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**West Virginia Participant 22 (White/male/18), interviewed on
March 9, 2022**

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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 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:

- 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 22 (White/Male/2022) Interviewed on March 9, 2022

The participant agreed to the terms of the consent.

Interviewer: Please tell me about when you first started using social media and news started to appear for the first time on your feed.

Participant: Uhm, frankly, I don't think news ever really appears on my social media feed unless I actively seek it out.

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

Participant: I use it for my schoolwork and sometimes to browse social media, if I am free.

Interviewer: What type of websites do you visit?

Participant: Informational websites, sometimes for research on subjects and class.

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

Participant: Mainly resources which help me study for my classes.

Interviewer: What websites do you visit to pass the time when you are bored?

Participant: I don't really visit websites. I mainly just go on my phone and access Reddit.

Interviewer: What do you do on Reddit and why that particular platform?

Participant: I've been using Reddit for like four or five years now, and I guess I like it because I can just tailor my feed to what I like, so I can just subscribe to a subreddit if I find it enjoyable or unsubscribe if I don't like it.

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

Participant: I think a lot of people search through their feeds on apps like Instagram and Facebook and the like for entertaining articles or things posted by their friends. I think it's mainly the social interaction aspect that keeps them engaged.

Interviewer: What types of devices do you use to access the internet, and which one do you use the most and the least?

Participant: I have two phones and a laptop and a computer. I probably use my phones the most to access the Internet. My laptop and computer are almost exclusively for school related searches.

West Virginia Participant 22 (White/Male/2022) Interviewed on March 9, 2022

Interviewer: What social media or forums like Twitter or Reddit do you use? When, why, and for what do you use them?

Participant: I mainly use Reddit- and Twitter if I am bored of Reddit. I actually have a timer on Reddit which doesn't let me look at it for more than 30 minutes a day. I mainly just go on it to stay entertained.

Interviewer: Are there any platforms that you try and avoid?

Participant: Frankly, I try to avoid Twitter as much as I can, but particularly Instagram and Facebook are ones I really try to avoid.

Interviewer: What are your reasons for avoiding them?

Participant: Instagram seems too interconnected. I don't want to participate too much in social media. I feel it urges you too much. Twitter has very polarizing ideas sometimes, and conversations do not evolve into something I like reading.

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

Participant: I think people I disagree with mainly use- So I think I can think up of people that use every single forum, Reddit, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook. I don't think they're particularly localized within this specific forum.

Interviewer: Describe for me what you do when you want to find out something factual.

Participant: I usually look it up on Google, but at the end of the search I add a news source like BBC or AP or something I know is reputable first, and then I'll dive into the content.

Interviewer: How do you think people around you find out something factual?

Participant: I think they do the same. They just search it up and then whatever the first few search results come up, they take as fact or agree with.

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 purpose.

Participant: Frankly, every times when I'm on Twitter and a company shares a sentiment with an issue that is occurring within the world. They're trying to humanize themselves in order to associate the brand with something human as opposed to just a giant company.

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

West Virginia Participant 22 (White/Male/2022) Interviewed on March 9, 2022

Participant: I think I mentioned it to my sister about how these companies really tackle all these subjects, not for the humanity of it, but for their own financial gain.

Interviewer: Tell me about a time you saw such content discussed on the news.

Participant: I don't really see it discussed on the news as much as other topics. I mean, yeah, places where it really is discussed, I think is on those platforms (social media).

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

Participant: Well, "untrustworthy" is a weird word to describe a social media site. I mean, in terms of getting knowledge from it, I don't think I would trust like any social media site at a base level if it just presented the facts, I would pursue my own research as opposed to just taking in anything said.

Interviewer: Tell me about your experience finding conspiracy theories.

Participant: Conspiracy theories mainly come up whenever it's something to make fun of, or somebody says it as a passing comment. It's not really anything that I've heard taken too seriously. It's something I see as an observer, I do not really partake in or have direct connection with anyone who believes in them.

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

Participant: I think whenever memes or jokes come up all the time and it becomes difficult to discern between the two, I have shared one or two facts which were indeed misleading, but sounded very plausible, which may have confused the other party.

Interviewer: If you can please describe a time when you share things that you knew were not true.

Participant: I think this wraps back to whole meme thing and just sharing stuff with my friends to kind of trick them that we can laugh back at later.

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 your search history.

Participant: Pretty much every time I use Google or Yahoo or Bing. They tailor it to my preferences. I usually use other search engines like DuckDuckGo or whatever, but if I really need to find something, Google and Bing are probably going to give it to me because they know what I'm looking for.

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

Participant: Google definitely makes it pretty obvious that they're tailoring it to you whenever at the bottom of the page they put your location and how you can improve it. On the news, I feel like it was a topic touched on a while back, but not really nowadays. I don't think it's as prevalent.

Interviewer: How do you decide what personal information you will provide to social media companies like YouTube or Google?

Participant: Frankly, whenever I set up a new account or any account I go through and uncheck every piece of information that I don't have to give up, like any of the non-required cookies or personal information that I need to divulge. I try to stay away as much as I can from divulging any.

Interviewer: Tell me the ways you try and protect your personal information online.

Participant: I don't really put any personal information online unless it's required of me by the school or government. Otherwise, I refrain from any of my personal activity being put online.

Interviewer: What do you think others around you do?

Participant: I think a lot of people really post a lot about their lives and share everything they can just to make a circle with their friends. But it really divulges a lot of personal information which creates a profile on them, which I feel is unsafe.

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

Participant: My parents always advise against putting anything on social media or anywhere on the Internet, really. And I have followed that since. I wasn't forever, but by the news they usually do tell you to not divulge information if you can. But I guess the news doesn't really tackle it as much.

Interviewer: How have you responded to Internet companies trying to customize or control what you see on their platforms?

Participant: I don't really like whenever Internet companies try to force specific things on their platforms like the whole net neutrality movement. I know it's not as specific companies, but rather the Internet companies themselves that are trying to restrict bandwidth for certain things to skew search results or what people see.

Interviewer: What have you heard others discussing about this?

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Participant: I haven't really heard other people around me really discuss it besides my personal family. Everybody else, whenever I see their devices or their social media, it seems very exposed.

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: I would say to first check things on Wikipedia if they could and do follow-up research or confirm with other individuals who may be knowledgeable about the subject, not take things firsthand or the first thing they see.

Interviewer: What do you think determines what is seen online or how things spread?

Participant: I think popularity towards a specific thing encourages the number of people who see it, like something that gains traction, whether this traction be artificial or human.

Interviewer: How do you think this works and who do you think benefits from this?

Participant: I think the larger social media companies like Facebook and Twitter. They're bought out by all these other companies to show and promote these ads, which are disguised as posts and everything. It's really just to benefit the larger companies, not really for the consumer.

Interviewer: Who do you think made the system and what do you think controls the information online?

Participant: I think the larger companies, the social media companies themselves, have made a system in which they could profit, and they really employ it as much as they can.

Interviewer: The Internet is full of stories that divide people about things like the Coronavirus, the Capitol Riot, Stop the Steal, Antifa, and so on. 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: I think schools should really talk about privacy and researching. I know a lot of teachers and individuals back in high school would always look for unbiased results. They'd always try to tell you to look for the most unbiased thing you can to create a solid argument or really analyze this subject unbiasedly.

Interviewer: If you happen to see the stories about "Stop the Steal" and the Capitol Riot, what do you make of why the protesters are there and why do you think some of them were dressed in costumes?

Participants: Uhm, for the riot I'm sure they're politically motivated to a certain extent to mobilize under a unified cause or something which really speaks to them which made them all go together for one thing, and then it's a perpetuating cycle of yes-men, really, of affirming

values, whatever they may be. I think the costumes may have been, like, almost role playing the part of their action like they're embodying their ideals.

Interviewer: What does this mean for stories about voter fraud and voting rights? And where did you learn this and what does it mean to you?

Participant: For voter fraud I would say this misinformation makes a country which is distrustful of their government and distrustful of the laws and systems that we employ to elect officials. The news frankly reached me from, I guess, social media, which posted about it incessantly. And to me, I think it may happen to a certain extent, but unless there's data provided by the government to really it back it up, I'm unsure.

Interviewer: What content do you post online and what content do you try to make visible for others to see? While you might try to hide some?

Participant: Frankly, I tried reigning back from posting any content online. I haven't posted content in years and have deleted anything I've since posted. If I do post anything, it is not personally identifying it is just something that is humorous or interesting that doesn't really disclose to any information or location.

Interviewer: Do 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 people's contributions and content on your social media feed?

Participant: Honestly, sometimes I think about a post that I like and hope that the social media algorithm does indeed learn that I want more of this content because it's entertaining or keeps me engaged as opposed to other content. But whenever I like stuff, I don't really think about it too hard.

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

Participant: Well, initially when I start something I do look up at DuckDuckGo and if that doesn't give me enough then I switch to Google, and Google doesn't give me enough then I'll switch to Bing. And then from there I will add more information, more specific information about the search result itself to narrow down what I want.

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

Participant: Usually whenever I click an article or something, I try to see where they get their sources from and if I've heard that it's somewhere reliable or something, or maybe do a little bit more research, especially if it's a topic I'm really interested in.

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

Participant: So somebody posted something on Reddit. It was a comment, and it was a link to an article, and I was skeptical about this article. So, I checked the source of this article where they got their information from and the articles- I just kept finding more and it just looped in a circle where it didn't really seem to be based off of anything physical, just something that somebody said.

Interviewer: What made you suspicious of this?

Participant: I think I was initially suspicious, because I did not agree with the content of the article. I won't deny that if I did agree with the content that I wouldn't do all this research, but I think that the fact that I didn't agree made me look into it.

Interviewer: How did your findings make you feel about the author or the website?

Participant: I feel like they were a little discredited, but I don't think the website as a whole or the individual should be penalized, really. In my head, because these are individual events, and if it repeatedly occurs, then I think their reputation would drop but- to me at least, but I don't think a single event can determine their reputation.

Interviewer: 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 it was credible?

Participant: Uhm, when my friends or family bring up a website that's untrustworthy? I'm sure sometimes they do their research and really look in depth, but I feel like those times are the ones they don't tell me the times that they do tell me is something on the spot which like almost makes them heated and they see it as fact as an opposing viewpoint.

Interviewer: How do you think the media should cover stories about fake news and misinformation?

Participant: I think the media should try their best to differentiate between fake news and real information, and if they are going to present fake news as a highlighted point, they should really recognize it as such and highlight it for what it is and not make it ambiguous.

Interviewer: Should the media do more to teach people how to verify the credibility of information?

Participant: I'm not sure if it's the media's responsibility to make people research more about the facts that they believe. Because the media can only do so much, and it's up to each individual whether they'd like to listen to the media at all. I think the media should try its best from its side to make sure everything it presents is factual.

Interviewer: 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 think fake news has almost turned into a blanket term for information that seems a little dubious to the individual in terms of opposing ideals. Where initially fake news referred to information that was flat out incorrect. But I think this evolution has occurred.

Interviewer: Who do you think fake news targets and who do you think is vulnerable to it?

Participant: I think fake news targets individuals who are loyal to this type of news or subject and follow specifically one side of it. They target individuals who are most likely to believe this, who are in their own cycle of information where they only take certain ideas as fact and everything else is falsehood.

Interviewer: What do you think this means for democracy? And do you think it's a real problem?

Participant: I think democracy can really suffer through this proliferation of fake news, and I do think it's a real problem which is affecting a lot of people because it changes their perceptions on things from something almost mild to maybe something extreme.

Interviewer: What do you think the politics of this all is? And what new laws or constitutional amendments might we need for the Internet age?

Participant: I think this is a very political subject, which is pushed by the politicians who benefit from this news cycle on both sides. And they won't really be pushing for something that will actively harm them, but I do think there should be laws which regulate fake news and how it's presented, or maybe media and how it's presented and what companies can do on their social media platforms to stop the spread. But it's almost an impossible task to really monitor every single piece of media that's presented.

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

Participant: Fake news is pretty prevalent on websites like Twitter and Reddit, where individuals repost news, and I think it's because of specific individuals take this news, repost it as fact that other people gravitate towards it and they see that it must be reliable as it's posted by another individual who believes it and they're like-minded. I think they're trying to benefit and push their own agenda and really proliferate their ideas on the subject.

Interviewer: What do you think should be done about it?

Participant: I think social media websites should try their best to mitigate the spread of fake news, but that's difficult as it's such a subjective term. Some stuff is indeed factual, but a lot of it

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is opinionated and it's really muddy in where it draws the line. It's up to the individual to determine really.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Participant: No.

Interviewer: What is the date?

Participant: March 9th, 2022.

Interviewer: What is your state of residence?

Participant: West Virginia.

Interviewer: What is your age?

Participant: 18.

Interviewer: Your gender?

Participant: Male.

Interviewer: Your race?

Participant: White.

Interviewer: Your highest level of education completed?

Participant: High school diploma.

Interviewer: Thank you for participating in this interview.

Participant: You're welcome.