Marshall University

Marshall Digital Scholar

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New Jersey Participant 1 (White/male/21), interviewed on October 26, 2021

Recommended Citation

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
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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 recoding 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:
- o You have concerns or complaints about the research.
- o The research staff cannot be reached.
- o 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?

The participant agreed to the terms of the consent.

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

Participant: So, I started using social media rather late if you refer to Twitter and things like Instagram and Facebook. My first influences with social media would probably be YouTube and things as such. I started to get news immediately. Different outlets have various different sources were immediately recommended to me in my YouTube timeline and as soon as I signed up for Twitter.

Interviewer: On a normal day, how do you use the Internet?

Participant: I use the Internet typically for research and utilize it for video calls. So just what we're doing right now. I like to keep up with various different news outlets and things like that.

Interviewer: What types of websites do you visit?

Participant: I like to look at all different sources. Like for Marshall for example, I go in the Marshall webpage and I look at the news on there for things in the libraries. I utilize that to read different books that I'm interested in or I'll use it for research or paper-writing. Other than that, I do my weekly grind or my daily grind rather on my Twitter and all my Instagram. And I utilized that very much as well. And then in my free time I'll spend some time doing some research on Twitch.tv or on YouTube.

Interviewer: What did you search for online in the last week?

Participant: There's been a fair number of things that I've searched for, mainly these days it's for research for my paper that I'm writing about interpersonal relationships and parasocial relationships. I've been looking into that and interviewing people and looking for contact information for record labels because I work in the radio station, so I'm using it as a bridge to communicate with other people.

Interviewer: What websites do you visit to pass the time when you are bored? Why do you visit those particular sites?

Participant: I use video streaming services, YouTube and Twitch. They run the realm of my study for parasocial relationships. I'm also engrossed in the e-sports scene, so utilizing those platforms of what people are using to communicate in those fields and in those areas of study or sport is very important. Other things that I do is I'll stream on Netflix. I guess you can consider that an Internet source.

Interviewer: Thinking about these questions, what do you think other people are doing? Both people you know and people you don't know? How do other people pass time online?

Participant: Well, it depends on your age demographic. It's wildly different, like for my grandfather for example. He passes all the time he could, going to go play poker on Pogo.com and play Texas Hold'em poker with all of his friends. But that's not what I'm doing. I go online and I'll watch videos or watch documentaries on Netflix, but I think there's people doing everything and nothing on the Internet, right? Some people are watching documentaries. Others are playing poker, others are playing video games, searching for adult videos, there's a lot happening.

Interviewer: What types of devices do you use to access the Internet, like phones, tablets, laptops? Why do you use them? What do you use the most and the least?

Participant: So I have a laptop that I use. It's my main form of connection while I'm here at the university. It's my production laptop. Other than that it's off my smartphone, but whenever I'm on those devices and I'm searching the web more than half the time, I use the VPN for my own safety.

Interviewer: What social media or forums like Twitter or Reddit do you use, when, why or for what do you use them? Please share any that you tried to avoid and your reasons for avoiding them.

Participant: I typically don't use Reddit because it gives me straight up-
4 Chan vibes these days. I don't want to be associated with those communities, even though there are boards that are relatively intelligent. I use Twitter. I'll browse the trending tab or else taken the tabs that I'm interested in. I use Instagram because Instagram is rather popular with most people in my age demographic and the other ones I use are YouTube and Twitch. There aren't any ones that I'm outright looking to avoid. But again, I'm looking to avoid topics boards that I believe to be too sensitive or triggering, in anyway.

Interviewer: When thinking about people you likely disagree with, please describe which forums you think they likely use and why.

Participant: That comes down the political spectrum depending on what you're looking at. I disagree with some people who are older than me, but I respect their opinions. I don't have a Facebook account per say. I'll browse Facebook, but I don't have my own account, so I guess I try to avoid that and interacting with them. I don't wanna get in a screaming pit, so I just I don't interact with people on Facebook.

Interviewer: Describe for me what you do when you want to find something factual, or how do people around you find out something factual.

Participant: I'm a journalist, we have this saying that there's one side, there's the other side, and somewhere in between there's the truth. I like to listen to both sides, and then after I listen to both sides, I do my own footwork, I do my own research, whether that be through a resource or network of resources, or whether that be through interpersonal networking and like journalistic footwork, trying to talk to people. But I always like to find

out myself. I'm a very hand-on person, so I'm not gonna take what anybody else says, I do everything myself.

Interviewer: 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 distrust its author or its purpose.

Participant: Oh, every time there are accusations made on anything, right? You know, there you are. Perfect example is I've had a few friends and a few people who I know who were college athletes over in Florida or over in New Jersey who had accusations made against them of assault and those accusations turned out to be entirely false. So whenever there's an accusation made against one side, there's three. There's three ends, right? There's one, there's one end of story and another end of a story. And then somewhere in the middle there's a trick. So whenever there's an accusation, I'm always going to question it right, I'm always going to wait for more information to pop up.

Interviewer: Shares a time when you talk to your friends or family about such content.

Participant: Uh content like that? I mean, no time in particular. I mean, whenever something like that pops up in the news, there's discussion about it, it becomes a whole political event. I mean, you look at the Epstein case and stuff like that. That's pop culture. Even like right now, right? When people look at the Alec Baldwin situation with the with the prop gun, everyone is talking about it. So I mean, there's no one thing that I could point out, but I can say that it happens often whenever there's something that controversial, or if there's something that is disputable.

Interviewer: To build onto that, tell me about a time you saw such content discussed on the news.

Participant: I mentioned before accusations made against college athletes. They lose their scholarship. Those have been brought up multiple times and it's like rockers and UCF and Florida State and people losing their scholarships even Penn State. Two people losing their scholarships. And those are the most publicized ones. The ones that you'll notice a lot whenever they do happen. And so those are the ones that I'll mention.

Interviewer: If there are any social media sites that you think are untrustworthy, what makes them untrustworthy?

Participant: People's intent makes social media untrustworthy. Everyone thinks that there are journalists nowadays, but they aren't. They don't follow that Creed. They don't have the same amount of footwork. They don't have the interviewing skills necessary and half the time they're trying to pass their own agenda. Another thing that's worth noting about social media is that it's a natural echo chamber. You get recommended stuff that you like, and therefore you won't get the other side of the story there or their view. So yeah, that's the biggest problem. there's some.

Interviewer: Tell me about your experiences finding conspiracy theories.

Participant: There's some ridiculous ones out there. The one that immediately pops to mind, it's a shame that it does is that Shane Dawson, with Chuck E Cheese pizza. Absolutely ridiculous, but there was probably some actual merit in that one. I think that there's some logic in some conspiracy theories and then some other ones are just downright ridiculous. But there's merit in questioning what you're told, so I'm not going to dismiss all of them.

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

Participant: I can't say that I've ever done that, shared content that I thought was true later found out that it wasn't true. I don't think I've ever done that purposely. I can't recall a time, I always wait for more verification before I pass anything on.

Interviewer: Please describe a time when that you shared things that you knew were not true.

Participant: Like a Like April Fools Day or something like that? I don't really know. In that vein of thought, I typically if I'm going to tell somebody something that isn't true, it's to fuck with them. It's like a: Hey man, it's Taco Tuesday tomorrow. It's not actually Tuesday, so there's no tacos. I'll get people excited just to fuck with them. There's nothing outside of that, nothing malicious or anything like that.

Interviewer: 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 searched for.

Participant: Oh my God, don't get me started on that. I bought a rug once from rugs.com and then after buying one rug, Google thought that all I ever wanted was rugs. Actually, I still keep on getting notifications and popups from Google about buying rugs and they won't leave me alone. It's really bad.

Interviewer: Describe a time when you noticed that search results seemed somehow tailored to you. If anywhere, where on the news have you seen this discussed?

Participant: They're obviously listening at this point. It's a part of the algorithm. They look at all your searches, and that's part of the cookies, right? Whenever you go into website, they ask you to open up cookies. That's because they track your information and then whenever you go back to that site, they end up checking out all the places that you've been since coming back and they recommend you products. So they know what you're doing and they know what you want. A perfect example is I was looking for a new protein shaker, but I was looking for one with a particular capacity to it. And so I did all these searches and it shot back a bunch of recommendations.

Interviewer: How do you decide what personal information you will provide social media companies like YouTube or Google? Do you have any other examples?

Participant: I used to be very against sharing any personal information with anybody, especially social media, but it's got to the point to where you need it to extend your career. So I'm pretty much open to sharing everything that isn't the three digits on the back of my debit card or my Social Security number, so my name, my address information depending on certain factors.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about the ways you try to protect your personal information online?

Participant: VPNs. VPNs and ways to IP mask. I don't like the idea of people being able to look at my stuff. Also, my laptop. It doesn't have a webcam and that's by design. I have to plug in an external one because I've worked in the field of cybersecurity before and I know that people, they can watch and they will watch and I don't only need that. VPNs, IP masking, and taking the proper necessary steps in terms of hardware to ensure the safety of my browsing.

Interviewer: What do you think others around you do?

Participant: Not enough, honestly. The average person doesn't really think about much. They don't even have two factor authentication on their social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook. They really should. That would be my answer, not nearly enough.

Interviewer: What have you heard about protecting your identity or personal information on the news or heard your friends or family discuss?

Participant: The only time you hear about protecting your ID or your identification on the news is when somebody's identity gets stolen, right? Or like the IRS is out for somebody. I haven't really heard anything from my from friends or anything, but that's the only time that you hear about in the news. You only hear about when things go wrong. Like that Equifax situation years ago when there is a huge leak and thousands of identities were stolen.

Interviewer: How have you responded to how Internet companies try to customize or control what you see on their platforms like in Google searches?

Participant: In certain instances, I'm fine with it. They at this point they know, but I want to see, but I don't want to see and that's perfectly fine. My problem is when they use that to tailor and push that to sell adverts, right? That's my problem, I don't like the idea of seeing their products that they're selling, though I understand the business model.

Interviewer: What have you heard others discuss about those?

Participant: I mean, here's a mixed bag. I think it's at this point in this time and age, especially people in our age bracket, most people are fine with it, entirely fine with it, because they don't want to hear that they're very happy in their echo chambers. And that's fine. And then the other half of people on the other side, I wish you would read more of my media or see more things that I like so that we can have an actual conversation. But I think most people are very content.

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?

Participant: To double check everything. Don't blindly. Don't blindly retweet somebody. Don't blindly like something. Do a little more effort. Put a little more effort into what you're reading and what you're saying, because ultimately, that's one of the biggest thing that spreads misinformation. Retweets accumulate really quickly and through social media and how many click-throughs people go through on like something like Twitter or Instagram. It becomes really hard to be accountable, but the best way to stop misinformation is to eliminate ignorance from your mind and to become more knowledgeable on the topic. That's the most important thing, to fact check and do a little more groundwork than just retweeting what somebody else has to eat.

Interviewer: Yeah, I agree. What do you think determines what you have seen online or how things spread? How does it work? Who benefits? Who do you think made the system? What do you think controls misinformation online or in our apps?

Participant: How information spreads on the Internet? That's a very complicated topic, and there's a lot to it. You could look into, like studies from like Richard Dawkins and like what metrics are to see how information spreads and that's a very complicated topic and I could spend literally an entire evening talking about it, because what was the 2nd part that question?

Interviewer: How does it work? Who benefits? Who do you think made the system and what do you think controls information online or in our apps?

Participant: So the system sort of has created itself at this point. It's sort of like our human consciousness in terms of its design, you could look at the MTX at some other time, but ultimately it's what we, as a collective group and hive mind, find is interesting, and it involves the algorithm to the point that it's really it's own being in a sense, and so it pushes it, pushes it, pushes it. Who benefits? Everyone benefits, everyone gets to stay in their echo chambers. The companies who sell their products could continue to make money. Everyone benefits from that perspective, unless you're talking about ignorance, in which case nobody benefits, right? The third party or 4th part of that question rather.

Interviewer: Who do you think controls information online or in our apps?

Participant: We control it. What we watch, we watch, what we do determines what the algorithm pushes toward us. We need to be willing to step out of our comfort zones and willing to listen to other points of view to equal out what the algorithm pushes. If we don't do that, then it's a poor experience that ends it. It really is just their own fault for being ignorant.

Interviewer: This is a rather long one. The Internet is full of stories that divide people about things like the coronavirus, the Capitol Riot, Stop the Steal, Antifa, Black Lives Matter, climate change, QAnon, 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.

Participant: So in terms of schools like a secondary education or like university education?

Interviewer: It's not specified, but both would be quite interesting.

Participant: So I'm a firm believer that there needs to be a restructure of what is Gen Ed and what isn't Gen Ed? I think that there should be law and ethics courses in terms of communication studies added to a secondary education as well as in college, so people are more aware about what happens online than what's available. Like I said earlier in this interview, there is one side, there's another side, and somewhere in between there's a truth. It is really hard to find that needle in that damn haystack. Now to get to that point you need to be able to decipher all these different things from these different sides and need to keep your mind open. And now the issue is that people get stuck-up really early on and that's why you need to get them in high school when they're still rather impressionable and need to teach them about law and ethics and communications, and teach them about how to look for right resources and become more journalistic. That's how you do it.

Interviewer: If you happen to see stories about Stop the Steal and the Capitol Riot, what do you make of what? Why the protests? Protesters were there? Why do you think some dressed in costumes like hunters and trappers, or with animal pelts or with Norse tattoos? Or as Roman soldiers? Or in groups like Cowboys for Trump? What does this mean for stories about voter fraud and voting rights?

Participant: Protesting is being inflamed. It's having a passion. There's something that's striking you right here, something that you feel that you need to get out and scream about because you're being hurt, something deep down inside is hurting you and you can't stand there and just let it be, and it really could be harmful for you not to and so people they take up these symbols not only to protect their identity, but also to refer their agenda and to use it as a representative symbol. You could look at comics and you look at Batman and I fear the bat. Well, that's the same thing with these pelts and with these Norse tattoos and with all these other symbols. So they're meant there to further emphasize our points. What does that mean about voter fraud and voter rights? It just shows that we still have some degree of power. In terms of our decisions, in terms of policy. Voter fraud has become a problem, especially because people were also

unwilling to accept winning or losing, and so they'll take extra steps to ensure their side has a victory, which leads to problems and more protesting because it leads to more distrust amongst the people. We start fighting each other in the streets. The protests become more inflamed, because who won? Was it legitimate? It was not legitimate. We may never know if it were, either with the emails deleted, were those votes not counted properly, or the why are there dead people voting? It's a very complicated topic, you can go into an entire evening talking about it.

Interviewer: If you happen to be following this story in the coronavirus, what sense do 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, and where did you learn this and what does it mean to you?

Participant: Again, people have their own agendas, of whether you're for vaccinations or against vaccinations. You're trying to further your own agenda because you don't want to sound stupid. You don't want to be alone, you want everyone else to change their opinion. Spoiler alert. They never will because we're stuck in our ways. Where you find your different opinions is from each individual echo chamber and in social media. I learn all this from being a fourth-year journal journalism student. And also just like being a very introspective person and listening to all these different stories and looking at both ends. If people are engrossed in their own media and they're too busy listening to themselves to listen to others. And even when they do listen to others, the only response they can come up with is: your wrong, I'm right.

Interviewer: Yes, of course. If you happen to be following coverage on the House Select Committee to Investigate the Capitol 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 does it mean to you?

Participant: I mean, that again is a very complicated one. Why do they disagree on the investigation of the riots? Well, clearly some people are more supportive of the protests than others. Not all people at the riots were harmful. Both parties were in the Capitol building. But I think that one of them is more acceptable than the other. I think the Democrats are much more understanding of how people were inflamed during that point in time, our political climate was rather hot. A lot was going on. As for the disagreements? I mean that that's where it stems from. It's a differing of ideology.

Interviewer: If you happen to see stories about the Black Lives Matter protests or Antifa, what do you make of the protests after George Floyd was killed? Why do you think some burned buildings or other property? Why did protesters denounce the police? Where did you learn this and what does it mean to you?

Participant: I was in Minneapolis at one point or another during those protests and I also went to Chicago for work during that time to get a B-roll during these events. George Floyd's death is tragic. It is really the peaking point of police brutality in this country. It's been a problem forever and it's only become more noticeable these days

and the acts of Derek Chauvin, the police officer who ended his life are ridiculous, especially when you look into his background, how he had several instances prior to this. It was just the boiling point. Everybody was so upset and you look at other similar things. Other shootings like the Zimmerman shooting or everything else that has happened over the years to young African Americans across the country being slain in the streets by poorly trained police officers. And then you come to realize that the people just are afraid and they need to be able to strike back. And unfortunately Martin Luther King's ways of peaceful protesting don't work in certain circumstances to get things done, especially when we're as impatient as we are in this generation. So fire-bombings, rioting, looting, that is what we resort to. I mean you look at the CHOP, the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone, right? There were several of them, one in Portland, one over in Chicago, and others over in Minneapolis. And then you had one in New York City and that's just the people trying to take everything back, trying to show it. And we all rally up where they gonna shoot all of us. But of course they're not. They can't do that. So it's our way of fighting back. People do it because they're inflamed. They're impassioned or they they're super afraid they just want to feel safe, but the only way to do that is to show that we have gumption and that we have a backbone.

Interviewer: What content do you post online? What type of content do you try and make visible for others to see? And what type of content do you try and hide others from seeing?

Participant: That's varied over the years. I mean, when I was younger, I used to post more entertainment based content and various veins of that nature, whether it be gameplay or animations or more cinematography. As I've gotten older, it's just been personal stuff. Pictures of myself, game footage, things like that. What do I try to hide from people? I can't say that there's anything that I put out there that I try to hide. If I wanted to hide something, I wouldn't put it on the Internet. That makes no damn sense.

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

Participant: If I like something, I'm going to like something. If I don't, I don't. Whether that be political or a cat picture. I'm not going to mix it up or think too deeply on the matter. Some people will think very deeply on the matter because they will think it'll affect their jobs. I don't. I just posted a picture the other day of me in a phone booth and I captioned it. I don't care.

Interviewer: Please tell me about a time when you tried to influence or change the content of what you see on YouTube, Google or social media results by searching differently.

Participant: Never. I've never tried to purposely changed the algorithm. If something pops up, oh well. I mean, I think it's interesting whether it be through thumbnail or the title of the video. I'll watch it. I've never outwardly looked to change what it's showing me. I've looked for a particular topic. I'll search for an opinion that is different to mine,

especially like in the realm of debates on topics. Whether it be abortion or whether it be something more economic from like economists. Them having their debates on whatever.

Interviewer: When you were unsatisfied with Internet search results, how do you adjust your surges to change the results?

Participant: If I wanted to adjust my search engine, I would clear my cache, clear my history, and work my way from there. That's one good way to do it because search engines, most of them like Google, you could just alter your history of what it sees and what it doesn't see from that point forward, you could see more stuff and start from the top. That's what I would do. Or if I wanted just a complete blank slate, I'd probably enter an Incognito tab or enter a different search engine.

Interviewer: How do you decide if an online source of information is reliable or credible?

Participant: There are several ways to do that and that new game coming from the journalistic field. That's what I do a lot of the times. There are sites that you could verify the ability of other sites. You can tab on particular pages and then read their origin from there. That way you can gauge what way they lean. Will there be far left, far right or somewhere in in the middle or in between those two. That's what you would do. Other ways to do that is to talk with friends or other academics about what they browse and why they browse it, being very open and not sticking to one particular source with that very topic. I like to look for at least five different sources or five different outlets when I'm reading about a particular topic, whether it be political or otherwise.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about a time when you double-checked information online to verify if it was credible?

Participant: I do a lot of my own groundwork. I like to even call some of the sources because a lot of writers like at the New York Times, they have to list their sources in their article or somewhere. I will call their offices and get contact information for some of them. Whether or not they are covered by the shield law. And then I'll personally talk to some of them or I'll just do some more groundwork research in the background of that journalist or in the background of the person that they were interviewing. And from that point forward, I'm able to decide whether or not I think it's credible.

Interviewer: What made you suspicious about the previous topic.

Participant: About a previous topic or about the previous question?

Interviewer: Uh, the previous question.

Participant: You can be suspicious based off the writing, the history and morality of a publication. Like if I'm looking at Fox and they're talking about something, Republicans

are great and Democrats are bad, I'm going to take that away, but it's a grain of salt there because they've been saying that forever, regardless of the policy.

Interviewer: To build onto that as well, what steps did you take to see if the information was correct and what did your findings make you feel about the website?

Participant: Again, the steps that I've taken to verify all of that is looking into the history of the website. You look at its license. When was it purchased? Who's it owned by? What is their MO? Their mission statement is a very good way to do that. Things change over time. Perfect example of my opinion changing of a particular news outlet or website used to be Vice. Vice used to be very middle-of-the-road in terms of the documentaries and everything for their resources. And they're in journalism. And then all-of-a-sudden they became...not that they leaned heavily to one end and would purposely hide information. And so, like my opinion certainly changed about them when I learned they were blocked by a different Media Group. And then that's why they changed.

Interviewer: Please tell me about a time that your friends or family distrusted a website or information on the website. Did they double-check the information from a different source to verify if it was credible?

Participant: No. Most people don't. Most people just say: that's fake news. And then they roll on and that is the same with my family or friends. I mean, it's a very rare thing for someone to go out of their way to learn more information because that that requires effort, and we're lazy, people are just generally lazy.

Interviewer: How do you think social 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: That's not necessarily the job of social media. And even if they did, people wouldn't look at it again. The solution to that problem is done at the level of secondary education. You need to get them in mass communication law and ethic courses early on, and so that people could understand that it needs to be mandated into that education and into that curriculum. If it isn't, there's nothing that you can do about it. Social media can only do so much by themselves, and unfortunately, they're not at all required to. And even if they did, they wouldn't be able to do it professionally.

Interviewer: The term fake news seems to be everywhere right now. What are your thoughts about what it is and where it's at? Who it targets? Who is vulnerable to it? What it means for democracy? Is it a real problem? And what are the politics of it all? What new laws or constitutional amendments might we need for the Internet age?

Participant: There are two separate definitions of fake news. I will give you the actual one and then I'll give you mine. One of the definitions that people use is: anything that is false and is being propagated. I don't think that to be accurate. I think that fake news is anything that is propagated and spread with the intent to spread misinformation

because I think it could be done accidentally. And that's one of the big problems: what is accidental and what is done with the intent to do harm to one's reputation or to a pool of peoples' knowledge? And that's a problem. How do you solve that? It's a really complicated subject, and the way that you solve it is secondary education, teaching people from the ground-up so they become more knowledgeable on those topics and that could work in principle. Maybe in practice it would require more study. What laws could be put in place? Can't really do much. You can't really dictate free speech. The most that you can do, you could point to the fact that free speech is right now, is to a certain point, you can't scream fire in a cinema when there's no fire. That's illegal, that's not protected speech, and I think the same could be said about fake news and things that are intended to be done maliciously, but that's where it becomes difficult. How do you prove that somebody was trying to spread information with malicious intent? It's really difficult. Hard to pinpoint, and again I've been saying this the entire time, the only way to solve this ultimately is to embed it early in education systems.

Interviewer: That was a very, very interesting answer. Please offer some examples of where you have seen fake news. Who are the people who publish it? What are they trying to accomplish?

Participant: So one of the more recent things that I've noticed is with cryptocurrency and the Bitcoin trading things and such. Everyone is making their own token or their own own cryptocurrency, and a lot of them are done with fake things. The perfect example is the saved the kid scandal. Again, people should be more familiar with it, but they aren't. It was a cryptocurrency that was explained to me that if you buy this coin a percentage of this goes to certain charities X,Y and Z, but in reality, that was not at all the case, that was false. Instead, it was a pump and dump scheme to where the majority of that token was owned by the people who were selling it and they waited for people to buy. And then they unloaded all of it when it reached its peak price and then made out with like $15 million and they screwed those kids. Then the kids don't get any money. That's fake news. That's one of the biggest things right now is in the crypto scene and people making like their own tokens. That's a huge deal. That's a big problem.

Interviewer: What should be done about it?

Participant: There needs to be more regulations put on it, but again, how do you regulate that information? The thing you could do is add more. From charges to it, but it's already a federal charge or something like that. In particular, I do think that people who purposely spread information falsely should be charged. A good example of people who don't get charged for spreading false information is people who make false rape allegations. Like for example, my friends who were on those football teams who lost their scholarships, they were facing like 15 years in prison, even though the woman who made those allegations that were false, she only got a year. Come again, I think there needs to be a larger punishment to detour people from making these, these poor decisions.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Participant: Just in general?

Interviewer: Yeah, anything that you would like to add on before we close out the interview.

Participant: Sure, I think that there are certain topics that people who are doing these studies should look into in terms of the Internet, fake news and other factors. One of them is memetics, which is the idea of memes and DNA or whatever, and how the information spreads rapidly amongst the populace and it's a very popular thing amongst our youth and how it works. It's a really old study, but it's good looking at what Richard Dawkins was doing with that. Another thing you need to be looking into is parasocial relationships and in relations to today's youth and how that relates to fake news and social media and likes and retweets. That's a very interesting study. Those two in particular are good enough to look at, I think. And the other thing is to always remember, there's two sides to every story. There's 1,2 and then the middle, there's some sort of truth there. And when you're talking to somebody, put your eyes up in the sky and figure out what they're thinking outside that. There's nothing much else I could add.

Interviewer: Thank you so much. I will need the date.

Participant: Today's date is October 26th. It's a Tuesday in the year 2021.

Interviewer: What is your state of residence?

Participant: My state of residence on my driver's license is New Jersey, but I've been here in West Virginia for four years now.

Interviewer: What is your age?

Participant: I'm 21 years old

Interviewer: What is your gender?

Participant: I am male.

Interviewer: What is your race?

Participant: I am Caucasian.

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

Participant: Some college.