

School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry

**How do News Consumers in
Western Australia Perceive the Credibility of News?**

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This thesis is presented for the Degree of Master of Philosophy
(Media, Culture and Creative Arts) of Curtin University

July 2020

Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

This research study was conducted in accordance with Curtin University regulations for ethical research, that requires guidelines and codes of conduct on ethics to be adhered to during the study period. The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262). The researcher's HREC approval number is HRE2019-0643.

Signature:

Date: 24/07/2020

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Abstract

Existing studies on news credibility have focused on news consumers' perceptions of news in locations around the world including parts of Australia such as Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales. These studies have highlighted significant shifts on how news consumers feel about the news they consume; shifts that appear to present a dilemma for news consumers and the news media who appear to be concerned and sometimes unsure about what news to trust. Fake news, Facebook, trust or distrust in news, and journalism are among key terms that news consumers use to discuss news. United States President Donald Trump has also attacked the fourth estate, challenging 'truth' in the public arena. Despite the literature available on the trends and changes of news and consumers' attitudes towards it, the scope of studies and discussions conducted thus far appears to be limited, especially in Western Australia (WA). This notable gap formed the basis for the researcher to conduct this current study, with the aim of contributing to existing knowledge on news consumers' perceptions about the credibility of the news they consume. The study adopted a similar terrain to other studies of this kind that have been conducted globally and in other parts of Australia, aiming to establish: how frequently news is consumed, noting that scholars have suggested that news consumers in developed countries are consuming news less frequently; which news sources the study participants trust; the elements that may contribute to trust and distrust of news; news consumers' perception of the news media as a reliable source of truth; and the effects of digitisation on the credibility of news. Primary data were retrieved through questionnaires that were distributed both online and physically, targeting participants 18 years and above. A sample size of 500 participants was targeted, however, due to the short timeframe set out to collect data for this study only 163 participants responded to the study. Generally, the findings revealed that participants are consuming news more frequently than the researcher anticipated, with the majority of these participants indicating that they trust the news they consume. The results retrieved also showed that the ABC is the most trusted news organisation ahead of commercial television channels 7,9 and 10, or print and online news sources. Participants also suggested that social media is a conduit used to access news daily or even more than once a day, although those who access news via these platforms do not always trust the news they receive from these sources. Some participants, however, suggested that they believe news shared on social media by specific journalists and media outlets they trust. The findings also identified that the issue of news possibly containing fake information appears to not be a significant concern among participants in this study, although it was not clear if

participants know what fake news is, if they can identify fake news when they see it, or whether fake news is rare in the news these participants consume. Additionally, the results obtained indicated that participants are careful about the news they consume, based on the fact that most participants will attempt to authenticate news information they receive if they suspect it contains fake information.

Glossary

The list below represents key words that were used in this study and their meanings as defined in this research.

News – Original and fairly recent information that enables people to be well-informed in order to make sound decisions for their lives.

The researcher recognises that news is identified as entertainment by some participants in this study, indicating that news is not always information that is designed to help with decision-making processes.

Journalism – The craft or process of finding new knowledge on events and people, and thereafter reporting this information to the public with the intention of providing truthful and accurate data with the people’s interest in mind.

The researcher acknowledges that journalism is also identified as a form of entertainment by some news consumers (Ricketson, 2012); suggesting that journalism is not always identified as a profession or a process of obtaining news, but rather as an entertainment function that is informative.

Journalist – An individual, in the journalism profession, who gathers new information on current events, trends, people and issues, and reports this information to the public.

Fourth Estate / “The Watchdog” – Journalists entrusted with the role of watching and reporting matters concerning institutions and individuals (“the powerful”) in society.

Trust – Accepting as reliable or true, information that one is unable or unlikely to verify.

Untrustworthy – Information that is not able to be relied on as honest or truthful.

Fake News – Information that is intentionally and verifiably false and is set to mislead its consumers.

Misinformation – False or inaccurate information spread intentionally or unintentionally.

Disinformation – False information that is intended to mislead.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Trust in the media, globally and within Australia, has been under scrutiny in recent times, with researchers revealing that world leaders and news consumers alike are unsure about what is real or false news. Television, print, online and social media news sources have been highly affected as new challenges to the credibility of news have emerged. Schudson (2018a), *The Globe* (2018), Newman (2019), Edelman (2018) and ABC (2018a) are among researchers who have suggested that news consumers are sceptical about news, with participants globally, in Australia and within Western Australia indicating that media organisations, journalists, social media, and fake news contribute to this heightened distrust in news. Some news consumers who have engaged in studies on trust in news in the past suggest that they have resorted to news avoidance, highlighting that they feel news is too negative (Benton, 2019), untrustworthy (Fray, Molitorisz, & Marshall, 2018) or not fully informative (Shine, 2018). These kinds of issues led to the development of this study that set out to investigate how news consumers feel about the news they consume and to identify related trends and behaviours.

News consumers globally and in some parts of Australia feel let down by journalists and news producers, according to Rossi (2020), Flew, Dulleck, Park, Fisher, and Isler (2020) and Shine (2018). This feeling has brought with it a significant shift in how consumers perceive the truth of the news they consume. Filloux (2018) and Rossi (2020) suggest that news consumers believe elements such as fake news contribute to this battle with trust in news. Edelman (2018) and Fisher, Park, Lee, Fuller, and Sang (2019) further revealed that news consumers are consuming less news as the years progress, with various scholars indicating that this decrease could be attributed to factors such as: news avoidance (Palmer & Toff, 2019); negative news (Benton 2019); relevance of news (Fisher et al., 2019); influx of news (Fray et al., 2018) and mistrust in news (Fray et al., 2018) among other factors. Phillips, Lindgren, and Bishop (2013) have urged journalists and media practitioners to be cautious about bias when telling stories, stressing that it is important for a story to be told as it is; sticking to the facts and maintaining trust among news consumers.

The idea that news produced is sometimes true and possibly powerful is still evident in Australia. An ABC Four Corners program, *Crime and Panic*, which aired in November 2018 highlighted how fear and race are issues being experienced by some citizens in Melbourne as a result of the news. The program examined how journalism affects news consumers, bringing to light the impact and influence of news (ABC, 2018a). The media reporting show

reveals how media prejudice can cause mistrust amongst citizens who appear to believe what is shown in the news, if when it has been constructed to fit to a certain narrative. On the contrary, some news consumers are happy with the news they access. Research by Fisher et al. (2019) additionally revealed that half of the participants who took part in a 2018 study lauded media organisations for providing news that is up to date, and often explained well. These examples are among research that has portrayed how news is seen by its consumers highlighting the role news has in society and how its consumption affects news audiences.

Journalists (Lamble, 2017), media organisations (McNair, 2017), personal convictions (Benton, 2019) and sources of news (Schudson, 2018a), represent elements that are used by news consumers to determine news accuracy. Political (Pickard, 2017), social ((Bainbridge, Goc, & Tynan, 2015), and financial facets are also recognised as factors that contribute to news credibility. These factors influenced the development of the following research questions that guide this study:

- I. How do news consumers in WA perceive the credibility of local, national and international news?
- II. To what extent do news consumers trust, or distrust news consumed?
- III. Does digitisation and networked communication influence how news consumers perceive news?

Research Objectives

This study explored Western Australian news consumers' views on the credibility of news, noting the impact of digitisation on news and how this may affect the kind of news consumers accept or disregard. This was an attempt to respond to consumers' desires to be heard about their concerns on the credibility of local, national and international news they consume (Madison & Dejarnette, 2017). The mechanisms the researcher used to answer the three primary study questions were:

- a. How frequently is news consumed by WA news consumers?
- b. In what format is news consumed in WA?
- c. Which news sources are trusted most by individuals?
- d. What, if any, are the elements that contribute to trust and distrust in the media?

The definition of news, according to Craft, Ashley, and Maksl (2016), is still a matter of discussion, but has been defined by Burns (2013, p. 51) as “information that can be used to bind people together in the sense of community; information that people need to exercise judgement about what is happening in the world around them...to make up their minds and function as informed citizens.” Through online and physical distribution of surveys, this study targeted news consumers aged 18 years and above whose input on their perception of the credibility of the news they consume, and how this perception affects the way they receive news was captured. This study is important and timely especially in this era of distrust in news and fake news. Participants contributed to a study that is timely in adding a local voice to ongoing discussions about trust in news; discussions that have become louder since United States President Donald Trump’s campaign era in 2016/2017, which highlighted the issue of fake news, trust and distrust in news, and the increasing use of social media platforms to access news. Trust is defined as the process of accepting as reliable or true, information that one is unable or unlikely to verify (Fray et al., 2018).

This study specifically targeted news consumers because as Agarwal (2017) argues, the time to know what consumers feel about the authenticity of news produced and why they feel so is now. Authenticity speaks to the ‘realness’, the truthfulness and believability of the content produced (Ali, 2014, p.14). Each group of ages: 18–24 (millennials and generation Z), 25–45 (millennials and generation X), 46–64 (generation X and baby boomers), and 65 and above (baby boomers), was targeted because it was believed that each group shared different beliefs and experiences and therefore could not be classified as one group of ‘mass audience’ (Agarwal, 2017). By classifying the targeted groups in different age brackets, the researcher hoped to retrieve different information about the perceptions of various groups.

Research Significance

Discussions about trust and distrust of news are ongoing, with various scholars and researchers attempting to provide solutions to a seemingly growing problem. News consumers globally and in some parts of Australia feel let down by journalists (Fray et al., 2018), highlighting the need to explore how news consumers perceive the credibility of news in Western Australia. This study set out to reveal how news consumers make judgements about the credibility of news organisations in alignment to their role as reliable sources of news information.

This research is timely and significant as it seeks to bring new knowledge on how news consumers in Western Australia view news and its credibility. No other research of this kind has been undertaken in Western Australia. Through a comprehensive study, the information retrieved from this research serves as a basis that could be used to start work in improving trust in news from a news consumers' perspective. Although the researcher obtained results from participants 18 years and above, results from millennials particularly contributed to this study because millennials have often been left out of discussions on news consumption (Agarwal, 2017); yet their input, which reflects the thoughts and trends of future news consumers, is crucial especially in this era of proliferation and globalisation of the media.

The information obtained can be used in journalism education, with more emphasis being placed on the perception news consumers have towards news that appears to be biased, false or misleading in any way. Further, news organisations can use the results obtained from this study to maintain or improve trust in their news brand. The researcher hopes that the findings of the study could be used to improve how news is produced; provide informed facts to WA citizens on the credibility of news in this era and especially in their state; and contribute to journalism education.

Research Method

This study employed a mixed method of qualitative "collection, analysis and interpretation of primarily non-numerical data which exists in the form of words, images, stories" (Seats, 2018, p. 18) and quantitative "collection, analysis and interpretation of primarily numerical data in order to predict, explain or describe phenomena" (Seats, 2018, p. 18) analysis. Qualitative and quantitative research was conducted through a controlled physical distribution process, group-administered surveys which targeted millennials and the generation Z age groups. This was through surveying undergraduate university students in the early weeks of a new semester, and church-going young adults in an effort to capture non-university news enthusiasts. Group-administered surveys are generally conducted in institutional settings (Donley, 2012, p. 28). The targeted age groups rely on the internet to provide information that affects their career, political choices and life decisions (Lane & Van Bergen, 2018, p.32). This same targeted group is said to have been neglected in the past when research of a similar kind has been conducted. "It has been noted that it is not only teenagers who have been neglected, but also the 18–24-year-old age group, who are virtually absent from the literature as they fall between teenage and adult demographics"

(Lancaster, Hughes, & Spicer, 2012, p. 16). The university group was targeted during a semester with the help of lecturers across WA campuses. The church group was targeted during their young adult youth forums which happen once a week, with the help of the church youth pastors. The same groups were also targeted through social media. The researcher circulated the group surveys in a similar manner across all groups to provide accuracy in comparability. The researcher hoped to generate answers to question 3 on the effects of digitisation and networked communication and its influence with this particular group.

News consumers of generation X, baby boomers and some of the millennials and generation Z groups were approached through social media with online surveys shared on Facebook and WhatsApp groups. These research tools were acceptable given the limited time frame and space available to conduct this research. It is also worth noting that some Australians largely rely on social media for their major source of news and information (Steffens, Dunn, & Leask, 2017). David (2020) further indicated that Australians are increasingly using social media platforms, a factor that inspired the use of these research tools. The researcher noted that the baby boomer age group, who were also targeted via social media, may not necessarily be social media users but are big consumers of news. With this process of collecting data targeting a larger group, the researcher hoped to get more in-depth knowledge on especially questions 1 and 2 which considered the extent to which news consumers trust and distrust news, and how local, national and international news is perceived. Overall, the researcher hoped to retrieve results that would allow for comparisons to other similar studies to be made.

Thesis Overview

This thesis comprises seven chapters, excluding the bibliography. This chapter (Chapter 1) introduces the basis of this study and gives a brief background on perceptions of news, while also indicating the purpose for the study, research methods aims and objectives. Chapter 2 of this thesis provides a brief overview of the theories that have been established, from the beginning of journalism up to the present date, and discusses the relevant literature. It also examines the systems and technologies that influenced the production and consumption of news. Chapter 3 describes the methods that were used to conduct this research. This chapter also focuses on the research design that was used to determine what method was best to use to collect data, the type of research approach that was appropriate for the collection of the data, and the research tools that were employed

to collect these data. Chapter 4 of this thesis outlines the results that were captured after data were collected; this chapter also elaborates on the findings in relation to each research question. In Chapter 5 the researcher analyses the results obtained in this study, while categorising findings into seven major topics that define this research: news consumption; trust in news; distrust in news; why news consumers distrust news; trusted news outlets; influence of social media; and fake news. The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 6, summarises the findings obtained in this study, highlights the limitations of the research, and provides recommendations that could be explored for further studies.

Research Ethics

This study was conducted in accordance with Curtin University regulations for ethical research. The application for approval was reviewed through the Curtin University negligible risk review process. This research met the requirements described in the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. The researcher's HREC number is HRE2019-0643. The results obtained protect the identity of the participants, an approach that safeguards information that could be detrimental to those who took part in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The connection between journalism, history and democracy has existed for generations. Bainbridge, Goc, and Tynan (2015) highlight that these connections can be seen from as far back as Ancient Greece. The journey of journalism, according to Eaman (2009), began as a form of discourse with regard to the writing of news. “Though varying in form from one age and society to another, it (journalism) gradually distinguished itself from ballads, chronicles, history and the novel through its focus on the unfolding present, its eyewitness perspective on current events, and its reliance on everyday language, among other characteristics,” (Eaman, 2009, p. 1). Around 400 BC, Thucydides and philosophers Plato and Aristotle, who were identified though not officially referred to as journalists (Eaman, 2009), criticised early Athenian democracy (Lamble, 2017) which they felt was cumbersome for its voting citizens, who had to attend meetings of the governing assembly in order to know what was happening before casting their votes. This criticism placed Thucydides in the history books as the first true writer, and he was also recognised as the first true historian (Lamble, 2017).

Thucydides’ mission to provide information to inform citizens led him to write fair, accurate and balanced reports, but the lack of a printing mechanism limited the realisation of his vision to share handwritten reports to a wider audience (Lamble, 2017, p. 5). In the 16th century communication on public affairs matters continued to spread in coffee houses where people gathered often to discuss current events (Bainbridge et al., 2015). In the 18th century China invented the mass printing of documents with ink and paper (Lamble, 2017) which accorded the country recognition as the most advanced nation on earth (Bainbridge et al., 2015). The secret of papermaking made its way to the Middle East and then to Europe (Lamble, 2017). “Then a German goldsmith, Johannes Gutenberg, invented a printing press that revolutionised printing, and the process of communication changed forever” (Bainbridge et al., 2015, p. 24). With the advent of the printing press, news earned its place as an important element in society. The definition of news, according to Craft, Ashley, and Maksl (2016), is still a matter of discussion, but some scholars such as Mencher (1997) have described news as: information that brings interruption and enables people to be well informed in order to make sound decisions about their lives; Lamble (2011) also mentioned that news is an intangible element in human lives that is a valuable tool for the fight of survival, food, shelter and living; Schudson (2018b) further added that news is novel information about relatively recent affairs. For the purpose of this study the researcher has described news as: information that is original and fairly recent that enables people to be well informed in order to make sound decisions for their lives. The researcher recognises

that news is also identified as a source of entertainment by participants in this study, thus indicating that for them news is not always information that is designed to help with decision-making processes.

As news gained momentum, individuals in authority began to criticise and scrutinise the role of journalism owing to the impact news had on the community. As Herbert (2013) highlights, judgement of news would only be exercised when and if news was collected. Kuttner and Coe (2018) further indicated that democratic governance would rely on informed engagement of the public, who rely on the press to keep them informed. Therefore, the more news is collected and shared with the public, the higher the chances of this news being judged. The cost of producing news also appeared to be a challenge to news producers (Lamble, 2017). Therefore, both issues – news being judged and the cost of producing news rising – posed problems that affected journalism (Lamble, 2017).

Although these problems seemed to threaten the progress of distributing news, the work of journalism continued to gain momentum. The first printing press arrived in Australia in 1788, and in 1803, Australia's earliest newspaper was introduced – *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* – which was established by a former convict George Howe (Bainbridge et al., 2015). *The Australian* (not to be confused with the current national newspaper, *The Australian*) was the second newspaper to be published in New South Wales, by explorer William Wentworth in 1824. At the time of both their printing, Australia's media freedom was lacking, unlike in Finland and the United States. However, as Pilger (2002) argues, journalism in that period was courageous with the most diverse and adventurous press in the world. Irrespective of the lack of freedom, *The Sydney Gazette* was still published in three editions each week, with its news heavily censored and the company mainly publishing government notices (Lamble, 2017). In 1824, after a dispute between the infamous Governor William Bligh and some of his enemies, the restrictions on the newspaper were lifted (Lamble, 2017). The first Tasmanian newspaper appeared in 1810; *The Perth Gazette and West Australian Journal* was launched in 1833, becoming *The West Australian* in 1877; and other newspapers were launched in other parts of Australia from 1836 and in the years that followed. The Western Australia newspaper readership, according to Roy Morgan (2020), is estimated at 314,000 for *West Australian* readers; 388,000 for the *Weekend West* readers and 344,000 readers for the *Sunday Times*.

Aside from the newspapers, the telegraph system was introduced in 1837 connecting all main cities in Asia, Africa, and South America. In 1860 Australian cities too were linked by

telegraph (Lamble, 2017). Broadcast radio entered the media scene in the 1920s, forcing newspapers to re-evaluate their role as the primary information provider (Bainbridge et al., 2015). The invention of the television forced newspapers to re-evaluate themselves even further during the World War II period (Bainbridge et al., 2015). In Australia, television was introduced with the intention of favouring the commercial sector: “From the very start the Menzies government opted for a system that privileged the commercial sector. As with radio, there was to be a commercial and a public sector, but the ratio would be two commercial stations (channels Seven and Nine) to one public broadcaster in each of the major capital cities” (Phillips, Lindgren, & Bishop, 2013, p. 18). Recently, *TV Tonight* (2020) highlighted the following viewership ratings for free-to-air TV news in Perth for November 2020: Seven News – 170,000; Nine News 63,000; ABC News 111,000; 10 News First – 49,000. Despite the invention of radio and television, the establishment of computer technology later in the century, around the 1970s, was recognised as the biggest revolution in the printing industry (Bainbridge et al., 2015).

Journalism was therefore identified as the profession that asked questions about people or events, and thereafter, publicised these facts through media platforms in the form of news (Herbert, 2000). Journalism was also identified as the process that reveals corruption and injustices, holding politicians and businesses to account, through informing citizens, organising public opinion, uncovering intricate issues and explaining crucial differences (Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2015). Ricketson further suggests that journalism functions as a source of entertainment: “Journalism is the act of gathering and presenting news and stories about actual people, events and issues. Its aim, too, is to inform and entertain” (2012, p.3). This implies that journalism is not only identified as a profession or a process but also as a source of entertainment that is informative. Journalism, as was understood by its professionals, focused on providing new knowledge about public events, irrespective of any differences or radical changes that took place, even when this knowledge appeared to be vague (Schudson, 2018a). The intention of journalism was to share new information with the public interest in mind (Schudson, 2018b). The ‘normal’ way of practising journalism, as originated with Thucydides, ensured that events were reported as truthfully and as accurately as they could be to those who did not witness the happenings (Diego, 2010). The journalism profession (Anderson, Bell, & Shirky, 2015) was identified by what journalists did. Journalists indirectly classified news into two categories as highlighted by Lamble (2017): **reactive** (the bread and butter of news stories) – when journalists find out about an event and generate a story about it – and; **proactive** – when a journalist conducts more

research into a story, following a new discovery or a hunch, and then develops a story about it.

Journalists assigned importance to new stories based on how this information would affect people; the larger the number of affected people, the more important the story was to a journalist (Gans, 1979). Journalists also decided which information was news, based on how they saw the information and what their gut feeling told them (Harcup & O'Neil, 2017). The journalism practice succeeded in allowing the public to consume news, and for the consumers to view this new information as truthful (Schudson, 2018b). Waisbord stated that: "Journalism remains firmly grounded in conventional principles to render "truthful" accounts of reality (2018, p. 1873). Journalism's role as truth-teller, however, appeared to be one of the major reasons why the profession began to be criticised. There appeared to be a struggle between news consumers and news producers in establishing whether journalism's interests were for the public or for political figures and the powerful in society. Journalism could not be identified as what was described by Tiffen (1989) as a segment institutionalised by demands that were determined by those with the interest and capacity to do so. Journalism through news, was identified as a tool that serves all citizens of society (Gans, 1979). Towards the end of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as elaborated by Rudin and Ibbotson (2002), debates about the role of journalism increased significantly, as this was the period that the development of democratic ideas through electoral franchise evolved, and in addition, the development of party politics. "It was argued that if more of the population were to be given the vote then they needed both information and discussion of public issues to enable them to make a rational choice," (Rudin & Ibbotson, 2002, p. 9).

There were eight functions of journalism as identified by Lambie (2017): to mirror society's acts by highlighting the good and the bad; to help keep individuals in power and hold powerful institutions to account through exposing their actions; to act as an advocate that helps right injustices through providing a voice for individuals and groups who could not achieve any redress or have their wrongs righted; to protect, inform and promote democracy and democratic ideals; to share information about events happening in one part of the world to the rest of the world; to protect the interests of the public by raising questions about things that affect or could affect individuals in society; to share stories on the good happening in the world in a bid to recognise and reward those who are doing good; and to help bring communities together especially during times of trouble and

disaster. Through these functions, the value of news was established based on how newsworthy a story appeared to be, according to Cotter (2010), Tiffen (1989), and Bainbridge et al. (2015).

News values were recognised as “the qualities that make a news item ‘newsworthy’... and ‘shape texts’” (Cotter, 2010, p. 67). These news values are ‘impact’, ‘proximity’, ‘prominence’, ‘human interest’, ‘novelty’, ‘conflict’, and ‘currency’ (Cotter, 2010; Bainbridge et al., 2015; Phillips, Lindgren, & Bishop, 2013). Each value was described by Bainbridge et al. (2015) in this way: Impact – consequences of the story shared. “...the greater the impact or wider and deeper the consequences, the bigger the story will be” (Bainbridge et al., 2015, p. 282); Proximity – where is the event taking place? “Information often becomes newsworthy if it is about something happening in the immediate vicinity or close by where the media is producing news and to where audiences are consuming it” (Bainbridge et al., 2015, p. 282); Prominence – who is involved in the news story and how well are they known? “Traditionally information regarding significant people within a society such as political leaders has become news because their actions can impact on many others” (Bainbridge et al., 2015, p. 283); Human interest – which stories circle the ordinary people and how socially interesting are these stories? “Often they are called ‘colour stories’ or ‘soft news features’ and will be used to provide a human face to a harder, more complex story” (Bainbridge et al., 2015, p. 283); Novelty – reflects changes in society that might be worth sharing. “...reflects information that is newsworthy, which attracts attention and provides a talking point” (Bainbridge et al., 2015, p. 284); Conflict – will the information cause conflict? “Journalists and media professionals consider information potentially newsworthy if it involves conflict” (Bainbridge et al., 2015, p. 284); Currency – how recent is the information? “...journalists and media professionals assess whether information given to them is current” (Bainbridge et al., 2015, p. 285). News values governed the stages of reporting and the editing of news in newsrooms (Cotter, 2010).

The speed at which news developed as the years progressed was an indication of the growth in journalism. News successfully managed to travel faster and farther to reach audiences far and wide, a process that Drok and Hermans (2016) define as an inalienable aspect of the journalism culture. When news was first published in America, the newspaper would only appear once a month (Tiffen, 1989, p. 15). This is in stark contrast to what is experienced today. “Across the world, journalists see the fast dissemination of news as the most important task” (Drok & Hermans, 2016, p. 540). The exchange of information through technologies such as telegraph, telephones, satellites and news agencies (Herbert,

2000) symbolised a big change as journalism evolved over the years. Drok and Hermans (2016, p. 540) further stated that the speed of news increased further because of the interactive and mobile internet, which changed the traditional way of news being produced from a fixed time-limit deadline cycle to a 24/7 news cycle. This increase in speed made news more powerful.

The place of media could not be ignored and as Couldry (2001) argues, media's symbolic power became important not only to those who used it – media people – but also those who did not use it – non-media people. Both groups valued their appearances on these media platforms, or if their work appeared on these platforms, owing to the strength the media possessed. That is why people in power criticised and scrutinised media in the past; that is why protesters would want to appear on media platforms; and that is why advertisers used media platforms to sell their products. Their intentions were to be recognised on a powerful platform, as a way of showing how important or relevant they were to the public or how important their cause was (with the case of protesters). It is therefore not surprising that the media had much authority (Couldry, 2001).

With power being placed in the media, journalists were faced with a dilemma where moral injunctions mattered (Mencher, 1997). When journalists reported on straightforward stories of actual events, even when these stories appeared to create bigotry or violence, it was expected that journalists remained responsible for how they acted, ensuring that they avoided using derogatory material (Mencher, 1997). It therefore became notable that journalists appeared to be always making choices – on what to report, who to interview, or what to write or leave out in a story – basically what **truth** to give and what truth to exempt.

Journalists were now identified as the “watchdog” of democracy and freedom. This was as a result of their important role of watching and reporting matters concerning elected officials in society (Gans, 2003). As the watchdog, or the fourth estate as they were (are) commonly referred to, journalists ensured that public figures – the powerful – in society (the presidents, the ministers, the political leaders and other senior officials) were held accountable for what they said and what they did (Bainbridge et al., 2015). Journalists held high-profile persons to account by revealing details, for example, of debates conducted during political meetings, while at the same time investigating their interests and how these interests served their positions while in power (Stockwell, 2004). In their role as the watchdog, journalists did not report on political officials only, they also identified and

exposed misconduct by public institutions/persons. “So in various ways...journalists have incorporated new models of analysis, interpretation, and investigation into their work – the latter being especially notable when news organisations identify topics or controversies that are not placed on the public agenda by prominent political figures – say, the child sexual abuse scandals in the Catholic church around the world from the 1980s onwards, or, in 2017, in the workplace sexual harassment scandals set off by a New York Times investigative report” (Schudson, 2018b, p. 5).

The public response to the work of the watchdog/fourth estate resulted in news becoming perceived as a trusted source of information. “Somewhere in the ascendancy of modernists, fact-centred, reported journalism, people began to speak not only of “news” but of “the news” as if it were a unified certified and perhaps sanctified whole. “Did you catch ‘the news’ today?” “What’s the top story on ‘the news’?” – often referring to national television news” (Schudson, 2018b, p. 5). This increased power of news resulted in journalism being trusted further as essential for providing truth, and journalists were indirectly tasked with the role of ensuring they remained convincing to the community. Park (2017, para. 4) states the role of journalism in this way: “The relevance of journalism in this century depends on convincing our communities we can be trusted – trusted to be honest, to be entertaining and to be compelling. Trusted to be essential.” Journalism was created to serve a purpose to the public, and with this purpose came power; but the misuse of power resulted in journalism being criticised and trust being threatened, yet its functions were still recognised as important.

“In the journalism profession, moral conducts were guided by codes of ethics - a system of moral principles by which a person can judge right and wrong in any field” (Bainbridge et al., 2015, p. 383). Moral conduct was also guided by codes of practice which individuals in the profession were expected to adhere to. Sheridan (2002, p. 65) says: “All professions face ethical conflicts, but journalists publish the results of theirs.” To be a journalist and in the journalism profession, meant that there was a high chance of facing ethical challenges that could very easily become public via what is reported and judged for its moral standing. It was therefore important for the profession to develop frameworks and social contexts that individuals in the profession would use to guide and govern them while they practised journalism.

The opening statement on the website of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) (2019), a media body that initiated press self-regulation in 1944 when it developed

the Journalist Code of Ethics, states: “Respect for truth and the public’s right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression... They scrutinize power, but also exercise it, and should be accountable.” This means that journalists were accorded a huge responsibility in ensuring that they convey truth, because they are accountable to their consumers. This responsibility, however, began to be threatened by the Australian federal government in 2011. According to Ricketson (2012, p.1): “In Australia, the federal government—having begun 2011 by launching a wide-ranging review of the rapidly converging media world—had ended the year with a further two inquiries. One examined the desirability of introducing a tort of privacy, the other looked at regulation of print and online media and whether the threat to the mainstream news media's business model warrants any government action.”

In addition to the four codes of conduct, journalists are expected to follow provisions such as: ensure they do not distort facts; do not allow gifts or benefits to undermine independence and fairness; do not plagiarise; do not position themselves for personal gain; use honest means and fairness while obtaining material for stories; use fairness when reporting on personal characteristics; disclose information on any direct or indirect payments for story gains; ensure that they present true and accurate reports; respect personal privacy; and do their utmost to correct errors in fairness. Australian media are regulated by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) which enforces the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (BSA). The Act oversees commercial and community broadcasting nationwide. These bodies (ACMA and MEAA) provide governing and regulation with codes of conduct (in the case of MEAA) that are intended to maintain accuracy and fairness within the journalism profession.

Although the journalism profession is guided by the above-mentioned code of ethics and codes of conduct, Broersma (2010) argued that truthfulness in journalism still appeared to be masked by an awkward reality. For example, journalists were not always in the know about events that happen and may have relied on sources who heard about, or were present at, certain events to tell the stories which the journalists reported in the media. Broersma (2010, p. 29) states that, “... this discourse of truthfulness obviously masks an awkward reality. To know about events, we have not witnessed ourselves, we rely on the media and journalism. But do journalists know what really happened? In 99.9 percent of

cases, they were not there either. They rely on sources who might have witnessed the events or heard about them and have their own interests and reasons to cooperate.”

Another issue that affected journalism was commercialisation of the press which changed the way truth appeared. Schudson (2018b) states “...journalism changed over time. An early step was the emergence of an ambitiously commercial newspaper business, a business that by the late nineteenth century in the United States and Britain was in the ascendant, its advertising columns coveted by businesses that sought the attention of the readers the newspaper had gathered” (p. 4). The emergence of commercialisation of the press evolved with businesses targeting newspapers that attracted the attention of readers, in order to advertise their products. On realising this, publishers and producers sought to increase their revenue by publishing more newspapers to create an increase in advertising opportunities and earn extra income (Schudson, 2018a). This new mindset of commercialisation in the press became part of the system, changing how reporting news was conducted (Bell, 2016). In Australia, newspapers— *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* – especially, were deemed as very lucrative businesses due to the money earned from classifieds and sometimes display advertisements (Ricketson, 2012). Schudson (2018a) further highlights that this commercialisation in the press brought with it what he called independent-minded news, the ‘he said she said’ way of telling stories. This changed how the media served the interests of its readers, and changed how news was reported in general.

Truth in media has also been affected by public relations (PR) politics (Tiffen, 1989) since the 1980s. In PR politics, as Tiffen (1989) points out, the relationship between sources (politicians, companies, celebrities, even normal citizens) and journalists was a two-way street. He described it as a dance where it took two to tango. A journalist would go to a source to get insights for a story, and in the same manner politicians, companies, celebrities, or citizens would go directly to journalists to give their stories. The aim was for each party to tell its story while relying on the strength of the media to highlight these stories and win the news consumers over. By distributing press releases, highlighting social media posts, or holding media briefings etc. politicians, celebrities, citizens and even institutions shared their stories in the hope that their stories were deemed newsworthy by the media and subsequently highlighted as news (ABC, 2014c).

Media power and the role media played also began to be scrutinised more deeply. In 1963, the most famous example of professional journalism was depicted by Tom Wicker, when he

recounted the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, a story that first appeared as a special edition in the *New York Times* published on the same day Kennedy was killed – 22 November 1963; an account that was fabricated (Calcutt & Hammond, 2011). “Kennedy’s assassination came at the high point of the post-war boom and the peak of American influence over the rest of the world. Wicker was prominent among a generation of journalists writing news for an industrial society,”(Calcutt & Hammond, 2011, p.15). Calcutt and Hammond (2011) further indicated that the false story by Wicker revealed the way in which journalists told stories during those times; for example, through their own view point. Another example of scrutiny appeared in 1995, when residents in Brightlingsea in Essex also questioned how media reported their stories after news broadcast about the protests that took place in the town were deemed inaccurate. “People came in touch with a whole other world: of animal cruelty, police intimidation, morally questionable business practices, behind-the-scenes government influence. But at the same time – something the media did not highlight – it was generally also protesters’ first direct encounter with media reporting” (Couldry, 2001, p. 127). The news media was expected to maintain a typical language of operation: “The news media uphold standard language ideals through practice in a variety of ways – through how they report, write, edit, and self-critique, as well as what they report on” (Cotter, 2010, p. 211). What they chose to report on for the citizens of Brightlingsea brought controversy and changed how residents in the town viewed journalists and their way of reporting. The media revealed a strategy news consumers were not cognisant of through what is known as news framing, “the way news is created” (Bainbridge et al., 2015, p. 288). The issue of journalists framing the story to suit their interests did not sit well with the residents of Brightlingsea. Burns (2013, p. 7) states that “the position from which the journalist observes the ‘facts’ unfold determines the presentation of the ‘truth’” revealing that journalists decided which truth to reveal based on the position from which they assessed the story. These kinds of acts, such as what happened in America and in Essex, weakened the trust residents had in the media. This kind of process by the media only encouraged mistrust by its consumers and with the above-mentioned issues, journalism appeared to be misunderstood (Phillips, Lindgren, & Bishop, 2013).

Media power was also affected by the evolution of information technology (IT) in the 20th century. Through information technology, “the capabilities offered by hardware, software applications, and telecommunications...to break down communication barriers...to expedite office work” (Attaran, 2003, p. 441), digitisation and networked communication provided

more sources for news information. In this new digitisation era, journalists' working practices changed; multimedia and multi-skilling became the new phrases journalists used as described by Rudin and Ibbotson (2002). "Digital technology has 'freed' journalists from reliance on a complex production process involving many different craft skills" (Rudin & Ibbotson, 2002, p. 12). Non-journalists, similar to journalists, also had access to online space (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018) indicating a shift in the positioning of journalists in the society. Four major News Limited daily papers, in 2006, became twenty-four-hour operating news rooms, owing to the increase in numbers of people accessing the internet. (Bainbridge et al., 2015, p. 72). In addition to 24-hours news updates, live blogs were introduced as a way of monitoring crisis events (Bainbridge et al., 2015). Through blogs and social media, what was once a one-way flow of sharing information through the internet, changed to a social web of interactions where conversations, discussions and engagements took place. This new world of Web 2.0, as stated by Calcutt & Hammond (2011), furthered discussions on journalism, suggesting that there is nothing the journalism profession does that digital media users cannot supply freely.

The one-way process of journalism, in which news consumers trusted editors, reporters and photographers and took in what they said, changed with digitisation (Herbert, 2000). News reporters could no longer just write news, they had to engage their readers through Twitter accounts to share their stories further, changing the way media disseminated news stories (Bainbridge et al., 2015). Digitisation changed the news consumer's outlook as well, and the public was now able to discuss the products and services offered by giving their opinions (O'Brien et al., 2010); a change in positioning that impacted the perception news consumers had towards the credibility of the news produced. The use of social media by journalists not only helped them share news widely but it also provided a channel where journalists could fact-check stories and the veracity of rumours (Bainbridge et al., 2015).

Digitisation and the online space created a new world for journalism. Anderson et. al (2015, p. 50) described the journalist's new role in this way: "...the journalist has not been replaced but displaced, moved higher up the editorial chain from the production of initial observations to a role that emphasizes verification and interpretation, bringing sense to the streams of text, audio, photos and video produced by the public." This new world of online space and digitisation created an environment where journalism could now be questioned openly (Posetti et al. 2018). Criticism of the media began to rise, and as Broersma (2010) points out, writers highlighted through the work they published online, the inefficiency that faced journalism. They stated that it was impossible to practise journalism now as it was in

the past. According to Hartley (1948, p. 5), "... it must be said at once that the news, whether heard on radio, read in newspapers or seen on television, gains much of its 'shape' from the characteristics of the medium in which it appears". Therefore, any inefficiencies experienced through the online medium, dictated the shape that news took.

Strauss (2018) criticises the digital space, stating that in this current era it is difficult for news consumers to follow stories because there are numerous online news stories from various sites, and this is overwhelming to news consumers. Schudson (2018a) calls this easy access to information distracting. Digitisation also affected how news was reported, taking away the in-depth style that was once essential for writing a good news story. Phillips et al. (2014) argue that reporting significant in-depth stories changed with the new developments, and these changes affected news consumers' understanding of news stories. However, Schudson counters the argument stating that though there have been significant changes, work habits and professional ideals from journalism practised in the past were still recognisable (Schudson, 2018b).

The way in which citizens act as eye witnesses also evolved with the increase in technology, and as a result, served as a new source of information. According to Schudson (2018a, p. 109), "There is more of this citizen eye witnessing than there used to be, although we should not exaggerate the difference from the past. News has frequently originated in "tips" that amateurs handed reporters free of charge. What's new is that the amateurs can publish their "news tips" directly on their own blogs or on their Facebook page or their Twitter account. They bypass the "gatekeeper" journalists they once would have been dependent upon." Once these amateurs share new information online, it is becoming increasingly common to see news consumers accepting these stories as truth and sharing them without factchecking this unverified information.

Filloux (2018) states: "Every day, roughly 100 million pieces of information hit the world wide web" (para 5). If most of these pieces are not verified before they are reshared, the cycle of sharing unverified news only gets strengthened and this is a cause for alarm especially where fake news is concerned. Fake news is defined as "material that is intentionally and verifiably false and is set to mislead its readers" (Tandoc et al., 2018, p. 138). As it stands, according to a 2019 digital report, 62% of respondents who participated in a research survey already felt worried about what is real or fake on the internet (Fisher et al., 2019). This *Digital News Report: Australia 2019* is the fifth report in a series of yearly reports that highlight the trends and behaviours of news consumers towards the news they

consume within Australia; particularly news found in the digital space (Fisher et al., 2019). News consumers, according to Rossi (2020) appear to confuse what is real and fake news online, resulting in people being affected by the uncertainty about the news information they consume. Rossi reveals trends by news consumers who are affected by the phenomenon of fake news in the USA through an HBO documentary, *After Truth: Disinformation and the Cost of Fake* (Rossi, 2020), which highlights real-life effects of disinformation in society today. The documentary further reveals how news consumers are appearing to define fake news based on former US President Trump's definition (Rossi, 2020). Disinformation has also evolved, threatening journalism. Wardle (2017) states: "Journalists and platforms are being targeted and manipulated by agents of disinformation who crave and require the credibility that comes with their exposure. Political polarization is creating dangerous schisms in societies worldwide, and the speed of technological advancements is making manipulation increasingly difficult to detect," (para. 22). Disinformation – false information which is intended to mislead – causes news consumers to increasingly question news information shared.

Pickard (2017) argues that the issue of journalism's shortcomings in relation to former United States President Donald Trump's presidential campaign and his attack on the media placed journalism in an awkward place. "Throughout his campaign, Trump manipulated and managed the media in numerous ways. He corralled and abused reporters at his campaign events, he feuded with journalists deemed unsympathetic toward his candidacy, and he gave special access to those in the media who were more compliant" (Pickard, 2017, p. 118). Trump's manipulation of the media and his giving of special access to those who were compliant to his desires not only made journalism appear weak, but it also accentuated the act of PR politics.

Former President Trump also publicly attacked the fourth estate by manipulating and managing the media during his presidential campaigning period in 2016 (Pickard, 2017) contributing to more pronounced questioning of the place of news and media in the society today. World leaders, including the former President Trump, popularised the term 'fake news'. "In 2017, I certainly wouldn't have predicted the term "fake news" would become so stretched and contorted as to render it utterly meaningless, much less weaponized by world leaders" (Wardle, 2017, para. 1). The former President Trump led leaders in weaponizing 'fake news' when he called journalists and media houses alike fake news (McNair, 2017, p. 13): "... at his first press conference after his November victory, he attacked the media pack with even greater ferocity, and CNN's Jim Acosta was his first

target. “You’re fake news”, he repeated and moved on to another correspondent. CNN was in good company, because Trump around this time made the same ‘fake news’ accusation about media organisations as widely respected for their journalism as the BBC, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and MSNBC. Any news provider, indeed, that published journalism of which Trump disapproved was liable to be branded as ‘fake’”.

The use of Facebook, “a social media networking website” (Thornton, Kalibala, Ewemie, & Alim, n.d., p. 2), also contributed to presenting news items in such a way that consumers questioned the kind of news content they were exposed to and the truth behind the information (Richardson, 2017; Benton, 2016; Bell, 2016). News consumers appeared to distrust news from social media (Reuters Institute, 2019). The 2019 Reuters Institute *Digital News Report* provides new insights, such as how people view media news globally based on surveys that capture responses of more than 75,000 people in 38 countries. Misinformation in the online space grew and Australia was listed by scholars to be among the developed countries in the world affected by fake news and distortion of information. According to *The Guardian* (2018, para. 3) report, based on Edelman Trust Barometer’s findings on people’s trust on traditional news media, “Australia and Singapore were the only two countries to have declined in trust across all four institutions this year: Australia’s trust in...media 31%”. Australia also appeared to join other developed countries losing the battle of fighting fake news, according to Filloux (2018). The *2018 Edelman Trust Barometer* generally reports findings captured from online survey responses of participants in 28 markets globally; over 33,000 participants have responded to studies conducted in a span of 18 years. The *2018 Edelman Trust Barometer* report captured results from 1,150 respondents per market from more than 25 markets globally.

News consumers questioned mainstream news media (Schudson, 2018a) and became curious about the type of news they received. News came under further scrutiny when public figures, including former President Trump, criticised the work of journalists. Trump called them the ‘enemy of the people’. “A central pillar of President Trump’s politics is a sustained assault on the free press. Journalists are not classified as fellow Americans, but rather “the enemy of the people”” (*The Globe*, 2018). Trust in media was weakened according to the eighth Reuters Institute *Digital News Report* (Newman, 2019), resulting in some news consumers choosing to read only what they agree with; while others such as those highlighted in the *2018 Edelman Trust Barometer* global report (Edelman, 2018), indicated that they consume mainstream media less than once a week. “People have retreated into self-curated information bubbles, where they read only that with which they

agree, as if selecting their playlist for music. Fully half of respondents indicate that they consume mainstream media less than once a week” (Edelman, 2018, para. 2). These behaviours possibly contributed to the journalism practices we were experiencing before the public outcry for journalists to fact-check their stories in order to be trusted; as highlighted by the Centre for Media Transition’s study on *Trust and News Media in Australia* (Fray et al., 2018). The *Trust and News Media in Australia* study (Fray et al., 2018) revealed results retrieved from 34 news consumers, who responded to a Facebook post requesting participants to take part in the study. These participants were recruited through a purpose-built Facebook post in April 2018 and were paid \$100 to participate in the study. Wardle (2017) predicts that these kinds of polarisations (such as the criticism of the press by former President Trump and news consumers criticising the media) are dangerous schisms and with technological advancements, manipulation will become difficult to detect in the media. Mainstream media, however, continue to attempt to report information truthfully (Waisbord, 2018).

In November 2018, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s *Four Corners* program examined the effects journalism has on news consumers in a segment that highlighted race, crime and media reporting, and how this media reporting affected residents of the city of Melbourne (ABC, 2018a). The ABC’s *Four Corners* is an Australian investigative journalism and current affairs program. “For almost 60 years, the Four Corners team has been exposing scandals, triggering inquiries, leading national debate and confronting issues that matter,” (ABC, 2018a, para. 1). In the November 2018 episode, the role media played in portraying a negative image of Sudanese citizens was questioned. The segment highlighted stories reported in the media over a two-year period that presented the Sudanese community negatively to some Melbourne citizens. According to the ABC (2018a) “For more than two years, the media has been reporting that Melbourne is in the grip of a crimewave, overrun by African street gangs responsible for a wave of violence and theft.... Images of brawling Sudanese teens and hooded armed robbers have spread terror and stoked a growing anger towards those “of African appearance” ... “*We’re seeing headlines and reporting that exacerbates the problem. Reporting on things that we’re not necessarily seeing,*” a Senior Victoria Police Officer said.” (ABC, 2018a) This report showed concerns by news consumers in Melbourne; some residents living in fear, some Sudanese community members who feel attacked by the community, and the police who have been accused of political correctness and inaction. This segment brought to light the issue of trust in news. The report added to the literature that points to the definition of news as has been

described in this thesis – recent information that enables people to be well-informed in order to make sound decisions for their lives. The report shows how some news consumers in Melbourne – residents and the police alike - used the information received in the news about the Sudanese community to make decision for their lives, which included vilifying some members of the Sudanese community who were innocent of any crimes. According to Agarwal (2017, para. 8) news producers can longer afford to take their audience for granted as in the past: “News publishers tended to assume that it catered to an unknowable mass audience.... They’d gathered, verified, and packaged information, sharing it at town squares, and after the development of their own distribution channels, people’s homes. This information was scarce and crucial and could command a premium from its audience...”. Today, this practice of news publishers assuming whom they cater for warrants questioning. Some scholars have urged news producers to ensure they could be trusted by their consumers to be essential, honest, entertaining and compelling (Park, 2017), in an effort to remain relevant as a profession.

Fray et al. (2018, p. 8) revealed that news readers were seeking trust in news, ahead of positive, informed, respectful and entertaining reporting. Fray et al. (2018) also revealed that Australians from Sydney already felt overwhelmed, and betrayed by journalists who were once perceived to be powerful, independent and trusted professionals by news consumers. But even with news consumers feeling as they do, the place of journalism in society still appears to be effective and influential considering the recent raid of the ABC’s Sydney headquarters by the Australian Federal Police (ABC, 2019) in relation to “the Afghan files” stories that were aired in 2017. This raid not only showed the power of news and democracy, it proved that journalism still plays an important role in society.

Another online survey conducted between January and February 2019 by *Digital News Report; Australia*, revealed that only 25% of Australian participants interviewed felt that stories shared on the news were relevant to them; 75% did not (Fisher et.al., 2019). The 75% group reveals the need for news producers to focus on producing news that serves people’s needs and interest. This finding shows that journalists and news producers focus on providing news that they feel is relevant and important to the public, even when this appears not to be the case, and demonstrates that times have changed. News producers need to be aware and prepared to work with consumers to change the narrative. It truly is the time for news producers to know their consumers (Agarwal, 2017). But regardless of their perception of news as mostly irrelevant to its audience, 66% of the respondents in this *Digital News Report; Australia 2019* research lauded the press for keeping them up to date,

with 57% feeling the information given is explained well (Fisher et.al., 2019). The *Digital News Report; Australia 2019* study also revealed that only 58% of participants were interested in news now, compared to 64% who were interested roughly three years ago (Fisher et. al, 2019). This is alarming but not surprising considering the many changes and effects we have discussed in this review. Fray et al. (2018) state that these are the golden years, where trust should be experienced more owing to all the new technological changes that present unprecedented openness and transparency. But instead of experiencing trust we are seeing a decline, which may be due to issues such as fake news, misinformation, disinformation, commercialisation of the press, influence of blogs and social media.

Phillips et al. (2013, p. 155) advises journalists to stick to facts in order to maintain trust: “Pumping up a grey story into shades of black and white can easily result in distortion and misrepresentation of the truth. If the story needs that sort of embellishment, maybe it isn’t a story at all. Keep to the facts. Avoid the temptation to embellish. Keep yourself out of it. Don’t let your biases determine your approach – let the story tell itself”. Herbert (2000, p. 62) states that, “nothing more quickly destroys the credibility of a journalist than the deliberate manipulation of news to serve other ends than information”. But even if journalists chose to stick to facts, they sometimes produce stories that are negative and as Benton (2019) states, as it stands, news is generally not known for generating happiness and therefore news consumers are choosing to explore other sources for entertainment. Shine (2018) revealed that Australian school teachers and principals do not feel satisfied with the reporting on school-based education systems. Shine (2018) highlights responses of 25 participants who took part in a study on schoolteachers’ perceptions of news coverage of education. The study was conducted in 2015 and early 2016, with participants responding from four states in Australia, including Western Australian. The results suggested that the participants feel news coverage often criticised and blamed teachers, while overlooking or disregarding good stories about schools; resulting in these participants avoiding or generally feeling reluctant to engage with journalists or agree to be interviewed by media personnel. The participants, as indicated by Shine (2018, p. 1), “...described news reporting of education as frequently inaccurate and generally superficial. Many expressed a distrust of journalists and were wary about being interviewed.” Ketchell (2020) further states that Australians feel tired about the news they consume because it is too negative, overwhelming, or upsetting especially in this covid-19 pandemic season. Some news consumers are choosing to avoid news altogether, adopting an approach of “news avoidance”. This news avoidance group could be increasing due to increased alternatives to

news; increased political polarisation; or increase in existing inequalities for news readers, for example, “more women than men avoid news, and women are more likely to say news upsets them” (Palmer & Toff, 2019, para. 5). It is therefore fair to say: “That phenomenon – improved technology increases access to news, but also makes it easier to avoid it – is fairly well established” (Benton, 2019, para. 3). There are two sides to each coin; news consumers will either enjoy more access to news, or they find it easier to avoid news altogether and enjoy alternatives to consuming news.

To change the way journalism was viewed, different mechanisms were adopted to guide media practitioners and the public on new ways of approaching journalism. One such way was through carrying out civic journalism. According to Hartley (1948, p.9) it would be best to help news consumers understand news functions in order for them to appreciate news: “If we can find out how the news works, what interests it serves, and analyse its meanings, we can use that understanding every time we see or read the news”. This civic journalism venture fizzled out, unfortunately, between 2000 and 2003 according to Madison and Dejarnette (2017). As the years progressed, the rise of social media, fake news and President Donald Trump’s presidential debates contributed to further decline of the (reform) momentum (Madison & Dejarnette, 2017).

Other scholars suggested that journalists should learn from truth-telling comedians on how to win news consumers back. Wijnberg (2018) argues that satire evolved as a serious source of information and social criticism, e.g. through shows like *The Daily Show*, which grew and gained trust from news consumers as a trusted source of news especially among young Americans. Satire won the hearts of its consumers due to its ability to penetrate into the hearts of its consumers: “...Through their perfect pitch for irony and their flawless bullshit detectors, comedians confront us not only with lies and hypocrisy, but also with what it means to be human” (Wijnberg, 2018). According to Gendron (2015, para. 2), “More than one in ten (11 percent) young adults (ages 18–29) say they trust “The Daily Show” or “The Colbert Report” the most to provide them with accurate information about politics and current events—an amount nearly double that of Americans overall (6 percent). More young adults trust Stewart or Colbert’s shows than public television (8 percent) or MSNBC (5 percent); the shows ranked fourth in trustworthiness behind CNN (24 percent), broadcast network news programs (19 percent), and Fox News (19 percent)”. However, Australia does not have satirical shows that have been so successful.

Social media platforms such as Facebook have been criticised for remaining silent in the wake of the fake news versus real news controversy. According to Bell (2016), although fake news and real news are different categories of activities, in Facebook they appear to be in one category of 'news'. Bell (2016) says that Facebook can no longer be the 'I didn't do it' boy of global media, and with that, the environment the social media platform has created where perception can matter more than truth needs to be addressed. The platform appears to be doing something behind the scenes, "...evaluating different approaches, listening to arguments for more editorial accountability and thinking about how to improve the very expensive moderation", however, "whilst the process remains partial and secretive, Facebook has helped create an environment where perception can matter more than truth" (Bell, 2016, para. 19). As Tandoc et al. (2018, p. 139) state: "Facebook, with its 1.23 billion and above audience facilitated the spread of wrong information such as fake news". That is why Facebook can no longer ignore what is happening on the online platform.

Some scholars have suggested solutions such as endowing journalists in order to keep local journalism active: "What if an endowment were established to fund journalists across America? Thousands of them, placed in every market with a focus on issues that matter to local residents" (Day, 2018, para. 7). Day (2018, para. 7) further argues that this idea is borrowed from investors who have endowed libraries which appear to be similar to journalism: "Libraries and local journalism have a lot in common. They both provide insight, bind a community together and, of course serve information needs." Another suggestion, by Benton (2019), is that journalism should look into providing solutions while sharing news about big problems. This is because, according to responses by news consumers who gave their input on a short survey conducted on LinkedIn by senior editor-at-large Isabelle Roughol, hearing about news on big problems is depressing if not presented with solutions.

But even with the above suggestions, the call for dialogue between journalists and their audiences appears to be the best way of attempting to fix the growing problem of how news is viewed and trusted by its consumers. Posetti et al. (2018) urge journalists to begin discussions with society on how people decide on credibility, saying that this is "a call-to-action". "Journalists cannot always guarantee 'truth'. Nevertheless, striving to get the facts right, and producing content that accurately reflects the facts, are cardinal principles of journalism.... Transparency, not objectivity, was delivering trust in the 'new media age'" (Posetti et al., 2018, p. 22). Agarwal (2017, para. 31) says: "If a shift is to be made from 'one-to-mass' to 'one-to-one' model for news, journalists need to go to communities to

understand what they're concerned about and how they get their news". The writer is encouraging news producers and the media field in general to know its consumers in order to improve the work being conducted on a one-on-one basis. Park (2017, para. 7) further states: "It means we need to understand our community – and develop our community. The end of mass media means journalism that better understands the tribe it's talking to and trying to build. By understanding our audience, we can ask: How do we make journalism so compelling and necessary that people will reach into their pockets?"

With this background assessment, it is clear that news is important in society today. News consumers in other parts of Australia already appear to be affected by changes in news and technology (ABC, 2018a). It has not been established in Western Australia whether news consumers have concerns about the news produced, and will not be established unless a study is conducted. As Agarwal (2017) states that now is the right time as any to discover what news consumers feel about news and why. This study provides timely discussions on news consumers views about the credibility of news. This study investigated three main research questions: 1) How do news consumers in WA perceive the credibility of local, national and international news? 2) To what extent do news consumers trust, or distrust news consumed? 3) Does digitisation and networked communication influence how news consumers perceive news? The objective of this study is to reveal how news consumers perceive the credibility of news in Western Australia, adding a local voice to work already being conducted such as that of the ABC's *Four Corners* program (ABC, 2018a) and Fray et al. (2017; 2018).

Chapter 3: Research Method

The previous chapter outlined the history of journalism and news, highlighting the development of this profession from its formative stages to date. This chapter outlines the methods that were used to collect data for this study, including methods that enhanced the generation of timely results facilitating coherent data and led to meaningful conclusions.

Research Design

A research design is a master plan specifying the methods and procedures used for collecting and analysing data to obtain meaningful information. According to Zikmund (2003) it is also a framework or blueprint that plans the action for the research project. For this particular study, the research design employed comprised of a quantitative and qualitative approach, through the administration of questionnaires both online and physically. The researcher adopted a sampling method of collecting data. Sapsford and Jupp (2006) describe a sampling method as a process aimed at saving time while maintaining consistency in data collection. This sampling method, as Sapsford and Jupp (2006) further illustrate, focuses not only on a characteristic of the selected sample but the population from which that sample is drawn. The researcher, therefore, adopted a sampling method by attempting to collect results from participants in Western Australia only, and also by collecting results from participants aged 18 years and above. Questionnaires, according to Donley (2012) can be administered via different ways; mail, telephone, internet, or in-person, which provided the researcher with a variety of options to get responses. Wright (2005, para. 7) highlights that distributing surveys, especially online, is beneficial because researchers access groups and individuals who would otherwise be difficult, or impossible, to reach through other methods of collecting data such as face-to-face interviews or via telephone calls. Therefore, through the use of questionnaires, the researcher managed to reach a much wider audience in the short timeframe set out to carry this study. Results from this study's questionnaires provided substance on the opinions of the respondents and insights into information asked in order to derive meaning and provide ranking about the key elements for this study; these as described by Larini & Barthes (2018) depict characteristics of questionnaires. Questions with multiple choices and questions that required an order of ranking to be provided, further allowed the researcher to categorise the answers, and derive more quantitative meaning and awareness to the elements presented. The qualitative aspect of the study allowed for the researcher to decipher meanings to responses without significant bias, due to the fact that responses given were anonymous (Larini & Barthes, 2018). This was crucial in open-ended questions where

respondents were asked for opinions to support their answers. Through questionnaires, the researcher obtained responses from participants due to the fact that the study was online, and it allowed participants to respond at their leisure. The questionnaire method was useful in capturing the attitudes and characteristics of the majority of the participants, concerning the news they consume (Lambert, 2019). This mix of qualitative and quantitative questions was conducted through a cross-sectional questionnaire method (Lambert, 2019), where results captured were obtained through a single point in time.

A micro-level methodology technique was deployed to collect and analyse the data collected in this study. This was a structure that allowed the researcher to explore in depth the current view participants have toward local, national, and international news. According to O’Leary (2010) the micro-level technique is a method that is used to collect and analyse data, through data collecting methods such as interviewing, surveying, and observation, while analysing through processes such as statistics. The micro-level methodology adopted, therefore, enabled the researcher to get the best knowledge from the results derived from this study. The data collected was analysed and interpreted to predict, explain, and describe trends that emerged from the responses in a process similar to that explained by O’Leary (2010).

Research Approach

The researcher targeted the respondents in two different ways (online and physically). This was in an effort to ensure that different age groups were captured who would provide an array of insights that may possibly point to different aspects of their news consumption patterns and behaviours. Through a controlled physical distribution process, the researcher approached university students and young adult church members in an effort to represent millennials in Western Australia. This controlled distribution process is described as a non-probability sampling method, a method described by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2015, p. 295) that “provides a range of alternative techniques to select samples, the majority of which include an element of subjective judgement.” The researcher relied on her own judgement in deciding which group(s) to approach to take part in the physical survey. Through this method, the researcher hoped to reach a sample size of 100 millennials representing young news consumers from WA universities. As has been highlighted by Agrawal (2017) millennials input has rarely been captured in other similar studies similar, yet their feedback is crucial in indicating the direction news will take in the coming years.

The researcher attempted to reach as many students as possible by approaching journalism and humanities lecturers from universities across WA. The researcher adopted a purposive non-probability sampling method by targeting journalism and humanities students. A purposive sampling method, according to Coolican (2009, p. 43), allows the researcher to choose participants who have some knowledge in the study matter. The method also allows the researcher to carefully decide who to include and exclude from the particular study (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015). The selected students targeted for this study were participants learning in a field tied to the study being undertaken. The researcher also targeted this group of students with the hope that their lecturers, who teach in the field of this particular study, would be easier to approach and would be willing to respond positively to the request of involving their students because they understand or are keen to contribute to the topic of discussion for this study. The researcher targeted other millennial groups through the church community, specifically young adults, in a bid to capture responses from non-university students. The researcher approached these groups through the help of the young adults' pastors from two churches. The researcher approached the two churches because she was affiliated to the churches in some way. Generally, these two sets of groups were approached because they either studied in the field related to the study being undertaken, or attended a church that the researcher was affiliated to, aligning with the characteristics of the sampling method the researcher had set out. This way of collecting data allowed the researcher to collect data within a short timeframe, as required by the limited time set to conduct this research study.

The online questionnaires were distributed through the social media platforms WhatsApp and Facebook. This online method was employed to capture responses from all other age groups, including millennials, to provide a comparative analysis of the perceptions participants have towards news in most, if not all, age groups. The researcher opted to use Facebook because it was possible to place a paid advertisement with a link to the questionnaire through this platform. By publishing an advertisement through Facebook and boosting the post, the researcher was also able to target specific but large groups of individuals across WA who use social media. "Almost every social media has a feature that allows individual posts to be "boosted" to reach more people in your network and beyond" (Hackett, 2018, p. 96). Boosting the advertisement enabled the researcher to reach the WA population through the following avenues: Instagram feed through mobile devices; News feed on mobile app; News feed on mobile web; and News feed on desktop computers. The researcher also chose to use the WhatsApp social platform because it was an easier way to

approach friends and family (as opposed to phoning them), who are living in WA to take part in the study. The researcher also encouraged the approached individuals/groups to share the links with their own friends and relatives to gain more responses. Both channels were easily accessible to the researcher and therefore served as the best platforms to use, considering the short timeframe available for the study. Overall, the researcher targeted a sample size of 500 participants. However, due to the short timeframe set to collect data for this study, 163 participants responded. The survey responses were collected over a period of one month, in the month of October 2019. The respondents represented age groups that ranged between 18 years and 65 years and above. "Usually, in survey research, we will be interested not just in the characteristics of a sample, but in those of the population from which the sample has been drawn" (Sapsord & Jupp, 2006, p. 27).

Hackett (2018) indicates that the language used to compel respondents to undertake a survey on social media matters. "Brief and compelling language is especially important in this case because you're more likely to be connecting with people who have never heard of you and are unlikely to be compelled to participate by anything other than the introduction to your survey" (Hackett, 2018, p.96). The researcher observed the approach described by Hackett (2018) with their messaging, by ensuring that the text used to attract participants was short and compelling.

On Facebook, the researcher created a page through their own Facebook account where the questionnaire was promoted by boosting the advertisement to attract as many respondents as possible to take part in the study.

Sample of the message used on Facebook: News appears to be a hot topic of discussion lately, with the credibility of news generating a lot of contention. Do you trust or distrust news? Have your say by completing this survey...

On WhatsApp, the researcher approached members from different WhatsApp groups to fill in the questionnaires and asked those respondents to share the questionnaires with members of other WhatsApp groups in order to obtain more respondents.

Sample of the message used on WhatsApp: Hi... I am doing research on how Western Australians perceive the credibility of news... Please fill this short survey for me and share your inputs on what you think. You can also share it with your family and friends to help me get more insights. Thank you.

Physical questionnaires were deployed through a controlled approach that targeted millennials and the generation Z age groups in Western Australia. The researcher approached journalism and humanities lecturers from four universities that teach these disciplines requesting them to allow her to administer the research questionnaires to their students. Only two lecturers responded to the request of involving their students. One lecturer requested the researcher to send a link of the study to them via email which she would in turn share with her students in class – this lecturer informed the researcher that some of the students’ responses may be skewed because they are international students who did not use social media back in their country and therefore may not have enough experience on receiving news via social media. The other lecturer invited the researcher to visit the school and speak to two sets of students in years 1 and 3, about the study while encouraging them to participate. Group administered surveys are generally conducted in institutional settings (Donley, 2012, p. 28). Young adult participants were approached through their church youth pastors, who encouraged them to participate by sharing the online link to the questionnaire with them. The targeted millennial age groups appear to rely on the internet to provide information that affects their career, political choices, and life decisions (Lane & Van Bergen, 2018, p.32). These same targeted age groups are said to have been neglected in the past when research of a similar kind, on news consumption, was conducted. “It has been noted that it is not only teenagers who have been neglected, but also the 18–24-year-old age group, who are virtually absent from the literature as they fall between teenage and adult demographics” (Lancaster, Hughes & Spicer, 2012, p. 16). These same groups were also targeted online.

The researcher attempted to circulate the physical questionnaires in a similar manner across all groups, using the same messaging, to ensure accuracy in comparability.

Sample of the message used to attract participation during the physical distribution exercise: *News appears to be a hot topic of discussion lately, with the credibility of news generating a lot of contention. Do you trust or distrust news?*

Different questions in the survey were designed to particularly appeal to different ages groups, ensuring that all would have an opportunity to share their views.

Quantitative approach refers to measuring data using the ‘yes, no’ answers approach (Hackett, 2018). A quantitative approach will generally require sampling data from a large group of respondents with questionnaires being one of the methods used to collect data (Hackett, 2018). “...the collected data is mostly quantifiable. Statistics helps us to

summarize our data, describing patterns, relationships, and connections” (Hackett, 2018, p. 6). These statistics could either be: descriptive, data is summarised in such a way that patterns emerge; or inferential, data retrieved can be used to derive statistical significance between groups enabling the researcher to draw a conclusion about the data set (Hackett, 2018).

Qualitative approach refers to the study of things in their natural setting, in an effort to make sense of trends and the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A qualitative approach is flexible and is commonly used to gain deeper understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations/drives of individuals, accentuating personal narratives and experiences, rather than measuring them (Hackett, 2018).

A mix method of quantitative and qualitative research approach was used by the researcher to collect data for this study. The quantitative approach provided the researcher with an avenue to consider societal knowledge through analysing representations of the demographics with the issues presented in mind (Larini & Barthes, 2018). The quantitative approach can be used to “compare the societal representations of specific groups, to better understand the similarities and differences” (Larini & Barthes, 2018, p. 230). This quantitative method provided the researcher with a way of analysing data, through comparing the societal issues presented, in order to explain and describe different trends that emerged from the results of the data collected. The qualitative approach provided the researcher with an opportunity to assess different aspects that appeared through the responses received in the open-ended questions. Through a textual analysis of the texts from the qualitative material generated, the researcher assessed the findings to establish participants perceptions of the trustworthiness of the news they consume.

Data Analysis

The researcher relied on a primary data collection method to collect and analyse data. Primary (new) data are retrieved from fresh evidence on a topic of discussion for a particular study. Primary data “...are collected for the specific research problem at hand, using procedures that fit the research problem best” (Hox & Boeijs, 2005, p. 593). In this study, primary data retrieved from the results of the survey were analysed and interpreted using tables for some of the questions. Tables, particularly population tables, provided the researcher with a systematic outlook of the variables presented in the study. Population tables, as described by Larini and Barthes (2018), tally the number of individuals in each of the modalities indicating variables that can be used to study the responses derived and

draw reasonable conclusions. Although population tables were useful to the researcher for analysing the study, the researcher provides both tables and graphical images in the research findings chapter, to enable readers of this thesis to read and understand the study easily.

Research Tools

The research tools deployed for this study were acceptable given the time frame and space available to conduct the study. It is worth noting that some Australians largely rely on social media for their major source of news and information (Steffens, Dunn, & Leask, 2017, p.120). David (2020) notes that in May 2020 16 million Australians visited Facebook, and 9 million visited Instagram. These statistics support the research tools the researcher deployed for this study.

Samples of the survey questions that were asked in this study, some like those asked by Fray et al. (2018, p.23), included (i) Where do you get your news? What are the top two or three news sources? (ii) How often do you access news via social media? (iii) On what occasions do you turn to other people (family, friends, or neighbours) for news? (iv) Roughly how much time do you spend following news in each week? (v) What is an issue you feel strongly about news received? The researcher hoped to use these questions to make comparisons or draw similarities from similar research conducted by Fray et al. (2018) in Sydney.

The researcher used NVivo 12 Pro to house the quantitative data collected during the study.

Using Toulmin's method of argument where data retrieved warrants a claim (Seats, 2018), the researcher provides a claim on how consumers perceive news produced in WA. Toulmin's argument, as stated by Hitchcock and Verheij (2006, p.1) is "to defend a claim made by asserting something." With this idea, the researcher attempted to establish claims based on responses retrieved from this study.

Ethical Considerations

This research study was conducted in accordance with Curtin University regulations for ethical research, that requires guidelines and codes of conduct on ethics to be adhered to during the study period. The researcher applied for ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Office, to Curtin University (for permission to conduct research with Curtin students), and to the targeted churches (for permission to conduct research with the young

adults) and audiences at large, as soon as candidacy was approved. The application for approval was reviewed through the Curtin University negligible risk review process. This research met the requirements described in the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. The researcher's HREC number is HRE2019-0643. The results obtained protect the identity of the participants, an approach that safeguards information that could be detrimental to those who took part in this study.

The questionnaire information sheet was designed to provide understanding to the participants on: what the project is about; who is doing the research; why the participants have been targeted; any benefits that may arise from participating in this research; any risks or inconveniences they may encounter; and who will access the information provided, with the ethical process in mind. Every participant was required to consent to taking part in the survey by ticking the check box at the start of the survey questionnaire. By checking the box on the questionnaire, the participants were telling the researcher that they had read and understood the information provided. Participants were encouraged to take their time before taking part in the survey to make sure they understood the information provided and to ask questions where necessary. This practice kept all participants informed about privacy matters and provided the researcher with all the necessary information required to make decisions during data analysis.

Participants were also provided with contact details of the researcher and the chief investigator, should they have wished to discuss any other aspect of the study or to discuss their rights as participants in this study.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

How do News Consumers in Western Australia Perceive the Credibility of News?

In the previous chapter, the researcher outlined the research methodology of the study. This chapter will highlight the results that were captured from the Qualtrics online survey and physical surveys of participants in Western Australia. Some of the findings identified in this study include: the majority of participants trust news but with conditions; social media has been identified as a key medium that is suspected to contain fake news by some participants; TV channels appear to be the most trusted news sources as opposed to sources such as print, radio and even social media platforms; some participants believe that journalists and news producers conduct the right checks, do their research, or adhere to ethical guidelines before producing news; and some participants believe fake news is contained in political and entertainment news.

1.0 Respondents

This study was conducted through surveys that were distributed in four ways:

- Facebook
- WhatsApp
- Through the church community and
- Through lecturers at WA universities.

1.1 Facebook

A post was put on Facebook and boosted to target Western Australians aged 18 years and above. The post was boosted for 14 days and it reached 676 viewers. Roughly half of these viewers, 322, engaged with the post, and 22 of them clicked on the link to engage further. Through boosting the post, the researcher was able to reach the WA population through the following clusters: Instagram feed through mobile devices (83%); news feed on mobile app (12%); news feed on mobile web (2%); news feed on desktop computers (2%).

There being no way of identifying how many participants actually took part in the survey from Facebook. The researcher chose to assume the 22 people who clicked on the link are the ones who actually undertook the survey.

1.2 WhatsApp

The researcher shared the questionnaire on different WhatsApp groups through her WhatsApp contacts, and encouraged people in those groups to share the survey link with

their friends and family to attain a wider reach. Based on the responses shared on these groups and the amount of resharing that was observed by the researcher during this period; the number of Facebook clicks captured at the end of the data generating period; and by considering that only 31 students took part in the physical questionnaire distribution round at a university, it is believed that the highest number of responses came from WhatsApp.

1.3 WA University Lecturers

In order to capture the 18–24 year age bracket, the researcher approached eight lecturers from different university campuses in WA and asked them to share the questionnaire with their students. The researcher targeted lecturers in the Humanities field at Curtin University, Murdoch University, The University of Western Australia, the University of Notre Dame and Edith Cowan University.

Four lecturers responded, three of whom requested the link to the questionnaire. Twenty four 18–24 year olds took part in the online survey. How many of these were from Curtin University, Murdoch University or the University of Western Australia through links being shared is unknown. Some of the responses could have also come from other sources like Facebook or WhatsApp.

The fourth lecturer allowed the researcher to distribute the questionnaires physically. The physical distribution took place over a period of two days. The researcher used this opportunity to explain more about the study and the reason why the 18–24 year age bracket was being targeted. The students were in their first or third year of university undertaking a journalism course. Through this approach the researcher was able to get responses from a further 31 students.

1.4 The Church Community

The final method the researcher used to collect data was through approaching young adults groups from two churches – Riverview Church and Westminster Presbyterian Church. This method was used to capture young adults who may not be enrolled in university but would still give valuable insights towards the study. Twenty four 18–24 year olds took part in the online survey; how many of these were from the churches is unknown.

This study was conducted over a period of four weeks. Online survey responses totalled 132 and physical distribution responses totalled 31.

2.0 Study Questions

The aim of this study was to investigate how news consumers in Western Australia perceive the credibility of news. This was through investigating three main research questions:

1. To what extent do news consumers trust, or distrust, news consumed?

To answer this question the researcher provides input obtained from the study, specifically sharing insights from questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 16, and 17 of the survey questionnaire.

2. Does digitisation and networked communication influence how news consumers perceive news?

To answer this question the researcher provides input obtained from the study, specifically sharing insights from questions 6, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 of the survey questionnaire.

3. How do news consumers in WA perceive the credibility of local, national and international news?

To answer this question, the researcher provides input obtained from the study, specifically sharing insights from questions 7, 9, 18 and 19 of the survey questionnaire.

Anomaly: Question 1 of this survey was invalidated due to the fact that one multiple choice answer appeared to present a contradiction which would affect results obtained for the rest of the questions in the study.

Where do you get your news from? (Please drag the options below into the correct order for you, from most used medium to least used medium). Participants were required to rank answers from this list: Newspaper, Radio, Television, Social media, From friends and family, Online news or website (including via news apps), I do not consume news.

The majority of participants indicated that they do not consume news, at a mean of 6.76 which was the highest mean, revealing a contradiction that was derived with statistics from the rest of this study: if participants do not consume news, then all other questions that followed would not matter. The researcher set up the question in such a way that those who indicated that they do not consume news, would be redirected to the end of the survey. Unfortunately, this was not the case because instead, the participants ranked their responses from the most used medium to the least used and continued to answer the remaining questions in the study, rendering this question an abnormality.

Before beginning the survey, participants were asked which age bracket they fell into.

One hundred and sixty-three people took part in the survey and indicated their age group as shown in Table 1. Ninety-three percent of respondents were aged between 18 and 45.

Table 1: Total number of participants clustered in age groups

| Age group | Percentage of participants per age group | Number of participants per age group |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| 18 years and below | 1% | 2 |
| 18–24 years old | 32% | 52 |
| 25–35 years old | 41% | 67 |
| 36–45 years old | 20% | 32 |
| 46–65 years old | 5% | 8 |
| 65 years and above | 1% | 2 |
| Total number of participants | 100% | 163 |

Q. 2.1 To what extent do news consumers trust, or distrust, news consumed?

In order for the researcher to identify how much news consumers trust or distrust news consumed, this section focused on analysing how trustworthy news mediums are deemed, how news from social media is perceived and how media personalities and media houses influence the believability of news produced.

2.1.1 Participants were asked how often they consume news and were only allowed to select one option from this list: More than once a day; Daily; Several times a week; Weekly; Fortnightly; Occasionally.

Responses by participants, as shown in Table 2, revealed that 42% of participants indicated that they **consume news daily**. The second highest group of participants, 31%, chose **more than once a day** and 20% selected **several times a week**. These were the most chosen options. Only 5% of participants indicated they consume news **occasionally** and 3% selected the **weekly** option; no participant selected the **fortnightly** option.

Table 2: How often do you consume news?

| Responses | Percentage of participants' responses | Number of participants |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| More than once a day | 31% | 48 |
| Daily | 42% | 66 |
| Several times a week | 20% | 31 |
| Weekly | 3% | 4 |
| Fortnightly | 0% | 0 |
| Occasionally | 4% | 7 |
| Total | 100% | 156 |

2.1.2 Participants were then asked to identify the genre of news they are most interested in: General, Business, Sports, Finance, Entertainment, or Political news.

Sixty-three percent of participants indicated that they are most interested in **general news** as shown in Figure 1; 18% of participants indicated they are interested in **political news**; 9% indicated that they are interested in **entertainment news**; 5% are keen on **sports news**; 3% are interested in **business news** and only 1% are interested in **finance news**.

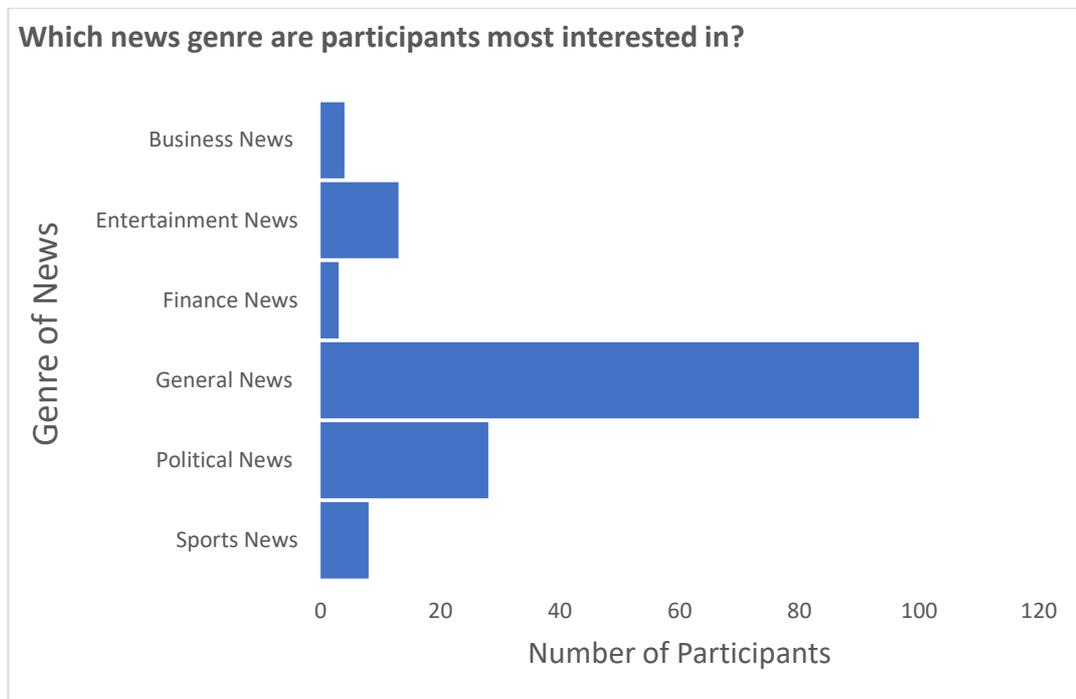


Figure 1: Which genre of news are you most interested in? (Please choose your MAIN interest)

2.1.3 In order to determine trust in news, participants were asked to indicate if they generally trusted news and to give reasons for their answers.

Q: Do you generally trust the news you consume? Why or why not?

The researcher categorised the responses into three categories: **Yes**, **No**, and the **Sometimes** group. The “sometimes” group was set up to accommodate participants who indicated that they trust, and distrust, news, sometimes simultaneously, based on different circumstances. Forty-two percent of the participants indicated that they **generally trusted news**, with some indicating that they do so because they rely on credible sources such as the ABC, SBS, *The Guardian* and Channel 7 for their news information. Some of the explanations given were as follows:

Yes, because I go to trustworthy sources like ABC and SBS.

Yes, I do, because I tend to find ‘good’ news sources such as the ABC or the Guardian who strive to work within ethical and honest news principles.

Yes, from trusted sources e.g. channel 7.

In general, yes, the news I look out for is often from ABC or from reliable friends/family who like to avoid bias.

It is important to note that the majority of the 18–24 year age bracket who took part in the survey physically are journalism students and therefore may have felt inclined to trust news based on their choice of career path. One student indicated that this was the case.

Yes, because I mostly read Australian outlets and I trust Australia's checks and balances. Also, as a journalism student, I generally trust news outlets.

The survey found 19% of participants indicated that they **did not trust news**. Some indicated that this was because of fake news, or perceived bias that comes with some channels and media outlets. Some of the explanations given included:

Of course not. No news channel is neutral. They're either far left like the ABC or far right like Fox News in the US.

No, people like gossip.

Nope. Political bias.

No, because even the journalists focus on things said on social media which not all of them are true.

No, I do not because they are not trusted and usually give fake news.

The last group of respondents, 28%, fell into the **Sometimes** category based on the responses given which revealed their concurrent trust and distrust in news. Some of the respondents' explanations were as follows:

Not always because some media houses tend to promote certain agendas or political parties.

Depends on the publication. Most news outlets are now more interested in getting clicks and views and therefore go for overly sensationalized headlines (clickbait headlines). Equally, most news pieces tend to read more like Op Ed's with the facts of the story being relegated to a fine print mention or shuffled to the very end of the article. At times, they are conveniently omitted, if the facts do not support whatever narrative the new publication is trying to push.

It depends on the news and source of the news. I believe most of the media are biased and show only one-sided information.

Sometimes. When I see it on an official news channel, I tend to be more believing because I believe they have the credibility. Then there's gossip news sites that I don't really believe unless there's extra proof.

It depends on what the story is, many times I choose to trust if the story has been verified via other sources.

No, except live news which are happening as they podcast. It's all about selling the most interesting news. Sometimes you find from other media that it was untrue.

2.1.4 Participants were then asked to indicate where (media/social media channels/individuals) they go to find trustworthy news.

The sources mentioned, and by how many participants, are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Which or who (Media/ Social Media Channels/ Individuals) do you go to, to find trustworthy news?

| Source (Media/ Social Media/ Individuals) | Number of Participants |
|--|-------------------------------|
| ABC | 39 |
| Channel 9 | 25 |
| Channel 7 | 20 |
| Facebook | 14 |
| SBS | 12 |
| BBC | 12 |
| CNN | 9 |
| Channel 10 | 8 |
| <i>Perth Now</i> | 8 |
| <i>The West Australian</i> | 7 |
| Friends and Family | 4 |
| <i>The Australian</i> | 3 |
| <i>The Guardian</i> | 3 |
| <i>Government News</i> | 3 |
| News Apps | 3 |
| Twitter | 2 |
| Triple J | 2 |
| Instagram | 2 |
| <i>The Weekend West</i> | 2 |

| Source (Media/ Social Media/ Individuals) | Number of Participants |
|---|------------------------|
| YouTube | 2 |
| Christian News Stations | 1 |
| Sky News | 1 |
| <i>The New York Times</i> | 1 |
| Yahoo News | 1 |
| Vox | 1 |
| Australia Home | 1 |
| CBN Radio | 1 |
| 93.7 Radio | 1 |
| Fox Footy | 1 |
| Independent News | 1 |
| Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) | 1 |
| <i>The Economist</i> | 1 |
| Snapchat | 1 |

Thirty-nine participants indicated that they go to the ABC to get trustworthy news. This was the highest mentioned source of trustworthy news. Channels 9 and 7 were the second and third most mentioned sources respectively. It is worth noting that Channel 10 was mentioned by only eight participants, compared to Channels 9 (25 participants) and Channel 7 (20 participants). Government News, Australia’s online independent news channel, was only mentioned by three participants.

2.1.5 Participants were then asked to reveal if they ever felt inclined to trust news brought to them by family and/or friends. Participants had to choose one of the following four options: Yes, all the time; Sometimes I do; It depends on what kind of news; Not really, I do my own background check.

Only 6% of participants trust the news they receive from their family and/or friends generally as revealed in Figure 2; and 60% of respondents trust the news based on what kind of news it is they are being told. A group of respondents (9%) conducts background checks first and another group of participants (25%) may or may not trust the news brought by family and/or friends.

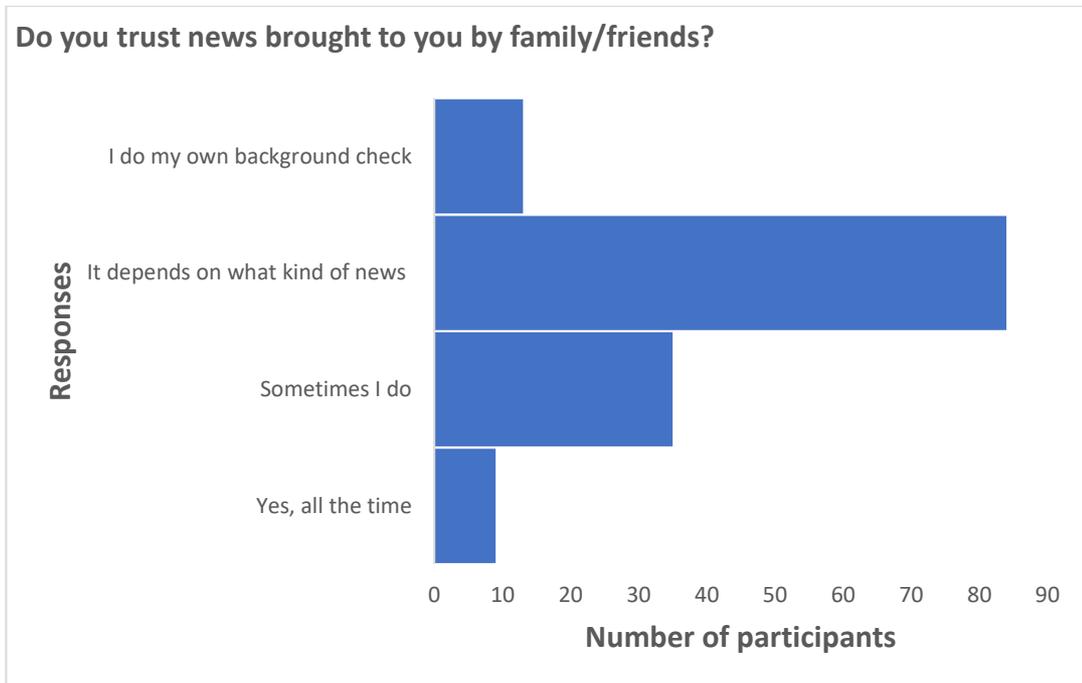


Figure 2: Do you generally trust news if brought to you by family and/or friends?

2.1.6 In order to determine how frequently participants come across fake news, the respondents were asked to choose how often they come across fake news. Either: More than once a day; Daily; Several times a week; Weekly; Fortnightly; Occasionally.

Eighty-two percent of participants who answered this question, as shown in Figure 3, implied that they do not come across fake news often. Forty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they come across fake news **occasionally**. Twenty-four percent indicated that they come across fake news **several times a week**. Seven percent of respondents only come across fake news **weekly**, and 4% indicated that they come across fake news **fortnightly**. The minority indicated that they come across fake news **daily** (11% of participants), and **more than once a day** (8% of the participants).

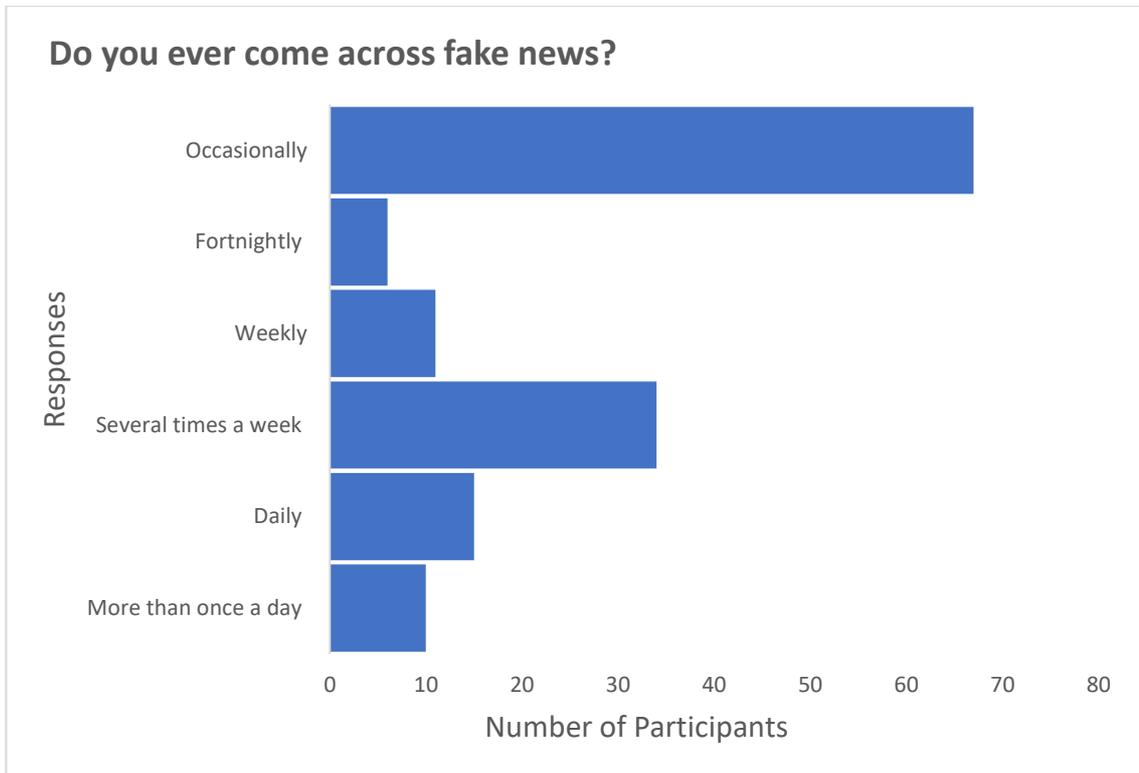


Figure 3: Do you ever come across fake news?

2.1.7 Participants were asked to indicate which genre they believed contained fake news from one of the following categories: General news; Business news; Sports news; Finance news; Entertainment news; Political news; All the above.

Forty percent of respondents believe that fake news is mostly contained in **entertainment news** as seen in Figure 4 below, while 39% feel it is most contained in **political news**. Seventeen percent believe that fake news is contained in **all genres of news**, and the remaining respondents believe that fake news is contained in **general news, business news** and **finance news** all in equal measure of 1%. No participant believed that fake news is contained in sports news.

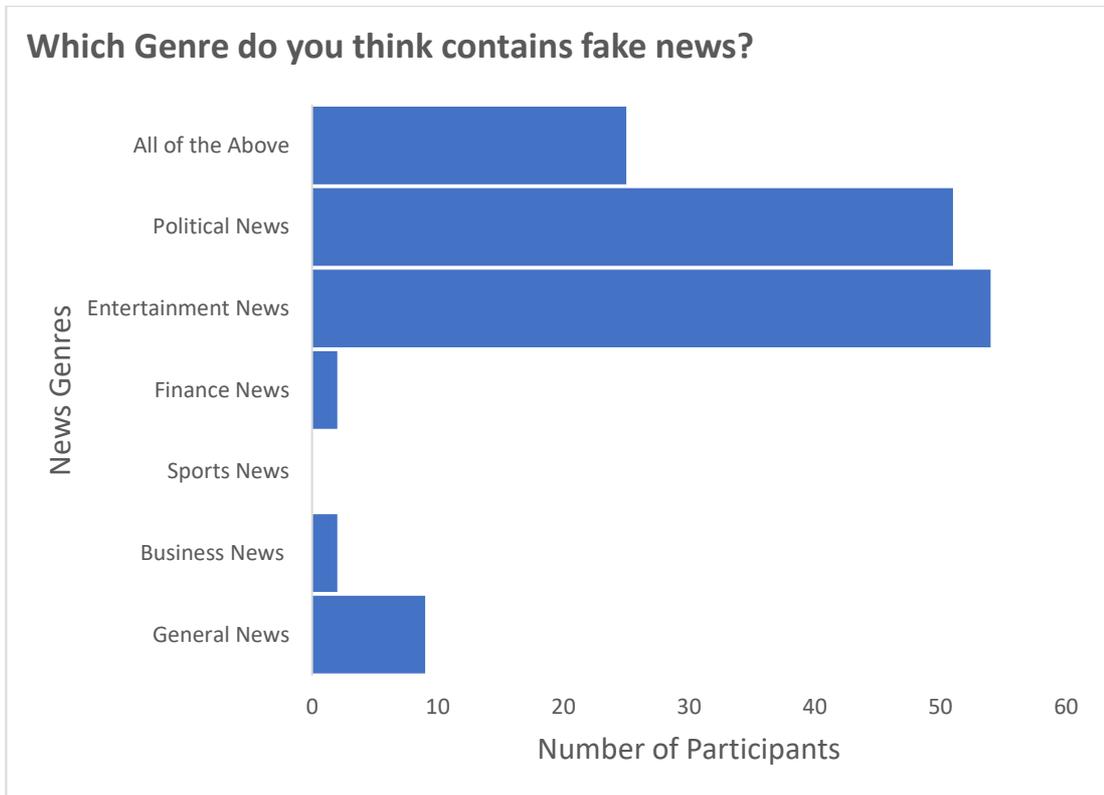


Figure 4: What genre do you think is most likely to contain fake news?

2.1.8 Participants were asked if they ever verified information whenever they suspected news received contained fake news.

Eighty percent of participants (as seen in Figure 5) selected **Yes** to verifying information whenever they suspected they have come across fake news. Twenty percent selected **No** to verifying information.

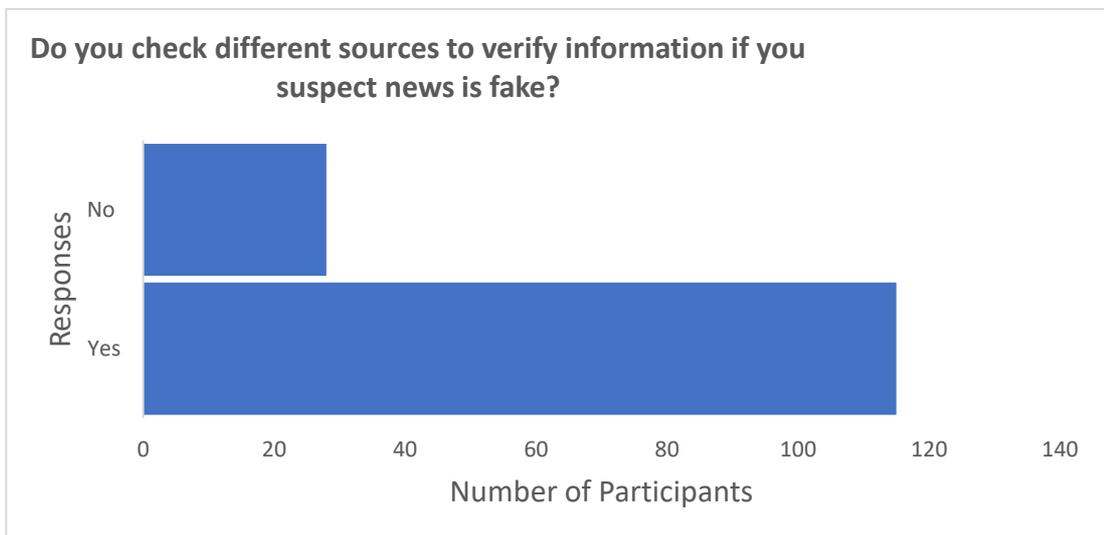


Figure 5: Do you check different sources to verify information when you suspect a story is fake?

2.1.9 The final category of questions for analysing trust in news aimed to establish how social media impacts trust in news. Participants were asked if they ever reshared news seen on social media by selecting one of the following categories: Yes, frequently; Sometimes; It depends on the type of news; I try to do a background check before resharing; I do not reshare.

As seen in Figure 6, 7% of the participants **reshare news** seen on social media; 29% will **reshare depending on what type of news** it is; 19% of the participants will **reshare news sometimes** and only 14% will **conduct a background check** before resharing any news. 28% of the remaining participants stated that they **do not reshare news** seen on social media.

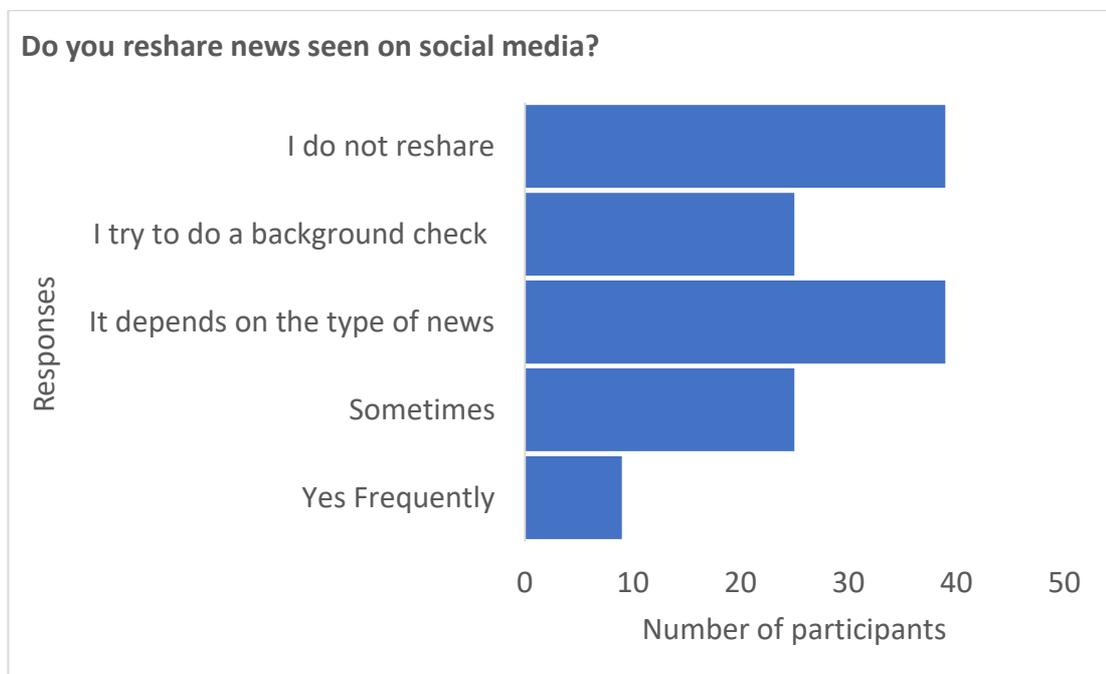


Figure 6: Do you reshare news seen from social media?

2.1.10 The final question participants were required to answer, was to indicate if they generally trusted news shared by specific journalists or media channels on social media. Participants were required to select from the following categories: Yes, I do; Sometimes; It depends on what kind of news; It depends on the person/media channel's credibility; I do not trust news shared on social media.

Twenty-six percent of participants, as shown in Figure 7, **trust news shared** by specific journalists or media channels on social media; 27% trusted the news **sometimes**, while 25%

will only trust **depending on what kind of news** these journalists or media channels are sharing. Twenty percent will believe the news **depending on the person or media channel's credibility** and 2% **do not trust any kind of news shared on social media** regardless of whether it is shared by a media personality or media house.

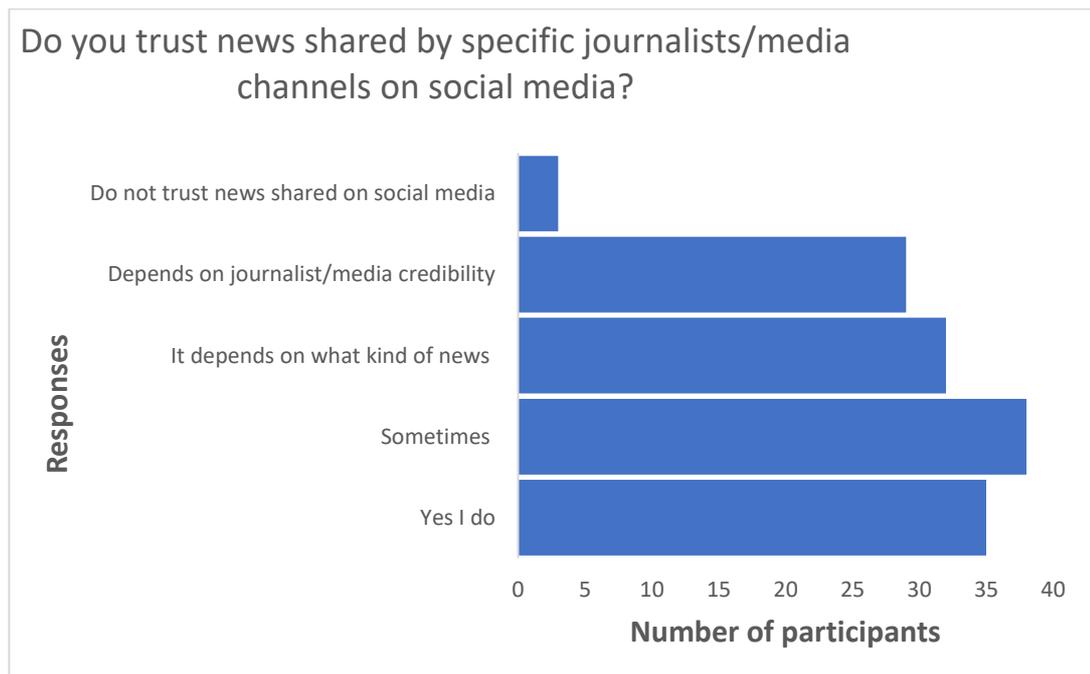


Figure 7: Do you generally trust news shared by specific journalists or media channels on social media?

Q.2.2 Does digitisation and networked communication influence how news consumers perceive news?

This section focused on digitisation, specifically social media channels and social media news sources, in order to determine how much digitisation and networked communication affects how news consumers believed and received news.

2.2.1 In order to determine how influential social media news is, participants were asked to indicate how often they access news via social media.

Thirty-seven percent of participants, as shown in Figure 8, indicated that they accessed news via social media daily. This was the highest selected option. Thirty-one percent indicated that they accessed news via social media more than once a day; this was the second highest selected option. Fifteen percent indicated they accessed news occasionally; 13% indicated several times a week, and 2% indicated they accessed news via social media weekly. No participant indicated that they accessed news via social media only fortnightly.

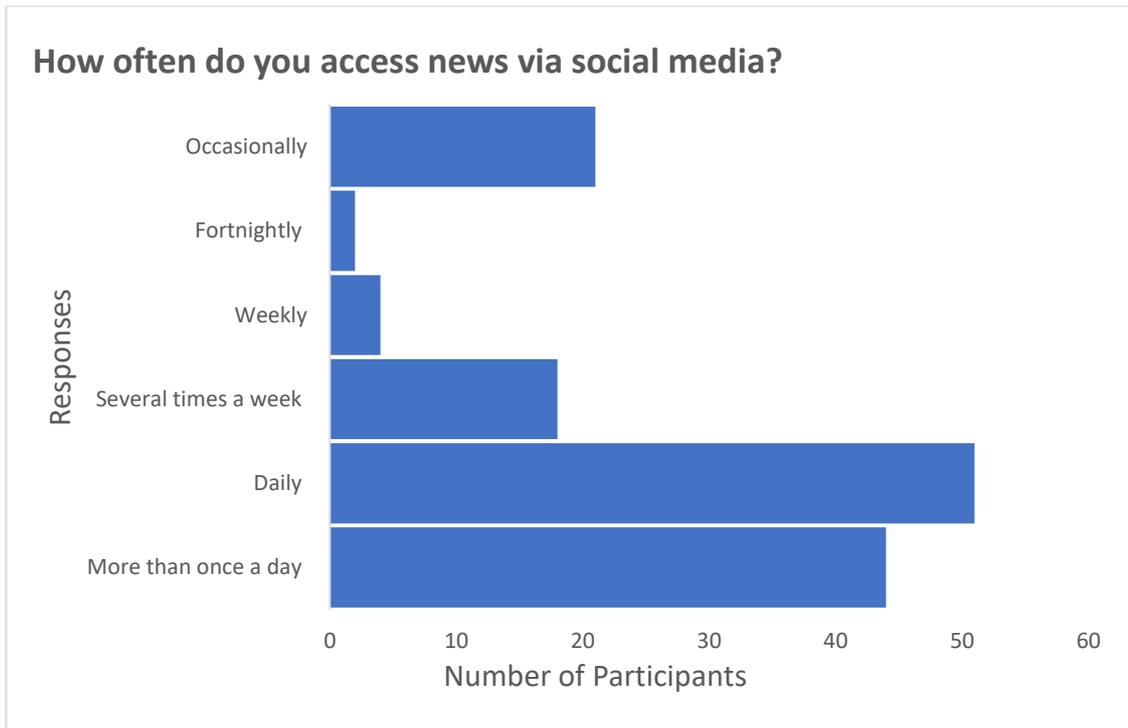


Figure 8: How often do you access news via social media?

2.2.2 Participants were then asked to further indicate which social media channels they use to receive news. Participants were asked to choose all sources that apply to them from the list: Facebook; Twitter; WhatsApp; Instagram; LinkedIn; and all social media sites that have news shared.

Facebook appeared to be the most used social media channel to obtain news as seen in Figure 9, with 34% of participants indicating they use it to receive news. Eleven percent indicated that they use Twitter. Although participants were asked to choose all channels that applied to them, suggesting that a participant may use both Facebook and Twitter to obtain their news, it is important to note that the majority of the participants did not receive their news from Twitter. Twenty percent of participants use WhatsApp and 16% use Instagram; 9% indicated that they used LinkedIn. Another 8% of participants indicated that they used all social media sites that have news to obtain news.

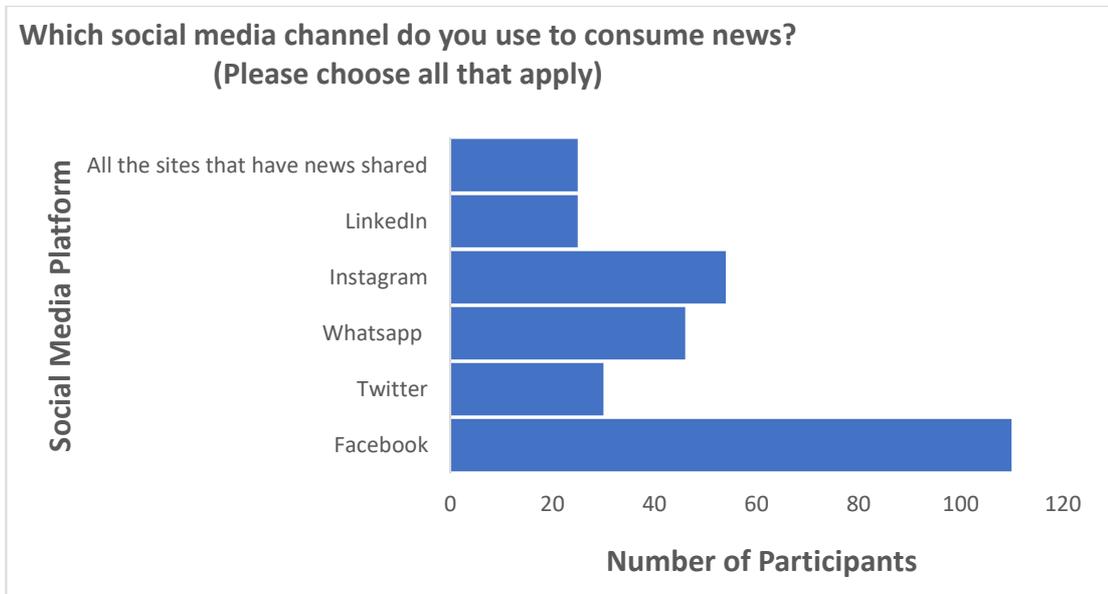


Figure 9: If you consume news via social media, which platforms do you use? (Please choose ALL that apply)

2.2.3 In order for the researcher to understand how much news consumers trusted the news they received from social media sites, participants were asked if they generally trusted the news they obtained from social media and to give reasons for their answers. The researcher grouped the responses into three categories: Yes; No; and Sometimes.

Q. Do you generally trust all the news you receive from the selected social media sites? Why or Why not?

Sixty-four percent of participants stated that they **did not trust the news** they received.

Some of the reasons the participants gave for their lack of trust were as follows:

No. Social media filters the truth.

No. Most of it is partial and targeted as opposed to informative and well researched.

No. Coz I need to verify it using reputable news providers.

No. Because some of the news may come from unverified sources.

No. Because its secondhand info. E.g. Facebook spreading fake topic/headlines not matching the stories.

No. Facebook might have true news, but it can be written by anyone.

Fifteen percent of participants stated **yes, they do trust news** they received from social media. Reasons stated included the fact that some people trust the news because they see the same news shared across different pages on social media, others believed the news based on the comments shared on the news. Some of the reasons participants gave for trusting news received from social media were as follows:

Yes, because Twitter allows you to curate a selection of who to follow and typically, I apply a trust but verify approach to whom I follow to get my news from.

Yes, cause there would be comments from various other people.

Yes. Mostly because they are reported by the various news outlets altogether.

Yes. Coz most of the time it is accompanied by posts from my social media friends and sometimes some of them were actually there when it all unfolded.

The final category of 21% indicated that they **sometimes trusted the news** they received on social media. One of the reasons given for this choice was the fact that they had to verify information before believing it to be true. Others stated that they sometimes trusted the news based on what kind of news it was, and who shared the news. Some of the reasons stated by participants for trusting news received from social media, sometimes, were as follows:

Sometimes, because of the source.

Depends and I use common sense to analyze the news.

Depends on the news.

Not all the time because there is not enough proof.

Not always. Depends on the credibility of the site.

2.2.4 Participants were then asked to indicate if they reshared the news they received on social media. Participants were asked if they ever reshared news seen on social media by selecting one of the following categories: Yes, frequently; Sometimes; It depends on the type of news; I try to do a background check before resharing; I do not reshare.

Table 4 shows the results which indicate that 7% of the participants **reshare news** seen on social media; 29% will **reshare depending on what type of news** it is. Nineteen percent of the participants will **reshare news sometimes** and only 14% will **conduct a background**

check before resharing any news. 28% of the remaining participants stated that they **do not reshare news** seen on social media.

Table 4: Do you reshare news seen from social media?

| Responses | Percentage of participants' responses | Number of participants |
|---|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Yes, frequently | 7% | 9 |
| Sometimes | 18% | 25 |
| It depends on the type of news | 28% | 39 |
| I try to do a background check before resharing | 18% | 25 |
| I do not reshare | 28% | 39 |
| Total | 100% | 137 |

2.2.5 Finally, participants were asked to indicate if they generally trusted news shared by specific journalists or media channels on social media. Participants were required to select from the following categories: Yes, I do; Sometimes; It depends on what kind of news; It depends on the person/media channel's credibility; I do not trust news shared on social media.

Twenty-six percent of participants, as seen in Table 5, indicated that they **trusted news shared** by specific journalists or media channels on social media. Twenty-seven percent trusted the news **sometimes**, while 25% will only trust **depending on what kind of news** these journalists or media channels are sharing. Twenty percent will believe the news **depending on the person or media channel's credibility** and 2% **do not trust any kind of news shared on social media** regardless of whether it is shared by a media personality or media house.

Table 5: Do you generally trust news shared by specific journalists or media channels on social media?

| Responses | Percentage of participants responses | Number of participants |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Yes, I do | 26% | 35 |
| Sometimes | 28% | 38 |
| It depends on the kind of news | 23% | 32 |

| Responses | Percentage of participants responses | Number of participants |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| It depends on the person/media channel's credibility | 21% | 29 |
| I do not trust news shared on social media | 2% | 3 |
| Total | 100% | 137 |

Q 2.3 How do news consumers in WA perceive the credibility of local, national, and international news?

This last segment of the overall study questions seeks to answer the researcher's main topic for this research project. The study questions were designed to answer the question of how news consumers in WA perceive the credibility of local, national, and international news.

2.3.1 Participants were asked to indicate if they generally trusted news they received from family and/or friends. Participants were required to select an answer from the following categories: Yes, all the time; Sometimes; It depends on the kind of news; Not really, I do my own background check.

Figure 10 reveals that only 6% of participants in this study trusted news they received from family and/or friends. Sixty-three percent of participants (the largest group of participants) indicated that they trust the news they received from their family and/friends depending on what kind of news was shared. Twenty-one percent of participants indicated that they trusted the news they received from family and/or friends sometimes. The remaining participants, 9%, indicated they did not trust news they received from their family and/or friends because they conduct their own background check.

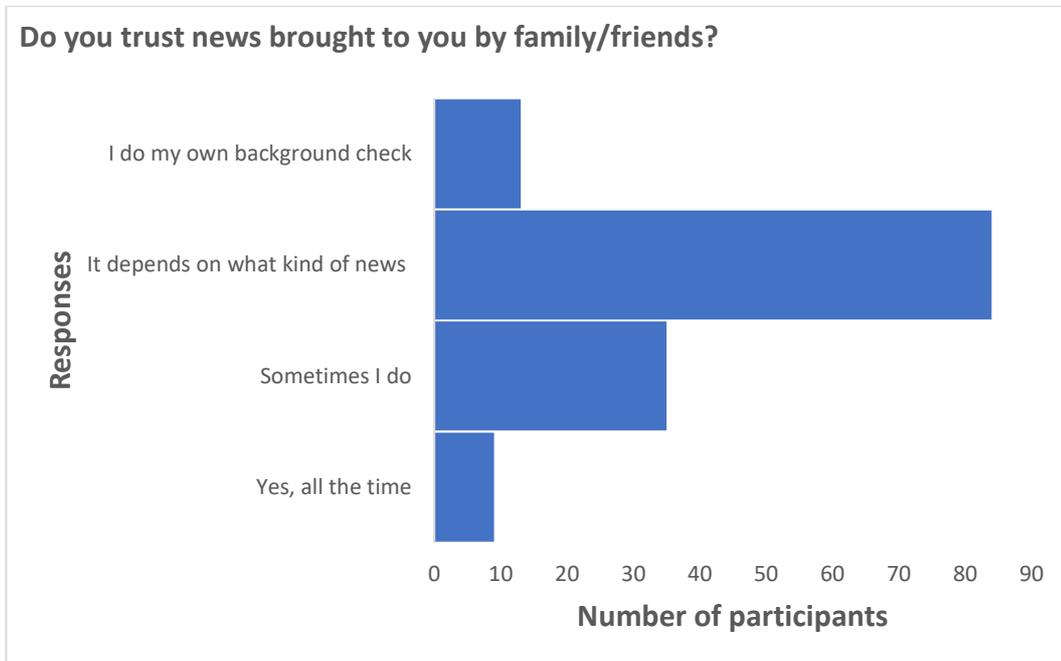


Figure 10: Do you generally trust news if brought to you by family and/or friends?

2.3.2 Noting that not all participants will trust news, participants who do not trust news were asked to indicate why they did not trust news. The participants were required to select an answer from the following categories: They had been victims of wrong news spreading about them/their family/their friends/their company or organisation; They had been in situations that were reported falsely in the news; They had heard of stories that were reported falsely and hence do not trust news; They came across fake news only.

Fifteen percent of participants revealed that they did not trust news, as seen in Figure 11, due to the fact that they were victims of wrong news spread about them/ their family/ their friends/ their company or organisation. Twelve percent revealed that they did not trust news because of the fact that they had been in situations that were reported falsely. Five percent of participants revealed that they did not trust news because they only come across fake news. The largest group of 67% of respondents indicated that they did not trust news because they had heard of stories of false news.

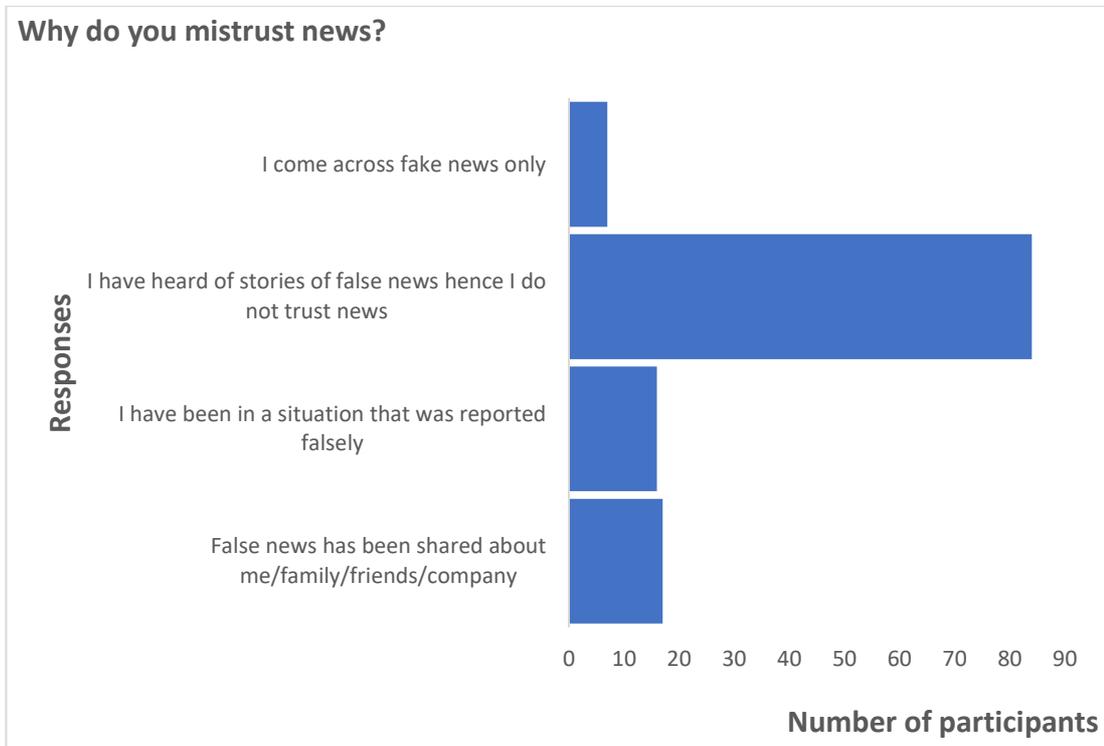


Figure 11: If you generally do not trust the news you hear, why is that?

2.3.3 Participants were also asked to indicate why they did not trust news on the occasions when they did not, and give a reason for their answers. Participants were required to choose an option from these categories: News is: too negative; mostly false; not appealing; monotonous; I do not trust news and there is no specific reason.

This study, as shown in Table 6, revealed that 19% of respondents indicated that they did not trust news because it was too negative. Six percent indicated that they did not trust news because it was mostly false; 8% of participants revealed that news was not appealing while, 6% indicated that news was monotonous. Eight percent revealed that they did not trust news because they do not have any interest.

Table 6: If you are not interested in news, why is that?

| Responses | Percentage of participants' responses | Number of participants |
|---|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| It is too negative | 18% | 23 |
| It is mostly false | 6% | 7 |
| It is not appealing | 8% | 9 |
| It is monotonous | 6% | 7 |
| I just do not have interest, no specific reason | 8% | 11 |

| | | |
|----------------------|------|-----|
| Not applicable to me | 56% | 73 |
| Total | 100% | 130 |

2.3.4 In this final question, participants were given an opportunity to make any additional comments they may have concerning the news they consume, the medium they use to consume news, and the genre of news that they consume. Some of the comments shared are as revealed below and have been divided into different themes.

Q; Do you have any other comments about the news you consume, the medium you use to consume news, or the genre of news you consume?

(More responses to this question are found in Appendix 1)

Some participants **believe that news is produced based on how popular a topic is** to the public. The responses shared by these participants (who believe news is produced based on how popular a topic is) were as follows:

There are a lot of things that are popular to say/think at the moment in the public square. For example, it's popular to be pro abortion, euthanasia, gay rights, feminism, Islam, veganism, climate change, identity politics; and against the historic oppression narrative and white men.

Because these popular issues are affirmed and perhaps get the channel better ratings, the media focus on these and bring these issues out of the story when they aren't present. And thereby twisting the truth to fit what they want to say - that is the definition of fake news. For example, if a terrorist attack is done by a Muslim person, the news will not mention that they're religious and say something like, "police are yet to identify a motive". But if an attack involves a white man, the media will play up the fact that he must be an oppressor, a white supremacist, and probably a Christian too. They have different standards of reporting based on how they can fit the story into their narrative.

Honestly speaking from my current surroundings, I think news regarding indigenous and minority groups are given the back bench and only gets relevant attention when it is negative or benefits the major groups.

Some participants **believe that news producers twist the truth or leave the truth out** depending on their own perception of each news story. Some of these participants said the following:

It seems like it used to be a lot less socially acceptable for "journalists" to just straight up lie. I think Media Watch is still going but how the hell do they keep up? It's so common for people to report on a story based on another person's article based on something unsubstantiated someone tweeted. Everyone twists the truth by 20% and by the end of the chain it's totally bent. Everyone knows now how easy it is to distract people from news you don't want them to see by faking another story. People have no incredulity or skepticism. No one's forced to retract their statements... Everyone who reports on anything is trying to make everyone think the thing they're reporting on is the most important thing in the world, so it gets the most attention, so they get the most ad impressions. Sensationalism has gotten out of control and no one in politics wants to regulate it because they're all involved.

Some of it needs to be backed with valid reasons as well as a source that won't deceive people.

Other participants **believe news producers report on information they feel matters or is significant to society, leaving out information that could still be classified as important news** by some consumers. Some of these participants stated the following:

News makers go out for grabs, anything that captures the mind of the audience.

I have noticed a lowering of standards on the ABC news lately (past few years). News reporting is becoming more emotive & opinion based, and less about providing information.

News only matters if it concerns me or any of my family or friends if not, I might not be bothered to do clarify whether it is false or not.

Some participants **believe news is affected by commercialisation**. One participant said:

News has become more of making money than telling information. Most media houses choose which news to air. Other sources of news are still trustworthy like documentaries and others which some time shows evidence of what you are watching. Fake news can cause devastating effects to individuals psychologically and socially and eventually their mental health, it's critical to guard yourself as an individual which news you

decide to believe and react to and hence it's very important to educate especially children on effects of media.

Other participants **feel digitisation plays a big role in what news is produced** and shared. One of these participants stated the following:

In the growth of Data Analytics, most of the news from online seems to be determined by what I search via search engines. YouTube now keeps history and tend to suggest similar topical issues or similar news channels.

The researcher will provide an analysis of these results in the following chapter. This will compare and contrast the findings to the relevant literature, and identify similarities from the results of this study, with findings from other research in Australia and globally.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Research Responses

The previous chapter of this thesis outlined in detail responses by participants who took part in this study. This chapter analyses these responses in depth, drawing similarities and comparisons from studies conducted, not only in Australia, but also globally.

News Consumption

Seventy three percent of participants who took part in this study indicated that they consume news daily or more than once a day. These participants revealed that they consume news frequently, in contrast with findings in an Edelman (2018) global report, which suggested that news consumers in developed countries are consuming news less than once a week. The Edelman report revealed results from a survey conducted across 28 countries, which received roughly 30,000 responses from participants; with about 1,500 responses per country (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2018). Of the 1,500 Australian participants surveyed, 43% indicated that they distrust the media and three other key institutions; the government, businesses, and non-governmental organisations (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2018). The Edelman report states: “Fully half of respondents indicated that they consume mainstream media less than once a week” (Edelman, 2018, para. 2). The results from our current study compared to Edelman’s report reveal that participants consume news several times in a week, or occasionally, suggesting that they are opting to consume news more frequently compared to participants in Edelman’s report.

Results from this study revealed that the majority of the 18–24 year age bracket (31 of 52) indicated that they consume news daily or more than once a day. Considering that satirical news shows may not be as popular in Australia as they are in the United State of America, which according to Gendron (2015) are mostly watched by news consumers aged 18–29 years in the United States to receive reliable news, the current results suggest that the 18–24 year age bracket who responded to this survey could be more interested in traditional news. That said, these 31 respondents were journalism students in year one or three of university who are likely to be more engaged with news, including traditional sources of news, because they are pursuing a career in journalism.

Eighty-one percent of the participants revealed that they are most interested in consuming general news (63%) and political news (18%), as opposed to entertainment, finance, sports, or business news. These genres (general news and political news) were the highest ranked. Edgerly and Vraga (2019), in accordance with results from an online survey study which captured results from 1,065 participants in the United States between 2013 and 2017,

revealed that participants' perceptions of general news and entertainment news differs. According to the *News, Entertainment or Both? 2019* report, it is suggested that general news is more focused on facts and information, while entertainment news focuses on fiction and is uninformative and emotional. According to Edgerly and Vraga (2019), the role of journalism is to provide news consumers with informed knowledge so they can make critical decisions that could affect their livelihood and/or their political views. It is therefore worth noting that the majority of participants, who are most interested in general news, will ideally be informed and equipped with knowledge that allows them to make critical decisions that could affect their livelihoods.

Trust in News

In order for the researcher to gain insights into how news consumers perceived the trustworthiness of news, the participants responded to an open-ended question where answers were categorised into "yes" if they trusted news, "no" if they did not trust news, or "sometimes" if they revealed that they trusted and distrusted news concurrently. Forty-two percent of the participants indicated that they generally trusted news. This level of trust is similar to that shown in the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Newman, 2019), which indicates that trust in news is at 42% across all 38 countries targeted in 2019 research. According to another study (Flew, Dulleck, Park, Fisher, & Isler, 2020), trust in news in Australia has fluctuated throughout the years. Results from the *Trust and Mistrust in Australian News Media* report (Flew et al., 2020) reveal outcomes from studies conducted across Australia that capture perceptions of approximately 2,000 participants annually, showing the following fluctuations in trust in news has been experienced since 2015: in 2015, 53% of respondents trusted news; in 2016, 43% of participants trusted news; in 2017, 42% revealed that they trusted news; in 2018, trust in news increased to 50%; and in 2019, trust in news dropped to 42%. As much as the percentages in Australia fluctuated across the years, in 2019 trust in news was at 42%, not only in Australia but globally, according to Newman (2019).

Twenty-five percent of respondents in this study who trust news indicated they trusted news because they relied on sources they perceived to be credible such as Australia's government-funded news sources ABC and SBS; Australia's commercial network Channel 7 and the British daily *The Guardian* to get their news information. To these respondents, it appeared that the source used to retrieve the news information warranted their choice to trust the news in general. Some of the responses were as shown below:

Yes, because I use trusted news sources.

Yes, because I go to trustworthy news sources like ABC and SBS.

These perceptions are similar to those highlighted in the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Newman, 2019) which revealed that participants trusted news because of the source they used to retrieve their news information. Participants in this study revealed that they decide which news to trust based on the source they use to get the news information. Other participants suggested that they trust the sources of news they use because they believe their trusted news channels are ethical and honest.

Seven percent of participants who trust the news they consume specifically indicated that they did so because they believe that the right checks and research are conducted before news is produced. One participant indicated that they are a journalism student, and therefore, their trust towards the Australian news may be influenced by the fact they are possibly taught to conduct the right checks and research before publishing news. Other participants indicated that they trust news because they believe research was conducted, and therefore, the information given is accurate and trustworthy. Some of these respondents stated the following:

Yes, as I expect thorough research has been undertaken.

Yes, because I believe it is already researched whether valid before being presented.

This finding supports Newman's (2019) global report that proposes that news consumers are relying on reputable news sources that they believe have accurate news information. Other results in this study suggest that news consumers trust news because they expect that journalists are proactive in their news research. These participants did not appear to necessarily understand or be aware of the classification of journalists, who are either reactive or proactive professionals, as discussed by Lamble (2017). Lamble (2017) stated that news was classified into two categories as journalism grew as a profession: reactive – when journalists find out about an event and they generate a story about it; and proactive – when a journalist conducts more research into a story before developing it into a news story. Two of the remaining participants who indicated that they trust news said they did so because they expect ethics and codes of practice to be adhered to by news media professionals so that they produce accurate news, and that social media has encouraged trust in news because of the comment section on the platforms.

Results from the question in this study on whether participants trust news brought to them by family and/or friends showed that 66% of participants are inclined to trust the news they receive from their family and friends. Out of this group, 6% revealed that they would trust the news brought by family and friends with no reservations, and 60% specified that their trust depends on what kind of news is being received. Only a small group of participants, 9%, revealed that they would do a background check first before believing news shared by family and friends. The remaining 25% revealed that they may or may not trust the news received from family and friends. Schudson (2018b) argued that a growing number of people go online frequently to get news from social media sites, through their online friends and friends of friends. In this study the type of news platforms used to access news from friends and family was not established, nor was the kind of news that was trusted. However, it was still significant to find out if participants in this study accessed news from their family and friends, and whether they trusted the news they received. Based on the results derived, participants receive news from their family and family, and some trust the news they receive with no reservations.

Distrust in News

This study also found that 19% of participants indicated that they did not trust news at all. One of the reasons given for distrust in news was the perception that news was politically biased. Although the meaning of bias as understood by the participants has not been established, or may not mean the same for each participant who suggested its influence, it appears that this perception of bias weakens trust in the media. Some of the respondents stated the following:

Nope. Political bias.

No. People only share the news that supports their beliefs. YouTube only promotes news that supports their politics, and recently, only if it is from a "mainstream" source.

Australian newspapers are ridiculously biased politically.

According to the *Edelman Global Trust Barometer* (2018) report, 59% of participants in that study indicated that they are sceptical about news organisations because they believe news organisations focus overly on politics, and support political ideologies instead of focusing on informing the public. In addition, Newman (2019, para. 1) argues that: "Political polarisation has encouraged the growth of partisan agendas online, which together with clickbait and various forms of misinformation is helping to further undermine trust in

media". Therefore, it is not surprising to see that some participants in this study perceive news as biased including politically biased, and this influences their trust in news.

Other participants cited click bait and fake topics/headlines as reasons why they distrust news. Some of their responses are seen below:

No. Click bait links.

No. Because its secondhand information. E.g. Facebook spreading fake topic/headlines not matching the stories.

According to the scholars Bell (2016), Benton (2016), and Richardson (2017) social media contributes to news consumers questioning the kind of news content produced and the truth behind that information. The *Digital News Report 2019* reveals that social media's influence on trust in news is still present and some news consumers still distrust news from social media (Reuters Institute, 2019). Reuters' argument aligns with the results from this study as some participants believe that social media news is untrustworthy. It is significant to note however, that while social media has contributed to distrust in news as indicated here, Facebook ranked as a top trustworthy news platform. According to a list that ranked news platforms that participants go to for reliable news, Facebook ranked fourth out of 39 news platforms. Nonetheless, social media still plays a part in the spread of misinformation (Flew, 2020), which causes news consumers to question news shared on social network platforms.

Another group of participants distrusts news because they believe news is gossip. Some of these participants' comments are included below:

No, people like gossip.

No. Mostly has gossip columns so it is quite unbelievable.

The early development of newspapers, as stated by Broersma (2010), was for the journalism profession to distinguish itself from gossip, pamphlets, newsletters, and other modern news products. It is therefore worth noting that there is a perception from some news consumers, as indicated in this study, that news contains gossip. The definition of gossip was not established in this study, nor is it possible to identify if the participants who mentioned gossip have the same understanding of the term gossip.

Fake news was also cited by a few (3%) of the participants who distrust news, stating that it plays a crucial role in causing distrust. World leaders, according to Wardle (2017), are

among news consumers who popularise fake news and contribute to the questioning of the place of news in today's society. It is therefore important to note that some participants attribute their lack of trust in news to fake news. It is not clear, though, if this group of participants define fake news as it has been defined in this study, which is, **information that is intentionally and verifiably false which is intended to mislead its readers**. Some of these participants stated the following:

No, there is lots of fake news.

Not really cos some are fake.

No, I do not because they are not trusted and usually give fake news.

Trusted News Outlets

Participants were asked to state which news organisations/individuals they rely on for trustworthy news. This was in an effort to establish which news outlets (local, national, or international) or individuals, participants deem trustworthy in Western Australia. This question required participants to mention all the news sources they use to get reliable news, therefore some respondents mentioned more than one news outlet. Overall, 139 responses from participants categorised news sources into 39 trustworthy news mediums that included TV channels, print, radio, and social media platforms. Although the question asked participants to mention individuals whom they may go to for trustworthy news, no participant mentioned an individual as their source of trustworthy news.

In total, 51 participants or 26% of respondents, mentioned that they go to the government-owned public service broadcasters Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) to get trustworthy news. Thirty nine participants from this cohort rely on the ABC, while 12 participants rely on SBS. The public service broadcasters are among the top news platforms mentioned in a list of 39 sources, which included commercial TV channels, radio stations, newspapers, and online platforms nationally and globally. Roy Morgan research (2019) revealed that the ABC and SBS are found to be the most trusted news brands in Australia, following a study conducted nationally that reached 1,200 participants in 2019. According to Roy Morgan (2019, para. 1), "... while Facebook – and social media generally – remains deeply distrusted in Australia, the ABC is still by far the nation's most trusted media organisation". Fray, Molitorisz, and Marshall (2018) argue that the ABC is a largely trusted news organisation in Australia. Flew (2020) further states that the ABC and SBS are found to be the exceptions where Australians' distrust in

individual news brands was concerned. SBS content manager Mark Cummins, during the 2019 *Radiodays Asia* conference, reported that SBS is one of the most trusted news organisations in Australia, and according to one survey, SBS radio was confirmed to be one of the most trusted news mediums (*Radioinfo*, 2019). This recent argument by Cummins may differ with results from this study which indicate that only 12 participants or 6% of respondents go to SBS for trustworthy news; a lower number compared to the ABC. Although SBS was mentioned by only 6% of respondents as a trustworthy news source in this study, it is worth noting that it was ranked as the fifth news outlet overall out of 33 outlets that participants go to for reliable news. This current study aligns with Flew's (2020, para. 21) argument: "The perceived quality of news brands mattered. In a finding that aligns with other surveys, ABC TV (3.92 on a five-point scale) and ABC Radio (3.90) had the highest levels of trust, followed by SBS TV (3.87)". SBS is among the top channels that participants in this study showed that they rely on to get trustworthy news, showing similarities to the statement by Cummins (*Radioinfo*, 2019) that SBS is one of the most trusted news organisation in Australia. By contrast, SBS did not rank as the third most trusted news organisation compared to Flew's (2020) findings, but rather as the fifth trusted news outlet according to responses from participants in this study.

Seven West Media (Channel 7), Nine Entertainment Co. Holdings Limited (Channel 9) and Ten Network Holdings (Channel 10) were also ranked as trustworthy sources of news by 53 participants (27%) in this study. Channels 9 (25 participants) and 7 (20 participants) were second and third respectively in the ranking table (Table 3, previous chapter), indicating both similarities to, and differences from Flew's (2020) argument. Flew (2020) states that results from the 2020 *Trust and Mistrust in Australian News Media* report indicate that all three commercial television networks were ranked highly as trustworthy news channels, demonstrating a similarity in that Australian news consumers relied on all three channels for trustworthy news right after the ABC and SBS networks. The difference depicted between the *Trust and Mistrust in Australian News Media* (2020) report and this study, however, is that participants in this study do not rank Channel 10 as highly as they do channels 9 and 7. Only eight participants indicated that they relied on Channel 10 for trustworthy news, ranking the channel at position eight (Table 3. previous chapter). As a combined group, it is clear that participants in this study rely on free-to-air commercial television for trustworthy news ahead of other online and print sources of news like Australia's locally edited newspapers *The Australian*, British daily *The Guardian*, or even Australia's independent online publication *Government News*.

It is worth noting that an analysis conducted by *TV Tonight* (2020) for free-to-air TV news overnight viewership in Perth, on 24th November 2020, revealed that Channel 7 ranked first with the highest viewership of 170,000 viewers compared to the ABC news – which had 111,000 viewers, Channel Nine news which had 63,000 viewers and channel 10 News First which had 49,000 viewers. *TV Tonight* is a blog that provides daily analysis of TV viewership programming including news for five metro cities across Australia; Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, revealing daily viewership ratings for evening programmes. In comparison to the *TV Tonight* November 2020 report, results from this study reveal a slight difference in ranking of the channels that participants use to access news which could also be viewed as the number of viewership for each channel; the ABC ranked higher as a channel participants rely on to access news compared to channels 7, 9 and 10. A slight difference is noted between the ranking of channels 7 and the ABC, in that participants in this study appear to rely on the ABC more to access news compared to the results of the report, where more viewers accessed news via channel 7 on the stated date, with a lesser majority compared to the remaining channels accessing news via the ABC. The *TV Tonight* November 2020 results do not reflect channels that viewers consider to be trustworthy, compared to the results in this study which ranked news outlets that participated stated that they access to get trustworthy news.

This study also revealed that social media platform Facebook, American news-based pay television channel CNN, and British public service broadcaster (BBC) news channels ranked higher than Australia's Channel 10 for trustworthy news. These results highlight a consistency between this study and the study conducted by the Edelman Trust Barometer 2018, revealing that news consumers trust traditional media outlets more than they do other sources, particularly social media platforms. According to *The Guardian* (2018), Steve Spurr, Head of Edelman Australia, suggests that news consumers who distinguish the different sources they use to access news are clear about the different type of media they use to access news.

The results from this study also reveal that participants generally rely on television news more than they do print, online news or social media platforms. One hundred and twenty-five participants (65%) rely on television channels ABC, SBS, channels 7, 9 and 10, BBC, and CNN ahead of online and print outlets such as *The Australian*, *The Guardian* or *The Weekend West*, *Perth Now* and *Government News* and/or some social media platforms like Instagram or Twitter to get trustworthy news. It is worth noting that Facebook ranked fourth in the list of 39 news sources participants go to for trustworthy news right after the

ABC (first), Channel 9 (second) and Channel 7 (third). Other TV channels like SBS, BBC, CNN and Channel 10 were ranked fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth respectively in the source of trustworthy news list. Participants ranked local daily newspaper *The West Australian* at number 10, which is surprising considering this is the only locally edited daily newspaper published in Perth and a news brand under Seven West Media which owns Channel 7. This finding suggests that participants may not be aware about the media companies which own news brands that they trust; and therefore, are not inclined to trust these media companies as they do the news brands they own. Social media channels Twitter and Instagram were ranked 16th and 18th respectively in the list of 39 channels. These results are consistent with the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2019* which states that television remains significant as a source of news to Australians. “TV news remains strong and steady in Australia and continues to be a significant source of news while newspapers continue to fall and social media stagnates” (Reuters Institute, 2019, p. 132/133). Further, the *Digital News Report 2019* indicated that the majority of Australians are accessing news via the television. “TV continues to be the most popular way of accessing news for Australians” (Reuters Institute, 2019, p. 132/133).

Why News Consumers Distrust News

One hundred and twenty-four participants responded to the question on the reasons why they distrust news. Sixty-seven percent indicated that they did not trust news because they have heard stories of false news being shared in the media about the community around them, or they themselves have been victims, which causes them to lose their trust in news. This study suggests that this group of participants chooses to distrust news because of experiences from those around them or their past experience. Park (2017) argues that journalism has a major role to play in ensuring that it remains trustworthy to communities; to be honest, entertaining, and compelling. A lack of trust from the community, as shown in this study, influences how some news consumers choose to perceive the media.

Through press releases, social media posts, holding media briefings etc., politicians, celebrities, citizens and even institutions share their stories with the news media, in an effort to have these stories highlighted in the news in order to attract news consumers and win them over (ABC, 2014c). Through such activities, media organisations gain their power in society because these politicians, celebrities, citizens and even institutions appear to rely on media organisations’ ability to get their stories highlighted to news consumers. However, when the stories shared are inaccurate, and news consumers at times become aware that the stories are inaccurate, thus media organisations lose the trust news

consumers accord them. Some respondents in this study (15%) revealed that they did not trust news because they were victims of inaccurate news being shared about them/their family/their friends/their companies and/or organisations, or because they have been in situations that were reported falsely by news producers. News producers cannot ignore the responsibility they have in society to be truthful, otherwise the repercussions could be as we have observed: news consumers choosing not to trust news in general. Herbert (2000) says, “Nothing more quickly destroys the credibility of a journalist than the deliberate manipulation of news to serve other ends than information” (p. 62). In this study, some participants have indicated that they believe that news presented inaccurately which closely affects them in one way or another, warrants their choice to distrust news in general.

Some participants (20%) indicated that they are not interested in news because news is too negative. According to Ketchell (2020), Australians feel tired about the news they consume because it is too negative, overwhelming, or upsetting, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic (which occurred after the survey data was collected). Benton (2019) states that news has not been generating happiness and therefore news consumers are opting to explore other options for entertainment. Palmer and Toff (2019) further state that news consumers who find news to be too negative opt to avoid news completely because they feel that negative news upsets them. Basically, this group of news consumers highlights a trend that has recently been labelled as ‘news avoidance’, where news consumers are opting to avoid news completely because of reasons such as those mentioned above. The *Digital News Report 2019* reveals two aspects about news consumers who avoid news due to negativity, based on responses retrieved from the 2019 study; women appear to avoid news more than men; and news consumers with less education indicated that they are most likely to avoid news compared to news consumers with medium or higher education (Reuters Institute, 2019). The results for this question therefore accord with the scholars’ arguments, proposing that respondents who are not interested in news believe negative news is a key factor for their disinterest. With these results however, it was not possible to establish which gender specifically avoids news or the educational level of specific respondents. This would be good to establish in order to determine any similarity with the *Digital News Report 2019* study. Regardless, these results reveal that a group of participants opts to avoid news because of negativity.

Only 5% of participants revealed that they did not trust news because they came across fake news. From our analysis of fake news earlier in this thesis (*Distrust in News - p. 60*), we

saw that some participants who indicated that they came across fake news occasionally, do trust news to some degree. It is therefore worth considering that the group of participants discussed here, who come across fake news and hence do not trust news, are a group of participants who do not trust news at all.

Influence of Social Media

The majority of participants (67%) indicated that they access news via social media daily or more than once a day. According to Deloitte's *Media Consumer Survey 2019*, 56% of social media users in Australia check or update their social networks daily, with Instagram and Facebook dominating as the most used social media platforms. The annual research study, that targeted participants aged 14 years and above, revealed how the 2,000 respondents consume digital news. Schudson (2018b) states that many people get their news from social media – Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms – arguing that this is because many people are online frequently each day, consulting their phones or laptop gadgets to check their social media accounts and to get news from their friends and friends of friends. Sterret, et al. (2019) further argued that, globally, people see news on social media through posts and comments from not only friends, family and acquaintances, but also from public figures and celebrities. It is therefore not surprising to see that participants in this study also access news via social media, and for some quite frequently.

After the introduction of the 24-hour news cycle that came about through the establishment of social media news (Bainbridge et al., 2015), social media became impactful as news gained momentum and travelled farther and faster using social platforms. News began to be shared and reshared by social media users across their social networks, highlighting the increase in news coverage through social media platforms. With this background in mind, the researcher sought to investigate if participants spread the news they come across through their social media platforms. Seven percent of participants indicated that they reshare news seen on social media without doing any background checks; 19% reshare the news sometimes; 29% reshare the news depending on what type of news it is; and 18% of respondents revealed that they conduct background checks before they reshare news on social media. This study also revealed that only 28% of participants choose not to reshare news on social media regardless of what kind of news it is, even if they could conduct a background check. Cumulatively these results suggest that news received on social media by this group of participants may not be readily spread across social media platforms by those who come across it. These results also suggest that the

respondents are generally careful and selective about what news they share on social media.

Participants were also asked to select which social media platform(s) they use to access news. Facebook is the highest ranking social media platform at 34%. The second highest ranking platform is Instagram with 19% selecting it as an option for accessing news. Both Facebook and Instagram, according to Larsson (2017), are social media platforms that news consumers use to access news in Norway due to features contained in their platforms such as the comment section, which allows users to interact with other users and verify if information shared is true or not. This feature (the comment section) is an avenue that news consumers can use to try to confirm the truth about information received. It was therefore significant to note that both Facebook and Instagram are highly ranked by participants in this study as social media platforms used to access news. Globally, as Schudson (2018b) states, Facebook and Twitter have been identified as the most commonly used social media platforms that news consumers use to obtain news. While it is not surprising to see that Facebook was the highest ranking social media platform that participants revealed that they use to access news, Twitter was only selected by 10% of the participants in this study, ranking it as the fourth most selected option. These results, therefore, suggest that Twitter is not commonly used by the participants in this study to access news compared to what is experienced globally. In addition, the results highlight that there is a greater popularity of Instagram with these participants. Fifty-two percent of participants from Australia, based on Reuters' *Digital New Report 2019* study, that captured responses from 25 million participants globally, indicated that they use social media to access news. Results from the same study suggested that 10% of social media users access news via Twitter, while 9% use Instagram (Reuters Institute, 2019). According to *Social Media News* statistics for May 2020 David (2020), Australians appear to use Instagram (9 million users) more than Twitter (5.3 million users). The high number of Instagram users compared to Twitter could be the reason why Instagram appears to be prevalent as a source of social media news compared to Twitter for participants in this study. In comparison to the Reuters *Digital News Report 2019* study, this study suggests that respondents access news via Instagram more than they do via Twitter. Our current study and Reuters' *Digital News Report 2019* study both indicate that Instagram has increased in popularity as a source of news. This study also points out a difference between users of Twitter and Instagram, in that Instagram users are increasingly relying on

Instagram to access news compared to Twitter users who appear not to rely on Twitter for news as was the case in previous years.

Although Instagram ranked second as a social media platform that participants in this study use to access news, it was not possible to establish which age bracket commonly uses this platform from the nature of this study. Scholars have suggested that younger news consumers who use Instagram frequently. News publishers, according to Agarwal (2017), have not been catering for the young readers and teens, knowledge of whose news consumption patterns it is crucial to know and understand given the proliferation and globalisation of media (Lancaster, Hughes & Spicer, 2012). According to Larsson (2017), Instagram users in Norway are mostly the younger group whose attention is sought-after by media industries. "Add to this equation that Instagram use is particularly frequent among comparably younger cohorts, and the benefits seem obvious—the platform is primarily used by a group whose attention is particularly coveted by the media industry, and this group of users do not seem to be explicitly interested in modes of interaction that demand more attention from those professionals who are involved in updating, curating, or otherwise working with the online presences of media organizations" (Larsson, 2017, p. 2236). Chan (2017) also argues that social media users in Hong Kong are mostly young. Therefore, to see that participants in this study rank Instagram as the second most commonly used social media platform to access news, could potentially mean that young participants are now being captured by news producers. Most participants who responded to this study were between the ages 18 and 45 years, therefore we can conclude that this particular age group may be interested in using Instagram as a news source.

Participants were also asked to indicate if they trusted news received from social media. This was an open-ended question and therefore responses were categorised into "yes", "no" and "sometimes" through analysing the comments detailed by participants. The majority of participants (64%) revealed that they did not trust the news they receive from social media, despite the fact that most participants indicated that they receive news from social media daily, more than once a day, weekly, occasionally or several times in a week. This response suggests that the results may be seen as a contradiction because features such as 'comments', 'likes' and 'share' found on social media platforms are known to play a key factor in contributing to verification of the authenticity of news information shared on social media platforms. Therefore, to see that participants distrust news received from social media platforms despite having these features (comments, likes and share), could mean that participants are not necessarily influenced by the features enough to trust the

news shared. Chan (2017) argues that the 'like' feature on Facebook can be used by users to support the information disseminated, which in turn can be observed as a form of authentication of the information and possibly trust towards the information. Diehl, Weeks, and Gil de Zuniga (2016) argue that, globally, the 'share' feature works as a tool for persuasion as it encourages users to believe and be persuaded into receiving information shared. This study established that social media news consumers in Western Australia do not largely reshare news received on social media. This revelation suggests that the 'share' feature mentioned by Diehl, Weeks, and Gil de Zuniga (2016) may not necessarily encourage these participants to believe the information they receive. With these arguments, therefore, it is clear that the features on social media can be used as tools to encourage believability of information, but even with this in mind, many participants in this study have indicated that they do not trust the news they receive through social media platforms.

These results could also potentially mean that participants are not making a distinction between information that comes up as 'news feed' and 'news' shared from media organisations such as the ABC, SBS or channels 7 or 9, which from this study were identified as media channels that participants rely on to get trustworthy news. However, from comments shared by some participants it appears that respondents may distrust news from social media, but there will be exceptions if the news received is from social media handles of news organisations or journalists they know. Some of these participants commented as shown below:

No, I do not trust social media news as much unless it is from a source, I know like channel 9 or the ABC.

No, I rarely trust social media news unless published by a TV news channel or reliable newspaper.

This therefore means that some participants can tell the difference between 'news feed' and 'news', ultimately revealing that they do not entirely distrust news received from social media. They may trust news from mainstream news sources as opposed to general public posts on social media.

Some of the reasons given by participants for their distrust of news retrieved from social media included: the perception that social media is not deemed as a credible source of news; social media users post news that is often not verified; news posted on social media is sometimes not well researched; news posted on social media is sometimes politicised;

news posted on social media is sometimes opinionated; and finally, news posted on social media is sometimes framed to attract readers. Fake news was mentioned by some participants, who believe it is the main reason why they choose not to trust news shared on social media. As will be discussed below, 46% of participants indicated that they only came across fake news occasionally. In another question in this study, 40% of participants indicated that they believe fake news was mostly contained in entertainment news. Whether participants in this study who come across fake news access entertainment news through social media occasionally, could not be established from the nature of this study. But it is worth noting that participants in this study believe fake news causes them to distrust news consumed via social media platforms.

Only 15% of participants completely trust the news they receive from social media. These participants revealed that they trust news received from social media because of reasons such as: Twitter allows them to choose who to follow, therefore they can trust information received from those they follow; comments from other followers on particular news posts reveal whether the information shared is true or not; news seen on social media is often shared simultaneously from different sources, suggesting that the information being consumed is trustworthy; news shared on social media by some users is live from the place the event is taking place — this enables news consumers to believe what they see. According to Bell (2016), Benton (2016), and Richardson (2017), the emergence of Facebook brought with it the ability for news consumers to question the content shared on social media and to expose untruths. Therefore, some of the participants who revealed that they trust news shared on social media because they can verify facts through comment sections, may possibly be reasoning in line with the scholars' argument, believing that they can detect false information on social media that is exposed by other users because of the comment sections. The remaining group of participants (18%) indicated that they trust news shared on social media sometimes, depending on: their perception of the kind of news shared; their perception of the person sharing the news; and their perception of the credibility of the site being used to share news.

More than 90% of the participants, to some extent, indicated that they trust news shared by certain journalists or media houses on social media: 26% of participants indicated that they trust news shared by specific journalists on social media regardless of what kind of news it is; 28% suggested that they sometimes trust news shared on social media from journalists; 23% trust the news depending on what kind of news it is; and 21% suggested that they would trust the news depending on the credibility of the journalist or media

house sharing the news item. These results show the role journalism plays in providing news to the community, presenting a correlation to Herbert's (2013) thoughts that pointed out the role journalism plays in informing the community. These results also show that some participants are still choosing to trust some media channels and some journalists despite the concerns that some news consumers may have had in the past, especially in other parts of Australia. For example, in a 2018 Australian news segment, according to the ABC (2018a), Melbourne news consumers questioned the role journalists played in portraying a negative image of the Sudanese community to the citizens of Melbourne. The results of this study, however, suggest that some participants in WA trust news shared by certain journalists and media houses generally.

Fake News

One hundred and forty-three participants responded to the question about whether they ever came across fake news. With the term 'fake news' popularised and with the wide array of information on the internet that is believed to increase the spread of misinformation online, it was key to learn how frequently participants accessed fake news. World leaders, including President Trump, popularised the term 'fake news'. "In 2017, I certainly wouldn't have predicted the term "fake news" would become so stretched and contorted as to render it utterly meaningless, much less weaponized by world leaders," Wardle argues (2017). Rossi (2020) argues that people are commonly confusing what is real and fake news, especially online, which has resulted in people being affected by the uncertainty about the news information they consume. "There is this ecosystem that is growing now where people are actually confusing real and fake news, especially when they see it online" (Rossi, 2020). Rossi (2020) further states that news consumers are defining fake news based on what President Trump has defined it to be. Therefore, the statistics from the current study were key in revealing how participants perceived fake news as much as establishing how frequently they accessed it. The highest number of respondents (46%) indicated that they only came across fake news occasionally. This may suggest two possibilities: participants may know how to identify fake news, or participants are unsure about which news is real or fake. According to the 2019 *Australian Digital News* study (Fisher, Park, Lee, Fuller, & Sang, 2019), a large group of 62% of participants indicated that they felt worried because they were unsure about what is real or fake on the internet. These results reveal that the cohort of news consumers in this study either support the *Australian Digital News* study or they contradict it.

In addition, the overall research study reveals that participants in this study may not perceive themselves as being exposed to fake news. This may be because 40% of participants believe fake news is mostly contained in entertainment news. Further to this, only 9% of participants in this study specified that they are actually interested in entertainment news. It is therefore worth considering that the low percentage of interest in entertainment news may be due to the fact that the majority of participants believe that entertainment news contains fake news. Another group of participants (39%) believe fake news is mostly contained in political news. According to the overall study, we established that only 18% of participants are interested in political news. It is therefore possible to consider that participants do not want to consume political news because most of them believe it contains fake news. Only a small group of participants (1%) believe fake news is contained in general news. In the overall study, we also established that 63% of participants are interested in general news stories. The results on how often participants come across fake news, therefore, may indicate that participants are more interested in general news than any other genre of news stories because they believe that general news is less likely to contain fake news.

Eighty percent of participants who responded to the question about whether they verify information if they suspected it contained fake news indicated that they would verify information if they ever suspected it contained fake news. To see that news consumers authenticate information if they suspect it may contain some false information may generally indicate two outcomes: it is possible that this cohort is less likely to believe information that may contain fake news; and that these participants are unwilling to share unverified information across the different channels. This practice would ideally stop the spread of any material that contains fake news, aiding the battle against fake news. These results also show that the effects of the US President Donald Trump's labelling of the media and media practitioners as fake news (McNair, 2017), may not essentially mean that the participants in this study believe news contains fake news because they take time to verify their information whenever they suspect information is false.

The last section of this research study provided participants with an opportunity to comment about the news they consume or choose not to consume, the medium used to consume news, and the genre of news they consume. Twelve participants left qualitative comments in response to this question. Some respondents indicated that they believe that news producers focus on issues that seem popular to news consumers, appearing to twist the truth to fit with public narratives. This ideology was also used by a participant to define

fake news. The participants' perception of media organisations is partially described through media framing, as discussed by Bainbridge et al. (2015) and Burns (2013), where journalists create news based on the events they observe, and use that observation to determine the narrative of the news story. Some of these participants stated the following:

There are a lot of things that are popular to say/think at the moment in the public square. For example, it's popular to be pro abortion, euthanasia, gay rights, feminism, Islam, veganism, climate change, identity politics; and against the historic oppression narrative and white men. Because these popular issues are affirmed and perhaps get the channel better ratings, the media focus on these and bring these issues out of the story when they aren't present. And thereby twisting the truth to fit what they want to say - that is the definition of fake news.

Honestly speaking from my current surroundings, I think news regarding indigenous and minority groups are given the back bench and only gets relevant attention when it is negative or benefits the major groups.

Other participants believe that news producers focus on twisting the truth, based on other people's articles or tweets on social media without verifying the information. In addition to this, some participants feel that news producers choose to leave out information that is important in order to distract people from actual news. Shine (2018) suggested that school teachers and principals, some from Western Australia, believe news producers choose to leave out important information about education, choosing to focus only on telling negative stories. According to results from interviews with 25 participants who were asked about their attitudes towards news coverage of education, Shine found that some of these participants believed news coverage often criticised and blamed teachers, while overlooking or disregarding good stories about schools. News consumers and the media organisations alike, according to Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018), have access to online space which creates a social web of interaction between media organisations and news consumers, or news consumers to each other (Bainbridge et al., 2015). It is through this online access that some participants can observe the media's focus on social media information as opposed to other types of news that consumers believe should be prioritised. These participants therefore are expressing their concern based on what they see online, which determines how they perceive the news produced. Some of these participants said the following:

News makers go out for grabs, anything that captures the mind of the audience.

I have noticed a lowering of standards on the ABC news lately (past few years). News reporting is becoming more emotive & opinion based, and less about providing information.

Some participants also feel that news producers report certain information as important or cause news consumers to feel that particular news stories are more significant than others, breeding what these participants call sensationalism in news. Uribe and Gunter (2007) describe sensationalism as a feature that has the ability to stimulate news consumers' senses. Ng and Zhao (2018) further stated that sensational news comprises information that affects humans' psychological mechanism causing them to pay attention to information that affects their lives, either through catastrophes or diseases, influencing their survival. Through headlines for example, Ng and Zhao (2018) claim that news producers guide news consumers to news stories about matters that could potentially threaten their lives or survival. Sensationalism in news, therefore, is mostly determined by information that affects human emotions in one way or another, to cause them to feel that their lives/livelihoods/survival could be affected. While some participants in this study believe that news makers produce sensational news, it was not clear from their shared comments which kind of news they believe is sensational and whether the type of news they consume affects them emotionally and/or has the potential to affect their lives/livelihood/survival. Some of the comments shared by these participants were as follows:

It seems like it used to be a lot less socially acceptable for "journalists" to just straight up lie. I think Media Watch is still going but how the hell do they keep up?... Everyone twists the truth by 20% and by the end of the chain it's totally bent. Everyone knows now how easy it is to distract people from news you don't want them to see by faking another story. People have no incredulity or skepticism. No one's forced to retract their statements... Everyone who reports on anything is trying to make everyone think the thing they're reporting on is the most important thing in the world, so it gets the most attention, so they get the most ad impressions. Sensationalism has gotten out of control and no one in politics wants to regulate it because they're all involved.

Some of it needs to be backed with valid reasons as well as a source that won't deceive people.

This chapter provided an analysis of the responses by participants in this study, and contextualised this analysis alongside comparable national and international studies. The

results analysed how news is consumed; which kind of news genre is consumed more than the other; how social media affects the news received; how participants identify fake news and what they decide to do whenever they come across fake news; which genres are believed to contain fake news; and finally, the general comments they were invited to contribute at the end of the survey. The next chapter will conclude this study by sharing significant outcomes, and suggesting research topics that could be explored further in order to improve on this study or to gain more insights into news and news consumption.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how Western Australian news consumers perceive the credibility of the news they consume. This was a timely study, prompted by global changes and past studies conducted globally and in Australia, showing significant shifts in how consumers feel about the news they consume. Existing studies have focused on the perception of news consumers from other Australian states such as Queensland, Victoria, and New South Wales. This study, the first study of its kind to be conducted in and focused on Western Australia, was designed to explore similar terrain to that highlighted by those past Australian studies. The findings from this study show both similarities to and differences from studies conducted in other states. The results also unearth perceptions by participants that reveal trends and behaviour news consumers have towards the news they consume. Generally, the results from this study suggest a positive outcome for news producers and media organisations in terms of trust. These results can be used to further discussions for the profession of journalism in Western Australia, through educating journalism students on the perceptions of news consumers, while also providing some broader contexts on how people feel about the news they consume.

The majority of participants who took part in this study revealed that they access news daily and sometimes more than once a day. This was a key finding as it suggested that participants are accessing news more than has been indicated in other studies. According to the *Edelman Trust Barometer 2018* news consumers in developed countries are accessing news less than once a day, with 43% of participants suggesting that they do so because they distrust news (Edelman, 2018). It is important, therefore, to note that participants in this study indicated that they access news more often than the researcher anticipated. This study also revealed that the majority of participants who are aged 18–24 years old (31 of 52), indicated that they consume news daily or more than once a day. These 31 respondents were journalism students in year one or three of university, and therefore, it is likely that they are more engaged with news, including traditional sources of news, because they are pursuing a career in journalism.

Forty-two percent of participants indicated that they trust news, while 39% revealed that they trust news sometimes. Only 19% suggested that they did not trust news. This level of trust shown by participants in this study is in line with studies conducted in 2019 and 2020, as cited by *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Newman, 2019) and *Trust and Mistrust in Australian News Media* report (Flew et al., 2020) which reveal that trust in news is at 42%

globally and in Australia. Half of these participants who trust news indicated that they trust the news they consume because they have confidence in the sources of their news. Australia's government-funded news sources the ABC and SBS, Australia's commercial network Channel 7, and the British news website *The Guardian* were specifically mentioned as trustworthy sources. Other participants accorded their trust in news to the belief they have in news producers whom they believe conduct the right checks to verify that news information is true before broadcasting or publishing it to the public. These results are good news for the trusted organisations and news producers mentioned, because they are perceived to be trustworthy sources for news in an era where news consumers especially in Australia appear to be distrusting media. Participants who distrust news revealed that they are sceptical of the news because they believe news is biased, and click bait and fake topics/headlines on social media affect their credibility. The results by this group revealed similarities to comments shared by participants in the *Edelman Trust Barometer* (2018) study, the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (2019) study and the *Digital News Report: Australia* (2019) study who also distrust news. Three percent of participants who distrust news cited fake news as a reason for their distrust.

Results from this study also suggested that many participants rely on television networks for trustworthy news, above print, online news websites/apps, and/or social media channels. Participants revealed that they depend on Australia's government-funded networks ABC and SBS, Australia's commercial networks channels 7, 9 and 10, American news-based pay television channel CNN, and the British public service broadcaster (BBC). This is ahead of print and online sources such as Australia's locally edited newspapers *The Australian*, British online news site *The Guardian*, Seven West Media's *Perth Now* and *The West Australian*, and even Australia's independent online publication *Government News*; or social media platforms Instagram and Twitter. Participants ranked local daily newspaper *The West Australian* at number 10, which is surprising considering this is the only locally edited daily newspaper published in Perth and is a news brand under Seven West Media which owns Channel 7. This finding suggests that participants may not be aware about the media companies which own news brands that they trust; and therefore, are not inclined to trust these media companies as they do the other news brands they own. Facebook was also highly ranked by participants in this study as a trustworthy news source, ahead of media networks SBS, BBC, CNN, and Channel 10 in the list of trustworthy news sources that participants trust. Participants suggesting that they trust Facebook as a news source, above other news producing organisations, could mean that participants are inclining more

towards trusting the channels they use to access news as opposed to the organisations that produce news. It could also mean that participants are not making the distinction between social media and news media. The ABC was the most trusted news source, not only in this study, but also with participants in the *Trust and News Media in Australia 2018* study and the *Trust and Mistrust in Australian News Media 2020* study. This finding supports discussions from other studies which suggest that Australians believe that the ABC is the most trustworthy news source.

Although the majority of participants in this study indicated that they access news via social media daily or more than once a day, participants revealed that they do not always trust the news they access via these social media platforms, and neither do they frequently reshare the news they consume on their social platforms. Facebook and Instagram were the highest ranked social media platforms that participants in this study indicated that they use to access news. This finding revealed a significant shift in the social platform which participants are using to access their news; Twitter was once a more prevalent source of news (Schudson, 2018) compared to Instagram, but this appears to have changed according to the results in this study. Instagram appears to be more popular as a source of news.

According to *Social Media News 2020* statistics, Australians seem to use Instagram more than Twitter. Therefore the major shift observed by the results in this study on news consumption between Twitter and Instagram could be as a result of the increased usage of Instagram by participants generally. This finding concerning Instagram's popularity is a positive for news producers in Western Australia because it suggests they can capture young news consumers who, according to Agarwal (2017), have not been catered for by media organisations in the past. Roy Morgan (2019) reveals that the majority of Generation Z social media users in Australia use Instagram more than any other social media platform on monthly average. Although the majority of participants in this study who access news via social media revealed that they did not trust the news they consume through these platforms, some participants indicated that they do trust news shared by specific journalists or media organisations via social media. Australians appear to know the difference between traditional media organisations and social media, according to Meade (2018), which allows them to trust the journalism by these traditional organisations even when they access their news content via other platforms like social media. The results from this study, therefore, highlight similarities between this study and the scholar's argument in that these participants appear to know the difference between news shared from a traditional media organisation and what is content shared from social media. It is also

worth noting that the participants who indicated that they did not trust news consumed on social media may or may not know the difference between information that is 'news feed' and information that is 'news'. Wong (2018) stated that for a time Facebook partnered with media outlets to produce news videos via the social platform, which brought with it significant changes on the platform because Facebook users would now come across 'news' through their 'news feed' section. With this background, it is very possible that some participants may not know the difference between news and news feed, hence suggesting that they generally do not trust news accessed via social media.

Participants in this study indicated that they come across fake news occasionally. By indicating that they come across fake news occasionally, these participants reveal three possibilities: they can identify fake news; they do not recognise fake news when they see it; or fake news is rare in the news participants are consuming. Rossi's (2020) documentary *After Truth: Disinformation and Cost of Fake News* suggests that news consumers are defining fake news based on what former US President Donald Trump has defined it to be. Former President Trump has labelled media and media practitioners 'fake news' (McNair, 2017). In line with Rossi's argument, it is possible that participants in this study may or may not know fake news or even how to define it. This finding also presents similarities with findings revealed in the *Australian Digital News* (2019) study, which suggested that news consumers are unsure about what is real and fake news. The majority of respondents also revealed that they would verify information if they suspected that it contained fake news. Although their attempt at verifying information may not succeed, this finding suggests that participants are trying to be careful about what news they consume, despite the label of 'fake news' that world leaders like former US President Donald Trump placed on media and media practitioners (McNair, 2017). This is because they can verify news that they suspect contains false information, allowing them to try consuming news without preconceived ideas.

This study also revealed that the majority of participants who do not trust news, do so because they have heard stories about false news being shared in the media, or that they or those around them have been victims of false news being shared about them. This cohort of participants reveals that they choose which news to trust or distrust based on what they have heard from other news consumers. Park (2017) argues that the journalism profession has a major role to play in ensuring they remain trustworthy among communities. A lack of trust by the community, as shown in this study, influences some news consumers to develop distrust towards the media. Results from this study, therefore,

appear to support Park's argument, indicating that some participants are affected by what the community around them experience with regards to news, which informs how participants respond to the credibility of the news they consume. Journalists and news outlets need to take note of this finding, which suggests that participants are choosing to trust, and distrust, news based on what they or the community around them feel about the news they receive.

Limitations

While the findings in this study revealed similarities and contradictions to other studies conducted in Australia and globally, the nature of this study had limitations and the researcher has identified some aspects. Firstly, it was not possible to establish which age group/s mostly access their news via Instagram. Even though the majority of Australian social media users use Instagram, the researcher could not determine if the younger participants in this study were being captured by news producers. The term 'news' may mean different things for different participants despite the fact that the researcher gave a definition of the term on the actual survey. It is therefore worth recognising that it was not possible to establish if those who access news via social media define news in the same way. This lack of certainty presented a new challenge for the researcher and indicates the need for further study. It was also not possible to determine if each participant who believed news is biased defines 'bias' in the same way or how these participants access and decide which news is biased. A comprehensive analysis of the term 'bias', and what it means to these participants, would contribute to a more in-depth analysis as to why this prejudice causes participants to distrust news.

Some participants suggested that they come across fake news in the entertainment news genre. It was not clear why participants believe that fake news is contained in the entertainment news genre. Participants were also not able to identify which channels/platforms they use to access fake news or which stories from the entertainment news accessed contain fake news. In the area of trusted news sources that participants indicated that they rely on to get trustworthy news, the ABC, SBS, channels 7 and 9, Facebook, CNN, and BBC, most of the respondents did not pinpoint how they access these trusted news brands. It would have been beneficial for participants to state whether they access these networks through the television, radio, news organisation applications or websites because some of these networks comprise television, radio, and online news. This aspect would have provided the researcher with a deeper view of what platform,

specifically, participants rely on to access the trusted news organisation and consequently the news information.

Recommendations for Further Research

The researcher, therefore, suggests the following proposals that could be explored in further research. Firstly, it would be worth establishing if younger news consumers are accessing news via sources such as Instagram, in order for news producers to determine if they are capturing the younger consumers through social media. Agarwal (2017) states that news publishers have not been catering for younger readers whose news consumption patterns are important to note, especially in this era of globalisation in the media. In this study, the age bracket of the participants who indicated that they access news via Instagram was not clear. Overall, results from the survey conducted showed that the majority of participants who took part in this research were aged 18–45 years old. It was not possible however to establish which age bracket in particular accesses news via Instagram. It is possible that the participants who access news via Instagram fall into the 18–24 year age bracket only, the 25–35 year age group only, the 36–45 year age bracket only or they comprise all age groups. David (2020) reveals that the majority of Australian social media users visit Facebook (16 million users) and Instagram (9 million users) more in a month than any other social media platform. With David's argument in mind, and with the need to establish which age group news producers are capturing in this globalisation era, the lack of certainty from this study indicates an aspect that needs to be explored further. It was also not possible to establish if participants who access news via social media define 'news' the same way, a factor that recognises the uncertainty with the definition of news in general in this era. It is worth establishing what participants who access news via social media define news as, in order to establish if these participants are accessing news via these platforms or not.

The second recommendation the researcher seeks to highlight is in the area of prejudice in news. There is value in investigating what participants mean when they use the term 'bias' and if the meaning is the same for all participants who cite it as a reason for distrusting news. Results from this study revealed that some participants believe news is biased, with some specifically mentioning it as the major reason for their distrust in news. This study, however, did not allow the researcher to explore this topic further to establish why they believe news is biased, or what in particular is biased in the news they consume. This ambiguity points to another aspect of this study that needs to be researched further.

The third aspect that could be explored further based on the results from this study is in the area of fake news. Participants in this study who suggested that they come across fake news revealed that fake news is contained in the entertainment news genre. However, participants did not have an option of explaining why they believe fake news is contained in this specific genre. Participants were also not able to identify which channels/platforms they use to access entertainment news, or what in those entertainment news stories causes them to believe they are accessing fake news. This doubt gives researchers another reason to study this topic further.

Finally, interested researchers could explore the platforms which participants use to access the ABC, SBS, channels 7 and 9, CNN, and BBC. Results from this study indicated that participants are relying on these networks to access trustworthy news. It was not possible though, for participants to state which platforms specifically they use to access these networks. Some networks produce news that is accessed via television, radio, print, news organisation websites, or news organisation online applications. There is value in establishing which platforms participants are using to access the trustworthy news.

Concluding Comments

This being the first comprehensive study of its kind to be conducted in Western Australia, the results retrieved fill a gap by providing knowledge about how some news consumers in WA perceive the credibility of the news they consume. The results obtained from this study matter because they reveal the following key aspects: News is being accessed more among participants in this study compared to participants from other studies; participants appear to trust the sources they use to access news, more than the news organisations that produce the news; the ABC network remains as the most trustworthy news source, thereby supporting discussions that suggest that Australians trust the ABC network as a source of reliable news; fake news is either rare in the news these participants consume, or participants cannot distinguish between news that is real or fake, or participants know how to spot fake news; some news consumers are choosing to trust or distrust news based on the experience they or those around them have had with the media; social media has impacted how participants access news, even though they may not trust the news they receive from these social platforms; and Instagram's popularity as a news source is high with these participants, compared to Twitter which was once a popular source of news.

These findings, although not conclusive, are timely and comprehensive. They shed light about how participants in Western Australia perceive the credibility of the news they

consume, locally, nationally, and internationally. This study reveals that participants are consuming news more frequently than expected and the majority of these participants trust the news they consume. The ABC is the most trusted news network that participants revealed they rely on to get trustworthy news. Very few participants completely distrust news, and of this group, the majority of participants distrust news because of the experience the community around them have with the media. This particular group (those who distrust news) highlight the need for news producers and media outlets alike to be careful about the news they broadcast or publish, as it greatly affects the perception some consumers have towards news. Social media is a conduit participants use to access news daily or even more than once a day, although they do not trust the news they receive from these platforms. Some participants, however, suggested that they believe news shared on social media by journalists and media outlets they trust. Fake news appears not to be common among participants in this group, although it was not clear if participants know what fake news is, if they can spot fake news when they see it, or whether fake news is rare in the news these participants consume. Most participants indicated that they would verify news they come across, if they suspected it contained fake news. Overall, the results from this study highlight a positive outcome for trusted organisations and news producers in WA who have been identified as reliable sources of news. The results also signify that some WA participants are careful about the news they consume, based on the fact that most participants will attempt to authenticate news information they receive if they suspect it contains fake news.

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

- I have received information regarding this research and had an opportunity to ask questions. I believe I understand the purpose, extent and possible risks of my involvement in this project and I voluntarily consent to take part.

1. Which age bracket do you fall into?
 - a. 18 years and below *(Thank you for taking time to participate in this survey. Your response has been recorded).*
 - b. 18-24
 - c. 25-35
 - d. 36-45
 - e. 46-65
 - f. 65 and above

News - *Original and fairly recent information that enables people to be well-informed.*

2. Where do you get your News from? *(Please rank your sources in order from most used medium to least used medium).*
 - a. Newspaper
 - b. Radio
 - c. TV
 - d. Social Media
 - e. From friends and family
 - f. Online news/website (Including via news apps)
 - g. I do not consume news *(Please go to Q.18)*

3. How often do you consume news?
 - a. More than once a day
 - b. Daily
 - c. Several times a week
 - d. Weekly
 - e. Fortnightly
 - f. Occasionally

4. Which genre of news are you most interested in? (*Please choose your MAIN interest*)
 - a. General News
 - b. Business News
 - c. Sports News
 - d. Finance News
 - e. Entertainment News
 - f. Political News

Trust (*Accepting as reliable or true, information that one is unable or unlikely to verify*) **in News**

5. Do you generally trust the news you consume? Why or why not?

6. Which or who (Media/social media channels/individuals) do you go to, to find trustworthy news?

7. Do you generally trust news if brought to you by family and/or friends?
 - a. Yes, all the time
 - b. Sometimes I do
 - c. It depends on what kind of news
 - d. Not really, I do my own background check

8. If you occasionally come across news that is untrustworthy, what indicates to you that they are not trustworthy?

9. If you generally do not trust the news you hear why is that?
 - a. I have been a victim of wrong news spreading about me/my family/my friends/my company and/organisation

- b. I have been in a situation that was reported falsely in the news
- c. I have heard of stories of false news and hence do not trust news
- d. I come across fake news only

Fake News (*Information that is intentionally and verifiably false and is set to mislead consumers*)

10. Do you ever come across fake news?

- a. More than once a day
- b. Daily
- c. Several times a week
- d. Weekly
- e. Fortnightly
- f. Occasionally

11. What genre do you think is most likely to contain fake news?

- a. General News
- b. Business News
- c. Sports News
- d. Finance News
- e. Entertainment News
- f. Political News
- g. All the above

12. Do you check different sources to verify information when you suspect a story is fake?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Social Media

13. How often do you access news via social media?

- a. More than once a day
- b. Daily
- c. Several times a week
- d. Weekly
- e. Fortnightly

f. Occasionally (Finish)

14. If you consume news via social media, which platforms do you use? *(Please choose all that apply)*

- a. Facebook
- b. Twitter
- c. WhatsApp
- d. Instagram
- e. LinkedIn
- f. All the sites that have any news shared

15. Do you generally trust all the news you receive from the selected social media sites? Why or Why not?

16. Do you reshare news seen from social media?

- a. Yes, frequently
- b. Sometimes
- c. It depends on the type of news
- d. I try to do a background check before resharing
- e. I do not reshare

17. Do you generally trust news shared by specific journalists or media channels on social media?

- a. Yes, I do
- b. Sometimes
- c. It depends on what kind of news
- d. It depends on the person/media channel's credibility
- e. I do not trust news shared on social media

18. If you are not interested in news, why is that?

- a. It is too negative
- b. It is mostly false
- c. It is not appealing
- d. It is monotonous
- e. I just don't have interest, no specific reason

19. Do you have any other comments about the news you consume, the medium you use to consume news or the genre of news you consume?

Appendix B

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| HREC Project Number: | HRE2019-0643 |
| Project Title: | <i>How do Western Australian News Consumers perceive the credibility of News?</i> |
| Chief Investigator: | <i>Associate Professor Tama Leaver (Media, Culture and Creative Arts)</i> |
| Student researcher: | <i>Miriam Ngechi Gichomo, Master of Philosophy (Media, Culture and creative Arts), Student</i> |
| Version Number: | |
| Version Date: | |

What is the Project About?

This project is set to investigate how news consumers in Western Australia perceive the authenticity, truthfulness and believability of news. Through this research, the researcher anticipates adding a voice to a timely discussion, by analysing responses that will be retrieved from participants 18 years and above. This project is aimed at providing new insights, which may add a relevant and local perspective to trust and credibility of journalism. The researcher aims to report findings of this study through published scholarly research and at academic conference/s.

Who is doing the Research?

- This project will be conducted by Miriam Ngechi Gichomo, under the supervision of Associate Professor Tama Leaver, with the aim of completing and attaining a Master of Philosophy degree. This is a Curtin University funded project. There will be no costs to the researcher or participant.

Participation

- Your participation in this study will involve filling in a 10-15 minutes survey questionnaire. All material gathered as part of this study will be deidentified. No personal or identifying information will be included in any published material. Please note that the following people will have access to the information we collect in this research: the research team and, in the event of an audit or investigation, staff from the Curtin University Office of Research and Development.
- All electronic data will be password-protected and hard copy data (including audio tapes) will be in locked storage. All information will be stored securely on the researchers USB Drive, a Hard Drive, and in Curtin Research Drive. The information stored on the Curtin Research Drive will be secured for up to 7 years after the research has ended, and then it will be destroyed.

- Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time, should you wish to opt out. Your participation in the study is greatly appreciated. There are no foreseeable risks from this research project.
- There may be no direct benefit to you for participating in this research, other than the fact that you add a voice to a very timely discussion. This project will give you an opportunity to express your opinion or describe your feelings concerning the credibility of news.
- Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved this study (HREC number HRE2019-0643). Should you wish to discuss the study with someone not directly involved, in particular, any matters concerning the conduct of the study or your rights as a participant, or you wish to make a confidential complaint, you may contact the Ethics Officer on (08) 9266 9223 or the Manager, Research Integrity on (08) 9266 7093 or email hrec@curtin.edu.au.

Consent Form

- If you decide to take part in this research, you will be required to consent by ticking the check box at the start of the survey questionnaire. By checking the box on the questionnaire, you are telling the researcher that you have read and understood what has been discussed. Please take your time and ask any questions you have before you decide what to do. You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep.

Contact Details

For questions about your rights as a participant or to discuss any other aspect of this study, please contact either the researcher or the Ethics committee of Curtin University:

Researcher – Miriam Gichomo

m.gichomo@postgrad.curtin.edu.au,

Supervisor – Tama Leaver

T.Leaver@curtin.edu.au.