

TWO VOICES: SOCIAL PRESENCE, PARTICIPATION,
AND CREDIBILITY IN ONLINE NEWS.

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ABSTRACT

An experiment tested hypotheses predicting that social presence would increase participation and credibility on a newspaper website. Participants read four news articles in one of four conditions created by crossing two manipulations: use or absence of social language, and use or absence of a reporter photograph, both designed to increase feelings of social presence. Repeated measures ANCOVA was used to test the effects of the manipulations on social presence and regressions were used to test the effects of social presence on credibility and participation.

In the first part of the experiment, it was found that social language increased social presence, but use of the photograph had no effect. In turn, social presence increased an expressed intent to participate on the news website, but did not result in an actual increase in participation. Social presence also significantly hurt credibility.