



MEDIA RESEARCH REPORT

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TEAM LIST

Kayla Brackett

Cheyene Gorman

Stepan Nasada

Dan Schaefer

Sabrina Sneden

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report attempts to answer the question of “How well do people 18-24 in the U.S. distinguish facts vs. opinions in news media sources?” The research was conducted by students at the University of Central Oklahoma in the Media Research class. Various methods, including surveys, focus groups and secondary research, were used to generate the information contained within this report. Between these research methods, a total of 618 research impressions were obtained with 14 from secondary research and 604 from primary research.

These impressions come from many different age groups, political affiliations and education levels. While the main focus was on the 18-24 demographic, for the sake of comparison and drawing distinctions to answer the primary research question, other age groups were considered for analysis as well.

Terms we will be using in this report are defined as follows: The big RQ: How well do people 18-24 in the U.S. distinguish facts vs. opinions in news media sources? Facts vs. opinion: A fact will be defined as something that is capable of being proved or disproved by objective evidence. Opinion will be defined as something that reflects the beliefs and values of whoever expressed it. News media will be defined as, regardless of platform, outlets that the target uses to get reliable information (as the target defines it) on current events. Source will be defined as any individual story, article, image or video that the target perceives as conveying the type of info noted in the definition of news media.

There are some potential shortcomings that should be kept in mind when reading this report. The focus group data comes from students directly connected to the research project, potentially affecting the objectivity of the qualitative data collected via that method. Since the students were aware of the research project and had, at the point of the focus group, put significant research into the question of fact vs. opinion in media, the data gathered possibly comes from those with a deeper understanding of the subject than might be commonly found in the general public.

Students, attending the class for which this project was implemented, distributed the survey themselves, through their personal social media channels. We can thus come to a

relatively solid conclusion that most of the survey participants come from Oklahoma, the state where the University of Central Oklahoma is located. This data is still valuable; However, it must be taken into consideration that the political climate, lifestyles and opinions might be more representative of the local population of Oklahoma, rather than those of the nation's population at large.

The first primary insight our team gathered from this project was a significant change in the way the population consumes news media. Results gathered from different methods of research suggest that people, especially within the target, are straying from the traditional methods of consuming news like television, newspapers and radio. They are shifting more towards mobile devices and computers.

In a survey conducted by our research group, respondents were asked where they obtained the bulk of their news and to choose all that apply between, computers/mobile devices, newspapers, radio, TV, word of mouth and other. Mobile/computer got 48.83% of the votes with the next highest being television trailing behind at 19.08%. These findings were split up between age and political affiliation and it was found that the older the subject, the more likely they would be to use television and radio for news. However, it should be kept in mind that the age range for this survey was heavily skewed towards younger demographics. Acknowledging and understanding this shift in consumption habits is a valuable piece of the puzzle, which contributes to finding an answer to the big RQ, and questions related to it.

Directly related to the previous insight is the advent of social media as news sources. We observed a growing trend of people, both within our target and well outside of it, turning to social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for their news consumption. Interestingly, our studies show that not only are people turning towards social media for news, in many cases they have become the platform of choice where the target often consumes most of their news media.

In a Pew research poll conducted in 2014, 61% of Millennials reported to have received political news from Facebook. It was also reported that Facebook and other social media platforms showed a much larger percentage of respondents than any other news outlet (Mitchell et al, 2015). Data from the survey conducted shows that people who primarily use

computers and mobile devices to access news media 187 out of 463 total responses or 40.39% answered social media, a significant majority. What might give this technology an advantage, is that the user experience is highly personalized to each individual. This means they have a lot of control choosing their sources and the types of stories they receive. This is something that was made clear to us as deemed very important by the target in our focus group.

Another insight that was brought forth from the research is the phenomenon of fake news and a general distrust of the media. The idea of fake news, while not widely explored in this study, adds valuable insight into the ability of the target to distinguish between fact and opinion. The idea that a number of people in the target demographic are viewing news media with a critical eye and not taking everything presented to them at face value leads to a deeper insight into their ability. Because of their critical viewpoint, they might be more likely to break down presented information more thoroughly. They are perhaps more inclined to judge critically the information their news media presents, knowing that fake news is a phenomenon.

In a 2017 Gallup Poll based on a nationally representative mail survey of more than 19,000 U.S. adults aged 18 and older, participants in the age range of 18-29 were asked to name news sources they viewed as objective. The following figures are based on the percentage mentioning each outlet. Fox News (15%), CNN (15%), NPR (13%), Local News (4%), BBC (7%), MSNBC (3%), PBS (2%), NBC (3%), The New York Times (3%) and ABC (2%). In the same study it is shown that of Americans age 18-29, 62% of those polled could not name an objective news source. (Jones & Ritter, 2018).

Adding support to the original claim, a study conducted by the Media Insight Project in 2018 found that of participants aged 18-29, 31% trust social media platforms compared to those aged 30-44 (18%), 45-59 (17%) and 60+ (11%). (The Media Insight Project, 2018). Both of these studies suggest a general distrust in media from the target demographic. One participant from the focus group was quoted to say “I think they try to play off people's emotions. There is a science behind making headlines, and so I think when I see a headline, and it attracts my emotions before it attracts my interest, and I click on it, I feel like there's this veil in front of me.” This shows a sensitivity to the way media presents information and a trend of overall distrust toward it.

Of all the subjects studied in this report, the perception of bias in media is one of the more poignant insights we were able to gather. The data we collected shows the target and others outside that demographic may have issues detecting bias in news media based on political standing and their own personal views.

In the survey conducted by our group, Question 21 asked, “to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: ‘I prefer information from news outlets that typically support my opinions/points of view.’” To this question, approximately 34% of respondents answered, “somewhat agree.” While, neither agree nor disagree was the most popular answer at 32%, the rest of the responses trended heavily towards agreement. Question 22 said, “to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Information in the news media I follow is usually accurate.” the highest response was “somewhat agree” with 36%, and the rest of the answers to this question largely leaned toward agreement as well. These results speak to the idea that people seek out news media that confirms their own biases.

Perhaps the most important insight gained from the research in this report regarding the big RQ regards the ability of the target to distinguish between fact and fiction in the media. Subjects in the focus group conducted were largely mixed in response when asked to rate their ability on a 1-10 scale (10 being very confident) to distinguish between fact and opinion. Some respondents were highly confident with one being quoted saying “it's something they teach you in second grade. It's true or false. Is it a fact or is it an opinion? ... I mean, it's just certain words in a sentence lets you know if it's a fact or an opinion.” (42:18) However, others had reservations and although nearly everyone in the focus gave themselves above average scores, they did express reservations and uncertainty.

In a Pew research study, subjects were given 10 statements, 5 being facts and 5 being opinions, and were asked to state what they believed each statement was. Though no age range was given in the poll, 26% were able to correctly identify all 5 facts and 35% were able to correctly identify all opinions. Because this poll is not broken down by age, the results are slightly less valuable to the answer of the big RQ. This information still provides valuable insight into the ability of Americans though, regardless of age, to distinguish between fact and opinion.

With all this information in mind, it is our belief that though we gained significant insight into many aspects of the target demographic, it cannot be determined with certainty, with the information we have right now, how well people in the U.S. 18-24 can distinguish fact vs. opinion in news media. Though we cannot definitively answer this question as of now, with more funding, time and resources, combined with the significant amount of data and insight we gained through our research on this report, the answer to this important question within reach.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

A variety of online resources were examined to aid our group's research in examining the main research question. Resources that were examined during our analysis is the following: Research took place in the months of February and March by our five group members at the University of Central Oklahoma. Most of the research we examined was over a larger target than ours. Most of the research was focused on Millennials but we value this research as we think it can be pertinent in leading us in the right direction with our target.

FINDINGS

FACT AND OPINION

With large influences of preexisting bias in news consumption, it arose urgency to explore the importance our target puts into fact and opinion. With a continuous expansion of communication networks and reporting platforms, there is a plethora of information regarding news being projected into America every day. The abundance of information is always subject to miscommunicating or under communicating information, along with integrating opinionative statements making it difficult for our target to identify what is true from first glance.

In an assessment given by Pew Research Center, about 32% of adults between the ages of 18-49 were able to identify all facts as facts, however the younger range of adults in this survey were overall better at identifying all factual statements which contains our target group (Gottfried and Grieco, 2018). This was done in comparison to adults of 50 and above. In addition, the test subjects trusted roughly 38% of the news sources they were asked about in a similar survey. With these studies also showing that Millennials are less likely to identify with a single political party, there also appears to be less concern with that audience to discern the need to determine fact vs opinion in news sources given a lack of bias. Concluding Millennials likeliness to gravitate to non-biased news sources as a result.

According to American Press Institute, Americans in a survey between ages 18-29 reported they are twice as likely (55%) than those 60 years and older (25%) to follow up in-

depth on breaking news (American Press, 2014). This could suggest that adults within our target put forth more effort in determining factual statements with their own secondary research methods, allowing them to eliminate opinionative statements from news sources.

With research showing that people within the U.S. above the age of 60 years are more likely to keep up with current events via various traditional media platforms (Roy, 2015) than adults of 18-29 years (American Press, 2014), it could be implied that our target's ability to determine factual statements according to Pew's assessment could directly correlate with the sources they're consuming news media referring to digital versus traditional.

Although we see a trend in younger audiences breaking away from specific political parties, there's still a large percentage of our target age that does choose to identify politically. In a Pew Research Survey conducted in 2018, it was found that Americans are less likely to be able to tell the difference between fact and opinion when the statement being made supports their side. While no age range is specifically noted in this study, the data suggests a larger trend of American partisanship and confirmation bias when faced with facts and opinions on subjects they may agree or disagree with.

When shown factual statements such as "Health care costs per person in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world." 73% of Republicans thought it to be a factual statement compared to 80% of democrats, a difference of 7%. While the results here do show a divide between party lines, the numbers are not extremely different. When the statement shown is more controversial, the numbers show a much greater divide between the parties. For example, when shown the statement "President Barack Obama was born in the United States." 63% of republicans identified that statement as fact compared to 89% of democrats, a significant difference of 26%. (Mitchell et al, 2018) This suggests that when faced with an issue that is heavily used as a talking point in news media, the ability of people to tell the difference between fact and opinion can be negatively influenced.

Another important element to research when analyzing how our target discerns fact from opinion is how likely our target would be to change their opinion once presented with opposing views.

Changing one's opinion can be extremely difficult but there are different ways to approach this struggle. One way to look at this phenomenon is from a psychological point of view. Research by Finucane and Slovic (2000) uses a term "the Affect Heuristic" to describe a phenomenon of feelings affecting the consumption and processing of information. This research suggests that facts are raw data to which minds of people are not as susceptible to as opposed to when their feelings can apply to the presented facts. This affects news consumption as well.

Author David Ropeik (2010) suggests that self-affirmation leads to a more open-minded outlook on new information even when it contradicts one's perception. Ropeik supports this claim with a study conducted to specifically test effects of self-affirmation. (Reifler 2009, "Opening the Partisan Mind? Self-affirmation and information processing about the surge in Iraq") Having said that, this indicates that to understand the target's likeliness to change opinion, the target's self-affirmation should be examined. Meaning, if the 18-24-year-old population in the U.S. tends to have lower self-affirmation they are less likely to be convinced of an opposing viewpoint or facts that are inconsistent with their beliefs. The reverse is also possible.

After some search on the web, a common trend may be seen. Many are quick to judge the Millennial generation as very confident and even self-absorbed. While most of those statements are wildly subjective, some research hints that such claims do have a foundation. Yet, it is important to note that even Pew Research admits that generational studies are not an exact science and that, "there is an element of false precision in setting hard chronological boundaries between the generations". (Kahn, 2010)

Even with a taste of subjectivity however, Pew Research Center article title "Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change" suggests that the connection we can see between the "Affect Heuristic", open-mindedness of self-affirmed individuals and the confident outlook of Millennials, may in fact be causative rather than just correlative.

NEWS CONSUMPTION

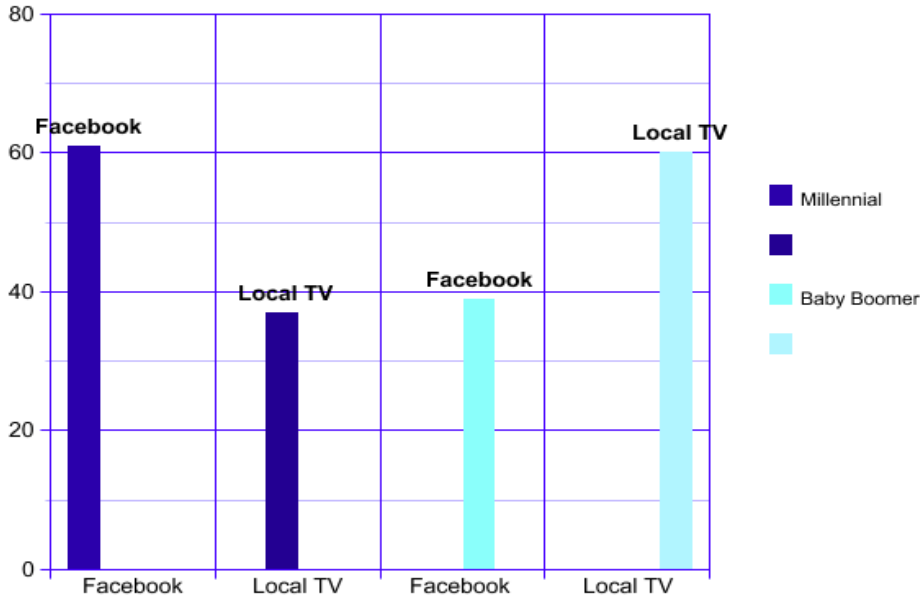
In the analysis process of our big research question, it is important for us to look at how our target consumes news.

As generations and technology evolve, there is an importance toward identifying what our target's habits are regarding news consumption. It's shown through research that data suggests adults between ages 18-34 years do not visit direct news sites or consume traditional media in comparison to the previous generation, however their news absorption largely comes from digital media platforms. 69% of this age group organically consumes news daily and 85% say that keeping up with the news is at least somewhat important to them (American Press, 2015). In this American Press Institute survey report conducted by the Media Insight Project, this age group was also more likely to report following news with subject matters of politics, community, crime, and social issues than they were to report tracking pop culture or celebrities (American Press, 2015). However, roughly 26% of the target selected politics and government as one of the topics they have the most personal interest in. This supports the statistic stating that just 35% of the target engages in political conversation at least a few times a week (American Press, 2015). It appears that they feel as it is more of a duty to follow political news rather it being dependent on their desire.

According to Pew Research Center, once Millennials encounter news, 90% from this report seeing diverse options for opinion forming, and 75% of those state researching opinions different from their own. The data also shows that 74% of the target obtains news for the reason of civic motivation, 63% for problem-solving needs, and 67% from social influences (Gottfried, 2015). With the technological developments of social media, about 61% of the target reports obtaining political news on Facebook per each calendar week. This piques interest when reviewing in comparison to the older generations as a majority of them acquire political news via local television for the same duration (Barthel, 2015). A Newsworks study gathered that 73% of the target agreed that they visit a branded news site to investigate more information after seeing an interesting story on social media (Greenslade, 2015), essentially conducting their own in-depth fact checking.

Pew Research conducted a study in 2015 that took a look at what news outlets are most popular with Millennials. Although the target age of Millennials covers a broader age than our

Percent of Millennials and Baby Boomers who got their news in the previous week from..



target age, their research can still be valuable when trying to uncover how our target age consumes news.

Sixty-one percent of Millennials are reported to receive political news from Facebook as opposed to television, with only 37% saying that was

how they received political news. Facebook and other social media platforms showed a much larger percentage than any other news outlet (Mitchell et al, 2015). This is an interesting data when comparing the research to baby boomers (defined as ages 50-68) where the numbers are almost mirrored with 39% saying they receive their news from Facebook and 60% say they get their political news from the television (Mitchell et al, 2015). Pew Research also pointed out that Millennials were less familiar with many of the 36 sources they were asked about in their survey, which ranged from USA Today, Rush Limbaugh to Slate.

A research study done in April 2009 showed that 79% of wireless internet users are more likely to get their general and political news online rather than 57% of wired internet users (Lenhart et al, 2010). 79% of young adults ages 18-29 use social networking websites, which is significantly higher than the 39% of users aged 30 and older (Lenhart et al, 2010). Though this last leg of research does not say specifically what news outlets are most popular, it is clearly stated that young adults were going online for their news information as of 2009.

RECOGNIZING BIAS

Research has shown that Americans of all ages perceive that most media outlets have biases. While data suggests that there is some confidence in the objectivity of some news outlets, young people seem to take a more skeptical view than their older counterparts. In a 2017 Gallup Poll based on a nationally representative mail survey of more than 19,000 U.S. adults aged 18 and older, Participants in the age range of 18-29 were asked to name news sources they viewed as objective. The following figures are based on the percentage mentioning each outlet. Fox News (15%), CNN (15%), NPR (13%), Local News (4%), BBC (7%), MSNBC (3%), PBS (2%), NBC (3%), The New York Times (3%) and ABC (2%). In the same study it is shown that of Americans age 18-29, 62% of those polled could not name an objective news source. (Jones & Ritter, 2018)

When the parameters are broadened from news companies to the medium of news consumption, studies have shown that while young people have an overall lower trust in news media, they seem to trust non-traditional news outlets significantly more than their older counterparts. In a study conducted by the Media Insight Project, of participants aged 18-29 31% trust social media platforms compared to those aged 30-44 (18%), 45-59 (17%) and 60+ (11%). (The Media Insight Project, 2018)

Although our research is focused on the news consumption of Americans aged 18-24, we found it of importance to look at how Millennials consume news to better understand the possibilities and trends of our target age. Millennials are known for being skeptical. With the world at our finger tips, Millennials and younger people have become custom to constantly asking questions. But even though the target age group is statistically more skeptical, there's a disconnect between their skepticism and their susceptibility to false media messages. (Lee, 2016)

The target age is also known for "microwaving" information. They want information fast and they want it easy. Because of this desire to "microwave" information, studies have shown that Millennials get most of their news from social media due to how fast social media puts out new information.

Although social media can be helpful for receiving information, there's an endless amount of false information spread throughout social media outlets. So what's the problem with this? Millennials aren't fact checking the information they're being given causing a snow ball effect. Older age groups have been shown to research the information they're given, either through libraries or through other scholarly sources. (Lee, 2016)

An example of Millennials not fact checking information is the "Stop Kony" campaign in 2012. The whole campaign was a hoax, and could have been proven so through a simple internet research, yet Millennials are the reason the campaign blew up. Millions of dollars was raised for a campaign over an un-factual cause. (Lee, 2016)

Another problem with relying on social media for news consumption was discovered in a research study over Facebook and fake news. Researchers discovered that Facebook's own algorithm shows people what they want to see. Whatever people click on the most, the algorithm will cater to that and continue to show things like news posts and advertisements that are similar to what a consumer has clicked on before (DiFranzo & Gloria, 2017). Online news consumers don't seem like they feel the need to fact check the things they see on Facebook because it is specifically catered to them (DiFranzo & Gloria, 2017). Most people wouldn't think to fact check something that they agree with or something they see regularly. The study even showed that Facebook users are only 6% less likely to see a post that conflicts with their views when compared to an unfiltered newsfeed (DiFranzo & Gloria, 2017).

Because of several fake news articles being passed around the internet, such as one that stated the Pope endorsed Donald Trump, Facebook decided to take matters into its own hands and flag these fake articles as "Disputed by 3rd Party Fact Checkers" (DiFranzo & Gloria, 2017). Mark Zuckerberg said in a Facebook post following the U.S. election, "Of all the content on Facebook, more than 99% of what people see is authentic. Only a very small amount is fake news and hoaxes. Overall, this makes it extremely unlikely hoaxes changed the outcome of this election one direction or the other". But he did not provide any data or evidence to back this claim (DiFranzo & Gloria, 2017).

The target audience was not fact checking in the first place, which was why Facebook stepped in and started flagging them itself. One major reason why the target is not fact

checking though is because of how everything on social media is catered to fit what they look at on a daily basis, so people are less likely to check their sources if they agree with them.

Another thing that could be contributing to our target age's lack of recognition of media bias is their use of the Third Person Effect. The Third Person Effect suggests that individuals evaluate others as being more gullible or more susceptible to mass media messages than themselves. So perhaps the reason Millennials aren't fact checking their information is because they trust themselves too much in recognizing media bias.

CONCLUSIONS

FACT AND OPINION

When researching how fact vs. opinion plays into the lives of our target, we found some interesting data.

The first thing we discovered is that our target is more likely to be able to discern fact from opinion than older generations. Although research in other areas of this overall topic made us question why that is, we find that piece of data of value.

Our target is more likely to be able to discern fact from opinion than other generations, but it's contingent on what the topic is about. If it's a topic that the target is passionate about, it may pose negative effects of the distinguishing of fact from opinion.

Fewer Millennials identify with a political party compared to other generations. Since fewer people of our target are identifying politically, we wonder if that aids them in discerning fact from opinion.

If it's more difficult to discern fact from opinion when it's something you're emotionally invested in, and if politics are a huge piece of news but our target isn't emotionally invested in it, then we assume our target has an advantage in discerning fact from opinion.

Once the target is given a competing opinion, we'd like to look further into how our target would respond. We believe that researching data on how our target's self-affirmation is would give us a better understanding of how likely our target would be to change their opinion on something.

Although we didn't find any solid data in this subtopic that helped answer our big RQ, it aided us in that it generated more questions to research and showed us elements of this topic that we didn't think of before.

NEWS CONSUMPTION

When researching how our target age consumes news, we discovered a few things we find of importance.

The first thing we discovered is that our target age has an interest in consuming news on the topic of politics even though fewer of them identify with a political party. After consuming news on the topic of politics, 35% of the target in return engages in political conversation at least a few times a week. We believe that this data shows that the consumption of news is of value to our target. If our target is having frequent conversations based off of what they see in the news, then we can conclude that keeping up to date on current events is something younger generations still value.

In relation to our main research question, we think that our target's interest in news consumption may give them a leg up in distinguishing fact vs. opinions in news media sources. If our target is seeking the consumption of news at least somewhat frequently, then one can assume they're becoming more and more familiar with pieces from different news sources. That assumption also assumes that our target is seeking news from multiple sources, which is where we found our second piece of pertinent information regarding this topic.

When researching how our target consumes news, we discovered that the majority of our target receives news from Facebook and other social media platforms. Since Facebook is primarily opinion based, with the exception of credible sources sharing information, we think it may pose a threat on the ability of our target to distinguish facts vs. opinions. If our target is consistently receiving news in the style of their friends commenting or re-sharing posts pertaining to news that they've seen, then one can assume that their perception of the story is different than the actual reality of it. Opinion sharing also comes with emotions, which can make it harder to discern fact from opinion when you have an emotional perception of the situation.

We also discovered that our target wasn't familiar with many of the news sources they were asked about when comparing to older generations. Reading the same story from different news sources allows you to piece together the story in a much more efficient way than if you read the story from one source. Although it's ideal to be able to obtain news from one source and have it be credible and accurate, that's not always the reality. Once you become familiar with different news sources, you start to recognize the bias in some of them. If our target age isn't subjecting themselves to different sources, we think it may show that they will have a more difficult time in distinguishing fact vs. opinion.

RECOGNIZING BIAS

When researching how well our target recognizes bias in the news, we discovered that there's many possible contributing factors to the hindered ability of our target to be able to recognize bias. We've concluded that our target age has a more difficult time recognizing bias than those of other generations.

The first factor that contributed to this conclusion is the research that explains that Millennials and younger age groups are being fed bias through Facebook and other social media platforms at no fault of their own. Facebook and other social media platforms use an algorithm designed to only show you posts that are similar with other posts you've interacted with. Although the algorithm is beneficial from a social media user perspective, it's not a beneficial way to discover pertinent issues. Since our target age utilizes social media platforms more than other generations, we believe our target age might have a difficult time recognizing bias because they're on social media more. If you see the same message enough times, you're going to begin to accept it as the truth. We believe that with the frequency of how often our target age checks their social media with the addition of Facebook's algorithm, it makes it much more difficult to recognize bias.

The second factor that contributed to this conclusion is our target age's lack of interest in verifying information. Research has shown that Millennials have interest in receiving information as fast and easy as possible, without the desire to take the time to fact check it. Millennials have been a part of big movements created by the sharing of false information, such

as Kony 2012 and other internet movements. The research shows that Millennials are more likely to believe a post with little to no verification over the topic, compared to older generations who are more likely to seek scholarly sources to verify their information. Because of these findings, we believe that our target age cannot discern biases in news due to the lack of interest in verifying information that they're receiving.

PRIMARY: FOCUS GROUP

INTRODUCTION

One variation of primary research utilized to answer the research question was focus groups. Two consecutive focus groups were conducted on March 29th at The University of Central Oklahoma, with completely different participants in each. The first group conducted consisted of eight people and the second consisted of 10.

It is important to note that the respondents in the focus groups are the students that are conducting the research themselves, thus the results may be skewed due to their knowledge of the subject and attitude towards it. This can be seen in research outcomes such as the statement that one participant made, "I think they try to play off people's emotions.

There is a science behind making headlines, so I think when I see a headline, and it attracts my emotions before it attracts my interest, and I click on it, I feel like there's this veil in front of me." (47:19) A participant

"I think they try to play off people's emotions. There is a science behind making headlines, so I think when I see a headline, and it attracts my emotions before it attracts my interest, and I click on it, I feel like there's this veil in front of me." (47:19)

viewing the process of writing headlines as a science is an example of how one's background in a study like this can affect their feedback.

An interesting perspective was brought into play when one participant stated, "I think they try to play off people's emotions. There is a science behind making headlines, and so I think when I see a headline, and it attracts my emotions before it attracts my interest, and I click on it, I feel like there's this veil in front of me." This points to a change in perception which

may occur with change in knowledge of the subject of communications. All participants can be identified as having some college education and have studied the subject matter previously. Keeping these limitations in mind, these findings may still provide useful insights and basis for further research.

Before analyzing the received responses, it is important to take note of demographics of the groups. Out of eight participants in the first group seven were Caucasian and one was African American. The second group was more diverse, containing Caucasians, Asian-Americans, African Americans and one Latina.

Male and female demographics were very close to even when counting both groups together. The first group consisted of five males and three females, while the second group had three males and seven females. Out of the 18 participants, two did not fit into the target age group of 18-24. One person was 32 and another was 25 years old, in groups one and two respectively. Out of all 18 participants most were single with only one person married.

FINDINGS

NEWS EXPOSURE

The first discoveries from the focus groups deal with exposure to news. To indicate interest in the news a simple show of hands was used. In both groups the trend was similar and possibly influenced by the education level. Five out of eight and seven out of 10 participants indicated that they actively follow the news. The rest agreed that when a significant event takes place and they hear about it - they are then likely to research it further for their own benefit. In general, it could be seen from both groups that the intensity of seeking information about a topic or news item increases with the individual's interest in the said topic. One participant pointed out that while new information about his hobby may not qualify as news to some, it is to him. This shows how news as a term and a concept is different to individual consumers.

PERSONAL IMPACT

Most participants, if not all, agreed that they are more likely to read the news if it had, has or will impact their lives. This consists of subtopics like social issues, environmental crisis or economic shifts. Perhaps this is an already established notion as it seems straightforward. Nonetheless, if this research does not discover it - it proves it correct again.

It was made clear in both groups that most participants simply received news notifications on their phones instead of having to actively seek out news stories. Just by going about their day to day lives, participants made it seem like news was always being presented to them on their cell phones, and they had the choice to engage with it if they wanted. A participant from the first group said, "It [news] either pops up from Twitter, or it pops up from Apple News, or it pops up from Reddit. And I'm usually not seeking it out. It just is there, and I say, 'why not just read it?'"

Four out of eight participants in the first group discussed how they get "burned out" of reading news regularly. They said they intensely engage in reading the news on occasion but not consistently. This can, in part, be caused by the nature and abundance of notifications they receive. One participant discussed how they did not care about current news unless they felt it was catered towards them. Another participant slightly agreed and said, "...but if there's something I'm particularly interested in and emotionally invested in, that's when the intense bursts of research and actual reading through every little word of every article and story, and then I just get burned out."

NEWS OUTLETS USED

The next topic of discussion within both groups was mediums and/or devices used by the participants to gain access to what they deemed as news. Very few participants in either focus group received their news by watching TV or reading the newspaper. Most received their news from their smartphone. This includes accessing news channel apps and going to different

social media platforms. The ensuing responses also suggested that different social media applications, while not originally designed to do, are used for certain types of news. For example, Instagram would be used more for cultural and environment news, while Facebook and Twitter lean more toward the political side. This could be a basis for further research.

In both sessions there were several individuals who, because of busy schedules, enjoyed being provided notifications by various news sources and mediums about current developments that cater to their interest.

NEWS TOPICS OF INTEREST

When it comes to different news subjects, some certainly stood out more than others. Group one steered away from politics and more toward other interests, while also addressing coping with the weight of negative content.

Comedy was defined by the first group as a useful mechanism to both access the news and digest it by breaking down what is fact and what is comical rhetoric. Although, naturally politics had to occur as a subtopic at least once. When it came to that, it appeared that a common emotion among the group was the abundance of argumentative conversation regarding the topic on media platforms which, in result, has led the topic to be unappealing to our target. This could indicate our target avoiding possible conflicts when in public.

In the second focus group topics of racism, social justice and civil rights came up. Interest rose in the first group when a statement made by the one African American female participant, and her insight on what topics of interest she keeps up to date with in relation to her race. Both groups expressed substantial interest in content and convenience of podcasts as well. Causes for these patterns could be the demographics of each group, but the substantiality of such claim cannot be completely proven at this moment.

DIFFERING FACT FROM OPINION

When it comes to the heart of the matter, distinguishing between fact and opinion, one respondent said that, *“it's something they teach you in second grade. It's true or false. Is it a fact or is it an opinion? ... I mean, it's just certain words in a sentence let you know if it's a fact or an opinion.”* (42:18)

“It's something they teach you in second grade. It's true or false. Is it a fact or is it an opinion? ... I mean, it's just certain words in a sentence let you know if it's a fact or an opinion.” (42:18)

This suggests that some individuals within the target have a consolidated view of what a fact is and how they distinguish it. Nevertheless, when this discussion took place, majority of the room did not show confidence in their response. However, the opinion split when considering if people graded themselves too highly or too lowly skilled at distinguishing between fact and opinion. This points toward a different self-perception of individuals and how that may affect their interaction with the outside world and consumption of information. When one becomes more confident in their skill, they may approach things differently and take their judgment as correct. Yet, that too depends greatly on the individual.

CONCLUSIONS

There are many things we can extrapolate from this data. Subjects in the target demographic, and even those who were older, preferred newer mediums to more traditional news sources such as newspapers and television. Smartphones and tablets seem to be the most popular methods of getting news within this segment of population. In addition to this, the research also shows that smartphones have opened the subjects up to non-traditional platforms such as social media to get their news and that often news is not necessarily sought out, but instead is more often brought to their attention by Push Notifications, or by influential personalities that exist on the said social media sites.

On the topic of interest, our study has shown that the target demographic heavily favors seeking out news they deem impactful or significant to their lives. Issues of social justice, immigration, politics, racially relevant news and even the subject of hobbies were mentioned as subjects that the targets took at least some active interest in. However, the study also suggested that the constant news cycle and consistent exposure led to frustration and burnout within the target group. In a rather fast-paced modern society people receive news faster, but trade off for getting tired of it faster as well.

Comedy and humorous takes on the news from sources such as Jon Stewart, Bill Burr and Joe Rogan were a standout theme in the focus groups. Seemingly, when perceived negative news is presented, the target group found it more palatable when the information is communicated in a more comedic light. To ease the follow of the focus group as a social gathering these comics were brought up by the participants and it served as an icebreaker of sorts. However, there appears to be sense of mistrust and a feel of being manipulated by many news sources in some of the subjects.

When asked if the targets had confidence in their abilities to distinguish between fact and opinion the answers were inconsistent. No solid conclusion can be reached without further research, regarding the subjects' perception of their own abilities. This is due to the focus group limitations described previously.

When tied back to our primary research question, we can see a changing trend in the way news media is not only consumed, but also how it is perceived. Subjects in the focus group tend to prefer personally relevant news subjects, whether serious or not, delivered in a multitude of different ways. While the subjects' confidence in their abilities to distinguish fact and opinion is inconclusive from this focus group, the target's perception of news media seems to be skewed toward a more negative, distrustful attitude.

PRIMARY: SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

A brief survey was distributed on Monday April 5, 2019 by the project research team. This survey consisted of 18 questions all relevant toward providing substantial data to support the big research question. After deep evaluation, this survey was narrowed to only questions that directly pertained to the secondary research that has been previously gathered with efforts of generating data that would remain on topic and provide us with strong supporting analysis. The survey was distributed via link through multiple media platforms among the research team's personal choice of mass promotion. These platforms varied from social media, email, and text communication. Messaging and verbiage consistency was maintained and encouraged when promoting the survey and kept within the same message template.

In sending out this survey, a total of 618 impressions were generated. Of this total, 318 of respondents were within our target demographics, leaving 300 of participants categorizing under a different demographic. Although keeping our focus on data responses generated from our target, a comparative analysis to the other demographic group of participants deemed beneficial to our research as it provided valuable insight. Given all questions asked within the survey, it is important to keep in mind that some questions were unavoidably subject to potential bias and this was taken into consideration when collecting and implementing the supporting research toward our big research question.

RECOGNIZING BIAS

The big research question is: How well do people 18-24 in the U.S. distinguish facts vs. opinions in news media sources? Question 27 of the Generation Z Media Survey asks, "what

word or phrase comes to mind when you think of journalism?" This question helps researchers understand what our target audience thinks journalism is. Out of the 175 people that responded to this question, 100 people wrote something negative. Many of the written responses included, "fake news" and "biased" as it relates to journalism. This shows that approximately 57% of answers were negative. This is not an overwhelming majority, but enough to show a strong lead.

This is particularly interesting because of the popular answers that were given on some of the other survey questions. Question 21 says, "to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "I prefer information from news outlets that typically support my opinions/points of view." Where approximately 34% of respondents answered, "somewhat agree". Question 22 said, "to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Information in the news media I follow is usually accurate." 36% of participants responded with, "somewhat agree".

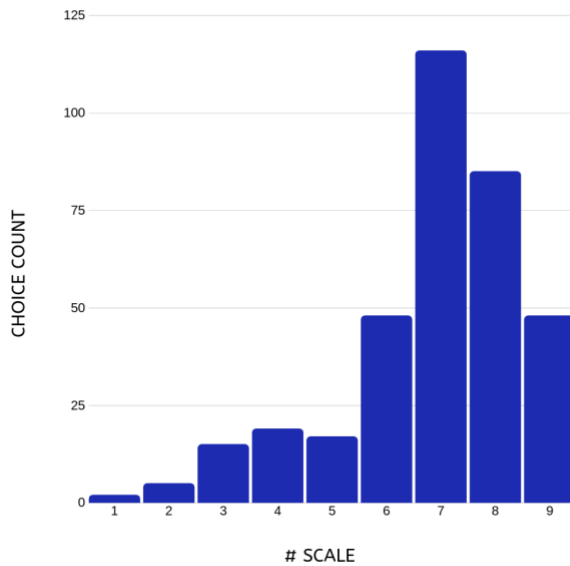
If the majority of participants say they somewhat agree that they follow unbiased news media that supports their ideologies or opinions, it is interesting that the same majority would say that journalism is biased or unreliable. This phenomenon could possibly be from the participants individual bias. The participants may think that their way of obtaining news is the correct way, where everything they read is factual. However, to them, other journalists produce fake news and unreliable content. Maybe these participants are thinking of news coming from a political party they do not agree with, since the majority answered "somewhat agree" to question 22, asking if they followed news sources that supported their beliefs. This question

proves some bias within the respondents if they are only following news that cater to their opinion.

Out of 163 total responses from the target audience (age 18-24) to question 27, 35 of these were negative. This means 21% of the target audience views journalism as a negative thing, which is significantly lower than the total response.

The rest of the responses that were not deemed as negative aren't necessarily positive answers, but were one word answers describing what they think journalism is. Nine people answered "reporter" or "reporting" and sixteen answered, "news". It seems like the 79% of people aged 18-24 view journalism as a profession. A majority of the target audience also answered "somewhat agree" to question 22, asking if the information from the news media they follow is accurate. With the written answers from question 27 mostly stating descriptions of what a professional journalist does, one may be able to conclude that the target audience is less biased than the audience as a whole. If they don't look at journalism in a negative way and believe that the things they read in the news are accurate, this may show a lack of bias. However, this does not include regularly fact checking their sources.

As it relates to the entire audience, it is not shocking that a majority of respondents have a negative perception of journalism. However, it seems that this large majority were not a part of the target audience. Less than two percent of the participants were under the age of 18, and 46% were over the age of 24. So, most of the negative answers to question 27 seemed to have been coming from the older participants. When the report was narrowed down to just the target audience, the percentage of negative written answers dropped 36%.



Survey results conducted from 355 total responses

Asking one to assess their own skill is often a tricky task, with varying results. Confidence in one's own ability to distinguish between facts and opinions is a matter not only of honesty, but also of psychological state. This means, perhaps, that age could possibly play a large role in such assessment.

However, the findings of our research

suggest that the coefficients of population feeling a certain way about their distinguishing skill are roughly the same across different age categories. That is, at least within one geographical location.

Much like what the focus group respondents said, responses to survey questions supported a trend of self-assurance and confidence in judgment. Respondents' answers to the survey question on this topic revealed this confidence. When asked how well they can tell facts from opinions on a scale of one to nine, nine meaning very well, a large portion of respondents in nearly all age groups selected the number seven. It must also be mentioned that the rest of responses to this question also leaned toward number seven rather than away from it. With a mean of 6.9, 29 nines and only two ones, it is possible to say that the confidence of our sample is more confident in themselves than not.

When it comes to answering the research question at large, the results, while suggestive, may be deemed as inconclusive. While the target respondents identified their self-

assessment by answering a fairly direct question, their accuracy is difficult to verify. Some may say that people should be more confident in themselves, others may say the opposite. With a varying degree of self-assuredness, 119 of 226 survey respondents within the targeted age group at least somewhat agreed that the news media they consume challenges their opinions and beliefs. This statement of course falls under their judgment as well, yet it is once again difficult to evaluate how well they carry out this judgment. Unfortunately, because the conducted research did not incorporate a test element into the collection of responses, one may only speculate upon how accurate the respondents were.

A conclusion may still be drawn from such results nevertheless. While acknowledging the assuming nature of the acquisition of responses for this research, it can be said that the target demographic realizes for the most part that a confident distinguishing process takes place when they consume the news. They often perceive news as at least somewhat challenging. This could mean that they do not all of it as fact, thus leaving room for opinion.

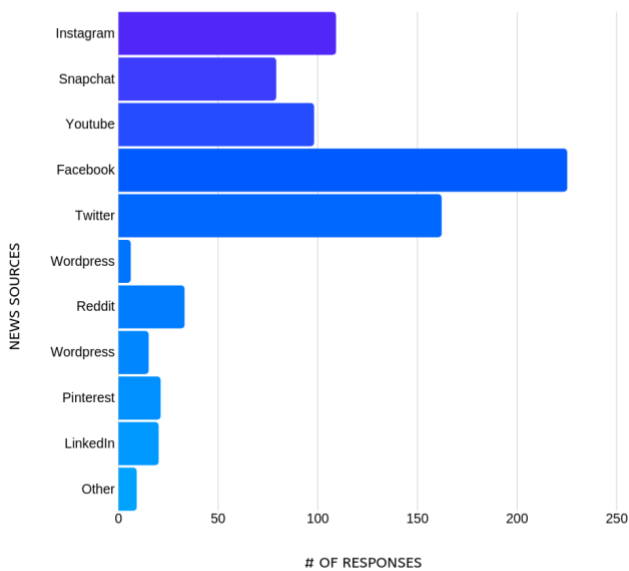
NEWS CONSUMPTION

In regards to the subject of news consumption the responses were highly variable. Subjects were asked where they obtain the bulk of their news and were asked to choose all that apply between, computers/mobile devices, newspapers, radio, TV, word of mouth and other. While every response was chosen in some capacity, of the 477 respondents the choice of computers/mobile was the clear preference for the subjects of this survey and garnered 48.83% of the votes. TV was the second choice with 19.08%, followed closely by word of mouth with 18.66%. Radio had 9.22% of votes and newspapers and other received 3.77% and 0.84% respectively

These results came from every surveyed age group and political affiliation. What we can extrapolate from this data is a clear trend of the population shifting from more traditional news media sources. Radio, newspapers and television viewing combined, while well represented in the results, equal to 32.07% when compared to the results of computer/mobile, the difference is a significant 16.36%. Word of mouth, specified to be through non-digital means is a surprising statistic and suggests that political discourse and discussion of news topics is common, though more research needs to be done to specify the types of communication and the subjects being discussed.

When broken down by age range, computers/mobile had the majority of votes in every demographic with the exception of the age ranges of 45-54 where the responses were tied between TV and computers/mobile at 41 each, and 65+ where TV had a slight majority of 51 to 44 responses. In contrast to those numbers, the target age range of 18-24 showed 231 responses towards computer/mobile versus the next largest number of 91 for TV. Age ranges 25-34 and 35-44 are also showed to heavily favor computer/mobile over every other option given in the survey. Despite the fact that older demographics seem to slightly prefer television to computers/mobile devices, all demographics use either their home computers or mobile devices to some extent to get their news. This supports the idea that there is a cultural shift to digital mediums in the world of news media, which upon further study could present new issues regarding the issue of opinion versus fact in media and its presentation to the public.

Political standing also seems to have an effect on media consumption habits. Those who consider themselves more conservative, or classified in the survey as conservative, very conservative/libertarian and alt-right responded as having more of a preference for



Survey results conducted from 777 responses

television news (32.57%) than their left counterparts, but still overall largely get their news from computer/mobile sources (41.12%). Those on the left side of the political spectrum, under the categories liberal/progressive, very liberal/progressive and leftist/socialist, seem to consume news media through

computer/mobile devices at a higher ratio (51.38%) and far less on TV (15.42%) than conservatives. While TV and computer/mobile were largely the most popular categories for both political affiliations, radio, word of mouth and newspapers were shown to be relatively consistent through both demographics though radio skewed towards being more popular with liberal participants. Though this data draws no conclusions of the cause of these discrepancies, it could point to a larger trend in the political affiliations represented in these particular mediums.

Education does not seem to have much of an effect on which mediums the participants use. Though there was a slight skew towards radio for those with bachelor's degrees and higher, the difference between those participants and the other education levels is near 4%. Conversely, word of mouth is skewed slightly towards those with education levels lower than a bachelor's degree but only by about 5.5%. All other categories seem to be consistent between

education levels, differing by less than 1% each. This supports the idea that society is embracing digital mediums regardless of how much education one has received.

When tied back to the primary research question, what can be gathered from this data is that regardless of political affiliation and education level, digital mediums are by far the most popular way to consume news. Though this is consistent, there are skews toward more conservative and older participants utilizing television more often than their liberal and younger counterparts. This is valuable data as it gives a framework for studying the types of media the target demographic consumes. Though more data on what specific media, in regards to networks and commentators, the target consumes would add deeper insight into the question of whether they are able to distinguish fact from fiction in news media.

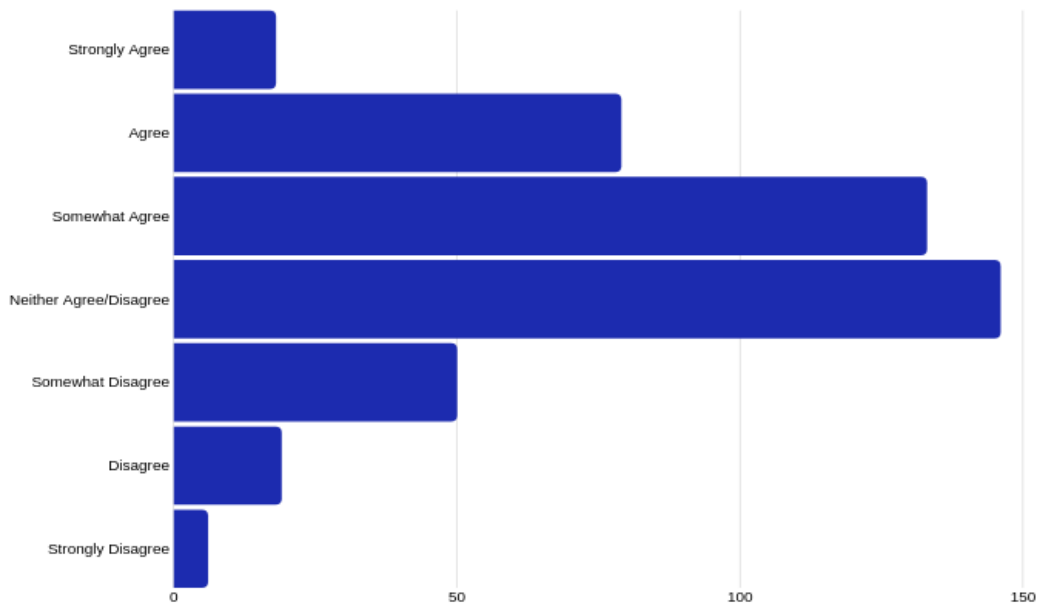
DIFERING FACT FROM OPINION

When we asked respondents if they agree or disagree with the statements “I prefer information from news outlets that typically challenge my opinions/ points of view.” and “I prefer information from news outlets that typically support my opinions/points of view.” We were surprised to see that almost the same number of respondents answered “somewhat agree” to both of those questions. 133 respondents answered “somewhat agree” for being challenged by their preferred news outlets, and 155 respondents answered “somewhat agree” for preferring news outlets that support their opinion/point of view.

We feel like this information could mean multiple things. First, this information could be telling us that respondents are truly trying to challenge themselves by the information they’re receiving. The second thing we think this could be telling us is that the respondents don’t challenge themselves as much as they think they do when it comes to news consumption. The reason for us believing both might be true is because of how close the responses were to both

questions. How can you primarily follow news outlets that challenge you while also primarily following news outlets that support your opinion? Because of this we think that the respondents might have a more difficult time discerning fact from opinion.

Another interesting aspect of the responses we'd like to touch on is that only 2 respondents answered "strongly disagree" to "I prefer information from news outlets that typically support my opinions points of view." This response is interesting when comparing it to the survey question "On a scale of 1 to 9, how well can you tell the difference between facts and opinions in news articles?" The majority of responders answered "7" to that question but how are they able to confidently discern fact from opinion if only 2 respondents disagree with the statement of primarily following news outlets that support their opinion?



Survey results conducted from 451 total responses

We feel like these questions give us an idea of biases that come with discerning fact from opinion in news consumption. Most people aren't aware of their own biases and we feel like the inconsistencies of the data that was collected supports that idea. Although the information that

was collected had responses from different age groups, we feel like this gives us a good idea of the difficulties that our target age goes through while consuming news.

In grand analysis of the supportive data collected from this survey, a conclusion was made in regard to the impact of various topics on our target audience. We believe that recognizing bias, news consumption and sources, as well as discerning fact vs. opinion all are important variables when developing a conclusion to our big rq.

NEXT STEPS

One major limitation to this research was that the researchers had to be in their own focus group. This shifted the findings a couple of ways, first being that we knew what the big research question was, so we knew exactly what we were looking for in the focus group. Secondly, as mass communication majors, we study current events and learn how to check our sources often. So I believe that if the focus group sample would have been random students, there would have been less of a skew of people studying to be communicators.

The survey was a great way to get a large amount of responses in a short amount of time. If the survey would have been kept open a little longer, more responses would have come in, making the target audience responses larger as well. Moving forward, if another survey were to be done, less answer choices would make for more solid responses from the participants. Instead of a likert scale of “somewhat agree, agree, disagree, somewhat disagree”, it may be more beneficial to display answers that give the researchers a stronger response. Such as true or false or answers describing how often the participant fact checks their sources.

More research could be done on how often the target audience is fact checking their news. The question could be asked, “How often are you fact checking what you read or hear in the news?” The survey touched on this situation a little bit, but it would be more beneficial to the big research question as a whole because the end goal is find out how well people age 18-24 can distinguish fact versus opinion in the news they consume.

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

-See next page for transcripts-

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Before the start...

- *Welcome people and thank them for attending.*
- *Point out the food and drink to them (if applicable).*
- *Have people fill out and put on nametags/ fill out placards.*
- *Tell them to make themselves comfortable while we wait for the start of the session.*

Introductory remarks and instructions

- As we've talked about before in class, this focus group is somewhat unusual in that all of you have been studying the main research question for the last several months – that usually is not the case for focus group participants. **The primary purpose of this focus group is to demonstrate how it is done.** That said, your teams will still report on any useful data that arises, while also acknowledging the fact that your prior research makes all of you unrepresentative of the target audience.
- That said, I am going to use the questions in today's focus group to **discuss and analyze some of the data you collected in secondary** as well as **get your opinions as consumers.**
- Before getting into the focus group itself, there are a few **announcements** for everyone in the room:.
- As you have probably noticed, we're recording this session, so please **speak up** when you talk so that your voice is audible.
- Also, please be sure to sign the **release form** in front of you.
- If you would, please **silence all your electronic devices.**
- If you notice me glance at the time occasionally, **please don't misread that.** It doesn't mean I'm bored. I just want to make sure I don't keep you beyond the allotted time. I appreciate your time, and don't want the session to run long.

- Once we start, please remember: There are **no “wrong” answers** to any of these questions. They involve your opinions and personal experiences, and I want everyone to feel comfortable sharing them.
- Now, because we will be asking about your opinions and personal experiences, it’s quite possible that some of **you may hear things that don’t match your views or experiences**. That’s perfectly normal in a session like this. If you have an answer to a question that differs with another member of the group, by all means, share that opinion. That’s what we’re here for. Nothing wrong with some civil disagreements as we talk. 😊
- So, are there any **questions** before we get started?
- OK, let’s begin.

Questions

1. Let me start by noting the demographics of the group for recording purposes. We have...
 - a. Sex...
 - b. Ethnicity...
 - c. Marital status...

...participating today. Obviously, everyone’s educational status is “some college”?
2. Let’s go around the room. By a show of hands, how many of you would describe yourselves as regular or semi-regular comers of news?
 - a. For those of you who didn’t raise your hands, would it be accurate to say that you do pay attention to the news on an infrequent basis, perhaps when a big story breaks?
3. For those who do keep with the news, tell me about that/ Describe your news consumption to me, if you would.
 - a. Sources
 - b. Frequency
 - c. Intensity of consumption (scanning vs. immersion)
 - d. Topics
 - e. Manner of consumption (hard copy, websites, apps, social media, TV, etc.)
4. Let’s talk about the media outlets and reporters you track.
 - a. What do you think they do well in reporting the news?

- b. What do you wish they did better?
- 5. How would you describe your sociopolitical worldview (conservative vs. liberal, e.g.)
 - a. How does this impact your ability to discern facts vs. opinion in news media and elsewhere?
 - b. Ever caught yourself believing things that fit your preconceptions only to discover later that the information in question was wrong?
- 6. How would you grade yourself – A to F – on your ability to recognize fact vs. opinion in news articles? What about fact vs. speculation?
 - a. Speculation = possible facts that are not yet proven.
- 7. Think of the people you are closest to – family, friends, and so forth. How would you grade them on their ability to recognize fact vs. opinion or speculation in news articles?
- 8. For those of you who aren't regular news consumers, let's talk about that. This isn't asked in a judgmental way, by why don't you keep up with the news on a regular basis?
 - a. On the infrequent occasions when you do track the news, what type of story(s) get your attention? Examples?

Closing

Before we close, does anyone have any pressing thoughts or opinions they'd like to share?

In that case, thanks again to all of you for your time.