0873: The Fake News and Information Literacy Project

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West Virginia Participant 26 (White/male/26), interviewed March 16, 2022

<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?

The participant agreed to the terms of the consent.

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

Participant: Uhm. I started using social media when I was younger, probably sometime around 2005. I made a Myspace account, which isn't much of a thing anymore, but I was on YouTube a lot as well watching different videos on there. I just did that for fun though, so I don't think much news showed up in my feed until I was a lot older in like high school, maybe sometime around 2009 if I had to guess.

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

Participant: I mainly just use social media or search stuff up on the Internet. I have my own social media marketing business, so I use the Internet a lot every day for my job which is to help different companies with growing their presence on the Internet and create things like social media accounts and websites for them.

Interviewer: What type of websites do you visit?

Participant: I just use a lot of sites and different programs to make websites and I also visit social media websites for accounts of companies that I work with. In my personal time though, I just use websites like my email and Google to look things up.

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

Participant: I don't search for much stuff online these days, but I guess I search for things like funny videos. I've been searching for a lot of recipes lately too because I like to make home-cooked meals a lot these days. I do a lot of searching for that, but I also normally look up what the weather is that day.

Interviewer: What websites do you visit to pass time when you are bored? What do you do on those sites and why do you visit those particular sites?

Participant: As I said, I don't visit many websites and my business takes up a lot of my time, but when I'm not busy I'll normally go on social media sites. What I do on those sites is scroll around and look at different things from clients that I work with and companies that I follow. I like to keep up on what they're doing, so I can help them more. I also follow along with my friends and what they post too, and I only visit social media to just pass time, mostly because it's entertaining.

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

Participant: I feel like it's different for everybody because not everyone finds the same things interesting. For example, when I think of people that I know and people around my age, I think that they're doing relatively the same things that I am, and they mostly use Twitter and Instagram. I feel that with people who are older and younger than me though, it may be different because they're interested in other things. For younger people, especially people that I know such as my siblings, they're on TikTok a lot. And with the older people that I know, like my parents and other family members, they use Facebook.

Interviewer: What types of devices do you use to access the Internet, such as Phones, tablets, or laptops? Which do you use the most and what do you use the least?

Participant: A lot of my time goes towards working and my business, so I typically use my laptop to access the Internet for things related to that, and for my personal use, I mostly use my phone. I use my laptop though for mostly everything and since I only use two different types of devices, I would say that my phone would be what I use the least out of both, although I still use it quite often.

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

Participant: I used to use several forums when I was younger and social media was still kind of new and developing, but I would use Twitter often and I'd use Reddit occasionally. I still use Twitter a lot these days and it is the social media platform that I use the most. I mainly use it for fun to post random things and to look at different threads. As for avoiding any forums, there are not any that I purposefully do this for.

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

Participant: Personally, for me, I think the people I disagree with are using different apps such as Facebook or TikTok, but that is mainly because I tend to not use them and stay away from those apps.

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

Participant: I use Google most of the time when I want to know if something is factual or not, especially when it is something that I see on social media. I try to fact-check it to make sure that it is not false or anything. For the people around me though, I believe that they possibly do the same as I do, by making sure that it is a true statement and checking it.

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: I cannot remember a specific time when this happened to me, but I do think that it happens often because there is so much information out there. It is difficult to immediately know if something is true and trustworthy or not.

Interviewer: Alright, please share a time when you talked to your friends or family about such content.

Participant: My family and friends do not talk about this topic often, but we have started to speak about it more since the beginning of the pandemic when quite a lot of information was circulating.

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

Participant: I do not see much about it on the news as of late, however, I have seen it discussed a few times in the past. The times that I have seen it discussed, it is not very in-depth or informational, and it is simply a warning that information could not be true, and urging people to be aware of it.

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

Participant: The only social media site that I think is untrustworthy is Facebook, but only because I have seen and heard a lot about false information being spread and circulated on it.

Interviewer: Tell me about your experience finding conspiracy theories.

Participant: It depends on what types of conspiracy theories we are talking about. In my opinion, there are different types of theories such as political conspiracy theories in the news and what I call pop culture conspiracy theories which involve things like aliens and the moon landing, which you can find on social media sites. I have only had experience with pop culture conspiracy theories. They are fun to listen to, but I have never had any experience with any other types of conspiracy theories.

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

Participant: I cannot think of a time that I shared anything that had turned out to not be true because in general, I try not to share too much online about different information and opinions.

Interviewer: If applicable, please describe a time when you shared things that you knew were not true.

Participant: As I said, I don't share much online in general, so I don't think there was ever a time that I shared something that was not true.

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 were already searching for.

Participant: These days any time that you get on a search engine, the results are tailored to you and what you have searched before. Because of this, there is not a specific time I can think of because it always happens.

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

Participant: Search engines are always tailoring things in results to you based on the information that they have on you and what you have been doing in general, so I have not seen it talked about even though it is a well-known topic, and it frequently happens.

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

Participant: This is a difficult question for me because I have multiple media companies that I work with, so I must put quite a lot of information about myself on the internet for that. I am aware that I should not put a lot of information about myself on the Internet, so I attempt to keep very personal information to myself.

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

Participant: There is not much that I try to do that protects my information other than watching what I post and trying not to provide very personal information about myself.

Interviewer: What do you think others around you do?

Participant: I also feel that other people, based on everyone that I know, do not do much either, other than monitoring what they do and limiting what they put out there.

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

Participant: I have heard that protecting your identity is very important and that you should try the best that you can to not provide personal information. The only thing that I have heard from the news is that identity theft is a serious and growing problem because people are sharing more and more about themselves in recent years, making it easier to steal said information. However, I have heard repeatedly from my family growing up that you should always be aware of people that you do not know online and that sharing too much can give them more information than they should have about you.

Interviewer: Question 14, how have you responded to how internet companies try to customize or control what you see on their platforms like google searches?

Participant: Because I work in social media, in all honesty, I'm I think that it is great. It is odd to say that it is a great thing, but from a media company owner's viewpoint, it is great to see companies trying to cater to users by customizing. However, when it comes to companies trying to control customers and control what they see on their platforms, I am not a fan of that because I feel that the users should still be able to decide what they'd like to see in searches.

Interviewer: OK, what have you heard others discuss about this?

Participant: I have heard a lot about this topic from other social media companies and customers that I provide services for, but out of work, I do not hear much about it from other people that I know.

Interviewer: Question number 15, 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: Many of my friends and family members already know about this, but to the ones who do not, I would explain that information spreads very easily and it is important to fact-check it before they share or speak about it.

Interviewer: What do you think determines what is seen online or how things spread? How does it work? Who benefits? Who do you think made this system and what do you think controls information online or in our apps?

Participant: Based on the knowledge that I have of this, I believe that it is mostly the algorithms or the companies who are running what sites the information is spread on because like I said, everything we see is catered to us and what we like and the interests that we search for. Because of this, they decide what we see, which in turn determines what we know and spread around.

Interviewer: The Internet is full of stories that divide people like 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: When it comes to this, I think it is difficult to have a definitive answer because I feel that this should be talked about, but I also feel that schools and the news are a part of the issue. In my experience, they tend to control what information is given to people, so I am not sure who can be the ones to teach people about it, because in some way I guess everyone has a part in it.

Interviewer: For this next section, there are multiple and/or questions, therefore if you have no opinion or have no knowledge of the topic, you can state that, and we will move on to the next question.

Interviewer: If you happen to see stories about Stop the Steal and the Capitol Riot, what do you make of why the 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? Where did you learn this and what does it mean to you?

Participant: I do not know much about Stop the Steal, but I have heard a lot about the Capitol Riot because of the news that came out the day that it happened and shortly afterward. With the Capitol Riot, I feel that the protesters that were there did something completely wrong because I believe that whatever problems that they had or wanted to sort out should have been handled differently. They could have expressed what they felt in a different way, rather than attacking the Capitol. I think that their costumes were possibly used as an intimidation tactic, but I am unsure why they did all that they did that day. I do not know much about how to respond to the rest of the questions, but I had learned this from the news that I saw and my opinions from it.

Interviewer: If you happened to hear about the QAnon movement, what do you make of how they talk about themselves and what others say about them? Why do you think we hear so many conflicting stories? Where did you learn this and what does it mean to you?

Participant: I haven't heard much about the QAnon movement, so I do not have many answers to this part.

Interviewer: If you happened to be following the story on 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? Where did you learn this and what does it mean to you?

Participant: I think that the spread of different information regarding the coronavirus is in all honesty a mess. I feel that if everyone listens to science and follows what the professionals and the CDC has to say, then there wouldn't be much debate about whether people should wear

masks or get vaccinated. I feel like there are many different stories about it because everyone has their opinions about it and information spreads very quickly. Meaning, if one person shares something to the Internet about COVID, then others will view it and possibly agree and spread it themselves as well. I had a lot of problems during the pandemic and with COVID because my family had to be very safe due to their health and their conditions, so this is just my opinion and how I feel about the topic and what I've experienced over the past year or two.

Interviewer: 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? What does it mean to you?

Participant: I do not follow along much with this, so I don't know much about this one.

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

Participant: I have different emotions about it, but I think that it is good to see people protesting for what they believe in. What happened to George Floyd was terrible and horrendous, and it is awful that this is what happened for the news to be spread and protests to happen, but I feel like in our society, people only really listen and pay attention to big issues like racism when something bad happens. Some buildings were burned because I think that a point needed to be made that people were not going to be ignored anymore and their mistreatment was not going to be pushed aside anymore and they wanted people to know what was happening to them. Along with that, I believe the police were denounced by the protesters because again, the protesters weren't going to let their problems and their mistreatment go unheard anymore. The police are hurting them and are in a way part of the root of the problem, so people made that known. I learned this and have these opinions by watching the news and people I know who experienced all of this too.

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

Participant: I typically post things about my life and what I do in my everyday life, so everything that I post online is information that I feel anyone would know about me just by either knowing me or observing me. Meaning, I try to keep what I post online information that would be available to almost anyone. So, I don't try to hide anything from other people who see my social media.

West Virginia Participant 26 (White/Male/26), interviewed on March 16, 2022

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 people's contributions in content in your social media feed, like on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram?

Participant: Honestly, I do not think that I've ever tried to be careful about what I like online, especially when I was younger. As I've gotten older and have a business, I pay a lot more attention to it because it's essentially an image of yourself online and a lot of professionals and typical people do a lot of research on a person before they work with them or get involved with them, so I think it's important to watch out for what I do.

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: I don't think that I have tried to influence or change it myself, but it does simply based on what I do and search.

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

Participant: Similarly, with the last question, I do not think that I've adjusted anything to change the content that I see.

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

Participant: For me, I try to research what I find and fact-check it, and even the publisher and the author as well to make sure that it's reliable.

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

Participant: I cannot think of a specific time, but every day I check a lot of information for my work before I include things in the content that I post for the companies that I work with, but out of work I do not do a lot of fact-checking because I don't research a lot of information in general.

Interviewer: Please tell me about a time 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: I think that my family distrusted information from websites during the pandemic because there was a lot of information circulating about it. Especially during the beginning when a lot was still unknown, and we did not know much about the virus and what was happening. We all had a hard time trying to figure out what was right versus what was fake from the news, but

the only good and credible information that we got was directly from doctors or other professionals.

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

Participant: This is difficult because I feel that the news and media are sort of a problem itself. After all, that's where some types of information start and get spread in the 1st place, but I also feel like there needs to be some ways that this is being shared and taught.

Interviewer: The term "fake news" seems to be everywhere now. What are your thoughts about what it is?

Participant: I think that fake news is news that is false and is being purposely spread and whoever is spreading it has a motive behind it.

Interviewer: Okay, what are your thoughts about where it's at?

Participant: I think that it's pretty much everywhere because it is being spread at all times, so it is everywhere.

Interviewer: How do you feel about who it targets?

Participant: It typically targets people who read more of that type of information, and who are willing to believe it.

Interviewer: Tell me about who you think is vulnerable to it?

Participant: As I said, I think the most vulnerable people are those who are willing to listen and agree with whoever is spreading it.

Interviewer: How do you feel about what it means for democracy?

Participant: I feel that the more that fake news is spread, the more people end up separated and that it in a sense destroys our democracy because we should all be united despite our opinions and beliefs, rather than being split into two different halves.

Interviewer: Do you think it's a real problem?

Participant: Yes, it's a problem because I feel like it separates everyone.

Interviewer: What do you think are the politics of it all?

Participant: I'm not sure how to describe it but in my opinion, politicians tend to use fake news at times because they are trying to get people on their side and believe their message and what they're saying to the public.

Interviewer: What new laws or constitutional amendments might we need for the internet age?

Participant: I'm not sure about this answer either, but I do feel that something needs to be done about the false information going around on the Internet. We could create a way to determine what news gets posted and ways to make sure that it is true before it's posted.

Interviewer: Question number 26, please offer some examples of where you've seen fake news. Who are the people who publish it? What are you trying to get from it? What should be done about it?

Participant: For me, I have seen a lot of fake news on social media, especially on different apps such as Facebook and Instagram. Because of that, mostly is it the users themselves who are posting it. I am unsure what they're trying to get out of it, but probably just like stirring the pot of opinions online honestly. But I feel that there should be more warnings or restrictions on fake news before it's posted.

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

Participant: No, I don't think so.

Interviewer: Last question. What is the date?

Participant: March 16th, 2022

Interviewer: Your state of residence?

Participant: West Virginia.

Interviewer: What is your age?

Participant: 26.

Interviewer: What is your gender?

Participant: Male.

Interviewer: What is your race?

Participant: White.

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

Participant: College bachelor's degree.

Interviewer: OK. That's all the questions for the interview, so thank you again for participating.

Participant: Thank you for asking me and for contacting me.