



How Do Individual and Societal Factors Shape News Authentication? Comparing Misinformation Resilience Across Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United States

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Abstract

In an era of pervasive misinformation, equipping citizens to counter its spread is increasingly critical. This study examines news authentication—individuals' proactive verification of news—as a key indicator of resilience to misinformation. Guided by the theory of planned behavior and the resilience model, we examine how individual characteristics and structural contexts interact to influence news authentication. To do so, we adopt a multilevel comparative approach, analyzing news authentication in three distinct societies: Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United States. Drawing on a preregistered, population-based survey conducted in 2022 ($N=6,082$), we apply multigroup structural equation modeling to identify the influential factors. Our findings show that, at the societal level, news authentication is more prevalent in the United States and Hong Kong, where severe polarization and fragmented, low-trust media environments amplify misinformation risks. Conversely, the Netherlands exhibits lower levels of news authentication, potentially due to its relatively cohesive media environment and moderate polarization. At the individual level, political efficacy

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and institutional trust are consistent predictors across societies, underscoring the importance of political empowerment and trust in fostering resilience. Education significantly predicts news authentication only in the United States, where the complex information landscape necessitates higher cognitive engagement. Notably, conspiracy beliefs positively associate with news authentication in the Netherlands and the United States, reflecting a potential “dark side” of this behavior in contexts marked by growing anti-establishment sentiments. These findings highlight the interplay between individual capacities, political beliefs, and broader media and political environments in shaping resilience to misinformation.

Keywords

news authentication, news verification, resilience to misinformation, cross-country comparison, surveys, theory of planned behavior

Misinformation remains a global challenge, and resilience to it—defined as the capacity of societies to cope with this challenge (Hall and Lamont 2013)—has become a critical area of research. Recent studies have emphasized resilience as a collective trait, characterized by a low propensity to engage with misinformation at an aggregate level and shaped by institutional and cultural factors, such as the quality of public service broadcasting (PSB) and societal polarization (Boulianne et al. 2022; Humprecht et al. 2020; Humprecht et al. 2023). However, these studies often overlook the role of individual-level factors and citizens’ efforts in countering misinformation. While resilience is frequently conceptualized as a collective phenomenon due to its roots in societal conditions, it also relies on individual cognitive capacity and motivation to process and respond effectively to misinformation (Rodríguez-Pérez and Canel 2023). Therefore, it is crucial to explore how structural contexts and individual characteristics together shape resilience to misinformation.

To address this gap, this study examines citizens’ news authentication as an indicator of resilience to misinformation. News authentication refers to individuals actively verifying the authenticity of news they encounter and suspect to be false, typically through cross-validation and social discussion (Chan, Lee, et al. 2024; Tandoc et al. 2018). It is often regarded as a “normative ideal” that discourages the belief and spread of misinformation (Edgerly et al. 2020: 53). In an evolving media landscape where platform interventions and fact-checking services have limited effectiveness, news authentication plays an important role in combating misinformation (Yu and Shen 2024).

In this context, we examine the individual- and societal-level factors that influence news authentication. At the individual level, our analysis is guided by the theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen 1991), focusing on individual capacities like education and political efficacy, alongside preexisting political beliefs including institutional trust and conspiracy beliefs. At the societal level, we build on the resilience model

proposed by Humprecht et al. (2020) to explore how structural factors in the political and media environments shape news authentication behavior.

To investigate these dynamics, we adopt a multilevel comparative approach that integrates macro- and microlevel factors, focusing on how macrolevel structures shape individual-level outcomes (McLeod and Lee 2013). In selecting the focal research contexts, we follow the most different systems design (Przeworski and Teune 1970; Zhu et al. 1997) and compare news authentication across Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United States through a preregistered, population-based survey. While these advanced economies with widespread social media use are vulnerable to misinformation (Boulianne et al. 2022; Humprecht et al. 2023), they differ in political and media factors crucial to resilience, such as polarization, PSB, and press freedom (Humprecht et al. 2020). These structural differences provide individuals with distinct opportunities and constraints for authenticating news to counter misinformation. Overall, this comparative approach not only enhances the external validity of the findings by examining various contexts but also provides a nuanced understanding of how individual-level factors interact with macrolevel contexts (McLeod and Lee 2013).

Citizens' News Authentication as Resilience to Misinformation

News authentication, synonymous with “news verification” (Yu and Shen 2024: 1703), is considered normatively desirable and practically essential for combating misinformation. Conceptually, it involves a two-step process: individuals first engage in internal authentication, relying on personal knowledge and credibility markers within news content (e.g., source, message, style). When doubts persist, they move to external authentication, triangulating with different sources and consulting others (Tandoc et al. 2018). Our study focuses on external authentication, which is vital in today’s ambiguous and uncertain information landscape (Wenzel 2019). Since internal authentication is prone to cognitive biases (Edgerly et al. 2020; Yu and Shen 2024), external authentication may offer a more reliable approach to counter misinformation.

Building on prior research, we differentiate two types of news authentication: interpersonal and institutional. Interpersonal authentication relies on trusted personal networks, such as family, friends, and social media contacts, while institutional authentication involves cross-validation through mainstream media, fact-checking services, or online searches (Tandoc et al., 2018; Wenzel 2019). Interpersonal authentication is common among those embedded in close online networks and is shaped by group norms and dynamics in collective settings (Chang 2021; Kligler-Vilenchik 2022; Waruwu et al. 2021). In contrast, institutional authentication, particularly through the use of fact-checking services, is less prevalent but varies across media systems (Cushion et al. 2022; Kyriakidou et al. 2023). Despite these differences, individuals often use both methods in daily news engagement (Chang, 2021). They both reflect intentional and proactive critical news consumption and require individuals to recognize when news authentication is necessary and to expend time and resources to

verify information (Chan 2024; Edgerly et al. 2020). In other words, they depend on individuals' ability and motivation.

While news authentication is primarily an individual behavior, its collective impact can enhance societal resilience against misinformation. When significant portions of a population engage in authentication, the spread of misinformation may diminish. Widespread adoption can also foster collective vigilance and promote social norms emphasizing accuracy and factuality, creating a societal defense mechanism. Additionally, it can potentially raise the quality of public discourse, facilitating more informed discussions on social and political issues and reducing misinformation's appeal. To unlock this normative potential, it is essential to understand the conditions that foster news authentication.

TPB: Individual Factors Influencing News Authentication

Existing research indicates that news authentication relies on individuals' ability and motivation (Chan 2024; Edgerly et al. 2020). To explore this further, we adopt a social cognitive approach that emphasizes the interplay between environmental factors and personal attributes, such as self-efficacy, attitudes, and beliefs, in shaping perceptions and actions (Bandura 1986, 1999). In this regard, we are guided by the TPB, focusing on individual-level factors related to behavioral control and attitude toward news authentication.

According to TPB, individual behavior is influenced by components including behavioral control, attitudes, and subjective norms (Ajzen 1991, 2020). Behavioral control reflects individuals' sense of their capacity to perform a behavior, while attitudes pertain to their evaluation of the behavior, and subjective norms capture the social pressures they perceive to engage in it. Instead of directly measuring attitudes, control, or norms specific to news authentication, our study incorporates elements of TPB to identify individual-level predictors within the broader behavioral context.

First, we use education and internal political efficacy as indicators of actual and perceived behavioral control over news authentication. Education, as a critical resource, enhances cognitive skills, critical thinking, and media literacy, equipping individuals to navigate misinformation effectively. Political efficacy, particularly internal efficacy, reflects individuals' belief in their ability to influence political outcomes, which can motivate proactive news verification. Both factors align with TPB's emphasis on individuals' perceived ability to perform a behavior, offering insight into why some individuals are more likely to authenticate news.

Second, we connect behavioral attitudes to preexisting political beliefs, including institutional trust and conspiracy beliefs. For instance, institutional trust reflects positive attitudes toward authoritative sources, which may predispose individuals to rely on institutional authentication methods, such as fact-checking services or mainstream media. In contrast, conspiracy beliefs often embody negative attitudes toward traditional institutions and the media, potentially undermining motivation to engage in institutional authentication. These attitudes resonate with TPB's concept of behavioral

attitudes, as they shape how individuals evaluate the desirability and necessity of authenticating news.

It should be noted that our study does not directly measure attitudes, control, or norms related to news authentication, a limitation that departs from a strict application of TPB. Instead, we use TPB as a guiding social cognitive framework to identify individual-level factors influencing news authentication. This approach allows us to explore the impact of broader constructs, such as political efficacy and beliefs, advancing research on citizens' communication practices to counter information disorder.

Behavioral Control: Education and Political Efficacy

Education can enhance individuals' actual behavioral control over news authentication, hence, facilitating the behavior. According to TPB, performance of many behaviors entails possession of certain skills and knowledge and demands the ability to overcome potential barriers (Ajzen 2020). In the case of news authentication, individuals must be capable of recognizing content that may be misleading or false, identifying situations that require further verification, and accessing reliable external sources to cross-check information. Education can enhance these abilities, as it equips individuals with critical thinking skills, reflective judgment, and media literacy (Brabeck 1983; Livingstone and Bovill 2013; Vinh et al. 2022). Existing research also supports this, showing that those with higher levels of education are more aware of misinformation and better able to identify it (Boulianne et al. 2022; Chan 2024).

Internal political efficacy serves as an important component of perceived behavioral control over news authentication. According to TPB, perceived behavioral control is based on self-efficacy beliefs, which are concerned with one's confidence in their ability to execute a behavior (Ajzen 1991, 2020). Internal political efficacy, defined as belief in one's ability "to understand and to participate effectively in politics" (Craig et al. 1990: 290), essentially involves the "confidence in one's own ability to determine the truth about factual aspects of politics" (Pingree 2011: 23). It can make individuals feel more in control, allowing them to critically evaluate news items and identify situations when authentication is needed. Moreover, this self-confidence also facilitates proactive information seeking (Pingree 2011; York et al. 2020), which is necessary for cross-referencing and validating news through both social and institutional sources.

Taken together, according to the TPB framework, education and political efficacy can enhance actual and perceived behavioral control necessary for news authentication, thereby making individuals more likely to engage in this behavior. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Education (H1a) and political efficacy (H1b) are positively associated with news authentication.

Preexisting Belief: Institutional Trust

Institutional trust is a specific type of belief that represents an individual's expectations and confidence in the integrity and competence of various political and civic entities, such as the government, legal system, and media. It involves the perception that these institutions will act in a satisfactory manner, often based on past experiences, institutional performance, and cultural norms (Hudson 2006; Mishler and Rose 2001). As a preexisting belief, institutional trust can influence individuals' attitudes toward news authentication behaviors in two primary ways:

On the one hand, individuals with strong institutional trust are likely to believe that media and other institutions will adequately ensure the quality of information (Hanitzsch et al 2018), which may lead them to perceive less need for personal news authentication. Research shows that during the Covid-19 pandemic, those with high institutional trust were less likely to perceive misinformation as a significant problem (Arrese 2024). Conversely, individuals with low institutional trust tend to approach news with greater skepticism, which drives them to engage more in news authentication (Rodríguez-Pérez and Canel 2023).

On the other hand, despite potentially perceiving less need for news authentication, individuals with high institutional trust tend to maintain a favorable attitude toward the behavior. Research consistently shows that institutional trust fosters a sense of civic duty, motivating citizens to participate in political and community activities for the well-being of society (Hudson 2006; Norris 1999). This sense of civic duty extends to staying informed and actively seeking information about public issues (Poindexter and McCombs 2001). Consequently, we can expect individuals with strong institutional trust to favor news authentication, as they value factual, quality information and care about the impact of misinformation on societal well-being. Indeed, qualitative findings show that individuals with strong institutional trust often use reputable journalistic work as tools for cross-source validation and take up a tutelage role for fact-checking within their social networks (Pasitselska 2022).

Given the mixed reasoning, we propose the following question:

RQ1: What is the relationship between institutional trust and news authentication?

Preexisting Belief: Conspiracy Beliefs

Conspiracy beliefs refer to the belief that power elites have "coordinated in secret to achieve an outcome of their own interest" (Douglas and Sutton 2023: 282). Even though most of conspiracy beliefs are unfounded or debunked, they are notoriously resistant to correction (Wood et al. 2012). We argue that these beliefs can foster negative attitudes toward news authentication, hindering individuals from engaging in this behavior.

First, individuals holding conspiracy beliefs may doubt that news authentication will lead to an outcome that they desire. Research shows that conspiracy beliefs are closely linked with anti-intellectualism—a generalized distrust and hostility toward

experts and intellectuals (Chen et al. 2023). Such skepticism undermines reliance on credible news sources, fact-checkers, and expert information (Bessi et al. 2015; Carey et al 2022; Merkley and Loewen 2021), discouraging these individuals from engaging in news authentication.

Second, conspiracy believers likely devalue news authentication itself. Conspiracy beliefs stem from a monological belief system that guides conspiratorial thinking, where conspiracy is the default explanation for any event (Miller 2020; Tam and Lee 2024; Wood et al. 2012). Individuals with such beliefs routinely engage in motivated reasoning, selectively gathering and interpreting information to maintain or bolster their existing views (Miller et al. 2016). As a result, they may not appreciate the value of accurate, fact-based information that news authentication provides. Therefore, we propose the hypothesis as follows:

H2: Conspiracy beliefs are negatively associated with news authentication.

Resilience Model and Society-Level Differences in News Authentication

Hall and Lamont (2013: 2) argue that social resilience refers to “the capacities of societies to cope with many kinds of challenges.” Resilient societies equip their members with institutional and cultural resources that support their well-being—resources that vulnerable societies lack. Building on this concept, Humprecht et al. (2020) define resilience to misinformation as a collective characteristic that limits the production, consumption, and spread of false or misleading content. They argue that this resilience is shaped by political, media, and economic environments: Countries with low polarization, high media trust, and strong PSB, such as those in Western Europe, are more resilient than countries with polarized, politicized, low-trust, and fragmented media environments, like the United States (Humprecht et al. 2020).

Building upon this line of research, we compare news authentication—an indicator of such resilience—across three societies with distinct political and media systems, namely Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United States. This comparison is based on the most different systems design, contrasting countries that differ in extraneous variables (Anckar 2008; Przeworski and Teune 1970). By examining “the differences along societal-level variables,” this method enables us to identify and contrast various societal factors, gaining a more precise understanding of their influence on news authentication (Zhu et al. 1997: 85).

Specifically, we focus on two key aspects of media and political environments that vary across these societies to explain the cross-country differences in news authentication: First, according to the resilience model, the United States and Hong Kong exhibit a “low-trust, politicized, and fragmented” media environment that fosters widespread misinformation, while the Netherlands benefits from a “media-supportive and more consensual” environment, which is more effective at curbing misinformation (Humprecht et al. 2020: 14). The lack of structural conditions to mitigate misinformation may, on the one hand, necessitate news authentication at the individual level,

while on the other, hinder individuals' ability and motivation to engage in it. Thus, based on the resilience model, we expect news authentication to be similar in the United States and Hong Kong, but different from that in the Netherlands. Second, the United States and the Netherlands have a freer, more diverse press than Hong Kong, potentially providing better tools, such as independent information sources and institutional fact-checking, to authenticate news. If press freedom enhances news authentication, we would expect it to be more prevalent in the Netherlands and the United States than in Hong Kong.

In sum, this conceptualization presents competing possibilities that can be empirically tested, with the results helping to identify which aspect of structural contexts has the greatest influence on news authentication (Zhu et al. 1997). The following section provides a detailed cross-country comparison of the two key aspects of media and political environments.

“Media-Supportive and More Consensual” Versus “Low-Trust, Politicized, and Fragmented” Media Environments

The United States and Hong Kong share high levels of political polarization, with increasing alignment between political and nonpolitical identities. Over the past decade, animosity has escalated between Democrats and Republicans in the United States, and between pro-democracy and pro-establishment factions in Hong Kong (Finkel et al. 2020; Iyengar et al. 2019; Kobayashi 2020; Lee 2016). In contrast, polarization in the Netherlands is more moderate, although divides over cultural issues and the political far-right have been widening (Harteveld 2021; Reiljan 2020). Research shows that polarization exacerbates misinformation (Humprecht et al. 2020; Osmundsen et al. 2021), raising concerns among citizens that motivate news authentication (Chan et al. 2025). However, polarization also fuels motivated reasoning and extreme beliefs (Tucker et al. 2018), making individuals more likely to support misinformation and less inclined to verify it (Hameleers and Van der Meer 2020; Humprecht et al. 2023).

Political polarization is linked to the rise of hyperpartisan media (Suiter and Fletcher 2020), which is more pronounced in the United States and Hong Kong than in the Netherlands (Chan 2020; Hallin and Mancini 2004; Lelkes 2016). Hyperpartisan media hinder news authentication, as partisans often view fact-checking services as biased and ignore those supporting opposing views (Young et al. 2018). Correspondingly, trust in the media is lower in the United States and Hong Kong than in the Netherlands (Behre et al., 2023). Distrust in media can foster skepticism, prompting authentication behaviors (Chan et al. 2025; Wenzel 2019). However, this distrust may undermine news literacy (Paisana et al. 2020), depriving individuals of the skills needed to authenticate news (Yu and Shen 2024).

Additionally, both the United States and Hong Kong have weak PSB. PSB has always been marginalized in the United States due to the dominance of commercial interests (Aufderheide 1996; Hallin and Mancini 2004). In Hong Kong, Radio Television Hong Kong faces increasing political pressures, limited resources, and

funding constraints (Lo and Wong 2021). In contrast, the Netherlands has a more robust PSB system (Humprecht et al 2020). Strong PSB contributes to the production and consumption of high-quality, balanced news content and promotes political knowledge (Aalberg and Cushion 2016; Park and Gil de Zúñiga 2021; Van Aelst et al. 2017). Thus, it can equip citizens with tools needed to authenticate news. At the same time, as strong PSB curtails misinformation (Humprecht et al 2020), news authentication may be less necessary.

Press Freedom

The Netherlands and the United States are liberal democracies with a free and diverse press, while Hong Kong, classified as a hybrid regime, has experienced democratic backsliding since the implementation of the National Security Law in 2020, leading to a significant deterioration of press freedom (Freedom House 2022). From a supply-side perspective, press freedom guarantees an inclusive and diverse media environment (Czepek et al. 2009), which is essential for obtaining independent information for cross-validation. In countries with a free press, institutional fact-checking is also more accessible and accepted, serving as an important tool for uncovering false claims (Cushion et al. 2022; Lyons et al. 2020). From a demand-side perspective, press freedom shapes “cultures of news consumption” (Toff and Kalogeropoulos 2020: 370), accounting for cross-country variations in news-related behaviors. Citizens in countries with limited political freedom are more likely to opt out of news, possibly because they perceive it as less valuable (Toff and Kalogeropoulos 2020). As this culture contributes to a less informed and engaged public (Sen 1999), we can expect news authentication to be less common in countries with restricted press freedom.

This conceptualization of the two aspects of structural contexts presents competing possibilities about how news authentication differs across the three societies. Thus, we propose the following research question:

RQ2: How does news authentication differ across Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United States?

Structural contexts also affect how individual characteristics influence news authentication. In polarized, fragmented, and politicized media environments, individuals are exposed to more conflicting, low-quality information, making their ability and motivation to authenticate news more critical. According to structuration theory (Giddens 1984), structures enable or constrain individual agency, as supported by research on news-related behaviors. For instance, the extent to which individuals’ political interest influences the diversity in their media diets varies across countries with different media ownership (Castro-Herrero et al. 2018). Hence, we also ask:

RQ3: How do the relationships between individual factors (i.e., education, political efficacy, institutional trust, and conspiracy beliefs) and news authentication differ across the three societies?

Method

Sample and Data Collection

To answer the research questions and test the hypotheses, we conducted a preregistered,¹ population-based online survey in Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United States in February 2022 ($N=6,082$). Ethical approval was obtained from the corresponding author's university human subject research committee prior to the commencement of the study. Participants were adult citizens aged from 18 to 65 in each society and recruited from online panels maintained by Qualtrics. Qualtrics used the quota-stratified sampling method to draw samples from their panels whose gender, age, income, and educational level were close to the census. The sample sizes for each society were as follows: Hong Kong (1,750), the Netherlands (1,981), and the United States (2,351). The detailed demographical characteristics of the sample can be found in Supplemental Information.

Measurements

Dependent Variables: News Authentication. The measurement of news authentication was adopted from previous studies (Chia et al. 2024; Edgerly et al. 2020; Yu and Shen 2024). Participants were asked five items on a five-point scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *almost always*) following the question "In the past two weeks, when you received news about current affairs, politics, economy, and public policy, did you verify the authenticity of the news through the following channels?" The items included: (1) Ask friends/family members for more information on this topic; (2) Check other major news outlets for more information on this topic; (3) Consult the fact-checking agencies (such as PolitiFact, Snopes, AP Fact-checking, and/or other fact-checking center run by the professional groups, or the fact-checking column of the news media); (4) Use a search engine for more information on this topic; and (5) Check social media for more information on this topic. Items (1) and (5) pertain to interpersonal news authentication, whereas items (2), (3), and (4) concern institutional news authentication. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement quality (see Supplemental Information).

Predictor: Individual Capacity. Individual capacity includes educational level and political efficacy. We measured the educational level differently in the three societies given the different educational systems. In Hong Kong, the level of education was measured in a five-point scale, from 1 = *middle school graduates or below* to 5 = *postgraduate or higher*. In the Netherlands, the level of education was measured in an eight-point scale, from 1 = *no formal education* to 8 = *postgraduate degree or higher*. In the United States, the level of education was measured by a six-point scale from 1 = *no degree* to 6 = *postgraduate or above*.

Political efficacy was measured with two items adopted from Niemi et al. (1991). On five-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), participants were asked: "I think I have enough ability to participate in the political affairs" and "I think I understand the government and political issues better than most people."

Predictor: Institutional Trust. We measured institutional trust with the existing measurement adopted from previous studies on political and institutional trust (Craig et al. 1990; Sønderskov and Dinesen 2016). Participants were asked to indicate their levels of trust in the following institutions or public sectors on six items, each measured on a five-point scale (1 = *have no trust at all*, 5 = *trust completely*), including the Chief Executive (Hong Kong)/Prime Minister (the Netherlands)/President (the United States), the court system, the legislative body, the civil service system, the army or the disciplined services, and the public health system.

Predictor: Conspiracy Belief. We used the existing Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (Bruder et al. 2013) to measure conspiracy belief, which asked respondents how much they agreed or disagreed with the following five statements on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*): “I think many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about,” “I think politicians usually do not tell us the true motives for their decisions,” “I think government agencies closely monitor all citizen,” “I think events which superficially seem to lack a connection are often the result of secret activities,” and “There are secret organizations that greatly influence political decisions.”

Control Variables. We control for basic demographic variables (age, gender, and income) and several individual characteristics including political interest, political ideology, and news consumption. Political interest was measured by a five-point scale (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *almost always*) on the question “How much do you care about the government, politics, and public affairs in Hong Kong/ the Netherlands/the US?.” Political ideology was measured on a nine-point scale (1 = *pro-democratic in Hong Kong/political left in the Netherlands/Democratic in the United States*; 9 = *pro-establishment in Hong Kong/political right in the Netherlands/Republican in the United States*) with the question “In political matters, how would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?.” News consumption was measured by asking participants “In the last two weeks, how often did you pay attention to news on current affairs, politics, and economic via the following channels? (1 = never; 5 = almost always)” on five items, including newspaper/magazine, broadcast/television, relationship orientated social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), video social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, TikTok), and instant messaging tools (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram).

We reported the descriptive statistics and the bivariate correlations of the variables in Supplemental Information (Table A1-1, A1-2, and A1-3). In our analysis, including both CFA and structural regression models, all variables measured with multiple items were treated as latent variables.

Analytical Plan

Following the two-step approach outlined in Anderson and Gerbing (1988), we employ a multigroup structural equation modeling approach with the *lavaan* package in R. First, a multigroup CFA is conducted to assess the quality of the measurement scales.

Second, a full structural model is fitted to the data based on the hypothesized relationships among the variables, controlling for demographic variables, political interest, and news consumption. See Supplemental Information for the detailed analytical plan.

Results

Individual-Level Factors Associated With News Authentication

We first conducted a multigroup CFA, which showed that the latent constructs were reliable based on the factor loadings, and the model-fit indices were satisfactory (see results in Supplemental Information). Subsequently, we performed structural regression models for each society to estimate the relationships between the individual-level predictors and news authentication. The results are reported in Table 1.

H1 proposes that education (H1a) and political efficacy (H1b) are positively associated with news authentication. We find that only in the U.S. sample, education predicts an increased level of news authentication (interpersonal: B [standard error (SE)] = 0.07 (0.02), $p < .01$; institutional: B (SE) = 0.10 (0.02), $p < .001$). H1a is thus partially supported. Political efficacy is a consistent predictor of news authentication across the three societies. It is positively associated with both interpersonal authentication (HK: B (SE) = 0.12 (0.03), $p < .001$; NL: B (SE) = 0.10 (0.03), $p < .001$; United States: B (SE) = 0.12 (0.03), $p < .001$) and institutional authentication (HK: B (SE) = 0.13 (0.03), $p < .001$; NL: B (SE) = 0.19 (0.03), $p < .001$; US: B (SE) = 0.23 (0.03), $p < .001$). The results support H1b.

RQ1 examines the relationship between institutional trust and news authentication. Results show that institutional trust is positively associated with news authentication in the three societies, both interpersonal (HK: B (SE) = 0.08 (0.03), $p < .01$; NL: B (SE) = 0.06 (0.03), $p < .05$; US: B (SE) = 0.16 (0.03), $p < .001$) and institutional (HK: B (SE) = 0.11 (0.03), $p < .01$; NL: B (SE) = 0.12 (0.03), $p < .001$; US: B (SE) = 0.13 (0.03), $p < .001$).

H2 posits that conspiracy beliefs are negatively associated with news authentication. Results show that conspiracy belief is positively, rather than negatively, associated with both types of news authentication in the Netherlands (interpersonal: B (SE) = 0.16 (0.03), $p < .01$; institutional: B (SE) = 0.15 (0.03), $p < .001$) and the United States (interpersonal: B (SE) = 0.17 (0.02), $p < .01$; institutional: B (SE) = 0.17 (0.02), $p < .001$). However, it is not a significant predictor in the Hong Kong sample. H2 is thus not supported.

News Authentication Across Societies

To answer RQ2 (how news authentication varies across the three societies), we performed the latent mean comparison (Müller and Schäfer 2017), with the two dependent variables: institutional and interpersonal news authentication. To accomplish this, we added a mean structure to the data to estimate intercepts and means. As explained by Müller and Schäfer (2017: 2), in the model specification, besides the predictors and the

Table 1. Summary of Multigroup Structural Equation Modeling Regression Results, Standardized Coefficients (With Standard Errors in the Parentheses).

	HK		NL		US	
	Interpersonal authentication	Institutional authentication	Interpersonal authentication	Institutional authentication	Interpersonal authentication	Institutional authentication
	Coeff (SE)	Coeff (SE)	Coeff (SE)	Coeff (SE)	Coeff (SE)	Coeff (SE)
Gender	0.04 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.02)*	0.04 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.06 (0.02)**
Age	-0.19 (0.02)***	-0.14 (0.02)***	-0.22 (0.02)***	-0.16 (0.02)***	-0.22 (0.02)***	-0.14 (0.02)***
Income	0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)	0.09 (0.03)**	-0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
News consumption	0.68 (0.03)***	0.63 (0.03)***	0.72 (0.02)***	0.54 (0.03)***	0.60 (0.02)***	0.46 (0.02)***
Political interest	0.18 (0.02)***	0.20 (0.02)***	0.14 (0.02)***	0.24 (0.02)***	0.09 (0.02)***	0.24 (0.02)***
Political ideology	-0.13 (0.02)***	-0.11 (0.02)***	0.04 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Educational level	0.00 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)	0.07 (0.02)**	0.10 (0.02)***
Political efficacy	0.12 (0.03)***	0.13 (0.03)***	0.10 (0.03)***	0.19 (0.03)***	0.12 (0.03)***	0.23 (0.03)***
Institutional trust	0.08 (0.03)**	0.11 (0.03)**	0.06 (0.03)*	0.12 (0.03)***	0.16 (0.03)***	0.13 (0.03)***
Conspiracy beliefs	0.05 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.16 (0.03)***	0.15 (0.03)***	0.17 (0.02)***	0.17 (0.02)***
Goodness of fit indices						
CFI	0.84		0.83			0.86
TLI	0.81		0.84			0.80
RMSEA	0.08		0.08			0.07
RMSEA CI lower	0.08		0.07			0.07
RMSEA CI upper	0.08		0.08			0.07
Valid N	1,562		1,772			2,180

Note. The reference group for gender is male (0, and female = 1). For ideology, 1 = liberal, 9 = conservative. CFI = comparative fit index; CI = confidence interval; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SE = standard error; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

outcome variables, “a constant with the value of 1 is introduced into the model . . . when the predictor is regressed on the constant as well, the unstandardized regression coefficient indicates the mean of the predictor” (see Kline, 2011, pp. 299–302). Estimated as such, concerning interpersonal news authentication, Hong Kong ($M=2.78$, $SE=0.026$) and the Netherlands ($M=2.63$, $SE=0.027$) have a relatively lower latent mean than the United States ($M=3.07$, $SE=0.026$). For institutional authentication, Hong Kong and the United States share a similar latent mean of 3.16 (Hong Kong: $SE=0.027$; the United States: $SE=0.026$), higher than that in the Netherlands ($M=2.92$, $SE=0.028$).

Lastly, to answer RQ3 (how the relationships vary across societies), based on the regression analysis, on the one hand, political efficacy and institutional trust are the two common factors that can foster news authentication across countries. On the other hand, we also observe country-specific idiosyncrasies. Education predicts a higher tendency to authenticate news in the United States only. News authentication is more prevalent among those holding conspiracy beliefs in the Netherlands and the United States but not in Hong Kong.

Discussion and Conclusion

Weighing in onto the discussion on resilience to misinformation, this study examines news authentication, a behavior often prescribed as normatively beneficial. Guided by the TPB and the resilience model, it examines how news authentication is shaped by both structural factors in political and media environments and individual-level factors related to behavioral control (education, political efficacy) and preexisting beliefs (institutional trust, conspiracy beliefs). Using data from a preregistered, population-based survey conducted in Hong Kong, the Netherlands, and the United States, the study offers the following contributions.

First, we extend the existing resilience model beyond the context of Western democracies and argue that resilience to misinformation not only stems from structural conditions but also individual initiative in response to these structural conditions. Specifically, at the aggregate level, the United States and the Netherlands differ significantly in the prevalence of news authentication, despite both having free and diverse press. This suggests that press freedom may not be a key societal-level factor for resilience. Instead, news authentication is more common in the United States and Hong Kong, both of which have low-trust, politicized, and fragmented media environments (Humphrecht et al. 2020). According to the resilience model, such fragmented environments produce more widespread misinformation but lack institutional and cultural resources to mitigate the threat (Humphrecht et al. 2020; Humphrecht et al. 2023). Our findings show that in these environments, individuals are more likely to authenticate news, suggesting that the need to combat misinformation drives this behavior rather than the lack of structural resources discouraging it. News authentication, in this case, may serve as an individual initiative to address structural disadvantages, thereby acting as a marker of resilience.

Second, we emphasize that individual characteristics, including a sense of control and motivation such as civic duty, is key to cultivating resilience to misinformation across different political and media environments. At the individual level, news authentication is predicted by political efficacy, a finding consistent across the three societies. Citizens who feel confident in their ability to understand political issues and influence processes are more likely to seek out information for cross-validation and engage in social verification of news. This aligns with TPB, where perceived behavioral control plays a key role in achieving behaviors. Institutional trust also consistently predicts a higher likelihood of news authentication, challenging the assumption that individuals with strong institutional trust are less inclined to authenticate news because they perceive lower risks of misinformation. A plausible explanation is that even those who trust media and other institutions to deliver factual information still encounter dubious content that is socially shared (Chadwick et al. 2024). In such cases, they are more willing than others to authenticate news, likely because they view staying informed as a civic duty and are concerned about the societal impact of misinformation. This suggests that institutional trust can foster a positive attitude toward news authentication, thus facilitating the behavior, in line with TPB.

At the same time, our findings also highlight that the relevance of specific individual-level factors still depends on the macro environment. For example, the impact of education on news authentication is context-dependent. In the United States, education is a significant predictor of news authentication, likely due to the country's low-trust, politicized, and fragmented media environment, which makes it harder for citizens to recognize when authentication is necessary (Humprecht et al. 2020). In this environment, education becomes a crucial enabler. However, this also highlights how educational inequality can unevenly distribute the risk of misinformation across the population. In contrast, Hong Kong, despite a similar media environment, does not show a significant education effect on news authentication. This may be due to the marginalization of civic education in school curricula, a legacy of Hong Kong's postcolonial political and ideological agenda, which has failed to reduce gaps in students' civic learning (Lee and Chiu 2018). Meanwhile, the relatively cohesive media environment in the Netherlands, supported by robust PSB and high media trust, makes it easier for individuals to navigate their information environment, thereby reducing the importance of education for news authentication (Humprecht et al. 2020).

Third, our findings contribute to the existing knowledge on the two types of news authentication. Across all three societies, institutional authentication is more widely used than interpersonal authentication, with triangulating information from other sources consistently outperforming consultation with trusted individuals. This may be attributed to the fact that interpersonal authentication may carry social risks, leading individuals to avoid it in order to preserve social harmony (Chadwick et al. 2024; Waruwu et al. 2021). The gap is particularly pronounced in Hong Kong, which is characterized by a strong tendency to avoid value conflicts during political discussion (Zhang 2022). Furthermore, individual characteristics consistently influence both

methods of news authentication across all societies studied, reinforcing the idea that both methods arise from critical news engagement, requiring individuals' ability and motivation.

Fourth, this study broadens our understanding of news authentication, moving beyond the common normative view. We observed a positive association between conspiracy beliefs and news authentication in the Netherlands and the United States, suggesting that individuals in these Western democracies who harbor suspicion toward the establishment are more likely to verify news through both institutional and interpersonal means. While this may seem counterintuitive when viewed through a normative lens, from a user perspective, individuals with strong conspiracy beliefs may actively seek alternative explanations and conspiracies to discredit news that contradicts their views—a process they may perceive as “news authentication.” As the line between alternative and establishment media becomes increasingly blurred (Steppat et al. 2023), these individuals may turn to alternative sources for validation, considering them more authentic or truthful. Furthermore, conspiracy believers often form communities where their views are validated and reinforced. Within these communities, they may collectively “debunk” news that challenges their worldviews. Therefore, we argue that whether conspiracy beliefs, or other preexisting beliefs, foster positive or negative attitudes toward news authentication depends on how individuals interpret the concept of news authentication and what they consider “authentic news.”

Lastly, much of the existing scholarship on misinformation and news authentication behaviors is rooted in concerns over the declining quality of information in today's media landscape (Yu and Shen 2024). In this context, news authentication is often viewed as an informational act—a normative response driven by factuality concerns to combat misinformation (Edgerly et al., 2020). Our study contributes to this literature by emphasizing news authentication as a political act. In democracies, conspiracy mentality is common in extremist fringe groups and often linked to political disenfranchisement (Imhoff and Bruder, 2014; Imhoff et al., 2022). Consequently, conspiracy believers may use news authentication as a tool to challenge the status quo and assign blame to authorities, questioning prevailing power relations. Our finding regarding the control variable, political ideology, also corroborates this argument: Pro-democracy supporters who are marginalized by the increasingly authoritarian political system in Hong Kong are more likely to engage in news authentication than the pro-establishment, arguably as an act of political activism. Taken together, we argue that, news authentication may serve as a political tool wielded by marginalized political groups to challenge status quo. In this case, news authentication is likely to backfire, further exacerbating information disorder.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Our study has several limitations, paving ways for future research. First, while this is the first cross-country comparative study on news authentication, the measure of news authentication, though grounded in existing literature, does not specify the news or sources participants referred to when answering survey questions. Second, the study

compares only three countries, which, while differing in political and media environments, also vary in cultural norms not considered here. Expanding the research to include more countries or adopting a most-similar systems design would help control for confounding factors. Third, the cross-sectional nature of our survey limits causal inference, whereas a panel design would allow for a more robust examination of causal effects. However, given that our predictors—individual capacity and beliefs—are generally stable, this limitation may be less impactful. Lastly, our study does not explicitly measure attitudes, perceived behavioral control, or subjective norms related to news authentication, which deviates from the TPB. Future studies could incorporate these factors to enhance understanding of the psychological processes behind news authentication. Additionally, news literacy and media literacy may be more direct indicators of behavioral control in news authentication than general formal education, warranting further exploration in future research.

Conclusions

In conclusion, news authentication is more prevalent in countries where the political and media environments foster widespread misinformation but lack structural resources to address it. This positions news authentication as a bottom-up response to structural disadvantages, making it a form of resilience. Political efficacy and institutional trust can cultivate this resilience across societies, as can education in countries with a challenging media landscape where education fosters civic learning. While our findings support the normative view of news authentication, we also uncover a “dark side” that it can be driven by conspiracy beliefs, an anti-establishment worldview common in politically marginalized groups in Western democracies. This suggests that news authentication may hold different meanings for different groups: a civic duty for those who trust public institutions, and a political act to challenge the status quo for those feeling alienated by the political system. We thus encourage future research to move beyond the normative understanding of news authentication and explore its varying meanings and practices across different contexts and groups.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Note

1. See the pre-registration here https://osf.io/fm7sj/?view_only=684052eb16694eceb79cb4daf1a952e

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