importance assigned to trust in collectivist cultures is therefore much greater than in individualist cultures. (p. 168)

It was further noted that the disparity between her findings and Ohanian's (1990) data (which failed to establish the significance of the three aforesaid ethos elements) was a product of cultural differences between the United States and Singapore: "Singaporeans tend to be very concerned about attractiveness. As expected, Singaporean respondents in this study appear to give more weight to the celebrities' attractiveness and trustworthiness than do American respondents" (Pornpitakpan, 2004, p. 168).

Similarly, in a study exploring the factors that could influence Chinese users' perceived source credibility of online health information, Gao, Tian, and Tu (2015) discovered that interpersonal relations could create strong impact on source credibility ratings. The authors noted that "negative comments from personal networks decreased perceived credibility significantly, and this effect was slightly more pronounced when the comments came from close friends" (Gao et al., 2015, p. 21). This finding may suggest not only the intersubjective nature of source credibility discussed earlier, but more notably, the moderating capacity of the degree of interpersonal relationship in collectivistic cultures in the sense that information coming from people who are closer to the one making ethos evaluations receives greater weight than information coming from a stranger or someone else. Again, this validates the assumption that interpersonal connection is regarded to be a prominent consideration in assessing one's source credibility (e.g., Hung, Li, & Tse, 2011).

Another proof that source credibility is a product of collective assessment (rather than of individual estimation) in Chinese culture may be located in Liu and Huang's (2005) research which centers on understanding how Chinese students differ from their American counterparts in evaluating information sources on the Internet. The authors found that online sources which were often viewed by other people were perceived positively by Chinese students, but negatively by American students. This finding may point to the presumption that Chinese students' source credibility judgments were influenced by other people's evaluations. This is in complete contrast from the case of American students who were not affected by other individuals' evaluations. What is interesting here is that this result could highlight the difference between generally collectivistic and individualistic societies, in the sense that people from collectivistic cultures tend to value other people's opinions as they form their own; while those from

individualistic cultures are more inclined to depend on their own unique appraisals.

Because most cross-cultural studies aim to compare U.S. practices against those of other countries, Johnson and Miller (2002) conducted research to test if the relationships among source credibility, immediacy, and learning in the United States were the same in Kenya. Even if they confirmed that the associations among the three variables were established in both nations, they observed that the scores from Kenyan students were consistently lower compared with the scores from the U.S. sample. Although they did not thoroughly elaborate on how cultural aspects could have determined the scores, they argued that the phenomenon could be attributed to cultural differences.

While the context of Zhang, Zhang, and Castelluiccio's (2011) investigation was different from that of Johnson and Miller (2002), they were able to provide more concrete elucidations on how cultural distinctions could pronounce the disparities in instructional communication across countries. As the authors compared college students' resistance in the classroom and the effects of teachers' source credibility, they recorded that in U.S. college classrooms, both competence and trustworthiness could predict students' resistance; however, in China, the sole predictor of resistance was said to be trustworthiness. According to them, one plausible explanation for the accounted difference lies in the assumption that teacher competence in Chinese culture is seen to be only a minimal factor of source credibility since their principal function in their classrooms is to guide their students in becoming good citizens. In a nutshell, they are expected to perform pastoral functions. This, being the case, competence becomes secondary, and thus, could not affect source credibility to a great degree.

In an attempt to develop a multicultural source credibility model that could be applied in instruction and education, Zhang (2009) tested how the dimensions of ethos would relate to learning in a sample composed of American, Chinese, German, and Japanese students. The author found that contrary to the findings of past research, trustworthiness did not have any significant interaction with learning. Despite this though, competence and caring had significant correlations with student learning. Even if this study was not very successful in constructing a source credibility model that could possibly work across cultures, it still yielded interesting results especially because trustworthiness has always been a strong and consistent factor of ethos.

Parallel with Zhang's (2009) findings, Santilli, Miller, and Katt (2011) observed that in Brazilian classrooms, only competence and caring had correlations with instructor nonverbal immediacy. Again, there was no significant relationship recorded between the aforesaid variable and trustworthiness. Considering this data set, it becomes increasingly interesting to explore the uniqueness of classrooms (and of instructional communication) and why competence and caring were determined to be more accurate predictors of teacher source credibility than trustworthiness. More than this, more in-depth problematizations of these conflicting results may lead scholars to treat classrooms as cultural spaces which do not automatically and necessarily reflect the cultural practices, traditions, and values of their respective geographic locations.

Other thought-provoking constructs that are proposed to interact with source credibility and may be said to be reflections of cultural systems include religion or religiosity in the Arab culture (Golan & Kiousis, 2010), wisdom and trust in Moroccan culture (Hassi, Storti, & Azennoud, 2011), respect and class in Korean culture (La Ferle & Choi, 2005), and source identification in both Chinese and American cultures (Pjesivac & Rui, 2014). While there could be a number of explanations for the significant relationships they maintain with ethos, the role of cultural influences in mediating these relationships cannot be dismissed since these concepts may be claimed to be unique to their respective cultural milieus.

The function of culture in shaping source credibility has been further highlighted by studies that directly examined the associations between specific cultural variables and ethos. For example, Morimoto (2012) found that acculturation had significant effects on subcomponents of source credibility, particularly on trustworthiness. On the other hand, Morimoto and La Ferle (2008) contended that racial congruency had the capacity to improve ethos. Finally, in research done in an organizational context, Neuliep, Hintz, and McCroskey (2005) recorded that ethnocentrism was negatively correlated with authoritativeness and character, arguing that higher level of ethnocentrism might lead to lower ratings of competence and trustworthiness.

From all the studies reviewed in this segment, it may be very well argued that culture definitely takes part in defining the variables and elements that shape source credibility. Indeed, Halloran (1982) makes a founded contention in strongly claiming that cultural systems and virtues are at the core of ethos as a persuasive device. Taking this and all the other findings discussed above into account, a few more questions remain unanswered. Would it be possible to construct a universal instrument

that can precisely measure source credibility while accounting for cultural differences? Should all measures of ethos be culture-specific? Should the existing source credibility models and theories be revised to include cultural factors? Is it possible that while source credibility dimensions may be universal, their indicators and manifestations are culture-bound?

Perhaps, all those questions would receive only partial answers as one thing that is commonly shared by ethos and culture is that both of them are fluid. Therefore, they almost always necessitate constant problematizations and theorizations.

Continuing the Conversations:Source Credibility in Culture, Culture in Source Credibility

Quite evidently, the relationship between culture and source credibility is truly complicated that the issues raised in this paper may never be completely settled. What is important at this point, however, is that it opens avenues where debates on the dimensions that make up ethos, in relation to cultural aspects, may be sustained. In addition, it also prompts communication scholars to launch more investigations that particularly target how culture is positioned in persuasive communication—the realm where ethos' functions and operations are mostly exemplified. Conversely, it challenges researchers to locate the concept of source credibility in intercultural communication studies.

The merging of intercultural communication and persuasive communication may be found to be a significant intersection in the discipline of human communication as they have overlapping concerns. Moreover, because they tackle many related constructs, it may not be possible to detach one from the other. Indeed, persuasion and culture share conceptual similarities in the sense that a communicator cannot persuade a group of people without understanding their cultural backgrounds; and in the same vein, nearly all intercultural transactions require utilization of persuasive techniques to ensure fruitful interactions (or to even initiate a conversation).

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About the Author

Jose Carlos Garcia de Pano is an Assistant Professor (on study leave) at the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts of the University of the Philippines-Diliman. He is currently pursuing a degree in PhD Communication and Information Sciences at the University of Alabama.