

Processed Enough? Why Summaries Seem More Credible Than Lists

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Abstract

Across two large experiments ($N = 3,400$), we show that the presentation format of search outcomes shapes consumer trust. Identical content is judged as more credible when presented in a summary-format rather than a list. This effect emerges because summary-format (vs. list-format) implies that the information has already been processed, increasing perceived credibility. A simple disclaimer noting that results are not independently verified eliminates this summary advantage. The effect of format generalizes across multiple health and lifestyle queries and is moderated by platform (ChatGPT vs. Google). We also observe real verification behavior, finding that list-format increases more source checking. Together, these findings show that formats of search outcome—not just content—can shape trust in digital information environments, and that transparency reminders about verification can recalibrate these inferences.

Track: Consumer Behaviour