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0873: The Fake News and Information Literacy
Project

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Fall 10-27-2021

**West Virginia Participant 15 (White/male/22), interviewed on
October 27, 2021**

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Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The Fake News and Information Literacy Project

Stephen M. Underhill, PhD, Principal Investigator



Marshall University IRB

Approved on:	9/17/21
Expires on:	9/15/21
Study number:	1779793

Key Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. Research studies are designed to gain scientific knowledge that may help other people in the future. You may or may not receive any benefit from being part of the study. Your participation is voluntary. Please take your time to make your decision, and ask your research investigator or research staff to explain any words or information that you do not understand. The following is a short summary to help you decide why you may or may not want to be a part of this study. Information that is more detailed is listed later on in this form.

The purpose of this study is to understand the Appalachian experience with fake news and how people determine what is/not credible online. We expect that you will be in this research study for one hour. Though you will be anonymous and your identity will be kept secret, a redacted copy of your interview transcript will be posted online on Marshall University's Digital Scholar website (https://mds.marshall.edu/oral_history/).

You will be asked 64 questions. Your dialogue will be recorded on Microsoft Teams and housed on Marshall University's OneDrive, which is password protected. The recording will be destroyed at the end of the semester (during finals week). To protect your privacy, you will be identified by your state of residence, race, sex, age and participant number. For example, the Digital Scholar website will catalogue your interview with a pseudonym like "Kentucky Participant 5 (White/Male/65), interviewed on October 5, 2021." Please avoid mentioning your name or other identifying information in the interview. Your name will not be on the transcript. The name of the interviewer will not be included in the transcript or otherwise on Marshall University's Digital Scholar website. All identifying information will be removed before transcripts are posted online. But once transcripts are posted on Marshall University's Digital Scholar website, they will be permanent. We will not be able to remove them.

How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?

About 24 people every semester people will take part in this study. A total of 24 subjects are the most that would be able to enter the study per semester.

What Is Involved In This Research Study?

You will be asked a series of 64 open-ended questions about your thoughts and feelings on fake news and disinformation online. You will be asked about your opinion of sensitive social questions like issues of race, class, religion, etc.

With your consent, this interview will be recorded. You will only be identified as "you" during the interview. The Microsoft Teams recording, which will be with the camera turned off, will be stored on Marshall University's OneDrive and will only be shared with the FYS small group, the FYS graduate assistant and the professor. These people will use the recording to verify consent and make a

Subject's Initials _____

redacted transcript. Definitized transcripts will be uploaded to Marshall University's Digital Scholar website (https://mds.marshall.edu/oral_history/).

What Are Your Rights As A Research Study Participant?

You may choose to not take part in the study. You may leave the study up to the point that the interview is complete. Once the redacted transcript is posted on the website a participant may not withdraw. Refusing to participate or leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide to stop participating in the study we encourage you to talk to the investigators or study staff first.

The study investigator may stop you from taking part in this study at any time if he/she believes it is in your best interest; if you do not follow the study rules; or if the study is stopped.

Detailed Risks Of The Study

Because the recording will be destroyed at the end of the semester, and because the only a deidentified redacted transcript will be posted online, there is no foreseeable risk in the study.

What About Confidentiality?

We will do our best to make sure that your personal information is kept confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Federal law says we must keep your study records private. Nevertheless, under unforeseen and rare circumstances, we may be required by law to allow certain agencies to view your records. Those agencies would include the Marshall University IRB, Office of Research Integrity (ORI) and the federal Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP). This is to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety. If we publish the information we learn from this study, you will not be identified by name or in any other way.

What Are The Costs Of Taking Part In This Study?

There are no costs to you for taking part in this study. All the study costs, including any study tests, supplies and procedures related directly to the study, will be paid for by the study.

Will You Be Paid For Participating?

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Whom Do You Call If You Have Questions Or Problems?

For questions about the study or in the event of a research-related injury, contact the study investigator, Stephen Underhill at 304-696-3020 or at underhills@marshall.edu. You should also contact the investigator if you have a concern or complaint about the research.

Subject's Initials _____

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity (ORI) at (304) 696-4303. You may also call this number if:

- You have concerns or complaints about the research.
- The research staff cannot be reached.
- You want to talk to someone other than the research staff.

Did you receive a copy of the consent form?

Please say Yes or No

Do you agree to take part in this study and confirm that you are 18 years of age or older?

Please say Yes or No

Have you had a chance to ask questions about being in this study and have had those questions answered?

Please say Yes or No

What is today's date?

Subject's Initials _____

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

The participant agreed to the terms of consent

Interviewer: Tell me about when you first started using social media and news started to appear for the first time on your feed like Facebook or Twitter or whatever you began using.

Participant: I started using social media probably around high school and I use social media the way it is designed to be used. News started coming through very quickly. Social media is all about connection, right so, they want you to be connected to world events. That's part of the reason that people get social media. So, I would say it just sort of started coming in almost immediately, probably immediately.

Interviewer: In a normal day, how would you say that you use the Internet?

Participant: I use the internet extensively on a normal day. Any question that pops into my head that I don't know the answer to immediately gets Googled. I'm on social media on all platforms, or most platforms, barring probably Twitter, daily. I run through a little bit of each one just to see what's new or what's up. I don't know that I necessarily spend a lot of time in there every day, but, you know, I'm on there every day.

Interviewer: What types of websites do you typically visit?

Participant: I visit a lot of, like, "how to do things" websites. I visit a lot of just informational websites. I use the wikis a lot just to gain general knowledge about pretty much anything. There's a wiki for everything. I use Wikipedia a lot. I mean if I need to know about something like, factual historical, I don't always use Wikipedia. They say in school "don't use Wikipedia if you really want solid fact." Wikipedia has a lot of stuff that's probably not true because it's publicly edited, but you know, I use it. I'm usually on informational sites, so I'm trying to get how to do things, sites, that kind of thing. I'm not usually on a lot of research studies sites or research sites or entertainment sites.

Interviewer: What would you say that you searched for online like in the past week?

Participant: In the past week I've searched recipes to cook, I've searched for information about video games that I'm playing, I've searched for information about new media coming out that I'm interested, new games or TV shows or movies. I've searched for how to grow plants that I'm growing. I've searched for lots of DIY stuff, just general, everyday life stuff. That's pretty much what I've searched for - answers to questions or information on stuff for school. Just everyday stuff that a college student is doing for research, pretty much.

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

Interviewer:

What sort of websites do you visit to pass time when you are bored?

Participant: When I'm bored... it's usually not websites. Usually, it's like a social media app, like Reddit or Tik Tok. I'm on Tik Tok regrettably. Mostly for informational videos. Not entertainment, like dancing and stuff. I'm on there for lots of random little information blurbs.

Interviewer: What do you do on those sites?

Participant: Scroll. I mean if I'm bored, I'm scrolling. Like I said, everybody doesn't know when they're bored and just scrolling, they're taking in information. I'm a big in-taker of information. So that's what I'm doing. It's just looking for new things, things that catch my interest as I scroll down through.

Interviewer: Why would you say you visit those particular sites? Like, why do you specifically visit those sites? Why do you visit, like, Tik Tok in this instance?

Participant: I get on Tik Tok just because it has a lot of news. It's the most popular thing right now. So, there's a lot of new information coming through and a lot of people showing off new things. A lot of people are giving out random blurbs of new information, or stuff that you've never heard of because everybody wants to be using it. It's the same thing for Reddit. I use it more, just to keep up with it. That's the thing [Reddit] I use them the most to keep up with stuff going on in the world. Just because if there's something happening there, there is a post about it. And people have all their opinions below the post.

Interviewer: So thinking about these questions that I've asked so far, what do you think other people are doing on the Internet? Like people, you know, people you don't know, how do you think other people are using the Internet and passing the time online?

Participant: I'm sure there's a fair amount of people that also use the Internet like I use it. But I'm not really in it for entertainment focused. I'm especially not getting all into it to look at music or dances. I'm getting on to gain information, but I feel like other people would do that as well, but they also want to see what's popular and what's entertaining and to them, that could be a lot like what I use it for. Things informationally, but I feel like most people get on there to see what the new popular person is doing.

Interviewer: What types of devices do you use to access the Internet?

Participant: My phone. And my computer, secondarily. Mostly my phone.

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

Interviewer: Yes, anything else like a smart TV's or gaming devices?

Participant: I stream on the smart TV.

Interviewer: Which do you think you use the most? And which do you think you use the least?

Participant: Which streaming services, is that what you're asking?

Interviewer: No, which device to access the Internet. Which would you say you use the most and which would you say you use the least?

Participant: Well, on the range of my phone to computer to the TV, I definitely use my phone the most and the TV the least.

Interviewer: OK. I see. That's pretty common in people among young people. What social media forums like Twitter or Reddit do you use? When, why, and for what do you use them? Please share any that you try to avoid and any reasons you have for avoiding them.

Participant: I'm on Twitter. And I follow like three people. If it's called following, I don't know what it's called on the twitters, but I use Reddit mostly. I mean, I use Reddit for what I feel like most people use Twitter for. I get on there if there's something that I've heard has happened, there are going to be posts on Reddit popular about it.

Interviewer: Yeah, do you think more people use Reddit or and more people use Twitter?

Participant: Twitter. That's a good question. Probably Twitter, honestly. Probably Twitter, because Twitter attracts not only people looking for the kind of thing I'm looking for, but also people looking for entertainment and Reddit does that to a point. You also have to get on the subreddits that you want to see. You can't just see random stuff, you know.

Interviewer: Are there any forums or sites that you, particularly avoid?

Participant: I mean, I avoid Twitter because I don't like the interface and I don't like the attitude. I don't like how people use Twitter. For drama, I feel like it's a very toxic place and you can apply it pretty much anything to politics, to entertainment, to popular media too. I mean, I just feel like the attitude surrounding Twitter has gone downhill and it has been for a long time. So, I very actively try to avoid Twitter. Also, I just don't enjoy it. I don't enjoy the whole idea of it.

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

Interviewer: When thinking about people that you likely disagree with, please describe which forums you think they would likely use and why. This is kind of a loaded question. But yeah, I guess this question is essentially asking you to stereo type people that you would disagree with. The people that you disagree with, which forums and sites do you think they would be more likely to use?

Participant: There are people that I disagree with on every single social media forum but, the kind of people like I said that are on Twitter - and Twitter is useful. I don't want to bash people that are on Twitter. If you're on Twitter, good for you. I mean, if you use it correctly, good for you, but there are plenty who don't use it correctly. So, I feel like, by and large the people that I would disagree with and how they operate their worldview and their perception will be on Twitter. Honestly, or Facebook spreading drama and lies, and that goes both ways. No matter what your view is there is somebody saying the opposite and they're saying it dramatically.

Interviewer: I agree. When I went through these questions myself, I kind of had a similar opinion in that there are people present on every interface, every site that are misusing it. So yeah, I agree with you on that one. Describe for me what you do when you want to find out something factual. How do you search for factual information?

Participant: This is most relevant to me when I'm searching up health related topics because of my path of education. When I figure out something that is relevant, like if I want to find out a fact about the human body or about a medication, or about a treatment or about a sickness, and sickness is a hot topic right now, I usually go to Google, honestly. I Google, very specific words, like something that couldn't take me to a place where I would find information that I wasn't looking for and I'll look at a lot of different sources. And usually if it's medical information, you can find some pretty credible ones. Then I'll compare them and I can do that in about five minutes. I can figure out whether it's a factual thing that's like correct and factual. If it's not correct, I could figure out if there's varying opinions on it. And I use Reddit a lot honestly to figure out people's opinions on it. Because people post their opinions on Reddit, they really do.

Interviewer: So how do you think that people around you find out something factual? Do you think people take a similar route? Or do you think you do something differently than other people do typically?

Participant: I think it's a pretty common procedure that a lot of people do. I feel like they pull up Google and they look up whatever they need to look up, but something I feel like people do way too often is take the first thing they see and that's it. And I really try to go the extra mile to get my information from a lot of different sources, like from maybe a

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

journal or maybe an article, maybe a Reddit post, or from a news clip. I try to get stuff from many different parts of the Internet that can come together to be what's right. I don't want to just take the first thing I see.

Interviewer: All right, this next section of questions is entitled feeds, search results, search critique. Everyone comes across things that surprise them on social media between advertising news and commentary. Please describe a time when you came across content that you doubted was trustworthy or made you trust distrust in its author or its purpose.

Participant: Anytime that I've seen news on a television, I do not trust it. I don't trust it because that's coming to me from one source. That source, whether they want to admit it or not, is biased, and that bias is politically rooted so, I don't trust anything that comes to me from a television. If I see something, that I think, "OK, that's probably true, that could be true," I'm still going to check it out. I don't trust anything that comes to me through television. I don't trust anything that comes to me, from a news article like on the Internet from a large network that would be playing something like that on television. There's always a backup, always, always looking up something on some other site. I don't trust anything that comes to me from one single source that is very obviously politically biased either way.

Interviewer: Does any one specific instance stick out in your mind? Do you have any memory of that happening to you specifically, one time where you saw something on the news that just didn't sit well with you, and you knew that you had to do some more research on it?

Participant: I don't have a specific time because I've very actively tried to avoid sources like that. They're obvious sources of distrust, like I don't trust them, and I try to actively avoid them. So, I can't pull up any specific memory. I'm sure I've seen plenty of things playing on Fox or CNN, or you know, NBC on lots of things about COVID, and I can remember some times that I've seen something about COVID and it's just like that's probably not true that's exaggerated. Just as an example of a subject that I've seen. I can't pull up a specific time because honestly, I do my best not to pay attention to it.

Interviewer: In these next few questions, I will be asking you to revisit a memory of a time in which you came across some news like that. Just answer honestly. If nothing sticks out in your mind, that's fine. Share a time when you talked to your friends or family about such content.

Participant: I can't remember the content exactly, but I can remember times when information about COVID was coming across the television, while we were at a grandmother's house sparked conversation. I promise you, I don't remember a specific

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

time in which I've seen something and was like "yeah, that's wrong." I've seen things come across the television that have sparked discussion and things that I've doubted and said "I don't think that's true," and people have said, "I think that it is true," and we've had had discussion about it. I can't recollect an exact time again because I try not to base my life around stuff like that. I'm trying my best to not be absorbed in it.

Interviewer: I'm referring to this batch questions that are asking you to revisit a specific memory so if you can't just say so and we'll move on. Tell me about a time that you saw such content discussed on the news.

Participant: I'm going to stick with the COVID analogy because it's just such a hot topic. I've seen people discussing COVID on the news, some going one way and others going another way. That's the extent of my memory and my experience with it, because again, I don't steep myself in it.

Interviewer: If there are social media sites out there that you think to be untrustworthy, what to you makes them untrustworthy? What qualities would a social media sit have to have for you to deem it untrustworthy?

Participant: I'm going to stick with Twitter just because that's the one that sticks out in my head the most. Just the quality of people. Again, I don't want anybody who would read this to think that I think you're a bad person because you use Twitter. Use Twitter the way you want to use it you're a free person. But there are just so many toxic people on there and it just sticks out. It's been famous in the news for it and famous on other social media sites too. It's been famous on Twitter itself for being such a toxic place. And that is really what makes it massively untrustworthy. It's such a good platform for people to express their own opinions, and it's a platform for news outlets to express their opinion on things, and it's just so many opinions, you can't process anything that way. You're just overwhelmed in them and that's what makes Twitter so untrustworthy. I feel like, when I read a tweet, it's just their opinion. Everybody has them and they're not all good.

Interviewer: Tell me about your experiences finding conspiracy theories.

Participant: I enjoy them. You hear about them and you read them. "Conspiracy theories" has such a negative connotation. Anything that is questionably different from what people are thinking can be considered a conspiracy theory.

Interviewer: You enjoy conspiracy theories?

Participant: Yeah, just as much as anybody else does. I like seeing what could've happened. People get caught up in thinking that, once you consider a conspiracy theory

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

that that's your opinion, but it remains a theory, and the theory is not founded in fact. A theory is a question that you're asking about something or it's an idea that you have formulated that you think may be true. I see lots of things like that from historical events to current events to the manner of space and time. It spans everything. There's a conspiracy theory about everything and I find them interesting. I'll entertain them. I'll look at them or read them. Some of them are obviously untrue.

Interviewer: Where do you find most of your conspiracy theories?

Participant: I get a lot of them on my feeds, or I used to anyway, not so much anymore. It just depends on whether I'm going on a conspiracy theory binge or not, or whether my feed is giving me that. Stuff pops up on Tik Tok about a "loose conspiracy theory videos" or somebody is like "what if this happened?" on Reddit. Social media spits it at you, it really does. And people want to pretend like it's crazy people that are going out and finding conspiracy theories in these crazy places. But no. If anything, it's encouraged by social media. Social media spits it at me all the time.

Interviewer: If applicable please describe a time when you shared content that you thought was true and then later learned was not true.

Participant: I can confidently say that I have not shared content that I thought was true and later learned was not true, simply because I don't share content. I don't post on Facebook. I don't post on Twitter. I don't post on Reddit. I post pictures on Instagram and those are pictures of me and my family. I'm not one to go on Facebook and share an opinion and I'm not going to retweet a tweet whether I think it's true or not.

Interviewer: Have you ever had shared news in person that you took in on a social media site or on television that you later learned was not true? Maybe you told your family or told your friends?

Participant: There's a really interesting one that is very relevant right now. When COVID started happening, there were talks and it wasn't popular. I remember a time when it got popular for a month or two, people were talking about COVID being engineered or having been tampered with. Very early on in the pandemic, that was something I came across. I don't know where I came across it; it was not a popular thing and I just came across by chance. I thought "wow, that would make a lot of sense," and talked about that to my family. I talked to my friends about it just in passing, not like saying that "this is what happened," just saying that "this is really interesting that this could have been what happened." There are a lot of things that makes you think, "if somebody wanted to keep this a secret, then it's very possible that this could have happened." That's just an example of one thing, and I don't know that I think that way now. I haven't thought about it in a while, but it is an example.

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

Interviewer: Thank you. If applicable, please describe a time when you shared things that you knew were not true. I think you already touched on this, saying that this isn't really something that you do.

Participant: Yeah, it's not something I commonly do, so I can't really bring one up.

Interviewer: Alright, tell me about a time when a search engine like Google or Yahoo seemed to give you what it thought you were looking for based on what you already had searched for like in the past.

Participant: Well, I'm sure that Google spat out things similar to what I'd search before if I asked a lot about COVID, it's really the first thing that I ever became involved in like learning more about because it was such a heated topic. Like I never cared about anything like elections before that or nor do I now, but I'm sure that google spat out, you know similar things about COVID when I would search for it, like if I would search for side effects of it, it would give me things that were, give me sites that had similar side effects as to the ones that I was trying to learn more about, for example. And we can talk about how my social media spits out ads about topics that I've spoken about randomly and that's just proof that these engines and these social media engines and Google, are designed to spit out things that it thinks you'd be interested in. You know to click on it, they just want you to click on it.

Interviewer: Right, tell me, have you ever experienced a time that your search results seemed to be tailored to you if anywhere where on the news have you seen that being discussed? Like has that ever happened to you and have you ever seen that being discussed anywhere?

Participant: I mean. You see, you see on the news from time to time "is your phone listening to you? Are these apps listening to you? Is China stealing your data through these apps" and you know, I don't, I don't look far into it besides hearing it on the news, but I like I said I've had ads suggested to me by apps before of things that I've sometimes I've thought that I've just thought about them and they just pop up and or maybe I've said it out loud and not realized that said in discussion in it and it gave it to me. And that's just that's part of being on those apps you in the process of signing up to use the app. There's something in there that you give consent to for it to listen to you and look at your searches and spit out personalized ads. You can go into some app settings and turn off personalized ads and then it'll just spit random ads to you. So, it's a known thing that uh, it personalizes what you see based on what you've searched. Based on what you've said based on what you've liked, based on what you've shared, you know, and I've seen I've seen news sources talking about this in a who are they

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

listening to kind of way. I mean, I don't think anybody really, it's not blowing up right like no other people talk about it. I don't think, but it's something we all know.

Interviewer: Okay. Yes, definitely. It's only fair. OK. How do you decide what personal information you will provide to a social media company? for example, YouTube or Google. How do you determine what you're willing to tell them?

Participant: My phone has been spitting me out Google notifications that is like emergency urgent, you need to put your birthday in here and I won't do it. I clear out in the notification every time. Google has my name, Google has my address because I have stuff shipped to me and auto fills sometimes and Google has my, of course my email which it has been set up with and maybe my birthday. Google has and everything has the bare minimum that it needs to get me on that website. That's it, bare minimum, but I know they have more.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, probably. Tell me the ways that you try to protect your personal information online.

Participant: By giving them the bare minimum - by only allowing the venues that I used on the Internet to have the bare minimum information about me. A lot of good it does me because there's probably, you know, something in the fine print that I probably signed; something giving them access to probably my phone to get stuff off of. But who knows? Thing is, nobody knows, you know. I try to protect my information online as much as I can, and the only way to do that is to give them the bare minimum and if they need more, they work around it. It's just, that's just part of being on the Internet now.

Interviewer: What do you think other people do to protect their information? What do you think others do?

Participant: Probably far less. I mean, I'm somebody who thinks about it and considers it. . I mean, there's probably some people like that, but I think the majority of people just say hey, there's a blank box that's asking for information. Let me put in whatever information it needs, because I want the whole form to be complete. You know, it's like. They want every single space in their bio to be filled. They want every single space in that you know sign up page to be filled up and sometimes the sign up page requires it with a little red dot says you can't go unless You put this information and so I feel like people might try to do what I do some, but I think more than not people like thinking about it and then it's putting in anything that the side asks for.

Interviewer: Have you heard anything about protecting your identity or personal information on the news? Or have you heard friends or family discuss it?

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

Participant: I haven't heard friends or family discuss it, but he I've heard the news discuss, you know discuss this along the lines of not sharing information with people that you don't know on the Internet, like not necessarily in the way that I was talking about giving certain sites your information, I've heard people discuss talking to strangers on the Internet, like talking to another person on the other end of the line on the other end of the communication service about giving them information. That's where I've heard it talked about because that's a problem.

Interviewer: Yup alrighty, let's see, I think that finishes up this section. The next section is about algorithms and what do you think of them? So alright, how have you responded to how Internet companies try to customize or control what you see on their platforms like in Google searches?

Participant: I mean, I browse settings and turned on or off personalized ads. Most of the time I leave them on just because if I'm going to see something, I want it to be something I'm interested in, not that I want to see it, but if you're going to force something upon me, it might as well be something that you know. That's all I do. That's the only thing that you can do.

Interviewer: Have you heard any other people talk about this?

Participant: No, I don't feel like it's a topic that's discussed. I feel like people are just blindly stumbling around the Internet, even though there's been problems with that in recent times, and even though it's becoming increasingly obvious that these companies have things that they shouldn't have about you. I feel like people still kind of just: ignorance is bliss, that's their attitude about it.

Interviewer: If you were to explain to your friends or family how false information spreads and can be found on the Internet or how to avoid false information. What would you say to that?

Participant: All that must be said about that to anybody is: don't trust anything because it's probably somebody's opinion and if it's not somebody who has valid education on the topic, and even sometimes if they do, the goal is not to take in somebody else's opinion and make it yours immediately. The goal is to take in somebody else's opinion and evaluate how that stands against your own opinions and that's how you form accurate opinions about things and more often than not the best choice is to throw your hands in the air and say I'm not going to be involved in this topic because is it worth me becoming so invested that I had to formulate an opinion about it?

Interviewer: What do you think determines what is seen online or how things spread? How does it work? Who benefits from it? Who do you think made this system it? And

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

what do you think controls information online and in our apps? I know that's a big question, feel free to ask me to repeat it. What do you think determines how things spread on the web.

Participant: Well, a lot of it is very personalized. Everybody carries a smartphone; everybody uses it for looking things up. That information is tailored to groups of people who want to see that information. That's on the very smallest level is at the individual level. Things were spread online based on what people want to see. And as you go up through the levels till you hit the actual corporations that are putting these things out, different things get involved, like, politics get involved. What people do and don't want to be shared on their based on how much power they have and how much they control they must make those things shared or to make those things silenced and a lot of that has to do with how much money they get there around. I feel like, especially like the companies at the top, even if something deserves to be shared or something, I don't know if, uh, let's say, there was another person missing, like the Gabby Petito thing and somebody in a tech company didn't want that shared. For whatever reason, it was politically biased, or they didn't want something to happen. If that company had a reason to benefit from that not being shared. They could make it to where it was not shared. You know? It's all about power levels.

Interviewer: OK, so do you think those are the people that benefit from these systems?

Participant: Yeah, I think at the base of everything it is money. If it makes them more money not to share something, then they won't share it. If it makes them more money to share something, then they share it and there are no morals attached to that. If I mean look at the thing with the Gabby Petito case, for example that was shared everywhere regardless of the morals of sharing that, because that made everybody every single platform that shared it money because it got more people will look at it. If I mean it was a terrible thing that happened, and people wanted to be nosey and that's something they want to be involved in. So that was shared regardless of whether that should be shared, for example, not that it shouldn't have been. I mean, it deserved a decent amount of attention, but I think it got more than it deserved because, these people, these companies want people to look at that and make them money, for example.

Interviewer: Alright, thank you very much. This next question is a bit longer. However, I'm asking you about multiple current events. You only have to address one of them, but feel free to address more if you feel so inclined. Feel free to ask me to repeat anything you need. Alright, the Internet is full of stories that divide people about things like the coronavirus, the capital riot, stop the steal, Antifa, Black Lives Matter, climate change, Q anon, and the political parties. If you were to decide, how would you like schools or the news to talk about what controls the Internet and what is seen? Yeah, that one is just kind of just like the basic question that's going to go into these next few so how would

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

you like if you could decide how? How would you like schools or the news like public to be able to control what we see on the Internet?

Participant: For the one thing that would make this OK, and it will never happen, is if every single outlet, and we wouldn't need multiple outlets if this was the case, would just present the hard truth just what happened. Basic facts. This happened, no opinions - but opinions matter. Because you got this opinion, this makes you more money. Regardless, I think that the only thing that I would say would make it OK, because it's not OK, none of it is, is if it was presented hard truth like that's this is what happened. I'm not going to say like, they wouldn't say anything about politics. They would just say this is what happened. Like just like straight news, just the way that it used to be when news came out like back when it became big. Just this is what happened. Formulate your independent opinion. That's how I feel like it should be presented.

Interviewer: So, you think like in the past news channels and such, they didn't have as much of an agenda? You think it was more straightforward.

Participant: I do, I think that it didn't last very long because people realized if you put out different opinions it can make you different money based on one opinion you put out there. But journalism, at its core is just presenting what is seen. What happened is that journalism at its core, or what it was when it started, has changed. Presenting news has become entertainment, not news. Who knows what's real and what's not real? It's all entertainment.

Interviewer: OK, these following questions. These are the ones if they're kind of about current events, some of the events that I listed previously in this very last question. You can choose to address all of them or just one of them, or however many. At the capitol riot, what did you make of why the protesters were there? Why did you think some dressed in costumes like hunters or trappers? Or with animal pelts, or with Norse tattoos. Or as Roman soldiers. Or in the groups like Cowboys for Trump. Where did you learn this and what does it mean to you? That's the first current event that you can touch on and or if you happen to hear about the Q Anon movement, what did you make about how they talked about themselves and what others said about them? Why do you think we hear so many conflicting stories? Where did you learn this and what does it mean to you? Uh, and or if you happen to be following the story on the coronavirus, what sense did you make of the different information out there about whether people should get vaccinated and or wear masks? Why do you think we hear so many conflicting stories? What do you think causes the different opinions? Where did you learn this and what does it mean to you and or? There are two more things. If you happen to be following coverage on the House, Select Committee to investigate the capital riot. What sense do you make of how Republicans and Democrats disagree over the scope and purpose of the committee? Where did you learn this and what is meet

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

you? And or this is the last one if you happen to see the stories about the Black Lives Matter, protest and Antifa, what do you make of the protest after George Floyd was killed? George Floyd was killed. And why do you think some burned buildings or other property? Why did protesters denounce the police? Where did you learn this and what does he mean to you? Feel free to touch on any of those or all of them, or combination of some.

Participant: OK, well we'll start at the beginning, UM, About the capital riot. I was not, you know, able to pay a lot of attention to that. It was a big deal. I heard about it, but I don't tie myself to either of the political parties. The protesters that were there... I feel like they had a right to be there, I mean. I don't feel like anybody has the right to tell somebody who has freedom where they can or can't stand and what they can do unless they're causing harm to someone or harm to someone property. I feel like what happened inside, you know the breaching of property on the White House and all the areas where places were vandalized, that was obviously wrong. The people who were standing there were no different than, if you know, the Black Lives Matter protest had protested peacefully. I mean they can be there for whatever reason they feel like can be there for it. It became wrong and only those who you know went inside and vandalized and broken into places they were wrong, and the rest weren't. I mean, the rest were abiding by their freedoms. They're allowed to do that. It doesn't mean anything to me, honestly. I'm not involved in the politics side of things. I really just... It's not worth it honestly. QANON? I didn't hear a lot about it. Honestly, I'm not going to comment much because I'm not educated enough on it. I followed Covid - about people getting vaccinated and wearing masks, I mean. Do what you feel is best for yourself. If you, at this point if you don't want to get vaccinated, you don't get vaccinated. That's your choice. If you want to get vaccinated, get vaccinated, that's your choice. Don't point your finger at the other person, then say they're right or wrong for it, because that's their choice. And that's their code of ethics. They can do what they feel they want to do. I mean, it's whatever you want to do. I think that it's fueled by the media.

Interviewer: I'm going to stop you just a moment to ask, where do you think you've absorbed this information that you used to formulate your opinions, like where did you hear about these events the most?

Participant: I mean, I heard about all these events through my social media platforms. I just didn't pay mind to them unless I decided they deserved a little bit of paying mind to for how I form my opinions on them. I'm just looking at it from a logical perspective. I don't think that I should be or anybody should be invested enough for it to make a difference. To them like, while it's not a life-or-death thing. It's things that are happening and you form an opinion about it. That's your opinion. I mean, it's not like it's not like a big deal. It's such a big deal to everybody nowadays, but, I form my opinions, I tried to look at things logically, honestly and that's what I kind of do. I didn't follow the house

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

Select Committee. Things that are going on with the investigation with the capital riot? I don't care about it, as bad as that sounds, I don't think that that is a good investment of my time in life to learn about it or follow it. It's not my problem. The Black Lives Matter protest and the George Floyd thing. The people who again destroyed property or hurt people were wrong. They were wrong because that's, you know. Hurting somebody else or taking away somebody else's freedom or it's just, I feel like this morally wrong but, if they wanted to march then march, but don't hurt people and don't destroy property. That's what I feel about it. Why they denounced the police while people were upset about what happened, I'm not going to comment, because I don't necessarily know what was right and what was wrong, I don't know what happened, so I'm not going to. That's something that I've just kind of been hands-off about because it's not something that I'm invested in honestly.

Interviewer: Thank you. I know that was a lot. I appreciate you just being able to retain all those questions at once. And that sums up that section of questions. We just have two sections left, so this next one is on contributions and active influence. What content do you find yourself posting online and what type of content do you try to make visible for others to see and what type of content do you try to hide from others? So, I mean essentially like what parts of your life are you sharing online?

Participant: The only thing that I share online is Instagram pictures of me and my family or my going ons. I haven't even done that for a while. I missed a lot of big events because I don't keep up with it. It's not a central part of my life. I don't waste time on it. I think using it is wasting time. I definitely use it. I just don't share on it. I don't make myself very well known on the places that I'm looking at. I just kind of want to observe. I want to observe and take in and leave it at that. I'm not going to share.

Interviewer: Are there other parts of your life that you say you intentionally avoid posting about?

Participant: I avoid posting anything on Facebook because I'm not going to fight with people when I know that I'm going to fight with you. I don't post anything, not a single thing, it's just a rule for myself, I don't post on Facebook because, I don't want to deal with all the people on it. I'm not even going to post the sky is blue on Facebook because goodness knows there's going to be somebody coming around and saying, "the sky is green" and then I'm going to have to fight this idiot because the sky is not green. It's just, it's not worth the trouble.

Interviewer: Can you remember a time when you were careful about the things you chose to like online because of how it might affect the visibility of other people's contributions and the content in your social media feed, for instance on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram?

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

Participant: I don't like things. I'll like friends' pictures on Instagram's and that's it. I don't like things on Facebook peoples posts or pictures. I get on Facebook, and I look. That's literally all I do on Facebook. Twitter? I'm not involved in Twitter. I follow like three people on Twitter. I don't care about it. Instagram? The only things I will like is pictures of other people. I don't like ads, I don't like some celebrity's pictures, I don't even know what else there is cause all I use it for is other people. I don't use it for like finding things to shop for, finding you know what the next big music thing is. I don't like stuff like that and same thing with Redditt. I don't like people's opinions. Sometimes I will upvote a Minecraft build. I'll say "hey, that's cool. upvote." That's it. It's not controversial. I don't "like" things that I'm either for or against on social media. Call me a bad social media user because I am. I take pride in it.

Interviewer: Would you say you're not typically an active user?

Participant: I'm active. I'm on there a lot. I'm just not sharing, I'm not interacting. I'm active but not interactive. I'm observant and that's it.

Interviewer: Alright, thank you. Tell me about a time when you tried to influence or change the content of what you're seeing on your feed, like on YouTube, Google, or other social media. Have you done that by searching for different things or specifically not searching for things? And how do you do that? How do you try? How do you try to control what you see?

Participant: The only thing I get irritated with is YouTube. Let's say I just randomly went on there and searched a Snoop Dogg song. Then my feed is going to be filled with like rap songs and pop songs and just playing the music. I don't want that, so I don't do it if I'm going to search something on YouTube that's not aligned with something. I have weird little hobbies like gaming, so I want my feed to be of all my weird little hobbies on YouTube. It really irritates me when I'm scrolling through wanting to see interesting videos that I might click on and I see, like. I don't know a Katy Perry song - like get off my feed! That irritates me. So, if I'm going to have to search something up like that, I open a guest tab. I get on the guest mode then I search it up. that way it's not influencing what I see. That's the only thing that is like that for me.

Interviewer: And let's see. When you are unsatisfied with Internet search results, how do you adjust your search is to change the results?

Participant: I mean, I'll go back, and we'll use the YouTube analogy again. I go back and delete things that I've looked up. To get them off my recent searches because I don't want that influencing what shows up. You know, I don't know if it does or not, but I just, I don't want it there, so I'll get rid of it. Like if I searched a random song or if I

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

searched some news clipping yeah, I'll go back and delete it off my recent searches cause one I don't want to see it there because I didn't care about it enough. I barely cared about enough to search it into. I don't know if it influences what I see or not, but I don't want it to. I use the "not interested" thing a lot. If there's a post and it was a Tik Tok video that I don't like, "I'm not interested" get it off my feed - if there's a YouTube video that's recommended, let's say one of those random Katy Perry music videos does pop up. Not that I'm searching Katy Perry. OK, I'm not searching Katy Perry, but let's say it does pop up on YouTube. I hit those three buttons, the three dots and hit "not interested". I don't want my YouTube algorithm showing me that.

Interviewer: That makes sense. This brings us to the last section of questions. How do you decide if an online source is reliable or credible?

Participant: Well, if it's from an accredited institution, that credible place. Again, I'm searching a lot of the most affable place. This is for me is my medicine. If I'm searching, I don't know, side effects of Tylenol from the Mayo Clinic. I feel like it's pretty solid, like they're putting out good stuff. And that's credible to me, and because I know their name. If I'm looking at, let's say a journal on a medication and how it interacts with people and side effects, or something controversial about it. I'll look and see what the credentials of the people writing that journal or and the people that are reviewing that journal. And the publishers and how credible they are and how educated they are, I've had to do that for assignments before: to look up how credible the people who are involved in this piece of information are. That's a good way to look at it. And it's not 100% full proof because those people are going to have their own opinions and they can be wrong. Everybody can be wrong. And people forget that. Everybody can be wrong about something, even if you think that person is right so, I just do my best to look and see, like the people who put it out, if they're credible. I mean honestly, that's the only thing you can do.

Interviewer: Tell me about a time when you double checked information online to verify if it was credible.

Participant: There's something that happened recently and I'm trying to remember what it was, where I double checked it, OH. We are fostering a cat that has the feline form of HIV FIV. Feline HIV basically. And I look something up on Google – "how could it be transmitted", and I read what was underneath the first link and it said it can't be transmitted through saliva. I was like, OK, good don't have to worry about the cat licking me and then the other cats getting sick. So, then I got back on thought wait, I want to be doubly sure, and I saw some websites that save maybe it can. It depends on if the cat has a wound in its mouth that's leaking blood and then the bloods and the saliva then that's like because I knew it gets in the other cat cause it's a blood thing. That's an example of when I went back to double check something just to make sure because it's a big deal. I don't know, the cats getting sick is just a mundane example.

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

Interviewer: So, what about that first sight made you suspicious? Like what? What made you think you needed to double check?

Participant: I don't know. It was a quick search I was busy and I'm pretty sure like the first link that popped up was like. Catsarelove.com or something like it's something it's not a credible source. It didn't seem official. If it's an official thing it makes me suspicious, and that's probably why I went back and double checked when I had more time to make sure. That's probably the biggest red flag if the site doesn't look credible from the very beginning.

Interviewer: So my next few questions are just kind of at this instant and like, Yeah, so like what steps did you take to see if the information was correct? You visited another site. And how did you what did your findings make you feel about the website? It was just that you weren't, you know, wasn't as credible as you originally had perceived it to be.

Participant: Well, actually what I did was pull up a veterinary journal like I pulled up, an article that had been written by a doctor in veterinary medicine is, or studies whatever, you know, they were credible, I could tell. These article were written just like if you were to look at a medical journal, but it was veterinary? So I looked it up and just read some of the parts of the study just to be absolutely sure. And I think I actually did that with a few just to make complete certain that we're going to not get the other kind of sick. And it was just such a small thing, but I wanted to be sure, because it's an important area of life right now.

Interviewer: So the information that you've found in these journals on these sites that you trusted made you suspicious of the original and then you searched for the original site.

Participant: I was suspicious for the original, the original search from the get-go, so I went back like I was completely unsurprised to find that information wasn't correct because. I mean, I feel like it was. It's whatever answer would satisfy me with spat out at me. Whether that's true or not. It didn't work if there's true, so that's why I went back and double checked, I mean. I was completely unsurprised that that first random Rep website was incorrect, like. It didn't surprise me at all.

Interviewer: My next question. Please tell me about a time that your friends or family distrusted a website or information on a website and they double check the information from a different source to verify if it was credible. So yeah, just tell me if you have any experience with that, like a friend or family member.

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

Participant: I mean, we could talk about COVID where you see different articles come out about the effectiveness of vaccines or the effectiveness of masks. I feel like there's distrust whether you think it is effective or isn't effective. And I feel like a lot of people don't double check that, so I can't pull up an exact time when I've discussed with a family member, but I'm sure it's happened where they pulled up something about COVID about a mask or a vaccine, or the spread of it, or the side effects of it, or shoot anything about it and had distrust and I don't know if they double check the source. I don't know that a lot of people often do that. I feel like a lot of people unfortunately just take the first thing that they're I see and that's the way it is, and that's the way that they want it to be. They want it to be designed whatever you see first. That's what I want you to think. That's what the higher ups want you to think so.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing. I know a lot of these are trying to get you to remember specific instances and I appreciate you trying to do that. How do you think the media should cover stories about fake news or disinformation? Should the media do more to teach people how to verify the credibility of information?

Participant: I'm going to tackle the second part of that first and say absolutely I do not think the media's job is to teach people how to verify credibility of information. I feel like the media's sole purpose and the only thing they should exist for is to give people pure content, pure truth and what happens and what doesn't happen. That's how I feel it should be. No, I don't think it's their job to teach people how to verify credibility of information. It would be nice if they wanted to. I don't know that I would even trust their information on how to verify credible information because of who they are. And because of the entire institution of media, I'll take media coverage on fake news or disinformation, just like I take media coverage on anything, and that's with a grain of salt. I don't put much stock in it because I don't know if it's true or not. I don't know if it's spitting it out to me to get views or if it's spitting at me for the right reason, which is to give viewers truthful information. I don't know of any news media that solely exists to give people information in its purest form and that is just what happens and what is known about it.

Interviewer: That's fair. The term fake news seems to be everywhere right now. What are your thoughts about what it is, where it's at? Who it targets, who is most vulnerable, what it means for democracy? Is it a real problem? What are the politics of it? And what news laws or constitutional amendments might mean need for the Internet age? I know that's a lot. Just generally, what are your thoughts about fake news?

Participant: Fake news. Fake news is a trigger statement. Fake news has been made to be a trigger statement. When you hear fake news, automatically something goes off in you and it came about during Trump's presidency. And here's the thing. No matter where you swung on that, fake news has been around. It was around long before

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

Trump, it just became a way for certain factions to fight against things they thought Trump was not doing correctly or just to fight against Trump in general. That's where it came about. You started hearing fake news. Even in the election. I mean, in the election, Trump's election against Hillary. That's when fake news started to be swung about and you started here about it. It's everywhere. It's in everything. Every news outlet is probably fake news or at least has some fake news. There's probably a sliding scale where you could put any news outlet and it'll give you a percentage of how much that is fake news. That doesn't exist, but theoretically you could put any news outlet on a scale of zero to one hundred percent of how much of this is fake news and it's probably going to be a high number, because, again, I feel like a lot of people just put stuff out to get views. What does it mean for democracy? It's probably not great because politics being so tied to media is an issue. So, it's probably not a good thing that media is so tied to democracy. I think it's a real problem, not because of any political reason, just because nothing is true anymore. It's shoved down your throat. News coverage is shoved under threat. What's happening is shoved down your throat. I just want to know what's going on in my neighborhood and like what's the dog across the street doing? And what's my family doing today? Like I don't care necessarily was happening in the big world. I mean, if a nuke is coming for us, I want to know that, but that's it. What laws or amendments can be made? I don't know that the government necessarily has a role in fighting fake news. I don't know that the government can fight fake news. I don't know that the government should fight fake news. Not fight it, but be involved with what we see at all. I don't know that the government should necessarily have any kind of say in what we see or how we see it. So, I don't know that there's anything that should be done about it. I don't know that there's anything that can be done about it now that we are so far down this road. I think the best thing for people to do is to just ignore it or find it and formulate your own opinions. Every man for himself. Every man should think for himself, man should speak for himself. Every man has the right to view the Internet for himself, and to find the truth, and it's not going to be that way ever.

Interviewer: Who do you think that fake news usually targets? who do you think, who seems to get the short end of the stick when it comes to fake news.

Participant: The people who invest their time into it and to news in general, the people who are so sunken into Twitter that a mundane post about something that is or isn't against their opinion, will sway their entire day. So, people that are invested in it. The more you time you put into it, the more you get sucked into it. That's what fake news targets. I don't feel like people like me are targeted, I don't invest my time into it. I don't care about it, like it's not relevant in my day-to-day life. For me, it's not something that I'm going to spend a lot of time on, so I don't feel like it affects me a lot. You know, it's how far deeply you want to go into the rabbit hole of news being shoved down your throat. The farther down there you are, the more it's going to affect you and the more that it's going to be presented to you.

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

Interviewer: Alrighty thank you, I know that was a giant question. Please offer some examples of maybe like, where you've seen fake news or instances in which you've seen fake news. Who are the people that are publishing it, what are they trying to get from it, and what do you think should be done about it? You kind of touched on these up in the previous question as well.

Participant: I mean, I don't know that I can offer an acceptable example because I take everything as fake news. If news is fake news it's not news anymore. I can't offer you an exact example of when I've seen something presented and then it's been very obviously fake news one because it's probably all fake news. Two, because I don't pay enough attention to it to know whether it is or isn't fake news. I just kind of dismiss all of it. Some people who do present what other people consider fake news are trying to get a certain group of people to view that and more people to view that. So, they get more views, and they get more money. And that's all it's about. It's all about money, man. It's all about money. It's whoever gets the most money from this view. They're going to put out, even if previous moral state of that news outlet is completely opposite, they'll present something just for money, and that's just the way that it is.

Interviewer: Okay, is there anything else that you would like to share?

Participant: No, I think that's it.

Interviewer: What is the date?

Participant: October 27th, 2021

Interviewer: And what is your state of residence?

Participant: West Virginia.

Interviewer: What is your age?

Participant: I'm 22.

Interviewer: What is your gender?

Participant: I'm male.

Interviewer: And your race.

Participant: I am white.

West Virginia Participant 15 (White/Male/22), interviewed on October 27, 2021

Interviewer: And what is your highest level of education completed?

Participant: I've completed four years of college. I do not have a bachelors yet though.

Interviewer: Great. Do you have an estimated graduation date?

Participant: May 2022.