Marshall University

Marshall Digital Scholar

3-7-2022

West Virginia Participant 28 (White/female/18), Interviewed on March 7, 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 when news started to appear for the first time on your feed like Facebook or Twitter.

Participant: I started using social media when I was pretty young, and I didn't really get too much into news until the past couple years.

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

Participant: I use it a lot. I look through like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. I do get a lot of news from those places. But I take it with a grain of salt, kind of 'cause it's on social media.

Interviewer: What types of websites do you visit?

Participant: Primarily Google, Blackboard, and my email, like Yahoo or Outlook, and a lot of other websites to do research for school or peer reviewed articles and things like that.

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

Participant: I had a project for my class, so I researched a lot of things about affirmative action and Wordle.

Interviewer: This question has multiple parts. If you need me to repeat any of them at any time, please let me know. What websites do you visit to pass time when you are bored, and what do you do on those sites, and why do you visit those particular sites?

Participant: When I'm bored, I'll do personality quizzes on BuzzFeed, or I'll play Wordle. I love Wordle. Or just like social media sites like Twitter and Instagram, things like that. Just to pass the time and look through what other people are posting.

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: I think other people use websites like the same way for entertainment or news sometimes. A lot of older people, like my parents, use it primarily for news, and not so much for entertainment, but younger people use it more for entertainment and more like what I do as well.

Interviewer: What types of devices do you use to access the Internet? Phones, tablets, laptops, which do you use the most and which do you use the least?

Participant: I use my phone primarily because that's just what I have on hand always. I also use

my laptop a lot when I'm doing homework or things like that for school. Those are the only two I really use. I don't have a tablet or anything like that.

Interviewer: What social media or forums like Twitter or Reddit do use? When? Why? Or for what do you use them? Please share any that you try to avoid and your reason for avoiding them.

Participant: I use Reddit a little bit for information about things I'm interested in, like games. I go on Twitter a lot for just entertainment and to see about people I follow, which is mostly like friends or people I know, to see what they're doing. I also use TikTok a bunch for just entertainment. I usually avoid Instagram or Tumblr because they've just gotten a little bit boring to me and there's not much content on there that I partake in.

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

Participant: I think there's a lot of people on Facebook that I disagree with. There's a lot of misinformation and a lot of people that partake in the spreading of misinformation that I see on Facebook all the time, so that's another one I try to avoid.

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

Participant: When I want to find out, if the news or some article I'm seeing is real, I'll look it up and see where it came from and who wrote it. Also, maybe (look up) who is trying to advertise it, or get that out there. I think the people around me also try to find out the same way. They just do a little extra research on it and try to see where that article came from and why.

Interviewer: This question also has multiple parts, please let me know if you need any of them repeated. Everyone comes across things that surprises 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. Share a time when you talked to your friends or family about such content. Tell me about a time when you saw such content discussed on the news. If there are any social media sites you think are untrustworthy, what makes them untrustworthy? Tell me about your experiences finding conspiracy theories. If applicable, please describe a time when you shared content that you thought was true but later learned was not true. If applicable, please describe a time when you shared things that you knew were not true.

Participant: I don't think I come across much news that I've found to be really not trustworthy. But I have come across some like, conspiracy theories, things about vaccines and masks and that kind of stuff, especially now with the pandemic and everything. I have talked to my friends and family about it, and a lot of my friends kind of agree. They also look for other places, or if they see that and they think it's untrustworthy. I have seen a lot of content discussed on the news

about especially vaccines and masks and all that. I've seen things on Fox News and other news channels like that. Like I said before, I don't think Facebook is super trustworthy because they don't really have a lot of fact checking and there's a lot of misinformation spread on there. I don't think I really share content unless I know that it's true. I try not to spread misinformation to anyone or like promote that on the platforms that I have. I don't think I've ever intentionally shared something that I knew wasn't 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 already searched for. Describe a time when you noticed that search results seem to somehow tailored to you? If anywhere, where on the news have you seen this discussed?

Participant: I've talked about wanting shoes and stuff, or some kind of item before, and then the next day I'll see it on my Explore page. And I do see a lot of people talking about how they think things are listening and the next day they will also see things that they talk about, on their Explore page, even if they didn't like, look it up, I feel a lot of people have discussed that on the Internet.

Interviewer: How do you decide what personal information you will provide the social media companies like YouTube or Google? Tell me the ways you tried to protect your personal information online. What do others around you do? What have you heard about protecting your identity or personal information on the news, or heard your friends and family discuss?

Participant: There are definitely a lot of places that can try to take your email address and your credit card information, things like that. I try to stay away from them and if I get a weird email, that seems kind of suspicious, I just don't open it, and just swipe it away and delete it. I know that my grandparents or like my parents, they'll ask me, "hey, should I respond to this email", or "somebody sent me a link that my package is delayed", things like that. So, I think that a lot of people are susceptible to it, and some might need a little extra help when it comes to these things. But, I have heard some things about like on the news and in other places about protecting your identity and making sure you don't fall victim to these scams and such.

Interviewer: How have you responded to how Internet companies tried to customize or control what you see other platforms like in Google searches? What have you heard others discuss about this?

Participant: I don't really mind that they try to customize your experience. I think that there's a big part of like the internet and what it does, and that it can be customizable. I think some people feel uncomfortable because they feel like they're being like, listened to or kind of spied on, but I don't think it's too big of a deal. I think it's just kind of how it works, but when it gets a little more in depth and personal, that's when it can get a little bit weird. But other than that, I don't really mind.

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

Participant: I think I would tell them or explain to them that, it spreads by other people like seeing it, like one person will post it and then other people will just not do research on it. And just like, retweet it, repost it, whatever, share it to other people without just looking at it and researching what it's about. So, I think I would tell them to just research where they're getting their information from, and where other people are getting that same information, and where they're sharing it.

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

Participant: I think the site itself can like determine like… there's algorithms and other things that can lead to something, some kind of information becoming more popular or spread to other people. The people that made the system are the ones who developed the apps or control that specific website, or have the money to back it up and make sure it grows online.

Interviewer: This has multiple parts that you can answer, let me know if you would like any certain parts repeated. 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? If you happened 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? And/or, 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? And/or, 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? And/or, if you happened to be following the coverage on the House Select Committee to investigate the capital riot, what sense do you make of how Republicans and Democrats disagree over the scope and purpose of the committee? Where did you learn this and what does it mean to you? And/or, if you happened to see the stories about the Black Lives Matter protests and Antifa, what did 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 think schools should be able to talk about it. Maybe not in such a way to sway kid's opinions on politics, because I know a lot of parents don't like that. But there's definitely ways for schools to be allowed to talk about these things, and to properly educate people on what is going on, and like how it can affect them and how it can affect other people. About the coronavirus, I think at first, we just didn't know a lot about it and like where it came from. So people were trying to justify and figure it out just in a way of fear. Like, people want to understand things that, they obviously don't understand, because they want to be able to know about it. A lot of conflicting stories that come from that as well, because people just like, you hear one little thing about it, and you're like, "oh, okay, so I know this thing and I can spread this thing to other people." So they can know about it. Also, we have a big problem in our political climate, and that definitely didn't help us, because we're so divided in that area. So, they don't wanna listen to any information coming from a side that they don't agree with. I learned a lot about it just from being online and like my own research, when like my own ideas. But I think there are ways for people to come together and have an agreement so if there is one thing that is a fact, they should be able to listen to it, no matter what idea they have in politics.

Interviewer: Alright. If that is your conclusion for that one, we will go ahead and move to #18. 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 mostly post content that I think would be funny or entertaining for other people. I usually just have friends on my social media, so I just post anything I think that they would find funny or interesting that I'm doing in the post. I don't really hide much content, because I don't make content, unless I'm going to like post it online, so I really don't have much to hide from people.

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 and content in your social media feed like on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram?

Participant: I know this is a big thing on Tik Tok, so if you like it, it'll show it to other people because of the way that their algorithm works. So, I am careful with what I choose to like on there, because I don't want something on my feed that, I wouldn't like to see in the future, if that makes sense? And, I don't wanna like something that would have a bad message or is being hateful towards anybody or things like that, just liking things that are funny or that I find interesting, but nothing that could spread bad things to somebody.

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. Or when you are unsatisfied with Internet search results, how do you adjust your searches to change the results?

Participant: Usually, sometimes you can click not interested, on a video or search result that comes up. So they can hide those types of things in the future. So, I do that, and when I'm unsatisfied with a search result, I'll just try wording it differently, or kind of deleting the history. That way I can get it out of there, and I will sometimes try just rewording until I find the thing I am looking for.

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

Participant: I will look at where it came from and who wrote it and maybe, other things they've written. Then see if it was written, like, as a response or to promote something. But if it was written by an educated person who knows about the topic, and knows what they're doing, and didn't write it with a bias, then I will be more open to reading it and learning from it.

Interviewer: This has multiple parts if you need me to repeat any, please let me know. Can you tell me about a time when you double-checked information online to verify if it was credible? What made you suspicious? What steps did you take to see if the information was correct? What did your findings make you feel about the website?

Participant: Recently there has been a lot of stuff going on about Ukraine and Russia, and so I've seen a lot of information and like talk about that. So, I would like, look things up from different sources and kind of trying to see what was going on. I'm definitely listening to people that are in it right now, like people from Ukraine, and their firsthand stories. I have seen stuff on social media, but I look to make sure that it's credible, and if it is, I'll feel obviously better about the website, or the article that I'm reading or looking at.

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 if it was credible?

Participant: So, my mom is very distrustful of information that I try to send her. She is an anti-vaxxer, and so my sibling and I try to send her articles and other things to educate her, but she really just doesn't wanna hear it out and doesn't trust it. Even if it's like the most credible article in the world. She doesn't really double-check and doesn't listen to anything unless it's her own opinion.

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

Participant: I don't think that some media handles stories about disinformation very well. Uhm, a lot of them seem to fearmonger, and make it seem really bad. They can even have their own disinformation spread, like in these topics and within these talks about it. But I think the media

should do more, to make sure they aren't spreading unreliable information. I also think it's very important for them to be credible. But as of now, I don't think that a lot of media, especially, online or on TV is credible.

Interviewer: The term "fake news" seems to be everywhere right now. What are your thoughts about what it is, where it's at, who it targets, and who is vulnerable to it?

Participant: I think fake news is definitely a big topic right now and has been for the past couple years. A lot of it is just online, on the Internet, and spread on TV even, by some news and TV shows. I think a lot of older people are more vulnerable, because they didn't grow up with the Internet. They have never learned internet literacy, so it's just harder for them to kind of catch up. So, I think they are very vulnerable to it, and the fake news is in a lot of places online.

Interviewer: What does it mean for democracy? Is it a real problem? What are the politics of it all? What new laws or constitutional amendments might we need for the Internet age?

Participant: I think it is a real problem, because a lot people see it, and they don't do other research. Because of this they can have false ideas in their head about the politics. So, I think it does mean some things for democracy, a lot of people could believe they vote in local elections or bigger elections for someone that, might not be right, or might have problems, might not be the best fit for it, because they had news spread about them that, wasn't really true to who they are. I think we will need some new laws, or something, especially online. To kind of decrease the spread of fake news and misinformation. I think that would be important just going forward.

Interviewer: Please offer some examples of where you have seen fake news. Who are the people who publish it? What are they trying to get from it, and what should be done about it?

Participant: I see a lot of fake news on Fox news, and it comes from there, a lot. Those are the people I see mainly publishing it, and I think they're trying to fearmonger and just get attention from it. Uhm, I don't think they are reliable, and it really does just seem like they're not trying to spread actual information, just trying to spread their own opinions and bias to the people.

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

Participant: No, I think that's all I can say about that.

Interviewer: What is the date, your state of residence, your age, your gender, your race, and your highest level of education completed?

Participant: The date is March 7th, 2022. I'm 18. I'm female. I'm white. I'm currently a freshman in college. My state of residence is West Virginia.

Interviewer: Alright. That concludes the interview. Thank you so much for your time.