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Believing the News: Exploring How Young Canadians Make Decisions About Their News Consumption

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Media Studies

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Abstract

In the last two decades, the adoption of online and mobile news applications has drastically altered the practice of news consumption. Young news consumers, the first generation of digital natives, have seemingly unlimited options in news sources, styles, modalities, and stories; but with so many choices, it is unclear how these young people make decisions about what news to consume. It is also unclear how these consumers are coming to believe the news when it is being disseminated from so many platforms and sources. This study seeks to fill a gap in scholarship by exploring how young Canadians are making decisions about what news to consume and what news to believe. Through a series of focus groups, interviews, and diaries, the participants in this study report that they use factors like interest, source, and experience to decide if they will read or follow a story. Participants also identified reasons that they believe the news including factors like source, completeness, corroboration, quality, and personal logic (if it sounds or "feels" true). However, these study participants indicated that they use these factors in subjective sophisticated strategies based on learned methods, news beat, and experience to make further decisions about the news. This study resolves that though many young people identify social media as a "source" of news, it acts more as a gateway to mainstream news that is considered more trustworthy and believable.

Key Words:

News; journalism; news consumption; believability; credibility; filter bubble; news habits.

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Chapter 1

1 Introduction

In the last two decades, the adoption of online and mobile news applications has drastically altered news consumption. News in the Western world[1] is being redefined by new technologies, new forms of authorship, and major changes to the controls and filters that previously ensured news was assessed, validated, and verified before being published (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007; Metzger, et al, 2003; Metzger, 2007; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2010; Robinson, 2007; Singer, 2003; Thorson, 2008). Changes to traditional news reporting have altered from whom, where, and how people get their news—revolutionizing the industry but also calling into question the reliability of news stories that are being broken faster and with less verification than ever before (Schudson, 2011).

Professional journalists[2] are harder to identify and many news consumers[3] may no longer see them as the primary sources of news; indeed, when asked in 2010 to name the journalist or newsperson they most admire, half of Americans could give no specific answer ("Americans Spending…") — a notable shift from forty years prior when Walter Cronkite was considered to be the most trusted man in America. In the past, credible, trusted, and professionally trained journalists acted as gatekeepers in communicating news to the public. News consumers have relied on these professionals to tell them what

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[1] This news is primarily English-speaking, North American news.

[2] For the purposes of this dissertation, a professional journalist will be defined as an individual who is employed as a reporter by a mainstream news source.

[3] For the purposes of this dissertation, a news consumer will be any individual that reads, watches, listens to, receives, or otherwise engages with the news. The idea of these individuals as consumers can be problematic given the relationship of the term to the cycle of production and mass consumption. However, 'news consumer' is the standard term used in the field by such research organizations as PEW, the Poynter Institute, Nieman Reports, and within the discipline of journalism, news, and communications studies.

was happening, and to provide them with information they could use to inform their participation in a democratic discourse. The level of trust in journalists has always had ebbs and flows—it tends to reach peaks following watchdog-ism like Bernstein and Woodward's Watergate reporting, or times of instability like just after 9-11 (Rosen, 2012)—but statistics show that the trust in journalists has been waning for the last two decades. In 2012, PEW reported that the believability of news organizations had dropped from 71% in 2002 to 56% a decade later ("Further Decline…"). Only 18% of Americans surveyed in 2016 stated that they had "a lot" of trust in national news organizations (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016, p. 8). Here in Canada,[4] a 2013 Ipsos Reed survey found that "only 29% of Canadians trust journalists" (Doolittle, 2014, p. 242). Similarly, a Gallup poll found that "a mere 8 percent of respondents said they had a 'great deal' of confidence in the media's ability to report 'the news fully, accurately, and fairly'" (Patterson, 2013, p. 5), and 60% of people surveyed reported that they had 'little to no confidence' in the press. Carroll Doherty (2005) refers to this dramatic drop in the believability of news organizations as a credibility crisis. This lack of believability leads to a loss of audience members (Doherty) and reduced impact of the news (a matter of great importance to the function of a democratic and informed citizenry) (Gaziano, 1988). That the credibility of news organizations and the journalists who are employed by them has always been in flux is a well-established fact, but with changes to news consumption, and an increase in choices of news online and via mobile devices, it is not clear what the longitudinal impact is on believability and trust of news.

This credibility crisis also reflects a basic change in news production and consumption—a turn away from the journalist and news organization as the primary news source, gatekeeper, and agenda-setter. A 2010 survey from PEW found that 92% of those surveyed use multiple sources to get their news rather than getting news from a single source, as did previous generations. It is easier and less time consuming to get piecemeal news: news from multiple sources online (especially using news aggregators

[4] Canadian data about news consumption is limited. Unless otherwise specified, the statistics used refer to American populations.

and search engines), rather than having multiple newspapers delivered, or watching multiple news broadcasts. When Nielsen ranked the most popular online news sources, six of the top twenty sites were news aggregators—sites that gather news from various sources—not news organizations or single sources of news ("More Young People Cite Internet than TV," 2011). In 2010, PEW reported that 68% of people aged 18-29 got news from one of these aggregators, followed by those aged 30-49 at 57%. The Media Technology Monitor[5] indicates that over fifty percent of Canadians access aggreagtors like The Huffington Post and GoogleNews (Rody-Mantha, 2016). These aggregators usually amalgamate stories from various news sources: mainstream stories in addition to stories, and opinions from journalists that are working for alternative media, and individuals that are posting on their blogs. Aggregators allow for users to get information from multiple sources (sometimes multiple kinds of sources like news organizations, blogs, or microblogs) at once, in one feed. Therefore the stories read by news consumers might not be from sources with which they are familiar, might be a personalized news feed, and might include local, national, and international news sources of a specified news beat.

News consumers also are not just getting news by visiting a news site or aggregator. Sixty-two percent of Americans report getting their "news on social media, and 18% do so often […]" (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016, p. 2). According to a recent PEW report, based on the number of American adults that have Facebook and the number who report getting news via the social networking site, 44% of the entire American population gets news from Facebook (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016, p. 4). Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube users that report getting the news from those sites, also report that they often do so unintentionally—getting the news while they are on the sites for other reasons

[5] The Media Technology Monitor (MTM) operates as a subscription service that releases an annual report about Canadian news consumption. MTM is owned and operated by CBC/Radio Canada's Research Department and says that it is funded by the media industry. Given that this is a subscription service, the only data that is used in this study is yielded from news reports written about the studies released by the service.

(Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). Almost half of the online traffic to news sites comes from either Google or Facebook, not from direct searches for specific news organizations (Olmstead, Mitchell & Rosenstiel, 2011). Thus, news consumers no longer rely on an individual news organization or journalist to inform them; instead, they seek multiple sources, sometimes unintentionally encounter news, and have greater options in their news choices.

Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2010) refer to this evolution in gatekeeping as the difference between "trust me" and "show me" journalism. The former describes the 'Cronkite era' of being *told* news; the latter describes the current news environment where news consumers act as their own editors, gatekeepers, and news disseminators. In "show me" journalism, the consumer takes a greater responsibility for selecting what news to consume, determining what news is believable, and curating the news on their social networks. While this shift away from the journalist as gatekeeper gives news consumers the power to choose the news they want, it must also be accepted that they may not be equipped or educated to take on this role. The average news consumer does not have the same training as professional journalists in investigating, verifying, and vetting news stories. Even more problematically, they often believe misinformation and disbelieve facts (Bushman & Anderson, 2001; Edelman, 2001; Fox, 1983; Mintz, 2002). The ability of news consumers to detect deception in their everyday lives is already poor. According to Frank, Paolantonio, Feeley and Servoss (2004), humans are not very good at identifying deception and in studies they only average between 55% and 58% accuracy in detecting deception in communication. Rubin, Conroy, Chen and Cornwell (2016), sum this up well by explaining that the truth bias (the tendency to believe that all information is true), gullibility, and confirmation bias (the tendency to only acknowledge news they want to see), are all aspect that prevent news consumers from detecting deception. News consumer's ability to judge online information quality is also questionable, with many researchers finding the most important criterion used in judging the quality of online information to be the appearance of the website—not the quality of the information at all (Chiagouris, Long & Plank, 2008; Metzger, 2007; Wathen & Burkell, 2002). With the rise of satirical news, online hoaxes, and regular news mistakes due to the increased speed of the twenty-four hour news cycle, the detection of

misinformation and truth in reporting has become even more difficult (Mintz, 2002). Furthermore, the piecemeal news consumption that has become popular means that the whole story may be obscured and we may be getting a very selective understanding of the news. Though it can be argued that piecemeal news consumption occurred in previous generations, there is a difference between reading the headlines in a newspaper and deciding not to read the rest of the story or the rest of the paper, and reading only a hundred and forty character news story on Twitter. There is also a difference between being informed at certain points in the day (the newspaper in the morning or the 11 pm broadcast news) and the opportunity to be informed throughout the day from ubiquitous technology. This is not a shift in the importance of being informed, but rather, a shift in the steps that news consumers are taking to get informed.

News consumers are in a new position of producing, consuming, curating, gatekeeping, and disseminating news from a variety of sources, organizations, and platforms. It is clear that there are more options for news consumption than ever before, but that means that there are also even more options for deception, misinformation, incomplete stories, and poorly reported, bad quality news. The contemporary news consumers must wade through the plethora of news stories online to find the information they need, not only to live their everyday lives, but also to stay informed as citizens. Yet there is little compelling evidence that they are ready or able to take on this role, and there are few studies that examine how the contemporary news environment (with its constantly shifting sources and platforms) affects the news habits that many use to make decisions about what sources to trust. With an increasing number of young people getting their news from online sources ("More Young People…,"2011; "In Changing News Landscape…," 2012; "Further Decline…," 2012; Salem & Alshaer, 2013)—an arena that is well known for its misinformation and disinformation (Benham, et al., 2012; Fitzgerald, 1997; Morahan-Martin & Anderson, 2000; Nguyen, Pan, Thai, Eidenbenz, 2012)—it is crucial that researchers and news organizations have a better idea of how young people are making decisions about what news to read, and what news to believe. It is especially important to study the millennial population as this is the first generation of digital natives (those that have grown up with computers in the homes) and there is a

general perception that these young people do not care about the news (Ingraham, 2015; Mellman, 2015).[6]

This dissertation is an exploration of how Canadian millennials choose their news and how they go about deciding if they believe it. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how young Canadians make decisions about the news that they consume, and to explore questions such as: how has the decline in perceived credibility of journalists affected the believability of the news? What impact has the increase of news choices had on news consumption habits? And what have been the overall changes to news consumption as a result of new technologies?

Chapter Two is a review of literature that considers how news has changed in the last two decades and reflects on how these changes have modified the roles of the consumer, the journalist, and the constitution of the news artifact. Chapter Three is a survey of how previous literature has studied news believability and credibility; it provides a background on habitual news consumption, and posits a potential model for studying news consumption in the contemporary news environment. Chapter Four positions the research questions of this dissertation in light of the literature reviews in Chapters Two and Three. The first part of a two part exploratory study that examines the results of a series of focus groups, which probed young people's thoughts about how they decide if they believe the news, is the subject of Chapter Five. Chapter Six examines the results of the second part of the study by discussing interviews and media diaries that were kept by a small group of young Canadians about a breaking news story. Given that this dissertation is written in an integrated article format, the final chapter is a conclusion that restates the findings of each chapter and reflects on the study results.

[6] Millennials will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Six.

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Chapter 2

2 The Current News Landscape: A Literature Review

2.1 What is news?

Defining 'news' is not an easy task. According to a recent PEW study, the news is "information about events and issues that involve more than just your friends or family" ("Twitter News Consumers," 2013). But this definition does not take into account the timeliness, importance, or complexity of news. Researchers have defined news in a variety of ways, suggesting that it is:

- a construction of reality (Tuchman, 1978);
- "a fact that is new and happening" (Herbert, 2001);
- "the most important textual system in the world" (Hartley, 1996, p. 32);
- the first rough draft of history (Barth, 1943);
- a "public construction of common experience" (Schudson, 2003, p.13);
- and a commodity to be bought and sold (McManus, 1992).

News can be international, local, or 'glocal.' It can be produced instantaneously, hourly, daily, weekly, or bi-weekly. News comes in a variety of different types or "beats:" it can be personalized, or public, political, or entertainment. News informs, and the consumption of news is a ritual (Schudson, 2011). In 1975, the BBC defined news as follows:

> News is new and honestly and accurately reported information which is about current events of any kind anywhere in the world set against a background of other honestly and accurately reported information previously gathered as news; selected fairly but without artificial balancing and without political motive or editorial colouring by trained journalists; included in a bulletin because it is interesting, significant or relevant to the bulletin's audience in the eyes of the journalists; and

> presented fearlessly and objectively but with respect for the law and the BBC's own rules concerning taste and editorial standards. (as cited in Herbert, 2001, p. 62)

For the purposes of this study, news is defined as timely, noteworthy information about a recent incident, important finding, notable opinion, or upcoming event. The news platform will be defined as the form from which the news is received (e.g. newspaper, TV, social media, etc.). The news source will be defined as the specific place from which the news is consumed (e.g. *The New York Times*, CTV news, Facebook, etc.). A news event will be defined as the actual event that has occurred. The news item will be defined as the specific news article, broadcast, or post. The news story will be defined as the cumulative account of the news event.

News is important; it is the way we maintain an informed citizenry and a necessary element in the operation of a democracy (Carey as cited in Schudson, 2011, 189; Herbert, 2001; Fuller as cited in Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2009, p. 14; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2009). With the dramatic changes outlined in the Introductory chapter regarding access, distribution, and production of news, it is important to remember that "[…A]ny changes in the relationships among people, information (i.e. news), and political authority will influence how a society functions and how its citizens fare" (Tewksbury & Rittenberg, 2012, p. 4).

As Kovach and Rosenstiel state:

> We need news to live our lives, protect ourselves, bond with each other, identify friends and enemies. Journalism is simply the system societies generate to supply this news. That is why we care about the character of the news and journalism we get: they influence the quality of our lives, our thoughts, and our culture. (2009, p. 2)

One of the key issues in contemporary news is the difference between what consumers and journalists find newsworthy. This issue is nothing new, but the dynamic between them is exacerbated by the ease of selective exposure that contemporary news platforms provide. "[…J]ournalists at generalist, mainstream news organizations consider stories about politics, economics, and international matters […] to be more newsworthy

than articles about subjects such as crime, entertainment, sports and the weather […]" (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein 2013, p. 6). Pablo Boczkowski and Eugenia Mitchelsein (2013) identify these kinds of news as public affairs and non-public affairs news respectively—what others have referred to as hard and soft news.[7] This distinction is important, since an individual's consumption of public affairs news affects his or her understanding of the world around them, the important events of the day, and informs them in their role as a citizen (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013; Prior, 2005).

Historically, it was *journalists*—those who wrote, edited, and ran news organizations—who defined news. Journalists made the decisions about what to write, publish, and inform the public about, thereby defining the news. But with the radical changes in news production, dissemination, and consumption with the rise and adoption of online news, "[…] the very meaning of news is shifting" (Tewksbury & Rittenburg, 2012, p.4). With the adoption of online and mobile news from aggregators and social news feeds, it is even easier for news consumers to get the news they want and avoid public affairs news that they might need. This process of selective exposure can erode the agenda-setting and gatekeeping authority of the press as consumers can self-select what they view as they curate their own newsfeeds. Consumers are deciding what news to read, personalizing their newsfeeds, and given the ease with which these consumers can choose and avoid news, it is important to understand how they are making decisions about what to read—particularly for millennials as little research has been done about how they are becoming informed citizens. The consumer, then, has a new role in defining what news is in the contemporary news-scape. The next section will examine what these changes are and how they are revolutionizing the definition of news.

2.2 How News has Changed

Michael Schudson, in his book *The Sociology of News* (2011) identifies six ways that news has changed in the twenty-first century:

1. "The line between reader and writer has blurred. […]"

[7] Though most would classify the crime beat as hard news.

2. “The distinction among tweet, blog post, newspaper story, magazine article, and book has blurred. […]”

3. “The line between professional and amateur has blurred, and a variety of “pro-am”[8] relationships have emerged. […]”

4. “The boundaries delineating for-profit, public, and nonprofit media have blurred, and cooperation across these models of financing has developed. […]”

5. “Within commercial news organizations, the line between the newsroom and the business office has blurred. […]”

6. “The line between old media and new media has blurred, practically beyond recognition.” (Schudson, 2011, pp. 207-216)

These are, in fact, more statements about how journalism as a field has changed, rather than reflections on shifts in the role of the journalist or the nature of news itself. Many other things have changed that have a more direct effect on the reader and news consumer.

In an article entitled “Does Journalism Exist?” Alan Rusbridger, editor-in-chief of *The Guardian* newspaper, addresses these effects more directly, stating:

> […] journalists considered themselves—and were perhaps considered by others—special figures of authority. We had the information and the access: you didn’t. You trusted us to filter the news and information and to prioritize it—and to pass it on accurately, fairly, readably, and quickly. That state of affairs is now in tension with a world in which many (but not all) readers want to make their own judgements, express their own priorities, create their own content, articulate their own views, learn from peers as much as from traditional sources of authority. (2011, p. 87).

Indeed, consumers in the Western world have entered into the realm of Kovach and Rosenstiel’s “show me” journalism where consumers want to make their own choices about what news to prioritize, consume, and distribute to their own social networks.

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[8] Professional-amateur.

The evolution in news from “trust me” to “show me” has brought about a variety of changes in journalism, not only as a field (as described by Schudson), but also to journalists as information sources. These changes fall into three categories (described in detail in Table 1): changes to the role of the consumer, to the role of the journalist, and to the news itself. As a result of these shifts, there are also changes to the credibility and believability of news that fit into all three of the categories. Exploring these three categories will shape the rest of this chapter.

Table 1: Changes in News

	Changed Elements	Past – "Trust me" Journalism	Present – "Show me" Journalism
Role of the Consumer	Author	Journalist	Journalist; eyewitness; news consumer
	Habits	Simple	Complex
Role of the Journalist	Verification	Journalist; news organization	Journalist; news organization; whistleblower; eye witness; knowledgeable and unknowledgeable news consumer
	Professional Tasks	Gatekeeper; reporter; fact checker; verifier	Sense-maker; evidence provider
	Regard for Public Desire	Low; greater concern for informing	High; greater concern for reader numbers
News Artifact	Platform	Newspaper; radio broadcast; television news broadcast	Newspaper; radio broadcast; television news broadcast; online news source; social media
	Number of News Sources Available	Few	Many
	Length	More long form stories	Short, headline grabbing stories
	Exposure	Broad	Broad or selective
	Evidence	Primary experts and sources consulted.	Some primary experts and sources consulted. Primarily context is provided for many news events.
	Time Attended to	Accessed through newspapers, or via radio or TV broadcasts are certain times of the day.	Accessed through ubiquitous mobilities at any time of the day.
	Credibility	Passive, source credibility	Active, message credibility

2.3 Changes to the role of the consumer

The job of the consumer is one of the main roles that has changed in twenty-first century news. The consumer can, and often does, now take a more active role in recording, disseminating, and authoring news. To be clear, news consumers have always been active in choosing what news to read or watch, but with online news, there is greater perceived choice in news sources, styles, and formats. The decisions of where, how and what to be informed about could take an enormous amount of cognitive energy and it is not entirely clear how news consumers are making decisions about how they choose to get informed. News consumers have historically also taken a role in witnessing news events and sometimes recording those eyewitness accounts. However, new technologies allow news consumers to be disseminators—posting stories to their own websites, blogs, and social media accounts instantly and without an editorial gatekeeper.

Before news was available online, many people in Western Europe and North America relied on journalists and news organizations to provide the news. Many news consumers bought newspapers, tuned into radio broadcasts, and watched evening television news broadcasts to stay informed. Journalists were responsible for interviewing eyewitnesses, researching the story, verifying reports, and generally reporting the news in a way that news consumers could understand. However, with online news:

> no matter how skilled the journalists in a large newsroom or how well informed and well placed their sources, the smartest person is likely to be someone else somewhere else, and thanks to the Internet, he or she may have already started a blog or posted a comment on yours. (Schudson, 2011, p. 209)

It is not just the smartest person who can cover the news event. Through greater interconnected and online technology those that are in the location, or on the ground have an even better opportunity to document the story. Take for instance, the terrorist bombings in London in 2005. On 7 July 2005, four suicide bombers attacked three London Underground trains and a double-decker bus killing fifty-two civilians. In an unprecedented move, the London media relied on citizen reporters for on-the-ground coverage and firsthand accounts of the bombings. The BBC received "[…] more than

1,000 photographs, 20 pieces of amateur video, 4,000 text messages, and 20,000 e-mails [in the first 6 hours after the attack]" (Sambrook, 2005). Of the BBC's use of citizen journalism, Richard Sambrook, former Director of BBC News, said: "We know now that when major events occur, the public can offer us as much new information as we are able to broadcast to them. From now on, news coverage is a partnership [between journalists and citizens]" (2005).

Citizen journalism is a contested and controversial issue within journalism and academia.[9] Some critics would argue that citizen journalists are merely eyewitnesses who have access to technology (Allan, 2013). Citizen journalism is also criticized for lacking objectivity, ethics, and quality. Champions of this civic journalism are often denounced for not considering the safety of the citizens who are reporting in locations and on events that are dangerous and sometimes life threatening (Lemann, 2006). Others would suggest that citizen journalism reflects a role that citizens have taken on—especially during crises—for a long time. According to Simon Cottle:

> Mainstream news organizations […] are nonetheless cognizant of the added value that forms of citizen journalism can bring when packaged inside their own news presentations—especially when reporting crises and catastrophes. Here first-hand testimonies, visceral accounts, and graphic images help to dramatize stories, injecting emotion, and urgency into the stories of people's plight and pain. (Allan & Thorsen, 2009, pp. xi-xii)

Jay Rosen defines citizen journalism as the act whereby "the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another" (Rosen, 2006). Here, we have the crux of what differentiates citizen journalism from eyewitnesses with technology: intention. A citizen journalist will record,

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[9] Citizen journalism—the debate about its existence, how it operates within and outside of mainstream journalism, and the dissemination technology used by citizen journalists—deserves far more attention than can be paid in this dissertation. However, it is important to note that citizen journalism is an important way that the role of the consumer has changed in the contemporary news-scape.

photograph, or report with the intention of informing. An eyewitness with technology will record, photograph, or report with the intention of documenting. The difference here is that a citizen journalist realizes that the news they have must be disseminated and will find the path in order to do that. One of the main issues with citizen journalism however, is that it cannot be vetted as clearly as professional journalism. It becomes the consumer's job to determine whether or not the news, images, or videos being offered by the citizen journalist should be considered believable. It is not clear how consumers make this judgement or if they see citizen journalism as different from mainstream news. The expanded involvement of citizen journalists has been seen in a number of major news events since 2005, including Occupy Wall Street; the Russian occupation of Crimea and the Ukraine; the Arab Spring in 2010; and most recently in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Citizen journalists have been seen as a key news source in the current civil unrest in the United States. Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors started the Black Lives Matter movement in 2012 in response to George Zimmerman's acquittal in the death of Trayvon Martin. The movement found a national profile after the death of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager who was shot and killed by Darren Wilson, a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. The questionable circumstances around Brown's death, along with the disputed evidence and lack of indictment for Wilson, led to a series of protests and unrest in Ferguson. This fury was amplified as a result of similar deaths of black individuals at the hands of white police officers throughout the United States: Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and Walter Scott to name only a few. The case of Walter Scott's death is an excellent example of how citizen journalism has been used to show injustices. Scott was pulled over for a traffic stop and attempted to flee from the car. Police officer Michael Slager shot Scott eight times as Scott was running away from him but claimed he shot him in self-defense because Scott had grabbed his Taser. Bystander Feiden Santana had a cellphone video of the altercation that proved Scott only attempted to flee and did not try to harm Slager. Here we see Santana act as a watchdog in sharing the footage—which he initially declined to do out of fear for himself (Capeheart, 2015).

Citizen journalists are also able to have 'on the ground' access to events at which mainstream news outlets are not present. During the riots and protests in Ferguson (as well as the subsequent protests in Baltimore and Minneapolis), members of the press were warned that they should stay back for their own safety. In fact, several journalists were arrested because the authorities had difficulty discerning journalists from protestors. On August 19, 2014, Twitter user and VICE correspondent Alice Speri (@ alicesperi) tweeted: "Police telling media to 'separate from protesters.' Protestor: 'let me pull out my phone, now I'm media'" (Speri, 2014). Mustafa Hussein, one of the live-streamers of the Ferguson protests explained: "As this (conflict) broke out, we said: 'We're [sic] getting spotty coverage of this (from mainstream media). So that first night, we went out there with the live-streaming equipment. We had 1.3 million viewers" (quoted by Simmie, 2014). There is a clear demand for the footage, and an understanding by protesters that it is important to broadcast these events. This role of the citizen journalist is especially important in an event like this ongoing civil unrest that has issues of representation and bias at its very core. Providing live streams of the events gives contemporary news consumers the opportunity to judge the news event themselves, rather than relying on news organizations that may not be able to understand or explain the scope of the hegemony, the systemic corruption, or racism to which the movements are drawing attention.

Citizen journalists are not limited to activists, or young technophiles. Indeed, a large proportion of news consumers participate in authoring the news: 37% of American internet users state that they have created and distributed news (Purcell, et al., 2010) and a March 2014 study indicates that 11% of online news consumers have submitted videos, photos, articles or opinion pieces to news organizations or blogs ("State of the News Media 2014," 2014). More than a third of the most watched news videos on YouTube in 2011 came from citizens and 39% of the news videos produced by news organizations were posted by users ("YouTube and the News…," 2011). In fact, a 2014 finding indicates that 36% of US adults use their cellphones to record news and breaking events. Cleary and Bloom (2011) found that almost 50% of the television stations they surveyed were utilizing User Generated Content (UGC) in their news reports. CNN, BBC and Al-Jazeera have all created citizen journalism websites that utilize UGC and in many cases

use that content as the basis for stories on their news organization's main sites.[10] Another series of sites have started up to help curate video, rather than textual UGC for news organizations, including Stringwire (acquired by NBC in 2013), Storyful (acquired by Newscorp in 2013), and Storyhunter ("State of the News Media 2014," 2014). Live-streaming apps like Periscope and Meerkat or sites like Livestream or UStream also allow for sharing of live footage.

Consumers are also sharing breaking news with their social networks. After the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the death of Trayvon Martin, 39% of tweets about the news offered straight news accounts, not opinion ("Twitter News Consumers," 2013). The same was true with the Affordable Care Act rollout in the United States, and the American federal government shut down in which over a third of tweets were straight news accounts, not the opinion that many associate with news tweets. With breaking news stories, individuals are more interested in spreading information than in promulgating their own opinion—where this appears to be different is for live events. For many news events, news consumers have taken to live tweeting the event, tweeting out what is happening and offering both fact (what is happening) and commentary (what the news consumer's opinion is on what is happening). These tweets often include images, memes, hashtags, and slang. It is not clear why news consumers decide to live tweet these events or which events they choose to live tweet (common events include political debates and awards shows) but there is definitely a sense of these news consumers being involved in the news event—watching it, sharing it, and commenting on it.

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[10] CNN's iReport and Al-Jazeera's Sharek (Arabic for share) are websites for citizen journalism separate from the mainstream news sites but still affiliated under the same brand. BBC's UGCHub is a group of BBC employees who verify user-generated content for publication. It should be noted that UGC and citizen journalism sites do not necessarily provide better or worse news than regular news sites (in fact CNN's iReport weathered its first scandal when a story about an asteroid destroying the Earth on March 35, 2041 was posted in May of 2014) rather, they give citizens the opportunity to participate in the news cycle and take a different role than they may have previously felt possible.

Just as the consumer is taking more of a role in authoring, curating, and choosing their news sources and stories, they are also playing a more active role in judging the believability of the news. "[…T]he likelihood for untruth has become so much more possible" in the contemporary news environment that citizens must take great care to consume their news with a grain of salt" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2009, p. 49). As Brooks Jackson and Kathleen Hall Jamieson explain:

> The hard reality is that the public is exposed to enormous amounts of deception that go unchallenged by government regulators, the courts, or the news media. We voters and consumers must pretty much fend for ourselves if we know what's good for us. (2007, p. 23)

Given that consumers are increasingly interpreting news for themselves (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010; Tewksbury & Rittenberg, 2012) it is not clear if they are prepared and educated to act as their own gatekeepers and validators. "Though we may little understand how [sic] we are all assuming more control over what we know about the world beyond our direct experiences. We are becoming our own editors, our own gatekeepers, our own aggregators" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010, p. 7). While this could lead to a more informed and engaged electorate—if people are more engaged with their news selections and judgements, they must surely be more engaged with the news itself. Yet, this also raises questions about how prepared the average consumer is to critically read the news they need to be considered an informed citizen, and how prepared consumers are to participate in this critical thinking.

The role of the consumer has always been an active one: finding news, using it to make decisions about their lives, passing it on through word of mouth, and considering the credibility of the news. But contemporary news places a greater burden on the consumer to find news they want, and whether to curate it, pass it on, and judge it for credibility and relevance. They also can choose to opt out entirely rather than expend the cognitive energy being asked of them. Their responsibility is also in "[…] sorting through stable predispositions, externally supplied options, and more ephemeral considerations to make decisions about what to hear, watch, and read" (Tewksbury & Rittenberg, 2012, pp.

23-24), and to believe. In two of Kovach and Rosenstiel's books—*The Elements of Journalism* (2009) and *Blur* (2010)—the authors point out the new role of the consumer in more carefully assessing their news. They state:

> The most fundamental change [in news] is that more responsibility for knowing what is true and what is not now rests with each of us as individuals. The notion that a network of social gatekeepers will tell us that things have been established or proven is breaking down. Citizens have more voice, but those who would manipulate the public for political gain or profit—be it corporations or the government—have more direct access to the public as well. (2010, p. 7)

The days of "trust me" journalism are over; audiences must increasingly see facts to believe them. Organizations like Wikileaks have proven the power of source documentation by releasing large amounts of primary source documents and allowing the public to yield their own conclusions.[11]

However, in all of the research that has been done about the changes news consumers are currently dealing with, very little has been written about changes to their news consumption habits. Even those who claim not to get the news regularly are likely to have developed habits that determine how they hear about and access the news. In discussing this project with colleagues and friends, many refer to their childhoods as times in which they developed news habits from their families: listening to CBC radio around the house or in the car, tuning into The National or CTV Nightly News, or having *The Saturday Star* delivered each week. But new technologies have provided access to more platforms and sources than ever before. The result is that news consumers have to make a lot more choices when it comes to their news consumption. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2010) refer to this as a "lean forward experience" where news consumers have to hunt for the information they want or the news they wish to consume. In their

[11] I am not suggesting here that Wikileaks is journalism (though that could certainly be argued), but that it is an example of an organization that has shown the characteristics of "show me" journalism in operation.

book *News on the Internet: Information and Citizenship in the 21st Century*, David Tewksbury and Jason Rittenberg explore how this news activity relates to human habits:

> People have well-worn paths […] that guide how they approach the process. There are specific goals, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors they habitually apply to news selection and processing. People are not automatons, merely repeating the past in an endless loop, but neither are they perfectly intentional all of the time. (2012, p. 85)

LaRose (2010) explains that research about media habits seems to ebb and flow despite the evidence that habitual media use is common and over half of media related activities are identified as habit (Wood, Quinn, & Kashy, 2002).

Tewksbury's (2003) study shows that as a result of the increased access news consumers have to news sources they are likely to follow news they are interested in and not be influenced by news editors. He found that few online news consumers were actually reading public affairs news online—a similar finding to Boczkowski and Mitchelstein's (2013) news gap—despite the fact that they were self-reporting as having read public affairs news. He posits that one of the main reasons for this is that people "do things differently online than they do offline" (Tewksbury, 2003, p. 706)—an indication that there needs to be further study in what exactly defines online news consumer habits.

Indeed, Diddi and LaRose (2006) would argue that habit is a predictor of news consumption. Their study indicated that college students are developing habits in checking their email and news online but that "they also have habitual consumption patterns with respect to conventional news media, and these habits may predate their contact with the internet as a news source" (Diddi & LaRose, 2006, p. 205). These habits might be things previously discussed, like listening to CBC Radio, or using *The Star* or CTV News as a source. Diddi and LaRose also identify these habits as being automatic. They state that "when confronted with a myriad of media choices, the consumer lapses into habitual patterns of media consumption in order to conserve mental resources, rather than engaging in active selections" (2006, pp. 194-195; LaRose & Eastin, 2004). They continue by explaining that news consumers who are asked to provide information about their habits often struggle and provide post-hoc rationalizations that do not completely

correlate to their actual media consumption. The researchers suggest this may be due to the fact that the news consumers "no longer actively think about their media options very much at all" (Diddi & LaRose, 2006, p. 195). To be clear, this is not to suggest that these automatic judgements or reports about news habits are passive or lazy processes but instead that perhaps the overwhelming task of wading through a mountain of news in the twenty-four hour news cycle that is constantly updated on multiple platforms, many of which are ubiquitous, is made easier by developing habits based on previous experience and learned behaviour.

LaRose (2010) theorizes that media habits develop and operate in a twofold process that includes habit acquisition and habit activation. Habits are acquired through specific, repeated circumstances with similar contextual experiences. These habits can then be activated through various triggers:

> So, a habit of watching the *CBS Evening News*, fixed in youth through thousands of repetitions following dinner, might be triggered in later years by the sight of the TV set in the early evening, even if the dinner hour, the news presenter, the family, the 'news time,' and expectations about the outcomes of news viewing have all changed in the interim. The target behavior might also change, generalizing to a different news program or to turning on the TV for the evening at 6:30. […] So, the cognitive structure of the habit and the cues that trigger it may change. (LaRose, 2010, p. 214)

Thus, it is posited that news consumption habits are often learned behaviours from parents and primary education curricula that provide stable contexts in which to develop regular consumption habits. It is also speculated that these habits are used in part to preserve a cognitive economy in the face of a seemingly infinite internet of knowledge and twenty-four hour news cycle. What is unclear here, however, is how these habits develop or are triggered within the constantly changing news landscape that currently exists.

While the evolution in the role of the consumer would suggest a more democratic news environment, having consumers in the position of gatekeepers is also problematic.

Most journalists in North America go to university to acquire the tools to critically read and report the news. The general public does not have the same kind of toolbox to verify and validate news stories.

2.4 Changes to the role of the journalist

The role of the journalist has also changed in the twenty-first century: with severely declining levels of public trust in journalists, the fundamental ethics of the profession are being called into question, and technological advances are forcing changes to the conventions that provided the foundation to journalism from its inception. The changing economic environment of the newsroom has also led to downsizing in many mainstream news organizations and led to professional journalists taking on more varied jobs and/or precarious jobs in order to make ends meet.

The shift to online and mobile news has allowed those who consume the news, greater control over what news they get. In *The News Gap*, Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2013) clearly outline the differences between what journalists and consumers find newsworthy. Though journalists write public affairs stories, consumers prefer to read non-public affairs stories. Mitchelstein and Boczkowski found that there is a large gap between these two desires and that, though this gap lessens at times of political activity, there is a disparity between what the public wants and what journalists think they need. As Nguyen states:

> If journalists were to faithfully and uncritically follow the sentiment of the crowd reflected in the web metrics, they would have to think about providing people what they want to consume and can consume at ease, rather than what they need to consume and must consume with effort to become informed and self-governed citizens. (2013, p. 153)

An *Atlantic* article from 2014 takes this further by explaining that audiences will tell you they want public affairs stories when they really want non-public affairs: "Ask audiences what they want, and they'll tell you vegetables. Watch them quietly, and they'll eat mostly candy" (Thompson, 2014). For example, in 2013 (the same year as the Boston Marathon bombings, the birth of Prince George, the resignation and election of a

pope, and Edward Snowden's NSA leaks), the most popular story read online from *The New York Times* was not news at all: it was called "How Y'all, Youse and You Guys Talk," an interactive news game that identified what state in the United States people were from by the way that they speak (Meyer, 2014).[12]

News organizations have always tried to find a balance between what audiences need and what they want. However, with so many choices in online news, it is also easy for news consumers to find another source that makes the bitter, hard news we need a bit more palatable. It is also a lot easier to avoid getting news in the contemporary news-scape. In the past, news consumers were likely to encounter hard news while flipping through the paper to the comics or the movie listings. Now, it is very easy to have the news curated according to specific preferences and desires, allowing readers to completely avoid any kind of hard news story. The only places that many individuals likely encounter news in this way is the trending topics on Facebook, the Discover area of Snapchat, or if they have a friend that posts a story on social media.[13] The movement of

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[12] Interestingly, "How Y'all, Youse and You Guys Talk" was released in mid December of 2013, which means that in eleven days it was clicked on more than any other story the *Times* published in 2013. In 2014, the app was still the third most popular page on the site. It was beat by Dylan Farrow's op-ed about her child abuse at the hands of Woody Allen in second place. The most popular article was a story and photography series about four sisters who have had their portrait taken together every year for forty years. In 2015 the most popular story was called "No. 37: Big Wedding or Small" and was a published set of thirty- six questions that is supposed to show intimacy, compatibility, and vulnerability of romantic partners.

[13] In May of 2016 it was discovered that Facebook's Trending Topics—which were thought to be determined by the popularity of the news story being shared on the site—were edited by an editorial team of Facebook staff (Thielman, 2016). While this is an important finding in terms of how it effects our understanding of gatekeeping the "most important" stories on the site, it does not change the fact that until it was discovered that the stories were edited by hand, it was believed by most users of the site that the stories were the most popular, determined by an algorithm. What is clear is that the automatic generation of important news stories is obviously not at the quality that it could or should be. Regardless of this finding, the fact still stands that the trending topics are one of the main areas that contemporary news consumers serendipitously encounter news they need.

news to the online environment, the option of selective exposure, and the expansion of citizen journalism are highlighting the need for insights into the modes of news production and distribution in organizations, and emphasizing the choices news organizations are making to retain audiences, engage with news consumers, and keep financially afloat. We need further research to understand this new context.

The movement of news online also emphasizes changes in the economics of the news industry. The shift of classifieds to online marketplaces like Kijiji and Craigslist, and the loss of news consumers who might have bought the paper to get the box scores that are now available for free on ESPN.com or Yahoo Sports, mean major losses in revenue. The ability of news organizations to track viewership online also means that news organizations know exactly what news consumers are looking at and engaging with on their sites. Thus the balance between what consumers want and what they need to be informed citizens becomes related to ad revenues and finding ways to keep consumers on the site, not clicking on the piece of clickbait from Buzzfeed, or the news story from a different paper on their aggregator. Much of the evolution to the role of the journalist in the contemporary news-scape can be linked to both technological changes and economic issues driving changes in news organizations and their structures. One of these major changes is the competing business models of online news sites. Many news organizations have tried to enforce paywalls for news access (or a quota system of access to a certain number of articles per IP address per month) but are competing with sites where users can go to get news for free.

These changes to the modes of news production also precipitate further changes to the role of the journalist. The verification of news stories has always been one of the most important journalistic jobs. Journalists were the individuals who had access to sources who could attest to the veracity of information to be reported. But "in the age of the 24-hour news cycle, journalists now spend more time looking for something to add to the existing news, usually interpretation, than trying to independently discover and verify new facts" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2009, p. 86). Just as consumers have turned online for news, journalists are using Twitter, social media, and even reddit and Periscope for on-the-ground reports of breaking news. This change in behaviour is indicative of the

reliance on new technologies but also the contemporary economic model of the news-scape.

These technological platforms and new sources can be problematic, however, and their use is leading to changes in journalistic practice: for example, the instantaneity of online news is forcing news organizations to make decisions quickly about the veracity of sources and information. Timeliness is a central tenet of news reporting, but with online news there is rarely time to verify facts. Nadrajan and Ang (1999) found that the increased speed of news reporting on new platforms and from new sources leads to more inaccuracies and errors in news stories. This was clearly seen with reporting on the Boston Marathon bombings.

On 15 April 2013, two explosives were detonated at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, killing three individuals and injuring hundreds. Social media was instantly buzzing with firsthand accounts of the bombings. Mainstream news showed cellphone videos of the explosions, tweets from marathon runners connected news broadcasters to potential interviewees, and amateur photographs of the injured were used on news websites around the world. In the days following, the mainstream news frequently reported tweets, twitpics, instagrams, text messages, reddit threads, Facebook posts and other UGC. With the proliferation of reports, misinformation abounded. CNN, AP, the *New York Post*, and multiple other mainstream news sources reported false and misleading information gleaned from social media updates and live-tweets. The *New York Post* even published a front-page picture of two individuals they incorrectly identified as bombing suspects (a photograph that had been circulated online and in threads on reddit and 4chan which were crowd-sourcing a hunt for the bombers) (Fung and Mirkinson, 2013; Wemple, 2013). In an attempt to keep up with the instantaneity of online sources and a public of citizen journalists, mainstream news made grave, embarrassing, and potentially career- and reputation-damaging claims (Carr, 2013; Shayon, 2013).

New forms of news production and consumption have also made it so that the story is never finished; it is constantly updated, changed, and fluid (Deuze, 2008). Schudson explains that:

> Now when a news story is posted online or even in print, the newsroom norm and public expectation is that it will be updated regularly. As a result, there is a new pressure on reporters to stay alert to even small developments related to an already posted and printed story. The result for the writer is permanent occupational vertigo: the story is never finished, never in final form. Journalism has become a 24/7 job. (2011, p. 211)

There is always a sense that the story is developing, rather than complete, and it is impossible to get all of the facts and verify them; especially when the story may have started as the work of one reporter and is revised by others throughout the day. News stories have become more like internet community threads where stories can be updated bit by bit throughout the day, rather than being publishing once a day, or broadcast during the news reports a few times a day.

The job of a journalist is now more about contextualizing facts and content gathering than it is about authoring a news story or broadcast, gatekeeping, or verifying facts. If consumers can assemble and curate their own news, gather facts, and assess the validity of those facts, than the role of the journalist must necessarily have changed. Matt Thompson (2011) describes this change as citizens "looking for understanding" (p. 119) rather than news; suggesting that journalists "analyze, synthesize, and filter" (p. 119), rather than verify and report. The success of twenty-four hour news channels like CNN, CP24, and MSNBC that are looking to fill airtime, make this shift in roles clear. According to Kovach and Rosenstiel, "the new journalist is no longer deciding what the public should know—this was the classic role of gatekeeper. He or she is helping the audiences make order out of it" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2009, pp. p. 19). Thompson agrees, stating:

> Explanatory journalism—what used to comprise sidebars to breaking news stories—is quickly gaining prestige as some of the most valuable and necessary work journalists can do. [For example:] The most downloaded segment in the

> history of NPR.org is an hour-long, magisterial explanation of the factors that led to the late 2000s financial crisis, an episode of the show "This American Life" entitled "The Giant Pool of Money" (Thompson, 2011, p. 122).

Furthermore, Thompson even suggests that future news items should look more like Wikipedia articles in order to account for what we know, what we do not yet know, how we know, who we know from, links to primary content, and any background context required to understand the story. Though this sounds like a great idea in terms of being able to get all of the information in one place, it is unlikely that anyone would take the time or cognitive energy to regularly read these stories. Additionally, contemporary news consumers are already not using singular sources for their news so it seems doubtful that they would attend to only one source that provided a lengthy explanation of a news event or story.

Lewis, Holton, and Coddington (2013) (building from arguments in Rosen's *What are Journalists For?*) suggest that the role of the future journalist should be "reciprocal," claiming that their role should be as community builder, working to connect with the public and build greater trust. And it would seem that this kind of framework is already in place: journalists are expected to maintain an online presence and often to interact with readers or viewers in comments, live-chats, or over Twitter (Tewksbury & Rittenberg, 2012). This kind of informal reporting is another way that the role of the journalist has changed. In *Newsonomics*, Ken Doctor (2011) reports that over two million blog posts are written by journalists every year in American newsrooms. Doctor goes as far as to suggest that one of the main trends in news is the evolution of the journalist to the blogger—an evolution that we may be seeing in the rise of journalists on Twitter. Fifty-nine percent of journalists worldwide use Twitter ("The New Normal for News," 2013). Twitter even has a page devoted to helping journalists with best Twitter practices, including tweet your beat, use hashtags for context, share what you are reading, and @cite your sources ("Twitter for newsrooms and journalists," n.d.). While there is no way that the political economy of journalism would support a full evolution onto Twitter, there has certainly been a shift in the role of the journalist to a more casual and communicative relationship with readers. Yet, it is uncertain whether this kind of

relationship is actually working to increase trust in reporters, or if this relationship is only representative of the greater interconnections present in a networked society.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I provided a series of statistics that clearly show a decline in the public's trust of journalists and news. It would be easy to point to any number of reasons for this decline in trust: the loss of credibility in reporting false and misleading information, the rise of gossip sites as "news" sources, the ambivalence of a public who does not want to be informed, or evident partisanship and bias in news. Regardless of the reason, this distrust is evident and greater interconnectedness does not seem to be having an effect.

In her book *Crazytown,* Robyn Doolittle spends an entire chapter detailing her surprise at the public's distrust of her and Kevin Donovan's report that they had seen a video of Rob Ford smoking crack cocaine. [14] On 16 May 2013, Gawker, the American gossip website, published an account of a video of the former (now deceased) mayor of Toronto smoking crack cocaine. Several hours later the *Toronto Star* published a report of having seen the same video weeks earlier and gave a detailed explanation of what they had seen and why they did not have the video. However, the descriptions of the video, and accounts from the two *Star* journalists who saw it were not enough to sway some of the public's belief that the mayor had not smoked crack. Forty-five percent of Torontonians surveyed said they believed the video to be "a hoax and part of a conspiracy to discredit the mayor" (Doolittle, 2014, p. 237)—a spin Ford Nation had used for many oppositional stories about the mayor.

The role of the journalist has always been to see and hear about things, and to report them. However, with new technologies and unparalleled levels of access to primary source content, reports are not enough for the public. Doolittle quotes Ivor Shapiro's J-Source article about the video scandal saying:

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[14] Chapter 13 entitled "Video, Schmideo".

> When did the accepted standard for reporters' verification become that raw evidence must be seen by the audience to be believed? If a reporter sees with her own eyes a document, witnesses with his eyes an event taking place, or hears with her own ears a statement being made, is this not good enough as the basis for reporting? (Doolittle, 2014, p. 239)

The point of this example is not the public's disbelief that their mayor could have participated in illegal drug use, but instead their belief that the video was described by journalists who were actively conspiring against Ford. Despite the fact that multiple journalists and news sites reported this information (and identical reports of what was in the video), some members of the public did not believe them because they had not seen the primary source video or verified the reports for themselves. Kovach and Rosenstiel suggest, "Whatever methods a journalist uses, the resulting story must display sufficient evidence to allow consumers to see the case for themselves and to understand why they should believe the evidence offered" (2011, p. 72). This is a fundamental example of the shift to "show me" journalism, where the journalist's word is not enough for audiences to trust. Providing evidence in news stories is not new, but the public's demand for evidence despite the journalist's reputation or individual credibility is one of the key characteristics of the judgement of believability of contemporary news. Consumers' inability to identify news anchors and journalists and their insistence on 'seeing to believe' highlight clear changes to the way believability has been assessed and credibility has been judged.

The role of the journalist has been revolutionized by online and mobile technology in a number of ways: finding a balance in offering consumers both what they want in non-public affairs news, but also the public affairs news they need to be informed citizens, new forms of verification, sense-making in news stories, rather than reporting and verifying, and community building by being more involved in connecting with consumers. In some ways these changes are not new—for example: consumers have always been interested in entertainment news—but online news and social media allow for selective exposure in a way that other news platforms and sources did not.

2.5 Changes to news

News looks different than it did even twenty years ago. There is more interactivity in online news: videos, games, top ten lists, and moving advertisements draw the consumer's eye online; stories include more photographs and URLs link to information about a news story or event. Consumers are also getting news in different formats and on different platforms. In 2011, the internet surpassed the newspaper as the second most popular way for Americans to access the news and is rapidly gaining on television to become the most popular platform ("More Young People Cite Internet…," 2011; "The Modern News Consumer," 2016). For news consumers between the ages of 18-29 and 30-39, the internet is the most common platform on which to get news ("The Modern News Consumer," 2016). Thirty-three percent of Canadians access the news online once or several times a day ("Traditional and Social Media Use in Canada," 2013). Sixty-six percent of American smartphone and tablet users get their news on their device, which means that roughly a third of American adults get the news on their mobile device at least once a week; getting the news ranks only second to email as the most common activity on mobile devices ("The Future of Mobile News," 2012). But news consumers are not using only one platform.

> Very few of us rely on a primary news source, a single institution, for most of our information. Instead, we have become "news grazers", who acquire information from multiple platforms at different times. Only 7 percent of Americans rely on one medium—say television or the Internet—for most of their news, let alone a single news organization. (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010, p. 173)

There is no denying that the most popular news platforms have shifted (Tewksbury & Rittenberg, 2012).

The use of different platforms for news consumption is important because the way the news is consumed can change the habits of news consumers and the aspects of news that they find most important. For example, the adoption of mobile technological devices has increased the immediacy of news. Using mobile devices, consumers can access news anywhere at anytime, and these same technologies enable the distribution of news stories

and images as they happen from where they happen. The large quantity of news, and the delivery of news on different platforms are also credited with changing the way young people read the news. According to Huang (2009), 78.6% of young people usually only skim news headlines. When Elmer Emig did a similar study on newspaper headlines in 1928, he found that 51% of his survey participants admitted to using only the headline to form their opinion on the day's news (pp. 53-54). In 2008, the Associated Press found that people consume the news in "bits" and quick-scans, rather than with depth ("A New Model for News," 2008). They also found that consumers are checking the news more frequently, but only during emergent or crisis situations do they read the story with any kind of breadth or depth. Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2013) attribute some of this shallow news reading with the fact that much news consumption happens at work in which consumers only have the time to read short snippets, not long-form reports.

Though changing news platforms have altered the way citizens are reading the news, these new platforms can also offer a more comprehensive news report. Thompson explains that:

> […] the opportunity to provide original source material online, including scanned copies of documents and reports or linking to sources citied in articles, represent major advances. In this way greater transparency can be achieved […] thereby inviting audience members to decide for themselves whether to trust the information provided. (Thompson, 2013, p. 22)

However, if young people are only reading headlines and "bits" of information, it is clear that they are not a part of the audience who is using these extensive news accounts and thus what they use to determine if they should trust the information provided is unknown.

Consumers are also using multiple sources to read and find the news. There is a "near-infinite" choice in the news sources that can be consumed (Bankoff, 2011). Though choice is helpful in finding the news that individuals want to consume, it can be difficult to filter through the large quantity of news produced on a regular basis (Pariser, 2012). Likely this has led to the popularity of news aggregators and news personalization where

a consumer can choose what kinds of news they want to see and have an algorithm amalgamate a personalized news feed. This can, however, hamper the ability to find news serendipitously, to attend to news that is needed to function as informed citizens, or to be exposed to alternate opinions. Furthermore, "if everybody is looking at dozens or hundreds of different sources, you don't have the common point of reference that—not to be corny—[is] an important part of democracy and community" (Pazinokas in Folfenflik, 2011, p. xii). With a fragmented news landscape such as the current one, developing this sense of community and shared opinions may be more difficult than in the past (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2009).

The role of the consumer in deciding what to believe online is further problematized by the kind of content found on many sites. Misinformation, disinformation, hoaxes, satirical news sources, and a boom of new sources in which to find news, makes it tricky for news consumers to wade through a large amount of news to find what is best. This content often looks like, and sounds like authentic news which makes it even more difficult for consumers to identify it as deceptive, incorrect, or only providing a part of the story, rather than the whole story.

Misinformation is wrong information that is spread unintentionally. Disinformation is wrong information that is spread with the intention of propagating wrong facts. Added to this might be a third kind of information that could be called vague information—what is communicated most often by what researchers are calling the FOX News effect (Mooney, 2012) and what Stephen Colbert refers to as "truthiness." This vague information is communicated in a non-specific way, and focuses on opinion and happenstance that leads viewers to make their own decisions about the veracity of the information and whether or not the story is complete, biased, honest, and reported as the BBC suggested "without artificial balancing and without political motive or editorial colouring" (Herbert, 2001).

As discussed previously, a lot of misinformation happens when news organizations try to deliver news in real time and do not properly verify information or sources. There is also research that suggests that misinformation that is tweeted or

reported is very difficult to retract or correct (Starbird, Maddock, Orand, Achterman, & Mason, 2014), making it even tougher to wade through what is and is not true or believable. Websites have sprung up to assist consumers in assessing the credibility and truthfulness of news including the Annenberg Public Policy Centre's factcheck.org, and *The Tampa Bay Times*' Pulitzer Prize winning politifact.com. Yet I have not found any evidence, statistics, or analytics suggesting that regular consumers are using these sites to fact check—or frankly, that they are even aware of them.[15]

Vague information is one of the other ways that the public can be misinformed. FOX news viewers are consistently the most misinformed of the American public generally because of the "truthiness" of content delivered on the network (Mooney, 2012). According to Chris Mooney (2012), FOX viewers are generally misinformed about such things as global warming, the war in Iraq, healthcare, the Ground Zero mosque, and the 2010 election. He concludes that FOX misinforms its viewers, polarizing the voting public using ideological and opinion-based news. By relying not on facts, but instead on innuendo and opinion, vague information allows the consumer to connect the dots and create a story that is not true.

With more news being consumed online, viewers are able to exercise their right of selective exposure, consuming only news that aligns with their ideological principles, and avoiding news that may make them question their values or their positions on such key topics as global warming. Those same viewers are also being informed by news organizations that focus more on ideology and less on fact. It is, consequently, difficult for consumers of this information to determine what is true when the news stories they are told rely so heavily on opinion, rather than facts.

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[15] The final few months of the 2016 US election were concluding at the same time that this dissertation was being readied for defence. The election was contentious for many reasons, but one of the key things that it illustrated was the lack of interest voters had in the facts versus the opinions that were expressed by the candidates. Though news organizations were intensely fact-checking Donald Trump and identifying the misinformation and falsehoods he continually stated, those lies did not effect the outcome of the election in his favour. Much more research must be undertaken about this phenomenon.

Hoaxes are another prevalent form of misinformation in contemporary news. A hoax is a kind of disinformation that is deliberate deception that is accepted as true by the general public. Hoaxes are often meant to be jokes but are legitimatized when mainstream media picks them up or when they go viral and reach a large audience who is unable to determine the veracity of the hoax's claims. CNN's Doug Gross calls 2013 the "year of the hoax." Gross identifies that these hoax stories, videos, and pictures are often viral marketing, and there are "news" websites like Buzzfeed, Upworthy, and reddit that utilize this virality to drive their ad numbers. These hoaxes move past tabloid stories like Bigfoot, or email spam, and include such things as celebrity deaths, strange news events, fake Twitter accounts that are attributed to real companies or people, funny stories, or affective stories. While many hoaxes are merely silly stories or celebrity gossip, in some cases, these hoaxes are a result of a legitimate source being hacked. In April of 2013, the Associated Press Twitter account was hacked to tweet out "Breaking: Two Explosions in the White House and Barack Obama is injured." As a result of the tweet, the stock market dropped over a hundred points. These hoaxes usually look and sound authentic, and with viewers asking news organizations to "show me," if it looks and sounds like news, they may believe it to be true, factual news. Online hoaxes have become so prevalent that there are multiple websites devoted to debunking them, including: hoaxbusters.org, hoax-slayer.com, and the popular snopes.com. However, there is no research to confirm that consumers are using these sites either. In fact, with the increase in the number of online hoaxes identified by Gross in 2013, it is possible that even the debunkers are having a hard time keeping up.

Misinformation and disinformation are not the only kinds of news causing problems for consumer's judgement of authentic news. Satirical news sites, such as *The Onion* or the *Daily Currant*, have caused (and continue to cause) issues with perceptions of believability. Satirical news is news that is reported in a humorous way that is intended, not to deceive, but rather to make a joke of the news of the day. This kind of news can make it difficult for viewers to distinguish the facts from the humour of the story (Rubin, Conway, Chen, & Cornwell, 2016). *The Onion*, which declares itself to be "America's Finest News Source," in particular has hoodwinked governmental representatives and the public alike. In 2012, the site published the article: "Kim Jong-Un

Named *The Onion's* Sexiest Man Alive for 2012." The article was picked up by the Chinese paper *People's Daily*, which ran the story as fact and included a fifty-five image slideshow about Kim Jong-Un. Also in 2012, American Congressman John Fleming posted *The Onion's* "Planned Parenthood Opens $8 Billion Abortionplex" story to his Facebook page with the comment "More on Planned Parenthood, abortion by the wholesale." Both sites look like authentic news sites and talk about real news events but in an often-ludicrous fashion—yet it is clear that not everyone is capable of judging the news as false. In August of 2014, Facebook announced that it was going to introduce a "satire" tag. Facebook released a statement that they were testing this tag, which would show up on stories from websites including *The Onion*, because users indicated that they wanted an easier way to tell if something was satire (Machkovech, 2014).

Satirical television news like *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, *This Hour has 22 Minutes*, or *Saturday Night Live*'s "Weekend Update" segment have triggered similar problems in veracity judgement. The difference between sites like *The Onion* and shows like *Saturday Night Live*, however, is that the television shows often cross over into real life, with interviews with real politicians, reports on real news stories with real footage making it even more difficult to tell what is real and what is meant to be humorous. Young people are identifying these (often) late night shows as sources of hard news (Brewer & Marquardt, 2007; Cave, 2004; Feldman, 2007). It is unclear if these young people are able to decipher what is meant to be humorous and what the real story is.

Beyond misinformation and disinformation, news consumers must also face the complexity of choosing news from a growing number of news sources. Not only does this expansion of options make it difficult to choose a news source, it also means that the consumer must be involved in a more nuanced judgement of the news. Metzger explains that "there are no universal standards for posting information online, and digital information may be easily altered, plagiarized, misrepresented, or created anonymously under false pretenses" (2007, p. 2078) which makes it far more difficult to judge the information coming from online sources. In addition, the author of information online may not be known or available, thus reputation and authority, which might have been the

foundation of a credibility judgement, are no longer available. It has, thus, become much more difficult to sift through a huge amount of information to choose the best information—that which provides the whole story in an unbiased way.

Misinformation, disinformation, hoaxes, satire, and an expanded catalog of news sources have made judging the truthfulness and deception in news very challenging. These types of news are disseminated by both fake and legitimate news sources making it even more difficult to judge the veracity of information online. It is currently unclear how consumers are making these decisions and judgements.

2.6 Conclusion

News is changing; that much is certain. The roles of the consumer, journalist, and the news artifact have all evolved with the adoption of online and mobile news sources. These changes have created a news environment that is more fluid in terms of distributing and receiving news anywhere at anytime, and as Schudson explains, the lines between old and new media, have blurred. News consumers have taken on the role of authorship, tweeting and sharing news in a networked digital word of mouth. They appear to be taking a more active role in choosing the news they consume, or choosing what news not to consume, in addition to identifying and documenting newsworthy events that happen around them with the intention of sharing these events as news authors. While consumers are verifying and documenting news, journalists have become news sense-makers, providing context for news events and helping audiences to understand why they are important and how they fit into the broader socio-economic climate. With active and engaged news consumers/authors, a decline in trust and believability of news journalists, the changing nature of news as an artifact, and no clear path forward in the political economy or technological dissemination of news, it is necessary to take a current account of how young people understand news now and what makes these news sources and stories believable.

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Chapter 3

3 Credibility, Believability, Heuristics, and Habits

Chapter Two has provided a background on the major changes to the role of consumer, journalist, and the news artifact that have occurred as a result of the adoption of online and mobile news. One of the major changes across the three areas is that the news consumer now has more choice when it comes to deciding what news to consume. The more choice that these consumers have, the more decisions they have to make about their news: how do they choose what news to consume? How do they assess the quality of that news? How do they decide what news they believe?

When asking these questions in the past, media scholarship largely discussed news in terms of trust and credibility. Though credibility has been studied since Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*, news credibility and source credibility began to be studied alongside mass communication after World War One. This chapter will review what is already known about news credibility from previous research, and will consider how believability is factored into judgements of news, and explore how experts believe that credibility should be judged, how news consumers actually judge credibility and information quality, and how these judgements can be translated into the news environment.

3.1 What is news credibility?

Most reports define news credibility as the perception of the believability of a message, source, or media (Bucy, 2003; Nah & Chung, 2011; Rieh & Danielson, 2007; Self, 1996; Tseng & Fogg, 1999), and credibility generally as "the quality of being trusted or believed in" (Stevenson, 2010). In fact, the word credible comes from the Latin *credibilis*, meaning 'worthy of belief.' But credibility and believability are two different things. News consumers may not believe a credible piece of news, and may believe news that they get from a non-credible source; there is a difference between things that we (maybe) *should* believe and things that we *do* believe. When news consumers believe something, they feel sure of its truth and this feeling is a subjective one—they can believe

different things, or the same things for different reasons. These are three important terms when considering news: credibility, truth, and believability. While credibility and truth are commonly discussed in journalism literature, believability is a term that has largely been relegated to discussions in psychology. But believability is an important concept in news consumption if only because it is based on judgements of credibility and evaluations of truth.

As explained in the previous section, 'news' can be true and accurate, but it can also deliberately or accidentally deceive, provide incomplete or vague information, or be biased or inaccurate. On the Internet, there is more news in general, and specifically more poor-quality news, to wade through and judge. Encountering news of this poor and deceiving nature can lead to a misinformed public and without news organizations fact checking, verifying, and validating news stories, the consumer is the only filter. The news credibility literature usually asks one of two questions: 1) Should this news be believed? and 2) What makes this news believable to a receiver? The first question asks if the story, source, or statement is truthful—unbiased, complete, accurate, of a good quality, balanced— and the second asks why the audience member believed it. To use language from the introduction of this dissertation, the former question belongs in "trust me" journalism, while the latter to "show me" journalism, where the consumer takes a more active role in assessing and judging the credibility, believability and quality of a story, source, or message (Johnson, et al. 2008). This second question is entirely relevant to a news environment where consumers make their own determinations about what news to consume and what should and should not be believed. Though this is a determination that they have always made—especially whether or not they believe the news—with the abundance of choice in contemporary media and the greater opportunity for misinformation, poor quality news, and deception, this is a far greater task. Furthermore, past studies have shown that consumers do not pay attention to information that they do not believe is credible (Gaziano, 1988).

3.2 How have credibility judgements been tested?

In their foundational and often cited study, David Berlo, James Lemert and Robert Mertz (1970) asserted that credibility is complex and multidimensional, a position that is

affirmed by many other researchers (Burgoon, Burgoon & Wilkinson, 1981; Meyer, 1974; Singletary, 1976). The literature on credibility divides the concept into source credibility, medium credibility, and message credibility (noting that there are often overlapping effects between the three) (Metzger, et al., 2003; Metzger, 2007; Pornpitakpan, 2004; Rieh & Danielson, 2007). Source credibility can be defined as the believability of a source or communicator as perceived by a receiver. Medium credibility is the analysis of the platform as having effects on credibility—how credible one views a medium strongly relates to how often one uses it (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Shaw, 1973), and potentially how credible one finds the information disseminated by that platform. Finally, message credibility is the believability of the content. Many studies confound source, medium, and message credibility, so that the separate effect of each of these aspects of credibility cannot be determined—or they design their study to account for one kind of credibility only. It seems impossible to determine if a news item is fact or opinion without having assessed the credibility of a news story or a series of news stories from that source. Yet it also seems that one could disagree with the way a story is written or an issue is dealt with by a news organization, but still find that organization credible. In the same way, different news organizations might be represented by the same platform but be perceived in different ways. It may be that there is no way to separate message, source and medium characteristics and that there needs to be a new way to explain their mutual effects. Many studies also make note of audience or receiver characteristics, suggesting that demographics can determine the factors that effect credibility and persuasion (Self, 1996; Sternthal, Phillips & Dholakia, 1978; Tewksbury & Rittenberg, 2012, p. 86; Wathen & Burkell, 2002).

Carl Hovland, et al. (1953), identified two characteristics of source credibility in trustworthiness and expertise—a determination that was affirmed by BJ Fogg in a study fifty years later about the credibility of the web (2001). In 1986, however, Cecile Gaziano and Kristin McGrath remarked that beyond a few studies, the factors indicating credibility were never identified. In their study they tested participants' credibility judgements on a sixteen point indexical scale asking their respondents to judge news based on the following: fairness; bias; accuracy; trust; whether it tells the whole story; whether it invades people's privacy; if it watches over the readers' interests; if it concerns

the community's well being; if it separates facts and opinion; if it is concerned with the public's interest; if it is factual or opinionated; if the reporters are well trained; if it cares about what the audience thinks; if it sensationalizes; and if it is moral or immoral. Other studies include similar characteristics such as: trustworthiness, honesty, believability, expertise, lack of perceivable bias, objectivity, reliability, confidence, reputation, balance of coverage, or ethics (Gezduci & d'Haenens, 2010; Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell, 2000; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McGinnies & Ward, 1989; Meyer, 1988; Miller & Kurpius, 2010; Notoro-Morgan, 1998; Rubin, Palmgreen & Sypher, 1994; Tsfati & Cappella, 2005). These are the characteristics that these studies have used to define credibility. Contemporary studies have continued utilizing methods with indexical scales and similar characteristics (Metzger, et al., 2003; Sundar, 1999).

However, many of the studies that seek to determine source and medium credibility that use these indexical scales (like the ones above), show that it is close to impossible to define credibility and perceptions of believability. These studies rarely allow participants to suggest other factors that might affect the credibility of a news story or source, instead typically using credibility scales developed in previous research. Furthermore, it seems difficult for participants to judge some of these elements; for example, how can people judge the accuracy or honesty of a news story if they were not an eyewitness or had no personal involvement in the news story? Moreover, and perhaps most critically, these studies very rarely account for message credibility, focusing instead on source and medium credibility. Message credibility studies are more likely to be found in psychology or linguistic studies that focus on the deception of a message and what elements a consumer finds believable, rather than whether the source ought to be believed. If, as Chapter Two suggests, young people are getting their news from many sources, message credibility is an area that needs significant research to understand the effects of the message on judgements of believability.

One study that has attempted to account for these issues was just recently released. In April of 2016, the Media Insight Project published a research project called "A New Understanding: What Makes People Trust and Rely on News," and found that accuracy, completeness, transparency, balance, and presentation are the most common

factors that lead news consumers to rely on or trust a news source—focusing particularly on accuracy and completeness. The report is a great source of data about contemporary audiences (something that is sorely lacking in Canada) however, the research confounds the variables of trust, credibility, and reliance, often using those terms interchangeably rather than clarifying the differences between them. What the authors did point out is that the type of news changes the factors used in assessing trust in a news source. For example, they explain, "The importance of trust may vary depending on whether a story is breaking news or is coverage of an ongoing trend or issue" (Media Insight Project, 2016, p. 8). The participants also ranked trust factors differently for different types of news (e.g. political versus entertainment). Here they identified that expert sources and data were necessary elements of national political news, but not of lifestyle news (p. 10). This study shows that the factors that affect trustworthiness in news are still important to research, but the way trust is assessed by contemporary news consumers is nuanced, amorphous, and multi-faceted depending on news platform, source, and beat.

It is not easy to describe how perceptions of news credibility have changed and, perhaps more critically, how the factors that influence news credibility (namely how much news sources are trusted) have changed, as there have been few reports of credibility judgements in a contemporary news environment and, as mentioned in Chapter One, limited data about Canadian audiences. It is difficult to take into consideration multi-platform, multi-source, and what one might call a "trans-news scape"—where news from different platforms, sources, modalities, and sites is aggregated and consumed as a singular news source. For example, if a news consumer reads a headline from *The Globe and Mail* while searching Google News, is the story from Google or *The Globe*? What about if a friend posts the story on Facebook; is the story from the friend, Facebook, or *The Globe?* How can the complexities of what is meant by "source" in a converged news environment be accounted for? Most studies have focused on the credibility and believability of new platforms or forms of communication like websites, blogs and social media (Ahmed & Lutters, 2011; Banning & Sweetster, 2007; Castillo, Mendoza, & Poblete, 2011; Chan, Lee, & Pan, 2006; Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007; Gunter, Campbell, & Touri, 2009; Fogg, et al, 2001; Johnson, Kaye, Bichard, & Wong, 2007; Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Johnson & Kaye, 2009;

Johnson & Kaye, 2010; Tseng & Fogg, 1999; Wathen & Burkell, 2001), rather than assessing the credibility and believability of news in a trans-news-scape. It is highly unlikely that a news consumer is only going to a blog to read the news, but if that blog was corroborated with a news story found in the trending topics on Twitter, or the Discover area on Snapchat, the blog's credibility might be perceived differently. The way credibility is perceived can change and adjust every time news is accessed. The blog that first broke a news event might be perceived more credibly in the future because it can be corroborated in the present. As the Media Insight Project report shows that the contemporary news consumer is making quite nuanced and sophisticated decisions about the news they consume and the news they believe every time they interact with news. The way this has been previously studied (through indexical and binary scales) does not and cannot account for these multi-faceted decision making processes.

3.3 How are consumers supposed to judge credibility?

In the previous section I reviewed the way that credibility has been studied, which explains a lot about how experts think it should be judged (via indexical scales). In most studies this is through a series of scales that typically assess characteristics of the source and content, including bias, authority, accuracy, expertise, and trustworthiness, or are source/message/platform characteristics including balance and sensationalism. However, Nicholas Burbules (2001) and Miriam Metzger (2007) identify that these characteristics do not all transfer to the web. In fact, they suggest that a new set of criteria must be created and tested to determine their relevance to the judgement of online information and to identify whether users are actually using these criteria. According to information quality researchers, these criteria provide the basis for one of the most popular ways to teach information evaluation online: checklists (Burbules, 2001). In practice, a user could utilize one of these checklists by assessing each characteristic when looking at Internet information. There are numerous examples of these online, especially on university and academic sites for use by students looking to determine if they are using appropriate sources. For example, the University of Toronto library website includes five headings of questions including: authority (who is the author?), affiliation (who sponsor's the website?), audience level (who is the site designed for?), currency (is the site

dated/current?), and content reliability/accuracy (is the site factual or opinion based? Does the material have depth?). The University of Western Ontario uses the Currency, Relevance, Authority, Attendance, and Purpose (CRAAP) method for evaluating the quality of a source's information. This method involves a series of questions that fall under five headings: Currency (Timeliness), Relevance (Intended Audience), Authority, Accuracy (Verifiability), and Purpose (Objectivity) (Western Libraries, retrieved June, 2014). Metzger provides a comprehensive—and extensive—list of information characteristics suggested for credibility evaluation, amalgamated from eight different studies. The identified characteristics include: presence of date stamp showing information is current; source citations; citations to scientific data or references; author identification; presence of contact information; absence of advertising; presence of privacy and security policies; certifications or seals from trusted third parties; professional, attractive, and consistent page design including graphics, logos, color schemes, etc.; easy navigation; well-organized sites; sponsorship of external links to reputable organizations; notification/presence of editorial review process or board; absence of typographical errors and broken links; professional-quality and clear writing; download speed; message relevance; tailoring; interactive features; past experience with source/organization; domain name/URL; ability to verify claims elsewhere; comprehensiveness of information provided; ranking in search engine output; paid access to information; and plausibility of arguments (2007, p. 2082). Fogg, et al (2001) identified fifty-one characteristics of websites and found that the five that most influenced judgements of credibility were real-world feel, ease of use, expertise, trustworthiness, and tailoring.

But as Metzger explains, few consumers will actually analyze sources with this kind of rigour. In fact, few studies indicate that users check or judge information they get online for its credibility (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000), and as previously mentioned, it is not clear if news consumers use sites like Politi-fact to confirm the veracity of their information. Scholz-Crane (1998) found that students only used scope and accuracy to evaluate the quality of a site. Several studies have found that site design is the most important characteristic in determining website credibility (Chiagouris, Long & Plank, 2008; Metzger, 2007; Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Meola (2004) suggests three different

approaches to determining good information online: peer - and editorially reviewed resources, comparing information found on a website to an offline source, and looking at several sources to corroborate information on a topic. It is clear that there still is not an agreed upon model of information evaluation. It is also impossible that anyone would evaluate all information or news that they come across with the kind of meticulousness these researchers provide in their "suggested" checklists. In fact, I would argue that consumers are far more likely to maintain a cognitive economy and only evaluate a few of the checklist items, rather than use all of them. Additionally, it is impractical to use a set of criteria when assessing an online source, even the characteristics that were once considered gold standards. It is close to impossible to verify the authority of an online source, especially when news sources are beginning to rely on user-generated content for which the source is anonymous, unknown, or without a reliable reputation. Accuracy, as previously stated, is impossible to judge unless the consumer has first-hand experience. Without accessing multiple sources, there is very little chance that a consumer could judge the coverage or scope of a news story.

Miriam Metzger resolves that there should be a dual-processing model of credibility assessment online (Figure 1), as not all information needs to be rigorously assessed for veracity and credibility. She indicates that there must be a motivation and cognitive ability to evaluate information credibility in order for consumers to undertake a rigorous assessment of the information rather than using only superficial cues (heuristics) or performing no evaluation. This model acknowledges that a consumer can take multiple paths when encountering a website or a piece of information, and that the factors used in this judgement are multi-faceted. However, I would propose that the judgement phase of this encounter leads not just to a credibility judgement but also, to one of trust or believability. It stands to reason that credibility is a part of the evaluation when a news consumer is deciding whether or not to believe a news story—particularly credibility judgements of a news source. Credibility, then, is a factor that is used to help make the decision about whether or not the information should be believed. Though there might be heuristics that can lead to a judgement of credibility, those same heuristics (along with credibility) can be used to make decisions about believability. When making a decision about whether to believe a piece of news, it would be strange not to call into question the

credibility of the source, or the evidence provided in the story in addition to factors like corroboration and quality.

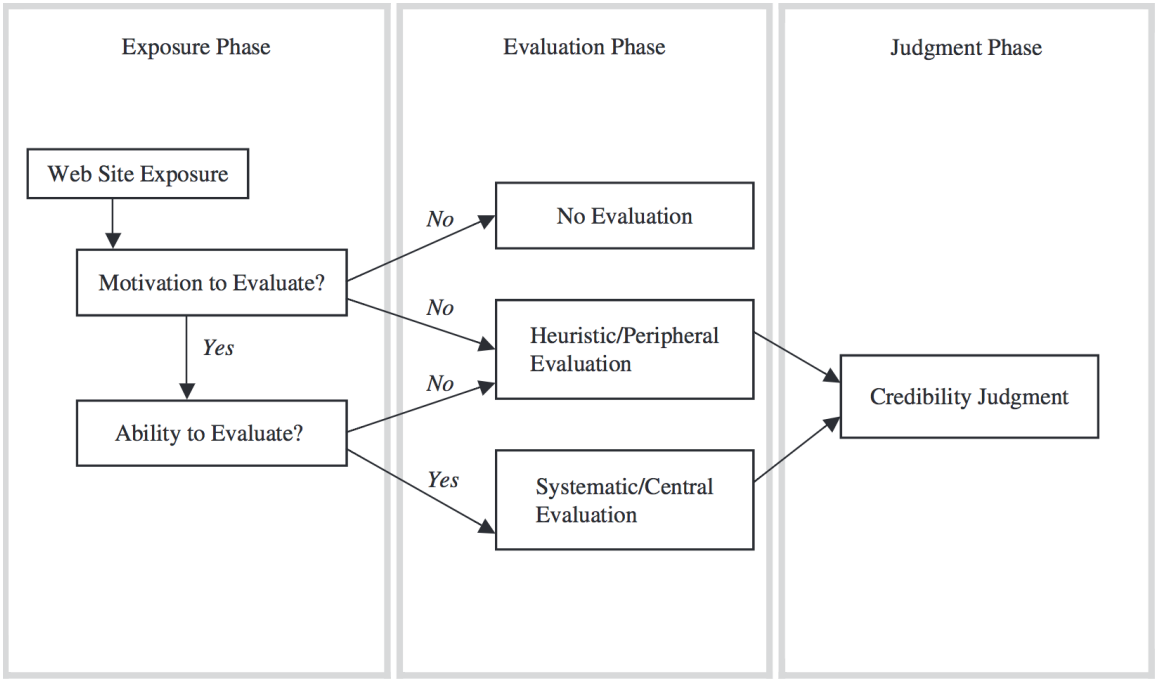


Figure 1: Elements of a dual processing model of website credibility assessment (Metzger, 2007, p. 2088).

In terms of news specifically, Kovach and Rosenstiel make several suggestions designed to assist consumers to make good critical judgements, and teach them to judge news. They describe what they call "skeptical knowing" (2010, p. 19): a series of steps to think critically about the news they are receiving. They also suggest that consumers should learn journalistic tradecraft so that they can understand if the news they are receiving is "faked, hyped or spun" (2010, p. 30). Their third suggestion is that consumers look at multiple sources, from independent organizations to determine if there are standard facts that can create a sense of credibility (2010, pp. 79-80). Theirs is not the only book that constructs this kind of lesson in critical learning (Browne & Keeley, 2013; Jackson & Jamieson, 2007; McManus, 2012).

It seems, then, that there is no agreed-upon model that is firmly in place to assist consumers with the task of assessing online information, and more research needs to be

done into how users and consumers of online information are assessing credibility in order to develop a practical guide to credibility assessments and information quality valuations that might actually work—rather than creating a model that is never tested, or developing a model based on credibility research that does not work for an online, mobile, trans-news environment. There should be a model that does not just suggest what news consumers *should* do, but one that considers what they *are* doing and to develop a practical, workable approach to train news consumers in what these changes in news mean for their role as informed citizens. After all,

> […] users need the evaluative skills to make a proper determination about which information is trustworthy, on the internet and in other venues. This is part of what it means to become a literate citizen in an information-rich, networked world. (Fritch from Metzger, p. 2089)

In the contemporary news environment the consumer must take responsibility not only to read the news to be informed, but to critically evaluate the believability and relevance of the news.

3.4 How is credibility judged?

Metzger's (2007) dual-processing model is quite similar to an earlier model of credibility found in psychology: the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo (1984a). This model suggests that there are a number of factors—particularly motivation (desire to process) and ability (level of critical thought)—that affect an individual's capacity to be persuaded by a message or report.[16] When a consumer has a high motivation and a high ability to perceive the message, their elaboration is said to be high. According to Petty and Cacioppo:

[16] For Petty and Cacioppo, as well as other theorists who use the ELM (See for instance: Angst & Agarwal, 2009; Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006; Petty & Wegener, 1999), the model is used to show the likelihood of persuasion. But persuasion is really just a term that can be substituted by believability because when we are persuaded of something, we come to believe it.

> This means that people are likely to: (a) attend to the appeal; (b) attempt to access relevant associations, images, and experiences from memory; (c) scrutinize and elaborate upon the externally provided message arguments in light of the associations available from memory: (d) draw inferences about the merits of the arguments for a recommendation based upon their analyses of the data extracted from the appeal and accessed from memory; and (e) consequently derive an overall evaluation of, or attitude toward, the recommendation. (1984a)

An individual who uses low elaboration when assessing a piece of information will rely on superficial judgements and minor cues of persuasion (i.e. source, attractiveness or positive or negative language) to assess of the believability of the information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984b). If a news consumer evaluates a news story or source using high elaboration, they are likely to be quite critical of the story on a number of levels and use a variety of factors to assess the quality and believability of that news. Conversely, if they use low elaboration to assess the news they will only use superficial cues like appearance of news broadcaster, or the reputation of the source.

The ELM suggests that there are two processing routes: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route is associated with high elaboration and is used when an individual has a high motivation to learn, or know the information they are consuming, and where they have the ability to learn the information. Central route processing is used when information is personally relevant, and more often by individuals who demonstrate higher levels of need for cognition. "When people are motivated and able to take the central route, they carefully appraise the extent to which the communication provides information that is fundamental or central to the true merits of the position advocated" (Petty, Priester & Brinol, 2002, p. 167). When using central route processing, individuals assess information based on their prior experience and attitude, and they determine the information quality and credibility before allowing that information to change their opinion or persuade them about a topic. In the central route, individuals usually find the information they are processing of personal relevance, importance, or interest. The peripheral route is associated with low elaboration when an individual has a low motivation to learn the information they are consuming, and where they do not have the

ability to learn the information. Peripheral route processing relies on impressions of information rather than the quality of the argument or the facts of the story. "[…A]ttitudes changed via the peripheral route are based on more passive acceptance or rejection of simple cues and have a less well articulated foundation [than the central route approaches]" (Petty, Priester & Brinol, 2002, p. 169).

The central and peripheral routes are not a binary but a spectrum in which assessments of information reside. Like Metzger, Petty and Cacioppo understand that not all information needs to be processed via the central route as not all information needs to be rigorously vetted or verified. They also explain that individuals will not always use one route of processing, but will undertake one or the other based on their high or low elaboration for that specific piece of information and the circumstances around heir encountering of that information. For example: if someone is interested in a topic and has the time to read a news story about it, they are likely to undertake the central route of processing. However, if they are interested and do not have the time, or uninterested they are likely to follow the peripheral processing route. Again, this model provides a way of thinking about the process of evaluating news believability in a multi-faceted way that also accounts for the many kinds of source, platform, and type of news that effect the way contemporary news consumers rely on, access, and evaluate the news (Media Insight Project, 2016).

Generally speaking, if people find information believable, they are more likely to pay attention to it (Gaziano, 1988; Johnson and Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001; Metzger, et al, 2003). In the ELM, there are multiple ways and multiple criteria that a consumer uses to determine the believability of information. The model does not suggest that one of the processing routes is better than the other, but it is clear that the central route provides the individual with deeper, and more meaningful analysis and judgement than the peripheral route. The peripheral route, however, allows consumers to make judgements easily without needing to engage them in a lengthy process of analysis. Rather than using the information quality judgements when assessing news, it appears, then, that there might be a dual-processing model that links the ELM to use of the heuristic checklists that are suggested by information literacy experts. Here, there may find a model of information

evaluation that will get closer to a method of assessing how contemporary news consumers decide believability.

3.5 How might contemporary news credibility be judged?

There are a lot of ways that credibility has been judged and studied in the past—particularly as credibility is seen as a multi-dimensional judgement. However, the way credibility has been previously assessed does not, and cannot, account for the trans-news environment where news consumers get news from a variety of different sources and platforms. Though there is no universally agreed upon model of information evaluation, it is clear that the believability of a piece of information is assessed in different ways at different times, by different people. I conclude that the models for assessing credibility are not perfect, and are in constant tension with the consumer's previous experience, regular news consumption habits, and the changing content of the news story. New studies of news credibility must account for previous user experience, the ability and motivation of the user in assessing the information quality and believability of the news.

It seems then, that a model based on the ELM and Metzger's (2007) dual-processing model may be the closest to being able to suggest how news credibility might be judged. A model that acknowledges that there are different layers to information evaluation strategies that are undertaken if following the central or peripheral route, seems most appropriate to describe credibility judgements undertaken by contemporary news consumers. This model may also acknowledge that the result of the processing undertaken by news consumers might not be a credibility judgement but a decision about how they come to believe the news and a weighing of different factors that help them determine if they believe the news. Given that news is coming from so many different sources and places, I would argue that it is the believability of the news that researchers should refocus research on, not just credibility. A reevaluation of what is really being assessed in the evaluations being undertaken by news consumers would also provide more information about the evaluation of content, rather than merely source credibility on which previous scholarship has focused. If researchers can train their attention on the idea of believability of news, rather than the current emphasis on the credibility of source,

they will potentially come closer to being able to evaluate how young people make judgements about what news they trust and what news they believe.

3.6 Conclusion

As evidenced by the number of models that have been designed and redesigned to study it, credibility has never been an easy topic to research. The contemporary news landscape, with the changes to the role of journalists, consumers, and the news itself has made this credibility even more difficult to assess. Consumers are taught checklists and heuristics to undertake these judgements in their everyday lives but it is unrealistic to assume that everyone—or anyone—can use these lists with any kind of rigour on a regular basis; it is merely too demanding on time and cognitive processing to have to undertake. It is also unclear whether credibility is the right focus to have when assessing how young people come to believe the news, because credibility is often a part of the heuristic analysis, not the result of the heuristic analysis. Dual-processing models and the ELM give a good foundation of different strategies that are undertaken for information evaluation that leads to the belief in a piece of news or a news source but it is not clear if these are the actual steps and tactics that are undertaken by contemporary news consumers.

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Chapter 4

4 The Problem

News has changed. Chapter Two of this dissertation reviewed the many transformations that have occurred in the role of the news consumer, the role of the journalist and the constitution of the news artifact in the last two decades. There have been major changes in the way that journalists report news in the twenty-four hour news cycle. But arguably the greatest change has been that news consumers now have a greater choice in the news that they have access to and in the news platforms through which they can achieve this access. The lines between professional and amateur news have also blurred, as has the idea of the news source—if a piece of news comes from social media (one of the main locations that young people are reporting getting news) (PEW, 2014) is the source of that news the friend that posted it on Facebook, the Facebook site, or the news organization that the friend's post may link to? Many researchers in media and journalism studies have identified the changes to news systems but it is still unclear how: 1. these modifications to news and the news-scape, effect the choices young people are making in choosing their news; 2. how the "lean forward" experience outlined by Kovach and Rosenstiel changes the news habits young people use; and 3. What the differences might be in what these participants report doing and what they actually do (as reported by Tewksbury and Mitchelstein and Boczkowski).

Chapter Three of this dissertation reviewed the news credibility scholarship and resolved that there has not yet been a study of news credibility or believability that can account for the changes in news outlined in Chapter Two. Previous methods of study could not consider the trans-news environment or the ubiquity of news via mobilities that have become commonplace in the last two decades. Media studies and journalism studies have concentrated a lot of scholarship on credibility and questions of what factors are used to make judgements of credibility but with the evolution in news and the new ways that news consumers are accessing news, it is evident that the methodologies used in these studies (primarily the development of indexical scales that limit the participant) can not fully explain how news consumers are making decisions about how they believe the

news or how they judge the credibility of news that is provided in a more fluid news-scape. These studies also have not accounted for the changes in audience that are evident in the millennial population—who trust news sources and beats in different ways than previous generations.

This dissertation seeks to fill in the gaps in scholarship about the effects of the changes in the trans-news landscape on news consumption practices and decisions news consumers make about whether or not they believe the news. This thesis asks specifically:

R1. How do young people make decisions about what news they consume?

R2. How do young people make decisions about what news they believe?

In asking these questions, I seek to have a better understanding of how the news consumption practices of young people may effect their understanding of news and their roles as informed citizens.

Chapter Five will provide the results of a series of focus groups. These focus groups will show that the type of news changes the perceptions of believability of the participants in the study. This chapter will also show that participants make a decision about whether or not they will consume a news item (usually made by deciding their level of interest in the topic) and then use a sophisticated matrix of judgements about the source, corroboration, completeness, quality, and their personal experience with the topic, to make a decision about whether or not the news story is believable.

Chapter Six will provide the results of interviews and media diaries about breaking news that were kept by participants. This chapter will show that the paths participants take to get news are similar: beginning with an encounter of the news story on Facebook and a follow up through a Google search to find more information from mainstream news sources. The media diaries also show that the study participants largely believe the breaking news they consume at first encounter. It was only in situations where the story "felt" unbelievable, or the participants had reason to question the source of the story or the news event, that they did not believe the story. These two chapters document

the steps participants take to get the news and the steps they say they take to make decisions about whether or not they believe the news.

Chapter 5

5 Believing the News: Using Information Evaluation Criteria When Encountering News

5.1 Introduction

In the last ten years the news landscape has changed considerably. Previous generations, who often got their news from radio announcers, daily newspapers, and broadcast television, have paved the way for online news organizations, live-stream videos, online television, social media sites, and aggregators all accessible by ubiquitous mobile devices. The information age has led to a boom in the amount of news that is available and the range of sources from which an individual can choose to get their news. A 2010 study from PEW found that 92% of those surveyed use multiple sources to get their news. This is in contrast to previous generations that accessed news from singular sources and often only at specific times in the day, not multiple times throughout the day. When Nielsen ranked the most popular online news sources, six of the top twenty sites were news aggregators—sites that gather news from various sources—not news organizations or single sources of news ("More Young People Cite Internet than TV," 2011). People are also accessing these sources in different ways: for example, sixty-three percent of Twitter and Facebook users are using those sites to get news and this number has risen in the past two years ("The Evolving Role of News on Twitter and Facebook," 2015).

Furthermore, news consumers are quite skeptical of professional journalists. A 2013 Ipsos Reed survey showed that "only 29% of Canadians trust journalists" (Doolittle, 2014, 242). Similarly, a Gallup poll found that "a mere 8 percent of respondents said they had a 'great deal' of confidence in the media's ability to report 'the news fully, accurately, and fairly'" (Patterson, 2013, 5), and 60% of people surveyed reported that they had little to no confidence in the press.

With these major changes in the news-scape, the practices undertaken by news consumers to get news from new places and new sources, and the rising distrust of journalists, there must be a reevaluation of questions that are important to journalism:

How do news consumers come to believe the news? How do they use this information in their daily lives? How do people get informed? This study is concerned with an exploration of the first question and investigates whether young people use the information quality assessments that are taught to them in information literacy programs to make and/or rationalize judgements about the believability and credibility of news that they receive, and questions how they make decisions about what news they consume.

5.1.1 Information Quality Assessments

Information quality assessments have become increasingly important with the enormous amount of information choices in contemporary society. There have been many articles written about information quality, especially in terms of how automated information systems can improve or dictate information-seeking behaviour (see Kandari, 2010 for a comprehensive explanation of these systems). However, what is of concern here is not the algorithms designed for search engines, but rather the strategies that are used and informally developed by consumers to assess information.

Methods for evaluating sources are introduced to Ontario students at the elementary level. As early as first grade (age six) students are being taught to think about the intended audience for a media text, to identify who makes certain media texts and why, and how to become informed from a variety of different sources ("The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8: Language," 2006). These skills are considered by the government to be part of standard "Media Literacy," and are introduced in the elementary school curriculum and elaborated in the secondary school curricula. It should be noted that Media Literacy is one of four "strands" in the Language curriculum (along with Writing, Reading, and Oral Communication). This means that students in the Ontario public education system are trained for twelve years to use various steps to evaluate information. According to the Language curriculum for grades 1-8:

> research has shown that effective readers and writers unconsciously use a range of skills and strategies as they read and write, and that these strategies and skills can be identified and taught to enable all students to become effective communicators. […The curriculum] emphasizes the use of higher-level thinking skills, including critical literacy skills, to enable students not

> only to understand, appreciate, and evaluate what they read and view at a deeper level, but also to help them become reflective, critical, and independent learners and, eventually, responsible citizens. (p. 5)

Presumably, these "skills and strategies" are the same kind of tactics that information consumers use later in life and it is not a leap in logic to believe that these skills are taught at a young age to encourage habitual use. The curriculum continues to directly underscore the importance of critical evaluation of media texts for students in the contemporary world, and states that: "Students must be able to differentiate between fact and opinion; evaluate the credibility of sources; recognize bias; be attuned to discriminatory portrayals of individuals and groups, including women and minorities; and question depictions of violence and crime" (p. 13).

There are many different tools for information evaluation. One of the most popular forms of evaluation uses the 5 Ws (Who, What, When, Where, and Why). These are discussed in the Ontario curriculum in grade two but the document does not identify any other specific information evaluation heuristics. Instead, they use prompts for each grade that are indicative of the characteristics that are to be used in information quality assessments. For example: in grade seven, students may be given an assignment to evaluate two different news editorials. The teacher prompts include questions like: "What are the differences in the way these sources cover this event? What do the differences tell you about each news source?" (133). In grade three they might be asked, "How did you choose the resources you used? How were they helpful?" (72). Here, it can be seen that information quality judgements are designed to help students judge a source and/or a piece of information on a number of levels and come to a decision about the believability and usefulness of information and information sources.

Although there is no 'standard' assessment tool, most university library websites have a section about how to evaluate information from various sources, and many use the CRAAP (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Attendance, and Purpose) method (or something very similar) for evaluating the quality of a source's information. This method uses a series of questions that closely mirror the 5 Ws and fall under five headings:

Currency (Timeliness), Relevance (Intended Audience), Authority, Accuracy (Verifiability), and Purpose (Objectivity) (Western Libraries, retrieved June, 2014). Other tools include criteria such as bias, credibility, conciseness, amount of data, price, and reputation (see Naumann & Rolker, 2000 or Lee, Strong, Kahn & Wang, 2002 for more comprehensive reviews of Information Quality assessments).

For their entire public education careers, students are taught to use these tools to make decisions about what information is best. While this makes sense when writing a paper or presenting a research project, it is unclear whether or how these criteria are used in everyday news consumption.

5.1.2 Changes to News Consumption

News consumption has changed a lot in the last two or three decades. News consumers can access news from a lot of new places and sources: mainstream, alternative, aggregator and social media ("Audience Segments in a Changing News Environment," 2008; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2010; Yuan, 2011). Dutta-Bergman (2004) found that if someone is interested in a specific news story or field, they are likely to get news from multiple platforms and sources. These results were echoed by Yuan (2011) who found that the number of sources that a news consumer accesses is affected by their level of interest in the news. For example, if a news consumer is broadly interested in the news they may get different news from different media. Conversely, if a news consumer is interested in the news content, they may overlap their news from different sources and platforms. Indeed, it is not surprising that a news story, topic, or event that a consumer finds interesting is one that they would seek out from multiple sources.

Young people seem to be getting their news from more places, both traditional and new media, and they access a wide variety of sources if their interest is piqued by a specific story or news event (Yuan 2011). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2010) explain that this is standard for contemporary audiences:

> Very few of us rely on a primary news source, a single institution, for most of our information. Instead, we have become "news grazers", who acquire

> information from multiple platforms at different times. Only 7 percent of Americans rely on one medium—say television or the Internet—for most of their news, let alone a single news organization. (p.173)

It is not yet clear how these changes to news consumption affect the way young people get news or make decisions about their news habits.

5.1.3 News Habits

It is largely accepted that "despite the growth and innovation in technology and [web]site […options], online news consumption routines appear to be shaped to an important extent by consumption habits that characterized the traditional media landscape" (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2010, p. 1093). These habits may influence where, how, or when consumers seek out news (i.e., the platform of choice to access news, the sources that a news consumer uses to access news, or the time of day that they regularly check the news). LaRose and Eastin (2004) point out that when faced with a large number of sources for their news, most people fall back on habits developed from regular practice with the media (for example: using the same newspaper website to get news or always tuning into the six o'clock news) rather than engaging in a more taxing practice of constantly making choices about what news to read, and presumably what news to believe. LaRose describes these habits as "automatic thought processes" (2010). As Diddi and LaRose (2006) explain:

> Over time, habit strength builds, perhaps aided by the process of classical conditioning in which news consumers return to their preferred news source to relieve their vague sense of unease about not knowing what is "going on" in the world. Habits persist until there is a change in their other daily routines, for example, when young people leave home to go to college or when a change in information needs occurs, perhaps occasioned by a major news event such as the Iraq War, or by a maturational change. (p. 195)

Lee and Delli Carpini (2010) suggest that news consumption habits are patterns that are developed in early adulthood. Presumably then, young people who are in university are in the process of developing these habits. Since the current university-aged young

people are the first generation of 'digital natives,' their understanding of traditional news sources is limited to what they have experienced from their parents' consumption practices, or what they have been taught in their primary education, in particular, the media literacy programs in the Ontario curriculum. In fact, Lee & Delli Carpini (2010) suggest that it is the teaching of better news consumption habits to school-aged students that could "revive" the news industry. But what they also point out is the lack of research —with the exception of uses and gratifications theory—that has considered habitual news consumption as a factor in news choice. In fact, there are very few studies that examine either learned or developed news consumption habits. This is a significant gap in the literature as these habits can affect the choices of news sources and events that an individual is informed about, and why they choose different sources to believe (i.e., reputation or past experience with being informed by a source).

5.2 Research Question

The news landscape has seen major changes, but there is little research into how the news consumption practices and habits of young people have changed in conjunction with these—or if indeed they have. The research reported in this chapter addresses a gap in scholarship by examining the reports of young people about their news consumption habits. In a series of focus groups, young Canadians were asked about what news they consume and what steps they take after they encounter a news item in terms of deciding if they believe it (for example: do they believe the story at first encounter, do they judge the source or quality of the story, or do they corroborate the story with other sources?). The results of this research will provide insight into how young Canadians are making decisions about what news to believe and what news to consume.

R1: How do young people make decisions about what news they consume?

R2: How do young people make decisions about what news they believe?

5.3 Method

Focus groups were used in order to elicit opinions and generate discussion about news consumption and the believability of news. The method of focus groups allowed

participants to be at ease in their discussion and also allowed one participant's comments to prompt another participant's thoughts about news consumption. Additionally,

> tapping into such interpersonal communication is also important because this can highlight (sub) cultural values or group norms. Through analyzing the operation of humour, consensus, and dissent and examining different types of narrative used within the group, […focus group] research can identify shared and common knowledge. (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 300)

Focus groups are also an excellent method to capture reported behaviour as they can promote participants to share stories about their own experiences that can be used to glean understanding about their everyday activities (Krueger & Casey, 2014). Given that this was an exploratory study, this method also allowed the researcher to use the focus groups to inform more in-depth interviews in the second stage of the study.

In this part of the study, six focus groups were run with 5-6 participants in each group (See Appendix 1 for Ethics Approval). Of the thirty-four participants, twenty-eight were students and six were non-students. Convenience sampling was used for recruitment, though there was an effort made to increase the number of non-student research participants by putting up recruitment posters around community centres, coffee shops, grocery stores, and laudromats around the city. Student participants were recruited using posters on the University of Western Ontario campus. The students were from a variety of disciplines including but not limited to, engineering, kinesiology, medical sciences, humanities, and languages. The non-student participants were from a variety of careers including but not limited to: entrepreneurs, servers, and housewives. All participants were between the ages of 18-29 and each was required to complete an online screening survey that included questions about demographics, thirteen questions about regular news consumption practices (for example: How often do you get the news from a newspaper? from television? from the radio? etc.), and nine questions about regular news engagement practices (for example: how often do you talk about the news with a stranger? How often do you comment about the news on social media? How often do you write a letter to the editor? etc.) (See Appendix 3 for the Screening survey). The survey was a series of close ended questions that took approximately 5-10 minutes to complete,

and based on the results of the survey participants were divided into two groups: high news interest and low news interest. Scores were assigned to each participant based on their self-reported level of regular news consumption and regular news engagement. For each of these questions participants who responded "Multiple times a day" were assigned a five, "Once a day" a four, "A few times a week" a three, and so on. The scores for each response were added together. The participants were split at the median score of thirty. The minimum score was fifteen and the maximum score was seventy-two. The mean news interest value was thirty-five. Those who were above a thirty in their news interest level were considered high interest, while those scoring twenty-nine and below were low news interest. The high interest group had an average score of forty-four and the low interest group an average of twenty-two. Focus groups were homogenous with respect to news interest category – that is, the high interest participants met with other high interest news consumers, and low interest news consumers met with other low interest news consumers in order to prevent one group from influencing the responses of the other group.

In the focus groups, participants discussed the most recent news story that they could remember, where they heard about it, if they thought they had the 'whole story,' and if they believed it (See Appendix 4 for Focus Group Questions). Each participant recalled the last news story they could remember hearing about and told the group about it. These descriptions provided priming to get the participants thinking about news, common examples to return to throughout the group, and a chance to see which elements of the stories the participants privileged in their retelling. The purpose of these questions was to prompt participants to recall and discuss news stories that they had heard about instead of requiring them to discuss stories they might not have known or did not have an interest in. These questions also led into a further discussion about the elements of a news event, story, or source that they found to contribute to the story or source's believability.

Participants were then asked to read two news stories. Both of the stories were selected that morning from the front page of the CBC online news website.[17] In the focus groups, one of the stories was attributed to the CBC, and the other to an unknown news source. Given that source credibility is often seen as a major contributor to believability,[18] the attribution was changed so as to prevent participants from using only the source as a factor in the believability of the story. Thus, attribution of the news stories was switched between focus groups to explore the effect of source. The participants discussed these stories, addressing questions such as whether the story had enough information, what they thought about the story content and mechanics, and if they believed the story. The stories were chosen such that one that was 'hard' news (politics, breaking news, business) and one was 'soft' news (entertainment, human interest). For example, one pair of stories included a hard news story about the Germanwings plane crash and a soft news story about a woman who was given a prison sentence for illegally injecting industrial silicon with a caulking gun into customers' buttocks (see Appendix 5).

The focus groups were transcribed and a theoretical, latent thematic content analysis was used to develop a set of codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research was performed within a constructionist epistemology. Thematic content analysis allowed for the flexibility of methodology required in an exploratory study and in recognizing the patterns of commonality in participants' experiences, habits, and behaviours. After the transcripts were coded for relevant information using HyperReseach, a qualitative analysis software package, themes were developed, reviewed, and named. During the process of coding and theming the focus groups, it became clear that there were some common strategies that the participants used when

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[17] Given that the CBC is the national broadcaster of Canada, it was chosen as the source for these news stories over a news organization that might have been seen as more partisan.

[18] There is an entire area of scholarship — beginning many would argue with Hovland and Weiss (1951) post WWII, though others would argue as far back as Aristotle's ethos — that conflates believability with source credibility. According to Self (1999), there is almost an intuitive understanding that source credibility and medium credibility are required to make judgements of believability.

making decisions about their news. In particular, participants reported that they used common strategies to make decisions about what news they consume. These strategies are often combined to make decisions about what news they believe.

5.4 Results

This section will report on the results of the screening survey, which news stories the focus group participants commonly discussed, and then will be organized into Interest, Source, Corroboration, Completeness, Quality, and Experience/Logic—these were the most common strategies identified through the coding process.

5.4.1 Participants

Eighty-five percent (n=29) of the participants were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Five percent (n=5) of participants were between the ages of twenty-six and twenty-nine for a total n=34.

Twenty percent (n=7) of the participants had finished only high school. Three percent (n=1) of the participants had finished some university. (See Table 2)

Table 2: Education level of Screening survey Participants - Focus Groups

Level of Education	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
High School	7	20%
Some College	1	3%
Completed College	0	0%
Some University	22	65%
Completed University	1	3%
Some Graduate School	3	9%
Completed Graduate school	0	0%

The majority of participants indicated that they were interested in the news: fifty-three percent of respondents (n=18) indicated that they were either ‘very’ or ‘pretty’

interested in the news, and twelve percent (n=4) indicated that they were 'somewhat' interested in the news (See Figure 2).

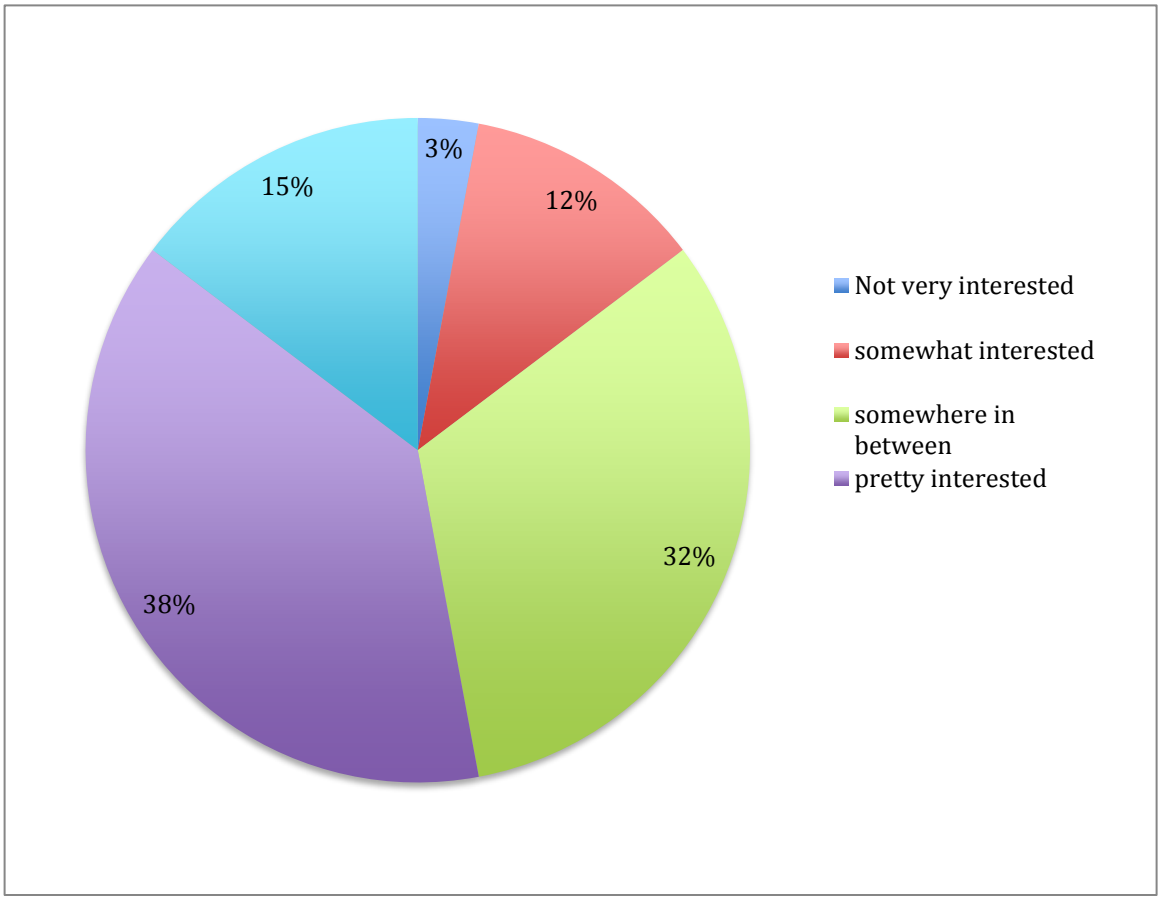


Figure 2: Responses to the question "Generally, how interested would you say that you are in the news?" by percent of responses

Sixty-two percent (n=21) of the respondents self-reported that they get the news multiple times a day from social media, and twenty-one percent (n=7) reported getting the news from social media at least once a day. Twenty-one percent (n=7) of respondents got news multiple times a day from online news organizations and twenty-four percent of respondents (n=8) got news multiple times a day from a browser or app on their cellphone. The most commonly identified platforms for news consumption were social media, in person from a friend or acquaintance, and from an online news organization (see Figure 3).

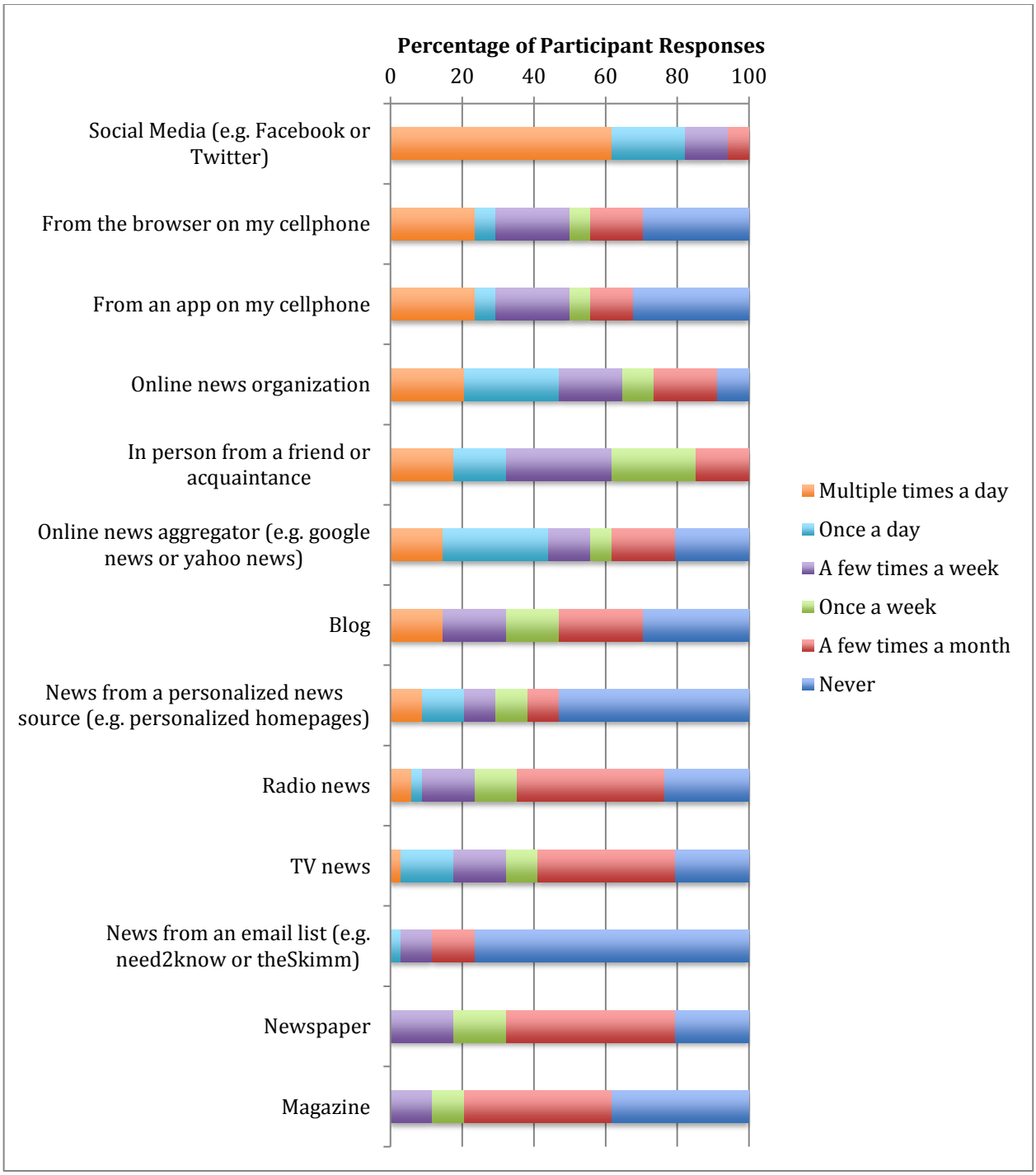


Figure 3: Responses to the question "How often do you get news from the following sources?" by percent of responses

In responding to questions about engaging with news, only three percent (n=1) stated that they 'never' talk about the news with family and friends. However, it is clear

from their responses that the respondents do not engage with news frequently; almost two thirds or of the participants reported never sharing their news opinion online (59%, n=20), and never making a comment on a news website (62%, n=21). Over two thirds of participants indicated never sharing news from a news organization via email (71%, n=24), never writing a blog post (79%, n=27), never writing a letter to the editor (97%, n=33), and never calling into a radio news show (97%, n=33). (See Figure 4)

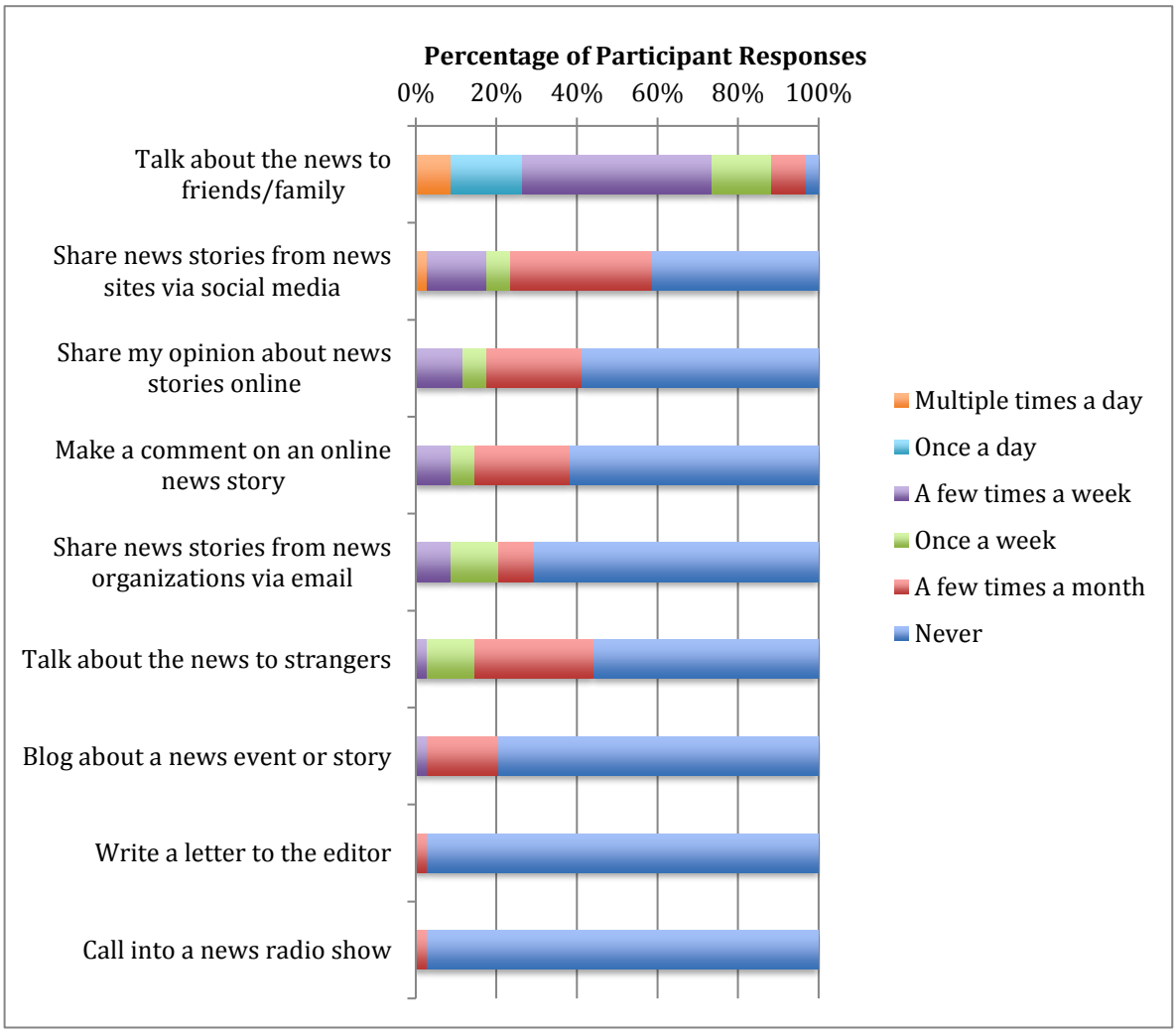


Figure 4: Responses to "How often do you do the following?" by percent of responses

Eighty-eight percent (n=30) of respondents indicated that they follow breaking news (see Figure 5). This was by far the most commonly followed type of news,

exceeding the results for Crime and Public Safety, Entertainment and celebrities, Traffic and Weather, and National Politics. Participants were least likely to indicate that they follow news about national politics, sports, business and the economy, and local town and city news.

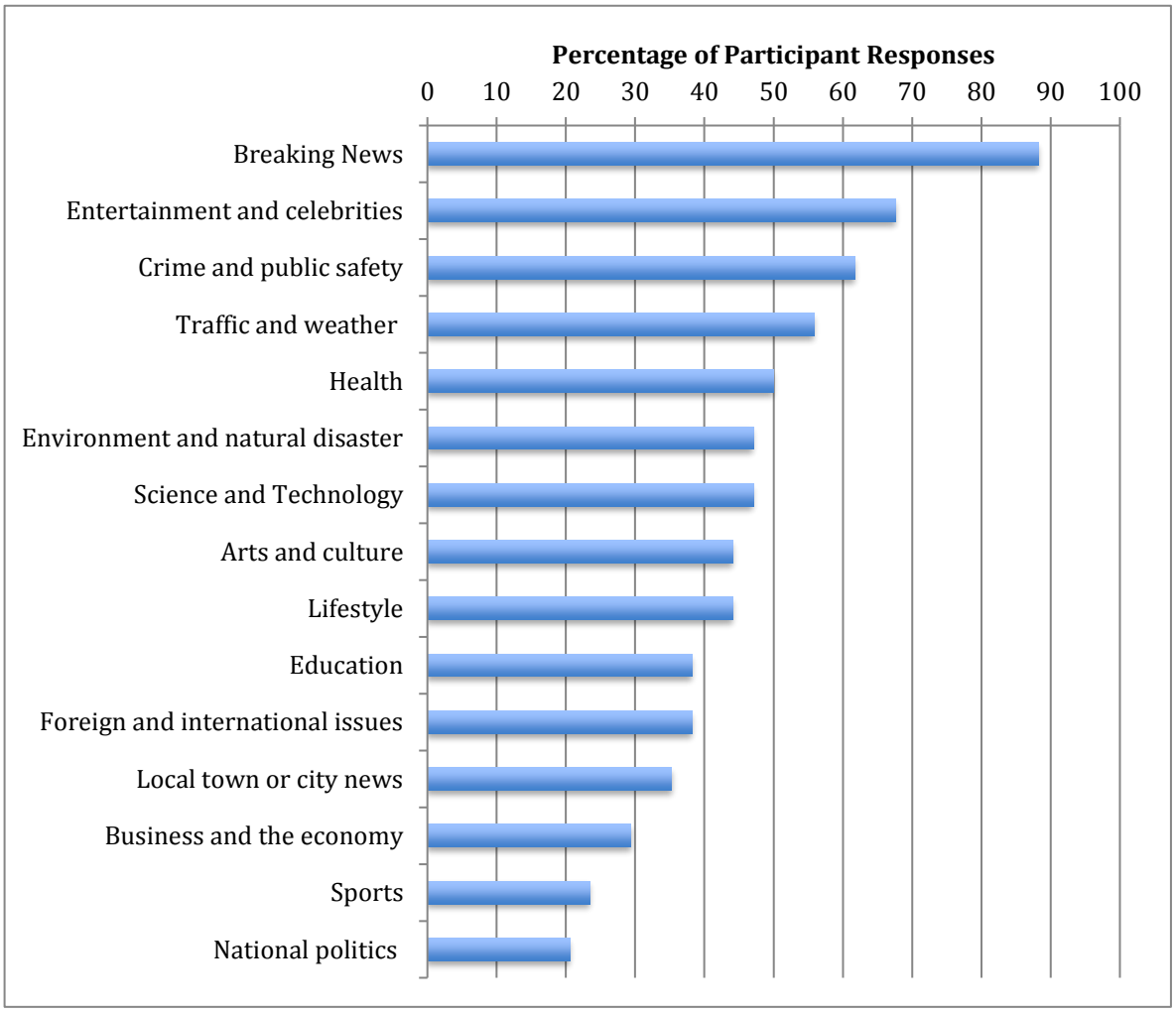


Figure 5: Responses to "Which of the following types of news do you follow? (check all that apply)" Reported by percentage of participants who identified following that type of news.

5.4.2 Focus Groups: News Stories

When asked to recall a recent news story, participants provided a range of different examples, and in most cases were easily able to explain the story to the group. The stories

that were recalled included the missing Malaysian airlines flight, the death of Michael Jackson, the candidates for the American primary elections, the Germanwings airline crash, Ferguson and the civil unrest in the United States, and a variety of entertainment stories. It was rare for the participants to recall an event that others had not heard about, which lead to lively discussions about the 'facts' and what each person had heard about the event, from where, and when. In most cases, the participants had heard about the news events that they recalled from multiple places or sources. These discussions provided a good foundation for the participants to continue conversing about the believability of news events, and gave them the opportunity to use certain stories as examples.

5.4.3 Interest

Interest was the primary criterion that participants identified using to choose the stories they read. Several participants also identified the relevance of a news event to their lives or the lives of those around them, as a reason for their attention to certain news stories. In fact, relevance and the perceived importance of a news event were both elements identified by participants that are related to their interest in a news event—they were interested in the news event because it: piqued their interests/hobbies, was relevant to their lives, or because they thought the story might be important. Participants were eager to discuss news that was of interest to them, and these were the news events that they were able to recall with ease.

Jennifer[19] explained that the last news story she could remember hearing about was Zayn Malik leaving the band One Direction. She explained that she used to be a fan of the band and so this story stuck out for her as interesting and relevant. In another group, Marisa identified Jeremy Clarkson's firing from the BBC show *Top Gear* as the story she had most recently heard about —despite the Germanwings crash having happened less than twenty-four hours earlier. She explains:

[19] The names of all participants have been changed.

Yeah, I saw that the plane crashed and I was […] reading it. […] I used to be more into the news but then school and …it's kind of hard to keep up with TV and stuff like that. This was really not important but I really like Top Gear, the TV show with Jeremy Clarkson, so he got fired, so my eye was kind of on that…I know, priorities.

So despite the fact that she identifies the Germanwings crash as potentially being more important in World News, the story she recalls and knows more about is one relating to the firing of her favourite television host.

In another situation, participants showed very different views on the relevance and interest of a news story. John and Janelle took different stances on whether or not they were interested in the story about the woman who injected silicon into customers' buttocks in an illegal cosmetic surgery, in the second part of the focus groups, where the participants read the provided stories.

John explains: This doesn't resonate with me, […] no one cares. I would never […] consider this anyway so I mean even if you told me this story […] I wouldn't do this anyways, so it doesn't resonate with me. I could never see myself in this situation so I don't have the, you know, the energy to look this up and I don't really care about this. […]
Janelle: I feel like I would look into it because I'm curious this—this sounds rude—I'm curious at how desperate people are and I'm also curious at people's level of stupidity because if you look on Facebook and you're going through Vines and stuff like that, you're watching videos, you click the link even though you shouldn't care because you're interested in the lengths that people will go and you're interested in how silly people are and I feel like I would research this just to see—because I'm interested at what lengths people will go.

These two participants show different aspects of interest. John sees that the story is not relevant for him but Janelle sees the same story—that she also identifies as not personally relevant—as a case study into the psychology of the cosmetic surgery

participants, which is what interests her in the overall story. These differing interest levels affect how much the participants will read and seek out about the story and show that relevance and interest are mutually related when evaluating information and choosing how much effort and attention to give to a specific news story or event. John and Janelle also provide an excellent example of how different individuals read the same news story or situation in completely different ways because of their level of interest and their viewpoint on the topic.

Miller explained that her interest in a story determines how much information she will seek out about the topic. She explained:

> *Depending on how interested I am in it I'll read everything I can find about it and some of the [… stories] are literally copy and pasted from another site but I will still go through it to see if they added some extra detail that I didn't know before. […] I think I did… […] when Michael Jackson died I did that. I was just like…okay well CNN was [saying] 'we can report that he is unresponsive' and I'm like 'okay that doesn't give me anything'.*

She went on to explain that she would use the trending topics on Twitter as a way to access news sites, blogs, and tweets that she might not have otherwise had access to, or found. In all of the situations in which a participant was interested in the news story, they accessed the news from more places—often Googling the story to read more about it from sites outside of their regular news sources. For Miller, her level of interest in the story related to the amount or work that she was willing to undertake in order to follow the story.

5.4.4 Time/Opportunity

Though interest is certainly a motivating factor for participants to consume more about a news event, it does seem that time and opportunity are also factors in these participants' ability and willingness to consume news items. This study was being undertaken at the midterm point of the semester and it was very clear by several comments from participants that they had changed their information consumption habits because they did not have time. You can see this in Marisa's comment above about how school "makes it

hard to keep up with TV and stuff like that" (meaning the news). But this is an interesting comment from her because in the next sentence she identifies having privileged consuming news items about Jeremy Clarkson's firing, rather than a news story that might have been considered world news (the Germanwings crash). It is clear that there is a relationship between time/opportunity, interest, and news consumption that has not been fully realized in this part of the study.

5.4.5 Belief

It was very rare for a participant to say that they did not believe a news story or event following a direct prompt. This occurred in only a handful of cases, and in each case the participant had self-reported a general skepticism about and/or distrust in the news. In one instance Nick explained:

> *Typically I don't like the bias of media. It's just really implied for me, so I'm kind of weaning my addiction to news sources. In a way I don't really care about any of the stories that I read because most of them don't matter and the ones that do matter are usually just filled with bias. You […] can't even believe the facts and then after the first paragraph the facts are talked about, then it really gets into the journalist's opinion at which point I don't really care about what they have to say because I have my own opinions.*

Nick identifies that he thinks the news is biased and opinion-based, rather than fact. In another focus group, Brianna explained: *I'm very skeptical of media in general so I usually don't have a lot of trust in news.* Later she explained that she is distrustful of the media, saying that:

> *If I were to resort to multiple sources…. I just think it's all the same. We have one massive media corporation that is disseminating essentially the same information. So whether you're reading it from one newspaper or the other, you're going to get the same stuff. It's just going to be worded differently for a particular event. Now you can have opinions and biases and that's different but I mean essentially if the government is trying to send a message to you it can be the same thing. And I'm not saying it's necessarily perpetrated by the government; it can be anything.*

It is shown here that Nick and Brianna had specific orientations about their belief in news and their distrust in the production and dissemination of news, rather than their belief in specific stories.

It became clear in the focus group discussions that participants make several decisions about news before they decide whether or not they believe it. The first decision they make, upon encountering or hearing about a news event, is whether they will even consume a news item about it. The main criterion for this decision appears to be interest and time/opportunity to consume more. If the news consumer is interested in the news story, they report using source and corroboration, in addition to completeness of the story and quality of the writing, to make a decision about whether or not they believe the news. In each of these scenarios, participants also reported using logic or their previous experience or knowledge with different stories to decide if the story sounded believable. For example, upon reading about the Germanwings crash, one participant said that they believed it because it sounded like other stories about plane crashes that they had read.

5.4.5.1 Source

Most participants determined the believability of the news by relying heavily on the perceived credibility of the source. Almost all of the participants pointed to specific news organizations as being credible: *if I've received news from… the BBC let's say, I know they are long, like they have a history in a sense, [of] being credible.* Another participant explained: *I would read the more […] national posts, like national news and Global, CBC news, the more reliable sources.* When discussing using Google to find news, Kayla summed it up by saying:

> *You gotta check if the articles come up, then you gotta see who wrote the paper, what source is it from, if it's a government website, if it's a national paper or national news source, sort of trusted. If you find one that's like aliensarereal.com, I probably wouldn't believe it.*

Only a few indicated specific news personalities and discussed their credibility. About Bill Maher, Trista explained:

I feel like he brings people with different opinions on his show just maybe also to make a controversy on a show but by doing that he also brings a lot of diversity of opinion. […] I don't […one] hundred percent agree with everything he says but, you get to hear people discuss two sides of the argument.

Trista identifies Maher as trustworthy because of his personality, but also because she feels that he demonstrates a lack of bias, or at the very least a desire to mitigate bias on his show. Despite the fact that she identifies potential "controversy" on the show, she sees that controversy as more of a debate where contrasting points of view can be discussed and explored. Other participants identified that news anchors can make the news more or less trustworthy but were unable to identify any news anchors:

Hong: I can't remember if its Global or CBC, and there is that one guy that news anchor that's been on there forever.

Jessica: Peter Mansbridge?

Hong: Maybe him, but I feel like […] the TV and news anchors, it's kind of like: I know these people they look really trustworthy and they haven't lied to me in the past kind of thing. So, I feel like that definitely makes me feel like, 'Oh okay, the TVs like a reliable source'— even though it probably isn't. Also because it's on TV, which is broadcast all over and you can't really edit stuff once it's been on TV, whereas online […] you can.

[…]

Jessica: I want to go back to what you're talking about in terms of the trustworthy news anchors and how news anchors are reliable source because they're people who you can go to, you've always gone to them, they're always there, like Peter Mansbridge got huge accolades because of his reporting of the Ottawa shootings in particular, have you heard about Brian Williams? From NBC?

[no one has heard of him]

Jessica: […] if somebody like Peter Mansbridge who is, you know kind of the voice of Canada in a way, like he's a person who always reports, he's always there in the evening to talk about what's going on, if he did something like […Williams] if he lied about a news report, would that change how you felt about getting your news from that source?

Hong: From that channel, yeah.

Rachel: He is the face of it. He sort of represents that.

Hong: Then you think that maybe the channel is lying to us.

Zachary: I think […] we naturally go to them first because it's their job and this is what they're meant to be doing whereas people like bloggers or on Twitter, nobody cares if they are wrong and if they're wrong it's like 'whoops,' they're not gonna be fired from their job.

Participants are doing a few things here in terms of vetting the believability of news based on source credibility. Hong identifies that a certain journalist "looks" trustworthy, her past experiences getting news from them has been positive, asserts that it is hard to lie on the television both because of the platform but also because the journalist comes to represent a larger brand of a news organization and thus is kept in check. In one comment it can seen that she is using a number of factors to gauge the believability of one journalist. Zachary mentions the professional role of the journalist as being a trusted source while also mentioning the lack of authority she gives to bloggers.

However, other participants indicated that blogs are an important, timely, and useful way to get informed.

Jeanette: Whenever [a] story is breaking, tumblr is always the first place I go to because everyone always has… I find they [post] information quicker and faster and they like to accumulate all the different perspectives and all the different facts that are emerging […] in real time. So, it's a little bit faster for me, personally because I'm already there anyway.

Jessica: So that's something that's important to you when you're getting the whole story on a breaking news event? You want the information quickly and you want a lot of information that you're not getting from other sources?

Jeanette: Exactly because […news organizations] might have ulterior motives and holding back some information or telling us specific bits and focusing on stuff. Whereas I find bloggers they just tell you the whole story taking account of all the facts and, I don't know, I just prefer it.

[…]

Jeanette: It's scary how fast they are sometimes.

Lee: […] I totally agree with how everyone accumulates their own knowledge and how you get information so much faster than news sources. Sometimes CP24 it takes a whole day to update their stuff. In comparison, tumblr would for sure be one of the things that I know, now that I think about it I would definitely go to if I need information.

Jeanette: But even the way it is shared…every time someone shares they usually add something else that they found so you've got like a whole thread, a commentary […] to read of what's going on, of updates— real-time updates, people adding more sources and people love to link too so that they know it's not just hearsay.

Jessica: Do you think those links are important?

Jeanette: Absolutely. Because you need proof to back up what you're saying especially because we're dealing with …commoners—I don't know what word to use. There's no other way to prove it because this is not our job. So like a random Joe, I'm not going to believe him unless you have a link. And it's kind of a convention on sites such as tumblr that you just you need to provide proof because it's the Internet and we're all skeptical.

Here, the participants identify tumblr both as being faster than news organizations but also illustrate their knowledge of how news organizations operate, potential bias present in these organizations, and how tumblr allows for a crowd-sourced thread with real-time updates. Additionally, Jeanette notes that tumblr requires the use of links and proof to provide a sense of believability because of her skepticism about getting information from Internet "commoners." This is a particularly interesting comment as it suggests a sense of class structure built into the authority for getting believable information from peers or unknown sources, and not the established press.

Another participant explained that live streamers are members of the public who are in a position to know about certain news stories as they happen:

John: An example I want to bring up is the Ferguson riots that happened. That was breaking news because they had riots and they were […] filming as it went on and all these major news networks are giving you these ideas of who's doing what and… and trying to implement who's the bad guy, who's the good guy, right? And where I look for a reputable source to actually find out what's going on would be stream sites. There is guys there in Ferguson right, right now streaming live and it's just that's the truth and you can kind of create your own opinion on the situation as opposed to listening to this third-party who they say they were able to film. These guys are doing it live so that would be mine, in that case the most reputable source not the big news FOXNews or CBC or whatever, CNN.

John identifies that livestreamers are authoritative not only because they have a lack of bias, and allow the viewers to make decisions about what they are seeing, but also because there is a sense of currency in seeing the footage as it is happening. According to John, these livestreamers are individuals that are in the know, on location, and have an authority not because of their expertise (like might be assigned to a mainstream journalist providing context to a story), but because of their proximity and connection to the news event.

Looking at the authority of the source was also common in the second parts of the focus groups where participants read the two provided news stories. When they finished reading the story many participants asked for source attribution to help them make sense of the article and to judge the believability of what they had read. In other instances they found it difficult to assuage their disbelief in the story with the fact that it was attributed to CBC—a news provider that they felt should be credible. For example: several participants were surprised and expressed their disbelief that the news item about a girl named Isis King that claimed Facebook shut down her profile because of her name, was from the CBC at all. These participants felt that the story was silly and not at a quality, nor did the subject have the levity, they would normally attribute to the CBC—a source that they identified as having a high level of credibility.

In one instance Janelle identified that she will research the source to find out if the source is known for accuracy. She explains that:

> *I think the last thing that I double checked […was a] food safety website. […The story] was about oranges being imported from some country that had blood in it. So the pictures show this orange cut open with like a red segment in it and so people were saying that this particular group was injecting oranges with blood tainted with HIV. So I know that HIV doesn't really exist outside of the body and it's like: if it was blood that was safe but what if it was blood…it still would've been disgusting! So I double-checked it and it was just a hoax, So sometimes […]sometimes I'll even check out the website. […] Some of them have at the bottom 'this is a satirical website' and if I don't*

see that at the bottom then I'll Google the website itself and see what links come up to see if people think it's reputable or not.

Here, Janelle identifies that sometimes it is difficult to prove the accuracy of the source that you are getting information from, not only from hoaxes but also from satirical websites. She is cautious of these sources so she searches the source to see if it is one that others find useful and fair, to decide if she should feel the same way.

In this section, source is being used in three ways: the first is as a tool to decide where to get the news (perceived trusted sources), the second as a tool to determine the trustworthiness of news that has been received (verifying that the news they have received comes from a trusted source), and the third as confirming that the people they are getting the news from are in a position to be "in the know" (reporters or citizen journalists that can have access to the information or image).

5.4.5.2 Corroboration

Participants identified corroboration as one of the central ways that they determine the believability of news. In almost every focus group there was at least one participant who, when asked about how they determine the believability of a news event responded: 'Google it.' In one group, Mariah explained that she did not even need to read the results stating:

I think it depends on how easy it is to find […] if I go on and there's a bunch of results, then I believe it more even without having to read all those results than if I go on there and there's nothing about it all. There is just that one.

Here, participants disclosed that they did not even have to read all of the content to determine if the story was believable but instead, trust Google to aggregate results and provide them with short synopses of the content to confirm the story is true. This is not corroboration as a mainstream journalist might undertake—looking in depth at multiple sources—rather, this is a very limited kind of corroboration where the participants describe only seeing that the story is on other websites or relying on Google to see that it is listed on the search page.

The same behaviour of relying on Google to provide news was evident for another participant when she was attempting to find more information about Malaysian Airlines Flight MH370. She explained:

Diana:[…] I was definitely on edge […] I checked a bunch of different sites until you get to like the weird conspiracy ones and you're like: okay I've gone too far.

Jessica: But how many does it take to get to that? […]

Diana: It did not a lot. It does not take a lot. I'd say it was on the first page of Google definitely.

Jessica: So you'll go through a Google page?

Diana: Oh yeah, definitely. Not each one, you kind of read headlines.

Here, Diana is using the ranking of Google's pages as a measure of the authority of the source and the best news items about an event. She assumes three things: 1. The best news items would be on the first page of hits; 2. That Google is an appropriate organization to filter these choices; and 3. That after skimming the first page of hits she knows enough about the news story and does not need to research anymore.

Much like Miller, the previous participant who spent a lot of time searching news about the death of Michael Jackson, some participants also recalled moments that they had trouble believing the story as times that they spent extra time corroborating the story. Jeanette, stated:

[…] I remember when Cory Monteith died I was a really big fan of Glee and I did not believe that […] and I had to go search for myself and after about three or four websites I was like 'okay he's, he's gone, that's sad.'

Other participants recalled the death of Robin Williams, and the missing Malaysian Airlines plane (MH370) and the crashed Malaysian Airlines plane (MH17) as news

events in which they had spent extended research time corroborating and learning about the events. Rob explained:

> *Well it depends on the kind of stories […] if it's crazy and it's hard to believe it, then I want to see what other people are saying but if is something that's not… […also] depending on the source with Buzzfeed. Buzzfeed I normally don't take it seriously except for that one article because I saw everyone else posting about it so I think maybe it's real […].*

Here, again, Rob identifies strange or unreal stories as ones that he would spend more time corroborating. He also explains that there are certain sources that he does not find to be particularly credible (Buzzfeed), but because of the number of times the story was shared, he felt that the story gained a level of believability. This kind of triangulation of truth that the participants engage in was one that was echoed repeatedly for stories that they found unbelievable. For example, in the second section of the focus groups, one of the stories was about government spending on surveillance equipment, and the participants in many of the focus groups noted that much of the information provided in the article was in quotation marks. In the opinion of focus group members, the heavy reliance on quotes from other sources made the story sound like a press release and therefore a biased source of information. Interestingly, the participants who identified this as sounding questionable also provided, unprompted, the keywords that they would enter into a search engine to corroborate the information.

There were very mixed opinions on using blogs or social media as authoritative news sources. Though these may be the places that they first hear about or encounter a news story, participants were quite skeptical about using social media and especially blogs as singular news sources:

> *Ling: I think with the whole blogs, it's important to take into account that they do lack a sort of solid background that enforces the truth. Yeah, journalists you have editing and stuff but like with the blog it's true. You can state your mind and it's open and free but you also have to take into account that they don't have anyone to report. It's not required. I think it's a little bit skeptical when trusting blogs for your only news source. This person is on the*

ground and doing it. I think you should take it with a grain of salt like you know if you can find something else to validate it. If it comes out later 'oh yeah, by the way this happened today,' —'okay, so that guy was truthful.' But I wouldn't base it solely on someone you don't know, who's on the ground, who could just be like "hey I'm bored and I've concocted this local story."

Pierre: I would take it into account but I wouldn't trust it in and of itself because it could have been a picture from 2005. […]Where's the evidence? I guess maybe I naturally trust it more if I find that they're…if I see them communicating with other people who have also claimed to be on the ground. Just in terms of … for example, if it's on Twitter and they're posting pictures and messages, if they're tweeting other people and if you look at their profile and they're also doing the same thing kind of gives some another level of credibility. But I wouldn't trust it alone. I guess if it's an ongoing story and they're providing more details or I don't know …but I would be skeptical about that a little bit especially if there is no actual link to legacy [mainstream] media.

Both participants identify blogs as being questionable sources if they are used without corroboration. They stand in contrast to the previous participants that felt livestreamers provide important on the ground coverage that can be relied on. Here, Ling shows that she is particularly skeptical of the reliability of this kind of information and both indicate that corroboration (for Ling and Pierre, via mainstream media) is essential. Pierre also states that news disseminators on Twitter who can be verified based on their past tweets (for location, position, authority, etc.) have "another level of credibility" that is still not enough to accept as a singular news source without corroboration.

Participants described using corroboration for verification in a few ways: 1. At a superficial level just to see how many people, places, or sites are talking about a news event (basically a popularity rating)—which is really more liked crowdsourcing corroboration because the news consumers do not independently corroborate the story, 2. to get more information that can provide them with the 'whole story,'—picking up pieces

of the story from different places which is not strictly corroboration but has an element of corroboration as they are verifying the story from each source they use; and 3. As a way of verifying information that they feel might have come from unreliable sources or, to provide facts to back up opinion.

5.4.5.3 Completeness

Unlike the participants who wanted information corroborated, some participants explained that if they felt that they had the 'whole story' or if an article provided compelling evidence, they would not feel that they had to research further. Rob stated that for him:

> *[…] it doesn't matter how many articles I see once I find a piece of evidence […], I can read one article or two articles […] because what they managed to say or what the evidence they proved to me is just enough or [it] can be 20 articles and then after all those after I piece the story together in my mind and made it believable then it doesn't actually matter how many articles; it's the content of each.*

Here, he is assessing the content to determine if he has what he views to be the 'whole story.' Overall, participants had a difficult time explaining what was enough information for them to feel that they had the 'whole story' or a sense of completeness in the story. When asked how many news stories they would read to feel that they had "enough," they identified anywhere from one to ten depending on the story and their level of interest in it. In the second part of the study, when asked what could be added to the news stories to make them more believable, participants responded with a range of suggestions: everything from adding an alternative perspective to very detailed information to answer the five Ws. Maria even explained:

> *Personally, the amount of information for me to get the full story would be a lot of information and I don't think I would read that much. Just my own personal opinion. So I just get a summary and that's fine for me until I want to dig for more information.*

Participants, then, identified completeness as a subjective criterion that they had trouble describing or explaining.

Corroboration and completeness overlap here as participants tend to corroborate while getting more information: when a participant is confirming a story at a different site, or through a different news organization they are simultaneously getting more of a complete story while also corroborating it. When participants identified that they had a high level of interest in a story, or when it was seen as important to them or the world, they were more critical of what the "whole story" was and what they would need to have an understanding of the complete event. It isn't clear from this study what the limits are on how much of a story participants will follow or seek out and why that is the case. Future research should delve into this topic further.

5.4.5.4 Quality and Persuasion

In the focus group discussions, participants identified aspects of news and information (including writing style, source validation, and questionable evidence) that they found to make the story or event more or less believable. One participant explained:

> *Hong: It's just like… you know… it wasn't trustworthy in my opinion. You look at some websites […and say] this is not a really good news thing. They're getting their news secondhand kind of thing but…*
>
> *Jessica: What are the cues that the news is coming secondhand?*
>
> *Hong: It's just the voice, the voice as well as…. it's just the words they use aren't very […] educated kind of thing. It's like Stephanie Meyer [the author of Twilight] kind of writing and you are reading it and this person is not very educated. They don't really know what they're talking about it's kind of like 'oh I heard this and now I'm gonna blog about it and I'm gonna spread all this other stuff about it and all of a sudden I'm gonna to be famous' […].*
>
> *Jessica: So the language that's being used isn't as objective as a legacy news source might be?*

Hong: Yeah, and then at the bottom it'll always be like: […] 'like' this on Facebook or 'leave a comment kind of thing here'….okay I feel like this is not a very good website.

Here, Hong is identifying the voice and language choices by an author as being important to developing a sense of believability in the news story or article. This was a common practice when the participants read the two news stories provided for them. They identified some writing choices and styles as being less believable; for example, the participants who read the story on government spending and identified the use of quotations marks as a writing choice that seemed questionable. Other participants were more specific, and identified words that they look for to determine how much they should believe a piece of news. Kayla said: *maybe or supposedly or reportedly I look out for those words as you know is…is actually something that they know or are they speculating.* In another group a participant identified the number of contractions in the writing as being too informal for writing from a news source.

In several focus groups the participants drew attention to the emotional language used in news stories. One group discussed the affective language used in an article written about the Germanwings plane crash—alluding to the emphasis of the tragedy through the use of certain words.[20] The participants felt that this type of language harnesses the emotions to persuade the reader or viewer to feel sympathetic towards the people in the news story. The group explained that this was clearly an event in which the victims were deserving of sympathy but that the language used was overly melodramatic—the event was terrible enough without needing to draw more emotion to it. Janelle stated:

it makes you feel something. So as you are reading you're developing an opinion and you're not empathizing because I don't think I ever could, but

[20] The news article refers to the screams from the passengers and the participants felt this was unnecessary in evoking their sympathy about the crash.

you're starting to feel bad for these people who were, who seem to be innocent victims in this plane crash.

These participants identified the language as being overly "dramatic" and, as a result, persuasive in making them feel badly for the victims.

Another group however, had a different initial reaction to similar kinds of sympathetic language. In the second part of the group the participants read a story about a woman named Isis King who had her Facebook profile shut down after receiving harassment for having the name Isis (presumably linking her name to the terrorist group).

Rose: I just got right into the emotional side of it I was just like: 'oh my God this poor girl is getting bullied' and I just automatically I don't know why, but I just automatically believed this so that it was true because who would write a fake article or lie about bullying when it's such a big thing recently. I immediately feel sympathetic towards this girl.

[…]

Rachel: I felt […] sympathetic right away I wasn't really thinking about whether this story was true or not, I just felt bad for her. I wish they would've said more at the end in response to the article. I would've liked to know how it happens.

Hong: Just give me the proof and I'll believe it.

Jessica: You think there's enough here for you to generate an opinion about the topic?

Rose: Yeah.
[…]

Hong: No, I don't think so, no.

Jessica: What would you need?

Hong: I would want to talk to these Facebook people and say: "are you for real right now? Or like is this like a complete hoax?"

Rachel: Yeah, they didn't say Facebook made an apology or anything.

Hong: It seemed kind of bias [sic] to me almost a little bit you know. Like […] this poor girl gets bullied by everyone including Facebook. It's like just because your name is Isis? Are you kidding me? No! And I don't know, I just feel like they're really trying to tug at your heartstrings I remember stories like that I'm kind of skeptical. I'm always skeptical.

Jessica: Of every story that has any kind of emotional…?

Hong: Yeah, whenever if it's silly… like the words really tugging at your heartstrings like 'oh no little puppy almost got hit by a car today and no cars stopped.' There's lots of puppies. There is overpopulation. […] You know some of these stories are… they over dramatize it. It's just I don't understand. Like the school shootings: 'it's these violent video games that make everyone like this' and now the kid is like that… it's not the video game. My brother plays video games and he doesn't go out shooting people. It doesn't make sense you know and you just want to be like he's just misunderstood that's why he killed everyone. […] He's a bad person he deserved to go to jail. And you know it's just I find the stories like that where they just, they are really trying to tug it to your heartstrings but they're trying to get the emotional side. It's no longer news, […it's] like drama now […]. I don't… I don't see that as reporting because news is supposed to be unbiased and is supposed to give both sides. I feel like this one's definitely biased. I just I feel like it is.

Jessica: Because they also don't talk to Facebook? That's what they're looking for is a Facebook apology or what Facebook had to say?

Hong: […] If you look at all quotes are from King and about how her feelings are hurt; how things are bad for her. It's not really talking about the other things and […] I feel like this […] is just a terrible story […] you know I just feel like this is what the story's a bit more focused towards.

[…]

Rachel: When I initially read it, I was sympathetic and I wasn't really thinking about those things but now that you said them kind of…yeah, okay …maybe, maybe… I can get too involved in the story and stop looking at facts because like I said earlier there's no mention of Facebook at all but I tend to …when I get emotional …I tend to just not question it.

Zachary: I think yeah, I kind of agree it seems like a David and Goliath story where the company, Facebook is a really huge giant and they're against this small [person].

Here, the participants discuss how the emotional language can affect the way they view the article and for some of the participants it is an unconscious reaction that they have to feeling bad for the harassment and bullying that Isis King had received. Once Hong challenges their perceptions about how this kind of language can make readers feel more sympathy towards the subject of the article, they acknowledge that they may have felt swayed towards automatically believing the story. Zachary continues by explaining that the story could easily be made up because it is not easy to fact-check it but Rose seems unsure through the rest of the group about the truthfulness of the King story (even though she hopes that it is not real because she finds the content sad). She explains that even though she is more sympathetic towards it that "*doesn't mean that I still wouldn't type Isis King into Facebook and see if it was an actual person*." This group identified a tension in the use of sympathetic language where it is clear that their initial reactions

were to just believe the story but when questioned struggled with articulating their feelings about whether or not they believed the story.

In another focus group, Paola identified her concerns with bias saying:
I think sometimes especially for certain […] news sources over others, that they have a story that they're trying… like a point of view that they're trying to express through the telling of facts so they may make a bigger deal out of certain things and make smaller, lesser deal, out of other facts to try to persuade you to a certain view.

Bias was definitely a concern for many participants in the study. What is unclear is if they can properly identify bias or if this is language that they have been taught and repeat by rote. Many participants mentioned bias as being a concern but they offered few examples, and were not clear in their explanations about how bias could affect their judgement about a news source or story; instead they stated that news was biased as a fact without explaining what this meant to them, or to the news in general. For example:

Marisa said
If you've ever looked at the Gazette stories [the campus newspaper] sometimes they show a lot of opinion and there is no like unbiasedness.

In another focus group, when discussing the bias of media they explained:
Jennifer: Yes, the media always mask, they always cover some stuff especially if it's not from home like in Toronto or London or Canada, it's from Germany or you know in Iran or something then obviously the reporters there want to hide something for some reason you never know.

Ling: They're biased towards things.

It is not clear if they assumed that everyone shares the same belief of biased news sources or if they are unable to engage in a critical discourse about the problematic nature of bias in the media.

5.4.5.5 Experience/Logic

There were a few instances where participants identified that they did or did not believe the news based on either their previous experience with the topic, or because they felt that the situation seemed, or felt untrue. For example: in one focus group we discussed the story of a toddler who froze to death after walking out of an apartment building in the middle of winter. The participant didn't believe the story because it seemed impossible that a child that young could exit an apartment building alone. Based on her knowledge, it seemed like an unlikely story and she did not believe it until she saw photographic evidence from security cameras in the apartment to verify what she heard.

In several of the groups we read an article about government spending on surveillance equipment and the participants picked the article apart for elements that they found unbelievable: wording, statistics, framing, the position of the article, facts about the third-party contractor, the flow of the article, an emotional section about the death of an RCMP officer that participants felt was out of place, and even content about job creation were all raised as elements that affected their belief in the article. In another story we read in the groups, several participants expressed disbelief that Isis King was blocked from Facebook for her name. Reasons that were given for this disbelief ranged from incredulity that a big company like Facebook would even care, to suggestions that there must be other people with the name of Isis.

Sierra identified the last story she could remember hearing, being one about Ted Cruz stepping forward to run as a Republican candidate for the President of the United States. When asked if she believed the story, she explained:

> *I did […] because the Republicans like their religious leaders who speak at universities and he is very 'Mitt Romney' like. And they haven't announced any prominent frontrunners yet so it was about time that they did.*

She not only identifies that he seems like a feasible candidate for the position, but she also uses her knowledge of the US political sphere to judge that it is a feasible time for this information to be released.

Experience and logic were used at multiple points in encountering news. If a story sounded fishy, participants might have questioned its validity; if they read the story and it was from a source from whom they had previously received misinformation, they questioned the story; if they were surprised by the story's content, they may have questioned the story.

5.5 Discussion

Given the results, it is clear that the participants use different criteria to choose their news and to judge its believability. It can be seen that the factors with which they focus fall into the Who (Source and Corroboration) and What (Interest, Completeness, and Quality) of the 5 Ws, but also the use of past experience, knowledge and logic to judge the story and source for veracity. These information quality assessments may be habitual for these participants as they are consistent with the curriculum they have been using since the first grade to justify their choices for sources and to determine which sources are the best to use for gathering information ("The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8: Language," 2006). These judgements seem to be so 'everyday', that the participants appear to not always be conscious of their evaluations of the events or sources, nor their verdicts about the believability of those events or sources. When participants were asked directly "did you believe this?" they responded (many with yes or no and some with hesitant maybes) and followed that statement with a rationalization that often had to be prompted by my asking why they believed it. The rationalizations were often detailed from the stories we were discussing and were based on any number of things. In the last few sections you can see that they could be quite critical about a variety of elements that they felt made the story unbelievable including: wording, story suggestions and editing, and previous knowledge and reasoning that made them think the story was not true.

However, participants required prompting to give reasons for their beliefs and gave very specific details that they felt would make the stories more believable. In some cases we sat for a pause during which the participants considered what elements made the story believable or unbelievable. It seems unlikely that these participants can know about a news event, especially something like the Germanwings or Malaysian Air plane crashes, and not have a sense of the plausibility, credibility, or believability of that news

event. There are a few reasons that these participants could have reacted with these pauses followed by rationalizations:

1. The focus group manipulated their reactions. Given that the groups took place in a school and were asking questions about news stories, the participants may have wanted to give the right answer, and were considering how to phrase a response that they felt was appropriate. In fact, some participants identified the focus groups as manipulating their behaviours. In reading an article in the second half of the focus group about government spending on surveillance, Janelle explained: *I think because we're in the focus group that I'm approaching it slightly more critical but had I read this without being in this focus group I would've probably just said, 'Okay, yeah, cool, high-tech surveillance saving Canadians. Sounds good.'* Here the participant is showing her understanding of the focus group environment making her more critical of the news article she read and acknowledging that if she had read the story outside of the focus group she would have just believed the story without questioning it.

2. The participants believe everything and they do not realize that they should not, so this is the first time they have considered that the information they received might not be true. It is hard to believe that the participants believe everything they read; in fact it is impossible. Yet, that does not preclude them from believing certain kinds of information outright. In one group, a particularly skeptical participant, Brianna, stated that she does not believe any of the news she gets from 'Big Media'. Another participant challenged her by asking about Amber Alerts (the notifications pushed from the media when a child goes missing), to which she reluctantly responded that she does always believe those alerts. Other groups agreed that major stories that are broadcast from multiple sources and on multiple platforms are most likely believed right away, using examples like tragic plane crashes or breaking news events. Conversely, Salemi explained that: *they start talking about like Egypt and political stuff like that….that's when I don't take that at face value as I know that there is a lot of influence of media and stuff like that…*

Other participants also identified political news as being significantly more biased than other kinds of news—especially breaking news, which was seen to be more

informative and factual than political or entertainment news. For these participants there is a difference in their believability for news from different news beats.

That said there were some participants who seemed surprised to be asked about the believability of news. One participant, Andrew, stated that yes, he did believe the story and explained that it was: *because I trusted the news source which is probably not a good idea when it comes to Facebook articles but yeah it just never occurred to me to not believe it.* Another participant, Mariah, identified her father as gullible in *believing everything shoved in his face,* suggesting that he was not a critical thinker. Yet another participant asked why the news source would lie about what they were reporting. In this situation it is likely less that it did not occur to the participants not to question the news sources, but that their habits with these news sources are so ingrained in their behaviour that any questions they may have, had have been asked and answered.

3. Decisions about the believability of news are snap judgements made from years of experience with news and other information. In this scenario, the participant is not always conscious that they have made the believability judgement and when pushed on their opinion, they struggle with articulating a gut reaction. This leads to their use of the information evaluation tools with which they are familiar to rationalize the judgement they have made and to understand why they feel the way they do about a story, event, or source. Given that this is an unconscious reaction, further research would need to be done about how this might operate in action.

From these three choices, the third one seems like the most plausible. In particular because what participants seem to do is not simple: they make decisions based on a complicated, personal, and subjective analysis and weighing of different factors at various points before, during, and after their encountering of a news story.

5.6 Limitations/Future Research

Participants in this study included a small number of students and non-students from a medium sized community in southwestern Ontario. Additionally, this portion of the study only used focus groups as a method. Future research should use this exploratory study for

grounding a larger study of Canadian young adults that uses a multi-method approach to determine which of the above scenarios young Canadians actually engage in when determining the believability of the news they consume. Designing research that investigates the news consumption habits of young Canadians would also be helpful in future research for being able to develop generalizable statistics that are not available at this time in Canada. The second part of this study, Chapter 6, aims to dig further into these issues and to mitigate the focus group manipulation described in the Discussion, through individual interviews and diaries.

5.7 Conclusion

The landscape of news—where it is found and from whom—has undergone enormous changes in the last two decades. This study is an exploration into how these changes are affecting how young Canadians get news and come to believe the news. Though they are getting news from a wide variety of sources and about an enormous range of topics, the study participants report news selection and judgement habits that are multi-faceted and rely, in part, on the heuristics consistent with what they learn through the public school curriculum. In addition, their interest in the news, and the type of news they are getting also affect how they make judgements about the believability of news. For example, a breaking news story is instantly believable but a political story is likely spun in some way; a topic that is of interest to an individual will be corroborated via the amount of time and energy they are willing to exert on learning more about it, while a story about something they are not interested in, they will not waste mental energy researching, or if they view the topic as important (just not interesting) they may corroborate it via shallow reading of headlines. These news consumers also use logic and past experience and understanding to consider whether they think the story is believable. Their process for evaluating news stories and sources is a complex one with many stages, and involves the weighing of different factors such as interest, source, corroboration, completeness, quality, and their own prior experiences with news. More research must be done about how these changes in news consumption behaviour are affecting young people and how tools can be designed to better inform them.

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Chapter 6

6 Believing the News: Multi-faceted Approaches

6.1 Introduction

The last two decades have seen a major revolution in the way that the public gets news. While in the past news consumers have largely relied on journalists and reporters to tell the news, new technologies allow them to get news from a variety of sources, to become active participants in disseminating news that they see happening around them or that they interact with online, and to aggregate news from multiple places straight to theiremail inboxes; the contemporary news consumer has more choice in their news than ever before. The "millennial" generation (young people between the ages of 18-35 who were born in 1980-1998 and also referred to as "digital natives") have grown up with these choices and research is now showing that their paths to news are different than other generations. A study by the Media Insight Project indicates that millennials have varied paths to news:

> This generation tends not to consume news in discrete sessions or by going directly to news providers. Instead, news and information are woven into an often continuous but mindful way that millennials connect to the world generally, which mixes news with social connection, problem solving, social action, and entertainment. (Media Insight Project, 2015, p.1)

Indeed, this generation of news consumers encounters, interacts with, and engages with news in ways that are quite different from those used by previous generations (Media Insight Project, 2016). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2010) indicate that this is not surprising. We have entered into a time they refer to as "show me" journalism, where the citizen must take more responsibility to determine what news to consume and what news to trust. However, it is not clear if this new generation of news consumers is equipped to make these decisions, or if they can tell the difference between what is news and what is entertainment. This study seeks to map the paths millennials take to get to news and make decisions about whether they trust and believe the news.

Chapter Five of this dissertation found that young news consumers say that they make decisions about their news using a variety of subjective and sophisticated strategies including: their level of interest, the type of news that they are consuming, and elements of heuristics that are part of their education (source, corroboration, and quality). This part of the study seeks to explore this subject more deeply by analyzing the steps these participants record in diaries to see if they actually do what they say, and through individual interviews about specific news behaviours when they encounter breaking news. The goal of this study is to ascertain the paths millennials take when they first encounter a breaking news story in terms of how they decide if they believe the story, and how they decide if they will read more about it.

6.1.1 Digital Natives and Millennials

Marc Prensky first coined the term "digital native" in 2001.[21] He explains: "as a result of this ubiquitous [technological] environment and the sheer volume of their interaction with it, today's students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors" (2001, 1). This theory has come up against quite a bit of criticism: with many arguing that the term "digital native" cannot encompass a generation because it does not consider that all people born within this time will have the same access to technology or digital literacy. However, much research supports the idea that there is something different about the generation of individuals born after 1980 (when computers were just starting to be adopted in the home) (*Digital Literacy in Canada*, 2014).

Millennials get a lot of flack, and according to a study by PEW they think quite negatively about their own generation; millennials apply terms such as "self-absorbed," "wasteful," and "greedy" to their peers. "Here is Where Each Generation Begins and Ends, According to the Facts" an article in *The Atlantic*, begins by stating that "We can all agree that millennials are the worst" (Bump, 2014). In general, millennials have a reputation as spoiled, selfish, entitled brats permanently attached to their iPhones, with no

[21] Others have coined similar terms such as Generation Y, net generation, or ME generation but digital native and millennials will be used for the course of this paper.

interest in being informed about the world outside of their own narrow interest. In an article for *The Washington Post* entitled "Five Really Good Reasons to Hate Millennials," Christopher Ingraham identifies millennials as being the least informed about the news (reason number three to hate them). This seems to be a well-accepted fact: Mark Mellman explains that, "The simple truth is that young people do not like news. PEW reported just 29 percent of millennials enjoy following the news, contrasted with 58 percent of those over age 48" (Mellman, 2015).

> Conversely, the Media Insight Project explains that:
> Much of the concern has come from data that suggest adults age 18-34 […] do not visit news sites, read print newspapers, watch television news, or seek out news in great numbers. This generation, instead, spends more time on social networks, often on mobile devices. The worry is that Millennials' awareness of the world, as a result, is narrow, their discovery of events is incidental and passive, and that news is just one of many random elements in a social feed. (Media Insight Project, 2015, p.1)

They continue by explaining that millennials are not disinterested in the news (85% of those surveyed indicated that keeping up with the news was at least 'somewhat important' to them), but their path to get news and the way that they keep up with news stories is different than previous generations. For example: the Insight participants identified that they regularly get a mix of different types of news (hard, soft, entertainment, and news you can use) and often encounter news they would not usually have read via their social networks. This study also supports the findings from PEW that 78% of Facebook users see news on the site when they are visiting for another reason (Matsa & Mitchell, 2014). Though critics like Mellman might suggest that this is "inattention" to the news, many others argue that this is merely a coping strategy designed to deal with the influx of news in the contemporary news-scape. Many millennials identify going to Facebook for social reasons but finding news when they are there. Thus they rely on social media sites and their friends on those sites to curate interesting news to their newsfeeds, in addition to seeking out news on their own (Media Insight Project, 2015).

Another key difference between millennials and previous generations is that millennials appear to be less knowledgeable about sources of news than were previous generations. PEW reports that millennials have not heard of the same news sources as other generations. Of thirty-six mainstream news organizations, millennials in the PEW study had heard of eighteen of them at substantially lower levels than members of Generation X or Baby Boomers ("Millennials & Political News," 2015). Included in these eighteen sources were *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *USA Today*—three well-known and popular newspapers. There were only two sources of which millennials had more knowledge than did members of earlier generations: Google News and Buzzfeed. These are both online sources: the former is a news aggregator on the search engine site, and the latter is known more for cats, animals, and lists (Burrell, 2014) than hard news.

Research shows that though the millennial generation is interested in news and recognizes the importance of being informed, they follow varied paths to get to news. There is nothing 'wrong' with the way they are being informed; it is merely different than previous generations. The task that must undertaken is in studying the effect these varied paths to news might have on the way that young people get informed, and the way that news organizations work to inform them.

6.1.2 News Beat and Interest

One of the other differences between millennials and previous generations is the kind of news that they are seeking. Millennials report most often following stories about music, TV and movies, hobbies, and traffic and weather (Media Insight Project, 2015, pp. 10-11). However, when looking for information about business and the economy, crime and public safety, foreign or international news, healthcare and medical information, information about their city, town, or neighbourhood, or national politics and government—really any kind of hard news—they are turning to mainstream news sources (Media Insight Report, 2015, p.16).

Young news consumers also use different news beats in different ways, seeking it from different sources, and platforms. In the focus group results reported in Chapter Five

of this dissertation, the participants identified that they believe different kinds of news for different reasons—in particular identifying that they believe breaking news versus political news, differently. In general, breaking news was seen as more factual than political or entertainment news and thus, was believed and judged in different ways than other types of news. This finding is the same as that from the Media Insight Project's study "A New Understanding: What Makes People Trust and Rely on News" which found that "the importance of certain components of trust may vary depending on whether a story is breaking news or is coverage of an ongoing trend or issue" (2016, p. 8). This study also found that "what makes something trustworthy and valuable differs depending on the topic and source" (p. 9).

Young people tend to treat breaking news differently than other news. Participants in the focus groups undertaken in the first part of this study (Chapter Five) indicated that breaking news events (natural disasters, plane crashes, and Amber Alerts were examples used) were often stories that they evaluated for believability in a different way than other types of news—in the focus groups participants identified bias playing a far greater role in political news, rather than breaking news like Amber Alerts. This finding was consistent with the Media Insight Project that found breaking news to be different than other types of news in terms of how news consumers trust and rely on it (2016, 8). There may be a few reasons that young people engage with this news differently: 1. Breaking news is often surprising or unexpected news that would require participants to verify it; 2. Breaking news can often be heard about in passing or from unusual sources which might prompt participants to verify it; and 3. Breaking news can be any kind of news (hard or soft, entertainment or political) but there is a significance given to breaking news because of its timeliness and also because of the authority and importance it is given by news organizations (these stories are usually the first stories on a news site, TV broadcast, newspaper, or pushed from a news app).

In a different study, the Media Insight Project indicated that young news consumers are far more likely to follow a news event or story about a topic which interests them, or which they find relevant. As the authors explain, these stories may be:

> […] related to career, heritage, travel experience, or some other factor. And they [the participants surveyed] tended to be quite conscious and active in the ways they sought information about those areas, identifying experts that they followed, news organizations that they trusted, and more. (Media Insight Project, 2015, p.11)

It is not particularly surprising that a news topic of interest or relevance would garner more of a news consumer's attention (if you are interested in something you are more likely to spend more time researching or becoming knowledgeable about it). Again, this is consistent with findings seen in Chapter Five of this dissertation.

Though there are clear differences in the levels of trust and interest millennials have for different news beats, there needs to be more research done about why this is the case and what it is about the topic and source that make news more or less trustworthy and believable. Researchers and news organizations need to have a straightforward idea of how to inform this new generation of voters and citizens.

6.1.3 Research Question

It is no surprise that the news landscape has changed with the adoption of online news sources, and ubiquitous mobile technologies. Yet, few studies have accounted for how these changes are impacting the news consumption habits and skills that digital natives are using in choosing and judging their news. Nor is there an accurate understanding of how their new habits of getting news via social media or aggregators are affecting how they come to make decisions about what news to trust and how they can come to believe news that they use to be informed citizens. Additionally, interest and news type also affect how young people evaluate news and need to be considered in any study that explores how they make decisions about their news.

This part of the study will take findings from Chapter Five—most notably that news beat and level of news interest greatly affect the decision to engage with news and the factors used to determine whether participants believe the news—and apply them to a real world news event with which the participants will engage and keep a diary about. This part of the study will further explore the same questions as Chapter Five by asking:

R1: How do young people make decisions about what news they consume?

R2: How do young people make decisions about what news to believe?

However, the use of individual interviews and the keeping of media diaries by participants will allow for a deeper insight into the actual behaviour of participants, instead of being limited to an analysis of what they say they do in a focus group with their peers. The diaries and individual interviews should allow the researcher to avoid social desirability bias and limit the memory issues involved in asking participants to recall their behaviour after the fact.

6.2 Method

This part of the study has three components: preliminary interviews, online diary keeping, and re-interview (See Appendix 2 for Ethics Approval). The preliminary interviews will allow the researcher to meet the participants and get an idea of how the participants think about breaking news. These interviews will also prime the participants to think about breaking news stories. The diaries will be kept online for a week, during which time participants will describe how they follow one news story, making a diary entry every day to record through open and closed questions, how they interact with the story, what they learn about it each day (if anything), and what the steps are when the first encounter the story. The secondary interviews occur after they are finished keeping the diaries and allow the researcher to probe their responses from the diaries.

6.2.1 Why Diaries?

While it is clear from Chapter Three that credibility is still used to judge news sources and stories, and from Chapter Five that source is a major factor for news consumers in deciding if they believe the news, it remains unclear what steps they take to decide if they believe a news story and how they use credibility judgements to help make those decisions. It is particularly difficult to get an idea of what steps millennials are taking to choose their news in a converged mobile media environment—where news can literally be at their fingertips in seconds from around the world. As explained in Chapter Five, some participants indicated that the focus group manipulated their behaviours making

them more critical of the news articles they were reading. The focus group method of soliciting information in this situation is a useful first step in gathering information and understanding the broad strokes of what news consumers do, but the retrospective recall required in that context does not provide an entirely accurate account of actual behaviour. The diary method allows researchers to study a phenomenon that may happen outside the time or space in which they can be present or "because the phenomena are internal, situationally inaccessible, infrequent and/or rare, or because the physical presence of the researchers would significantly impact the phenomenon of interest" (Sheble & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 213). Thus, using the diary method for this part of the research will allow the researcher to study what the participants do every day, rather than what they reported doing in a focus group. Using a solicited participant diary method allows for "[…] the opportunity to investigate social, psychological, and physiological processes, within everyday situations. Simultaneously, they [participants] recognize the importance of the contexts in which these processes unfold" (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003, p. 580). Though it is known from Chapter Five that various factors are used in making decisions about news consumption, there is no clear rhyme or reason for why those factors, at that time, for that story. The diary method will provide an opportunity for participants to record their behaviours in the moment (or near the moment) of encountering a news story, rather than speaking generally about their behaviours after the fact.

Diaries are most often used in psychology to assess psychological effects, or in sociology and occasionally media studies to report time use. In this study, self-report diaries will allow participants to report their news consumption and reflect on their perceptions of believability and news consumption habits in situ rather than with researcher prompts. Diary-keeping also allows participants to recall either immediately or soon after their experience with a phenomenon (in this case, news consumption) rather than asking for recall after a long period of time has passed and allow the opportunity to see changes over time (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003, p. 585).

The media diaries also work as an elicitation tool (rather than a feedback tool) to prompt a more detailed discussion in the secondary interviews (Carter & Mankoff, 2005). In Jan Hess and Volker Wuff's 2009 study, for example, the researchers were able to find

concrete examples of social behaviours reported in media diaries, but felt that it was only in feedback interviews that they would be able to contextualize these behaviours. Thus there is a necessity to have follow-up interviews to contextualize the diary records.

6.2.2 Sample and Screening Survey

There were twenty-five participants in the first set of interviews, and of these twenty-three participants kept diaries and participated in the secondary interviews. These participants were students from a south-western Ontario city, and were a convenience sample recruited using posters around the University of Western Ontario campus. All participants were between the ages of 18-29 and each completed a screening survey in which they provided basic demographic information and reported their regular news consumption practices (answering questions such as: How often do you get the news from a newspaper? from television? from the radio? etc.) and their regular news engagement practices (for example: how often do you talk about the news with a stranger? How often do you comment about the news on social media? How often do you write a letter to the editor? etc.) (See Appendix 3 for the Screening Survey). The survey was used to verify their self-reported ages between 18-29 and acquire quantifiable information about news consumption habits.

Young people consume different kinds of news in different ways and for the purposes of this study it was important to focus on a particular type of news. As described in the introduction and consistent with the Media Insight Report, breaking news appears to be treated differently than other news in terms of believability. Also, in the Screening Surveys for both the focus groups and interviews, participants reported getting and following breaking news at high levels (See Figures 5 and 9). For these reasons, this portion of the study will focus on breaking news.

6.2.3 Interviews and Diaries

In the initial interviews participants were asked about the last breaking news event they could recall (See Appendix 6 for interview guide). They described the event and then were asked about where they heard about it, and if they felt that they had the "whole story." The participants were also asked about their definitions of breaking news in order

to prime them to think about different breaking news stories when they kept their diaries. After the interviews, participants were given a walkthrough of the online diary keeping process.

The semi-structured diaries were kept online through Survey Monkey (See Appendix 8 for the Diary). Participants were told that they had a month from the first interview to document an encounter with a breaking news event. 'Breaking news' was never defined for participants, and they used their judgement to identify an event that was breaking news to them. When they found the event, they informed the investigator by email and began keeping their diaries. They were required to log into the diary each day for seven days, and received email prompts to remind them each evening. The diary was broken into two sections: the first asked them about all of their news consumption that day, and the second asked them about the breaking news story they were discussing and/or following. In the first section, the diary asked them quantitative questions about where they got news that day, what sources they got news from that day, and they were asked to use a Likert scale to rank the news from that day on a number of factors including: trust, interest, enjoyment, credibility, importance, relevance, bias, accuracy, and quality. Following these general questions, participants were asked qualitative questions about their breaking news event: what happened? What did you think? Where did you hear about it? What were the updates that day? They were also asked whether they believed the story and why or why not. Participants kept the diaries for seven days and when they stopped following or hearing about their breaking news story they were told to put N/A or just to leave that section blank.

Once the participants had finished keeping the seven days of diaries, a secondary interview was scheduled (See Appendix 7 for interview guides). In the secondary interview, participants were asked to walk through their encounter with, and interaction with the breaking news story they selected. The purpose of the interviews was to allow participants the opportunity to contextualize their diaries and to provide feedback on their experience with the breaking news story they were diary-keeping.

The interviews were transcribed and a theoretical, latent thematic content analysis was used to develop a set of codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic content analysis allowed for the flexibility of methodology required in an exploratory study and in recognizing the patterns of commonality in participants' experiences, habits, and behaviours within both the interviews and the diaries. After the transcripts were coded for relevant information using HyperReseach, a qualitative analysis software package, themes were developed, reviewed, and named. These codes and themes were also considered within the context of the diaries as thematic analysis allows for analysis across media (Boyatzis, 1998).

6.3 Results

Following a description of the participants based on a summary of the screening survey results, the rest of the results will be organized to report how participants discussed encountering and accessing news in the media diaries and the interviews and then, to report how participants discussed coming to believe the news, in the diaries and then again in the initial and secondary interviews.

6.3.1 Participants

Twenty-three individuals responded to the posters and completed the screening survey and diaries: eighty-seven percent between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five (n=20) and thirteen percent (n=3) between the ages of twenty-six and twenty-nine.

Of these participants, four percent (n=1) had completed only high school, forty-nine percent (n=11) completed some university, twenty-six percent (n=6) had completed university and twenty-two percent (n=5) had completed some, or all of a graduate degree (see Table 5).

Table 3: Education level of Survey Screener respondents - Interviews and Diaries

Level of Education	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
High School	1	4%
Some college	0	0%
Completed College	0	0%
Some university	11	48%
Completed University	6	26%
Some graduate school	3	13%
Completed Graduate school	2	9%

Thirty-five percent (n = 8) of these participants indicated that they were either "very interested" or "pretty interested" in the news. Sixty-seven percent (n = 14) were "somewhere in between," and "kind of interested" in the news (see Figure 6).

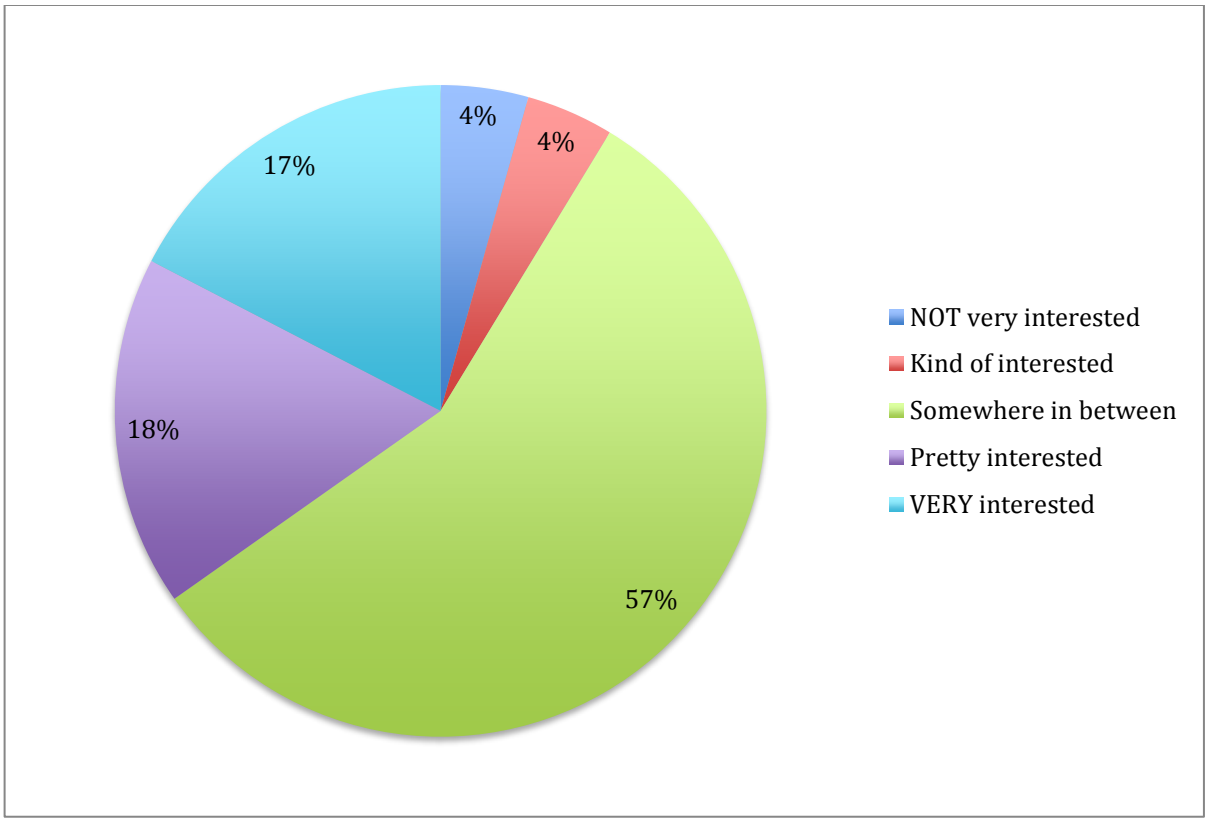


Figure 6: Responses to the question "Generally, how interest would you say you are in the news?" by percent of responses (From Screening survey for Interviews and Diaries)

When asked how often they get news from specific platforms, forty-eight percent (n=11) of participants identified getting news from social media multiple times a day. Social media and in person from a friend or acquaintance were the most identified news sources, followed by online news organizations. This data indicates that the participants of the Screening Survey use social media to get news far more than any other kind of news platform or source. All of the participants identified that they get news from social media at least a few times a month and seventy-four percent (n=17) indicated getting news from social media once a day or multiple times a day.

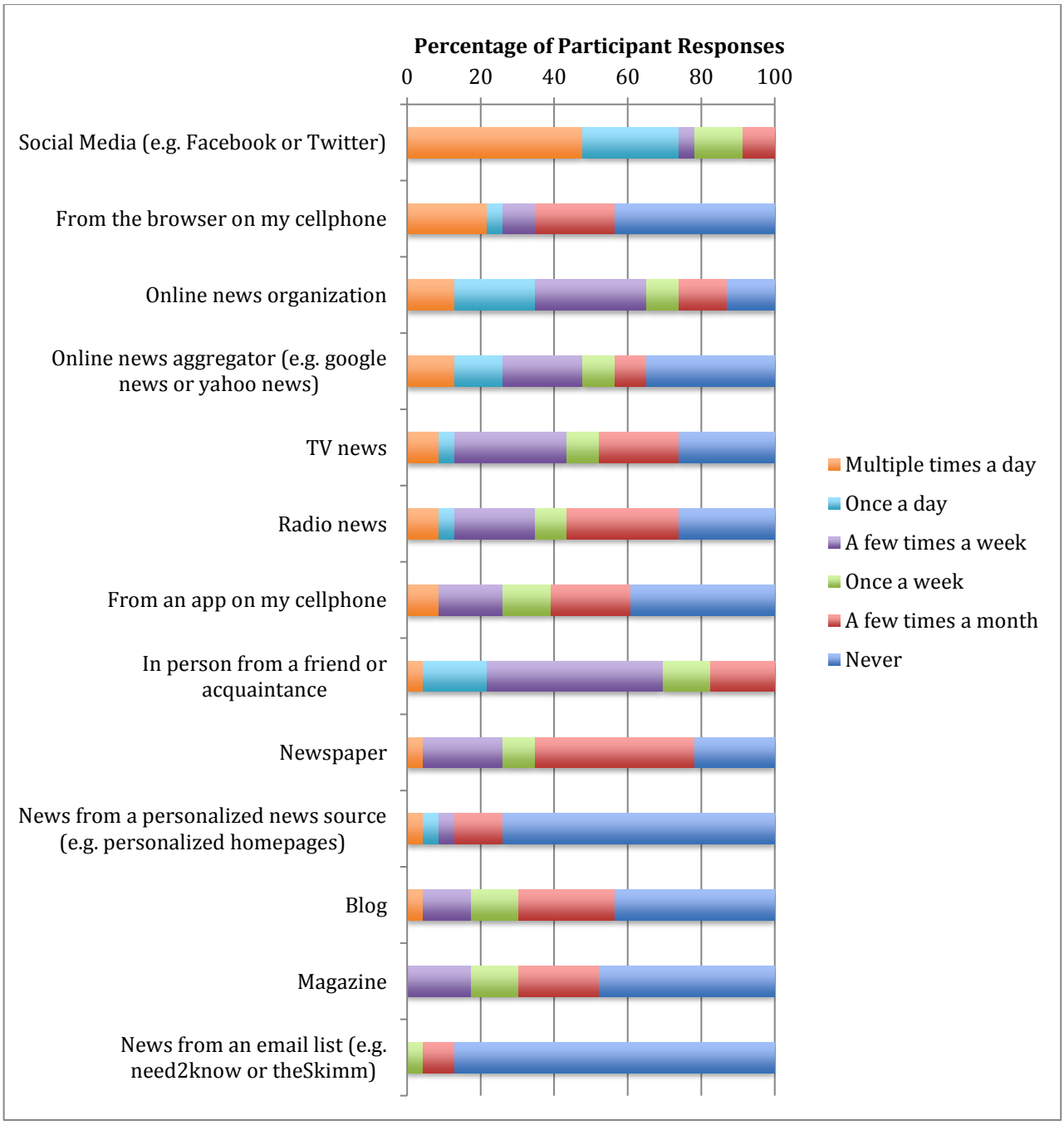


Figure 7: Responses to "How often do you get news from the following sources?" by percent of responses (from Screening survey for Interviews and diaries)

In terms of news engagement, all but one participant indicated that they talk about the news to friends/family. However, there is not very much other news engagement for these respondents. Though they seem to consume a lot of news from various platforms,

they do not appear to be interested in disseminating that news or talking about it outside of discussions with family and friends. Not one of the participants identified writing a letter to the editor or calling into a radio show (See Figure 8).

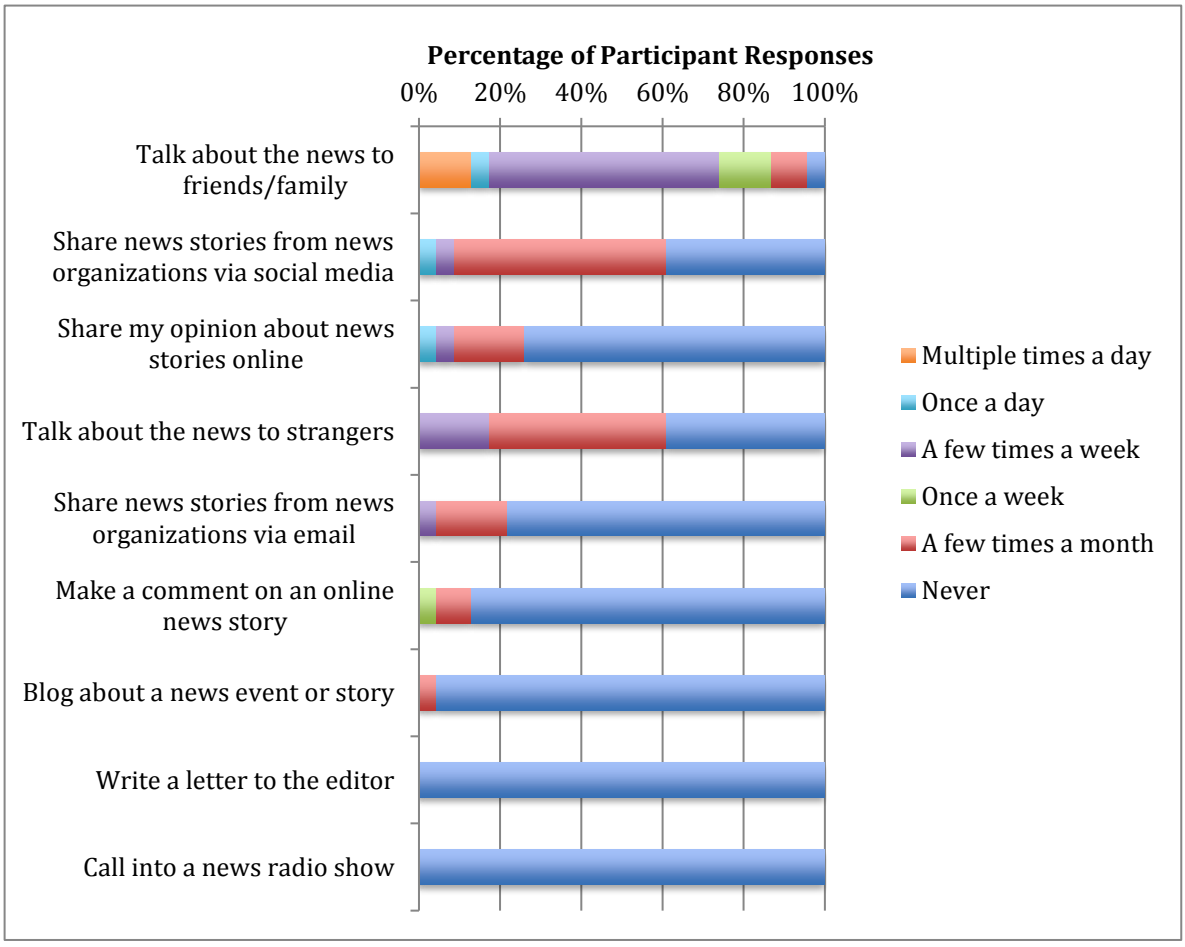


Figure 8: Responses to "How often do you do the following?" by percent of responses (From Screening survey for Interviews and diaries)

Seventy-four percent (n=17) of the screening survey participants reported regularly following breaking news. A surprising eighty-three percent (n=19) of respondents identified following health news (see Figure 9). These participants appear to follow a lot of different types of news. The news beats followed least often (a tie between Business and the Economy and Crime and Public Safety) were still followed by thirty-five percent (n=8) and thirty-nine percent (n=9) of participants respectively. There is certainly overlap in these categories (e.g. environment and natural disasters can surely be

considered breaking news), it is interesting to see which news beats were privileged over others.

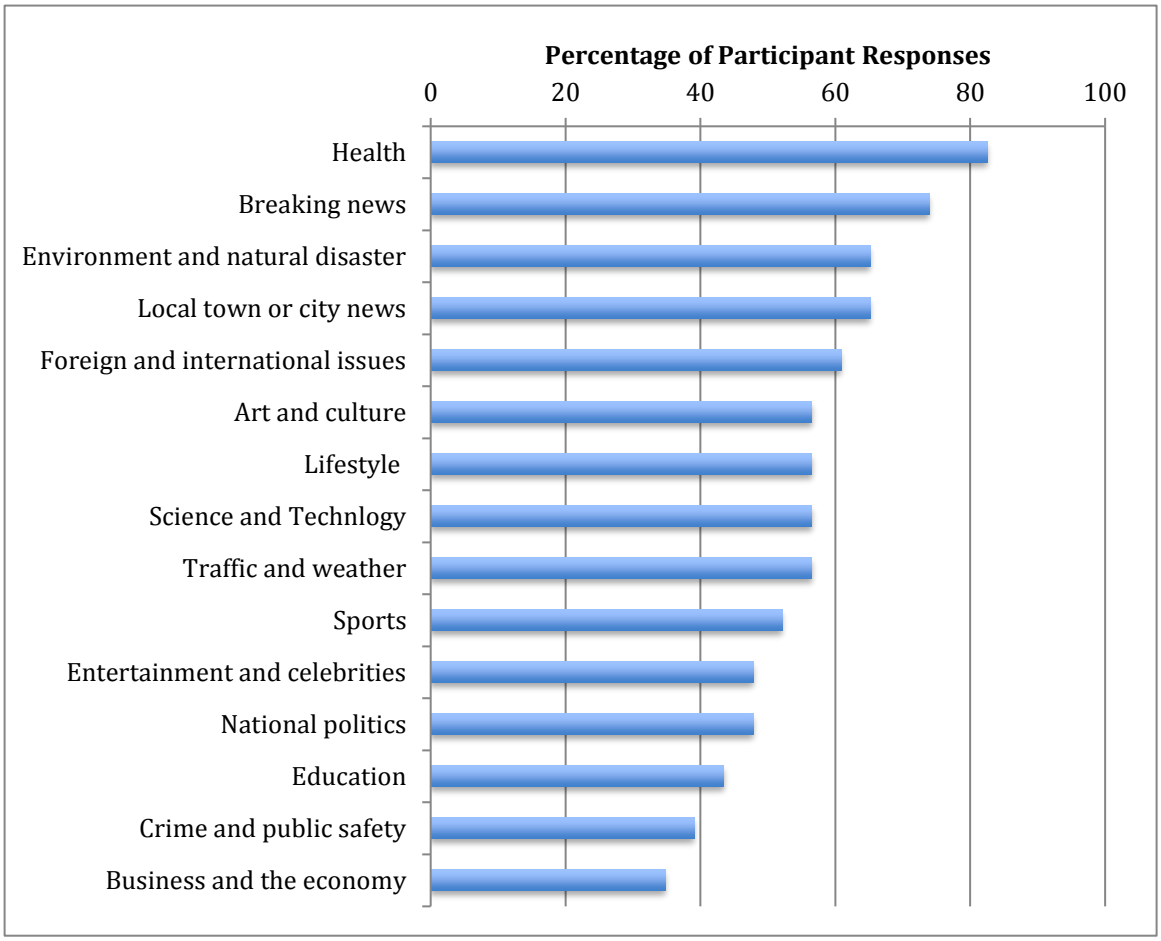


Figure 9: Reponses to "which of the following types of news do you follow? (check al that apply)" by percent (From Screening survey for Interviews and diaries).

6.3.2 Encountering and Following Breaking News - Media Diaries

The participants reported enjoying the process of keeping the media diaries. A few participants forgot to complete the report each day but were quick to complete their diary entry to the best of their ability the next morning. Figure 10 shows that participants reported accessing the news through Facebook an average of 3.2 days of the week-long reporting period, and news aggregators (Like Google, Buzzfeed, and reddit), an average

of 1.7 days of the week. This was a close-ended question that had a list of platform options, Consistent with the screening surveys, participants reported using Facebook more than any other platform. Participants did not report getting news from word of mouth in the diaries as often as the screening survey. This could be because their actual behaviour is different than they think, or because the language of "word of mouth" is less familiar to them than "getting news from friends and acquaintances" which was used in the screening survey.

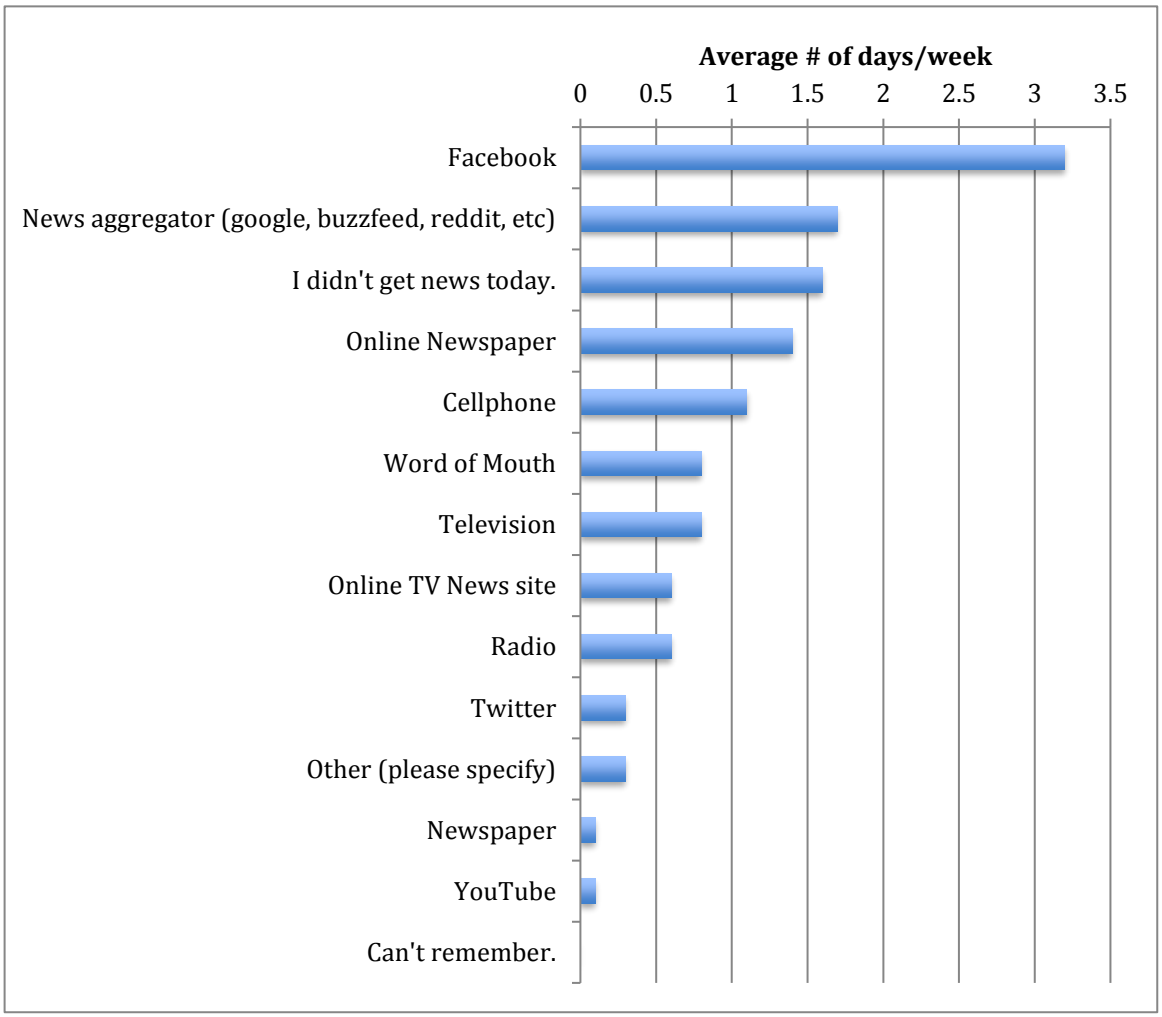


Figure 10: Media Diary - Average number of days per week that participants reported using specified platforms

Figure 11 shows the results of the open-ended question asking participants to report all of the news sources they used that day. Participants were encouraged to write

the specific sources (i.e. the exact newspaper, radio station, or blogger) and they averaged three sources a day. Over sixty-six individual sources were reported and these were collapsed into the following categories: Facebook, Word of Mouth, Social Media, Online and Broadcast News, Radio Stations, Aggregators, Online Newspapers, Entertainment/Comedy/Blogs, Other/Unknown. There were so many sources used that the averages reported are very low. Clearly Facebook is an often-used source and, followed by word of mouth, was the most common way they encountered news—even though when asked about what platforms they got news from, they did not list word of mouth as being particularly high. Sources included in Social Media include Snapchat, Twitter, Baidu, and Youtube.[22] Sources included in Online and Broadcast news include but are not limited to, CNN, CTV News, BBC, NBC, ABC, CBS, and CP24. Radio stations reported include AM 980, AM 1290, 103.1, and 98.1. Aggregators include but are not limited to, Huffington Post, Google news, Yahoo news, and Reddit. Online newspapers include but are not limited to, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Daily Mail*, and the *London Free Press*. Entertainment/Comedy/Blogs include but are not limited to, Eonline, Comedy Central, ifuckinglovescience.com, and Gawker. The 'Other' and 'unknown' categories include sites like Environment Canada and instances where participants identified that they used a news site but they do not know or remember the specific source.

[22] Facebook was used so often and identified so specifically that it warranted its own category despite being a form of social media.

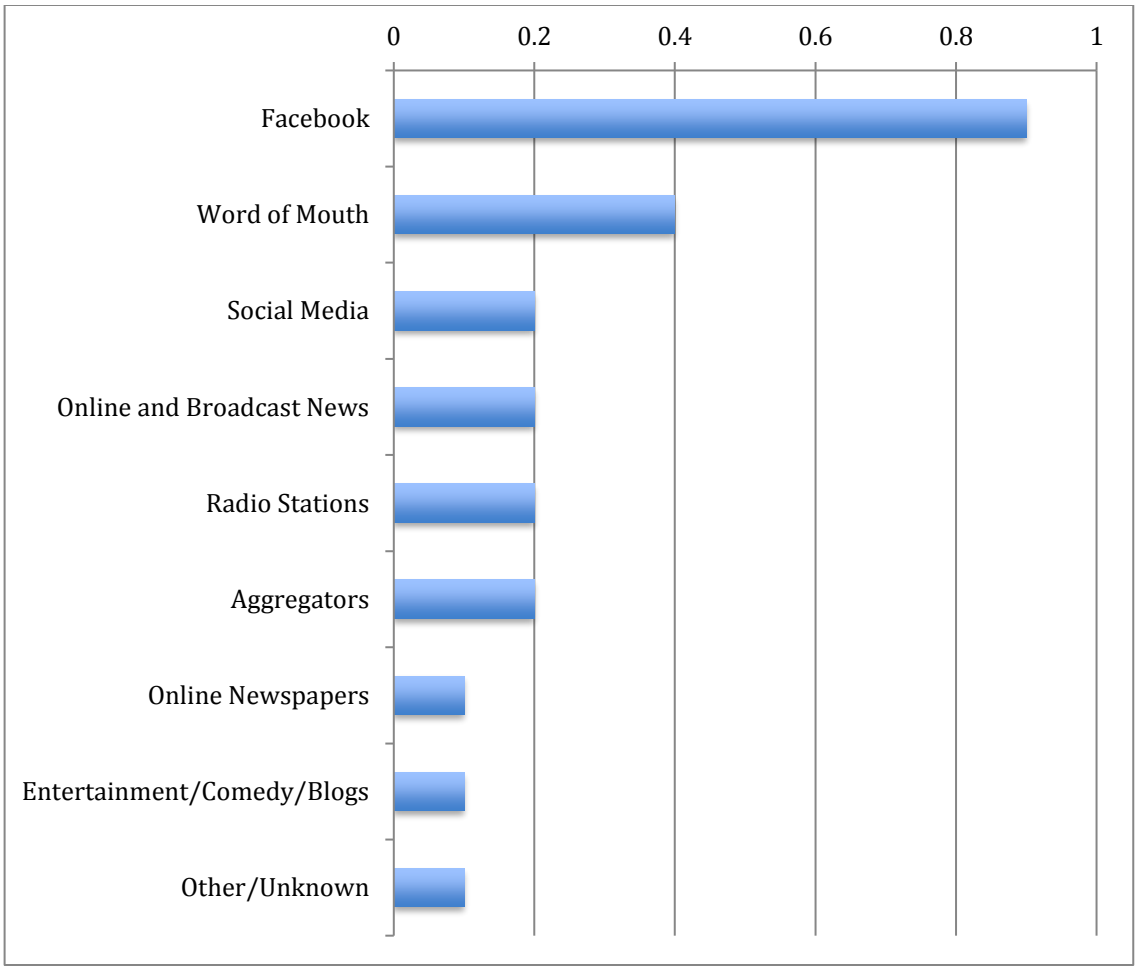


Figure 11: Media Diaries - Responses to "What sources did you get your news from today?" on average per day

6.3.2.1 Selecting Breaking News Stories

Media diaries were reported on the derailment of the Amtrak train, the Irish same-sex marriage referendum, George Zimmerman being shot in the face, the second earthquake in Nepal, the transition of Caitlyn Jenner, Josh Duggar's molestation accusations, the FIFA organization and the Qatar World Cup scandals, the shooting in a Charleston church related to Black Lives Matter, a local city worker's strike, flooding in Texas, a few stories about local crime, an election in South Africa, a sexual assault on the university campus, and the hacking of the Canadian government websites (See Table 4). Participants followed their stories for an average of 2.9 days in the week.

Table 4: Media diary responses regarding encountering and following news

Diary Code	Name[23]	News Story Followed	News Beat of Story	Path to Initial Story	# of days followed
AAE	Julia	Ireland, Same sex marriage	Foreign and International	Facebook (friend) to Mainstream News (Guardian) to Trending Topics	3
AAR	Craig	George Zimmerman shot in the face	Foreign and International	Twitter (trending) to Mainstream News (various sources)	3
AAU	Trinity	Amtrak derailment	Foreign and International	Mainstream News (CNN on TV and app) to Search Engine (Google) to Mainstream News (Fox news, NYT and USA today)	7
AAV	Mikayla	Akon to provide solar power tech to African villages	Foreign and International	Facebook (from Friend) to Search Engine (Google) Only read headlines	2
AAX	Stan	South Africa's opposition elected a new leader	Foreign and International	Mainstream News (Economist) to Search Engine (searched oppositions party) to Mainstream News (multiple sites) to Wikipedia	1
BAG	Joseph	Ireland, same sex marriage	Foreign and International	Facebook	3
BAP	Valentina	Ireland, same sex marriage	Foreign and International	Facebook (friends) to Facebook (trending) to Search Engine (Google) to Mainstream News (BBC and Time)	4
BAV	Dalia	Ireland, Same sex marriage	Foreign and International	Reddit (Mainstream Link to Telesur) to image from Reddit that linked to Facebook (post liked by friend)	5
BAW2	Jenna	Shooting at Charleston church	Foreign and International	Facebook (celebrity post from George Takei) to Search Engine (Google) to Mainstream News	3
BU	Kiersten	Texas flooding	Foreign and International	TV News (CTV) to Word of Mouth with parents	2
BAD	Tara	Man shot at Guelph ER	Local town or city news	Home page (Yahoo News). Later, Cellphone App, Mainstream News (CTV)	3
BAH	Morgan	City of London workers on strike	Local town or city news	Unclear	4

[23] Names have been changed for anonymity.

Diary Code	Name	News Story Followed	News Beat of Story	Path to initial story	# of days followed
BAS	Ruinan	Western student charged with sexual assault	Local town or city news	Facebook (share on USecrets page) to Mainstream News (London Free Press). Later, Word of Mouth	2
AAY	Shauna	Caitlyn Jenner	Entertainment	Facebook (Friends) to Mainstream Media (Vice)	4
BAF	Louis	Josh Duggar molestation scandal	Entertainment	Unclear	1
BAB	Gavin	Qatar scandal in the World Cup	Sports	Unclear	2
BAM	Theresa	FIFA Scandal	Sports	Reddit front page to Mainstream News (articles linked) and user comments) to Word of Mouth	3
BAN	Carly	New drug for colitis	Health	Mainstream (London Free Press)	1
CV	Sarah	Chinese person infected with MERS	Health	Weibo to Mainstream News (CTV) and Online News (Yahoo News)	6
AAT	Mohammad	Nepal's second earthquake	Environment and Natural Disasters	Facebook to Mainstream News (CBC)	3
AAH	Grace	Anonymous hacked Canadian gov't website	National Politics	Radio to stories online (unclear how searched) to Youtube	2
BAW1	Hailey	Columbia student carried mattress to graduation as symbol of sexual assault burden.	Lifestyle	Unclear	1
AAA	Sydney	Teacher had sex with underaged student	Crime and public safety	Unclear	1

Table 4 gives a brief explanation of the steps that participants report taking upon first encountering the story. This information was gathered from the report provided on the first day that the participants encountered the story and their descriptions of how they first heard about (encountered) the news event and how they accessed various news items about the story. Most of these participants reported encountering the story in one place (primarily Facebook), and then getting more information from another site, source, and/or

platform. As you can see from the 'path to initial story' column, eight of the participants first encountered a story about the news event on Facebook, and that led most of them to seek more information about that story from another source. Other participants identified other locations where they encountered the story (reddit, TV, the radio, etc.) and explained the steps they took to get more information about the story from other sources. The articles they linked to most often appeared in mainstream media. The participants usually reached a news item via social media or searched for more information via a search engine (primarily Google). Social media and search engines, for these participants, seem to act as gateways to mainstream news sources that participants are likely to use to gain information about a news event. Mainstream news sources appear to be the "terminal source" that these participants go to get the news, as very few went to other sources (e.g. government websites, Wikipedia, blogs, or even social media like Twitter). On the first day, all participants used more than one source to inform them about the story they were keeping the diary about.

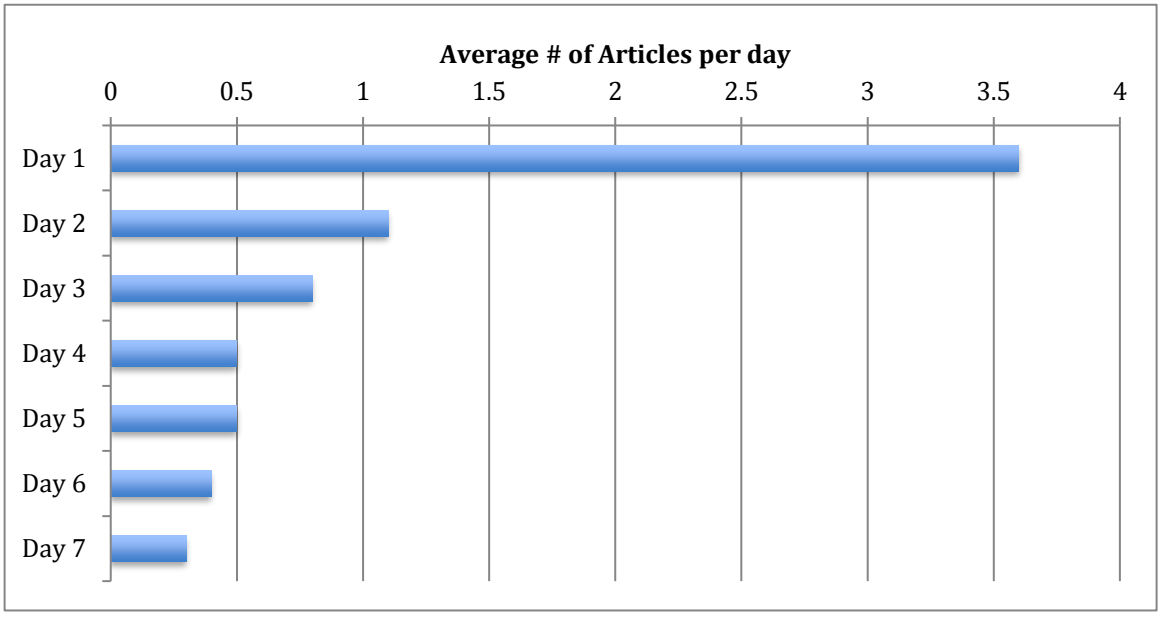


Figure 12: Average number of articles participants accessed to follow their breaking news story by day

Figure 12 illustrates the average number of articles accessed by all of the diarists on each day that they consumed news about their breaking news story. As is clearly

evident from the graph, consumption declines quite rapidly after the first encounter (Day 1) with the breaking news event. This is not particularly surprising, as many of the news stories would have quickly reached a resolution, or there would be no new information in the days after the news event.

The media diaries showed the intensity with which participants first engaged with a story they find interesting. This engagement, however, appears to be time-limited: not one of the interviewees (regardless of how interested they indicated that they were in these stories) reported following the story for the full seven days of the diaries. There were several participants who reported accessing news items about the news event they were following for one or more days, not getting news about that item for a few days, and then returning to the story to get more information later in the week. It is not clear from the diaries whether they lost interest in the story, the news story had reached some kind of conclusion or resolution, or the story was no longer reported as breaking or trending news. A common statement in the diaries was that there were no new updates.

In one of these situations, where Louis identified that there were no new updates for the story about Josh Duggar being accused of molesting his sisters, there *were* updates about the story up to a week after it initially broke, but he did not identify these. These updates include the cancelling of the Duggar's TLC show, and responses from other personalities on the TLC network. Louis identified first hearing about the story from a friend's Facebook post and following that to read about the story on multiple other sites and discussing it with his mother (a fan of the show). Likely, he no longer encountered the story and felt that the story had reached a resolution, even though that was not the case. This points to the subjectivity of feeling that the story is over—rather, the story was over for this participant.

In the diary entries, participants indicated that 'interest' was one of the key reasons that they chose to engage with a news item. For some participants, interest in a news item was piqued because that item appeared in a regularly followed news beat (e.g., the FIFA scandal appeared in Sports). In their diaries, some participants selected to follow stories that they felt affected them directly. When describing the news story they

were following, Ruinan discussed an individual who was accused of sexual assault on the university campus and explained that *it relates back to me or it's relatable to me because I am in school and I am in an environment where I might see this person. So I would say it's closely related.* Another student, Morgan, kept her diary about a city workers' strike in the city she lives in and her concerns about how it would affect her commute and garbage collection. In his diary, Stan said:

> *This story is breaking news to me as I was born in South Africa, have gone back multiple times, and currently have all my family and relatives living there except my immediate family (mom, dad and brothers). So I have a personal connection to it and found it interesting and breaking news. I however did not research this any more than I would any other news story I found breaking.*

In the same section Tara said:

> *[this] was an interesting news story that I think was relevant to me because of my interest in disease, health and medicine. It is also an important news story, and breaking news, for this area due to the death occurring at a local hospital.*

The participants of this study chose a variety of different news events to keep their diaries about and most identified interest as being a key factor in why they chose certain news stories to follow. Largely, they encountered the story via Facebook and then followed the story through a Google search of mainstream news sources.

6.3.3 Encountering and Following Breaking News - Interviews

In the initial interviews, participants were asked to recall any recent breaking news story they could remember. They recalled an enormous variety of news stories and sources, and had little difficulty explaining the major narratives of the stories they recalled. They showed ease and comfort when explaining the stories and describing what they knew about the stories in the interviews. Some of the news events and stories recalled in the initial interviews included: the earthquakes in Nepal, the Manny Pacquiao versus Floyd

Mayweather boxing match, the tornados and flooding in Texas, Caitlyn Jenner's transition, the election of the first NDP Premier in Alberta, Black Lives Matters protests in Baltimore, an election in Guatemala, a typhoon in the Philippines, a derailment of an Amtrak train in the United States, the strike of elementary school teachers in a local region, proposed revisions to sexual education curriculum in the province, a scandal involving the president of the university, and the results of hockey playoffs. There was a huge variety of stories that were recalled by participants. Because contemporary news consumers have such great choice in their news, many news consumers found stories that reflected their specific interests—sometimes in niche areas like the South African political election because one participant had family from there. Many of the participants gave a great deal of detail about each of these stories, showcasing their knowledge and how informed they are about each news event.

Like the focus group participants in Chapter Five, interviewees identified news interest as a main factor in how they choose what news to read—especially what news they choose to research in more depth. Participants identified three main reasons they found the news interesting: it was personally relevant to them, it was entertaining, or it was important to the world in general.

In the initial interviews, participants identified a huge variety of stories that were relevant to them for an assortment of reasons (e.g. The Parliament Hill shootings because they had peers at the local universities at the time, ISIS terrorism because the participants were international students and they worry for the safety of their families, the Nepal earthquake because one interviewee had a Nepalese boyfriend, another had a roommate from Nepal, and still another had visited the country). In the secondary interviews, participants reiterated that the stories they followed were important to them, relevant to them, or interested them for the reasons they listed in their diaries (as described in 6.3.2.1).

Not only does interest affect whether a news item is chosen for consumption, it also affects how much news these participants would consume once they read the story. As in the focus groups, many participants in the initial and secondary interviews

indicated that the greater their interest in the news event or topic, the more they would read about it or seek out information about it. In his initial interview, Mohammad stated, regarding how much he would read about a news event:

> *It would depend on how interested I am in it. And I can't really gauge that. It just depends on the story and the importance of it. But I probably read two or three if it's very interesting that day. And then as more comes out that I'm interested in I'll read that.*

He continued by explaining that he followed the Manny Pacquiao versus Floyd Mayweather fight because he was a boxing fan. In his first interview, he explained:

> *There's a few YouTube videos, HBO, Showtime posts that I guess hyped up the fight and I'd been watching those videos. I think it was once a week starting in April, sometime in April. And there was four episodes or something. So I watched all those and I periodically went on boxing websites and read articles on it. I went on ESPN.com.*

Here, Mohammad explains that, because he is a fan and is interested in the topic, he engages with material about the fight from a variety of sources. Generally, one participant summed it up best by saying:

> *Carly: If it interests me then obviously I'm going to look more into it.* […] *If it's interesting then I go further, but if not then I just move on.*

Some participants were clear that even if the story wasn't relevant to them, but they felt it was important, they would be likely to read about it. Joseph explained:

> *I don't really look at the celebrity ones [stories] or anything like that. Really just what interests me. I'm studying biology so if it's a scientific breakthrough I'll look at that. Or something like the Baltimore riots, I'll look at that if it's a world event kind of thing.*

Joseph identifies that there is news that interests him (biology) and news that is important (world events). Though he can be interested in world events, he also acknowledges that there is a difference between these two kinds of news. Another

participant identified that many of her peers read news in which they are interested and might seek out that news story everyday, but that she does not necessarily do that. She explained that she felt that there were some stories, especially the important ones, that were covered everywhere, so she would read the headlines in order to be informed but not go any further in reading about those news events. Here, there appears to be a level of social responsibility in which participants feel responsible to know about news that is "important" but not necessarily interesting to them. It is not clear how this social responsibility operates and it would be speculative to suggest that the motivation to be informed about "important" news comes from a desire to be informed citizens or possibly a desire to be "in the know."

6.3.4 Believing the News at First Encounter – Media Diaries

Table 5 shows participants report on whether or not they believed the news story upon their first interaction; the table also provides details about their stated reasons.[24] The large majority of the diarists (18/23) indicated that they believed the breaking news story when they first encountered it.

[24] The reasons given for believing the news have been categorized here. For full text please see Appendix 9.

Table 5: Media diary responses regarding believing the news story on first encounter

Participant Code	Name	Believability on First encounter	Why?
AAA	Sydney	Maybe	Source
AAE	Julia	Yes	Evidence.
AAH	Grace	Yes	Logic. Corroboration.
AAR	Craig	Maybe	Logic.
AAT	Mohammad	Yes	News Type. Logic.
AAU	Trinity	Yes	News Type.
AAV	Mikayla	Maybe	Logic. Source.
AAX	Stan	Yes	Corroboration. Logic.
AAY	Shauna	Yes	Corroboration.
BAB	Gavin	Yes	Source. Logic
BAD	Tara	Yes	Source. Corroboration.
BAF	Louis	No	Logic. Opinion.
BAG	Joseph	Yes	Corroboration.
BAH	Morgan	Yes	Logic.
BAM	Theresa	Yes	Logic.
BAN	Carly	Yes	Logic. Source.
BAP	Valentina	Yes	Corroboration.
BAS	Ruinan	Yes	Source. Corroboration.
BAV	Dalia	Yes	Source. Evidence. Corroboration.
BAW1	Hailey	Maybe	Opinion. Logic.
BAW2	Jenna	Yes	Source. Evidence.
BU	Kiersten	Yes	Source.
CV	Sarah	Yes	Source.

The remaining five diarists indicated that they 'maybe' believed it (4 respondents) or did not believe it (1 respondent). The disbelieving participants included the following reasons:

> From Sydney, about the teacher that had sex with an underage student: *I have doubts in my mind that it is credible because it was from Facebook.*
>
> From Craig, about George Zimmerman being shot in the face: *At first twitter was saying he got shot in the face. However, that made it seem like he was directly shot*

point blank execution style in the face, which I doubt was true. After looking into it further it seems that the injuries were minor and if he was shot in the face he would most likely be dead.

From Mikayla, about Akon funding solar power for an African village: *My friend posted it to show that there were more important things to consider news than the Bruce Jenner sex change. There is a chance that the story was made up to downplay the #callmeCaitlynn trend.*

From Louis, about Josh Duggar's molestation charge: *It is only allegations and rumours at this point, no new developments had happened since the original charges in 2004/2005. The news only broke out about it as the original charges were kept secret until recently.*

From Hailey, about the Columbia student that carried her mattress to graduation: *There are so many sources going in both directions. Also, most of the authors put their own comments in their articles and there is no real way of saying because 1) there were no eye witnesses or physical evidence of the incident 2) it happened 2 years ago, it's probably near impossible to get physical evidence of it, 3) even if there is physical evidence their initial encounter was consensual by both parties, 4) only thing you can do is to listen to their part of the story.*[25]

There are not any clear patterns in the reasons participants offered for why they did not initially believe these stories. As seen in Table 4, it also is not clear if the participants took different steps in interacting with the story when they did not believe it. Three of the 'disbelieving participants' have unclear paths to the original story and to subsequent news items, but two of the participants have paths much like the 'believing' participants (via social media [Facebook and Twitter] to mainstream news and search engines. The news beats of the 'disbelieving' participants breaking news stories vary: two are Foreign and

[25] This participant and the one who reported on the Duggar molestation charge, appear to have misunderstood the questions of believing the news story and instead wrote about whether or not the allegations about the sexual assault and the molestation are true, rather than if they believed the news event.

International news, one is Crime and Public Safety, one is Entertainment, and one is a Lifestyle story.

On average, these 'disbelieving' participants followed the story for 1.1 days (in contrast to the average of the other participants of following the story for 3.3 days). These participants used fewer news items to get informed about the story—using an average of 3.6 news items versus the 'believing' participants who used an average of 8.3 items. The 'disbelieving' participants also indicated getting the general news at lower levels than other participants on a daily basis: on average these participants accessed news from 6.2 sources over the course of the week while other participants reported an average of 14.2 sources. It is possible that these disbelieving participants, though identifying these stories as "interesting," did not find the stories important enough to engage in more extensive search behaviour and as a result just identified that they might not believe the story and left it at that. It is also possible that these participants are disinterested in the news more generally than the other participants in the study and feel less inclined to become informed.

Only one participant started the week not believing the story and then changing his opinion. Craig was following the story about George Zimmerman being shot in the face explained that on the first day he did not believe the story because it was unclear what had happened, and the accounts of the event on Twitter did not align with his expectations (he felt that someone that was shot in the face would be shot "execution style" or would be severely injured and it did not sound like that was the case from Twitter's explanations). On the second day of following the story he explained that he did believe the news event stating:

> *Yesterday, initially Twitter was very unreliable everybody was saying different stories however after the dust settled it seemed as if the story was more credible as more information was obtained. It was difficult to determine who was primarily responsible because both sides of the story are completely different.*

Here, Craig is identifying that there appeared to be a cohesive story that emerged to solidify the events and make clear what occurred.

6.3.4.1 Source

In the diaries, participants referred to source more than any other reason for believing the news. In the open-ended responses indicating why they believed the news, participants made statements like the following: *I think it is credible because it was broadcasting on a reliable news channel. I believe it was CNN*; *The information is from credible sources like CNN and NYT so I believe that*; *CNN is a very trusted news source*;[26] *Websites seem credible, long standing news companies with good reputation that I've learned to trust by fact checking their stories*; *No new updates, but the news I got today seemed credible. Posted on two credible news sites*.

6.3.4.2 Corroboration

One of the other main ways that participants identified that they assess news is through corroboration. Valentina even recalled one of her classes where the prof told them that in order to get the "whole unbiased story" they have to read seven news articles about it from different sources—though she admittedly only felt that she would read three. It appears that there were four different types of corroboration identified by participants: what might be called deep, superficial, crowdsourcing, and unintentional. Deep corroboration is really what traditionally is thought of as corroboration, using multiple news items from different sources to confirm the authenticity of a news story. For example, Stan decided to keep his diary about the election of a new leader for South Africa's Democratic Alliance party. When asked about what sources he heard the story from and where he went to get more information he included the following:

> *Stan: Started on The Economist website; went to Google news to read more about this and searched for Democratic Alliance South Africa; ABC.co.au to read another report on the event; then wikipedia to read about the background of Maimane; then back to Google news and searched Mmusi*

[26] More research would need to be done but I believe that CNN comes up as a common news source because the Discover application through Snapchat launched a few months before this study and CNN was one of the main news sources offering content through this platform.

Maimane; from the Google news, clicked on link that took me to International Business Times site; then another link on Google news took me to Mail & Guardian site; finally went to News24, a South African news site to skim and see if any mention of the story was front page.[27]

While this example is quite a bit more detailed than other entries, it is clear to see the breadth with which Stan was willing to search this news event to learn more — even including Wikipedia articles to provide context about the new party leader.

Superficial corroboration is most often seen when participants accidentally corroborated (like in the next example), or when they only used one or two sources to corroborate limited information. Theresa reported on a story about a man who was shot in a local hospital by police. She encountered the story on Yahoo news and said:

Typically yahoo article[s] aren't the best source of info especially on trivial things (e.g., the best Tim Horton's donut, the best superfoods) - so when I saw it again on my cellphone I though the topic must be pretty important and I was happy that it led to CTV news (I think this is a trusted source).

Theresa understands that the Yahoo articles she read are not good or reliable and she did not seek out more information about the story intentionally but encountered the story again on her cellphone—accidentally corroborating the story.

Unintentional corroboration occurs when a news consumer corroborates through looking at more than one news item because they are interested in a news event. By looking at more than one news item about a news event, they corroborate the news story from multiple sources, which may have unintended effects in terms of the news consumer's belief in a news event. Additionally, it is likely that the news stories that participants identified being relevant or interesting to them concern topics that they already have extensive knowledge about, and thus they are able to engage with the story and evaluate the believability of the story differently than those participants who do not

[27] Direct links to each site have been removed for brevity.

know anything about that news event. For example: Mohammad may have been informed about the Pacquiao and Mayweather fight from the sources he discusses, but because he is a boxing fan he already knows the boxers' rivalry and likely has some knowledge about their careers and the sport of boxing. Another participant, Theresa, discussed the FIFA scandal and indicated that she and her partner regularly follow international football (soccer) teams and as a result, know about FIFA and about the way the World Cups are organized.

In Figure 12 it can be seen that participants were likely to use an average of 3.6 articles on the first day, and that number drops each consecutive day. When participants followed up with the story later in the week, it was unlikely that they looked at more than one source if any to get an update. With breaking news stories, it is more common for the news to be unbelievable or for news organizations to have different information when the story is first breaking, so this is the time when it is most necessary to corroborate the facts of the story.

6.3.4.3 Completeness

Participants in the study kept a week-long diary after they first encountered a news event that they identified as breaking news. They were told not to follow the story unless that would be their normal behaviour. Many participants in the study stopped following the news story (even though they were still accessing and encountering other news) when the story died down in the press (See Table 5). However, when they met with me for the re-interview and I asked them if they still had any questions about the news story, each of them had things they would like to know (See 6.3.5.3).

6.3.4.4 Quality

In the news diaries, participants rarely identified quality as a characteristic that determined whether they came to believe news. It seems unlikely, however, that quality is *not* a factor in deciding whether or not a source is credible or a news item is believable; it is impossible to accept that something with bad spelling, or grammar, poor formatting, unlikely sources or claims, would be believed. Alternatively, quality of the information may be conflated with things like the quality of the source —information from a well-

known or often-used source is also seen as high quality and thus there is no need to mention quality as a factor in believability.

6.3.4.5 Experience/Logic

In the news diaries, participants discussed using their past experiences and knowledge about the news topic to make judgements about the news—just not as a feeling that something was 'off.' Grace was following the story of the Government of Canada websites being hacked and stated:

> *This story does seem credible to me because of the extent that they were able to carry out the hacks (affecting all government websites). It was witnessed by a large amount of people so it would be near impossible to fake something of this scale. The only thing that seemed off to me was the YouTube videos from Anonymous, but I believe that was because it seemed more like something from a movie with the way it sounded, so I was not sure if it was legitimate at first. Overall though I trust the story and information I received.*

Here, Grace explains that the YouTube video seemed 'off' because it did not seem as if it would be real. Other participants stated such things as: the news stories *fit with my current knowledge on the topics and weren't that far fetched from it* (Dalia); and—speaking about the response from the Westboro Baptist Church and a Catholic Cardinal about the legalization of same-sex marriage in Ireland— *It's not surprising that Christians are against the legalization of same-sex marriage* (Julia). And *Two pictures were posted in the article showing the Westboro Baptist Church members protesting with the backwards flag. I wouldn't put it past the WBC to do something like this (*Valentina).

Here it can be seen that participants are using their previous experiences and knowledge with (and about) a news story, as well as their general knowledge about the world to make decisions about whether or not the story is believable. This is a step beyond using characteristics like quality or completeness of the specific news story and involves the critical assessment of whether they think the information they are consuming in the news story fits into the larger picture that they already have about a topic or news event.

6.3.5 Believing the News at First Encounter - Interviews

As in their diaries, in their initial and secondary interviews participants rarely identified any times in which they did not believe the news, but some did indicate that this was not a question they had considered. Especially in the secondary interviews, after filling in the diaries where they were asked about the credibility of the news everyday, some participants explained that they had difficulty answering questions in the diary about believability. One participant said:

> *Morgan: I didn't really know what to write … because I always believe the news. I know there's some newspapers that are like The Onion or something, obviously they're not credible news, but I usually go on CTV news and stuff and I don't think I've ever encountered like a situation ….but I know some people are scrutinizing the media and sometimes they don't give the full story but I don't know. Again I don't think I've really thought about that too much so when that question came up I was like 'I think… I'm pretty sure I believe,' ….I just didn't know how to explain why I believe them.*

Craig said:

> *Well, I mean, if I see it or if I hear about it, I would probably believe it regardless and then it would just be the fact of just getting all the details associated with it [….] but I would just believe all the time and then I would just, if I want to, I would search it more.*

One interviewee, Sarah, was astonished that anyone questions the news. She was confused as to why, in the news diaries, she had been asked about whether or not she trusted her news because "*90% of people trust their news, right?"* When I explained that this was not the case, she was very surprised and said, "*it's just that we need to trust their source* [and if not] *they [news consumers] will question everything*." Of importance here is that Morgan, Craig, and Sarah all made these statements *after* they had completed their news diaries. They had engaged in reporting on specific news stories and realized that they do not critically evaluate the news for believability. It is possible that they determine believability at an unconscious level (in terms of having decided that certain sources are

credible and thus they follow those sources because of past experience of habit), but they have never thought about not believing the news.

Other participants explained that there are some stories that they just 'automatically' believe. Gavin said:

> *if it's, especially something science related or like a new discovery, immediately the first thing I do is I double check. I'll fact check it. And if it's a story like… there was an earthquake in Nepal, I don't really see why someone would want to make up a story like that. So I tend to believe those a little bit more intuitively. There are things like natural disasters, things like that, I usually tend to just believe if they're on a major Google news site.*

One interviewee, Jenna, pointed out that *it's not likely that someone would make up an earthquake happening.* When I asked why that was the case she said:

> *It's just such a, I don't know…I think that would be very weird, psychologically weird to make that up unless they completely heard something wrong. But, I don't know, they're common enough that it's not … I don't know how to explain that better than that, I don't know. It's just a really weird thing to make up.*

Theresa said: *I sort of believe it right away. I'm very gullible*. Both Jenna and Theresa explain that, like Gavin and many of the participants in the focus groups, there are some stories that are just believable, and participants do not engage a great deal of cognitive economy to decide if they should be believed. These interviewees reason that it would be strange to make up a story about a natural disaster, and Jenna indicates that the story is believable because the event is "common enough" that it sounds reasonable.

A similar aspect of believability came up in the interviews, but not the focus groups or diaries. In the interviews, research participants indicated that mainstream news sites are credible because the sites "would get in trouble," if they were to disseminate misinformation. Valentina explained why they believe mainstream news sites by stating: *I think they'd probably get in a lot of trouble if they just made up lies. So I think they probably have to be pretty trustworthy.* Louis explained that *bigger newspapers, bigger*

news sources have more to lose if they're going to report something wrong. These participants echo the thoughts of Jenna that there would be something "weird" going on if the news organizations made up a breaking news story or a tragic news event.

6.3.5.1 Source

In the initial interviews, when the participants were asked about where they get breaking news, they gave a huge range of answers: word of mouth (especially from roommates or parents), reddit, a science blog called "I Fucking Love Science," cellphone apps, the radio (especially local radio station AM 980, and the AM980 Facebook page), PC Mag, IGN, msn.ca, CBC, CP24, CNN, ABC News, YouTube, HBO, ESPN.com, *The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Star, The Huffington Post,* and a variety of different social media sites including: Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Yik Yak, and Weibo—to name a few. They also reported getting news from news organizations via a range of platforms: TV, online, and mobile applications were most frequently mentioned. The most commonly reported source was definitely Facebook—it was discussed in all of the interviews and was reported in the news diaries as the most used news source (followed by news aggregators and online newspapers).

Many participants identified the source as a major factor leading to their belief in a piece of breaking news. Especially when discussing mainstream news media, participants identified the source of the news story as the best signifier of the believability of a news event or breaking news story. Joseph explained: *They're [the mainstream news organizations] the big names. They post a lot of stuff and they're generally regarded as, I guess, I was going to say reputable but [also] credible.* As in the focus groups, some participants in the interviews identified specific reporters because they *seemed reliable* (Kiersten), they are *an authority* (Joseph), and *they have gone out and gotten the story* (Stan). In contrast to focus group participants, the participants in this second phase of the research were better able to list specific trustworthy reporters including Lisa LaFlamme (because the participant's parents think she is a good reporter), and local CTV correspondents (*because they seem honest, it's like 'I know [them],'* and *they are doing the duty of reporting on news that is relevant to the community and I guess they're closer*

to the news and they seem like they try to make more of an effort to understand it) (Trinity).

As seen in the diaries, participants largely encountered the news on Facebook but used it as a gateway to other news items. It appears that these participants use Facebook trending topics as a place to learn about what is going on (learning *of* the news) but that they get informed from other places (learning *about* the news). In fact, there was some contention about using social media sites to learn *about* the news. Jenna explained that Twitter can be used as a news source but only if the Twitter user is re-tweeting a 'legitimate' source: *my automatic thing is to redirect to something more credible. Or if they're re-tweeting a more reliable news source, that's okay*. Another participant expanded on this process in the re-interviews:

> *Morgan: I always go for news organizations just because I think they're more factual compared to like…I don't really understand Twitter, I don't like going on it. And I don't really like reading blogs cause that's more opinionated. So I always go to more news organizations first.*
> *Jessica: Okay. But how do you decide which ones you're going to pick?*
> *Morgan: Oh, whichever one is like the top four* [links listed].

This characterization of blogs and Twitter as being source of opinion rather than fact was quite prevalent in both the initial and secondary interviews. Another participant said:

> *Joseph: you often see people on Facebook or Twitter or stuff posting about it [a news event] as well. So that's another source where I find articles [and/or] the news. Those ones I don't trust as much just because they're often links to bloggers or to indirect sources that are covering the news. But, yeah, those are other sources where I gather news from sometimes. […]*
> *Jessica: Do you ever use blogs or any kind of other sources for your news?*
> *Joseph: I, if I wanted to get an opinion of how people are interpreting the news then yes, of course I would go to blogs and see what people are saying or like YouTube comments for example, or stuff like that. But if I'm just*

wanting to get the facts to be aware of the story that's often where I'll go to a trusted site like CBC or CTV or something like that.

Kiersten echoed Josephs's feelings regarding encountering news via social media, explaining that they have friends who post a lot of different articles so they get to *see alternate views of the same story because people post sort of opinion pieces* but then they will go and find *an objective article on it* so that they can *go back and try and form my own opinion.* It seems here that these participants look for fact from news organizations and balance that with personal and public opinion from blogs and social media comments in order to help them generate their own opinions and make sense of the news event. Gavin said:

If I wanted to get an opinion of how people are interpreting the news then yes of course I would go to blogs and see what people are saying or their comments for example, or stuff like that. But if I'm just wanting to get the facts to be aware of the story that's often where I'll go to a trusted site like CBC or CTV or something like that.

Here it can be seen that participants have a clear understanding of what kind of information they can get from each type of source and are knowledgeable about the credibility of the news they might get from various sources.

6.3.5.2 Corroboration

In virtually every interview, when asked how they would find more information about a news story, or how they would check other sources to confirm a news story they had heard, participants responded that they would "Google it." This statement identifies their path to news but also provides an immediate superficial corroboration—Google will have a list of news sources that have this news story and it will be clear that the news event has occurred by the number of hits. For example, when discussing how she comes to believe a story, Carly stated the following:

[…] the first thing I do is go to Google News and type it in and see how many websites come up with that same story and how many of those websites are reputable. So for example, with the statins one [a story about a new medical

drug] I kind of did that as well. I kind of checked out how many have reported on this? Is it just this one paper and kind of what are the opinions and reporting from other sites. For major things ... Usually that's it. I'll see it on a major news site and I'll kind of read about it. I'll skim Google News, see that it's been reported elsewhere, maybe read one or two of those stories. If it seems legitimate, I'll believe it. And then also, I tend to notice it later on that when I'm just going through the other news sites that I read. So if I see a major story on Reuters and I'll think oh, that's crazy, is it believable? I might quickly go to Google News, type it in. If there's two or three stories that are pretty reputable, I'll give one of them a read. […] So it just kind of reconfirms what happened.

Here, Carly is using corroboration as one of her main strategies for deciding whether or not the news story about statins is believable. She describes using a superficial kind of strategy that relies more on reading a few news items and confirming the popularity of the news story, than it does on engaging with multiple news items and considering the facts.

Sydney takes on a deeper kind of corroboration and explains:
If I were to be actively looking for information I would start with the main broadcast news centres like CBC or CTV to get basic idea around the story. Then to get more facts I'd probably, I would search more key words that would bring up articles that I could follow and see what sources they use. And if I really wanted to go in depth I'd follow those sources to see whether they're credible or not credible.

Here, Sydney is not just corroborating the information in the articles (which she does), but she is also verifying looking for deeper information, and verifying the secondary sources that she is using.

In the initial and follow-up interviews, participants said that they Google keywords from the story and then choose from the news articles listed. Some participants indicated that they take the first few articles and read those (one participant indicated that

these are probably the most popular stories and thus can be most trusted because they have been vetted by the most number of people). A few interviewees explained that they corroborate a news event by taking note of how many people are talking about it. This is not strictly corroboration (which would be finding consistent information or facts across sources or stories) but almost seems to be a way or skipping the time of corroboration by crowdsourcing it. One participant likened this to Twitter retweets. When asked how he chooses what to click on Mohammed explains:

> *Honestly, for the Twitter it's probably how many retweets it gets. If something, if you see a celebrity tweeting or a famous newspaper article, or whatever, and you see like thousands of retweets then you know it's something that's pretty powerful, so then I would proceed to click it. And then also if it's on the internet it would be probably credible…not credible, but well known journal articles. I mean newspaper articles or whatever, like Huffington Post or there are different stories like that.*

Ruinan agreed, stating that she primarily gets her news from Weibo, a Chinese microblogging site. Ruinan described feeling comfortable trusting the information on this site because the site has a large number of users and *if it's wrong news then a lot of people will see it and point that out.* Here, Ruinan is relying on crowdsourced quality control for the news. This is not exactly the same as sources being accountable not to make up news stories, as that is more related to the credibility of the source. Instead, Ruinan is relying on the public to upvote the most important and most accurate news onto Weibo. Similarly, Tara discussed Facebook stating:

> *I think I would also trust that [Facebook], because I think that's like, the trending topics that come up. Not the stuff that comes up in my newsfeed, but the topics that come up on the right hand side, that I do generally trust because ... well, to my assumption, I'm assuming that those are the most talked about topics and if people are talking about it then, you know, it must be true.*

6.3.5.3 Completeness

Much as reported in Chapter Five, interviewees sometimes had a hard time explaining whether they felt they had enough information or the "whole story." In the re-interviews, when I pushed them on whether they felt they had the complete story, they usually had a list of other things they would like to know about the story. For example: when I asked Mohammad in the post interview if they still had questions about the second Nepal earthquake they responded:

> *Maybe how the country is dealing with it still. I haven't really gone into it myself so that's why I haven't for the past three days I haven't heard anything about it. I know there are obviously things that are going on, but, I just haven't heard of it so as in how the efforts are going, what other countries are doing to help and maybe the estimated time costs of covering the area and how much destruction there was. I don't think there was a number as to how much it's going to cost because they haven't even really been able to deal with it because when they were dealing with the first one, this one just hit them.*

What he wants to know is not directly relevant to whether or not she believes the story, or how she chooses news, but she acknowledges that there are other things that she would require to have the "whole story." There is not a clear indication for this participant, or for the other study participants, about what triggers their cessation with a news story.

This example is interesting, and consistent with reports from interviewees about their diary responses. It seems that there is a difference between being satisfied with knowing enough and not seeking out more, and having the "whole story." In one of the interviews, a participant realized that she still had questions about the story but explained that she feels that having "whole story" is a subjective criterion. Julia says:

> *I think I just felt like there's certain parameters that once you hit the ones that are most important to you, you just kind of….usually I feel like the majority of the newspaper, like a journalist, that's kind of what they study. I assume that they find those parameters for that story might be the necessary ones and then they publish those so that you don't have to go anywhere else. Or they*

make you think that you have all the information in any case. In this particular case I think the things that they did talk about was, yeah what I was looking for.

Here, Julia is pointing out that there are subjective criteria that determine whether she has the "whole story," but that journalists study what these criteria are and likely aim to include all of the relevant information in their reports. There is a balance that she seems to try and articulate between what she wants to know about a news event and what the journalist provides in the news item.

When I asked the participants why they stopped following the news story, some participants explained that there was a point in which they felt that there would not be any new information. Louis, who was following the Josh Duggar scandal, explained:

I figured that I had the whole story once the story started to die down, so initially there was this media rush through a bunch of people's opinions and facts and stuff being brought up on the day of, and then the next day there were a few sources still reporting on it, but then definitely two or three days after the event like nothing new had really come out other than people's … other than like bloggers blogging about like say molesters in general, like I was just wondering about the facts concerning Josh Duggar and not just the person's opinion in general about that, or like late night show guests just sort of forming a satire on it, which I know doesn't really have any true facts, so yeah.

Louis felt that the story had reached a conclusion because there was not anything new that could be reported about it; however, as explained earlier in this chapter, there were new things that were reported after he stopped hearing about the story. This does not mean that he was wrong to stop following the story, rather, it points to the fact that he felt it was over possibly because he did not hear anything else, because all of his subjective parameters had been checked off, or because he had lost interest in the story.

Shauna stated that she feels that she has the whole story when there is a conclusion of some kind to the news event. She states:

I usually follow something as long as there's a resolution or some sort of compromise. I know that something's been done or someone did something. I just want to know how the story ends. But usually if it's running down for years and years to come, I usually lose interest maybe like three months into it.

These responses indicate that the idea of completeness is relative to the kind of news story with which news consumers are interacting. A breaking news story may have a resolution quickly (e.g. a natural disaster, a change in law like the Irish Same-sex referendum, or a celebrity death) or may drag on in the news (e.g. a criminal trial, an election, or the Black Lives Matters civil protests). Depending on interest and how long the story stays in the news, participants may be more or less inclined to follow the changing story.

6.3.5.4 Quality

In the initial and secondary interviews, participants mentioned how the quality of information provided changed their opinion about the believability of the news story or source. The examples of quality that were given were very specific and reflect surface characteristics of information quality rather than the actual level of information quality. For example: one participant discussed the formatting of a reddit thread for judging the credibility of the source, suggesting that those that include metadata and professional websites are more believable. Another participant discussed YouTube vloggers and indicated that the way the vlogger presents the information (the vlogger's level of confidence) and the graininess of the image on the screen are characteristics that influence the trustworthiness of the vlogger. It is possible that the participants did not include quality as a factor in their diaries or interviews because, as mentioned in 6.3.4.4, they were conflating quality with source and expected that credible sources would also be high quality.

6.3.5.5 Experience/Logic

In the practice of reading and choosing breaking news stories and news sources, participants often discussed using their own experiences to judge whether the story

sounded feasible, and using their familiarity with sources to justify confidence in the assessments of those sources. When asked about judging the believability of news, Joseph explained:

> *If I saw somebody saying we found Sasquatch or something, I'd be like, all right, that's probably bullshit. But if it's something like… a country is holding a referendum for something, it's probably actually happening.*

Theresa said that some stories are *common enough* that it seemed to be a believable thing that could be reported on. In one interview, I asked Craig what makes a news story trustworthy and he said:

> *I'm not sure. Just I want to say it's believability, but that's kind of super-vague. I don't know, I guess I just base it on my own past experiences and stuff, and decide for myself on a story-by-story basis whether I think it's trustworthy or not.*

When asked about trustworthiness, Craig suggested that the believability of the news story made it trustworthy. This logic might seem circular (something that is trustworthy is more believable and something that is believable is more trustworthy) but I think what Craig meant is that he believes news stories that seem like they might have happened, could happen, or that sound authentic—whatever that might be for him.

Other participants also had a hard time articulating their positions in terms of why they believe a news item or event and did not always identify that they were using their own experiences or their logic to inform their current positions. When asked how she comes to believe news, Tara said:

> *I'm a trusting person, I guess. I don't know*.

Sarah said:

> *By, by feeling, I don't know. By, I just believe it by, I guess, what I know of what people do nowadays kind of. By judging our society and like the things that people will do. So, yeah.*

It seems then, that one of the strategies of determining if something is believable is intuition. Participants described a 'feeling' they had that something was either 'right' or 'wrong' about the news story, event, or source. It is not entirely clear how this strategy works but it seems to involve an expertise (having to rapidly judge if something seems 'off' about the news event or the story). Intuition as a way of judging the believability of a news story was only discussed in the interviews and focus groups, not the media diaries. I suspect the diaries allowed the participants the time to provide post-hoc rationalizations to their 'feelings' rather than the interviews where they felt they had to answer right away.

In the re-interviews, some participants explained that they also use their previous knowledge to analyze the source of the news, not just the news event or story. For example, Grace said:

> *Now that I've been reading the news for so long, there's some knowledge I have about which sources are a little bit more reliable, but I do try to always click on like at least three or four and see if they're writing different things or the same things.*

It can be seen that habitual news consumption can lead participants to develop a history with, and trust in certain news sources; sources that they come to believe they can rely on because of these previous experiences getting reliable news.

6.3.6 Differences Between Reports in Diaries and Interviews

For the most part, the diaries and the interviews report the same information. The participants in the study were able to contextualize their diaries consistently in the interviews and mainly repeated the same information, providing a bit more detail or a clear thread between their diary notes—however, there two notable areas of discrepancy.

First, some participants, when asked why they thought the story was credible, provided different reasons in their interviews than in their diaries. For example: in her secondary interview, Theresa reported on the FIFA corruption scandal and explained:

The article itself was pretty vague. They sort of outlined the charges that they were – the alleged charges that they were facing. And one of the other sites that I went to that Justice.gov, that's an actual like federal government website that outlined the charges that they were facing as well. So I thought it was pretty legitimate just given that the news article from the New York Times cited what was found on a government website.

Teresa reports that the *New York Times* article is more legitimate because it cites the government's findings. What is interesting about Teresa's report is that what she reported in the follow-up interview is in addition to different factors that she reported in her media diary. In her diary, she reports:

I think it's true. It's one of those things that has probably been going on for years but everyone turns the other cheek and refuses to address it. Hopefully corruption in FIFA will be better addressed now.

And:

I think CBC [the source from which she was reading about the story] *is pretty credible and it seems like a plausible story.*

In her diary, Theresa states that source and her own logic (*it seems credible*) are the reasons that she believed the story—NOT the evidence provided by the *New York Times*. There is an inconsistency in what Theresa said she did, and what she reported. It isn't clear if this is an accident (e.g. that she took these steps in her initial decision making process and did not report them), or if she provided these factors as post-hoc rationalizations. Theresa was not the only participant to report one thing in her media diary but explain a different process in her interviews. Many participants wrote that the source was credible in their diaries but explained other factors in their interviews.

Morgan discussed a local worker's strike for her diary and in the diary explained that the reasons she believed the story were:

Day 1: Strikes are legit

Day 2: They interviewed city workers - very un-bias view - discussed it from both standpoints

Day 3: The video shows what is going on.

Day 4: My friend likes listening and reading the news. He's pretty straight with the details.

In her diary, Morgan identifies a different reason for believing the news event each day: logic, evidence (interviews and then a video), and source (her friend is reliable). However, in her interview she explains:

> *I usually believe in those websites. I did look at London Free Press, though, just in case, because the radio, the AM 980 […] I do think that they're very authentic, I do follow a lot of their news and they seem to grab their sources from like London Free Press or something and they link it, but for some reason I think that they're just a lot quicker; it's kind of like a Twitter update.*

In her interview she explained that the reason she believed the story was the source of the news items, corroboration with the local newspaper, and their speed of reporting—not any of the reasons she listed in her diary. It is not clear why there are these discrepancies between what the participants say they do in the diaries and the reasoning they give in the interviews for believing the same story—especially as they have the opportunity to review their diary entries at the beginning of the secondary interview.

A second area of discrepancy between the interviews and diaries is that the participants in the initial and secondary interviews discussed using blogs and social media/YouTube comments to get informed about other opinions but very few participants in the media diaries reported using these sources. In fact, only a handful of instances were recorded where participants used news from outside of mainstream sources. These instances were only the use of social media to encounter news stories, blogs for entertainment, or the use of reddit that was also used to encounter news, not just as a source to find out more about a breaking news event. This is completely counter to the reports from the interviews where participants seemed keen to learn other opinions. It is possible that the participants were unwilling to expend the time and energy to search additional sources for these stories (especially at the end of a semester when this research was done), but it maybe be that they use blogs more for entertainment

(ifuckinglovescience.com was one that came up several times in the interviews and was reported in the diaries) and do not see the information received from those as 'breaking news' in the same way as mainstream news sources. Though there was a question in the diaries that asked about their general news consumption each day that they completed the diaries, it did not promote participants to disclose these kinds of sources. More research should be done to determine if these young people actually use these sources, or if they just know that they could use them to get an idea of other opinions.

6.4 Discussion

6.4.1 Encountering and Following Breaking News

Participants in this study identified encountering the news primarily from Facebook and using it as a kind of gateway into a news story. If the participants were interested, or found the news event of some kind of importance, they were likely to seek out more information via a mainstream news site found from a Google search. This path into news seems like a decent strategy to use when dealing with a contemporary, overwhelming news-scape like the current one. However, it is not clear from this study how many of these participants are aware of the real sources of their news when using Facebook and Google as filters. For example: at least one participant during this part of the study identified that the Facebook trending topics were popularity based. However, in May of 2016, *The Guardian* uncovered that human editors, not a computer algorithm, chose the trending topics of Facebook (which by definition suggest that they are the most popular and "trending" topics on the site) (Thielman). In the article, Thielman notes that the Facebook editorial guidelines obtained by *The Guardian* are "very similar to a traditional news organization's with a style guide reminiscent of the Associated Press guide […]" (2016). So, rather than the trending topics identifying the most popular news story being discussed and shared on the site, the stories and events have been chosen by at least twelve unknown Facebook employees acting as gatekeepers. In a similar way, not one participant in this study identified that Google does not publish its search algorithm and there is no way of knowing why certain news stories, or new sources would be more likely to be listed on the first page (identified by participants of this study as the search results they are more likely to use). More research would need to be done to discover how

much participants know about how search engine and aggregator algorithms work and whether or not their knowledge of these intervening filters might make them reconsider their trust in these sources of news.

For the breaking news stories, participants exhausted their interest in the story after a few days and rarely searched for more information when it no longer came up in their newsfeeds, or on their regularly checked news sources. It seems that for these participants when a story is out of sight, it is also out of mind. When they did encounter the story after it initially broke, they used fewer sources to read about it. More research will need to be undertaken to determine how much they interact with a story after it is broken but this does seem to be a rational strategy to save energy. After learning about the initial story from multiple sources, they only need to get the newest details that would be provided in the headlines days later.

6.4.2 Believing the News at First Encounter

As evident from their comments in their interviews and their entries in their diaries, participants often used more than one strategy to determine whether they believe a news source or story. Participants reported using a variety of different strategies to decide if they believed the news, and often reported layering strategies: Is the source reliable? Does this sound like something that could be true? Do others also report the same thing? In the interviews, participants often discussed far more factors that they used to make the decision about whether they believed the news story or source, and it is not clear if they actually used these factors, especially as they primarily reported using source, logic, and corroboration to decide if they believed the news story they reported on in their media diaries. By using source, logic, and corroboration in their assessment of the news they are typically deciding that they trust the source of the news (mainly these participants explained that they found the source credible), that the news story ‘sounds’ true, and that other sources say the same thing (or something similar) so it must be true. The differences between the news consumers’ evaluations provided in the diaries and post-hoc interviews are important but it is not clear from this study why the evaluations are so different. In my view, there are a couple of options as to why this might be the case:

1. In their post-hoc rationalizations, the participants were in the same situation as those in the focus groups of Chapter Five—in an educational environment (a university campus), put on the spot to defend why they believed this particular news story. In this location they felt that they had to give the "right answer" and this meant that in the post-hoc rationalization they were far more critical of their positions.
2. Participants completed a complicated process of evaluation but primarily reported source, logic, and corroboration in their haste to complete their diaries. Though it is possible that here was some shortening of reports in their rush to complete their diaries, it seems highly unlikely that the participants would primarily choose to report the same things as making the stories believable. Though most participants discussed source, logic and corroboration as ways that they were able to judge believability, it seems that these factors are layered in different ways by participants. For example, one participant explained that he first judges whether or not the story seems like it could be true, then attempts to corroborate it by seeing what comes up in a Google search, and then he looks at the reputation of the sources that are reporting it—but he only does this if he is interested in the story. Other participants used a different series of factors when evaluating their story. One participant explained that she found the story on reddit but linked to a 'credible' news source, the story had been up-voted six thousand times so she believed it was important and popular. She was well informed about the context of the news story and used her own experiences to make a judgement about its reliability, and finally assessed the quality of the story. Not all of the factors seem to be used by each participant and they appear to layer them according to the type of news, their level of interaction with it, and their level of interest in the story.
3. Participants have a very low threshold for what they believe and if it seems true and is from a reasonably trustworthy source, they believe it. Otherwise, if they have time, motivation, or interest, they seek out more information. It is only if the story seems to be interesting or important that they appear to read the story at all, and then to decide if they will expend the energy to dig any deeper in learning more about it, or following it—especially if they are at a stressful point in the

semester and do not have a lot of extra time. Though this is one of these strategies that critics of millennials suggest is lazy, it could actually be a rational strategy for dealing with the Information age—an influx of sources, constant information, and ongoing news updates—and maintaining a cognitive economy.

4. Participants pick and choose the strategies to determine the believability of news when they need them. If the study participants heard about a breaking news story they usually did not go much further in their question of belief unless they felt that the story was from a questionable source, interesting/important, or unbelievable (either did not fit into their previous knowledge, or sounded unbelievable). When they heard about a story they did seem to do a cursory judgement of the story to see if it seemed like it could be believable, and then if they had the time, interest, or energy, they sought out more information about each element: possibly researching a source they have not heard of to verify if it is legitimate, searching Google to see how many other sources are talking about the news event, etc.

   So, if the news item they encounter seems like it sounds unbelievable, they will use one set of strategies to determine if the story is true. If the news item is about something in which the participants are not interested, they will use another set of strategies that are more superficial (i.e. only getting the news from their most relied upon source). If the news item is important and interesting, they might use an entirely different layering of strategies to decide if they believe the news story.

5. When the participants completed their media diaries they had unconsciously performed a heuristic evaluation and primarily documented logic and source in their haste to complete the media diary. It is also possible that when they say that the story "feels" or "sounds" believable what they are actually doing is performing that heuristic evaluation without consciously identifying this performance. So when they say that the story "sounds" believable, they make that judgement because they realize that the story falls into what they expect of a similar kind of story, and that it has a level of quality, and completeness from a source that makes the story more likely than not: true.

There is a lot of overlap in the options listed above and likely it is a mix of a few of these based on the situation, motivation, time, use of logic, and level of interest. Participants in this study were able to be quite critical of the news when they thought that they should be, or needed to be, but had moments where they also just took news events and items at face value; and this strategy makes sense. We cannot be critical of all of our news all of the time—we would be exhausted! Rather, these participants seem to identify preserving a cognitive economy for the news that matters to them (whether it is something that they find interesting, relevant, or important). It may not be clear what the steps are for each of these participants in making decisions about whether or not they believe the news, but it is clear that the millennial population uses a variety of different strategies, often layering sophisticated and complex strategies to determine if the news they are consuming is believable.

6.5 Limitations/Future Research

The results of this study cannot be generalized, given the mainly qualitative approach that was used, and also given the limits of the sample (only twenty-five participants from a small southwestern Ontario city). Though participants were told not to alter their behaviours in consuming news while keeping their news diaries, there is a possibility that they paid more attention to the news and news story they were writing about because they were primed to pay attention to it. The study was also limited by the events that occurred during the time that the study was run. All of the participants found a breaking news event to discuss, but the results might have been different if the study had taken place when there had been an election happening, for example, or if there had been a tragic national news event. Future research should look at a specific breaking news event and have all participants keep a diary about one major news event. Thought the media diaries still do not provide direct observation of the participant's behaviour, the diary method was an interesting way to have the participants discuss their news practices and habits, and future research should consider using this method for probing millennials' media habits.

6.6 Conclusion

It seems that the new ways that millennials are accessing and encountering news should implicate changes in the ways that they come to believe news and the strategies that they use to judge that news for truthfulness and credibility. The general public has a very negative view about millennials and the perception of them as lazy, and disinterested in the news and in being informed. However, this study indicates that this may not be the case. Millennial participants in these studies use a variety of strategies to evaluate the news and make decisions about their news consumption and how they decide if the news should be believed. This study indicates these young Canadians use source, interest, corroboration, completeness, quality and past experience and personal logic to choose and judge breaking news stories. For the most part these participants tend to believe the stories unless there is something "off" about the story they hear: for example, it sounds unbelievable, the quality is poor, or they can not find information about it from multiple sources. This does not seem to be the worst practice that they could engage in—though it might limit their level of critical thinking about some news stories—because it saves cognitive energy. These participants layered information quality judgements to generate their beliefs in certain news stories or events. These participants decide based on their time, energy, interest level, and motivation about whether or not to read news stories and whether or not to seek out more information, or to only undertake a superficial or peripheral judgement of the news. Though more research needs to be done about the evolving millennial generation and how they go about getting news and using news, it would appear from this study that they deserve significantly more credit as news consumers than they have been given.

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Chapter 7

7 Conclusion

The way that news consumers get news has changed: from newspapers and television broadcasts to aggregators and apps, technology has revolutionized the way that news consumers get news. Moreover, the role of the contemporary news consumer, the role of the journalist, and the mode and modality of the news item have all undergone revolutions in the last two decades. These transitions are important because they impose increased responsibility on the news consumer to choose what news to consume and to evalute the news for accuracy, quality, credibility, trustworthiness, and believability—and they have also increased the choices a consumer has in where, how, and when they get the news. Though news consumers have been evaluating news forever, in the past there were more filters that assessed and validated news before it reached the news consumer. This thesis has explored how contemporary news consumers make decisions about what news to read and what news to believe, using a combination of interviews, focus groups, and media diaries. The goal of this exploratory research is to describe the strategies that news consumers use to select and evaluate the news, and to provide a context of current strategies being used by some Canadian millennials to make decisions about their news.

7.1 Discussion

The second chapter of this dissertation outlined the changes in the role of news consumers, journalists, and the news artifact and reviewed what the scholarship and literature says about news and changes to the news. Chapters Five and Six show these changes in the everyday choices and decisions focus group, diary, and interview participants made. These chapters explored the question of how young people come to decide what news to consume and how they make decisions about whether or not they believe that news. The participants in this study have discussed and reported the ways that they encounter news, and choose news to consume, and both parts of the study show that interest in and importance of the news are necessary elements in the decisions that participants make about the news. The result is unsuprising given that news which is interesting to a news consumer is news they would want to engage with—this is also

consistent with Kovach and Rosenstiel's "lean forward" experience where news that consuemrs are most interested in, is most sought after (2010).

Also consistent with other literature are the results that demonstrate the varied paths that young news consumers take to get the news (Media Insight Project, 2015). Participants in this study showed that they often encounter news via Facebook and follow up by finding more information from mainstream media sources identified via a Google search. This path works well for millennials, as it allows them the opportunity for deep, superficial, or crowdsourced corroboration based on the opportunity (time), motivation, and level of interest that they have in the news. These paths can seem less intentional than previous modes of news consumption and, along with the perception of the millennial generation as slothful and entitled, can make news consumption habits of these young people seem accidental and haphazard—especially when those young people demonstrate little knowledge about their understanding of news sources and journalists. However, the strategy of encountering news on Facebook and following up on the news event via a search engine, may be rational given the amount of information and the number of news sources, platforms, and choices that young people can access in the contemporary news-scape. The main concern, however, is that it is not clear if the authority that young people give to companies like Facebook and Google to be their main sources of news is appropriate and warranted.

It is clear that the participants in this study recognize that reading the news is an important part of being an informed citizen and participating in a democracy, but in the 'information age' they depend on sites and aggregators like Facebook, Snapchat, and Google, as well as their friends and family to funnel important or interesting news to them rather than spending time and mental energy sifting through thousands of news sites, blog posts, YouTube videos, tweets, Snapchats, radio broadcasts, and television news bulletins to find the most relevant news. Therefore, rather than their paths to news being haphazard, or their strategies being lazy, the millennials that participated in this study show a sophisticated approach to—and interest in—becoming informed citizens.

Indeed, the participants in this research show refined skills that allow them to critically assess news for credibility and believability. Chapter Three of this dissertation outlined the ways that credibility has been studied in other research and identfied the ways that media literacy is currently taught to students. As demonstrated (especially) in the focus groups and interviews, as well as the media diaries, the millennials that participated in this study were adept at analyzing sources, and news information. They were able to identify sources that they trust and give lengthy explanations about why they are trustworthy. These participants showed skills in corroborating information, judging the quality of news items, and evaluating the completeness of a news story. Impressively, the participants in this study were also able to use their own logic and experiences with the news to make judgements about the likelihood of a news event occuring and/or the authenticity of a news item. In many cases the participants layered these strategies to justify the decision they made about whether or not they believe the news. These strategies are often multi-faceted, showing a sophisticated knowledge of news sources, technology, and the operation of the contemporary news landscape. With the proliferation of misinformation online (as indicated by the recent 2016 US election), educational insitutions need to be even more diligenet in their media literacy instruction.

The participants in this study are also aware that they can not be informed about everything, all the time. They are careful to spend their energy and time on researching, reading, and watching news that they they are interested in, or find important. Again, this finding should be unsurprising. Psychological research, in particular, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and the dual processing models (like Metzger's model in Figure 1), show that (motivation) interest and importance are central to how information is processed, and the level of work that news consumers will put into processing.

7.2 Limitations and Future Research

As with all research, there are limitations to this study. It is important to note that there are differences, as described by Tewskbury (2003) and witnessed in the focus groups and diaries, between what news consumers report doing and what they actually do. For example: though participants in the focus groups and interviews reported using or following sources like livestreams and blogs, they rarely showed this in their media

diaries. Also, the diaries allowed the participants to report in real time but this did not provide direct observation. The diary method is closer to direct observation than the focus groups or interviews but it still does not allow for complete in situ reports. Additionally, though the participants were able to explain why some sources were more reliable and credible than others, it is possible that they do not make those kinds of judgments in their everyday life. Future reseach should look more closely at the differences between self-reported and witnessed news consumption by young people and consider using mixed methods to test if what they are reporting is really what they are doing. Future research should also test a greater sample size in order to see if there are patterns in who does not believe a story at first encounter, and the steps they take if they do not believe it.

7.3 Implications

Young news consumers come to believe the news via a complex system of strategies that depend on time, energy, type of news, level of interest, level of importance, and a series of information quality evaluations that include: source, completeness, quality, corroboration with multiple sources, and their previous experiences. In a news-scape that is increasingly fragmented by platform, source, aggregators, and social media, this finding is important because it is a starting point in thinking about how news sources and items that young people can (and will) engage with can be developed. This study also considers the education of contemporary youth about media literacy techniques that can help them choose the best news, develop heuristic techniques to evaluate and judge the news, and to make decisions about what news to believe.

These findings are important for the media industry generally given that mainstream news organiaztions continue to struggle in attracting the attention of young news consumers that are turning more to social media and online sites and apps to get their news (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel & Shearer, 2016). In turning to social media—in particular, Facebook—Google, and online news aggregators, these young people are showing a lack of loyalty to specific news sources that must now rely on algorithms and upvotes to be selected for consumption. These findings are also important for Canadian media. The Media Technology Monitor indicates that the most common source of news online for the Canadians surveyed in 2016 is broadcaster websites—the CBC and CTV in

respective first and second spots (Rody-Mantha, 2016). Yet, over fifty percent of respondents indicated that they also access aggreagtors like The Huffington Post and GoogleNews. Canadian broadcasters need to be aware of where and how Canadian millennials are seeking out and encountering news so that they can be sure to position nationally important news in locations and spaces that might reach news consumers.

This study also highlights the importance of private companies like Facebook and Google—two sources of news that participants in this study often discussed as their main sources. Unlike journalists, who have a professional code to inform citizens' everyday decisions, companies like Facebook and Google are run as commercial ventures. Neither their business models nor their filter systems are entirely clear and it cannot be confirmed that news consumers (especially young news consumers that may include these two sites in developing adult news habits) know this—or that they care. With this study showing how important these kinds of sources are to young Canadian news consumers, implications of private businesses and computer algorithims acting as gatekeepers must be considered.

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Appendix 1: Ethics Approval for Stage 1 (Focus Groups)

Western Research

Research Ethics

Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Jacquelyn Burkell
Department & Institution: Information and Media Studies\Faculty of Information & Media Studies,Western University

NMREB File Number: 106137
Study Title: Believing the News - Focus Groups
Sponsor:

NMREB Initial Approval Date: March 12, 2015
NMREB Expiry Date: March 12, 2016

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Instruments	Preliminary Focus Group questions	2014/12/01
Recruitment Items	Recruitment Poster	2014/12/01
Instruments	Updated instrument -screener survey	2015/01/25
Revised Western University Protocol	Clean PDF of revised protocol.	2015/01/25

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

___ Erika Basile ebasile@uwo.ca	✓ Grace Kelly grace.kelly@uwo.ca	___Mina Mekhail mmekhail@uwo.ca	___Vikki Tran vikki.tran@uwo.ca

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Appendix 2: Ethics Approval for Stage 2 (Interviews and Diaries)

Western Research

Research Ethics

Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Jacquelyn Burkell
Department & Institution: Information and Media Studies\Faculty of Information & Media Studies,Western University

NMREB File Number: 106153
Study Title: Believing the News-interviews and diaries
Sponsor:

NMREB Initial Approval Date: February 20, 2015
NMREB Expiry Date: February 20, 2016

Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Revised Western University Protocol	pdf version of Western Protocol	2015/01/13
Instruments	interview questions	2015/01/14
Recruitment Items	Recruitment poster	2015/01/14
Letter of Information & Consent	LOI and consent	2015/01/14
Instruments	Revised screener survey	2015/01/13
Instruments	Re-interview questions.	2015/01/13

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

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Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

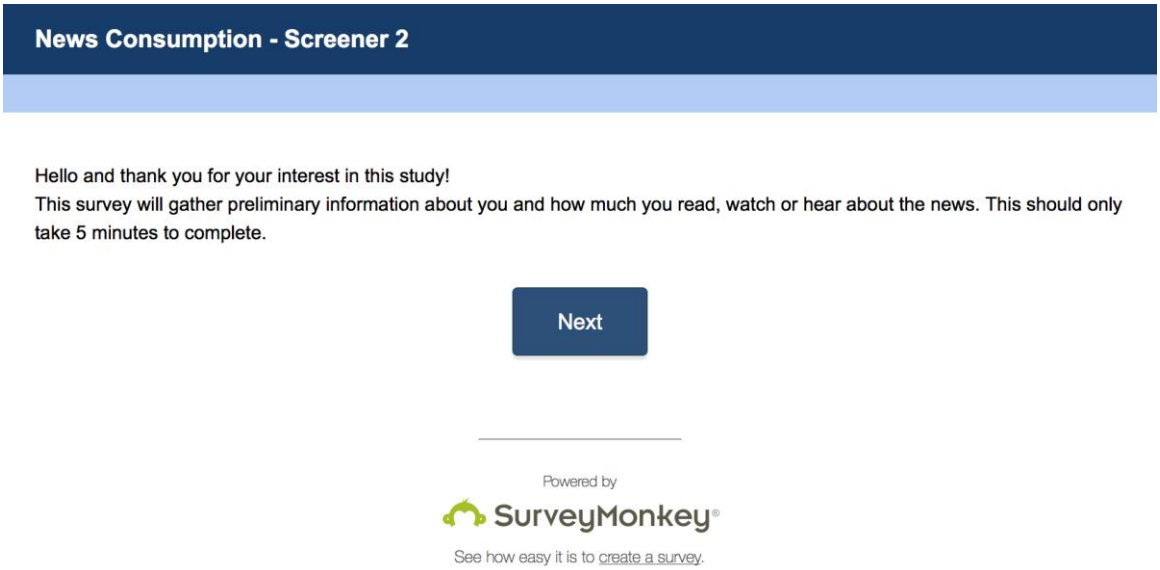
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Appendix 3: Screening survey



News Consumption - Screener 2

1. Code (You were given this in the email I sent you)

2. Age

- ○ Under 18
- ○ 18-24
- ○ 25-29
- ○ 30+

3. What level of education have you completed?

- ○ high school
- ○ some college
- ○ college
- ○ some university
- ○ university
- ○ some graduate school
- ○ graduate school

Other (please specify)

Prev Next

News Consumption - Screener 2

4. How frequently do you get news from the following sources?

	Never	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Once a day	Multiple times a day
In person from a friend or acquaintance	○	○	○	○	○	○
Newspaper	○	○	○	○	○	○
Magazine	○	○	○	○	○	○
Radio news	○	○	○	○	○	○
TV news	○	○	○	○	○	○
Online news organization	○	○	○	○	○	○
Blog	○	○	○	○	○	○
Online news aggregator (e.g. google news or yahoo news)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Social Media (e.g. Facebook or Twitter)	○	○	○	○	○	○
From an app on my cellphone	○	○	○	○	○	○
From the browser on my cellphone	○	○	○	○	○	○
News from a personalized news source (e.g. personalized homepages)	○	○	○	○	○	○
News from an email list (e.g. need2know or theSkimm)	○	○	○	○	○	○

5. How often do you do the following?:

	Never	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Once a day	Multiple times a day
Talk about the news to friends/family	○	○	○	○	○	○
Talk about the news to strangers	○	○	○	○	○	○
Share news stories from news organizations via social media	○	○	○	○	○	○
Share news stories from news organizations via email	○	○	○	○	○	○
Share my opinion about news stories online	○	○	○	○	○	○
Make a comment on an online news story	○	○	○	○	○	○
Blog about a news event or story	○	○	○	○	○	○
Write a letter to the editor	○	○	○	○	○	○
Call into a news radio show	○	○	○	○	○	○

6. Which of the following types of news do you follow? (choose all that apply)

- ☐ Art and culture
- ☐ Breaking news
- ☐ Business and the economy
- ☐ Crime and public safety
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Entertainment and celebrities
- ☐ Environment and natural disasters
- ☐ Foreign and international issues
- ☐ Health
- ☐ Lifestyle
- ☐ Local town or city news
- ☐ National politics
- ☐ Science and Technology
- ☐ Sports
- ☐ Traffic and Weather

Other (please specify)

7. Generally, how interested would you say you are in the news?

NOT very interested		Somewhere in between		VERY interested
○	○	○	○	○

Prev Next

Powered by SurveyMonkey
See how easy it is to create a survey.

News Consumption - Screener 2

Thank you for completing this screening survey. I will be in touch soon about how you can further participate in this project. If you have any questions in the meantime, you can contact me at jthom54@uwo.ca.

Prev Done

Powered by SurveyMonkey
See how easy it is to create a survey.

Appendix 4: Focus Group questions

1. Can you tell me about the last news story you remember hearing, reading, or watching?
2. What did you think about the story?
3. Where did you hear about this story?
4. Did you hear about it from more than one place?
5. Did you believe the story?
6. Why or why not?
7. Do you feel like you got the whole story?
8. Have you ever heard about a news story but not believed it or wanted more information?
9. What did you do?
10. I want to read a couple of news stories that are in the news right now.
11. Read first story (provided):
    a. Have you heard about this story?
    b. What do you think about it?
    c. Is there enough for you to create an opinion?
    d. Do you believe the story? Why or why not?
12. Read second story (provided):
    a. Have you heard about this story?
    b. What do you think about it?
    c. Is there enough for you to create an opinion?
    d. Do you believe the story? Why or why not?
13. Anything else to add?

Appendix 5: News stories used in the focus groups

High-tech surveillance tech nets $75M federal investment

By: Peter Nowak

Posted: March 23, 2015

The federal government will help bolster the development of next-generation surveillance technology with a $75 million investment in Burlington, Ont.-based L-3 Wescam.

The repayable contribution was announced by Industry Minister James Moore, who noted that the company's sensor technology was used during the police manhunt for Justin Bourque, who was convicted of fatally shooting three RCMP officers and wounding two others last year.

"It was one year ago, where a coward, a gunman with a shotgun and rifle, went through the streets and cowardly killed three members of the Moncton RCMP, leaving families and communities and friends of those who were killed in mourning," Moore told the crowd.

"It was Transport Canada, and a Transport Canada aircraft that was equipped with an L-3 Wescam sensor, that helped to capture the gunman, who was hiding in a dense forest."

He added that Wescam technology had also been employed by the Canadian military in Afghanistan, and is currently "protecting Canadians in Iraq."

"Simply put, Wescam technology is helping to keep Canadians safe both at home and abroad," he said.

The "meaningful investment" will support research and development of "new high-tech air, land and sea surveillance cameras and sensors that are essential to Canada's defence, security, and search and rescue operations," according to the accompanying news release.

It will also "lead to the creation of new high-paying, high-tech jobs across southern Ontario's defence manufacturing supply chain" and "maintain 200 existing positions in Burlington and Don Mills."

The company will devote $2 million to collaboration efforts with Canadian universities and colleges "to help train Canada's future security and defence technology workforce."

Last month, L-3 Wescam signed a two-year, $6 million contract for design and repair services in support of the U.S. Navy’s maritime patrol and surveillance efforts.

The deal garnered official congratulations from International Trade Minister Ed Fast, who noted in a press release that the sale was "facilitated" by the Canadian Commercial Corporation," a government-run international contracting organization, under a Canada-U.S. defence production sharing agreement.

Ontario teen Isis King faces bullying, Facebook ban over her name

By: Jennifer Ng

Posted: March 23, 2015

A high-school student from Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., is fed up with harassment she's received about her birth name, which hit a new low when she got barred from using it on Facebook.

Her name is Isis King and she's been taking undeserved flak because of the similarities her first name has to the extremist group Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

King said some people have told her they find her name offensive, that it's horrible or that she shouldn't have it at all.

Some of this has come from people at her high school, but she's also been served with a heavy dose of online abuse.

"They'll call me a terrorist, or a freak, and say I don't belong and stuff like that," King told CBC News in an interview this weekend.

King said her mother named her after the Egyptian goddess.

"I really like it because it's different than everybody else's," she said.

And while King is proud of her name, she's growing tired of the hassles she's been putting up with, which have coincided with the growth of the militant group.

The latest issue came when Facebook forced her to change the name on her account, she says.

"Basically, I was just scrolling through photos and it directed me to this page, where it said my name and told me I have to change it because it was deemed inappropriate and fake," King said.

King said she tried to enter her name as usual, but it wouldn’t allow her to do so.

As a result, she had to put a fake name down in order to be granted access to her account.

"They never sent me a message, they literally made me or I couldn't get back on my account," said King, who had been trying to make contact with Facebook about the issue.

In response to a CBC News inquiry, King is able to use her name once again on Facebook.

Germanwings Flight 4U9525: Co-pilot put plane into descent, prosecutor says

By: John Gervais

Posted: March 26, 2015

The co-pilot of the German airliner that crashed in the southern French Alps apparently locked the chief pilot out of the cockpit and caused the plane to crash, as passengers could be heard screaming, a French prosecutor said Thursday.

The co-pilot of Germanwings Flight 4U92592, identified as a 28-year-old German national named Audreas Lubitz, appeared to want to "destroy the plane," Marseille prosecutor Brice Robin said. The co-pilot was breathing and alive until the plane hit the ground, Robin said.

The Airbus A320, on a flight from Barcelona to Dusseldorf, began to descend from its cruising altitude and slammed into a remote mountainside in the French Alps on Tuesday killing all 150 people on board.
Lufthansa chief executive Carsten Spohr said he has been left "speechless" by the revelations about the plane's co-pilot.

"No system in the worlds can rule our such an isolated event," he said.

Lubitz has been alone in the cockpit after the chief pilot left to use the washroom. Robin said audio recovered from the cockpit voice recorder indicated that the co-pilot didn't say a word while he was alone in control of the plane.

"It was absolute silence in the cockpit," he said.

The chief pilot tried to get back into the cockpit but was unable to regain access.

The A320 is designed with safeguards to allow emergency entry into the cockpit if a pilot inside is unresponsive. The override code known to the crew does not go into effect, however —and indeed goes into a lockdown—if the person inside the cockpit specifically denies entry.

Robin said Lutz apparently pushed a button that put the plane into descent. The jet dropped thousands of meters before it hit the ground.

In the final minutes of the flight, terrain warning alarms sounded and pounding could be heard on the cockpit door, Robin said.
The plane did not respond to communication from air traffic controllers and did not issue a distress call before it crashed, he added.

Just before the crash, screams could be heard on the audio recording, the prosecutor told reporters.

Since the Sept. 11 attacks, it has been standard operating procedure for airlines in the United States to require a flight attendant to be present in the cockpit when one of the pilots briefly leaves. Spohr said airlines in Europe do not have that requirement.

Lubitz had never been flagged as a terrorist, Robin said. He declined to provide details on Lubitz's religion or ethnic background, adding that German authorities are taking charge of the investigation into the co-pilot.

German Interior Minster Thomas de Maiziere said authorities checked intelligence and police databases on the day of the crash, and Lufthansa told them that regular security checks also turned up nothing untoward on the co-pilot.

Speaking at a news conference in Cologne, Spohr said the airline had no indication of why the co-pilot would have crashed the plane.

"We choose our staff very, very carefully," Spohr said.

The airline's pilots undergo yearly medical examination but that doesn't include psychological tests, he told reporters.

In the German town of Montabaur, acquaintances said Lubitz showed no signs of depression when they saw him last fall as he renewed his glider pilot's licence.

“He was happy he had the job with Germanwings, and he was doing well,” said a member of the glider club, Peter Ruecker, who watched him learn to fly. “He gave off a good feeling.”

Lubitz had obtained his glider pilot’s licence as a teenager and was accepted as a Lufthansa trainee after finishing a tough German college preparatory school, Ruecker said. He described Lubitz as a “rather quiet” but friendly young man.

Woman who injected silicone into customer's buttocks sentenced to 8 years in prison

By: Jane Crawford

Posted: March 26, 2015

A woman who injected industrial silicone into the buttocks of customers as an illegal cosmetic procedure has been sentenced to eight years in prison.

With credit for time already spent in custody, the sentence means Marilyn Reid has five years and three months left to serve.

Superior Court Justice Jane Kelly says Reid "wounded, maimed, disfigured and endangered" the lives of her victims.

She says Reid was neither authorized to perform cosmetic surgery, nor was she authorized to give injections, but she did both.

Reid, who is from Newmarket, Ont., held her head in her hands and looked down at the floor as she sat in the prisoner's box while Kelly discussed the details of her case.

The 50-year-old pleaded guilty to eight counts of aggravated assault in January.

Court heard that Reid used syringes attached to a caulking gun to inject silicone into women's buttocks in hotel rooms or their homes between April 2011 and May 2012.

All but one victim suffered serious health consequences — four almost fatal. Some had to undergo repeated medical procedures and long periods in hospital.

Crown prosecutors had argued that Reid preyed on the vulnerable for profit and asked for a sentence of 10 to 12 years.

Reid's defence lawyer asked for a sentence of about two and a half years — roughly equal to the time Reid has already spent in custody.

At a sentencing hearing, Reid apologized to the court, saying she didn't realize the consequences of what she was doing.

She said she "never meant to harm anyone."

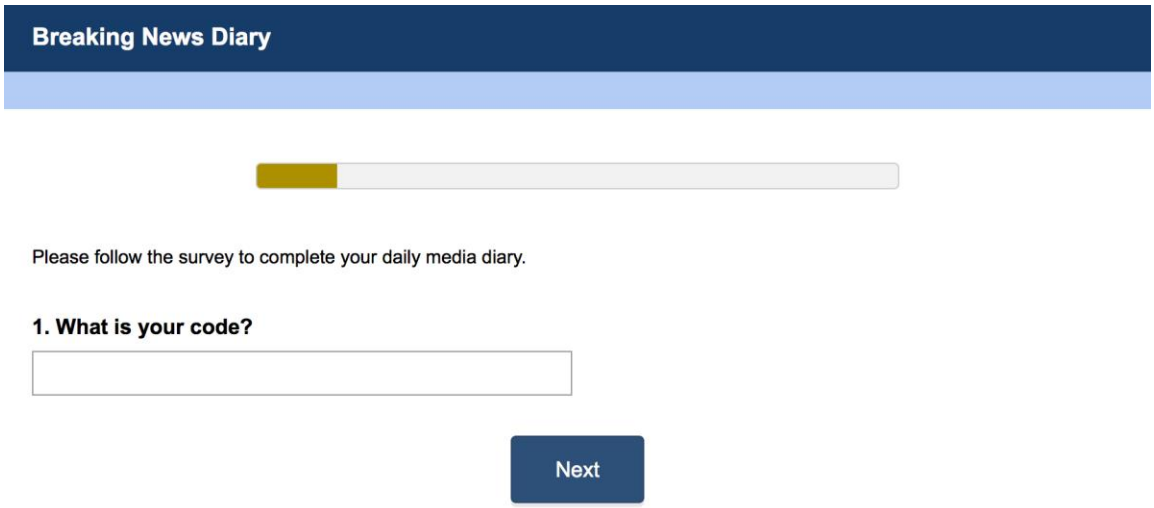
Appendix 6: Preliminary Interview Questions

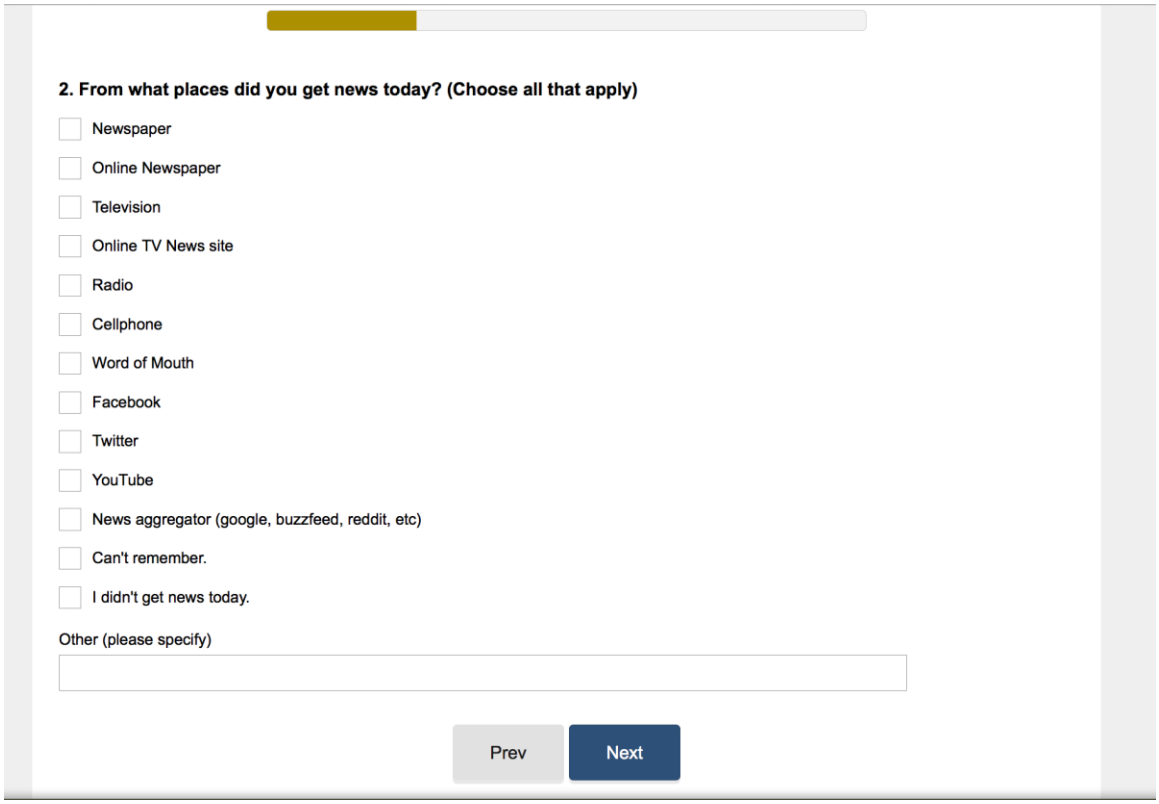
1. Can you tell me about the last breaking news event that you heard about?
2. Where did you hear about it? What did you do next? Did you search for more information?
3. What questions do you have left about it?
4. Can you tell me about some other recent breaking news events?
5. Where did you hear about them?
6. In general, what do you do when you hear about a breaking news event? Ask questions? Seek more information?
7. What about it made it breaking news? What's important about the event?
8. What is the difference between news and BREAKING news?
9. Have you ever followed a breaking news event? (provide context and examples)
    a. Like what? Why that story? How did you follow it? For how long?

Appendix 7: Re-Interview Questions

1. Talk to me about the event you selected. Can you walk me through the diary entries?
2. Why do you feel like this event is breaking news?
3. When you first heard about the event, how did you know it was true?
4. How did you decide if you believed it?
5. At what point did you feel like you had the whole story? Why then?
6. When did you feel like you had enough information to make an opinion/judge the story? Why then?
7. I want to spend a bit of time talking about belief in news. If there is an event that you read about (let's say in the trending topic on facebook. So you know something about it because you read the summary), and you don't have a real interest in the topic: how do you decide if it's true? How do you decide if you believe it? Why?
8. Overall, would you say that you believe the news you get? Why or why not?
9. Do you have anything to add?
10. DEBRIEF

Appendix 8: Media Diary Survey





Breaking News Diary

3. What sources did you get your news from today? (for example: a friend, CBC, The Star, The National, Maclean's, etc. If you don't remember, that is no problem - but please mention that you don't remember)

Prev Next

4. Thinking generally about the news you got today, please respond to the following questions.

	Yes	I believe so	Mostly	Sort of	No	Not Sure
I trusted the news I got today	○	○	○	○	○	○
The news I got today was credible	○	○	○	○	○	○
I enjoyed the news I got today	○	○	○	○	○	○
The news I got today was boring	○	○	○	○	○	○
I found the news I got today relevant to me	○	○	○	○	○	○
The news I got today was important	○	○	○	○	○	○
The news I got today was true	○	○	○	○	○	○
I think the news I got today was high quality	○	○	○	○	○	○
The news I got today was accurate	○	○	○	○	○	○
The news I got today was biased	○	○	○	○	○	○

Prev Next

Breaking News Diary

5. Tell me about your breaking news event.
What happened? What did it say? Where did you hear about it? What do you think about it? What are today's updates?

6. Where did you get information about this news event?
Please provide a list of the places that you went, people that you talked to, TV shows that you saw (etc.), or copy and paste any of the URLs that you used to find out information about the breaking news event.
It is okay if you copy the same link more than once.

Prev Next

Breaking News Diary

*** 7. Thinking further about this story: did you believe it? Did it seem credible, trustworthy, and/or true**

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Maybe
- ◯ I'm not sure

8. Why or why not?

Prev Next

Breaking News Diary

9. Do you have anything to add?

Prev Next

Breaking News Diary

Complete.
Thank you.
If you have any questions or concerns, please email me at jthom54@uwo.ca

Prev Done

Appendix 9: Table 6: Media Diary Responses

Table 6: Media Diary Responses- Explanation of Story and Reasons for Believability

Participant Code	Assigned Name	Explanation of Story On First Day of Encounter	Reasons For Believability on First Day of Encounter
AAA	Sydney	A teacher who was in her twenties had sex with an under aged student. I read it on a Facebook post. I think that it is morally wrong. I have no received any updates since.	I have doubts in my mind that it is credible because it was from Facebook.
AAE	Julia	Ireland legalized gay marriage through a public vote. I saw it on my Facebook feed, there was a few articles, one especially by The Guardian, being reposted a lot since a lot of my friends are gay and a lot of my friends are supporters of gay rights. Then it started trending as well. I find it gives me hope for the state of the world and I'm very happy a lot of my friends now get the same rights as straight people.	A law got passed, there's no doubt about it. There's percentage figures supporting the voting claim. People have newspaper sources to support the fact.
AAH	Grace	I first heard about it on both AM980 and AM1290 radio stations. They did not go too far in depth, only saying that government websites had been hacked, and certain sites were down for a couple hours yesterday. It had apparently been carried out by the "hacktivist" group Anonymous, in protest of the anti-terrorism Bill C-51. The sources of news that I found did not go too much into detail about what sites were down (just "government websites" and email). One site said that the Canadian government's online presence disappeared for that time. After around two hours the sites went back up and no private information was compromised. It was considered a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack. Videos linked from one website led to YouTube, where it showed Anonymous taking responsibility for the attacks, claiming to have stood up for the privacy of Canadians, and saying that Bill C-51 is a violation of the universal declaration of human rights. They call for people to stand for their rights and protest the bill two days from now, on June 20th. That is about the extent of what I have seen on this story so far.	This story does seem credible to me because of the extent that they were able to carry out the hacks (affecting all government websites). It was witnessed by a large amount of people so it would be near impossible to fake something of this scale. The only thing that seemed off to me was the YouTube videos from Anonymous, but I believe that was because it seemed more like something from a movie with the way it sounded, so I was not sure if it was legitimate at first. Overall though I trust the story and information I received.
AAR	Craig	It said that George Zimmerman got shot in the face George Zimmerman was a very controversial figure in the death of Trayvon Martin I thought that people are still mad about the verdict that was made with regards to the decision to not have him responsible for Trayvon Martin's murder However, after looking	At first twitter was saying he got shot in the face. However, that made it seem like he was directly shot point blank execution style in the face, which I doubt was true. After

		into it further, people are saying that it was a gun shot through the window and the glass hit him, but may not have actually been hit with the bullet	looking into it further it seems that the injuries were minor and if he was shot in the face he would most likely be dead.
AAT	Mohammad	-There was another major earthquake that occurred in Nepal -This happened only three weeks after the last one that occurred on the 25th of April -I initially heard about it on Facebook, then read an article on CBC news for more information -I think it is very tragic for the people of Nepal to have to deal with yet another disaster before being able to barely begin recovery efforts from the previous quake	Since this event is natural disaster, I think it is much more difficult to get biased and/or misleading information. There isn't much controversy behind the facts and so this makes the information I received more credible.
AAU	Trinity	Amtrak train crushed in Philadelphia and people might be injured, the train was going to NYC. I heard it on CNN and got notification from the news app on m phone. It was relevant to me as it is type of transportation that people I know take. I heard late at night so not much updates just the news itself.	This news is about an accident, I think that type of news is usually accurate when it comes to the fact of what happened, the details might be not that accurate in the beginning as the news is still developing.
AAV	Mikayla	Singer Akon has promised to supply 600 million people in Africa with solar power. A friend of mine, posted a link about this story on Facebook. At first, I did not believe that the story was accurate. I thought that it is a positive, life changing event for many people.	My friend posted it to show that there were more important things to consider news than the Bruce Jenner sex change. There is a chance that the story was made up to downplay the #callmeCaitlynn trend.
AAX	Stan	South Africa's main political opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA) elected a new leader, replacing the old one. The party is the only contender against a heavily entrenched ANC party in a one party system that is ripe with corruption. The story told the brief background of how the new leader was elected, his background, and how there is hope that he can bring more support to the DA party to challenge the corruption and ineptitude of the current government. I heard about this story on the website of the weekly news magazine The Economist. I am torn about the news, it is good news to see that the support of the DA party is increasing and that the new leader looks promising. However, I am also a bit disenchanted with politics in South Africa given the abysmal record of the recent politicians. The main updates on this story today was that I found out about it and read up about who the new leader was and his experience/background.	The news story was presented on multiple different news sites from multiple different countries (and continents). It was reported by a British, Australian, American, and South African news agency. The story was also supported by the wikipedia page for Maimane. All the reporting of the stories seem factual, listing real parties and politicians I am familiar with and giving background information that fits into and is accurate according to my current knowledge of the country and situation.

AAY	Shauna	The breaking news event I followed was The Duggars parents "breaking" their silence after their son's allegations stating an interview will be aired June 5th. TIME magazine stated that Fox news will be holding the interview. I think that this is going to be interesting in the sense that I think we already know what the Duggars are going to say. I also watched a video on the FIFA scandal from Vox, and I think that it is shocking to see that this corruption is just being shed to light now. The fact that many individuals have been affected in this scandal I wonder if the PanAm games, Olympics hide the same issues.	I believe the story because a lot of other news sources have talked about the Duggars and FIFA scandal, and it's true enough to believe because it's relevant for it to be a story.
BAB	Gavin	[World Cup] corporate sponsors being pushed to improve human rights for workers thought it was pretty good news	i think cbc is pretty credible and it seems like a plausible story
BAD	Tara	A man was fatally shot in the ER by police in a Guelph Hospital. I read the article in the evening (CTV news) but it was last updated in the afternoon so perhaps more details have come in since then. When I first heard about it, it reminded of the theme of police brutality that is quite prevalent in our Southern neighbours. That's why the headline interested me (plus I first saw the headline in yahoo news front page...didn't open the article. And then when I saw it on my cellphone I decided to look into the story) so I opened up the article. It mentioned that the man was shot in the ER and various emergency codes were called throughout the hoskpital. The hospital was not evacuated but it was temporarily not accepting any other patients. What do you think about it? It seems mysterious and scary that a shooting would happen in a hospital, especially the ER? Maybe the person was an intruder or maybe a patient...my first impression when I saw the headline was that the victim was a patient in the ER...	-typically yahoo article aren't the best source of info especially on trivial things (e.g., the best Tim Horton's donut, the best superfoods) - so when I saw it again on my cellphone I though the topic must be pretty important and I was happy that it led to CTV news (I think this is a trusted source)
BAF	Louis	[Joshua Duggar is accused of molestation]	It is only allegations and rumours at this point, no new developments had happened since the original charges in 2004/2005. The news only broke out about it as the original charges were kept secret until recently.
BAG	Joseph	Ireland is holding a referendum to approve same sex marriage today.	Many different sources on facebook are referenced

BAH	Morgan	City of London workers are going on strike effective of today. around 750 workers are currently protesting. Welfare and lower income citizens are being effected heavily. I was really worried on how it would impact me as I live in London currently.	Strikes are legit
BAM	Theresa	- A number of FIFA officials face charges relating to racketeering and corruption; apparently they accepted bribes within the millions to host the world cup in various places; sounds like the investigation was sparked after they chose Qatar for the 2018 world cup. - even though the investigation started about 2 years ago, this without a doubt has been happening for longer (accepting bribes to host the world cup in different areas) - the officials are being indicted by the US federal government because the crimes committed happened using US banks; making that under the US jurisdiction - sounds like the corruption goes all the way up to the justice system, where judges were likely paid off to report there was no evidence decision making was altered. I interpreted this from this section of the NY times article: "As new accounts of bribery continued to emerge — a whistleblower who worked for the Qatar bid team claimed that several African officials were paid $1.5 million each to support Qatar — FIFA in 2012 started an investigation of the bid process. It was led by a former United States attorney, Michael J. Garcia, who spent nearly two years compiling a report. That report, however, has never been made public; instead, the top judge on the ethics committee, the German Joachim Eckert, released a summary of the report. In it, he declared that while violations of the code of ethics had occurred, they had not affected the integrity of the vote." - The comments section on reddit allude to the fact that these officials will probably face some serious jail time unless they give up FIFA president, Sepp Blatter - so although they report he is "serene", he should be nervous - I heard about it online, discussed it with my boyfriend who is a soccer fan, he isn't surprised - apparently corruption in FIFA is no new idea - I think it's crazy how long they got away with this before anyone taking action. Makes me think maybe others tried to take action but they were paid off? - I hope they decide to change the location of the world cup in 2018. Hosting it in Qatar was never a good idea to begin with.	I think it's true. It's one of those things that has probably been going on for years but everyone turns the other cheek and refuses to address it. Hopefully corruption in FIFA will be better addressed now.

BAN	Carly	breaking news event was from the london free press paper and the Schulich homepage: http://www.lfpress.com/2015/05/22/the-next-step-is-to-get-provinces-to-cover-the-cost Health Canada has approved the use of the colitis drug Entyvio, this medication targets overactive immune cells in the gut and may help to relieve symptoms of UC (with potential side-effects). This also comes after years of work from Dr. Brian Feagan from Robarts Research Institute. I think this is a very important breakthrough, while readers have to be careful to note that this drug is not yet covered by Health Canada and that there are still potential side effects with its use.	Seems credible! Comes from a reasonable news source and unconfirmed information is stated as "yet to be made" and not speculated on.
BAP	Valentina	I learned that Ireland held a referendum to decide whether or not to legalize same-sex marriage. Today's update was that it went through- same-sex marriage is now legal in Ireland! This makes it the first country to legalize same-sex marriage through popular vote. Those advocating to vote "no" to same-sex marriage were obviously disappointed, but many congratulated the "yes" advocates for their success.	Because it is reported on many different well-known news sites.
BAS	Ruinan	My breaking news event was about a male Western student getting charged for a sex assault that happened in 2013. The young woman said she found herself exposed when she woke up on his bed after a party that he had invited her to - he was sober because he was acting as a bouncer that night - and found him poised above her the morning after as if he were taking a picture. After a sexual assault examination at St. Joseph's hospital, it was discovered that DNA of the offender was found between her breasts. The offender plead not guilty and did not take responsibility of what has happened. His main focus on his plead to lighten charges was due to his ambitions of becoming a doctor in the future. I found this article shared from the fb group "USecrets Western" on May 15th, 2015- the share was an article that was linked to the London Free press. I thought this article needed more details, such as if there's any speculations as to what kind of DNA it was - ie. saliva. I also found it a bit odd that the article expressed his future doctor goals so many times - it didn't tell me his other reasons as to why he is pleading not guilty other than the fact that he simply was not responsible. This article creates a bit of a bias for me because it didn't tell me his other defending statements (unless he had none), and therefore makes me believe he is 100% guilty. I really hate how he uses his medical school aspirations as a reason to	I think this is a credible story because it from the London free press, a notable source in london for news (for me at least). But also I was looked up the offender's name on fb, and I have mutual friends with him from Western - which means this person does exist within the Western community. I also think it's possible that this story is true because of the "date-rape" culture - I personally don't know these people, but I do believe that things like this do happen when alcohol is involved.

		give him a conditional discharge.	
BAV	Dalia	What happened? There was a poll in Ireland asking whether same-sex marriage should be legal, and the majority of the vote seems to be in favor. What did it say? Ireland is the first country to welcome same-sex marriage through popular vote. Where did I hear about it? I heard about it over the day through Reddit, some were posts linking to news websites, others were pictures of the crowd in Ireland showing their support. I also saw that one of my friends on Facebook liked a post made by Philip DeFranco, saying "Congrats Ireland! Good on ya. The fact that minority rights passed with a majority vote says a lot about how awesome you are.". What do I think about it? I like that the world is becoming more open to the way people are. Same-sex marriage is definitely something I would like to see legal in all countries, and this is a big step towards that goal. Today's updates: Preliminary results suggest that same-sex marriage will be legalized through popular vote in Ireland.	Although the news story on telesur did not seem very credible (I've never heard of telesur before and the article does not state who the author is), I believe the article because it provides images of tweets made by people who are involved in the story. Also, people on Reddit and Facebook are talking about what is happening, which suggests that something is actually happening over in Ireland.
BAW1	Hailey	Emma Sulkowicz, a student in Columbia University, carried her mattress to her graduation ceremony and refuses to shake hands with the president (or he refuses to shake hands with her?). In the original news in the DailyMail, it only states that the girl carried the mattress where she was raped around campus and she did carry it on the stage of her graduation ceremony. Also she refused to shake hands with the university president and that the guy who raped he,Paul Nungesser, was graduating at the same ceremony. The rape happened a couple of years ago in August 2012 (according to another source thedailybeast), and a few months later she came out to tell the truth after hearing about other girls being assaulted by the same guy. Other sources claim that the guy was falsely accused. I really don't know what to think about this, I think that in today's society it takes a lot of courage to admit that she's been sexually assaulted, even if there is less victim blame there still is and there is stigma against women who are sexually assaulted, and this makes be believe that her case is a real one. Also there are sources that says there were multiple occasions of sexual assault in the university that the university did not deal with properly. I also might not be the truth because she resented the guy somehow, but really there is no way of knowing this. The sources that defended the guy were very biased and what they used as "proof" of his innocence are not legitimate because it was	There are so many sources going in both directions. Also, most of the authors put their own comments in their articles and there is no real way of saying because 1) there were no eye witnesses or physical evidence of the incident 2) it happened 2 years ago, it's probably near impossible to get physical evidence of it, 3) even if there is physical evidence their initial encounter was consensual by both parties, 4) only thing you can do is to listen to their part of the story.

		screenshots of a facebook conversation with their names. It's just so easy to create a fake account and put someone's name and make a fake conversation, so I don't know if that's credible. And there are no updates today	
BAW2	Jenna	There was a shooting in Charleston at an african-american Church and the white gunman is at large. I saw it on my newsfeed on Facebook from George Takei's page. I then went to my google news page to read about what happened. I think it's relevent because of the white-black racial tension in the US that has been in the news over the last year.	Yes the police made a statement about the crime.
BU	Kiersten	There has been rain for days on end in different parts of Texas. There is nowhere for the water to go so it has caused major flooding. Cars were stuck on the highway and several houses were damaged. I think I heard there were 16 dead (I forget if this was the actual number or not). I do know that the number of people dead will most likely increase as there are still many people missing. I heard about this news story when my parents turned on the CTV National News. I don't always watch the news with them, but I just happened to be watching TV with them this night. This news story impacted our community as we got some of the aftermath of the storms that caused the flooding in Texas. I did not look up more information about this story when I heard about it. I did however talk to my parents about the news story as my mom was talking about how my aunt and uncle had just visited Texas so they would've just missed this flooding.	I did believe this news story. The only thing that I might not have thought was correct were the numbers that were released, including death numbers and missing people numbers. Otherwise, the news story did seem very credible
CV	Sarah	China confirms the first case of MERS. I heard about it through browsing weibo on my cellphone I think it is a serious issue because MERS is a virus similar to SARS which can cause death once infected	Because weibo is a very credible app that people share news and information

Appendix 10: Curriculum Vitae

CURRICULUM VITAE

a) NAME
Thom, Jessica

RANK
PhD Candidate, University of Western Ontario: Faculty of Information and Media Studies

b) DEGREES:

Ph.D. (in progress), Media Studies, University of Western Ontario, Canada
MA., Communication and Culture, Ryerson University/York University, Canada, 2009
BFA., Image Arts: Film Studies (honours), Ryerson University, Canada, 2007

c) EMPLOYMENT HISTORY:

2015-current	Limited Term Assistant Professor, School of Image Arts, Ryerson University
2015	Administrative Assistant, School of Journalism, Ryerson University
2014	Instructor: *Technology, Culture, and Communication*, Image Arts, Ryerson University
2012-2015	Research Assistant, University of Western Ontario
2011-2012	Teaching Assistant, University of Western Ontario (courses: "Communication History" and "The Meaning of Technology")
2010-2011	Instructor: *History of New Media*, Image Arts, Ryerson University
2008-2011	Research Assistant, Ryerson University
2008-2011	Founder and Research Associate, Zeto Communications
2006-2011	Administrative Assistant, Faculty of Communication & Design, Ryerson University

d) ACADEMIC HONOURS:

Dennis Mock Student Leadership Award, 2008

e) SCHOLARLY AND PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES:

2015-2016	Interim Associate Chair, School of Image Arts
2015-current	University Teaching and Development Program
2016	Emerging Scholars Network of the International Association of Media and Communications Research (IAMCR) Conference Reviewer
2014	Women, Property and Realty Television Symposium Co-Ordinator, Ryerson University
2014	Research Note Reviewer, GRAND Network Conference
2014	Student Volunteer Co-Ordinator, GRAND Network conference
2013-2015	Research Committee Member, University of Western Ontario
2013-2014	InSite Conference Reviewer
2013	mLeague Symposium Coordinator, Ryerson University
2012-2013	Student Volunteer, GRAND Network
2012-2013	Research Note Reviewer, GRAND Network
2012-2013	Secretary, Media Studies Doctoral Students Association
2012-2015	Committee member, mediations, University of Western Ontario
2007-2010	Senate Appeals Committee Member, Ryerson University

h) EXTERNAL RESEARCH FUNDING:

Year	Source	Amount per year	Purpose	Title of Project
2016	OMDC, Telefilm, Harold Greenberg Fund, DGC (Awarded to James Warrack and I in partnership with the DGC and PRO)	$30,000	Research and hiring of RA/GAs	Feature Film in Ontario: Looking forward to the next decade
2007	SSHRC	$17500	Master's Thesis	The New Spectator

i) INTERNAL RESEARCH FUNDING:

Year	Source	Amount per year	Purpose	Title of Project
2003	Ryerson University Entrance Scholarship	$3000		
2011	University of Western	$2000		

	Ontario Dean's Entrance Scholarship			

j) PUBLICATIONS:

1)

- Books authored 0
- Books edited 0
- Refereed Chapters in books 0
- Non-refereed Chapters in books 0
- Papers in refereed journal.....1
- Papers in refereed conference proceedings. 2
- Major invited contributions and/or technical reports 0
- Abstracts and/or papers read.....17
- Others (workshops presented) 3

2) Details for past seven (8) years same categories as above:

Papers in Refereed Journal

Rae, I., & Thom, J. (Forthcoming: Spring, 2016). The Rise and Fall of the Stratford International Film Festival. *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*.

Papers in Refereed Conference Proceedings

Goodrum, A., Pope, R., Godo, E., & Thom, J. (2010). Newsblog relevance: Applying relevance criteria to news-related blogs. *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, *47*(1), 1-2.

Godo, E., Thom, J., & Goodrum, A. (2010). "Social Networking and Online News Aggregators: The Role of User Comments / Feedback in Forming E-Communities". In Kommers, P. & Isaias,P. (Eds.), In *Proceedings for the International Association for Development of the Information Society Conference on e-Society* (pp. 426-430), Porto, Portugal: IADIS.

Abstracts and/or papers read

Thom, J. (2015, July). *What we are willing to accept from our journalists: A review of the role of the journalist in respecting public interest*. Paper under review by IAMCR pre-conference "News Producers & Public Interest, Montreal, Canada.

Thom, J. (2015, July). *How Do Young Canadians Come to Believe Their News?* Paper under review by the International Association of Media and Communications Researchers (IAMCR) for Montreal, Canada.

Thom, J. (2015, June). *Believing the News: How Do Young Canadians Judge the News?* Paper under review by the Canadian Communication Association for Congress, Ottawa, Canada.

Thom, J. (2015, April). *The Changing Role of the Young Canadian News Consumer*. Paper to be presented at What is Journalism? Conference, Portland, Oregon.

Thom, J. and Burkell, J. (2014, September). *The Effect of Online Commenting on the Perception of News Stories*. Poster presented at Social Media and Society Conference, Toronto, Canada.

Thom, J. (2014, May). *Getting the News: How news credibility is assessed*. Paper presented at the Canadian Association of Information Scientists (CAIS), St. Catharines, Canada.

Rae, I. and Thom, J. (2014, May). *The Rise and Fall of the Stratford International Film Festival*. Paper presented at the Film Studies Association of Canada (FSAC), St. Catharines, Canada.

Thom, J. (2014, May). *The Effect of Online Commenting on the Perception of News Stories*. Poster presented at GRAND Network Conference, Ottawa, Canada.

Thom, J. (2013, October). *A Hundred Points is Not Equivalent to A Hundred Pounds: The Gamification of Healthcare, Fitness, and Social Wellness*. Paper presented at the Apps & Affect Conference, London, Canada.

Godo, E., & Thom, J. (2011, June). *"Daddy Lets Me Shop on Ebay": The Changing Nature of Kids' Culture Online*. Paper presented at the Canadian Communication Association Conference, Fredericton, Canada.

Thom, J., & Godo, E. (2010, June). *Sci/Tech Readers: An Examination of Science/Technology Blogs and Online News*. Paper presented at the 8th Association for Cultural Studies Crossroads Conference, Hong Kong, China.

Thom, J., Godo, E., & Goodrum, A. (2010, June). *Fe/Male Audience Relevance Criteria for Blogs*. Paper presented at the 8th Association for Cultural Studies Crossroads Conference, Hong Kong, China.

Godo, E., Thom, J., & Goodrum, A. (2010, June). *User Relevance Criteria for*

Blogs. Paper presented at the Canadian Communication Association Annual Conference, Montreal, Canada.

Thom, J. & Godo, E. (2010, March). *Social Networking and Online News Aggregators: The Role of User Comments / Feedback in Forming E-Communities*. Paper presented at the International Association for Development of the Information Society Conference on e-Society, Porto, Portugal.

Thom, J. (2010, March). *The New Spectator*. Paper presented at Can you Digit: Cinema and New Media Colloquium, Toronto, Canada.

Godo, E. & Thom, J. (2010, January). *A Political Economic Analysis of the Ownership of Online News Aggregators*. Paper presented at the Media, Communication & Cultural Studies Association International Conference, London, United Kingdom.

Thom, J. (2009, July). *The New Spectator*. Paper presented at the International Association for Media and Communication Research's Annual Conference, Mexico City, Mexico.

Other (Workshops presented)

Thom, J. (2015, September). mediations presents: How Canadian Young People Judge News Stories.

Thom, J. (May, 2014). Journalism, New Media, and Civic Engagement workshop presentation at the University of Copenhagen.

Thom, J. (2014, January). Mediations Speaker respondent: (un)covering Suicide in Canadian Media.

Thom, J. (2013, February). Mediations Speaker respondent: Artificial Publics: Astroturfing the Web.