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0873: The Fake News and Information Literacy
Project

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**Missouri Participant 1 (White/Male/21), interviewed on October
26, 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:	8/24/22
	Expires on:	9/15/23
	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/fake_news_information_lit/).

You will be asked a series of 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 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 (First Year Seminar) small group, the FYS graduate assistant and the professor. These people will use the recording to verify

Subject's Initials _____

consent and make a redacted transcript. Definitized transcripts will be uploaded to Marshall University's Digital Scholar website (https://mds.marshall.edu/fake_news_information_lit/).

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.

You will be given a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

SIGNATURES

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 _____

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The participant agreed to the terms of the consent.

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

Participant: I was young. When Facebook and Twitter probably came out, I wasn't even ten years old. So, whenever I was able to use my phone and stuff around like 12-14, I first started using Facebook just with family, adding family and things like that.

Interviewer: Okay. And then when did you first start noticing any kind of news on your timeline?

Participant: I was never interested that much. I noticed social media always gives you mostly what you're interested in. So, I always had memes and funny things, but the news didn't start coming, probably until I got into around 18, 19, or 20. So within the past, you know, five years.

Interviewer: Okay. And then on a normal day, how do you use the Internet?

Participant: I go on most social media, Facebook, and things like that, and then I use Google. I'll look something up on Google for my landscape company. So, for that, I'll use Google sheets, mostly Google stuff.

Interviewer: Okay, we were on number three. What types of websites do you visit?

Participant: Google, if I have a question or something. I use a lot of measurements like calculators, the preset Google calculators they have. Sometimes I look up recipes, but I don't go to like any specific websites often.

Interviewer: What have you searched for online in the last week?

Participant: I've looked up a recipe or two and then I've watched a few how-to videos, I think. Just the normal surfing the internet

Interviewer: What websites do you visit to pass the time when you're bored? What do you do on those sites? And then why do you visit those particular sites?

Participant: I feel like all the general apps and all the normal social media, Facebook, Snapchat, and things like that. But as far as just websites, I don't really have use many websites.

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

Participant: Just for passing time, people are either playing games or just surfing the internet, talking to whether it be talking to friends or family or, you know, just scrolling through funny videos or whatever.

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Interviewer: Okay. Seven What type of devices do you use to access the Internet? Phones, laptops, tablets? And then what do you use the most and the least?

Participant: Starting from most to least, I use my phone. And then the computer and the iPad are about tied.

Interviewer: Number eight, what social media forums like Twitter, Reddit, Facebook do you use? When why or for what do you use them for? Please share why you try to avoid which ones and your reasons for avoiding them.

Participant: I do not use Twitter. I try to avoid that one just because there's a lot of stuff I don't really care for on Twitter, and there's nothing on Twitter that I personally want to get out of social media that I can't through Facebook or YouTube. So, I mostly use Facebook and Snapchat and YouTube, but that's not really social media. That's just for entertainment.

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

Participant: I don't know. I've heard Reddit's good, but I don't use it. Maybe just Twitter. I think a lot of people that I don't disagree with, but I use Twitter.

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

Participant: I go on Google look at the websites, I don't go off that I usually have to look into it a little bit deeper than that and look at a couple sources, compare the two. And I try to avoid mainstream sources that are big, like CNN headlines and things like that.

Interviewer: And how do you think people around you find something factual?

Participant: The people around me, probably very similarly to me. Just knowing the big names in social media, knowing that you do not want to take anybody's word, but some people's words are more credible than other people's words. So just knowing who you follow and what their views are and things like that. But sometimes, like I said, you must even look into it deeper and things like that. Sometimes unfortunately, people believe the first thing that pops up.

Interviewer: We're moving into feeds and search results and search critique, that kind of category. So, we're on question 11. Everyone comes across things that surprised them on social media between advertising, news, and commentary. Please describe a time when you came across content that you doubted was trustworthy, or you made this or made you distrust the author or its purpose?

Participant: Really what opened my eyes was whenever I just knew something was fact, surely not correct. And then I saw being pushed by a lot of mainstream media sources, or I source a piece of information that if I were in that person's shoes, I wouldn't want that out into the world

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either. And then I also saw the same media outlets also suppressing that information and things like that.

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

Participant: I don't know. I talk to people about it all the time, so there's not a specific moment I could think.

Interviewer: Tell me about a time you saw such content discussed on the news. How do they go about bringing it up?

Participant: I think they don't really talk about it too much. You don't hear them advocating for making sure that the information is good information or fact checking things. You don't hear about that. Obviously, everybody knows it's a thing, but the way that you see them push violence or something of that nature, you don't see them pushing the good interest of things like the truth.

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

Participant: Definitely the whole cancel culture thing. Whenever I see these big media platforms, all canceling somebody or something like that, that's kind of a red flag. And it's kind of situational because some people are saying things that are acts of violence or kind of crazy things that, you know, maybe some people shouldn't be digesting. But in the general scheme of things, you know, they don't really.

Interviewer: Tell me about your experiences finding conspiracy theories.

Participant: They are definitely something I am interested in. I always hear about them on YouTube and things like that, and whenever I first would hear about them, I didn't know if was necessarily true, because they kind of sound so crazy, probably around like, I don't know, 2014, 15, 16 around there. As time went on, I would hear about them resurfacing, you know, the same things. Everybody was about 911 and the moon landings and things like that. That's whenever I would first start to hear about them. And I didn't necessarily believe them. But as time went on, you know, there were always more things that would come out and obviously not some like the world being flat and things like that. Some are, are obviously still great. But um, there were some eye openers with, with some of them that, you know, were pretty surprising.

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

Participant: There definitely has been. I don't know. I would say in the whole COVID thing. Not that it was untrue information, but in the beginning, I just thought it was. And obviously COVID, it was dangerous for some people, but just the way that everybody was making it seem like it was the most contagious virus you could ever get. And it's killing people at crazy numbers. I just don't necessarily think it was like that. So, I was on the bandwagon as well with just making sure my family was protected and things like that. So that could be that could be a time.

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

Participant: No, I wouldn't do that.

Interviewer: All right. 12, tell me about a time when a search engine like Google seemed to give you what you thought you were looking for based on what you've already searched for. Describe a time when you noticed that search results somehow seemed tailored to you, if anywhere, on the news. Have you seen this discussed? And have you seen it talked about?

Participant: I haven't necessarily seen it talked about other than the kind of news outlets or the people that I watch that talk about things similar to them. But if the mainstream media and the public figures that, you know, are commonly known across America, I don't hear them talking about stuff like that.

Interviewer: But has it happened to you? Having the results of your search being Taylor has.

Participant: Yeah. I see a lot of ads pop up that are things that I would like mentioned or something. Or something will pop up on a different device. If I've looked it up on my phone, it'll pop up on like my internet on the computer. I've seen things like that. I've also seen when you look up a certain controversial topic on especially Google search history or search browser, the. The things that come up are always very similar. Like the outlets that come up such as CNN.

Interviewer: How do you decide what personal information you will provide to a social media company like YouTube or Google? If necessary, others. Okay. So how do you decide what information you're going to give to platforms that are requesting, you know, phone number or things like that?

Participant: I don't know. Just if it kind of seems dangerous or feels uncomfortable, I won't do it. But I think most of the information that you give out, it can kind of be found. If somebody wanted to dig that deep into, you or what you have going on your social media, just as far as a phone number or an email. I mean, some of these things you can find if you were to look somebody up. But it just depends on the company if it's some weird company or something.

Interviewer: Tell me why you try to protect your personal information online. What do you think others do around you? Have you heard about protecting your identity or personal information on the news? How do you do it? Why do you do it? How do others do it? And what do they say on the news?

Participant: I definitely don't put any personal information on other than the information that you just asked about. That is social media apps would be asking about a Social Security number or something like that. But as far as like my personal life and like addresses and things like that that I'm frequently at, I don't post anything like that. So that's something I do to protect myself. Um. And yeah, I don't share my views a lot, so I don't want my views to be ever criticized and used against me in any way. way.

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Interviewer: Okay. What do others do around you?

Participant: the same.

Interviewer: And then, have you heard it discussed on the news?

Participant: No, not really. Other than, like I said, the few outlets that I follow that do talk about misinformation and things like that. They'll speak about it. But public figures and big, big names that I haven't heard much about it from them. Maybe the bare minimum.

Interviewer: Okay. And now we're moving on to algorithms. What do you think of when you hear it?

Participant: Just how a lot of these bigger companies are filtering what information comes to your device, you know, your interest and things like that.

Interviewer: How have you responded to the Internet companies trying to control or customize what you see on their platforms? And what have you heard others discuss about it?

Participant: I don't try to do anything to control it. I think it's going to do what it's going to do. But I don't really mind it too much because I try to watch stuff that, I watch stuff that I'm interested in, just like I think anybody else does. So, I think most people are kind of like how it's tailored to you. You wouldn't want to be scrolling through Barbie. You're not interested in Barbies.

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

Participant: I would tell them it can be spread just by believing information, you see. And not looking into it and. You must look into it to really figure it out. And by going and telling, large groups of people are reposting that idea. You know, you're then spreading that information.

Interviewer: What do you think determines what is seen online or how things spread? How does it work? Who benefits? Who made the system? What do you think controls the information online or in our apps? Tell me if you want me to break it down.

Participant: Yeah. Could you break that down?

Interviewer: Okay. So, what do you think determines what is seen online or how things spread? How does it work? Who benefits?

Participant: The algorithms control what is seen online and depending on what app you're using or what outlet you're going to see. Those algorithms could be influenced by political ideas or, you know, greed and those things. And whoever engineered all the software in the beginning? I think they made it in a in a way, it's kind of, like you said, tailor to people, interests, and things.

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Then it became this thing that they realized they were able to influence so many people. Now greed has taken over with the sponsorships and the advertisements and things like that. And then also the political ideologies also has to do with greed and things like that. So, I don't know, I think it was once good created by, the software engineers or whatever, and then it's just influenced by other people.

Interviewer: The Internet is full of stories that divide people about things like the Corona virus, the Capitol riot. Stop the steal Antifa, Black Lives Matter, climate change. QAnon on gun violence and abortion. 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 that's a good question because that's something that's happening right now. I think it has to do with personally having values and morals and having a high confidence level and not having a low self-esteem. All these things have to do with being able to be influenced. And if you're being taught these things through your parents and then your upbringing and then through elementary school and middle school, by the time you hit high school, whenever all these negative things are trying to influence you, you'll be able to know right from wrong and be able to, you know, navigate through that rather than all these ideas that are killing traditional values and moral and important morals and values that were traditionally a lot of Americans views like LGBTQ and all these crazy ideas, ideas of emasculate, you know, taking away men's masculinity and all these things.

Interviewer: If you happen to see stories about the FBI retrieving documents from President Trump's Mar a Lago club, what do you think made. Wait, what do you make of why federal law enforcement searched this property? Where did you learn this? And what does it mean to you?

Participant: I'm not well versed in that topic. But just as a because I didn't research it so I wouldn't want to be, you know, say it's not the truth, but from the outside looking in, it just looks like it was something used as a big headline to the face. Trump Just like all the other popular headlines were about Trump. And it could have been that there was an election around that time, or a poll was going around that time, but it looked like it was used to negatively influence his name because of his influence on politics and things like that. I don't know if there was something going on around that time or if it was just something that they put in the news to just make them look bad. But that's what it seemed like. I'm not sure I didn't see anything else come about it like he was federally indicted or anything.

Interviewer: This one is kind of long. Okay. So, the Capitol riot, what do you make of why protesters were there? Why do you think some of them were dressed in costumes like hunters and trappers or with animal pelts or with these Norse tattoos or as Roman soldiers or in groups like Cowboys for Trump. What does this mean for stories about voter fraud and voter rights?

Participant: I don't know.

Interviewer: Okay. If you happen to hear anything about the Q Anon movement, what do you make of how they talk about themselves and what others say about them? Why do you think we

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hear so many conflicting stories? Where did you learn this and what does it mean to you? Do you know anything about QAnon

Participant: I remember reading up about it and I can't remember that. Well, I know it was like a group who was pushing something, but I don't know quite what they do.

Interviewer: If you happen to be following the story on the coronavirus, what sense did you make of the different information that was out there? Whether people should or should not get vaccinated and or wear masks? Why do you think there are so many conflicting stories? What do you think causes different opinions?

Participant: I think what causes it is just because everybody has such a different opinion and is voicing that opinion. You know, it's yeah. That's why I think that's what caused it. It's just people pushing things out of greed and things like that, benefiting the pockets of some. He also played a huge role into it.

Interviewer: So, another part to that, where did you learn this and what does it mean to you? So where did you hear about that kind of information, and did you trust that more or not because you were on a certain app or things like that? So where did you learn it? What does it mean to you.

Participant: I would mostly learn it on all the social media platforms, and I would just see stuff on a day-to-day and. I don't know. It says, what did I make of it?

Interviewer: Where did you learn it? And what does it mean to you?

Participant: In the beginning I thought it was very important. And it's still important to protect yourself and still be using anti-bacterial things and stuff like that. But I just think it was pushed on everybody so, so much now. We can all look back and have the discernment to realize that it was just another virus and it's still out there, you know, it hasn't gone anywhere. So, it matters to me so much now just because a lot of people aren't looking at it and saying, "that's weird." Now that television's just gone and no one really talks about too much anymore, but it's still out there going anywhere. It's still the same COVID it was in 2020.

Interviewer: If you happen to see coverage on the House Select Committee to investigate the Capitol riot, what sense do you make of how Republicans and Democrats disagreed over the scope and purpose of the committee? Where did you learn it? What does it mean to you?

Participant: I don't know about that.

Interviewer: If you happen to see stories about the Black Lives Matter protests and Antifa, what do you make of the protests after George Floyd was killed? What do you think of the burned buildings and other property? Why did protesters denounce the police? So, what happened to if you happen to see Black Lives Matter and Antifa? What do you make of protests after George Floyd was killed? Why were they burning things? Why they denounced police?

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Participant: At first, I thought it was a very real issue. Racism is a very big problem in America. And as time goes on and it kind of loses traction and things are all still the same thing, it's it makes me question, why is that happening? Because you see all the millions of dollars Black Lives Matter was able to generate and how many people publicly supported it and were following things like that. And I don't see any equality changes between black people and any of the other races in America. So not that there's not racism in America, obviously. There definitely is, just as there's racism against any other races. But it just seems like something that was blown out of proportion. And then now, it doesn't have that much traction and it's kind of something that's faded out a little.

Interviewer: It's okay if you happen to see stories about the recent mass shootings. Do you think it's a real problem? If so, has it always been a problem? Why is it a problem now? Where did you learn about this? What does it mean to you?

Participant: The mass shootings are weird because they were blown up across all the media for a very long time and then out of nowhere, they just all stopped. And I wondered the same thing, because it was like every week there was one or multiple shootings. So as time went on, maybe it wasn't that much, but I think they like going on still. Once a month, once a week. So it was weird because you wouldn't hear about them too much. And there was actually one in St Louis Monday that was crazy. I think it's something that's still a problem that is so weird that it was addressed in a way but there was no action.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. If you happen to see stories about the Supreme Court overturning abortion laws, why do you think this is happening now? Why do you think this issue? Why do you think this issue is divisive? Divisive? Where did you learn this? And was I mean to you? Let me look up that word so you can just start. If you going to see about the Supreme Court overturning abortion laws, why is this happening now?

Participant: I think it just causes division in people. And I don't know why. It's something that gets put in the mainstream media at weird times, and I don't look into it deeply. So, I couldn't tell you why the time is. But like climate change sometimes that'll be the big issue of the week. It's like every week it's a new issue. So, I think these are all issues push like they have been for the past forever since mainstream media came into existence, that they kind of just get recycled and it's used to divide people and keep people scared. And that's what I think it's mostly used for.

Interviewer: Okay. Now we're going on to source criticism. How do you decide if an online source of information is reliable or credible?

Participant: Like I said before, I just check and compare through multiple sources. Many times, with all these big issues like COVID and Black Lives Matter, there's just certain details that I'll look up them and stuff about it.

Interviewer: Okay. And what made you suspicious?

Participant: I don't know. It has to do with morals and values. I guess something that if I feel it is an outlandish claim I would want to look up and verify it to be true.

Interviewer: And what did your findings make you feel about the website?

Participant: Well, it just depends on what I'm looking for or what it said. But there's been a lot of information I'll say and realize it's either true or untrue. So, it's just kind of if I feel like in the beginning when social media was new might have been surprising. But as of now, you a lot of people know and as I know, you have to look at, like I said, multiple times or across a couple of different platforms to see what's really going on.

Interviewer: Tell me about a time that your friend or family just 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: I can't really think of something. Just a lot of conspiracies. Like if you tell somebody and you show them the evidence behind some of them, they're very surprised. That's all I can think of.

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

Participant: I think a large majority of the media wants to promote fake news and wants to promote things like that. So, there are a lot of outlets that are their fact checking and showing their evidence and things like that. So that's just something you have to personally see and identify so you can watch the correct ones.

Interviewer: Okay, the term fake news seems to be everywhere right now. What are your

Participant: Oh, it's information you see that is not true. Or ideas that are being pushed that are out of just influence for politics or something like that. That's what I would say fake news is.

Interviewer: Okay. And where is it?

Participant: It's everywhere. It's probably on every platform that you could go on. Even Google when you search the Internet. Just that. Just small pieces of information that are not correct.

Interviewer: Who to does it target.

Participant: It targets everybody, the American population, or any nations population. That's who it's meant to target.

Interviewer: Who is vulnerable to it?

Participant: The people who like to believe what they're seeing. And if you're naive, naturally, a lot of younger people are naive. So, people under 18, you know, and even some people over and that are older than they're just like to believe what they see and don't like the look and the things.

Interviewer: What does this mean for democracy?

Participant: It's meant to make division within the people because with division they realize that there's not a lot of power within that. Something that's used to make us not as powerful. So, it's bad for democracy. It negatively impacts democracy.

Interviewer: Okay. And is it a real problem?

Participant: Yes, very much so.

Interviewer: And what are the politics of it all?

Participant: It's used to influence politics, but I feel like the politics of it all is something bigger than like the dynamic of what's going on... I don't know, that's a hard question.

Interviewer: Yeah, I think it's kind of like we've almost covered it in all of these already. Almost, you know?

Interviewer: What new laws or constitutional amendments might we need for Internet change?

Participant: That's a hard one, too, because I'm not a politician. But I would say just. There does need to be government interference. As much as I like the I think it's the Lasses Fair Act or something like that where government isn't tied in the businesses with these big businesses like Google and Facebook and Instagram who have large influences over populations. There needs to be a bit more government interference and policies enacted, and I think you can. Some politicians are going at it at that route, and some are using it to their advantage so they wouldn't want to put those policies into place. So, I think that's probably what's going on.

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

Participant: They're just trying to get influence for whatever view that they're trying to push for greed or whatever it is. Um, and what, what was the other ones? What did they get out of it? They get money or power. Or respect probably any of those they would want to do it for.

Interviewer: Okay, and what should be done about it?

Participant: Policies need to be enacted and there needs to be government interference. I don't necessarily know what amendments could be used exactly, I just how they need to be involved in what's going on and knowing the truth and getting the truth across.