

important

research

media news stories

integrity reliable

reporting stories opinion report ABC TV online public truth media Facebook

idiot dumb

& NEWS MEDIA in AUSTRALIA
a qualitative study

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FORWARD



The **VALUE** of trust

RIGHT NOW, TRUST IS THE hottest topic around the boardroom tables of Australian companies, large and small.

That's because an organisation's social licence to operate hangs on the relationship it has with its community, the people it serves, its customers. And healthy relationships are a two-way street. To invest time, energy and money in a person or a company, you need to feel you can trust them. Unfortunately, trust in business, government and the media in Australia is endangered. The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer places Australia just four percentage points above the world's least-trusting country, Russia.

In Australia, recent corporate examples of breached trust have outraged the public after being aired in a royal commission. They are being added to a long list. Each breach has further eroded trust in business generally, and those transgressions may have finally

reached a tipping point. Meanwhile, there has been a corresponding erosion of trust in politics and media with a procession of lies, scandals and charges of "fake news". So it's not surprising that Australians are suffering a crisis of confidence in the very institutions that once held their trust: banks, government, news services. (Though there are a few encouraging signs, as detailed on p. 13).

In a disrupted world, the barriers to entry for challenger businesses, brands and organisations in most sectors have never been lower. Advances in technology have enabled consumers to bypass once proud, trusted institutions in favour of newer entrants, turning the concept of trust on its head. Consumers are increasingly turning to people they believe they can trust: family, friends, peers, "people like us", over institutions that are perceived to have breached their trust.

Restoring trust is the goal and is every organisation's key challenge, but it's complicated. Research cited by PwC Australia reveals that drivers of trust vary depending on the generational group you

belong to, with millennials most likely to be attracted to ethical investing. By contrast, ethical investing is not a driver for baby boomers.

The research undertaken by the Centre for Media Transition (CMT) was motivated by this idea, that we no longer trust the way we used to. We have shifted to a type of distributed trust, by which we are willing to trust strangers to drive us around or offer us a place to stay. In an effort to attempt to find a solution to the question of restoring trust, we tested the idea that users would be more likely to trust a more peer-to-peer, collaborative news media, rather than the traditional top-down model.

In order to win back trust, one thing is clear: it has never been more important to explore *relationships*. If we can better understand relationships, we can better find a way to a more trusting society.

Marina Go
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Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	The value of trust	3
<i>Motivation</i>	How do users relate to news media?	5
<i>Executive Summary</i>	Don't be my friend!	6
<i>Introduction</i>	Falling in love again	8
<i>Literature Review</i>	The study of trust and news	12
<i>Definitions</i>	An attitude of vulnerability	16
<i>Participants</i>	Talking trust	20
<i>Methodology</i>	Taking a constructive approach	23
<i>Results</i>	Written	31
<i>Results</i>	Spoken	46
<i>Insights</i>	Disappointed but hopeful	54
<i>Further Research</i>	Where to next?	58
	References	60
	About the Centre for Media Transition	62
	Case Studies	
<i>Fred</i>	Quietly engaged	21
<i>Gail</i>	"I have faith"	25
<i>Elsbeth</i>	Media for democracy	29
<i>Ed</i>	"Propaganda"	33
<i>Anne</i>	The long view	43
<i>Carol</i>	Overlooked	47
<i>Richie</i>	Global news	49
<i>Brittany</i>	Betrayed	51

MOTIVATION



How do **USERS** relate to **NEWS** **MEDIA?**

AT THE INNOVATIVE EDGES OF mainstream journalism there are a few hardy and inspired souls who are developing ways to listen, understand and work with their audiences. Most news media companies have been using qualitative concepts such as focus groups to hone their products and attitudes for decades. But very few have taken the user-design route where the first step is to understand what customers and audiences actually do, want and potentially need. In user-design, audiences actively identify the problems they have and help design the product. A few “new” media ventures have gone as far as enlisting their audience to solve these “problems”, giving rise to a professional-amateur, deeply collaborative, membership-based journalism. *De Correspondent* in The Netherlands is an interesting and seemingly successful example of this approach.

There are good reasons for established media companies to be less enamored of such approaches. Collaborative journalism is difficult (though not impossible) to scale. Traditional media companies are addicted to scale — for advertising revenue. They also tend to avoid the central question of user-design thinking: what problem are you now solving for your audience? That’s because for many years for-profit media’s answer was, quite legitimately, “we are fixing it for advertisers to find people who might buy their products”. The people who news media executives listened to most were — and largely, still are — advertisers not readers, listeners and viewers. Advertisers pay the bills.

But there are new dynamics afoot. Advertisers are not sentimental about journalism. They follow the eyeballs. Because Google, Facebook and YouTube deliver more or better-targeted audiences, advertisers follow. It can be that simple. On the journalism side, audiences have more choice of content now than ever. There are signs some are prepared to pay via subscriptions for what they perceive as quality content, or even donate to support quality journalism.

Many unanswered questions remain. Are there sufficient numbers of people in these categories willing financially to support journalism? If the news media were redesigned to put audiences first, would it stand a better chance of thriving in a world of ongoing digital disruption? Are audiences willing to trust news media? Do they see journalism as a service?

These questions were behind our workshops held in Sydney and the regional New South Wales city of Tamworth. We had no preconceived ideas nor products to test, rather wanted to talk to “ordinary” people about what media they used and what they wanted. In essence, we wanted to explore the relationship users have with news media in order to see if we could identify strategies that might strengthen that relationship, and hence benefit both news users and news media.

Because we were investigating trust and relationships, we took a leap of faith. We invited strangers to answer open-ended questions with the hope that they might help bridge the divide between themselves and news media. And before that, we wanted them to shed light on how big that divide is.



“Don’t be my FRIEND!”

IN MAY 2018, WE HELD FOUR

workshops in Sydney and Tamworth blending written work with open-ended discussions. The participants – 34 in total – were asked about aspects relating to three overarching questions. Firstly, how do they use news media? Secondly, how do they trust and relate to news media? And thirdly, how might their trust in news media be rebuilt?

In the course of addressing these questions, we also set out to test our hypothesis that users want their news media to be more peer-to-peer, and less top-down. This would align with a general shift towards distributed trust, and away from institutional trust. Hence we asked if users wanted their news media to be more “like a friend”.

The results surprised us. In some ways, participants seemingly wanted their news media to be more peer-to-peer, less top-down. Certainly, they said they want news media that is transparent, interactive and “vulnerable” (by admitting its mistakes). Emphatically, however, they do *not* want their news media to be like a friend.

Our research was informed by an extensive bibliography of the academic

literature into trust and news media, completed specifically for the Centre for Media Transition by Elaine McKewon. In keeping with the vast scholarship on the subject, our results reveal reasons to be optimistic about restoring trust in journalism, but also reveal deep cause for concern.

GENERAL

Complaints exceeded compliments.

By far. There were oases of positivity, but these came amid deserts of negativity. When participants were asked to break down their relationship with news media into positive and negative aspects, the latter clearly outweighed the former (*see Ex. 3, p. 36*). In discussions, common responses included “overwhelmed”, “bombarded”, “manipulated” and “infuriated” (*see Spoken Results, pp. 46-53*).

But wait ... These users were not lost to journalism. Every participant seemed to support the premise that quality journalism is vital for a well-functioning society and democracy. Some even said that these are golden times for news users. As one wrote: “I think that it is wonderful that there are so many different sources/types of news media available and accessible 24/7 if desired.” (*see Ex. 3, pp. 36-7*).

MEDIA USE

Voracious and omnivorous.

Unsurprisingly, participants relied overwhelmingly on smartphones, computers and TV to find news. More surprising was the diversity of their news consumption habits, which involved social media, traditional media and alternative sources. There is no new normal. Rather, our users follow complex and unpredictable pathways – and often several pathways at once – to find their news (*see Ex. 1 and 2, pp. 32-5*).

Particular and personalised. One participant found her news via “American TV comedy news shows”. Others found their news via comments threads. Just as there is no longer a typical news user, the definition of “news media” has expanded to become unwieldy and amorphous (*see Introduction, pp. 8-11 and Ex. 2, pp. 34-5*).

A mix of passive and active. For many participants, news now finds them. This happens often on social media, where baby photos jostle with political news. Or it happens when the TV is on in the background. However, other users are highly active and strategic, deliberately seeking out specific sites and platforms (*see Ex. 2, pp. 34-5*).

From the horse’s mouth.

Participants wanted to bypass gatekeepers and find firsthand accounts and information sources. If the news involved weather, participants would go straight to the Bureau of Meteorology website. Whenever there was eyewitness video available, they would watch it. Sometimes, this was due to distrust of established news media (*see Ex. 1, 32-3*).

USERS’ RELATIONSHIP WITH MEDIA

Betrayed. Several participants said they’d felt betrayed by news media – including four who’d felt *personally* betrayed. That is, they’d been involved in a news story and felt the news media had broken their trust (*see Spoken Results, pp. 46-53, and Brittany Case Study, p. 51*).

Overwhelmed. Repeatedly, participants drew on the lexicon of war. More than one participant described the media landscape as a “minefield”. Others described a “bombardment”. The vast proliferation of news sources, and range of ways to access these sources, left many users admitting to feeling “overwhelmed”. As one participant said, “Sometimes I feel like we are bombarded with continual news, usually bad, which can be a bit overwhelming.” (*see Ex. 3, pp. 36-7*).

Dumbed down. When asked how news media treated them, users repeatedly used words such as “dumb”, “gullible” and “idiot”. As one participant wrote, “So many stories are dumbed down”. Another wrote, “It [news media] treats me as being somewhat simple-minded.” (*see Ex. 3, pp. 36-7*).

My news source vs the news media. However, when we asked participants to describe their relationship with *their own*

preferred news sources, their accounts were overwhelmingly positive. One possible explanation is that participants tend to be negative about news media as a whole, but positive about their own specific news sources (*see Ex. 3, Part 2, pp. 38-9*).

The ABC. The ABC consistently emerged as the participants’ most trusted source. When participants described their relationship with specific sources, the ABC received 13 positive mentions, and in second place were Facebook and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, who each received five (*see Ex. 3, pp. 36-7*).

REBUILDING TRUST

Trust matters most to users. We asked participants, “How would you feel about your ideal news media?” The most oft-cited ingredient on participants’ wishlists was trust. Apart from trust, participants wanted to feel (in order of preference) positive, informed, respectful and entertained (*see Ex. 4, pp. 40-1*).

Intelligence and respect. When we asked, “How would your ideal news media treat you?”, 26 of 34 participants answered “as intelligent” (or a synonym). As one participant wrote: “As an intelligent and knowledgeable person who is not gullible.” This was followed by (in order of preference): with respect; without bias; as part of a community; and as not just a revenue source (*see Ex. 4, pp. 40-1*).

Traditional values. We also asked participants to choose from a list of attributes and tell us what they want their news source to be. Their answers surprised us. Overwhelmingly, participants wanted their news sources to be: 1. Accurate; 2. In the public interest; 3. Objective; 4. Diverse; 5. Transparent; 6. Easy to access (*see Ex. 5, pp. 42-3*).

Country v city. We held workshops in Sydney and Tamworth to see if we could identify any differences in use and trust patterns. Generally, however, results were uncannily similar. One notable exception: while Tamworth participants were eager for their news media to “be more positive”, Sydney participants more staunchly wanted news media to “be in the public interest” (*see Ex. 5, pp. 42-3*).

Distributed trust. We wanted to test whether news users want more of a peer-to-peer model of news media, in which they can place distributed trust, rather than institutional trust. There seemed to be qualified support for this hypothesis. On the one hand, participants valued transparency and interactivity. On the other, they expressly didn’t want media to “be like a friend” or “be less ‘voice of god’” (*see Ex. 5, pp. 42-3*).

Strategies. Of various strategies that we suggested might help to rebuild trust, participants clearly preferred “go behind the story”, in which news sources revealed details such as any conflicts of interest, who was interviewed and why the story was written. They also wanted news, comment and advertising to be clearly labelled, but didn’t want a user-generated trustworthiness rating (*see Ex. 6, pp. 44-5*).

Our participants didn’t hold back. They were expansive and blunt with their criticisms. Partly, it seems, this is because they care about news media and value its significance. With a voracious and omnivorous news appetite, they *want* to trust the news — in a way that combines elements of institutional trust and distributed trust.

Repeatedly, participants drew on the lexicon of war. More than one participant described the media landscape as a “minefield”

falling in ~~LOVE~~ again

WE WOULD LIKE TO START this report with a small confession. The working title for this project was: “Falling in love again: what will it take for audiences to trust news media.” But journalists were never loved by their audiences. We know that, you know that. To suggest otherwise – that falling in *love* again might be an option – is to mislead. We were too ambitious. Sorry.

But our aspiration to understand “love” and the news media was driven by good if not noble intentions. We thought it a handy way to consider a bigger, more powerful and more important word. That word is trust.

Both words are of course key ingredients in many relationships; we thought love might serve as a synonym for trust

in journalism. If it does, or ever did, we have been firmly corrected by the participants in this report. They were not really



interested in loving journos. But they did see value in trusting them or wanting to do so.

As one workshop participant put it, in response to a question about whether users need to fall in love again with news media:

It should be “falling in trust again”. At the moment, we’re crawling through a minefield of sources and we’re trying to prod our way through in a trusting way without losing limbs or our lives or our heads or other parts of our anatomy. You’ve got to fall in trust again, not so much in love. I don’t want to be in love with them.

Later in this report (see Definitions, p. 16), we take a good hard look at the concept of trust, about what it is and why it is so important. And why there are key distinctions between trust, an attitude, and trustworthiness, a property. But for now, let’s return to trust in relation to love, and why the former wins out over the latter when it comes to news media.

Unlike love, which can be fluid and fleeting, trust is normally a stable compound. It is not overtly emotional. No one hums along to a “trust” song or sends a flower in its name. No, trust is an accretion, a slow build, a worthy and solid companion. It is, or should be, the lasting foundation upon which to build hopes, dreams and, perhaps, love.

We would suggest – and this report indicates – that finding and keeping trust is harder than love. We would certainly argue that once it is gone, it is tougher to get back.

That is why we went in search of it – and why we are so concerned by its apparent absence in the relationship between audiences and journalists. There are people among us who fall in love every other day. But there are few, if any, who have such a fickle relationship with trust. But, as relationships go, not much of value or worth can happen in its absence.

Trust never used to be a “thing” in the news media. Few editors lost sleep over whether their newspaper or TV channel was trusted. Even if the word was occasionally adopted by news media marketers and sales people (as it still is), whether or not the audience trusted a particular masthead or story or journalist was not much of a matter in the newsroom.

Partly, this blind spot was a function of a much bigger dynamic: until the past decade or so, newsrooms didn’t really care and were not readily exposed to what their audience actually thought about them or their products. Journalism was, to a great extent, made, constructed and executed within its own walled garden. Sure, a focus group might be



convened once in a while, but they were usually consulted about changes in layout, design and content which were already made or in train.

The internet changed that. Forever. It brought to life the morbid idea – the existential threat – that readers, viewers and listeners could now become something else entirely: as scholar Jay Rosen put it, they could become the “people

Trust is, or should be, the lasting foundation upon which to build hopes, dreams and, perhaps, love

formerly known as the audience”. The war to keep and understand audiences has been raging ever since. Many editors and journalists might even think they are winning. Thanks to a plethora of online analytical tools, the audience is now an essential and constant presence in the newsroom. What it likes and doesn’t like, what it shares and doesn’t share, is captured and displayed across the newsroom in real time.

But metrics are not the same as wisdom. The audience is not only “real”, it is fluid, fickle. It can leave at any time for a host of reasons: a key one is a breakdown of trust. As we argue, losing trust in news media can have dire consequences. It is how we, as individuals, groups and a society, build a shared view of the world and come to an agreed version of the most important and relevant facts.

Sure, journalism is a first cut of those facts. It is mutable and fluid itself. And it is far from perfect. But accepting – and largely trusting – what journalists say about certain events, allowing the news media to build commonly shared narratives, is the key transaction in the relationship between journalists and their audiences. It is the essence of journalism’s authority. If that is breaking down, we need to get it back.

This report was born out of that very fear: that trust in news media – or large swathes of it – might be gone for good. It is still too early to make a call on that. But the prognosis for trust in institutions generally is not good. Public confidence in banks and governments has been falling. And news media has been especially hard hit. As our own extensive bibliography on trust shows, there are grave and sustained threats to trust in news media



We would certainly argue that once trust is gone, it is tougher to get back

across the world (see Lit. Review, p. 12). The trust deficit is global and pervasive.

Themes and trends are emerging:

- **Trust is shifting away from institutions and towards peer-to-peer models. Fueled by technological innovation, this so-called distributed trust is replacing the traditional trust in “elites” such as banks, governments, churches and, yes, news media (see Definitions p. 16).**

- **Sensing this opportunity – or, perhaps, fearing its power – populist politicians are seeking to wage war on various “elites”, in particular attacking journalists as being out of touch with, if not inoculated from, “real” people. They are, in short, seeking to destroy the mediation role played by the news media.**

The fightback against the slur of “fake news” is waging on several fronts. Here in Australia, we have been relative-

ly blessed so far to escape its worse manifestations. But there is a very real and present danger that such terms will become a cancer which eats away at trust in journalism. We are not, in our opinion, yet at that stage. This is going to be a long conflict. But in a world often characterised as being “post truth”, where everyone can assert their “truth” as being equally valid, even when it is demonstrably false, there is no doubt that journalists need to understand what audiences really feel about and really want from them. That’s why we went and asked.

Our journey into trust and love started with a request from Facebook. In Singapore in 2017, the organisers of a Facebook journalism project summit asked whether we had any ideas that might suit a broader discussion. Immediately, the idea of how audiences might “love again” sprang to mind.

It was a short pitch, but found a receptive welcome. We are thankful to Facebook for funding this project and trusting us to investigate and iterate it at arms-length from them.

This report brings to a close stages one and two of a project that could, much like the issue we are grappling with, morph in many ways. We discuss those ways in closing remarks. And we invite your commentary and assistance on aspects of this report and what we might next do in the area. If you are keen to know more about the subject, we’d encourage you to read the extensive trust bibliography we did as a precursor to our field work, which can be found at cmt.uts.edu.au

The literature review gave us a good sense of the challenges the news media faces with trust. They are extensive. Armed with that knowledge, we held our workshops mindful to ask not tell, listen not talk.

As you will see, the picture is complex and at times, confronting. It is certainly not all bad news.

Love may not be an option, but learning to trust again might well be.

The study of TRUST & NEWS

IN SOME WAYS, THIS OUGHT TO be a golden age for trust in news media. After all, new information technologies have brought about an unprecedented openness and transparency. In 2002, philosopher Onora O'Neill said "Openness or transparency is now all too easy: if they can produce or restore trust, trust should surely be within our grasp." The reality, however, is that trust in news media is in short supply. As O'Neill continued: "Some sorts of openness and transparency may be bad for trust."

Trust is important (see Definitions, p. 16). It's also hard to understand. With all its surprises and paradoxes, the topic has occupied philosophers for millennia. And in recent years, hundreds of researchers have turned their attention specifically to issues relating to trust and news media.

On June 1, 2018, the Centre for Media Transition published an annotated bibliography into the state of research into trust and the news media (see cmt.uts.edu.au).

That bibliography revealed that many of the studies into trust and news media have been quantitative. They seek to answer questions such as: Which medium do people trust more as a news source: the internet or television (eg, Mehrabi et al, 2009)? Do people in Finland trust differently than people in Greece (Newman et al, 2017)? And do people rate news stories sourced from social media as less credible (Kruikemeier and Lecheler, 2016)?

The most influential surveys measuring trust in journalism in Australia (The Essential Report) and internationally (Edelman Global Trust Barometer, Reuters/Oxford Digital News Report, Pew Research Centre Surveys) provide broad indicators of trust in the media and other key social institutions. Some of these surveys have endeavoured to provide more granular analysis: Edelman breaks down trust in "the media" into trust in "journalism" and "platforms"; Reuters/Oxford has examined trust in news in the context of specific media channels; and Pew correlates trust in news media with specific demographics and partisan groups.

However, there are limitations to the existing research. As some scholars have noted, much of the existing literature has failed to provide a sufficiently nuanced account of public trust in news media. In their 2003 review of the academic literature, Metzger et al argued that the intense focus on measurement does little to advance our understanding of the range of factors and complex process by which consumers place trust in journalism or individual media or

Australia's trust in traditional news media and journalism rebounded from 46 per cent in 2017 to 61 per cent in 2018

outlets. In 2009, Coleman et al observed that "much of the existing literature tends to reduce the tricky issue of trust to the appreciably more straightforward issue of accuracy". And in 2014, Blöbaum noted that studies often refer to trust in one specific matter or context, and so questions remain about whether these findings can be generalised.

This has left significant openings for qualitative research, right down to establishing the ground rules for any discussion. What do we mean by "news media"? What do we mean by "trust"? And how do we measure it? As Australian researcher Caroline Fisher wrote in 2016: "There is neither an agreed definition of trust or credibility in news media nor an agreed reliable and valid

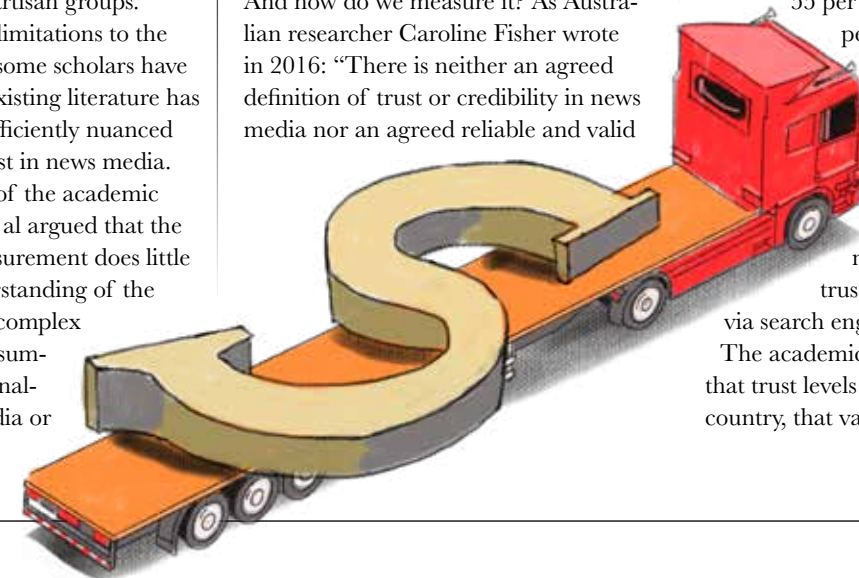
way to measure it". One of our key motivations was to open these and other issues up for qualitative discussion.

That said, the academic literature does reveal a number of significant insights about trust and news media. Some are logical, some are counter-intuitive, and a few are contradictory.

One well-documented insight is that trust in news media has been falling at an alarming rate in recent decades, just as it has in other institutions. In 1978, 68 per cent of people in the US trusted news media; by 2016 that was down to 32 per cent (Swift, 2016). However, that trust is rebounding. In February 2018, the Edelman Trust Barometer found the public is increasingly recognising the difference between traditional media and social media and is more willing to trust the former. According to Edelman, Australia's trust in traditional news media and journalism rebounded from 46 per cent in 2017 to 61 per cent in 2018. And in May, the Digital News Report: Australia 2018 found that trust in news had risen to 50 per cent among Australians, up from 42 per cent a year earlier. Further,

55 per cent of Australians (up 7 per cent) said they trusted the news they use most of the time. By comparison, only 24 per cent of news consumers said they trusted the news they found on social media and 39 per cent trusted the news they found via search engines.

The academic research also reveals that trust levels vary from country to country, that various ethnicities and



demographics trust differently and that people often trust for irrational reasons. More specifically:

- **Different populations trust differently.** In Finland, 62 per cent of people trust news media, compared with only 23 per cent in Greece and South Korea (Newman et al, 2017).
- **Different demographics (men/women; white/black/Hispanic; old/young) trust in different ways.** Trust is in the eye of the beholder (eg, Armstrong and Collins, 2009).
- **What's more, different demographics are trusted differently.** Women journalists who tweet often will be trusted more than men journalists who tweet infrequently (Boulter, 2017).
- **Progressives trust news media more than conservatives** (Glynn and Huge, 2014, among many others).
- **Young people trust differently: they think user-generated content is more trustworthy than mainstream content; they're more likely to trust online content than their older**

peers; and they don't believe in a civic duty to be informed (Cannon and Mackay, 2017).

- **US university students are most likely to get their news from the internet and TV comedy programs** (Jarvis et al, 2009).
- **People regularly and knowingly consume news media they don't trust** (Arpan and Nabi, 2011).
- **The third-person effect exists: people tend to believe others are more gullible than they themselves are** (Banning and Sweetser, 2007).
- **There are conflicting accounts of whether interactivity (between user and source) enhances trust, but some persuasive research suggests that it does** (eg, Jahng and Littau, 2016).
- **Cultural proximity enhances credibility** (Espina, 2013). You're more likely to trust your local newspaper than a metropolitan daily from another country – unless you're more “culturally proximate” to the foreign daily.

Our goal was to take a qualitative look at the relationship between news media and news users, drawing on the research as appropriate, including in the design of our workshops

• **Exposure builds trust. For instance, higher levels of exposure to social media is associated with higher levels of trust in social media** (Fernandez-Planells, 2015). Indeed, reliance is the best predictor of credibility (Johnson and Kaye, 2016).

• **And often, trust is based on completely irrational factors. For instance, high quality videos increase the credibility of a news item** (Cheever and Rokkum, 2015).

The research on trust, in other words, is complex and unwieldy. Our goal was to take a qualitative look at the relationship between news media and news users, drawing on the research as appropriate, including in the design of our workshops.

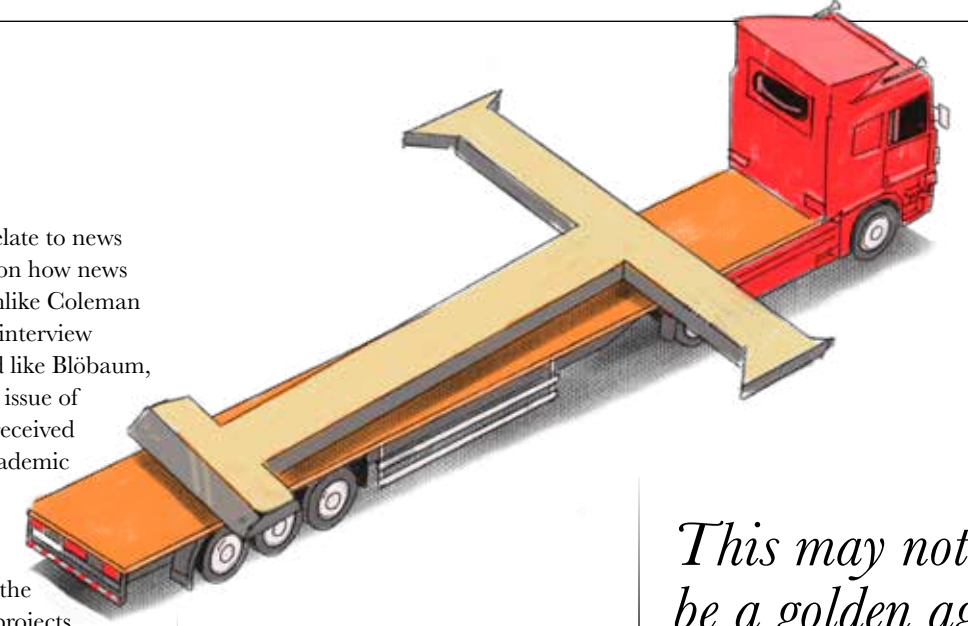
Of course, we are hardly the first to take a qualitative approach. In 2007, Kohring and Matthes sought to develop and validate a multi-dimensional scale of trust in the news media. In 2009, Coleman et al's constructivist project began by asking focus groups how they defined trust and news, before investigating the bi-directional nature of the relationship between news users and news media. And in 2014, Blöbaum focused squarely on *rebuilding* trust, arguing that news media adopt specific strategies – promoting their brand, personalising their content, face-to-face discussions, use of social media, harnessing user-generated content, fact-checking, enabling more interactivity – to reestablish trust with audiences in a digital environment.

Our constructivist approach, drawing on Coleman et al, seeks to investigate the textures of the relationship between news users and media, encouraging news users

to think about how they relate to news media, and also to reflect on how news media relates to them. (Unlike Coleman et al, however, we did not interview journalists or editors.) And like Blöbaum, we wanted to focus on the issue of *rebuilding* trust, which has received limited attention in the academic literature.

Despite the limited *academic* attention, there has been a sudden upsurge in the number of *industry-backed* projects investigating how trust can be rebuilt (Schmidt 2018). These include:

- **News Guard, a startup by US publishers Steve Brill and Gordon Crovitz, which has been hiring journalists to rate news content by trustworthiness. It expects to go live in the second half of 2018.** newsguardtechnologies.com
- **The Trust Project, which brings together news organisations under journalist Sally Lehrmann to increase transparency for users. Housed at Santa Clara University's Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, it aims to create “trust indicators” explaining the “work behind a news story”, and will give credible outlets a “trust logo” to display.** thetrustproject.org
- **Trusting News, which is working with local newsrooms in the US to develop strategies that enable news media to build trust with their audiences, including by encouraging interaction on social media.** trustingnews.org



This may not be a golden age for trust in news media, but it may yet prove to be a golden age for research into trust in news media

- **News Integrity Initiative, which looks to the specific measures that news organisations and others can adopt to foster trust. At the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, the \$US14 million fund will support projects “to connect journalists, technologists, academic institutions, non-profits, and other organizations from around the world to foster informed and engaged communities, combat media manipulation, and support inclusive, constructive, and respectful civic discourse”.** journalism.cuny.edu

- **Journalism Trust Initiative, which was launched in early 2018 by Reporters Without Borders and is a media self-regulatory initiative designed to combat disinformation online** rsf.org

- **Deepnews.ai, which is working to use AI and machine learning to surface higher quality content. Run by Frederic Filloux and Stanford students, its aim is to separate “commodity news” (news based on pageviews, churn, and so on)**

from “value-added news” (original reporting with balance, expertise, and innovation). deepnews.ai

Researchers are currently engaged in highly important work that seeks to explore and foster trust between news media and its users. In the past two years, that work has intensified dramatically, with tens of millions of dollars invested in researching the issue.

For both the academy and industry, trust is a very hot topic. This may not be a golden age for trust in news media, but it may yet prove to be a golden age for research into trust in news media, and the deeper understanding it yields.

DEFINITIONS

An attitude of VULNERABILITY

WITHOUT TRUST WE cannot stand,” wrote Confucius, 2500 years ago. But what is trust? And why does it matter? And what is news media? For our workshops, we took a constructivist approach. By this we mean that our workshops were open-ended and exploratory. We did not provide participants with definitions of news media, nor of trust.

Rather, in this age of disruption, we specifically asked participants how *they* defined “news media”. This constituted the first exercise of each workshop, and the answers were remarkably varied (see Results, p. 31).

But for the purposes of this report, we define “news media” broadly, as the media where news is broadcast or published. On our broad definition, news media thus includes traditional outlets (newspapers, radio, television), and also newer media outlets (the internet and its platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, blogs and,

say, the Bureau of Meteorology website). In this way, even search engines including Google can qualify as news media. As it happened, many workshop participants cited search engines and social media as a primary news source.

By contrast, we did not ask participants to define “trust”. Rather, we simply used “trust” according to its conventional meaning. This is for two reasons. First, we believe the nature of trust is changing, and wanted to explore this change, without becoming trapped in discussions about semantics. Second, while we wanted to understand trust and news media, our larger goal was to explore in depth the relationship users have with news media. Hence we asked participants about trust, but we also probed them more generally how they felt about news media, and how they would like to feel about news media, among other questions. Trust, however defined, is only part of the story we wanted to explore.

That said, trust is a *rather large* part what we wanted to explore.

According to the Oxford Dictionaries, the primary definition of trust is a “firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability

of someone or something”. A subsidiary meaning is, “acceptance of the truth of a statement without evidence or investigation” (eg, “I used only primary sources, taking nothing on trust”), and another is, “The state of being responsible for someone or something”. These are supplemented with several further meanings. Clearly, trust is a nuanced concept. For the purposes of this report, we take the concept of trust to mean accepting as reliable or true something that one is unable to, or unlikely to seek to, verify.

But there is more to say about trust. A first point, as made by philosopher Carolyn McLeod, concerns the distinction between trust and trustworthiness. “Trust” is an attitude. It is a position that one can take towards a person, animal or thing. I trust my Labrador to be loyal, but not to exercise dietary restraint.

“Trustworthiness”, by contrast, is a property. It describes whether someone (or something) deserves to be trusted. For staying by my side, my Labrador is trustworthy. For not stealing food from random children, she isn’t.

With news media, the difference between trust and trustworthiness is particularly salient. I might trust *The Daily Clarion*, even though it is demonstrably full of lies. Conversely, I might not trust *The Daily Clarion*, and be unfailingly suspicious of its content, even when it is patently full of journalism that is accurate, balanced and fair.

In the current media landscape, it is entirely possible that people generally trust news media much less than they used to, but that news media is just as trustworthy as ever.

That possibility is not explored in this report. Here, we are specifically focused on the *attitude of trust*, rather than the property of trustworthiness. Inevitably, of course, issues of trustworthiness arise. But our focus is squarely on trust, and more broadly on the nature of the relationships that news users have with news media.

For philosophers, as Carolyn McLeod writes,

“Trust” is an attitude. It is a position that one can take towards a person, animal or thing. “Trustworthiness”, by contrast, is a property.

trust requires four elements. First and most obviously, trust requires that we can be vulnerable to others, and specifically *vulnerable to betrayal*. It is only the chance of betrayal that gives trust its special character and significance. Trust is needed in the absence of a guarantee. After all, if we had a guarantee that someone

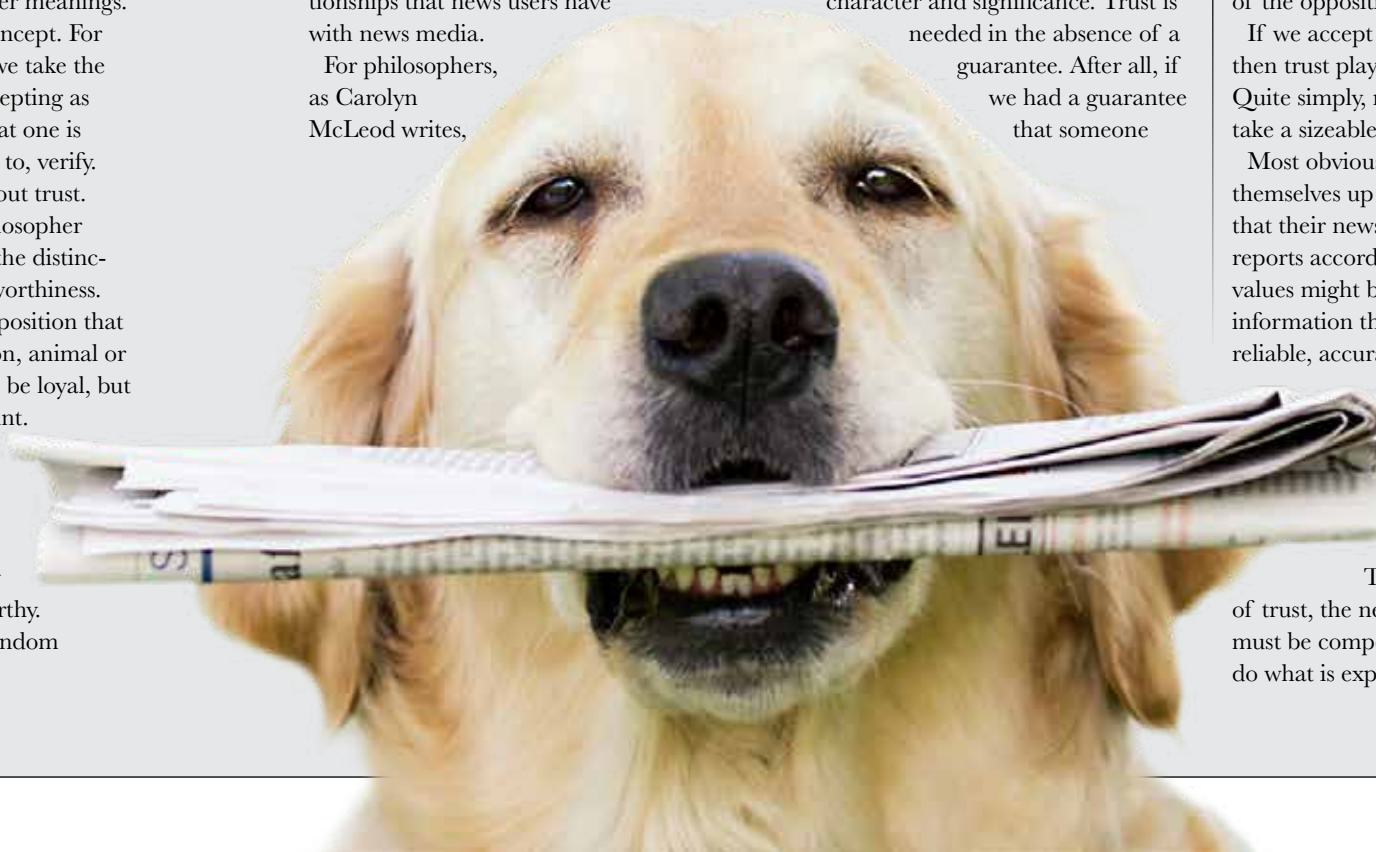
were going to act in a certain way, then there would be no need to trust them to act that way. This is why trust is dangerous. When we trust, we risk getting hurt.

A second element is that the trustee is competent and committed to do what is expected. If we’re after an accurate report of national politics, there’s no point trusting my eight-year-old child to provide it. And this brings us to a third element: the truster must be optimistic about that competence. I cannot trust someone who, as I well know, is destined to disappoint me. To these, we can add a fourth (disputed by philosophers) condition: that the truster expects a certain kind of motive for acting from the trustee. If I trust *The Sydney Morning Herald* to expose a corrupt prime minister, then I must assume *The Sydney Morning Herald* hasn’t been paid to do so by the leader of the opposition.

If we accept these four conditions, then trust plays a key role for news users. Quite simply, news users are required to take a sizeable leap of trust.

Most obviously, news users open themselves up to betrayal. They expect that their news sources are delivering reports according to their values. These values might be that news media conveys information that is, just for starters, reliable, accurate and timely. Users of news media are aware that news media can betray them by being unreliable, inaccurate or slow. This is the first condition of trust.

To fulfil the other conditions of trust, the news media, for its part, must be competent and committed to do what is expected. And in return, the



“If we can’t trust what the press report, how can we tell whether to trust those on whom they report?”

news user must be optimistic about that competence. And finally, if we accept the fourth condition about the fourth estate, then news users expect news media to, say, act in the public interest.

These four conditions provide a working account of trust in the context of news media. And in this report, we were particularly keen to explore the condition of betrayal. Do news users feel betrayed? If so, how?

Having arrived at this understanding of trust and betrayal, we come to our second question: why does trust matter?

Trust is routinely described as the glue that holds society together. It enables us to form relationships with people and to depend on them. We trust our friends to keep our secrets and we trust our family to help in times of trouble. Without trust, our social relations would wither and atrophy.

The key role of trust in society is demonstrated by one telling point: society flourishes when trust flourishes, and vice versa. As Francis Fukuyama wrote in 1995: “One of the most important lessons we can learn from an examination of economic life is that a nation’s well-being, as well as its ability to compete, is conditioned by a single, pervasive cultural characteristic: the level of trust inherent in society”. This works both ways. High trust societies have stronger economies and stronger social networks than low trust societies. At the same time, trust levels are partly set by the larger social and political climate.

More specifically for news users, trust

also enables us to know about the world. Epistemologically, trust is indispensable. As individuals, we cannot know everything, we cannot witness everything. We cannot be omnipresent and omniscient. There are big gaps in our knowledge and experience, gaps that we need others to fill. If I have a sickness, I trust that the doctor knows which treatment will work best, because I don’t.

“The basic argument for the need to trust what others say is that no one person has the time, intellect, and experience necessary to learn, independently, facts about the world ...,” writes Carolyn McLeod.

When I want to know what’s happening in the body politic, I rely on reports from Parliament House, and from elsewhere. My knowledge of the world is built on trust, and news media plays a key role in that knowledge. If I trust news media, and if they are indeed trustworthy, then I will be the sort of informed citizen that democracy requires me to be.

Philosopher Onora O’Neill argues that trust in news media is particularly vital. In 2002, O’Neill began her BBC Reith Lectures on trust with Confucius’s maxim that without trust we cannot stand. She agreed, proposing that for the well-being of democracy trust is vital, and trust in news media is *especially* vital.

Journalists, she said, are a mechanism by which we hold people accountable. In their role as watchdogs, journalists report on the wrongdoings of the powerful. We need to trust journalists, or we won’t know about such wrongdoings: “If we

can’t trust what the press report, how can we tell whether to trust those on whom they report?”

Unfortunately, O’Neill thinks the internet may be making things worse. “The new information technologies may be anti-authoritarian, but curiously they are often used in ways that are also anti-democratic. They undermine our capacities to judge others’ claims and to place our trust.”

Our research bears this out. Several participants admitted to feeling overwhelmed, describing the news media landscape as a minefield where it can be difficult, if not impossible, to know whom and what to trust.

In 1974, philosopher Hannah Arendt made a similar argument about the value of a free press:

The moment we no longer have a free press, anything can happen. What makes it possible for a totalitarian or any other dictatorship to rule is that people are not informed; how can you have an opinion if you are not informed? If everybody always lies to you, the consequence is not that you believe the lies, but rather that nobody believes anything any longer ... And a people that no longer can believe anything cannot make up its mind. It is deprived not only of its capacity to act but also of its capacity to think and to judge. And with such a people you can then do what you please.

This dystopian vision is of a society where trust has completely broken down. No one believes anything, and, as a result, democracy can only collapse.

The problem is that trust appears to

be breaking down. In recent decades, people’s levels of trust in institutions has dropped substantially, including their trust of news media (see Lit. Review, p. 12). However, that’s not to say that trust has become a scarce commodity. In some areas, trust appears to be flourishing.

Business scholar Rachel Botsman has written that patterns of trust have shifted, as shown by the rise of peer-to-peer platforms such as Airbnb, Uber and Tinder.

Just as our trust in banks, governments and churches is collapsing, technology is creating new mechanisms that enable us to trust strangers, ideas and new companies. In short, she argues that institutional trust has been replaced by distributed trust.

“Trust is no longer top down, opaque and linear, but is distributed among people and is accountability based,” Botsman said in a 2016 TED talk, after her 2010 book. Her argument followed the Edelman Report’s claim that 2005 was the year in which “Trust shifts from ‘Authorities’ to Peers”.

In our research, we wanted to test whether consumers want their news media to reflect this shift. We wanted to test

whether news users want more of a peer-to-peer relationship with their news sources. Hence we asked whether they wanted news sources to “be vulnerable” (by admitting mistakes), to “be less ‘voice of god’” and to “be more like a friend” (see Results, Ex. 5, pp. 42-3).

“There is now an unbounded marketplace for efficient peer-to-peer exchanges between producer and consumer, seller and buyer, lender and borrower, and neighbour and neighbour,” wrote Botsman in 2010. “Online exchanges mimic the close ties once formed through face-to-face exchanges in villages, but on a much larger and unconfined scale. In other words, technology is reinventing old forms of trust.” Technology is enabling news media to reinvent itself, and we wanted to test whether Botsman’s argument extends to journalism.

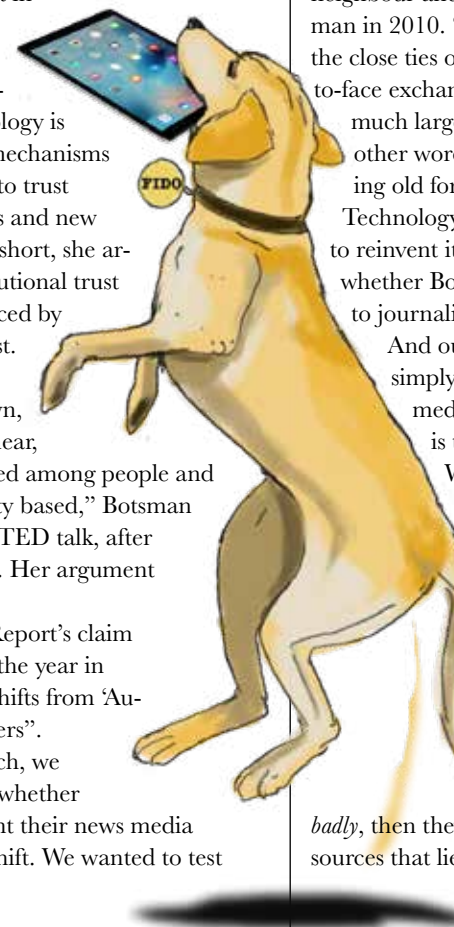
And our goal, all the while, is not simply to get users to trust news media more. Our goal, rather, is that news users trust *better*. What we want, in other words, is that news users have *justified* trust. We want them to trust news outlets that deserve to be trusted. We want them to trust *The Daily Clarion*, confident in the knowledge that it is in fact trustworthy. After all, if news users trust *badly*, then they’re likely to trust news sources that lie, or that are otherwise

unethical. Trusting badly leaves them vulnerable.

In this report, we explore only part of the picture. We explore user trust, but not news media’s trustworthiness. We make no empirical claims about the trustworthiness of any specific news media outlet, or the news media generally. Of course, if our larger goal is for news users to trust well, then the trustworthiness of the news media is a salient issue. If the news media is in fact entirely filled with deception and lies, then our larger goal is doomed. In this sense, there is an implicit assumption in our report that there are at the very least *some* trustworthy news media outlets.

As O’Neill, McLeod and many others note, trust is slow and hard to build, but quick and easy to destroy. The reputation of a masthead may have been built over hundreds of years, but can be sunk within days. In this context, we can’t simply will ourselves to have trust. We can, however, cultivate trust, both in ourselves, and in others. Specifically, we can cultivate being more trusting and making others more trustworthy.

If news users don’t trust news media, then democracy suffers. And if news users trust badly, democracy suffers too. With this research, we aim to take some steps toward cultivating justified trust in news media. While we leave it to others to focus on the trustworthiness of news media, we set our sights on user trust, and on the wider relationship users have with news media, with a view that both can adopt strategies to enhance that trust and that relationship.



PARTICIPANTS

TALKING



IN TOTAL, THERE WERE 34

participants across four workshops, all recruited on Facebook. In late April, on a purpose-built Facebook page (facebook.com/trustprojects), we posted an image of a golden retriever with a newspaper in its mouth, announcing that we would be holding two workshops at the Tamworth Community Centre. We also said participants would be paid \$100.

Users who clicked on the link were taken to a page on the Centre for Media Transition website, where we had constructed an

interactive form. On this form, we asked prospective participants to provide details about themselves, including name, contact details, age and occupation. We then asked a series of questions, including:

- *Where do you get your news? What are your top two or three sources?*
- *How often do you access news via social media?*
- *On what occasions do you turn to friends and neighbours for news?*
- *In a week, roughly how much time do you spend following news?*
- *What's an issue you feel strongly about?*

Whenever someone completed this online form, it generated an email that was

directed to a Centre for Media Transition inbox. We then sorted through these emails to contact potential participants.

For the Tamworth workshops, only a trickle of people responded to our notice, at the rate of one or two per day, starting on April 28. To attract more participants, we posted our notice on "Tamworth – Buy, Swap, Sell or Free!" with the permission of the page's administrators. We also paid \$150 to boost our post. In total, we had 22 applicants, of whom we selected 17. To these we emailed more detailed information about the workshops, and a consent form, which noted that we would protect their privacy by giving them pseudonyms.

The 17 participants who attended the Tamworth Community Centre on Thursday, May 10, were (by pseudonym):

Tamworth 2pm

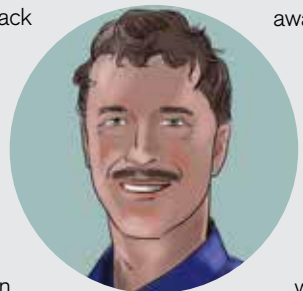
- Anne**, 68, retired teacher
- Barbara**, 55, student
- Carol**, 51, educator
- Diane**, 59, office manager
- Ed**, 57, handyman
- Fred**, 41, farm assistant
- Gary**, 41, sports supervisor
- Harry**, 32, unemployed

Tamworth 5.15pm

- Isabelle**, 17, high school student
- Jenny**, 50, health administrator
- Karen**, 65, educator
- Lincoln**, 27, public servant
- Mary**, 51, communications officer
- Natalie**, 24, disability officer
- Olivia**, 61, horticulturalist
- Penny**, 50, IT consultant
- Quentin**, 37, public servant

Quietly engaged

FRED, 41,
Farm assistant, Tamworth



Fred didn't say much in the workshop. He studiously completed each worksheet, then sat back and listened. However, his written contributions revealed a pragmatic and considered view of the news media, starting with his own habits. He uses news.com.au as a main source, even if he doesn't necessarily consider it to be quality journalism. "They do like to propagate 'fame' as currency via endless articles on celebrities. I understand it may not be the most reliable source, however it is free. I am cheap and this site has no paywall. High turnover of stories

keeps the site interesting." He worried that some news media is more prone to incite than insight. "Some organisations deal in emotions — trying to whip up the audience into a fury in order to keep them watching. While I enjoy [the Steve Price podcast] and share similar political leanings, they do like to deal in trying to incite an element of rage in their audience and this does get a little much at times." The way to combat this, Fred suggests, would be "a panel type program to discuss issues further", and stories that offered people different levels of engagement, so they could "get the basics or could really go in depth with the issue". Fred is keenly aware that news organisations are struggling to fund quality journalism. He has observed that there are fewer people working in journalism, and more working in PR and spin.

"Traditional news, their staff has been cut so much, that's probably why they can't do the work they used to, whereas the politicians employ media people themselves. I just did a degree in professional writing and just about everyone has got jobs with politicians."

For Sydney, we repeated the process. We posted a notice on Facebook, which we then (with permission) posted to various geographically diverse “buy, swap, sell” groups. Given the response, we had no need to boost the post. In total, 62 people applied to participate. Of these, we selected 17 to attend the workshops at the Centre for Media Transition at UTS in Ultimo on Thursday, May 17:

Sydney 2pm

Richie, 18, high school student
Susan, 32, scientific sales
Trish, 34, sound engineer
Ulrich, 23, programmer
Viv, 41, teacher
Wanda, 19, student
Xander, 50, agricultural parts manager
Yanni, 31, unemployed
Zara, 61, creative industry freelancer

Sydney 5.15pm

Adam, 66, research analyst
Brittany, 25, retail
Cecil, 19, student
Darren, 42, industry magazine
Elspeth, 39, administrative officer
Fiona, 31, public service
Gail, 28, editor
Helen, 23, student radiographer

We deliberately chose participants with a view to both diversity and balance. This was our motivation behind asking potential participants about their age, occupation, media consumption habits and an issue of concern to them. We wanted people from a range of backgrounds and occupations, with an array of ethnicities, from a range of ages, with a variety of political views. Ideally, we wanted a spread of view-



points to show how people use and trust news media.

In age, our participants ranged from 17 to 68. We also found that we were able to divide our participants neatly into two equal groups: those under 35, and those over 35. As the results to several exercises suggested, there are subtle but significant differences in the way younger and older people relate to news media.

However, we cannot claim that the 34 participants are demographically typical of Australia, or even of Tamworth and Sydney. We could only choose from those

who applied to participate. This meant, for instance, that there were more women among the participants: 21 women compared with 13 men. Also, people have specific motivations for attending such a workshop. These presumably include: having something specific to say; being highly engaged with the issue; and wanting to be paid \$100.

Hence we cannot claim that the 34 participants who took part are a perfect cross-section of typical Australians. We cannot even claim that they are fairly typical Australian news users. However, we do claim that their insights are valuable and revealing.

And of these 34 participants, we selected eight for the case studies that appear throughout this report. These eight were chosen because they represented a diverse array of backgrounds and viewpoints and because, taken together,

they reflect the eclectic makeup of the workshops. Half the case study participants were from Sydney, half were from Tamworth; five were women, three were men; and their age and ethnicity ranged widely. The Tamworth participants selected for case studies were: Anne; Carol; Ed; and Fred. The Sydney participants selected for case studies were: Richie; Brittany; Elspeth; and Gail.

One final note. In total, there were 34 participants, but not all of them completed every exercise. As a result, the number of participants for our exercises was often 34, but sometimes fewer.

Taking a CONSTRUCTIVE approach



Much of the academic literature into trust and news media is quantitative (see Lit. Review, p. 12). Many studies have surveyed vast numbers of people to measure, for instance, whether younger people trust news sources differently than older people, and whether users trust news on the internet more than news on the television, and whether South Koreans are more trusting than Brazilians.

By contrast, our workshops were qualitative, seeking to investigate the details and nuances of their relationship with news media.

We adopted a largely constructivist approach to the design of these workshops. That is, our approach acknowledged that users

have different perceptions and interpretations of concepts including “news”, “media” and “trust”, and those different perceptions and interpretations were precisely what we wanted to explore. Inspired by Coleman et al (2009), we investigated participants’ relationship with news media in an open-ended way. That’s not to say that we didn’t bring *any* values or norms to the table. As we explained to participants (not at the outset, but in the second half of the workshop), we were very much working on the premise that quality journalism is vital for the functioning of society and democracy. On that basis, then, we wanted to explore what exactly the workshop participants think the phrase “news media” denotes and connotes, and then to explore how Australians use and trust news media, which included investigating how their relationship with news media might be improved. Specifically, we kept circling around the question: how can user trust in news media be rebuilt?

We began by asking the participants to define news media, quickly and roughly. We then structured the workshop in two parts: first, in Exercises 1 and 2 we explored how participants *use* news media; second, in Exercises 3, 4, 5 and 6, we explored how participants *trust and relate* to news media. Our questions were open-ended, such as: How would you find out more if you heard about the cancellation of a major local event? How do you feel about the news

Our preliminary remarks were simple and did not reflect what we hoped to find but only that we were looking at 'trust in journalism'

media? How do you think the news media feels about you? And while the academic literature tends to stop after exploring how users trust (or don't trust) news media, we went a step further by asking participants to design their ideal news media, and hence how trust might be rebuilt.

The workshops were structured to balance written and oral components. We wanted to cater for both introverts and extroverts, given that introverts can find it difficult to add their voice to an oral conversation. However, the main reason for a balance of written and oral contributions was that we didn't want participants to be overly influenced by each other, nor by us. To ensure this, our instructions for each exercise were simple and general, providing relatively little explanation and context. Our acknowledgement that we were running the workshops on the premise that quality journalism is vital for both society and democracy came only once we were well into the workshops. Similarly, if we mentioned our hypothesis that users want news media that resembles a peer-to-peer model, it was towards the end of the workshops.

The value of mixing written and oral components was revealed when one of the Tamworth participants, Carol, returned 10 minutes after her workshop had ended. She said she was Aboriginal and had found it hard to contribute orally because some of the participants had revealed strong prejudices (see Carol's Case Study, p. 47).

More detail about each of these exercises is contained in the Results.

Written Exercises

Introductory Exercise: What is news?

Instead of giving participants our definition, we asked each of them to write on a post-it note how they defined "news media". Participants had 30 seconds to complete the task.

Exercise 1

Where would you go to find out about....?

In Exercise 1, we asked participants to detail where they would go to find out about a rumoured news story. The aim was to begin to understand what news sources people use and trust. We provided four different "rumours": two local; two national. For each, we asked participants where they would go to find out more.

For instance, we told the participants: "Someone has mentioned in the supermarket that the Tamworth Country Music Festival is not going to be held next year. Where would you go to find out whether that's true?" We designed these scenarios to be a mix of local and national, urgent and non-urgent.

To make them relevant, two of the scenarios varied between Tamworth and Sydney.

Tamworth:

- Where would you go to find out more if you heard the Tamworth Country Music Festival had been cancelled?
- Where would you go if you heard there was a bushfire headed towards Tamworth?

Sydney:

- Where would you go to find out more if you heard the Sydney New Year's Eve fireworks had been cancelled?
- Sydney is expecting a major storm. Where would you go to find out more information?

The third and fourth scenarios were the same for both Tamworth and Sydney:

- Live sheep exports have been banned. Where would you go to find out more?
- You hear Australia Day is going to be moved to a different date. Where would you go to find out whether that's true?

We then provided participants with a worksheet with space in which to write each answer.

Exercise 2:

Where did you go to find the news?

In Exercise 2, we moved from hypothetical to actual, asking participants to provide as much detail and explanation as possible about how they found out about three recent news stories.

We provided one story that was local/national, one that was national, and one that was international. The first story

"I have Faith"

GAIL, 28
Editor, Sydney

Most workshop participants were sceptical about news media, so 28-year-old Gail stood out. "I have faith in the news media," she said. "I'm not a sceptic or a cynic. I don't think there's some grand conspiracy to keep people from the facts. I trust the process stories go through before publishing and I know media organisations aren't making stuff up."



However, Gail was careful to distinguish between sources. On the one hand, social media is a "great source for breaking news, but sometimes you have to wade through a lot of crap". On the other hand, there are reputable outlets such as the ABC, which is "factual and unbiased". "The great privilege of living in this era is that you have the ability to choose where your content is coming from."

For me, that's good. It means I can avoid sources that I know have bad politics or who aren't trustworthy and can focus on good sources. But I guess it means that some people also can just read bad sources and just seek out the places that publish the things they agree with." Gail said that misinformation and extremist views can easily be disguised as news, and can then be spread via platforms including Twitter and Facebook.

"I always come back to thinking of the ABC, SBS and *Sydney Morning Herald* as being trustworthy sources, because they've been around for a long time and because I know that they're big operations that have the resources to research stories properly. They're not some dude's blog that he's writing from his basement in his parents' house." For Gail, the issue of misinformation has been exaggerated. "We're living in this moment where people talk about fake news all the time. I'm not saying that that has never happened but I feel like that has led people to trust media less, when in reality it's not that big of a concern. Yes, we're seeing more of those people on the fringes making a lot of noise and giving everyone a bad name, but I'm sure *The New York Times* is doing as good a job as it was 20 years ago. They haven't suddenly just started making things up."

*Describe your ideal news source.
How would you get it? How would you feel
about it? How would it treat you?*

varied between Tamworth and Sydney. In Tamworth, we provided a local story. In Sydney, where “local” means different things for different participants, we chose a national story.

Tamworth:

- Tamworth Regional Council has proposed putting a levy on businesses to fund bringing more events into town. Where did you find out about this?

Sydney:

- Seven people from one family died in a murder-suicide in Western Australia. Where did you find out about this?

The second and third stories were the same for Tamworth and Sydney participants.

- How did you find out the details of the Federal Budget and how it affects you?
- How did you find out that the proposed peace talks with North Korea are in danger of not going ahead?

Not wanting to limit participants to “traditional” news sources, we asked participants first to

identify the medium/device: mobile or smartphone; television; person; radio; or computer. We then asked them to elaborate about specifics, be that the platform, channel, relationship, or other. We left off print newspapers, encouraging participants to add that category if they wished. One participant did so. We also distinguished between content accessed on a smartphone and a computer.

We gave each participant three worksheets: one for each question. A copy of the worksheet can be found in the Results, p. 34.

Exercise 3:
Your relationship with news media

In Exercise 3, having explored use, we wanted to delve into trust. We were motivated here by our initial framing of this research project as, “Falling in love again? What will it take for audiences to trust news media?” (see Introduction, p. 8).

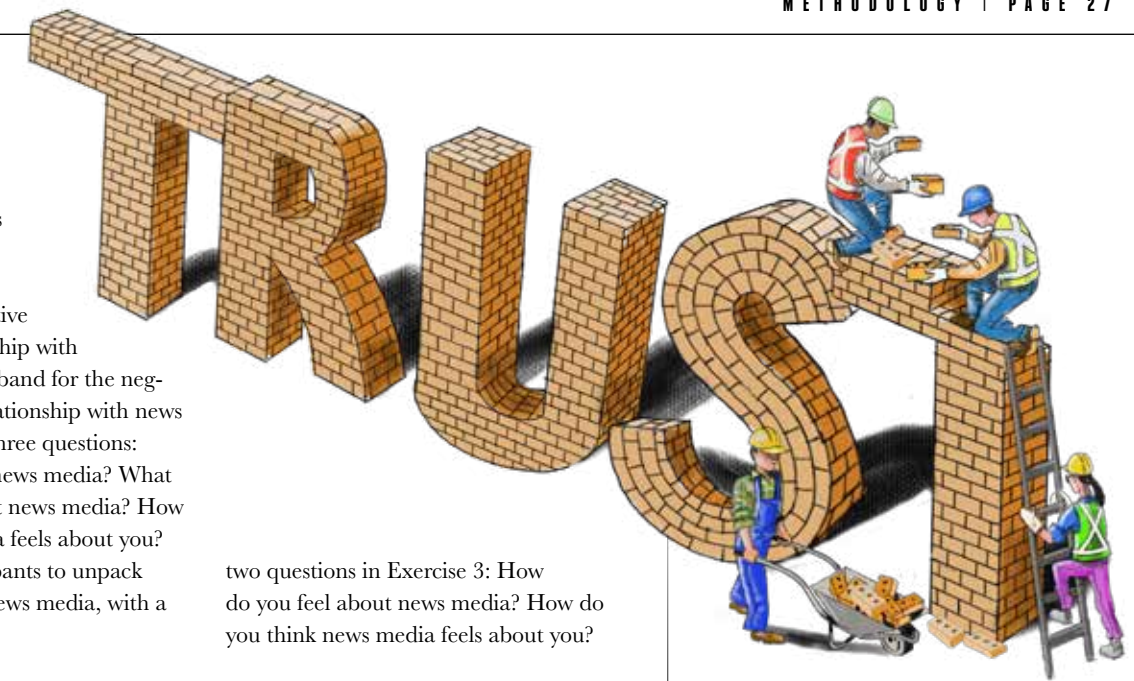
As Blöbaum (2014) writes, trust refers to a relationship. However, the academic literature focuses almost exclusively on how users trust and feel towards media, rather than how media trusts and feels toward users. By contrast, Coleman et al (2009) examined both how news consumers felt about news producers, and also how news producers felt about news consumers. In this research, we did not interview representatives of the news media, but we did explore in some detail how news users think news media feels about them.

In the design of the worksheet, we gave users two coloured bands to write down answers: a yellow band for the positive aspects of their relationship with news media; and a blue band for the negative aspects of their relationship with news media. Then we asked three questions: How do you feel about news media? What do/don't you trust about news media? How do you think news media feels about you? The aim was for participants to unpack their relationship with news media, with a focus on trust.

In the short second section of this exercise we asked participants to cite two specific media sources they'd used, then to reflect on how they felt about these sources. Our motivation here was to explore whether participants have different opinions about the specific news sources they use, and the news media as a whole.

Exercise 4:
Design your ideal news media

In Exercise 4, the focus was on how trust can be rebuilt. This is a blind spot in most of the academic literature. As Fortunati (2014) wrote: “in order to reverse trends in falling levels of trust in societies around the world, [news media] need to be more responsive to feelings of disempowerment among audiences/stakeholders.” Building on this, we wanted to ask news users what they wanted news media to be. Again, our approach was constructivist. We gave four prompts: How would you get it? How would you feel about it? How would it treat you? Describe your ideal news source. For each prompt, our worksheet left a space for participants to write their answers. The third and fourth prompts directly related to



two questions in Exercise 3: How do you feel about news media? How do you think news media feels about you?

Exercise 5:
Attribute Ranking

In Exercise 5, we continued to focus on ideal news media, by getting participants to identify the attributes of news media that were most important to them. Each participant was given 13 small pieces of paper. On each one was printed an attribute, or an imperative, that they might prescribe for their ideal news medium. The 13 attributes were:

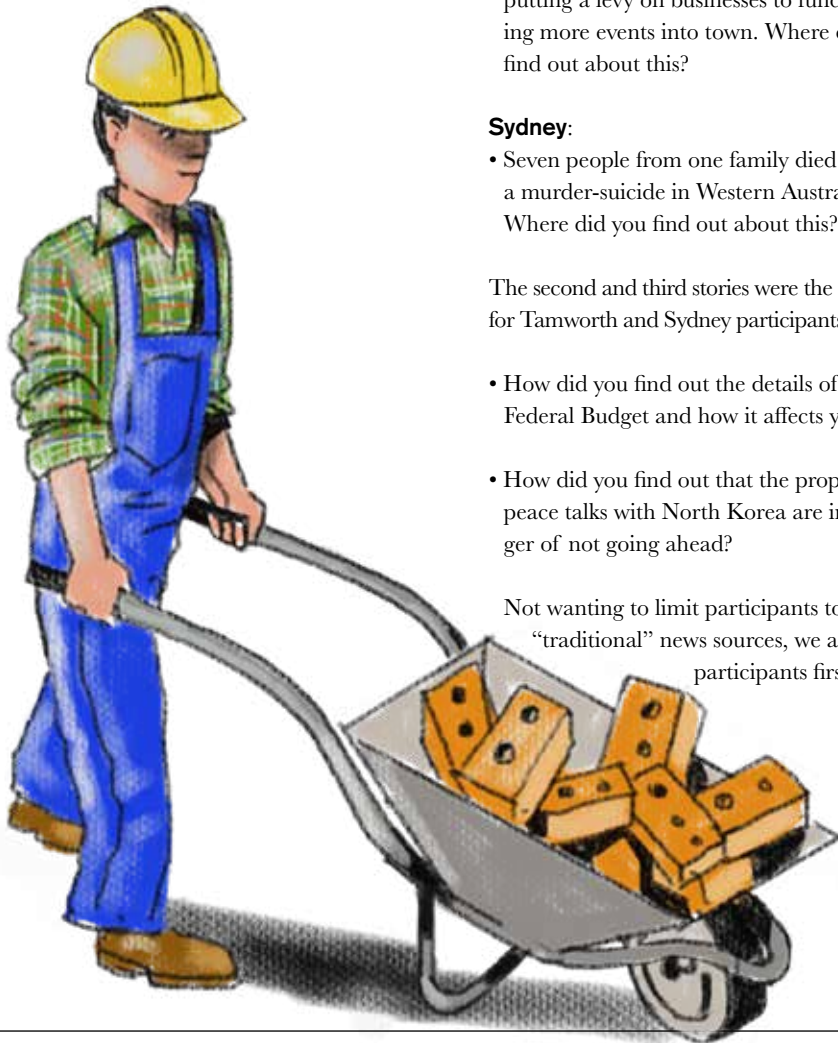
- **Be easy to access** – can I get it when I want it?
- **Be more positive and less negative** – more good news
- **Be visual** – include high quality video
- **Be less ‘voice of god’** – more conversational tone, be human
- **Be interactive** – ability to give extra info to journalist, ability to ask questions and comment
- **Be like a friend** – you feel like you know the journalist
- **Be timely** – content appears quickly
- **Be diverse** – include a variety of voices in stories
- **Be accurate** – check the facts
- **Be objective** – the values and biases of

publication/journalist are clear

- **Be vulnerable** – admit mistakes, prominent corrections
- **Be transparent** – who was interviewed? what was the journalist unable to find out?
- **Be in the public interest** – stories not just chosen on expected clicks

We asked participants to consider these 13 attributes and to pick the six that were most important to them, in order of preference. We also gave participants three blank pieces of paper, on which they could write their own attributes. In this way, we were asking participants to build their ideal news source from the ground up, based on the attributes they valued most in news media.

So again our approach, like Dr Frankenstein's, was largely constructivist. Certainly, we set the parameters by offering 13 specific attributes, but we drafted these broadly, offering participants the chance to contribute their own. And in this way we

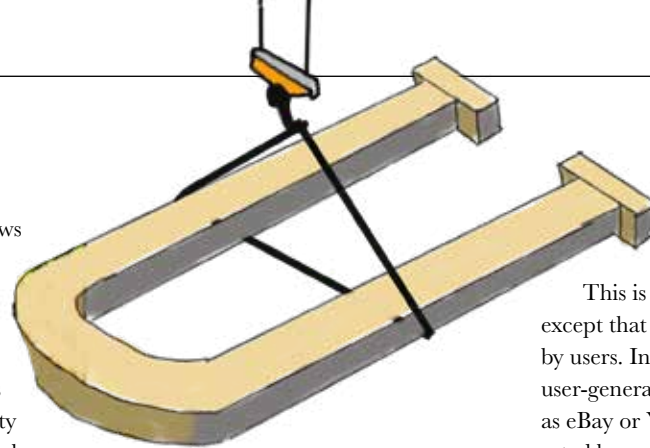


were keen to test the hypothesis that news media users are more likely to trust a media source if it follows a distributed trust model (see Definitions, p. 16). Hence we were trying to assess whether participants wanted their news media to be diverse and include a variety of voices, be vulnerable and admit mistakes, be interactive and enable users to engage with journalists, be less “voice of god” and more conversational, and be like a friend.

We also asked participants to identify any categories they particularly *didn't* care for. This enabled us to identify the news media attributes that were least important, and perhaps even repellent, for users.

Exercise 6: Media Technologies

In the final exercise, we provided participants with information and images that described six different strategies/technologies that have been used in an attempt to rebuild trust between news users and news media. We asked participants to rate how likely they would be to use and trust each of these six strategies/tech-



2. User-generated trustworthiness rating

This is much like the previous strategy, except that in this case the rating is given by users. In this sense, it is akin to a user-generated rating on a website such as eBay or Yelp, where a news source is rated by members of the public. In the US, Facebook is trialling a version of this approach on a large scale.

3. Closed Facebook group for readers and journalists

This option involved the creation of a closed Facebook group for a media outlet, its journalists and its users. That way users could engage directly with news media, by: suggesting story ideas; asking journalists about their methods; questioning editors about why certain stories aren't being covered; giving comments and feedback; and more. This direct contact has the potential to build trust by enhancing open contact and communication, and follows a distributed trust paradigm.

4. Clear labels for news, comment and advertising

This option is self-explanatory. The

nologies, which were drawn from both the academic literature and various real world examples. Our concern, then, was to gauge support for practical solutions for rebuilding trust.

The six strategies/technologies were:

1. Expert-generated trustworthiness rating

On this model, a group of experts would determine the trustworthiness of a news media source, and give it a rating. This approach has been adopted in projects including NewsGuard, which is building a database of news sources whose trustworthiness has been assessed with a traffic light rating system: green means trustworthy; red means untrustworthy; amber means mixed.

reason for its inclusion is because in a digital media landscape the line between news, comment and advertising is often being blurred, as Carson and Miller (2017) show.

5. Go behind the story

On this approach, stories come with explanatory background information, which might include why a particular story has been written, who was interviewed, how the story was edited, whether there have been any corrections or revisions. It might also include detail about the authors and any potential conflicts of interest, as well as a section detailing, “What we still don't know”, or, “What we weren't able to find out”.

6. Readers encouraged to contribute to stories

This involves enabling citizens to contribute to the process of journalism, by providing tips, accounts, images, videos or other materials.

The exercise enabled us to rank these six strategies/technologies into the order preferred by participants.

Media For democracy

ELSPETH, 39

Administrative assistant, Sydney

“I quite trust the media,” said Elspeth.

“I always use search engines. I call it my Professor Google.” Elspeth is multilingual, like many Australians. (The 2016 census reported that 21 per

cent of Australians speak a language other than English at home.) This gives her extra perspectives on the news, and on news media.

“My mother tongue is Cantonese Chinese. I will read the Chinese news and then I will read the English news. I can compare the two and that is, I think, quite interesting.” This is particularly interesting when it comes to topics such as North Korea, or Hong Kong's Umbrella revolution.

“China has a more close relationship

with North Korea. They won't say too many nasty comments. I think this is a bit of an advantage for me, because I can know different perspectives.” Apart from Google, Elspeth also seeks out news on Facebook and in TV reports, and from her husband and colleagues. Her concerns are that sometimes news media don't tell the whole story, because she wants to hear a diversity of voices. She wants “unbiased, transparent, multi-perspective information”, and wants news media to treat her as an “equal”, so that she is not just a passive receiver, but is able to contribute and interact with the news. “News media, it really affects our life. I had an argument with my father. He feels

like this Umbrella Revolution destroyed Hong Kong. He was so furious. We definitely need some trustworthy channel to let him know what happened in the world. In that generation, they think, ‘I need to work and earn money and then I survive and that's alright’. In our generation, we actually think of democracy. We want more. It's really important that we have good media. Not only for us, for my son, the next generation.”



*How has your media use changed?
Do you trust news media?
Have you ever been betrayed by news media?*

Discussion

In keeping with the constructivist nature of our workshops, the discussions were open-ended. To a large extent, they revolved around the questions in the exercises, asking participants to explain and expand upon what they had written. However, we were also specifically interested to investigate the notion of betrayal, which was not addressed in the written work, and which forms a crucial defining component of trust (see Definitions, p. 16).

The workshops ran for two-and-a-quarter hours, which included a 15-minute break, and thus divided neatly into two one-hour sessions. The workshops each had two main oral discussions: the first lasted about 20 minutes, and preceded the break; the second lasted roughly 40 minutes, and came at the end of the workshop. In total, there were about four hours of discussions. Every single participant was directly asked to contribute at one stage or another, but there was insufficient time to cover every topic with each participant. Hence questions of betrayal, for instance, were asked of only two or three participants in each workshop.

The questions asked included:

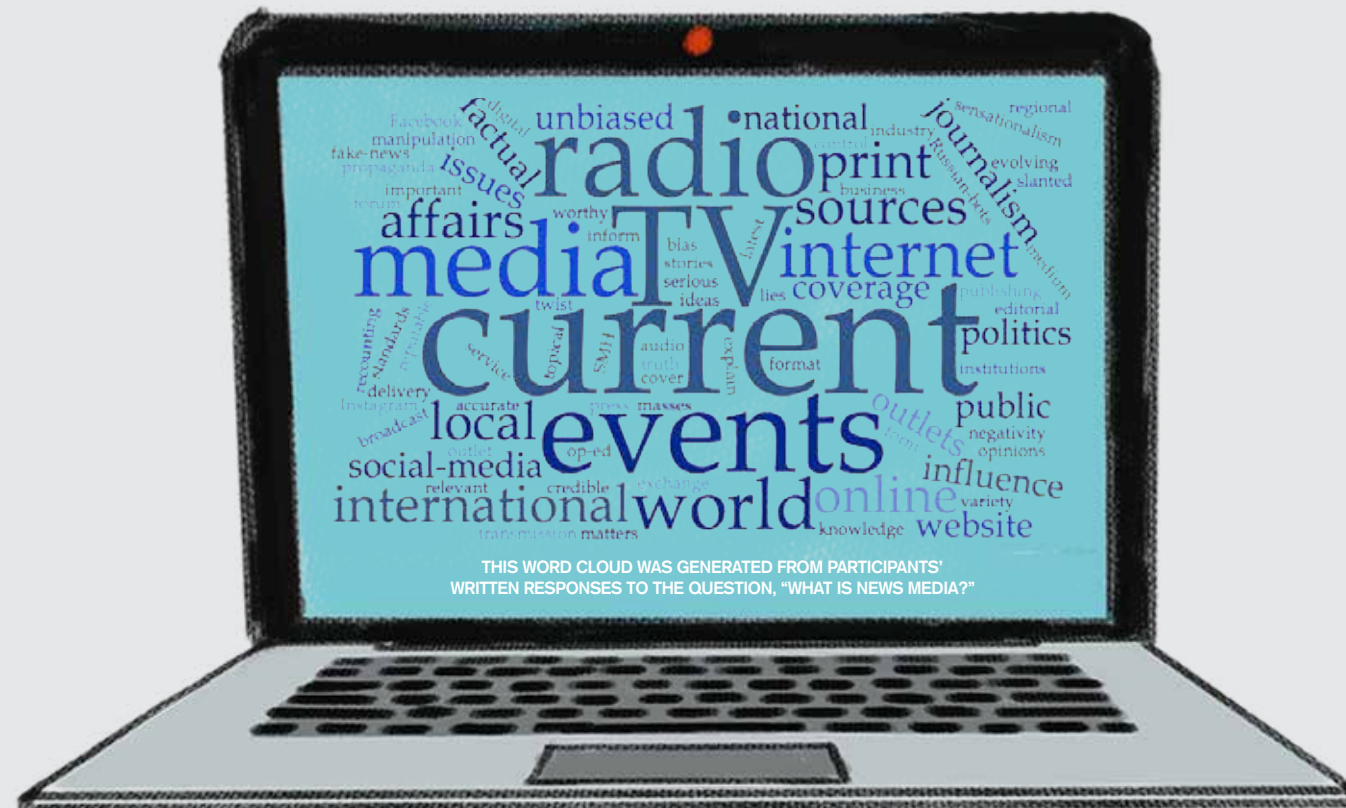
- How has your media use changed?
- Do you trust news media? Why?
- Have you ever been betrayed by news media?
- What sort of attributes do you want your ideal news media to have?

And, towards the end of the workshops:

- Do you agree that quality news media is vital for society and democracy?
- Do we have a duty as citizens to be informed?
- Do you think that news media could benefit from adopting more of a peer-to-peer, distributed trust approach?

The discussion also delved into specific issues. In Tamworth, several participants raised the topic of Barnaby Joyce, the former deputy prime minister who had been the centre of a series of controversies in late 2017 and early 2018. The main themes concerned whether the news media had inappropriately invaded his privacy, but also whether the news media had failed in its reporting duty by not publishing details about Joyce's extra-marital relationship before the local by-election.

RESULTS WRITTEN



INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE
WHAT IS NEWS MEDIA?

In this open-ended exercise, we gave participants 30 seconds to write down on paper whatever came to mind in response to the question, "What is news media?"

A majority of participants (21 of 32) gave definitions which were neither positive nor negative, but neutral.

"TV, radio, internet, newspapers."

"Any media forum that gives you information on events."

However, nearly a quarter of participants were explicitly negative. The seven of 32 who were negative gave answers that included "re-hashed", "slanted", and

"bias". The most negative definition was, "Propaganda, lies, sensationalism, public control, manipulation". By contrast, four of 32 were positive, invoking terms including "unbiased", "accurate" and "reputable".

"Influence, Russian bots, informing the masses, swaying behaviour."

"Credible Institutions where I can find out information."

Fourteen participants referred explicitly to traditional media, while 11 referred to "digital", "online" or "internet". These two groups were not mutually exclusive. Only two participants explicitly cited "social media" or social media platforms.



EXERCISE 1 MEDIA USE

Where would you go to find out more about ... ?

In this exercise, we asked participants where they would go to find out more information about four different hypothetical stories. The first two stories were on local issues (the cancellation of a local event; an impending natural disaster); the second two stories were on national issues (live sheep exports have been banned; the date for Australia Day celebrations will be changed).

WEBWISE To find out more on these rumoured stories, every single participant turned to the internet. For this exercise, 33 participants provided four responses each, yielding a total of 132 answers. Only two of these 132 answers did not cite the internet or its platforms in one way or another. More specifically, participants relied particularly heavily on Facebook and Google. Of the 33 participants, 23 wrote they would turn to Facebook for one or more of the stories, and 22 would turn to Google. The two most cited traditional media sources were the ABC and *The Sydney Morning Herald*: 20 wrote they would turn to the ABC, and 13 wrote they would turn to the Herald. However, some participants stayed well away. As one wrote, "I don't trust MSM [Mainstream Media] reports."



FOCUSED Many of the sources sought out for these hypotheticals were very specific. In response to the question, "Where would you go to find out more about the Tamworth Country Music Festival being cancelled?" more than half the Tamworth participants (nine of 16) replied that they would visit the Tamworth Regional Council website. In response to the question, "Where would you go to find out more about a big storm about to hit Sydney?" every Sydney participant but one replied that they would visit the Bureau of Meteorology website or Facebook page. Repeatedly, participants wanted to get their information "straight from the source". This included eyewitnesses, where possible. For instance, the Sydney storm answers included, "Twitter for up-to-date information regarding the storm (even if it was false) [and] would seek storm chasers potentially if people were streaming about the storm."

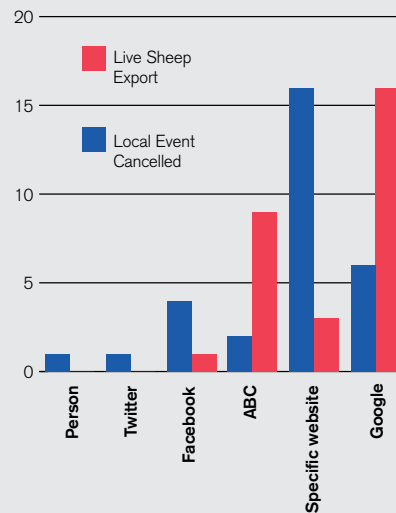


DISCERNING Many who turned to search engines were discerning in their use of search results, looking specifically for reputable sites. These regularly included government sites. In response to the question, "Where would you go to find out more about live sheep exports being banned?", answers included: "Google and look for reputable website e.g. government to source information. I would trust government websites"; and "Google compare main news sites, again preferring abc.net.au and Guardian. Government websites for announcement".

ALTERNATIVES Most participants listed several sources for each story, and participants' sources ranged very widely, including the Greens Party website for information about live sheep exports and BBC, *The New York Times* and Al Jazeera for a non-Australian perspective. Many participants also had well-developed strategies. For example, on the live sheep export ban story: "I will check Facebook/Twitter to confirm ban. Then I would go to a news website to read the story for more details. I will then check an NGO/ENGO [Environmental Non-Government Organisation] website to confirm ban. Return to social media to see how public is reacting to the news."

COUNTRY v CITY Mostly, the workshops in Tamworth and Sydney yielded uncannily similar results. In all four workshops, precisely five participants said they would turn to the ABC. Reliance on social media was consistent too: 11 of 18 Tamworth participants and 12 of 19 Sydney participants wrote that they would turn to Facebook. Reliance on newspapers (or, more accurately, their websites) was also comparable. In Tamworth, nine of 16 wrote that they would turn to the local paper, *The Northern Daily Leader*; and in Sydney, nine of 17 turned to *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Unsurprisingly, *The Northern Daily Leader*

Where would you go to find out more about ... ? (first source only)



was not cited at all in Sydney; by contrast, a quarter of Tamworth participants (four of 16) cited *The Sydney Morning Herald*. One distinction between country and city was that Sydney participants were more likely to use Google: in Tamworth, nine of 16 participants said they would turn to Google; while in Sydney, 13 of 17 said they would do so.

LOCAL v NATIONAL News-gathering approaches varied significantly according to whether or not events were happening in the participants' backyard. To find out more about the cancellation of a local event, a majority of participants listed a specific website, such as the site of the relevant local council, as their first answer. By contrast, for local issues, Google was the most common place that participants wrote down as their first answer (see Graph, above).

ENTERTAINMENT VALUE Sometimes, the motivation was not for finding information, but for entertainment. In response to the question, "Where would you go to find out more about the date for Australia Day being moved?" one participant cited news.com.au, then added, "Real Mark Latham Twitter feed. Why? Humour." To the same question, another wrote, "Wait for the Facebook arguments to start and get out the popcorn."

"Propaganda"

ED, 57
Handyman, Tamworth

"Propaganda, lies, sensationalism, public control and manipulation." This was Ed's answer to the open-ended question that opened the workshop: "What is news media?" A reader of infowars.com and "alternate news", Ed believes that mainstream media is "no longer interested in truth, fact or protecting the people." Like many workshop participants, Ed was concerned about media ownership

and control, but Ed's views were the most extreme. "The media manipulates us and it controls us, because it's where we get our information from. It can tell us anything and the majority of people will believe everything they hear on the news." Given the deception that he says is practised by the mainstream media, Ed feels he has to do his own digging to get the facts. On the internet, he has joined various NSW community groups. That way he gets to see unfiltered news, including eyewitness videos. "I like to know what's going on in the state.



Unfortunately, my only resource that I can trust is the word of the people. That's where I get it from, is from the people themselves, because everyone's got a camera. That's where you get your truth. The media has a responsibility to show that to us, and they don't." Ed believes journalists and news media play a crucial role in a democratic society, but currently they are letting society down. He avoids the "tell-lie-vision". "I believe that journalists have a responsibility and that responsibility is to share the truth and to share the facts. Because the media has to make our politicians be accountable with everything they do. Today, there's more and more corruption in our political ranks ... [but] the media says nothing about it."

For Ed, trust has broken down. He doesn't trust news media, and doesn't trust other institutions, including government and the police. He says he has uncovered the truth about world affairs, and thinks others need to do the same. For news, he says, the only hope is some sort of watchdog. "I think there needs to be an oversight organisation that is monitoring everything that is given to the people as far as information is concerned. If [the media] overstep that mark, give them a grading: this is unreliable, sorry, you lose your licence to practice."

EXERCISE 2 MEDIA USE

Where did you go to find the news ...?

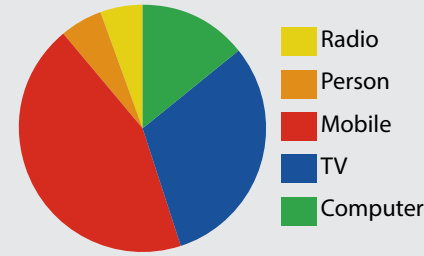
In Exercise 2, participants were asked about where they had in fact accessed information about real recent stories. We wanted to explore their sources in detail, from device right through to outlet (even if this "outlet" included a person). This contrasted with Exercise 1, which asked participants where they would go in the case

that they heard specific hypotheticals. For this exercise, we provided participants with three copies of a worksheet (pictured). We then asked participants to fill in each worksheet according to how they'd heard about the stories. For reasons of timeliness, these stories varied between workshops, and included: the shooting deaths of six members of one family in Western Australia; the Federal Budget and its direct impact on the participants; and North Korea's threat to pull out of peace talks with the US.

On the left side, in the first column, participants were asked to nominate one of five categories: mobile or smartphone; television; person; radio; and computer. (Participants were also told they could add in another category, such as newspaper. One participant did, for one of



Where would you go to find out more about ...



four answers.) In subsequent columns, participants were asked to provide more detail about their initial response. For this exercise, there were 34 participants, potentially giving their response on 102 worksheets. However, a handful of participants had not heard about particular stories. In total, 92 worksheets were completed. The answers varied widely, from smh.com.au accessed via Facebook on a smartphone, to overhearing colleagues.

National story: "Radio (by accident/ was just on in the room) – Triple J – breakfast program"

When asked where they did go, rather than where they would go in a hypothetical case, usage patterns started to become clearer. Of the five options presented in the first column, participants most commonly found out about news stories through their mobile phones (44.9 per cent), followed by television (30.3 per cent), followed by computer (14.6 per cent). In all, participants found the news by smartphone, computer or television on nine out of 10 occasions. In other words, in these 92 responses, participants encountered recent news by phone or computer 60 per cent of the time, and by television 30 per cent of the time.

TOP 3 MEDIA How participants first came across recent news (combined across all three stories)

Device	Percentage
Mobile	44.9%
TV	30.3%
Computer	14.6%

Unsurprisingly, there were variations according to the whether the story was local, national or international. When the story was local/national, a handful of participants had heard about it from a person; when the story was international, no one had. When the story was international, a few more participants had heard about it on the television than when the story was local/national. By contrast, the number of participants who first found out about a story by smartphone, computer or radio stayed fairly constant, no matter whether the story was local, national or international.

Local story: "Person (told in conversation) – Daughter"

National story: "Person – my colleagues were discussing it and I joined – work friends."

International story: "Television (I watch TV every day) channel 7, 9, 10, ABC"

There were also differences by age. Half the participants were under 35; half were over 35. Perhaps unsurprisingly, younger users were more likely than older users to find their news on smartphone or computer, and less likely to find it on television. More than two thirds of

the time, under 35s found these news stories on smartphone or computer; more than one third of the time, over 35s found the news via TV.

When we dug more deeply into the data to look beyond the devices/person offered in the first column, it emerged that participants often came across these stories while not actively engaged in looking for news. Previous studies have found that young people in particular "expect the news to find them" (Knight Foundation, 2017). Our workshops confirmed that many news consumers, young and old, are often passive users.

"TV (just because it was on the TV in background) NBN News"

"Mobile (passive browsing) – I don't remember – habitual news browsing"

Overall, the participants revealed a staggering array of devices and sources. They watched YouTube on their TVs. They visited South Korean news sites on their phones. They followed international events by watching the Twitter feed of politicians, commentators and news sites such as BuzzFeed. And it's true. Just as Jarvis et al (2009) found, some do get their news from TV comedy:

"American TV comedy new shows, e.g., Late Show with Stephen Colbert, Sam Bee, Full Frontal, Seth Meyers."



Ex #2.2

Where did you go to find the news?

START HERE

Please write below why you made this choice

Mobile or Smartphone → Second source

Please write below why you made this choice

Television → First coverage seen

Please write below why you made this choice

Person → Third

Please write below why you made this choice

Radio →

Please write below why you made this choice

Computer → newspaper - fourth source

Phone or Text Who did you call/ text? What is your relationship with them? Is there a voice / journalist you looked for?

Web or App Name the website / app. What made you select this? Did you look in your feed? Please write here what you looked for. Did you look at a specific profile? Please write here the name of profile.

Social Media Which platform? Northern Daily Leader facebook. Which program or type of program? news update did then coverage later. Is there a voice / journalist you looked for? NO

Which channel? ABC TV. Which program or type of program?

Who did you talk to? my son. What is your relationship with that person? mother.

What station? Which program or type of program? Is there a voice / journalist you looked for?

Which platform? Did you look in your feed? Did you look at a specific profile? Please write here the name of profile.

Who did you email? What is your relationship with that person? Is there a voice / journalist you looked for?

Name the website / app. Which program or type of program? Is there a voice / journalist you looked for?

Web or App Northern Daily Leader - seeking more detail on local impact of Budget.

EXERCISE 3 MEDIA TRUST

For this exercise and the next, we shifted our attention from use of news media to trust in news media. That is, we turned from exploring how participants hear about the news to exploring their relationship with the news, with a specific focus on trust. We asked three specific questions: How do you feel about news media? What do/don't you trust about the news media? How do you think the news media feels about you? We then divided each participants' worksheet into two bands: a yellow band for their positive responses; and a blue band for their negative responses.

Assessed by word count, participants had far more negative comments than positive comments about their relationship with news media. Some participants left the positive spaces entirely blank. Across all three questions, the ratio of negative words to positive words was uncannily consistent: three words in the negative band for every two words in the positive band. In all, the 34 participants devoted 2496 words to describing the negative aspects of their relationship with news media, and 1695 words to describing the positive aspects of their relationship with news media.

Arguably, a comparison of word count merely reveals that participants have more to say about the negative aspects

of their relationship with news media. After all, people may love, but also love to complain about news media, right? However, a closer analysis of the substance of the comments reveals that participants are indeed more negative than positive about their relationships with news media.



THE NEGATIVES

Among the negative comments, recurring themes emerged. One theme included feeling manipulated and cheated. "Sometimes I feel used by 'clickbait' stories," wrote one participant. This tied in to concerns about stories that were structured to "be provocative or to drive readership/view numbers/clicks on website/interaction on Facebook". And for some participants, concerns about substance were accompanied by concerns about falling editorial standards.

"Too much sensationalism and rubbish being touted as news e.g. winners of

MKR (My Kitchen Rules). Various outlets trying to outdo each other. No proofreading! So many spelling and grammatical errors."

"Often very biased blatantly misleading/dishonest/prejudice. All about hype of breaking stories, not substance and truth of stories."

OVERWHELMED For several participants, there was a sense of feeling overwhelmed (see Case Study Richie, p. 49). There main reason for this was the sheer volume of news that can be accessed, given the number of voices clamouring to be heard, the proliferation of platforms, and the acceleration of the 24-hour news cycle, among other factors. In 2018, the news is dizzying and relentless in its pace. And on top of this, there is a depressing negativity to much of the coverage.

"Sometimes I feel like we are bombarded with continual news, usually bad, which can be a bit overwhelming"

"Conflicting information. Can be very depressing. Constant news cycle."

"Saturation. So much going on all the time."

TRUST Variations of the word "trust" appeared 25 times among the answers. Repeatedly, its absence was noted, often in the context of perceived bias.

"I don't trust the media to be unbiased, or completely true. I believe it's about shock value in order to reel an audience in. The news and media is often negative."

"I do not trust social media or any individual who is not certified or a journalist or political figure of some sort. I do not trust local newspapers because they amplify the 'little' stories they can publish."

Ex #3

Your relationship with News Media

POSITIVE

How do you feel about the News Media?
I think that it is wonderful that there are so many different sources/types of News Media available and accessible 24/7 if desired

What do you trust about the News Media?
I trust basic news stories on television radio most of the time.
I only use Facebook not Twitter or anything else and find Facebook not to be trusted at all.

How do you think the News Media feels about you?
I suppose without us they wouldn't have a job.

NEGATIVE

Many news stories are started in a particular way to cause over reaction

What don't you trust about the News Media?
or a weighted view politically or socially. There are so many programs that are commentaries on news stories that are only conveying the opinions of the presenter.

I think that frequently we are treated as if we can only understand basic info and thus we are only given limited information

Write down the details of the source you identified previously:
Television

How do you feel about the source? The same as above or differently? Please describe.
As above General news - trustworthy basically other related current affairs programs politically slanted.

Write down the details of the source you identified previously:
Radio

How do you feel about the source? The same as above or differently? Please describe.
As above

BLIND SPOTS Still others worried about what the media wasn't covering, including women, young people, and "third world, Pacific and Aboriginal issues". On a related note, one participant noted the way that, "Social media helps generate bubbles, and feedback loops".

The negative comments also came in response to the question: How do you think news media feels about you? The majority of respondents thought that news media sees them simply as stupid, or a source of revenue, or both. More than four in 10 participants (15 of 34) included the words "dumb", "gullible" or "idiot" in their negative answer; and one-third of participants mentioned "money", "dollars" or "sales".

"They think we are idiots, so many stories are dumbed down. We get a saccharine sweet level of news which kills the brain."

"I'm just a disposable number. Won't trust me as a source. Voice can be blocked out in mainstream media. Just a commodity to them. Treat me like an idiot."

"Money (ad revenue/data mining)."

THREATS Participants also expressed concern about threats facing the industry.

"My main concern is how lack of resources/funding affects the ability of journalist to do good work. That is the biggest threat facing media moving forward."

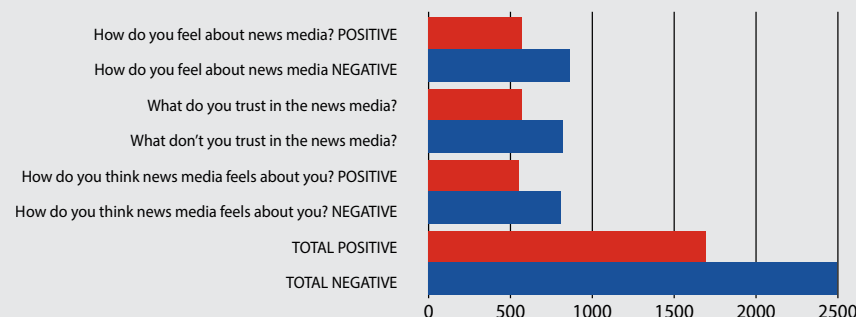
THE POSITIVES

By contrast, however, those who saw positives in their relationship with news media often identified the very same points that others regarded as negatives. This includes the way modern news media is nimble and fast, the way it covers a diverse range of stories, and even the way it offers platforms for longform investigative journalism.

"I wouldn't have a clue what was going on in the world without them so I suppose [I feel] thankful or grateful. I feel like they often take many risks so that we can have important well rounded information so I'm both impressed and again thankful."

"I think that it is wonderful that there are so many different sources/types of news media available and accessible 24/7 if desired."

Participants' relationship with news media by word count



EXERCISE 3

PART 2

MEDIA TRUST

What are the pros and cons of your relationship with news media?

In the second part of Exercise 3, participants were asked to choose two sources that they had identified in an earlier task (Exercise 2), and then to write how they felt about that source. Here we were aiming to test the intuition that participants might feel differently about “the news media”, taken as a whole, and about specific news media sources, including those that they tended to use most often.

This intuition turned out to be correct. While participants were overwhelmingly negative about their relationship with news media as a whole, they were often positive when discussing specific news media sources. In fact, the vast majority of participants were positive about the specific sources they had named in Exercise 2. Of the 66 references made by participants to news media sources, 50 were positive, 12 were mixed and four were negative.

This exercise reinforced just how splintered and diverse the news media landscape has become. In total, participants named 24 sources, ranging from the general (TV, radio) to the specific (Al Jazeera, infowars, Steve Price). The table on page 39 includes all sources that received three or more mentions. The fragmented nature of the news media is illustrated by the size of the “other” category. By far the most mentioned source was the ABC, and all but one of its mentions were positive.

The letter-shaped word clouds to the right are made up of the participants’ answers to Exercise 3, Part 1.

“ABC: More positive. They are held to account for both taxpayer and the government. Not designed for advertisements/to make money. Focus more on transmission of information. Biases still exist, but it appears they focus on balanced reporting.”

“Facebook: Take with a grain of salt use as a starting point.”

“SMH: Relatively positive re-SMH but it is increasingly becoming more ‘lowbrow’ and not really giving us good, quality information. Letters to the editor a good source of information and opinion.”

NEWS SOURCE	RESPONSES POSITIVE	MIXED	NEGATIVE
ABC	13	1	-
FACEBOOK	5	4	-
SMH	5	1	-
TWITTER	2	2	-
GUARDIAN	3	-	-
NEWS.COM.AU	1	1	1
NORTHERN DAILY LEADER	1	-	2
OTHER	20	3	1
TOTAL ALL SOURCES	50	12	4



EXERCISE 4 REBUILDING TRUST

Describe your ideal news source

In Exercise 4, we asked participants to design their ideal news media. This followed logically from Exercise 3. Participants were asked to respond to four specific prompts: How would you get it? How would you feel about it? How would it treat you? Describe your ideal news source.

1. HOW WOULD YOU GET IT?

In accordance with Exercise 1, which revealed a heavy internet reliance, participants wrote that they wanted to access their news online. Across the workshops, only three of the participants did not explicitly mention the internet or one of its platforms. Many also wrote that they wanted it to be free.

“Online, free, mobile phone, instant.”

“It would be a site on the Internet with free/public access. And/or: for breaking news would receive text message alerts. Could also be a phone app.”

“Online – with a print option because a lazy afternoon reading the news is enhanced by good coffee and ‘holding’ a paper.”

Several answers were playful and futuristic.

“Portable device. Instant. Credible. Verifiable. Video. Holographic option. Zero delay. Selective alerts.”

“Number one choice would be broadcast directly to brain e.g. something like Google Glass but more sonic like Doctor Who. Number two choice would be some kind of app for mobile.”



“AI – Google Glass set up. A digital feed that I could tap the side of my head and have stop or blink on a story I wanted spoken to me. Constant in the background.”

2. HOW WOULD YOU FEEL ABOUT IT?

This question in Exercise 4 was the complement to the question in Exercise 3 asking, “How do you feel about news media?”

When asked how they would feel about their ideal news media source, participants cited trust above any other attitude. In order of priority, Australian news users want to trust their news media, to feel positive about their news media and to feel informed by their news media.

How would you feel about your ideal news media?

- 1 Trusting
- 2 Positive
- 3 Informed
- 4 Respectful
- 5 Entertained

Trust was by far the most oft-cited ingredient on participants' wishlists. Across the workshops, 18 of 33 participants wanted to feel trust in their ideal news media. The preference for trust is even more pronounced once we take into account that the second and third most-cited ingredients comprise several synonyms and variations (see below). The notion of trust was raised in various different contexts.

“Part of the family, reliable source of information. Trust it. I don't mind paying extra for it – it seems these days if you pay for news you get a better story.”

“Like I can't wait to read/view it. Informed about the world. Excited that it's tailored to my interest. That I can trust any buyers/prejudice will be clearly stated. That reporters will state when they are presenting their subjective opinions.”

“Valued. Anticipate what I will read – with excitement, interest and not left feeling frustrated. Maybe that expands my horizons and experiences. A source that can be trusted and shared.”

The second biggest category comprised the 16 participants who wanted to feel “positive”, or variations such as “excited”, “inspired”, “grateful” and “happy”.

“Empowered. Informed. Positive. interested. I'd feel nourished after reading it, and like my life had improved (if only for a few minutes) after reading.”

The third biggest category comprised the 15 participants who wanted to feel “informed”, “interested”, “educated” or “intelligent”.

“It would treat me like an intelligent person.”

Two participants wrote that they wanted to feel entertained; and two wrote “respectful”.

3. HOW WOULD IT TREAT YOU?

This question in Exercise 4 was the complement to the question in Exercise 3 asking, “How do you think the news media feels about you?”

When asked how their ideal news media would treat them, more than three quarters of participants said that they wanted to be treated as intelligent. This was by far and away the most common response. The second most common response, shared by two-thirds of participants, was that they wanted to be treated with respect. To a lesser extent, participants also wanted their ideal news media source to treat them in an unbiased way, as part of a community, and as more than just a source of revenue.

How would your ideal news media treat you?

- 1 As intelligent
- 2 With respect
- 3 Without bias
- 4 As part of a community
- 5 As not just revenue source

Overwhelmingly, participants wanted to be treated with intelligence, which they expressed with a range of synonyms and variations, including “intelligent”, “educated”, “knowledgeable”, “rational”, “not gullible” and “not patronising”. Across Tamworth and Sydney, 26 of 34 participants listed this as an ingredient of their ideal news source.

“As an intelligent and knowledgeable person who is not gullible.”

“It would treat me intelligently – use sophisticated vocabulary, go into detail on historical/social context of particular stories. Like I'm a global citizen that should be informed of a variety of issues.”

“As an informed, intelligent, articulate thinking person. Someone who appreciates both sides/all aspects of

a story, is open to and appreciates new ideas, needs to be exposed to alternative points of view, enjoys learning and appreciates a challenge. A lifelong learner.”

The second most common answer, given by 12 of 34 participants, was respect. Often, the desire to be treated with respect was combined with the desire to be treated as intelligent.

“With respect and intelligence. No tricks or echo-chamber approaches – just worthwhile content. As a fellow Traveller. As someone who the content is for rather than someone just tagging along.”

“With respect, like I am an intelligent person.”

Meanwhile, six participants wanted to be treated by news media without bias or hidden agendas, four wanted to be treated as part of a community and two of 34 wanted to be treated as more than just revenue.

“As an interested, intelligent and even minded member of the Australian/world community.”

“Valued customer and not just revenue. Less clickbait and actually respecting me as a reader with well thought-out articles.”

“It would treat me as part of a valued community of readers not consumers. It would treat me as though I was intelligent and capable of understanding complex topics or viewpoints. Its goal would be to ensure I was well informed – nothing more.”

4. DESCRIBE YOUR IDEAL NEWS SOURCE

The final part of Exercise 4 was open-ended, asking participants to write down their ideal news source. As a result, the responses were wide-ranging, making it difficult to

tease out themes and trends. Interestingly, the most common recurring prescription was for diversity, with 11 participants wanting an ideal news source that was “diverse” or had “multiple perspectives”. This included both diversity of presenters and (more commonly) diversity of viewpoints and stories.

“News presented by people from a variety of backgrounds, maximum of one straight white guy. Not for profit, government funded but protected from influence or budget threats like ABC should be. It should have closed captions if on TV.”

“No bias (very critical). Can I just focus on the politics (self interest) multi perspectives/angles/different lenses. Fair. Easy to get the required info (technology advancement).”

Clearly-labelled facts were sought after by 10 participants who prescribed “facts only”, or analysis without comment, or clearly separated and identified comment. Also, media ownership was a recurring concern, with nearly a quarter wanting their news source to have non-private ownership, be that “public utility”, “not for profit” or “community owned and controlled”.

“It would be not controlled by any person or organisation it would inspire people to think about their opinion and someone's opinion.”

“Rather than setting an agenda for you, it would allow you to search for things you find relevant and provide you with multiple sources of information. E.g. videos of government announcements, intellectual analysis, opinion pieces. No advertising. Also provide background of each contributor – doesn't need to be original, but have variety.”

“Fast, accurate, facts only, detailed, non-censored, from all around the world – not just Western.”

EXERCISE 5 REBUILDING TRUST

Which attributes are important to you in a news source?

In Exercise 5, we gave participants 13 small pieces of paper. On each one was printed an attribute, or an imperative, that they might prescribe for their ideal news medium.

We asked participants to pick the six that were most important to them, in order of preference. We also supplied blank pieces of paper, on which participants could write their own attributes. In other words, we took a Frankenstein's Monster approach, asking participants to build their ideal news source from the ground up, based on the attributes they valued most in news media. Among other things, we were keen to test the idea that users wanted a media constructed more along peer-to-peer lines, in keeping with notions of distributed trust.

What participants want their news source to be

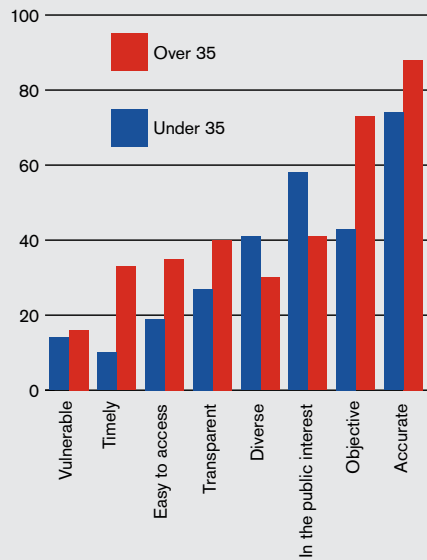
1. Accurate
2. In the public interest
3. Objective
4. Diverse
5. Transparent
6. Easy to access
7. Vulnerable
8. Timely
9. Interactive
10. More positive
11. Visual
12. Less "voice of god"
13. Like a friend

At the top of people's wishlists were traditional journalistic imperatives: the three most commonly-cited attributes were: be accurate; be in the public interest; and be objective. All but one of the participants (33 of 34) listed "be accurate" among their top six attributes for a news source. "Be in the public interest" was second most popular, chosen among the top six by 28 participants, and "be objective" was chosen by 27. These were followed by "be diverse", "be transparent" and "be easy to access". These six attributes were chosen among the top six of more than half the participants. The least valued attributes were "be less 'voice of god'" (chosen by two participants) and "be like a friend" (chosen by one).

Did the results confirm our hypothesis? Did they show that news users want more of a peer-to-peer version of news media, which follows a model of distributed trust, rather than institutional trust? (see Definitions, p.16). Yes and no. Participants' preferred attributes were overwhelmingly those that prevailed in decades past, when journalism ran on a top-down model and institutional trust was the norm. These attributes were accuracy, objectivity and the public interest.



What participants want their news source to be (weighted results)



By contrast, the attributes that align with a peer-to-peer approach had mixed results: most participants wanted their media to be diverse and include a variety of voices; many wanted news media to be vulnerable and admit mistakes; some wanted news media to be interactive and enable users to engage with journalists; only two wanted news media to be less "voice of god" and more conversational; and only one wanted news media to be like a friend.

Further, three participants included among their top six an attribute they had written down themselves: "Use of language; spelling; grammar – sub-editing"; "be well-written/presented, suitable vocab"; and "Entertaining form/prose of journalism, style of writing".

Generally, participants in Tamworth and in Sydney valued the same attributes, with two notable exceptions. The most stark was that one-third of Tamworth participants (six of 17) wanted their news media to "be more positive", whereas this was regarded as relatively undesirable in Sydney, where only one participant listed it among her top six. In Sydney, "be more positive" was the least valued of all attributes, equal

with "be less 'voice of god'" and "be like a friend". However, Sydney participants placed a much higher value on news media's role in furthering the public interest than Tamworth participants. In Sydney, every participant cited "be in the public interest" among their top six; whereas in Tamworth, only two-thirds cited it among their top six.

Participants were also asked to rank their six chosen attributes in order of preference. Two participants wrote that they wanted to feel entertained; and two wrote "respectful" their most desired attribute a score of six, their second most desired attribute a score of five, and so on. These weighted results are similar to the un-weighted results. For instance, the top six attributes are identical (though their order is slightly different). Using the weighted results, differences emerged between age groups, however. Most obviously, under 35s favoured "be in the public interest" and "be diverse" far more than over 35s, as shown by the Graph, left.

As an optional extra task, we also asked participants to point out any attributes they didn't care for, and which they thought were irrelevant or unhelpful. Half the participants identified such attributes. Two of these attributes surprised us: more than three-quarters of the participants who selected attributes they didn't care about included "be like a friend" among their selections; and two-thirds selected "be less 'voice of god'". Clearly, if the workshop participants want to move to a distributed trust model of news media consumption, it will have to be a model that needs careful articulation and planning. This can be interpreted in various ways. Perhaps we can infer that users want a news media they can trust in a way that blends elements of institutional trust with elements of distributed trust. Or perhaps they do want a distributed trust model of news media, but in a form that builds in several of the key values (accuracy, the public interest, objectivity) that used to prevail in the days of institutional trust.

The long view

ANNE, 68
Retired teacher, Tamworth

At 68, Anne was among the workshops' oldest participants, giving her added insight into the flux of today's media. "We haven't talked about the need for instant news," Anne said. "Now there are so many sources. I grew up on the farm. We got *The Daily Telegraph* — it was quite well regarded then — four days after it was printed. Then we used to get the ABC news on the radio. And I was talking to a friend yesterday about bomb cam. Remember, with the Iraq war? That was the first time you got instant



footage of what was happening in wars. And then 9/11. And now, because there are so many news sources, they're all grabbing for something. On the TV, the breaking news might be that someone fell over in Pitt Street in Sydney. There's this constant need to be first and to have lots of news." This need for speed is causing problems.

A few decades ago, her options consisted of *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *ABC News* and *Prime News*. "News was fact and we only got limited information. Now there's a proliferation of sources and my concern is, what's the impact on kids? Where are they sourcing their news?" As a retired teacher, Anne is passionate about preventing bullying. However, she thinks that some of the biggest stars in the news media are bullies. "We have various media outlets or people on various media outlets thinking that they can say anything. But when kids say anything in a school, it's — you can't do it. We've got so much poor role modelling happening." To get her news, Anne looks at the websites of a range of local and metropolitan newspapers, listens to ABC radio, and checks Facebook. Increasingly, she's frustrated by spelling mistakes and grammatical errors, and with the way reports are dumbed down. She wants to be treated as "an interested, intelligent and even-minded member of the Australian/world community ... and I'd like to have inspiring journalists, who inspire people to think".

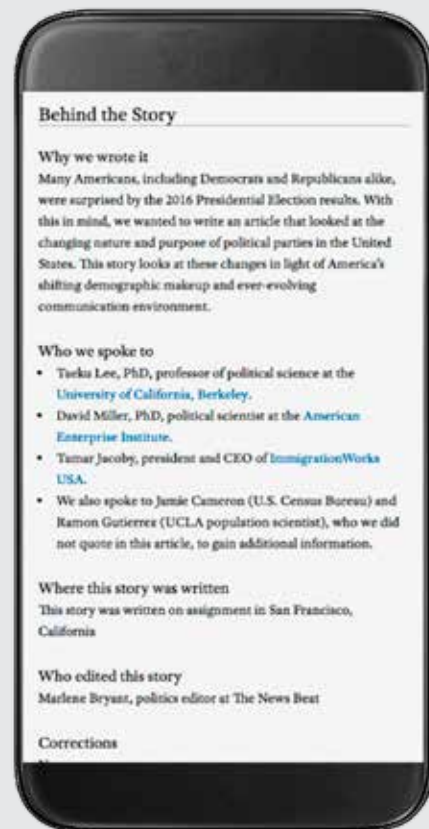
EXERCISE 6 REBUILDING TRUST

Which strategy would you use?

To finish, in Exercise 6 we explained six different media strategies/technologies that might help restore the trust between news users and news media. These are all strategies that have been and are being tried in various incarnations, in the attempt to rebuild user trust in news media. We then asked participants to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 how likely they would be to use each strategy/technology: a score of 1 denotes highly unlikely; a score of 5 denotes highly likely. In order of participants' preference, the six strategies were:

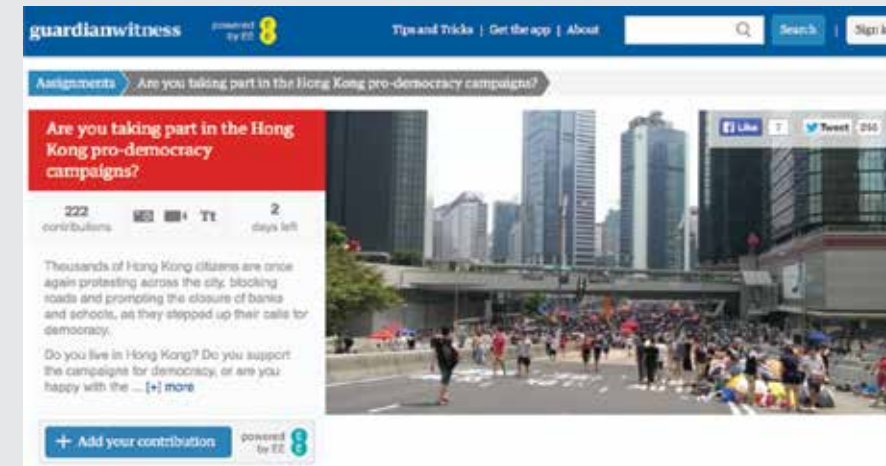
#1 GO BEHIND THE STORY

This is the approach taken by *De Correspondent*, which supplements stories with background information. This information might include an explanation of why a particular story has been written, who was interviewed for the story, how the story was edited and whether there have been any corrections or revisions. It might also include detail about the authors and any potential conflicts of interest, as well as a section detailing, "What we still don't know", or, "What we weren't able to find out". In this way, it is a significant step towards greater transparency, in which the processes of journalism are held to the light. It also has potential to build trust in a way that is more peer-to-peer, less top-down. For workshop participants, this was the clearly preferred strategy/technology.



#2 CLEAR LABELS FOR NEWS COMMENT & ADVERTISING

This option is self-explanatory. The reason for its inclusion is because in traditional media editorial and advertising were very clearly separated, at least in theory. In traditional media, this separation was sometimes referred to as "church and state". However, the line between the two is becoming increasingly blurry in a digital landscape, where news is proving difficult to monetise. As a result, several newsrooms have turned to "native advertising", "branded content" and "sponsored content". As Andrea Carson and Denis Muller found in their study, *The Future Newsroom*, digital-only newsrooms such as The Guardian and BuzzFeed are turning to content that blends editorial and advertising in a bid to generate revenue. Workshop participants, however, named clear labels for news, comment and advertising as their second-favourite option.



#3 EXPERT-GENERATED TRUSTWORTHINESS RATING

On this model, a group of experts would determine the trustworthiness of a news media source, and give it a rating. Who would the experts be? We told participants that they should imagine the experts as their ideal assessors, whether that be journalists, academics, lay people, others, or some combination. These experts would then rate news sources (and perhaps stories) on a trustworthiness scale. This approach is already being tried, including by NewsGuard, which is building a database of news sources whose trustworthiness has been assessed with a traffic light rating system: green means trustworthy; red means untrustworthy; amber means mixed. (It's worth noting that this is not the same as the fact-checking conducted by organisations such as Politifact, The Conversation, or Aos Fatos in Brazil; however, news media organisations that engage in rigorous fact-checking are more likely to be assessed as trustworthy by experts.) For workshop participants, this strategy was their third-favourite.



#4 READERS ENCOURAGED TO CONTRIBUTE TO STORIES

Given the potential of digital technology (and in response to financial pressures), some newsrooms are opening themselves up to contributions from users. This way every citizen can contribute to the process of journalism, by providing tips, accounts, images, videos or other materials. This can build distributed trust, enabling users to be an integral part of the news-making process. Workshop participants rated this fourth out of the six options.

#5 CLOSED FACEBOOK GROUP FOR READERS AND JOURNALISTS

This option involved the creation of a closed Facebook group for users and journalists so that users can engage directly with news media by: suggesting story ideas; asking why certain stories aren't being covered; giving comments and feedback; and more. The idea was prompted by the closed Facebook group set up by *The New York Times* for its subscribers in Australia, and can potentially build trust by enhancing open communication. It also follows the distributed trust model, including by opening up media outlets and journalists to tips and criticism from users. However, this was the second least-favoured option for participants.

#6 USER-GENERATED TRUSTWORTHINESS RATING

This is much like #3, except that in this case the rating is given by users. In this sense, it is akin to a user-generated rating on a website such as eBay or Yelp, where a news source is rated by members of the public. A version of this approach is being trialled on a large scale in the United States by Facebook, which is enabling its users to rate news pages for trustworthiness. Of the six choices, this was the least favoured strategy among workshop participants, with some noting that it risked confusing trustworthiness and popularity.



Preferred media strategies	Average score
Go behind the story	4.21
Clear labels for news, comment and advertising	3.93
Expert-generated trustworthiness rating	3.56
Readers encouraged to contribute to stories	2.76
Closed Facebook group	2.71
User-generated trustworthiness rating	2.44

Interestingly, the list of preferences was identical for younger and older workshop participants, apart from one exception: the under 35s swapped the order of their two least favourite options, ranking the user-generated trustworthiness rating at fifth and the closed Facebook group at sixth.

WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS

With its imposing facade and generous proportions, the building that houses the Tamworth Community Centre exudes solidity and permanence. It dates from 1896, a time when news meant newspapers. And, presumably, trust.

More than a century later, eight participants shuffled into one of the Community Centre's oversized rooms for our 2pm workshop. We were confident that smartphones, search engines and social media would loom large. But what about radio? And TV? And what about newspapers?

In 1896, the local newspaper was *The Tamworth Observer and Northern Advertiser*. Against the odds, it still exists in both print and digital versions as *The Northern Daily Leader*. Do people still read it? What do they think of it? Do they trust it?

"I just want to thank everyone for coming along today," said Claire, following Peter's acknowledgement of country. "We're really interested in your opinions. Feel free to be open and honest. Don't give us what we want to hear."

We began by asking each participant to define "news media".

"Propaganda, lies ..." said Ed, a 57-year-old handyman, "... sensationalism, public control, manipulation."

Over the next two hours we discovered that Ed was profoundly distrustful. He rarely watched the "tell-lie-vision" (see Case Study, p. 33).

One week later, 400 kilometres away, our fourth and final workshop was coming to an end in the compact, modern meeting room of the Centre for Media Transition at UTS when Brittany became emotional.

RESULTS
SPOKEN

"Have you ever felt betrayed by news media?"

Starting confidently, then faltering, she recounted the way her family suddenly found themselves "in the middle of the circus" after being involved in a newsworthy incident.

"They definitely got things wrong," she said, recovering her composure. Yes, she had felt betrayed, and no longer trusts domestic sources of news (see Case Study, p. 51).

These responses made dramatic bookends to our four workshops. And Ed and Brittany are not alone in their distrust. But the workshops also revealed veins

of trust, and even sympathy, for news media.

What follows are excerpts from discussions across the four workshops. They have been organised thematically, not chronologically. And, to avoid duplication, the eight participants who feature in the case studies (including Ed and Brittany) play only a minor role.

CHANGING USAGE

Bits and bytes

Reflecting on her media use, 61-year-old Zara was struck by how much she used her phone. "When I say phone, it's to link to other stuff. Online reporting. I've changed completely from someone who always read the newspaper, to someone who hardly ever reads the newspaper." Now she grazes, reading an article from here and a comment from there. "Just bits. I don't subscribe to anyone and read a whole thing. I cherry pick around interest areas and things that are in the news that people might be commenting on. Then I will follow that up."

Social media

When we suggested in Tamworth that people are getting their news more from social media, 32-year-old Harry corrected us. "I'd say a lot more people are getting it *through* social media," he said. "Social media is the conduit to the news, to the ABC, *The Daily Telegraph* website, wherever you want to go, but Facebook itself is not actually writing, publishing and finding those journalists who make the stories. That's where I think more people need to make the distinction. If you get a newspaper delivered to your mailbox every morning, you don't praise the mailbox for giving you that story."

Addicted to news

"Because of the Facebook feed, I think I've become addicted," said Viv. "I never used to be. That can be a problem." Viv is a 41-year-old teacher in Sydney. Originally from the United States, she's been

reflecting closely on her relationship with news media, particularly since the election of Donald Trump as President. And she's not sure her relationship is healthy. "It's like one amorphous experience of updates of my friends' children and then what Kim Jong-un says and the latest Stormy Daniels thing and all these really sensationalist characters that are in the news currently. It's a form of entertainment and I feel like I'm informing myself and being a good citizen — but I feel like I'm doing it a bit too much. It all blends in on the feed." Does this mean that sometimes the deeper story is missed because her attention is constantly being attracted by the latest headline, status update or post? "Yeah. Where will I go and follow up on some stories that I find are more important and more interesting? I love the news, obviously. We have to. We're so global now. Feeling connected to each other in the world, it's hard not to engage in it."

Routines

Despite the fragmented media landscape, some still stuck to routines, including 19-year-old student, Wanda. "I rely on SBS emails in the morning, to get what's going on. Then if anything interests me, I'll go further into that and maybe look at more. If it's international, I'll only generally use SBS because I've found that I have a really big distrust of more social media sites. When there are too many opinions that aren't factual, I get annoyed. I don't trust it. If it's an actual journalist, I find that I have a lot more respect and also I'm a lot more interested in what's going on."

Entertainment? Disappointment!

"Growing up, we always used to watch the news," said Wanda, who came to Australia from Ireland. "You'd always have a story and then the next story and the next story. What I've noticed in Australian news, is it's gone very, very Fox Newsy. Where it's, 'Coming up next!' It's all so clickbaity. I've found that whenever I watch the news I'm actually

Overlooked

CAROL, 51

Educator, Tamworth

Ten minutes after all the participants had left, there was a knock at the door. It was Carol, wanting to add something. "You're worried about your safety, because you're in a room and you're on your own. They probably didn't pick up that I was Aboriginal, you know what I mean? In a way it's good to be a fair Aboriginal person. You get to suss out the feelings of everybody."

Carol says that indigenous communities face particular challenges when it comes to news media. Access to news is often an issue; for some remote communities, television is the only medium. In our workshops, many participants admitted to feeling

overwhelmed by news media; but indigenous Australians sometimes have the opposite problem. They feel excluded by limited access. And for those who do have good access, mainstream reporting of indigenous issue is often poor. "I work a lot with really remote women. My grandmother's community is Toomelah. There's a lot of poor reporting that went on about Toomelah, saying that just about everyone that comes out

of there is a paedophile. Well, as a community person, I know that's not true. The way that media portrays our men, Aboriginal men, is really bad." In her written responses, she said news media "scaremongers", "hides the truth", "stereotypes minorities" and "has an agenda". The effects of media portrayals can be dramatic, including during the Northern Territory National Emergency Response, or "Intervention", of 2007. "I was in Alice Springs when the intervention started," she told us after the workshop had ended. "Then I get home and it hit Tamworth. You could see non-Aboriginal people would cross the road if one of our black men was walking down the street. Things that happen nationally impacts here. How do we talk about the truth when you've

got people on the ground that only listen to the bullshit side of things about our people, and the really negative stuff?" Carol doesn't trust the local newspaper. She says it has a blind spot for indigenous issues. When it does

tackle indigenous topics, it is overly negative. Her most trusted news sources are NITV and SBS. And among indigenous communities, news is often conveyed orally. When she visits remote women, Carol often brings the news with her. For many people, Carol is the news source. "We start off with the anecdotal stuff, and hear what we're hearing. We talk the truth."



on my phone, looking for the proper news that they're talking about. You are actually looking for the proper story, and he's talking away at you, but you're not actually getting it. There is a lot of fluff around."

Trust then and now

At 66, Adam is a research analyst who can put the issue of media trust into some sort of perspective. Fifty years ago, when he was a kid, people trusted banks, and took news reports as gospel. "There was a general sort of trust," he said. "I can recall thinking, 'Why was [Fidel] Castro so evil?' Because that's how our media portrayed him." For Adam, the assumed verities of trust started to wobble during the Vietnam War, when he and his peers began questioning what to believe. "And maybe there's been an acceleration, because of all the different sources now, of this distrust."

"I think, even though I read a lot, it's also good to have a bit of scepticism around what you're reading, just so that you can gather your own facts and make up your own mind."

"I source everything from right wing to left wing, and everything in between, particularly on the internet. Somewhere in amongst all of that I think is, for me, the truth and the reality."

OVERWHELMED AND BETRAYED

Overwhelmed

In our workshops, discussions would lurch violently from delight to despair and back again. This was particularly the case when discussing the 24-hour news cycle. When it comes to news media, participants feel both spoiled for choice, and spoiled by choice.

"On a positive side, I think it's wonderful that there are so many different sources of news media available these days, and they're accessible 24/7," said 61-year-old Olivia from Tamworth. "Going back

through the years, you sat down to the evening news, and that was it.

And John Laws on the radio. But sometimes too you feel like it's a bit overwhelming. You're bombarded with all these bad things all the time."

A week later in Sydney, 61-year-old Zara agreed: "The constant bombardment, I guess it's the 24-hour cycle thing, has necessitated a huge generation of content on all sorts of platforms. I know for myself. I thought, 'Oh, I'd quite like to get daily things into my email from *The Guardian*, because I like *The Guardian*. You could choose which ones you wanted. In they came, flood, flood, flood, flood, and I don't read them. I just delete, delete, delete, delete, delete. Because I realised it's



too much. I don't want that."

This sentiment was echoed by 31-year-old Sydneysider Gianni. "It can be quite overwhelming sometimes. I think that's just the nature of the 24-hour news cycle."

Betrayed

When we asked participants whether they'd felt betrayed by news media, we meant generally, not personally. As in, have you ever felt the news media has broken your trust by reporting, for instance, that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, or that Donald Trump would lose the election? Indeed, some participants felt betrayed in a general way, including Xander. He felt let down by Sydney's radio landscape. "In Sydney we have a hard thump radio station, we have a wishy-washy irrelevance that's public-funded and FM. If you want to listen to radio, they're your choices now, and I feel extremely betrayed by that."

Even more betrayed

And to our surprise, several participants said they'd been personally betrayed by news media. The most startling account came from Brittany (see Case Study, p. 51). Others included Trish, who was working at a pub accused of condoning homophobic violence, an accusation widely reported in both the mainstream and alternative media. "We got bombed on social media," said Trish. "I was in the middle of it and I saw the reporting and it was copied and pasted." Was the story every set straight? "It was never reported on after that. Nobody followed up on the fact that the pub was cleared of all the allegations. We still have lots and lots of people who won't go there because they think it's a homophobic pub or a transphobic pub. I was the one running the Facebook page and that was a lesson — I never, ever want to be involved in PR."

Infuriated

Some participants admitted to being infuriated by news media — which they sometimes enjoyed. "I have a cousin whose political and social position is completely different to mine," said Zara. "Anything that he links to on social media, I know I will hate, I know would make me furious. So I will read it, just so I can feel furious. I think, 'How can you?'" Zara likes being exposed to contrasting viewpoints, particularly in the comments. For Zara, these comments often lead to heated debates, on topics including gay marriage and the Israel/Palestine conflict. "Suddenly you find yourself in a thread on social media. I'd much rather have all those people in the one room and we all sat around for three hours with a glass of wine and really talk. But because it's all coming in and there are opposing views it's very ... it's very stressful, actually. I'm buying out of that. It's just too stressful."

"When you get interviewed, some information you want to relate to the interviewer or the journalist, but when you come in they've already fixed what sort of information they want to get from you."

"It's all about the clicks, it's not about the facts."

GRIPES

Dumbed down

"Media plays a really important role in our society in terms of being a fourth estate," said 24-year-old Natalie. "We put a lot of trust and power in certain people in our society, so it's really important to hold those people to account." Articulate and engaged, Natalie is a disability officer who attended the evening workshop in Tamworth. With a degree in communications, she is a keen media observer.

"It concerns me when news sources are designed to generate revenue, either through advertising or creating clickbait,

Global news

RICHIE, 18

High school pupil, Sydney

For 18-year-old Richie, trust is in short supply. "It's so dangerous. Online they have this whole world that's just like a great big fallacy. You can't really trust anything on there." Older participants were curious about Richie's perspective. As adults, they found news media confusing, and so wondered how young people were coping. As 50-year-old Xander put it: "I used to go to school at eight o'clock in the morning and get *The Age* and sit there for 40 minutes reading a credible source. I grew up through my high school years learning how to discern that. But the young kids at school [now], they're in the minefield." Richie nodded, then said: "As a high



school student nowadays, you're socially obliged to have social media. And when you're in this minefield, there are so many headlines which are so amplified and exaggerated. You click on it, you read it, and then you try to delve deeper into research on the internet trying to find a source that backs it up. You feel completely just confused, you don't understand where you are with any matters or any affairs that are of relevance."

In the quest to find credible, reliable sources, he has subscribed for online news services, and checks government websites. He says he tends to trust larger news outlets, including the ABC and *The Daily Telegraph*, and trusts the printed word over online, even though he rarely if ever reads print editions. By contrast, he doesn't trust social media, individual reporters and local newspapers. In fact, he has grown sceptical of most media, he says, unless they can publish research to validate their claims. "As a high school student, I'm experiencing this new generation, living their lives in this virtual world in their phones and experiencing everything through this. It's a world in itself, and I see these children, who don't see anything outside or experience anything else. And when, say, scrolling through Facebook, you have all these headlines, which are really amplified and just exaggerated in every way." In this minefield, Richie's ideal news source would be truly global and completely trustworthy. "I would like an international news source that covers dominant worldwide affairs, which is recognised by many nations, such as a 'United Nations information source'," he wrote on his worksheet. "It would be completely objective and simplistic in its prose, backed by qualitative research, and would serve as the factual and trustworthy foundation for the media sources around the globe."

and want people to continually access the stories. That definitely raises a lot of concern, because it's not then about quality of information, it's more about readable information." How, then, does Natalie feel the news media treats her? "It treats me as being somewhat simple-minded. So often the articles that I read are very short, straight to the point, and don't really delve into bigger issues. So I feel like I have to go to outside sources to get in-depth views."

Participants felt that they were being treated as stupid, and that the news was being dumbed down. "Actually, they're the very words that I've written," said Karen, a 65-year-old educator also attending the Tamworth evening workshop. "Our local television news is now being broadcast from Canberra, and so they mispronounce things, like Quirindi. And certainly dumbing down the language that's used."

Bias

"For too long, different sources have been biased, one way or the other," says Gary, a 41-year-old sports supervisor. "That's not a good way to deliver your news. Too many people are influenced by particular bias and then they're going out and telling their friends and spreading whatever news they've heard in the particular way they've heard it." Several participants noted that the proliferation of news sources has been accompanied by a proliferation of editorialising and comment. As 65-year-old Karen said, "You go back 30 or however many years, news was fact and we only got limited information, because there was only *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *ABC News*, *Prime News* or whatever. Now there's a proliferation of sources and they're constantly searching for news, putting their own spin on it." At 32, Harry has studied communications, and has witnessed first-hand how the media



she says. "That's where I find it insulting. We're not supposed to know that this story was designed, and you've now got an ad campaign happening with — oh, hoses! We've got these new hoses that are ideal for fire season! When they do things like that they lose a lot of credibility with me, and I turn it off."

The Northern Daily Leader

The Tamworth Observer and Northern Advertiser first rolled off the presses 142 years ago, in 1876. In 1910, it became the first daily paper in the region; and in 1921 it became *The Northern Daily Leader*, which still exists in both print and digital editions. Judging from our participants in Tamworth, it still plays a significant role locally. And we don't know if our participants' views are typical in Tamworth, but many of their comments were criticisms.

"With *The Northern Daily Leader*, I've noticed that for some of their articles they will actually pull whole press releases from the Tamworth Regional Council website, and publish them as an article," said Natalie, 24.

"It's just with a few tweaks, so it flows. That to me is just gutless."

Much of the discussion of the *Leader* centred on Barnaby Joyce. As the local member of federal parliament and the Deputy Prime Minister, Joyce became the target of rumours in the lead-up to a 2017 by-election concerning an extra-marital relationship with a staffer. Participants wondered why the *Leader* hadn't reported this story, which was broken by *The Daily Telegraph* in Sydney. "The complete lack of reporting on the Barnaby Joyce affair by *The Northern Daily Leader*, a lot of people in town felt betrayed by that," said Fred. "It wasn't that they wrote a bad story or wrote a good story about him. It's just that there was literally nothing in the paper."

landscape had changed. "Back in my day at uni, the plan was to work in a newspaper for five years or so and then go up into PR. The communications lecturers used to tell the kids this — this is what you do, and when you go work for PR, you'll have contacts back at the paper you can leverage." But these days, he said, communications students go straight into PR. The road to spin is direct. And so journalists are becoming rare as publicists abound.

A link between ads and news

Penny, a 50-year-old IT consultant from Tamworth, asks: is it a coincidence there's an ad for hoses after a story about bushfires? "Often, there's an advertisement after stories related to that product,"

Spelling

Many complaints about news media were big. Others were about the minutiae, such as spelling and grammar. "I have an education background, so I'm very alert to that," said Karen, 65. "Given the incredible impact that the media has on kids, and then we get the media reporting the declining standards [of literacy], and I feel like saying, 'Hello, you are the people who are constantly abbreviating everything, using incorrect grammar, mispronouncing words all the time. This is what the kids hear.'"

"There's no investigation by journalists anymore. Half the time they're just regurgitating a story. I've seen two stories and they're just regurgitated — even the grammar errors are in there."

"I'd say that there's certainly less of a focus [in news media] on integrity, and more on, 'The paradigm's shifting too much, and so we need to sell units and stay relevant.' So I think from the privately-owned ones, there's less integrity than there used to be."

THE WISHLIST

Accuracy and credibility

Participants were clear about what they wanted from their news media: accuracy, objectivity, the public interest (see Ex.4, page 40). "I want objective and accurate," said Xander, 50. "I want to have fast news that's well analysed, balanced, direct from the source and from organisations with credible backgrounds that have credible systems in place. A credible news source protects its brand by making sure it employs people who are producing and creating the news, where if they go off the rails and they decide to create rubbish, there is a system in that organisation to terminate their career. By that, I mean the *SMH*, the *ABC*, *Seven News*, *9 News*, all of the mainstream brands, *SBS*, even *Daily Mail*, but right

Betrayed

BRITTANY, 25

Retail worker, Sydney

In each workshop we asked whether participants had ever felt betrayed by news media. "One hundred percent," said Brittany. "I say that because I've had a very personal experience. I once had a family issue that was reported on the news, unfortunately. It was very interesting to be in the middle of the circus and to see how the media actually treated my family. But also how they reported on the issue as well ..."

At this point, Brittany started to cry. We asked if she wanted to take a break, or if she wanted us to come back to her later.

"No, it's okay," she said, composing herself.

"They definitely got things

wrong. They definitely made a bigger issue than what it was." Other participants said they had also been the victims of inaccurate, misleading or sensationalist reporting, but Brittany's response was the most moving. She now finds it hard to trust Australian news media. "I don't really trust domestic sources of news. Big news channels such as Channel 7, Channel 9, newspapers I'm a bit more sceptical of. The international companies such as the



BBC, Al Jazeera, I tend to trust them a lot more, and the research that they do. Every company wants to get the news out a lot quicker than others. That is one of the biggest aspects of news nowadays. Everything's so accessible. [But] I feel like that those bigger companies take more time and the issues which they cover are more expansive." Brittany tends to access the news on her smartphone. "I'm always on my phone." She finds the news through Facebook and other social media, and she is very fussy and diverse with her sources. "When I was younger, television was what I relied on. Even though you had multiple news channels, they reported on similar issues in a similar way. Now, because you have social media, you have a wide selection

of media which isn't necessarily truthful. I remember for a while people thinking of *The Onion* as being the facts. I think because of those type of publications, people have to be more critical. Whether or not they are is a different question."

Among her chief concerns is the prevalence of bias and sensationalism. "I am always critical of news media," Brittany wrote on her worksheets. "I don't trust it to be unbiased. I believe that every writer, journalist and reporter has an agenda and ... I don't believe that at a personal level that journalists or reporters respect the privacy or grieving of individuals and will do what is necessary at someone's expense to obtain a sensational story."

wing, left wing, that's fine. I look for credible brands in a world where we had a press secretary in the White House stand up and use the words 'alternative facts'. I have a personal social responsibility to make sure that the channels that I'm receiving my news from are credible."

The public interest

"One of the good things is the news media thinks about its consumers, whether someone has a right to know particular information," said Lincoln, 27. "They might go to great lengths to delve into a story and find out its detail, because they think that you have the right to know that information, that it's beneficial to the public. The story I was thinking of is when the ABC reported on all those government filing cabinets. That was obviously information that was valuable to the government, but they [the ABC] felt as the public we had a right to know." Lincoln, a public servant, was one of the more positive participants. "In Australia, journalists have a fair bit of integrity with that particular aspect. I can't think of any other stories off the top of my head, but there are probably more people though, like the bloke in WikiLeaks."

Don't be my friend!

Penny was adamant: she didn't want media to "be like a friend". "This is the one where I had really zero care factor," said the 50-year-old IT consultant. "If I want to know the answer I would ask someone who was an expert in the field. I wouldn't be asking someone like my friend. My friends tend to tell me gossip, rumours, and all sorts of little amusing stories, but that doesn't mean that I would respect them and hold them as an authority in a field. I would have more respect for somebody who's distant to me, and doesn't care, to a certain degree, whether I like them or not." This response turned out to be typical, which surprised us. We had thought that users might prefer a peer-to-peer model of news media. We had thought that maybe they wanted friend-like sources. But in Sydney, Yanni agreed with Penny: "I'd rather they focus on objective reporting rather than try to be my friend."

Reliable sources

"I access sources like ABC News because I feel that there is some onus on them to be more reliable," said Natalie. "They have more accountability because

they're taxpayer-funded. Should they do the wrong thing, they're accountable to a whole range of people, not just advertisers and editors. But I guess at the moment with the budget cuts to the ABC, they're in a difficult position, in terms of you can't write a lot of negative information about someone who has the ability to restrict your funding. So in that case, probably my main source of news information that is more content-driven would be the website The Conversation. I access a lot of my information just through Facebook, or scrolling through ABC News, but if there's an issue that I feel strongly about, I'll move onto The Conversation and see what an academic has written about it. The fact that they say who the person writing it is, state whether they have a conflict of interest, write about their background and what they've studied. If it's an opinion piece, if I know the background of who's written it, that's more important than being objective."

"I think sometimes, yeah, we don't have enough variety of voices in the media. We don't need Anglo-Saxon persons all the time. Yeah, we need



to know some of those different stories of the people that you see down the street, who make up our community."

"I feel as a woman that news media treats women as less important, in the reporting they cover. I think that extends out more broadly to some other issues I'm passionate about around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other minority groups which are marginalised in society and the way that the news covers that."

USER POWER

Taking responsibility

Unprompted, several participants noted that they themselves had a large role to play. They have a relationship with news media, after all, and that relationship depends on both parties. As 24-year-old Natalie said in Tamworth: "I feel very strong-



ly that we can sit and blame news media for a lot of the problems within the media, but we forget that as users, we're active consumers as well. It's our choice. We only have the clickbait articles because we constantly subscribe to them, and we click on them. We don't resist that little temptation to find out what Britney Spears is up to at the moment, or what Kim Kardashian wore to the Met Gala." Penny agreed vigorously: "I think we created the Kardashians, and now we don't know how to get rid of them."

Challenge me

"Something that concerns me is like breeding like," says Helen, a 23-year-old student. "You get this especially on Facebook — where the stories that you read and you believe and you see are from your viewpoint. All you get is more of those stories. To me a source that I can trust is potentially one that presents me with arguments that I haven't already thought of or discussed, because I want to make sure that I'm not just solidifying my existing opinion with what I read. I want to be challenged." Does she manage to do that? If so, how? "I try and do a bit of a wider search. I don't just read what pops up on my newsfeed. I make an effort to go and find news or talk to

people that I know have differing opinions. Because they'll often point me towards a source that I have never looked at or read." Of course, that source might be untrustworthy. How do you know if you can trust it? Helen laughs. "I guess it's about taking everything with a grain of salt. I haven't been trained to know which ones to trust and which ones not to. I guess sometimes it's a gut feeling. I think if you read enough from a variety of perspectives, you get an impression for where the truth lies. But you don't get that same impression if you're only reading a singular perspective over and over again. So yeah, it's a lot of effort."

"I feel like it's high time for an education campaign. In the same way Home Economics would have been relevant back in the day, this is probably a really good time for people to start looking at, how do I know this is credible, who wrote it ..."

"Journalistic oversight bodies could potentially play a bigger role and actually, you know, mean something. Why isn't there more of an overt professional body distinguishing bloggers from journalists?"



INSIGHTS

Disappointed but HOPEFUL

Part of a bigger picture

The results from our workshops are pointers to and echoes of ongoing conversations and debates happening in and outside the news media industry. There is a palpable sense of crisis among many news consumers, civil society actors and policy makers about journalism's future; there is a real fear that, having lost its revenue model, the news media industry's democratic functions may follow.

These concerns are prompting considerable effort – and a raft of urgent questions. Is there a role for greater government support? How can consumers be encouraged to pay more (directly or indirectly) for journalism? How does journalism change to better meet what its audiences want? What role do social media platforms and tech giants play in the new news ecosystem? How do we understand journalism's public good in this disaggregated, fast-paced digital environment?

These are a few of the questions being asked by government, industry and concerned citizens. There are many more. We do not pretend to have all the answers. But this report points to the challenges and opportunities ahead. If journalism needs sharper definition, if it needs to better understand how it might serve its customers, then the results of

our foray into trust should be essential reading. Here's why.

Disappointed consumers

Given the chance to have a say, news consumers have a clear tendency to feel disappointed about journalists and journalism. This was true of the participants in our workshops. And, as successive "trust" surveys have shown, it is largely so for one in two news consumers.

Given the opportunity to bash, many of our workshop participants sought to wound with pen and voice. Some felt manipulated and cheated by journalism. Many felt misunderstood and belittled. Virtually all demanded a better service. They wanted to be treated as smart and intelligent, given due respect; instead, with a few notable exceptions, they felt they were receiving the exact opposite. It is perhaps a good thing, then, that this report discarded from the start notions of love between journalists and its audiences. Love is certainly not an option, but is trust?

Hardwired for trust

There is a contradiction – an ongoing tension – at the heart of the relationship between news consumers and those who report and produce it. That is, the consumers really want to trust and be positive about the news media. They

appear almost hardwired for trust. But time and again, either by action or reputation, they feel journalism fails to deliver. It is as if the ideal is besmirched by the reality. News consumers might be hardwired for trust but they are conditioned to expect the opposite. Is this fair? Can journalism ever win this argument?

The participants in our workshops had a clear idea about what they want. They want journalism to demonstrate and possess traditional and even what might be described as its eternal attributes. When asked to cite the qualities of their ideal news media, the participants said, in order: be accurate; be in the public interest; and be objective. These were the clear favourites. The next best three were: be diverse; be transparent; and be easy to access.

It is important not to make grandiose claims for these workshop results. There is, for instance, a more nuanced debate about what being transparent means in practice and massive, ongoing discussion about objectivity: what it is, how it is achieved and how useful it is. But objectivity is clearly a characteristic that resonates with consumers. It seems the news media needs to do more to claim it.

Transformational and foundational needs

Of the top six ideal qualities, the top

three can be seen as foundational to journalism and its central promise to and its contract with audiences. There are deep roots here. For well over a century, journalists have sought to act in the public interest and construct their authority over news events on the basis that they are objective and accurate observers and recorders. Such promises are the essence of journalism. It is heartening, though perhaps unsurprising, to see our participants so attached to and understanding of such a deal. These qualities appear to be prerequisites of any trusting relationship with the news media.

After that, the picture presented here shifts closer to the digital world. Transparency, diversity and ease of access are all qualities which align closely with the transformational state of the news media industry. All three attributes were of course possible in the analogue world. Newspapers, for instance, could strive to present a diverse section of views. They could also make efforts to be transparent and open about what they did and why they did it. But by and large, they were opaque, closed even.

Before the digital world empowered audiences with choice, created social

media platforms as the key distributors of news and views, and stripped traditional media of its advertising revenue base, there was little need for news media companies to be transparent or, for that matter, worry too much about how easy it was for audiences to receive its outputs. The news media were in control. The TV news was delivered at 6pm or 7pm, the radio bulletins on the hour and the newspaper on the front door in the morning. This has changed. The digital world has put the customer in the driving seat. The results of our workshops indicate they well understand that. But does the news media?

What they don't want

The design-your-own media list we deployed also included several attributes which were firmly rejected by the workshop participants. It is unclear precisely why. But it is clear that, for instance, news consumers aren't especially enamoured by the idea of

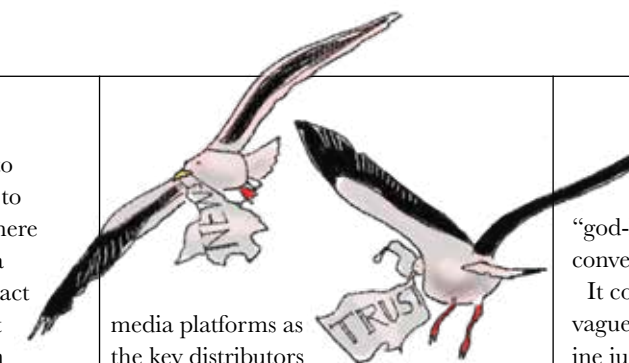
news media being "like a friend" or sacrificing its authoritative or "god-like" voice to be friendlier, more conversational.

It could be that these constructs are too vague and theoretical to help users imagine just how journalism could change to be better-suited to a society where trust is more diffuse and distributed. Or it could be, of course, that having authority, being distant (and objective) and dare we say it, striking a god-like pose over events, trends and activities is part of the unique selling point of journalism.

If this is indeed the case, then the news media may need to further explore and enhance what makes it special and "other" rather than what makes it approachable and open. Perhaps a clue here rests in something we mentioned before: audiences want to be treated as intelligent and smart by a smart and intelligent news media. Being a trusted "friend" is in such a context not as valued or important as being a trusted source of the news. It may be as simple as that.

We were, in a preliminary way, testing the idea that users want to trust news media in more of a peer-to-peer way – whether they want news media to follow more of a distributed trust model, rather than an institutional trust model. We wondered whether users might want their news media to look more like Airbnb or Uber, and less like a bank or government department. And so we asked participants whether they wanted news media that looked more like a friend and to be more conversational.

This hypothesis, our results suggest, may be *partly* right. Today's users, it seems, want their news media to be something of a hybrid, with elements of both distributed and institutional trust. If that's true, then it remains to be seen just how well news media can adapt to fit the prescription. At best, it's a big ask. At worst, users want the impossible.



There is a genuine desire for the news media to play a vital role in society

Multiple sources

Our workshop participants gave every indication that they were capable of being discerning and active seekers and consumers of news. When we asked them how and where they would check out various rumours, they revealed a multi-layered approach to information gathering. The news media had a key role to play but participants did not ascribe to it any level of exhaustive power – even over the facts. Depending on the rumour, sources to be consulted included the local council's home page, the Bureau of Meteorology, social media and official government and non-government sites.

These interactions are in themselves complex and less than uniform. Participants, for instance, indicated they were using social media platforms to gain initial information and (depending on the subject) check the cut and thrust of public debate. By contrast, news websites, government and (for some) non-government groups were more relied upon for the *facts* of any matter. In other words, when it comes to ascribing trust, the participants were omnivorous. They were, it seems, willing to shop around and build their own picture of “truths”.

When it comes to the cutting of history, journalism's traditional role as the first draft appears to be increasingly shared and contested. The takeout for journalism: it's still very much part of the mix in fact- or truth-seeking, but no longer does it enjoy exclusivity. The outlook for trust in journalism? It is elusive, but still there for the taking.

How to deliver

Discussion about the future of journalism invariably returns to questions of payment and delivery. Our workshop participants aligned with many news consumers by clearly indicating a

preference for news which was “free”, “online” and “mobile”.

There is little surprising about these particular results. There is a tendency to see basic news as a public utility, a fact enhanced in this country by the existence of a large and largely trusted public broadcaster in the ABC. Of all the many news sources identified by participants, the ABC was by far the most trusted and well-regarded. What's more, there is clearly no going back from the on-demand convenience of online, a smorgasbord of choice where the prawns are always fresh. And there is no doubt that for now at least, mobile is the key platform, though, in passing, it is worth noting that some participants realised that delivery might evolve into something “like Google Glass”.

The emerging picture – an outline of the future, at best – sees news consumers wanting the basics, such as the objective facts, and at the same time understanding that the delivery mechanisms – the tech – have changed how they receive news forever. This level of acceptance opens up opportunities for the news media.

Opportunities abound

Widespread concern about the very future of journalism is inspiring multiple responses. Sensing its vulnerabilities, a handful of public figures, such as US President

Donald Trump, are seeking to denigrate it further, labelling unwanted attention as “fake news” and seeking to deny the legitimate role journalists play in keeping politicians honest.

The likes of Trump (or Trump-lites) play little role in mainstream Australian politics. Here, fortunately, much of the debate is turning around what role, if any, the government sector can play in securing and enhancing journalism's future and how best can private individuals or non-government actors work to support the activity of public interest journalism. Such broad developments are not the primary concern of this report, though they are central to the work of the Centre for Media Transition. But as we spoke with our workshop participants it became clear that, with a few exceptions, there is a genuine desire for the news media to play a vital role in society. And even those participants with extreme distrust recognised the value of their own preferred media sources. Apparently, not *all* journalists are liars. There is then a bedrock on which to build. Journalism isn't going away any time soon. There is an acceptance of online, of mobile and a recognition of, if not a hankering for, traditional journalistic values, such as objectivity and accuracy. There is also a willingness to consider new strategies and technologies. We examined the potential for these in the final workshop question.

Future strategies

The journalism world is working hard to figure out how best to secure its future and listen to its audiences. The tricky part is that in contrast with years gone by, when the advertising model engendered financial stability and relatively

high levels of profitability, there is now a need to find new business models *and* new ways of engaging with news consumers.

This dynamic explains in large part why no one strategy has emerged to “save” journalism. It also explains why much of the news industry remains firmly attached to the revenues still generated by the advertising model. This is understandable, and we are not suggesting the industry forego income, even if it has been well-documented that the vast bulk of advertising revenue is now flowing to digital platforms rather than news publishers. Several of our participants acknowledged this. For our part, we have every sympathy for an industry attempting to put out fires in its own, old house while at the same time being told to build a bright, new one. But we are also sure there are not too many alternatives to attempting such a feat.

That's why we wished to engage our participants in some ad hoc, open-ended strategy thinking. We presented them with six ideas using strategy often combined with technologies. All the suggested strategies have been or are being tried elsewhere to rebuild trust. The list is not comprehensive. It could not be, as new ideas emerge about trust and quality in journalism virtually every day. But it gave voice and form to some of the more entrenched ways being tried. A full outline is contained in the results section of this report. In summary the six were: an expert-generated trustworthiness rating; a user-generated trustworthiness rating; a closed Facebook group for readers and journalists; clearer labels for news, comment and advertising; helping readers to get behind the story; and encouraging

readers to contribute to stories.

Interestingly, the participants' top two picks hark back to an issue explored earlier in this chapter – the desire for news consumers to know about what journalism is doing and why it is doing it. The wish to “get behind the story”, the clear favourite strategy, embeds a level of collaboration and engagement with the audiences by informing them of not only what we (the journalists) did but also what they still don't know. Such an admission is not, as might have once been thought, a sign of failure; to our participants it was, in fact, an act of honesty and openness. As we note in the results chapter, it is a significant step towards greater transparency, in which the processes of journalism are held to the light. In this way, it has tremendous potential to build trust, in a peer-to-peer way rather than top-down.

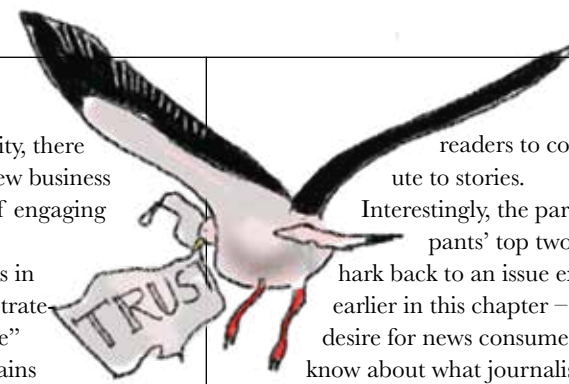
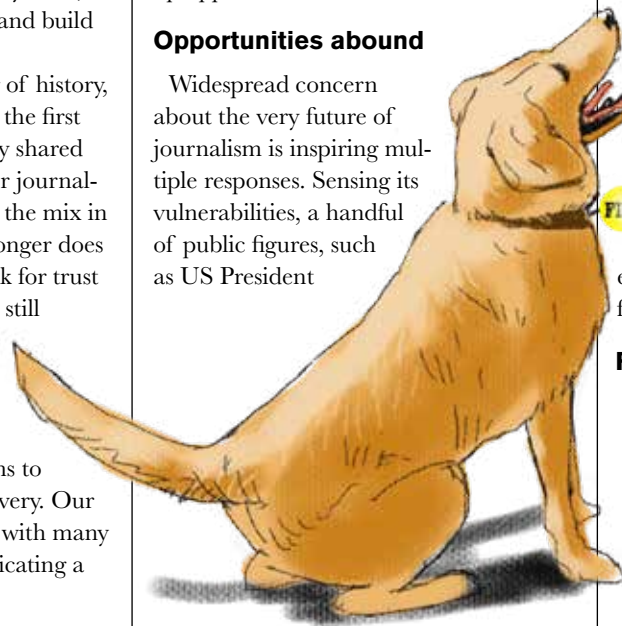
In a similar vein, the second most important is also an act of transparency. Though in no way a radical as the first, the idea of clearly labelling the type of content – news, comment and opinion – has great consumer appeal and speaks to the desire for audiences to be treated as intelligent. In other words, don't lie to us. There may well be people within the industry who say such obfuscation rarely happens and, when it does, is quickly stamped out. But what the industry thinks is somewhat immaterial in this matter. The audience feels it needs greater clarity. Surely, it should get it.

The flipside of these results also makes for interesting reading. Participants in our workshops clearly do not want to work that hard for their news. They don't wish to rate it (they'd much rather leave that to experts), they aren't that interested

in contributing to stories and they don't necessarily wish to be inside an exclusive Facebook group to receive or discuss the news. This is not to say no readers want such things. *De Correspondent* in The Netherlands has built a highly-engaged readership which actually does several such things and is willing to pay for the privilege.

We held workshops, not a plebiscite. But the ideas identified in them reflect broader trends and desires and suggest emerging pathways for the news industry to rebuild trust with news audiences. Some of them involve not much more than giving audiences a bit more: more information (about the choices made by journalists, the choices made by editors, the gaps in knowledge that remain); more facts; more “quality”; more diversity; and more respect. And some of them involve pushing out *less*, especially less journalism that fails to deliver anything from the “more” list. Including clickbait. And exaggerated emotion. And dumbed-down content. In other words, news consumers are a discerning bunch. They want less crap.

Of course, the news media has an obvious comeback. Journalists, editors and publishers might reflexively respond, “Well, users say they want to be treated with intelligence and respect, but then they click on cats and Kardashians.” Certainly, clickbait is popular. But clickbait, often built on deception, damages trust. It tends to harm the relationship between user and news media. The way to rebuild audience trust, it seems, is for the news media to avoid clickbait, and to treat the audience with more intelligence and respect. This is what our participants say they want. Would they be true to their word? We'll only ever know if the news media adjusts.



The ideas identified suggest emerging pathways for the news industry to rebuild trust

WHERE TO NEXT?

OUR JOURNEY TO TRUST IS A three-step affair. We have now completed the first two steps: the bibliography of research into trust (which can be accessed at cmt.uts.edu.au); and the workshops that form the basis of this report.

The third stage starts with a question: how can we test key findings of the first two stages in practice? That is, how can we begin to apply them to the real world, with a view to affecting significant change in the way people use and trust news media?

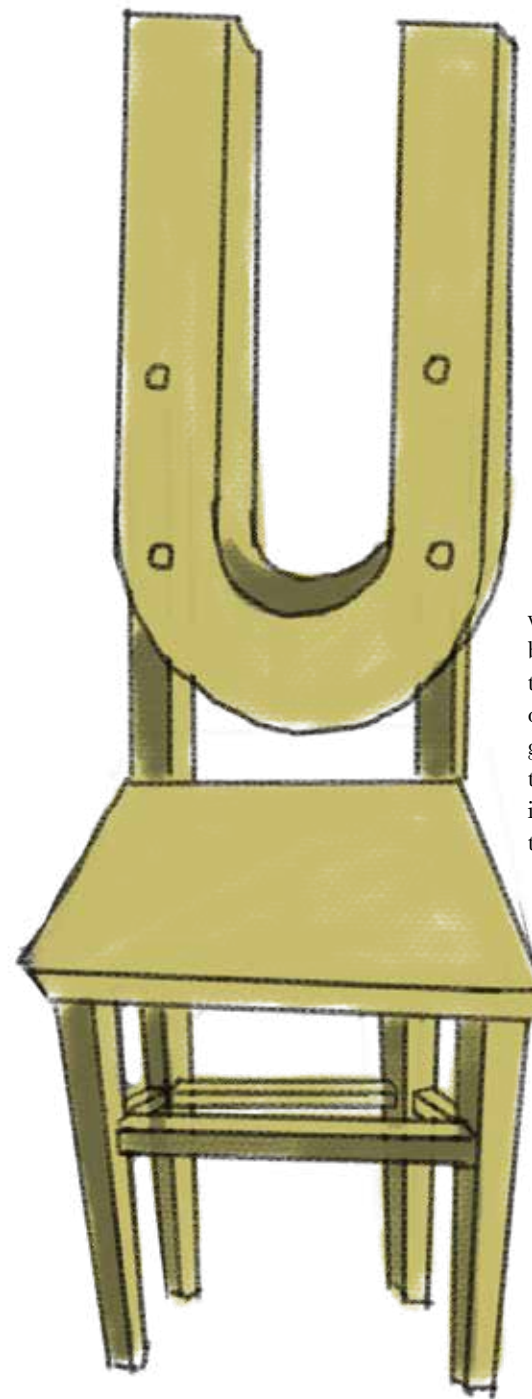
This might involve a collaboration with one of the industry-backed initiatives already underway (see Lit. Review, p. 12). It might involve implementing the *De Correspondent* model on a wider scale, just as journalism scholar

Jay Rosen is doing in the US. “They have a clear sense of how to continuously produce trust” (Rosen, 2018; see Ex. 6, p. 44). Or it might involve testing the Spaceship Media model in Australia. Run by innovators/journalists in California, Spaceship Media is testing whether journalism would be trusted more if it bridged divides rather than highlighted conflicts.

Traditionally, journalism has relied heavily on a he said/she said oppositional model. In response, Spaceship Media brings together divided communities using “dialogue journalism”. In 2016, Spaceship Media brought together female Trump voters from Alabama and female Clinton voters from California. Using Facebook and other platforms, they then opened up a conversation between the two groups about hot-button issues, such as abortion, immigration and healthcare, as well as

softer issues, such as holiday traditions, news-reading habits and relationships. The discussion humanised the women to each other, making them more than just the person who had voted the other way. Once journalism had helped bridge this divide, many women continued their conversations in a Facebook group they themselves had created.

Bridging divisions in Trump’s America is a laudable and timely idea, but would it work in Australia? Do we need it? And is it journalism’s role to do so? The surest way to find out is to try. Granted, our participants rated a closed Facebook group as among their least preferred options for rebuilding trust. What’s more, Australia is not as overtly divided as the US. Still, we are open to giving it a shot, whether that involves applying the Spaceship Media model of dialogue journalism, or some sort of alternative.



Would journalism be trusted more if it bridged divides rather than highlighted conflicts?

In any event, our research convinced us of one key point: the focus for further work must be squarely on the *relationship* between news media and its users. In the proposed third stage of our research, our aim will be to study user attitudes in greater detail, but also to study the attitudes of journalists and industry. Trust is indeed a two-way street. As Jay Rosen told the International Journalism Festival in April 2018, just a month before our workshops: “Increasingly the quality of your journalism will depend on the strength of your relationship with the people who use and value your work the most.”

News media plays a vital role. It informs citizens about the workings of government. It exposes unethical and illegal behavior. And it reveals society to itself, in part by showing one community to another community. As Coleman et al noted, communities

within our society are often physically close, but separated from one another by high walls of incomprehension and resentment: “Irresponsible journalism feeds on such mutual distrust and contributes to a culture of default distrust.” If our trust in news media is low, and if our news media is indeed untrustworthy, the negative effects will cascade: government will be opaque; ill behavior will not be exposed; society will remain unknown to itself. Mistrust will build upon mistrust. All of which is exacerbated in this time of interactivity and user-generated content, when the line between media user and media producer is increasingly blurring, as revealed in neologisms such as “prosumer” and “prosumer”.

In this time of upheaval, the stakes are high. If we manage to succeed in rebuilding warranted trust in news media, we thereby succeed in building a better society.

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ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR MEDIA TRANSITION

The Centre for Media Transition works across disciplines to explore and develop responses to: the dramatic and ongoing movements wrought by digital disruption to the media industry; the role of journalism in Australian democracy and the world more widely; and the business models that support a diverse and prosperous industry.

The Centre for Media Transition (CMT) is an interdisciplinary initiative of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Law. It was launched in July 2017.

It sits at the intersection of media, technology, regulation and business. Working with industry, the academy and other stakeholders, the CMT explores:

- the changing nature of journalistic practice;
- ways in which citizens and media interact and how regulatory and ethical frameworks might adapt for this environment (this includes issues of digital privacy);
- the ingredients of a competitive commercial media sector, built on sustainable business models and informed by the experience of other disrupted industries;
- the development of a diverse media environment that embraces local, international and transnational issues and debate; and
- contemporary formulations of the public interest informed by established and enduring principles such as accountability and the public's right to know.

Recent works have included reports on trends in digital defamation, innovation in regional news media and trust in Australian news media. It has also been commissioned by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to prepare a report on the impact of digital platforms on news media in Australia.

The CMT hosts public events, conferences and forums on a regular basis. Details of events and the CMT's work can be found at cmt.uts.edu.au

