Marshall University

Marshall Digital Scholar

Fall 10-18-2021

Massachusetts Participant 1 (White/non-binary/19), interviewed on October 18, 2021

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<u>Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study</u>

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
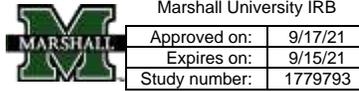
Key Information

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 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?

Participant agreed to the terms of the study.

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.

Participant: What, kind of news starting to appear on my feed?

Interviewer: Right, yeah, like the first time you started using Facebook or anything else like that, and when did you first start seeing news on your social media?

Participant: So I was like… Ten. But the only news that I really saw on it, or like big news that I first started seeing was around the time when, like school shootings started happening.

Interviewer: Alright, and then on a normal day, how do you… How do you use the Internet?

Participant: Contact other people. Keep up to date on what's happening.

Interviewer: Okay, and then what type of websites do you visit? This can also include apps or just websites that you Google day-to-day.

Participant: I don't really use any websites, but I use TikTok, Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram.

Interviewer: Okay, and what did you search for online in the last week?

Participant: Stuff about the Covid vaccine and stuff about the presidencies.

Interviewer: Alrighty, and what websites do you visit to pass time when you are bored?

Participant: Can this be like apps?

Interviewer: This can also include apps, yeah.

Participant: I go on TikTok a lot.

Interviewer: And what do you do on these sites?

Participant: Scroll through videos.

Interviewer: Why do you visit those particular sites?

Participant: Because those are the only ones that are actually interesting.

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

Participant: By watching videos.

Interviewer: What do you think is their main source? Do you think others normally go to TikTok? Do they go to Facebook, Instagram, etc?

Participant: I would say TikTok and Facebook.

Interviewer: And what types of devices do you use to access the Internet with? Such as phones, tablets, laptops? Which do you use the most and what do you use the least?

Participant: (I) use (my) phone and laptop. I use my phone more than my laptop.

Interviewer: Alrighty and what social media or 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 your reasons for avoiding them. So, I know you mentioned TikTok and Facebook, are there any others that you use?

Participant: Use for news?

Interviewer: Uh, no. Just in general, just social media forums.

Participant: I use Twitter.

Interviewer: Twitter? Alrighty and do you have any that you try to avoid and what are your reasons for avoiding them?

Participant: I don't like Reddit because it's full of… like fake stories, so that's kinda the point of what Reddit is. Uh-huh. I think it's just Reddit really.

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

Participant: Facebook…. Typically, because-

Interviewer: -And why do you think- sorry?

Participant: Uhm, typically because, that in, Facebook is used by older generations more, and we have very different viewpoints.

Interviewer: Alrighty, and describe for me what do you do when you want to find out if something is factual?

Participant: I Google it and go to the most credible website I can find, so like .gov, .org, things like that.

Interviewer: Alright, and how do you think other people over find out if something is factual?

Participant: How do you think they find out if something's factual?

Interviewer: Right, so you like to go online and look for .org sites that are more credible. How do you think others around you find out if something factual?

Participant: Umm, A lot of people I know get their news from TikTok and Facebook and things like that, but the majority of those websites are biased between a certain group of people typically.

Interviewer: Do you think they ever fact check or do you think they just listen to them? (The websites)

Participant: Some people I know don't fact check, it's like a 50/50 I'd say.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewer: Alright, and 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 the author or its purpose.

Participant: I don't trust news that comes from television. Like those two main ones, I don't know what they're called, but those two main channels.

Interviewer: Right, Is there a specific reason why?

Participant: They're biased. They have biases.

Interviewer: Okay, and then share a time when you talked to your friends or family about such content.

Participant: I avoid talking to my friends or family about that content. *laughs*

Interviewer: *laughs* Fair enough. Uhh tell me about a time when you saw such content discussed on the news. So, stuff that you might have thought was fake.

Participant: I might have thought was fake? Uhh, the presidential election of 2020.

Interviewer: Alrighty, do you care to elaborate? You don't have to if you don't want to, but…

Participant: I'll, I'll leave it as is.

Interviewer: Okay.

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

Participant: If they tend to have a more… (if) they seem like they have a bigger opinion towards one side or the other. Whatever the discussion is on. They'll use certain keywords, things like that to… Kind of point out what they think, or they have this opinion on this topic.

Interviewer: Okay, and then tell me about your experiences with finding conspiracy theories.

Participant: My experiences with finding conspiracy theory?

Interviewer: Right or hearing about them, researching them. Just any experience with conspiracy theories.

Participant: Uh, I mean I research different ones quite a lot. Just because it's interesting to see what other people's viewpoints and or other theories are on things that have happened.

Interviewer: Alright, and 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 think of a time that I have right now, that I'm aware of.

Interviewer: Yeah, no worries. If applicable, please describe a time when you shared things that you knew were not true.

Participant: I've not shared anything that I knew for sure was not true.

Interviewer: Alright, and 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 had already searched for. So like if the algorithm was somehow tailored to you.

Participant: I don't think it's done that with… Umm, Google or things like that. It's definitely done that way with apps like Facebook and Tik Tok.

Interviewer: Okay, and then very similarly, describe a time when you noticed that search results seemed somehow tailored to you, if anywhere…Uh, where on the news have you seen this discussed?

Participant: I have seen it when- I've seen it on like Facebook and TikTok- Things like that… because it'll pop up on your page, things that you've recently talked about or searched through Google and things like that, it'll always pop up on your feed.

Interviewer: Okay, and then how do you decide what personal information you will provide to social media companies like YouTube or Google, such as your name, your age, phone number, email, things like that.

Participant: I don't really mind sharing like phone number, email, things like that because it's already out there anyway. Pretty much anybody can look it up if they need to. And you kind of have to have those things just sign up for any social media outlet anymore.

Interviewer: Alright and then tell me the ways you try to protect your personal information online, or if you do try to protect it.

Participant: I don't give away my actual address. Most of the time. I'm pretty sure anything I've signed up for I've never given my actual address. But I think that's pretty much all I do.

Interviewer: No worries, and what do you think others around you do? Do you think they try to protect their personal information more? less? They do it different ways, etc?

Participant: I know a lot of people don't like giving away their, like phone number or emails, but they kind of have to for some websites again but they won't give their real age. Things like that.

Interviewer: Okay, and what have you heard about protecting your identity or personal information on the news, or heard from your friends or family discuss?

Participant: I heard that you shouldn't put up hardly any of your information, mainly regarding what Facebook has been going through with identity theft and things like that, because people do have easy access to all of your information nowadays. So, people have been discussing a lot more on news outlets, different ways to try to prevent it.

Interviewer: Alright, and how have you responded to (how) Internet companies try to customize or control what you see on their platforms, like in Google searches?

Participant: What do you mean?

Interviewer: Like what I was saying earlier with algorithms and everything. If you have noticed a tendency to Google one thing and the next week you see the same thing being advertised to you, how have you responded to that? Do you like it if it happens to you, has it just not been happening to you at all with the algorithms?

Participant: It's definitely happened to me. I don't like that it… Kind of like it knows what you're searching all the time and it goes on to other apps and things like that and they can see these things. Sometimes you'll just be talking and then it'll pick up what you're saying and put it in your algorithm, and that's kind of creepy. But it's also nice on one part that I get to see the things that I like to see, you know.

Interviewer: Of course, and have you heard others discuss this?

Participant: Yeah.

Interviewer: What have they been saying about it? Did they like it? Did they dislike it?

Participant: Kind of the same as my opinions, usually a 50/50. They don't like the feeling of being listened to. But it's nice when you see that stuff show up on your page because you don't have to search for it.

Interviewer: Okay, and then 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: Search what you're looking for like on Google, do your fact check on what you're finding, develop an opinion on it if it's something more important you know; Like do your research on your own and then you decide.

Interviewer: Alrighty and iwhat do you think determines what is seen online or how things spread? How does it work?

Participant: For what I've seen online, I think it just depends on who's page you're looking at, because once again, the algorithm… It's up to it.

Interviewer: Uhm, who benefits, and who do you think made this system?

Participant: What kind of system?

Interviewer: The system of like how things spread online.

Participant: I have absolutely no idea who made it.

Interviewer: No worries, do you have any idea who benefits from it?

Participant: All the big social media outlets and/or stores, things like Google. Pretty much if you are an online website, you benefit from it.

Interviewer: Okay, and what do you think controls information online or in our apps? Do you think it's also the big social media platforms or do you think it's someone else?

Participant: I think it's… I'm not sure. I don't think it's a big social media platform some of the time. Uhm, it can vary between like… Certain apps you get, it could be Google. Just like phone stuff itself, you know?

Interviewer: Alrighty, and this next one is a very long paragraph. If you need me to reiterate anything, just let me know and I'll restate it. The Internet is full of stories that divide people about things like coronavirus, the Capital 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: How would I like schools to address it?

Interviewer: Right, like how would you like schools to tell the children what all is happening?

Participant: I mean, just be blatantly honest because I feel like that's a necessity that a lot of kids don't get anymore is… Be like-- don't sugarcoat the fact of what's happening in like, who's being biased, who or what is gonna happen regardless because it's gonna happen regardless. And they need to like fully understand what is going on so they can address it the way they would wish to.

Interviewer: Okay, do you think the schools should address it at all, or should they avoid talking about in schools because I know some of these things could become political.

Participant: No, I think they definitely should address it in schools. It's about education as well as history education like textbook education and current day problems. I think politics also belong in school to a certain extent. So, I feel like that is also a necessity that you should have to teach the kids, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah, most definitely. Alright, and if you happen to see stories about Stop the Steal and the Capital Riot, what do you make of why did protesters were there? Why do you think some of them were dressed in costumes like hunters and trappers or with animal pelts, Norse tattoos, or Roman soldiers, or in groups like Cowboys for Trump? What does this mean for stories about voter fraud and voting rights? Where did you learn this and what does it mean to you?

Participant: Yeah. I learned a lot of this stuff from network channels, things like that on the news and social media like TikTok, mainly TikTok. I think regarding the Capital Riot, things like that it was just to push the people who listened too much to one side of that story and then didn't get the other half at all, because they don't have access to it because networks are biased. And they make the other side seem like such a horrible thing when really it's not. And that goes both ways. I think the costumes and things like that, in my opinion, I think it shows how far people are on some parts of the news and how far people will go because that's what social media has told them that they need to do. And some people still think it's right, some people still think it's wrong, that's totally their decision, but it shows how far media will go to get what they want. I don't really have an opinion based on the other one.

Interviewer: If you happen to hear about the QAnon movement, what do you make of how they talk about themselves and what others have to say about them? Why do you think we hear so many conflicting stories?

Participant: I don't know too much about QAnon.

Interviewer: You're good if you want to. We can go ahead and skip it if you haven't been informed about it.

Participant: Yeah, I mean if you want to.

Interviewer: I mean, whatever works if you would like to talk on it, you can, but if not, we don't have to.

Participant: I don't know enough to form an opinion on that.

Interviewer: Okay. Alright, and if you happen to be following the story on the coronavirus, what sense do you make of the different information out there about whether people should be vaccinated and/or wear masks? Why do you think we hear so many conflicting stories?

Participant: I think it's a big issue with people, I think it's inflicting on their rights and things like that, and I think that's the reason it got out of hand for a long time, and it's kind of calming down now. But, I don't know. People just argue about absolutely anything that they can, and I think that's a big reason it got out of control.

Interviewer: Okay, what do you think causes the different opinions and where did you learn about this and what does it mean to you?

Participant: I think once again, social media obviously causes the different opinions. That's the different platforms you're on, where you're from has a big impact on what you think about certain issues or movements.

Interviewer: Alright, and 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 about this and what does it mean to you?

Participant: I also don't have enough of an understanding about that to form an opinion, I don't know much about it.

Interviewer: Yeah, no worries, we can skip over that. And if you happen to see stories about the Black Lives Matter protests, and Antifa, what do you think? What do you make of the protests after George Floyd was killed and why did you think some burnt buildings or other property? Why did protesters denounce the police and where did you learn about? Where did you learn this and what does it mean to you?

Participant: I learned all that from Tik Tok mainly. I think that I don't agree necessarily with the whole burning buildings things, but I think that the riots were a necessity because that movement needed to happen. Really bad for the African American community.

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

Participant: I don't hide any of my content. But I do post stuff that's sometimes regarding big upcoming issues that is going on like the Black Lives Matter movement and things like that. Other than that, it's just like family stuff, you know?

Interviewer: And 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 others… of other people's contributions and content in your social media feed like on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram? So, I know it sounds a little confusing but basically, can you remember a time where you chose to either like something or to not like something based on who was following you, who could see what you were liking and how the algorithm might be built upon it?

Participant: I used to be questionable about what I liked on Facebook a lot because of the algorithm and things like that, and to family and their different opinions.

Interviewer: Okay, and then 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 result by searching differently.

Participant: I changed my algorithm on Facebook before just by kind of following a more diverse group of people that I like, agree to be friends with, following different groups, watching different types of videos. It can fully change it.

Interviewer: Okay, and then how do you decide if an online source of information is reliable or credible?

Participant: I look up multiple different ones, but I usually go for any of the .gov, .org, .net, or .edu.

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

Participant: Whenever the… Referring back to like the Capital Riot thing like that, seeing why they decided to do it and like what different people said like, you can't trust really what one side or the other was saying regarding the other based on, you know, what they were doing.

Interviewer: Uh-huh

Participant: So, I had a hard time sitting through all those.

Interviewer: Okay, was there something that made you suspicious in regard to why you thought it might not be credible, as to like why you double -checked it?

Participant: Yeah, because it's stuff that you haven't really heard on the news before. Or like hadn't heard the specific person really talk about before, so it seems out of character a little bit.

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

Participant: They, a lot of people I know get their information from, once again, Facebook and they don't really ever check to see if it's credible or not, they just kind of decide then and there if they're gonna believe it or not.

Interviewer: Okay, and how do you think the media should cover stories about fake news or disinformation? Should the media do more to teach people about how to verify the credibility of information?

Participant: I definitely think that they should, as well as educate people. And try to at least a little bit, teach them that your side of the news is not always 100% percent correct, as well as the other one, you know.

Interviewer: Absolutely yeah. Alright, and the term fake news seems to be everywhere right now. What are your thoughts about what it is and where it's at?

Participant: I don't think fake news is… "fake news." I think what people are referring to as "fake news" is just a difference in opinion and what they believe. It's a perspective difference, it's not fake per say.

Interviewer: Okay, and who do you think it targets/Who do you think is vulnerable to it?

Participant: Older generations, typically I'd say- or very young generations.

Interviewer: Alright, and what does it mean for democracy, or is it a real problem at all?

Participant: I think it is a problem. But I don't foresee it changing or anything, just because it's one of the ways the world works.

Interviewer: Yeah, do you know what the politics of it all are? Or what do you think the politics of it is?

Participant: To get the other person to be on their side. They want to be more liked.

Interviewer: Alright, and what new laws or constitutional amendments might we need for the Internet age?

Participant: More protection, definitely.

Participant: Laws that kind of prohibit extreme fake news because that just starts mass hysteria...laws that protect specific groups of people on the Internet.

Interviewer: Alright, and please offer some examples of where you have seen fake news. Who are the people who publish it and what are they trying to get from it?

Participant: I've seen it… Facebook is a big one. The opposite sides of whatever the debacle is, post it and then they benefit from it by trying to get people on their side to get more viewers, more followers, more likes.

Interviewer: Do you think it's meant to antagonize people or just to get them on their side?

Participant: I think some of it is meant to antagonize people, but I think that the true meaning is to get people to agree with them.

Interviewer: Okay, and what do you think should be done about this-- People spreading fake news?

Participant: I think there should be tighter laws and regulations towards it. I mean people, it seems childish in my opinion to spread fake news and people need to grow up and be realistic. If you spread fake news there has to be a consequence to it because you're blatantly giving people these, like extreme ideologies that you have.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Alright, and is there anything else that you would like to share?

Participant: No, I don't think so.

Interviewer: Alright, and what is the date?

Participant: October 18th.

Interviewer: What is your state of residence

Participant: Massachusetts.

Interviewer: What is your age?

Participant: 19.

Interviewer: Your gender?

Participant: Non-binary.

Interviewer: Your race?

Participant: White

Interviewer: And your highest level of education completed.

Participant: High school diploma.