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# **Do we trust the news?**

A cognitive-semiotic exploration of how people  
engage with news and media in South Africa

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# Abstract

In an era of widespread disinformation, understanding how individuals navigate diverse media is critical. To address this, this thesis investigates how South Africans engage with news across different media formats, focusing on the role of semiotic systems, sensory modalities, and trust in shaping news engagement behaviours. The study poses four research questions: 1) What kind of media do South Africans engage with for their news? 2) What kind of news media do South Africans trust and why? 3) What is it that motivates South Africans to engage with the news? 4) Does age affect any of the above? Using phenomenological triangulation, and drawing on concepts and methods from cognitive semiotics and phenomenology, the study combines personal reflection, photovoice and interviews, and a survey to provide a rich, multi-dimensional view of news engagement.

Findings from the survey showed that the internet was used more frequently than TV and YouTube, with digital media perceived as accessible yet overwhelming. Most participants preferred the "written with pictures" format, as they perceived images as both emotive and credible, while they valued audio formats for convenience. Participants engaged with and trusted informative reporting more than other reporting styles. Participants favoured social media and radio for their interactivity and synchronicity, as opposed to newspapers. The interviews revealed that trust in the news was linked to source reputation and professionalism, and participants managed their mistrust by cross-referencing multiple sources due to concerns about manipulation and hidden agendas. Emotional strain from the overwhelming negativity of the news led to selective engagement strategies, as participants reported balancing staying informed and impacts on their mental health. Despite these challenges, participants valued news engagement for the sense of connection it provided and its relevance to their lives. Contrary to existing research, this study found minimal age-related differences in news engagement, possibly due to differences in sampling and environment.

In sum, the thesis revealed the complexities of trust, emotional strain, and social connection in navigating modern media, offering new perspectives on how individuals cope with an evolving news landscape. Ultimately, this research highlights the personal and collective importance of news engagement, reflecting a deep human need for connection, even in a climate of growing mistrust.

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# Abbreviations

CSSR	Centre for Social Science Research
SM	Social Media
TV	Television
VT	VoiceThread
VTXX (e.g. VTA1)	VoiceThread, participant code (e.g. A), entry number (e.g.1)

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

The world is currently saturated with vast amounts of information, requiring people to make choices about what information, and specifically what news, they “consume,” and to what degree to trust this. Some people prefer to watch the news on television, skim through newspaper headlines, or scroll through social media (referred to as SM). These different media are often *polysemiotic*, relying on the use of multiple semiotic systems, such as language and depiction, as well as *multimodal*, involving multiple sensory systems like hearing and vision (Stampoulidis, 2019; Zlatev et al., 2023). The assortment of semiotic systems and sensory modalities in which we encounter news information could affect both how we engage with it, and how critical we are of it. This is one of the central points of this thesis.

A second is that of trust: a phenomenon at the core of human nature. Trust is central to human sociality (Wacewicz & Żywiczyński, 2018), enabling us to develop complex social interactions, from individual conversations to multi-conglomerate organizations. While language allows for the possibility to lie infinitely (Dor, 2017), we do not do so frequently and do not suspect each other of doing so constantly (Sokolowski, 2008). Rather, we trust that the other is being, – for the most part, – honest and truthful in their communication, even if this leaves us vulnerable. This vulnerability is susceptible to abuse and misuse, which can lead people to question and distrust things that were once assumed.

News media inform us of events in the world and are expected to be places of trustworthy verified information. However, the problem of false or biased information, and the overwhelmingly negative consequences it can engender (e.g., influencing elections) (Wang et al., 2019), is becoming increasingly salient in the era of digital media (Pomeratserv, 2019). Distinctions are often made between the deliberate generation and dissemination of inaccurate or manipulated information that is intended to deceive or mislead an audience: *disinformation*, and the inadvertent sharing of such information: *misinformation* (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019).

While news, and its accompanying disinformation, are global phenomena, they have predominately been studied in the USA (e.g., Guess et al., 2018), Europe (e.g., Fletcher & Nielsen, 2019), Australia (e.g., Pickles et al., 2021) and New Zealand (e.g. Hannah et al., 2022) with much of the recent research on news engagement focusing exclusively on SM (e.g. Chenzi, 2021). Thus, a third relevant issue is the type of media involved, since most people have diverse media diets (Swart et al., 2017), which can be influenced by their age (Brosius et al., 2022).

This thesis examines how people engage with news across different media, and how these experiences and interactions are consolidated. The main goal is to better understand how people make decisions about which news to consume and share, and how this is affected by trust. The study is situated in South Africa. In addition to being understudied (Mare, et al., 2019), South Africa is a diverse country, both linguistically and culturally, with high 3G penetration, SM, and internet usage (Masullo et al., 2020) allowing for engagement in a variety of spaces and potentially offering many perspectives on how news is engaged with.

The polysemiotic nature of human interaction has been extensively studied within the discipline of *cognitive semiotics* (Zlatev, 2015; Zlatev et al., 2023). Being established during the past two decades, cognitive semiotics integrates theories and methods from semiotics, linguistics, and cognitive science to study meaning and meaning-making, with the help of phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophy and methodology inaugurated by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the past century, which focuses on “the study of human experience and of the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 2). Key phenomenological concepts such as life world, subjectivity, and intersubjectivity can help us understand our engagement with the world and with others. Consistent with phenomenology, researchers in cognitive semiotics emphasize that all knowledge presupposes consciousness, and systematic studies require the triangulation of first-person methods, such as intuition; second-person methods, based on empathy; and, eventually, third-person methods, based on detached observation and quantification (e.g., Mendoza-Collazos & Zlatev, 2022).

Following this principle, elaborated on in Section 2.2, I began the investigation by reflecting on my engagement with news and trust (first-person), extended with interviews to include others’ experiences (second-person) and finally employed a quantifiable survey, to assess the frequency

of certain views and experiences (third-person). Furthermore, I used *photovoice* (e.g. Tsang, 2020) as a specific method to aid the in-depth analysis of lived experiences that phenomenology aims to achieve and to allow for the inclusion of the polysemiotic nature of news in the discussion.

In summary, the thesis intends to explore how factors like media, semiotic systems and sensory modalities affect the news engagement of South Africans of different generations, specifically drawing into focus the relationship between trust and news. As such, the preliminary research questions are:

1. What kind of media do South Africans engage with for their news?
2. What kind of news media do South Africans trust and why?
3. What is it that motivates South Africans to engage with the news?
4. Does age affect any of the above?

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides the theoretical background, situating the study within cognitive semiotics, and explores the concepts of media, news and trust. Chapter 3 outlines the methods used, while Chapter 4 jointly presents and discusses the results. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the thesis, revisiting key aspects of the study.

# Chapter 2. Theoretical Background

## 2.1. Introduction

This chapter lays the groundwork for the thesis. It begins by outlining cognitive semiotics as a discipline and introducing key methodological principles and concepts, like polysemiosis. The focus then shifts to the central phenomena of this study: news and trust, and concludes by further specifying the research questions.

## 2.2. Key Concepts from Cognitive Semiotics

As previously mentioned, cognitive semiotics transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries by integrating insights from an array of fields into a unified framework for studying meaning-making (Mendoza-Collazos & Zlatev, 2022; Zlatev, 2015). This approach investigates how meaning is communicated across various sensory modalities, such as vision and hearing, and through different semiotic systems, including language and gestures (Konderak, 2018; Stampoulidis, 2021).

Cognitive semiotics often turns to phenomenology, a foundational philosophy that denies both materialism and idealism and describes reality as the multidimensional *life world* experienced by human beings (and other subjects) (Zahavi, 2018; Zlatev & Mouratidou, 2024). Phenomenology prioritizes *subjectivity*, *intersubjectivity*, *empathy*, and *agency* as fundamental elements of its investigations, along with *intentionality*. This is the inherent directedness of consciousness towards its object in different types of acts, such as perception, remembering, and imagining (Sokolowski, 2008). In its attempt to understand experience as it is actually *lived*, phenomenology distances itself from preconceived interpretations and theories, thus facilitating a deeper understanding of the underlying structures of experience.

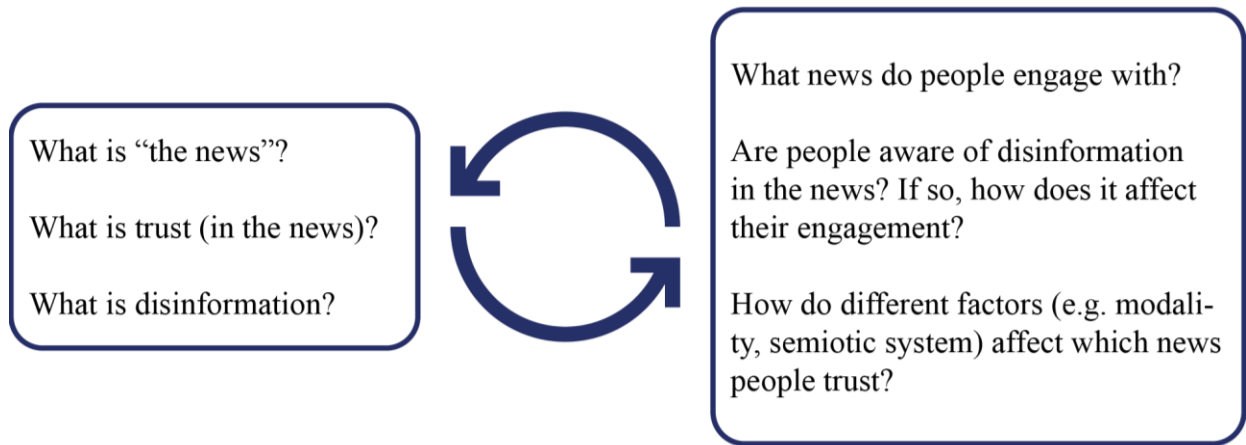
Applied phenomenology extends these principles into practical domains (e.g. in fields such as psychology and sociology), aiming to uncover the underlying structures, or *essences*, of subjective experience (Giorgi, 2009; Hycner, 1985). It encourages researchers and practitioners to engage directly with lived experiences, rather than viewing phenomena through theories and

preconceptions. To achieve this, phenomenological interviews focus on acquiring rich, detailed descriptions of specific events (Høffding & Martiny, 2016).

A key notion in cognitive semiotics is *phenomenological triangulation* (e.g., Mendoza-Collazos & Zlatev, 2022; Pielli & Zlatev, 2020), which, in its most recent formulation (Zlatev & Mouratidou, 2024) distinguishes between two planes: the *epistemological* plane, corresponding to the ways the phenomenon is accessed by the researcher, and the *ontological* plane, referring to the nature of the phenomenon being accessed: self, others, and things as indivisible dimensions that jointly constitute the life world. The general principle is to start with first-person methods based on the experience of the researcher herself, continually reflecting on this, with the help of intuition (e.g. Zlatev & Blomberg, 2019). Following this, second-person methods, where the perspectives of the researcher and participants are on par, mutually informing one another, as in (phenomenological) interviews. Finally, third-person methods are most distanced from the phenomena, allowing them to be objectified and (in many cases) quantified, for example, in the analysis of experimental data. In sum, cognitive semiotics research balances all perspectives while prioritizing the first two methods as they are presupposed in any scientific investigation (Mendoza-Collazos & Zlatev, 2022).

Another principle is the *conceptual-empirical loop* (Devylder & Zlatev, 2020; Mendoza-Collazos & Zlatev, 2022; Stampoulidis, 2019; Zlatev, 2015), which implies the constant interplay between the conceptual understanding of a phenomenon and the empirical questions asked of it. As such, an investigation does not begin with theories but rather with pre-theoretical reflections on the phenomenon itself, via the first-person methods mentioned above. After which, and with the considerations of previous research, empirical investigations emerge, which in turn contribute to the conceptual understanding of the phenomenon, and so the cycle repeats (e.g., Zlatev, 2015). The iteration of the loop in this project is displayed in Figure 1, illustrating that by first reflecting on trust and disinformation in news on the conceptual side of the loop, I recognize the malleable nature of the concepts. Subsequently, empirical questions like “What news do people engage with?,” “Are people aware of disinformation in their news? If so, how does it affect their engagement?” and “How do different factors (e.g. modality, semiotic system) affect which news people trust?” have emerged. By answering these questions, we can develop our understanding of the concepts and prepare for another iteration of the loop.

**Figure 1.** *The conceptual-empirical loop as realized in the present thesis*



As mentioned in Chapter 1, the concepts of *polysemiosis* and *multimodality* are central to cognitive semiotic research as human communication recruits multiple semiotic systems and modalities to convey meaning (Zlatev et al., 2023). While the two concepts are often conflated outside of cognitive semiotics (see Stampoulidis, 2019 for discussion), they are, rather, complementary. Polysemiosis implies the simultaneous use of two or more semiotic systems in communication<sup>1</sup> such as when language is combined with gesturing, with signs combining different semiotic grounds (Sonesson, 2010), namely iconicity (similarity), indexicality (contiguity) and symbolicity (conventionality). As for modality, the same semiotic system, language can be realized in multiple sensory modalities. Spoken language requires an auditory modality while written language recruits a visual modality. A poster may contain written language and images (i.e. depiction) thus displaying two semiotic systems both of which are consumed in the same, visual, modality. Each semiotic system and sensory modality has advantages and limitations in what they can confer (Zlatev et al., 2023). For example, a written text about a news event may be very good at informing viewers of the facts while an accompanying picture or interview clip may help an audience connect emotionally with the event (Facchinetti, 2021).

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<sup>1</sup> A semiotic system can be either a system of signs or signals, both consisting of pairs of expression and meaning. However, only signs can denote things, properties or events, while the meanings of signals are not denotational (Zlatev et al., 2020; Mouratidou et al., forthcoming).

Communication has the potential not only to provide veridical information but also to deceive. This is because sign use goes beyond what Dor (2017) calls “experiential communication” concerning the physical and temporally present, and may extend into realms of the unreal and imagined. Yet, we have an innate inclination to be truthful as communicators and to trust as receivers (Waciewicz & Żywicznyński, 2018). Of course, we occasionally lie, but for a lie to succeed there must be an underlying assumption of truth; otherwise, the lie would fail to deceive effectively and be irrelevant. It is this basis of trust and truth that allows for a social niche where language can develop.<sup>2</sup> I return to the topic of trust in Section 2.4, but before that, we need to consider that of media.

In today's information landscape, where news engagement plays a significant role in shaping individuals' perceptions and understanding of the world, the relationship between trust and media is crucial. As such, cognitive semiotics, with its synthetic approach to studying meaning and communication, is well-positioned to delve into how trust influences the reception, interpretation, and sharing of news across different channels and platforms. By examining how trust is established, maintained, and potentially eroded in the context of news engagement, this study has the potential to broaden the scope of cognitive semiotics research. More generally, understanding the interplay between trust and media within the framework of cognitive semiotics not only helps us better understand our behaviour and experience as human beings but also offers valuable insights into the dynamics of current information environments.

### **2.3 Semiotic Systems, Sensory Modalities and Different Kinds of Media.**

As indicated above, human communication is both polysemiotic and multimodal. Particular combinations of semiotic systems become conventionalized in specific cultural practices (e.g. sand drawings, Zlatev et al., 2023), or more formally, as *media*. Hodkinson (2016, p. 17) describes

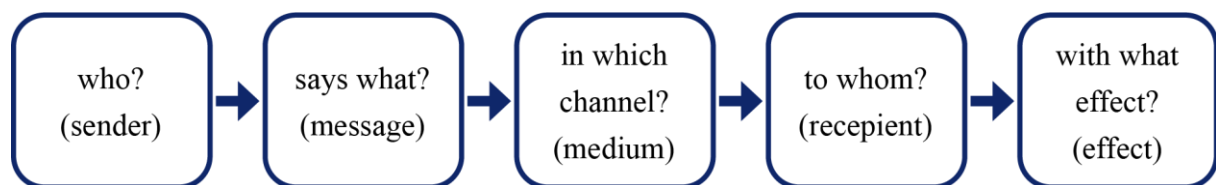
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<sup>2</sup> This is further corroborated as it is through trust-laden relationships that other species, such as bonobos and chimpanzees, have been able to learn language from people (Savage-Rumbaugh & Lewin, 1994; in Zlatev & Mouratidou, 2024). Thus, positioning language as something spontaneously acquired in trusting environments and consequently intertwined with them (Seگردahl et al., 2005).



media as the "means through which content is communicated between an origin and a destination". For example, print media delivers information to readers, and television broadcasts news to a wide audience. The process of how information flows from a sender (who), through a medium (which channel), to a recipient (to whom), and with what impact (effect) is outlined by Lasswell (1948) (see Figure 2). While this model offers a structured understanding of communication, it overlooks the interactive and participatory nature of modern media, particularly SM. As Bruns (2007) points out, SM differs fundamentally from traditional media like print and television because it is defined by its sociality. Platforms like Facebook facilitate many-to-many communication, allowing users to create and engage with content, rather than passively consuming information from media professionals. This shift underscores a key difference: SM encourages interaction and participation, free from the constraints of traditional editorial control. This is relevant when we consider how each of these aspects provides a different point at which one may or may not trust, which is further discussed in Section 2.4.

**Figure 2.** Diagram of Lasswell's model from Hodkinson's (2016, pg. 26)



Additionally, one can differentiate media on the following dimensions.

- *Mass vs Interpersonal.* Mass media (e.g., radio, TV) enables large-scale communication, while interpersonal media (e.g., WhatsApp groups) facilitates smaller, localized interactions. The internet and SM blur these lines, merging public and private content, like Instagram's mix of news and personal updates. Online mobility has increased, allowing news access anywhere via smartphones. Additionally, people now control how and when they consume content, personalizing their interactions (Facchinetti, 2021; Hodkinson, 2016).
  - *Synchronous vs A-synchronous.* Synchronous communication happens in real-time (e.g., live radio), engaging participants and creators simultaneously. Asynchronous communication, like listening to a pre-recorded news clip on Spotify, occurs at different

times. Asynchronous media, like newspapers, are slower in delivering breaking news. Evolving audience preferences and technological changes are reshaping how news media prioritize content, while also impacting the balance between synchronous and asynchronous communication (Hodkinson, 2016).

- *High vs Low Intensity.* High-intensity media are media that commandeer one's attention, while low-intensity media are generally less demanding (Hodkinson, 2016).
- *One-directional vs Interactive.* Media that offer little opportunity for participation or interaction are one-directional, for instance, a TV clip – as TV generally lacks direct engagement opportunities. However, when the same clip is uploaded to YouTube it becomes viewers can comment, like, dislike, or share, thus it is now interactive. Interactivity is becoming valued, reflecting our evolving expectations of media to facilitate interactive communication rather than one-way transmission (Hodkinson, 2016).

Further, to account for varying levels of media engagement, McLuhan (1973) distinguishes between "hot" and "cool" media, with the former demanding high attention due to its "high-definition," and the latter encouraging more interaction with lower attention demands. However, Hodkinson (2016) critiques this as simplistic, noting that media engagement varies by context. For instance, while McLuhan classified radio as a hot medium, it often serves as background entertainment, allowing minimal attention as well as facilitating interaction (e.g. call-ins). Conversely, TV, labelled as cool, can be highly absorbing, with limited opportunities for participation. The distinctions between different kinds of media are summarized in Table 1.

The vast number of media available enables people to become more “eclectic” in how they engage with the news (Facchinetti, 2021; Swart et al., 2017). For example, I might come across an article in the Guardian (a form of mass, asynchronous, one-directional media) about rising gas prices, then hear a friend complain about the high cost of groceries in a WhatsApp chat (interpersonal, synchronous, and low-intensity media). Later, I might watch a TikTok video discussing how rising gas prices affect food production (mass, asynchronous, and interactive). Each of these forms of media allows me to interact with news in different ways and these threads of information – across different intensities, synchronicity, and interactivity – are woven together

to shape my understanding of the situation. Through this eclectic engagement, news audiences become active participants in the co-creation and dissemination of stories and perspectives (Facchinetti, 2021).

**Table 1.** *Different media and their attributes (based on Hodkinson, 2016, pg. 48)*

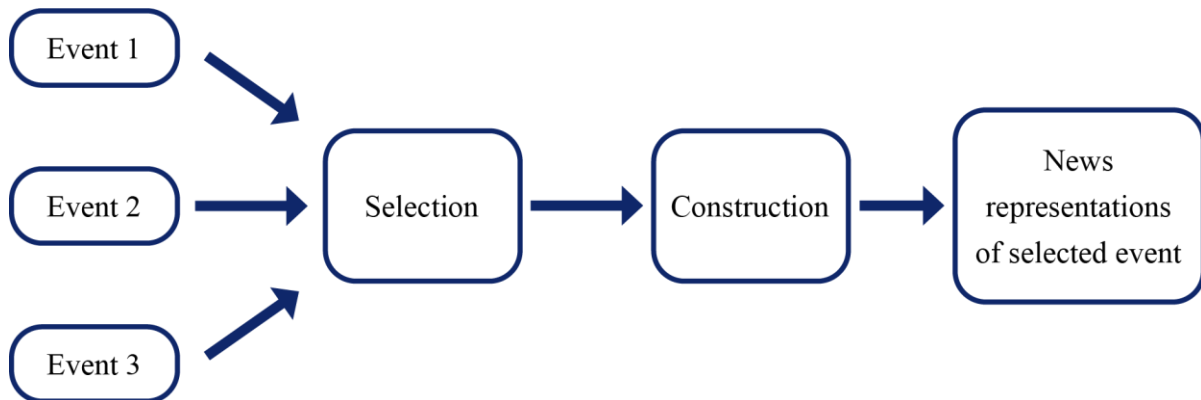
	<b>Printed media</b>	<b>Radio</b>	<b>Television</b>	<b>YouTube</b>	<b>SM</b>
<b>Media Type</b>	Mass	Mass	Mass	Mass	Interpersonal/Mass
<b>Semiotic system</b>	Language	Language	Language	Language	Language
	Depiction (static)		Depiction	Depiction	Depiction
<b>Sensory modality</b>	Visual	Audio	Visual	Visual	Visual
			Audio	Audio	Audio
<b>Synchronicity</b>	Low	Mid	Mid	Low	High
<b>Interactivity</b>	Low	Mid	Low	Mid	High

## 2.4. News

### 2.4.1. What is “news”

The nature of news is evolving rapidly in today's digital age, where its abundance and complexity pose challenges for individuals trying to navigate and comprehend information. According to Hodkinson (2016, p. 156), news is “a vital public service that provides neutral information and truthful facts”. This definition is normative and emphasizes that news should aim to offer a fair, accurate, and balanced portrayal of events, striving toward objectivity. We anticipate news to present an impartial, fair, and accurate portrayal of events, or, at the very least, least endeavour to reach this ideal. Consequently, when news is perceived as biased, it is often viewed as a breach of trust. However, this does not imply that the news is simply a mirror of reality, as it is shaped by, and presented within, a cultural and social context. This process of construction does not imply a lack of objectivity but acknowledges that the news is created and presented in alignment with the society and culture in which it is produced (Hodkinson, 2016), as represented in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** *The News Filtering system (Hodkinson, 2016, pg.157)*



Multiple events occur simultaneously but, naturally, not all can be reported. Decisions are made about which stories will be conveyed to the audience (e.g., what is expected to be relevant or interesting). These stories are then constructed to determine how the story will be presented (e.g., what style and angle will be used), ultimately resulting in the news representation that we, as an audience, encounter. News organizations act as gatekeepers, deciding what information is disseminated and what is not. Through this agenda-setting process, these organizations are able to influence public opinion (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Some outlets may prioritize impartiality and fact-based reporting, while others may present more overtly biased perspectives, reflecting their editorial stance. As a result, different sources may shape the public's perception of events in varying ways.

How the news is selected differs, but Galtung and Ruge (1973) identified 12 key criteria that can affect whether an event is deemed “newsworthy”. Amongst others, these included the frequency and immediacy of the story (i.e. if it is a new or breaking story), the unexpectedness (i.e. how unusual the story is), elite nations (i.e. if the story concerns nations considered to have a large influence over international relations) and cultural proximity (i.e. if the story, or its content, is familiar to the audience).

Other theorists have proposed changes to these categories. For instance, Harrison (2006) suggested that the availability of imagery (e.g., the presence of enticing images or dramatic footage) can elevate the priority of a story, as well as increase its salience. This trend underscores

how the demand for more visual elements in the news has reshaped priorities. News sites try to maximise viewership and engagement, which means audience preferences for quick tempo and attention-grabbing segments also play a significant role in content selection. Understanding how these values have evolved, especially with the advent of SM, is crucial.

When considering news' construction and dissemination, it is important to examine its sources. A significant portion of international news is distributed by three major agencies, Reuters, Associated Press, and Agence France-Presse, supported by extensive local networks (i.e. their own reporters and correspondents) that contribute original reporting, particularly for local or specialized coverage (Hodkinson, 2016). Another significant source of news content is public relations, with organizations promoting their clients. This appeals to news organizations because these ready-made stories are easy to use and help meet the increasing demand for content in the 24-hour news cycle (Hodkinson, 2016). However, this raises questions about the independence of news providers and their agendas (Davis, 2013). Furthermore, advertising and funding can influence what news is selected, prioritized, and how it is presented.

News is often categorized as either “hard” or “soft,” though these terms have led to various interpretations. In a review, Reinemann et al., (2012) identified three main dimensions (i.e. topic, focus, and style) upon which news can be distinguished along a hard-soft continuum, as summarized in Table 2. While prioritizing the topic dimension as the most fundamental, Reinemann et al., (2012) emphasize that these dimensions interact to ultimately determine whether a news piece can be considered more or less “hard”, and to help conceptualize how the same story can be presented differently. For example, a natural disaster can be reported as hard news by focusing on the scale of destruction and official responses while using an impersonal, factual style. Alternatively, it can be presented as soft news by highlighting personal stories of survivors and emotional appeals for aid.

**Table 2.** Table showing the dimensions of hard and soft news.

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Hard</b>		<b>Soft</b>
<b>Topic</b>	Politically Relevant		Politically Irrelevant
<b>Focus</b>	Societal Issues	↔	Individual Issues
	Thematic Framing	↔	Specific Events
<b>Style</b>	Impersonal	↔	Personal
	Unemotional		Emotive

The style of presentation can also help engender an audience, with some news using more formal academic or jargon-laden vocabulary to target professionals, while others more “everyday” language. Soft news usually attracts more attention (Bokzkovski & Peer, 2011) and is often used to draw in a broader audience. Traditional definitions of news align with “hard” news topics, but common perceptions of news are expanding to also include more typically “soft” topics related to culture and entertainment, such as sports and celebrities (Swart et al., 2017). This links with incorporating opinion into news (usually associated with soft news) and is often accompanied by provocative, even sensationalist, images (Reinemann et al., 2012). Lately, there has been an increased preference for opinion-dominated news (Bergström & Jervelycke Belfrage, 2018) that Facchinetti (2021) posits could potentially be due to the increased popularity of depiction in news.

The inclusion of images can be used to create vivid and immersive experiences that highlight certain perspectives (Van Krieken, 2018). The relationship between depiction and language can indicate the angle of the story, portraying what aspect is considered most significant. This is also relevant for how news is constructed when we consider each element of a news article. For example, consider the headline and image in the news piece displayed in Figure 4. How would the story have appeared differently if the article had used a different picture – one of the families, or the workers actively excavating the site? What if they had used different words – if “it’s” was “rescuers”? This demonstrates how journalists not only transmit news but shape how it is presented to, and subsequently perceived by, an audience.

**Figure 4.** News article detailing rescue efforts after the May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024, George building collapse  
(From screenshot submitted by Participant A)



Incorporating depiction can enable the communication to feel more personal by creating a sense of connection between the audience and the image, which subsequently compounds its popularity (Facchinetti, 2021). According to Hodkinson (2016, p. 40):

Photographs are argued to reduce the complexity of issues to particular observable fragments and encourage emotional, voyeuristic captivation. Worse still, this inherent superficiality is hidden by a veneer of realness and proximity – photographs, then, entice us into the mistaken feeling that we have fully understood the situation depicted.

This hints at how imagery can be used to mislead an audience. People tend to accept images as real, leading to as many as one-third of manipulated photographs going undetected (Nightingale et al., 2017). Furthermore, people tend to be more likely to accept (and share) claims presented with images, even if the images are uninformative (Fenn et al., 2019) (e.g., an article about universities accompanied by a generic building).

The rise of SM has also changed how the news is engaged with and led to a drastic increase in the presentation of content in multiple semiotic systems. The ease and affordability facilitated by modern technologies has subsequently meant polysemiotic and multimodal news has become more prolific and entrenched (Facchinetti, 2021). This has culminated in online news platforms,

providing a new medium where integrated news is expected, and polysemiotic and/or multimodal representations of the news are the norm. As mentioned in Section 2.2, while these notions commonly occur together, it is through cognitive semiotics that we are able to de-conflate them and independently access how they relate to news engagement.

The intertwining of multiple semiotic systems (like text and image) and (potentially) sensory modalities (like vision and sound) has led to the development of the news *package*, as opposed to the news *piece* (Kolodzy, 2012). For example, a news website may have a picture, a written article (many with the option to have this enunciated through a text-to-speech generator), a video clip with scenes from the original event, as well as a reporter describing it, and a news ticker announcing breaking news. This unified conglomerate demonstrates a change in journalism where the journalist is no longer merely writing to convey information, but rather curating a cohesive package to tell a story. The newsworthiness of such a “package” is constructed through the interplay of many, previously described, components including the content, influencing people’s engagement with news in various ways.

Availability, accessibility, and lifestyle are some of the factors affecting people’s decisions on news engagement. Many individuals consider news engagement indispensable, despite often perceiving the news they engage with as unreliable, inconsistent, or disjointed (Swart et al., 2017). This has led to a variety of behaviour interactions and styles. For instance, Elvestad et al., (2014) distinguished between news seekers, who actively pursue news and valued being informed, and news avoiders, who do not, often due to feeling overwhelmed or disinterested. Monitoring behaviour, which involves continuous, low-level engagement with news, is thought to be increasing and is highly valued by many (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2014). Additionally, media multitasking, where individuals engage in multiple media activities simultaneously – such as scrolling through SM while listening to the radio – is also on the rise (Pilotta et al., 2004).

The change in media usage is, in part, enabled by the increase in online content, which has also allowed interactivity to become central, from clickable, shareable links to crowdsourcing and polls (Facchinetti, 2021; Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2019). Subsequently, the way an audience interacts with the news is no longer a linear unidirectional process. Rather it has become a dynamic platform where individuals can choose not only what to engage with but also how to engage, whether by



skimming a headline or clicking a link to read the full article. Furthermore, the audience can also interact with one another by commenting, liking, and sharing, thus contributing their voices and opinions to the mix (Facchinetti, 2021). News sharing may play an important social role. On the one hand, people feel that they have social capital by displaying their knowledge of valuable information, and, on the other, they perform the civic duty of sharing it (Chakrabarti et al., 2018). This is particularly apparent when there is distrust in the ability of official news sites to relate important information (Chenzi, 2021).

Further, according to Swart et al., (2017), people construct their news repertoires based on different priorities. Nationally orientated news users see news as a way to relax and connect with others, blending hard and soft news. Regionally orientated users value local news for its personal relevance and civic duty. Background-orientated users focus on international news, seeing it as a form of education. Digital news users rely mainly on online platforms, and generally adopt a critical stance viewing news as addictive and unhealthy. "Laidback" users adopt a passive approach, monitoring news rather than engaging, emphasising its social sharing aspect. Exhibiting different news engagement behaviours implies that people find different things appealing in news, influencing their choices on what to consume and share, thus warranting further investigation.

While subsequent sections delve into how individuals interact with news, it is essential first to comprehend how this experience of the news is complicated by disinformation and related "disorders," as described in the following sub-section.

#### 2.4.2. "Fake news"

The rise in the accessibility of vast amounts of information and the means to disseminate it widely has contributed to the informational chaos in which we often find ourselves. This problem is exacerbated by the proliferation of what is commonly referred to as "fake news". The term encompasses a wide spectrum of situations, including manipulated images, rumours, fabricated stories, and automated SM accounts. Some scholars, such as Green (2017), advocate for viewing this as a spectrum that ranges from biased information to outright falsehoods, but ultimately, it is becoming increasingly challenging to define "fake news" as a unified concept given its many nuanced aspects. Moreover, the term's ubiquitous use in public discourse has diluted its specific meaning, in some cases transforming it into a rhetorical tool (Wasserman, 2017).

In an effort to bring clarity to the complex landscape, Wardle and Derakshan (2017) categorized “fake news” under the umbrella term “disinformation disorders”, distinguishing between: *disinformation*: the deliberate generation and dissemination of inaccurate or manipulated information that is intended to deceive or mislead an audience; *misinformation*: the inadvertent sharing of such information; and *malinformation*: the accurate, nonmanipulated information shared with the purposeful intention of causing harm. While crucial, these distinctions hinge on knowing the intentions of the source of the news, and it is unclear how apparent these differences are for those encountering the information. If I see a misleading news article, how am I to know if it is disinformation or misinformation?

Although often viewed as recent, disinformation strategies date back to ancient times, such as Rome 44 BC (Posetti & Mathew, 2018). Some scholars, like Wahutu (2019), go so far as to suggest the fears surrounding the increase in misinformation may be more of a ‘moral panic’. However, technological advancements, like the internet and social media, have amplified the spread of information and accompanying disinformation (Masullo et al., 2020), making it more abundant and harder to verify (Pometatzev, 2019).

This is concerning because the spreading of disinformation not only undermines journalism’s integrity but can also have severe political and societal consequences, such as derailing public and social health initiatives (Wang, 2019). Thus disinformation is often used as a tool of manipulation, creating a particular response or reaction from an audience (Tandoc et al, 2018; Chenzi, 2021, Pineteh's, 2017), as seen in its role in escalating xenophobia in South Africa (Chenzi, 2021).

Disinformation can be considered from the perspective of how much the content relies on facts (facility) or the extent to which it purports itself as true (deception) (Tandoc et al., 2018). Framing, the notion that how information is presented is important, plays a critical role in presenting it as valid (Pineteh, 2017). This implies the tendency of these phenomena to mimic “genuine news” (as hinted at by the colloquial “fake news”) (Tandoc et al, 2018, Chenzi, 2021). As such, it is in part through this framing and mimicry that opinions and disinformation can pass as news. As such, its success hinges on audiences’ ability to discern its falsity, yet many fail to do so, sharing it as “misinformation” (Baptista & Gradim, 2020). Thus, disinformation is less a technological issue and more a social one, gaining power through sharing (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019).

The current media landscape (Baptista & Gradim, 2020), including increased use of SM as a news source (Chenzi, 2021) and journalistic practices, have also heightened the salience and unparalleled effect of disinformation. For example, respected news organizations often strive to present balanced coverage by giving equal airtime to opposing views. However, this approach can unintentionally elevate fringe opinions (those held by a small minority) by placing them alongside mainstream perspectives and creating a false equivalence that distorts public perception of their prevalence and credibility (Wahutu, 2019).

Additionally, many people feel disconnected from the authoritative tone of mainstream media, finding it impersonal or alienating. As a result, they seek out alternative sources that adopt a more personal and colloquial tone, which is often characteristic of disinformation and fake news outlets (Wasserman, 2017). This tendency is further amplified when individuals perceive a lack of resonance between the content of mainstream news and their own lived experiences (Nielsen & Graves, 2017).

The constant connection afforded by the internet and SM has enabled news to become an ever-present facet of our lives (Facchinetti, 2021). We no longer need to find the news; the news is all around us, just a swipe or glance away. This environment, filled with vast amounts of information and disinformation, along with highly integrated news packages and selection processes, influences how people engage with news (Chenzi, 2021). Moreover, this engagement increasingly occurs on social media, which I will discuss in the next sub-section.

#### *2.4.2. Social media in news engagement*

SM have emerged as a central platform for news engagement (Baptista & Gradim, 2020), as evidenced by the extensive research dedicated solely to news dissemination within these platforms (e.g. Fletcher & Nielsen, 2019; Guarda et al., 2018; Masullo et al., 2020). SM have changed how we engage with news (and other media), blurring the lines between audience and journalist while disrupting traditional understandings of journalism (Chenzi, 2021; Mare et al., 2019; Wahutu, 2019). The merging of the boundary between creator and consumer mirrors and emphasizes the change in who is considered a trustworthy source of information.

The content presented to users in SM can be determined by editorial selection by professionals, algorithmic recommendations based on peer interest, and/or algorithms that reflect a user's past behaviour (Fletcher & Kleis Nielsen, 2019; Thurman et al., 2019). Algorithmic selection was perceived as a way to avoid bias and access impartial news and was more likely to be accepted when engaging with soft news (Thurman et al., 2019). SM, by contrast, whether curated by editors or algorithms, was met with "generalized scepticism" (Fletcher & Kleis Nielsen, 2019). SM privileges posts that are popular and through this, can create a cycle of spreading information which could be incorrect. Fake news stories are considered highly shareable, making them appealing in SM due to their potential to go viral (Herman, 2016 in Chenzi, 2021).

People often report feeling overwhelmed when using SM due to conflicting factors like convenience versus privacy, trust versus distrust, and meaningful versus wasted time (Masullo et al., 2020). This reflects the delicate balancing act that users are continuously, often unsuccessfully, negotiating when using SM. Guarda et al. (2018) note that the sheer volume of information can lead to passivity and a "narcotic dysfunction," where individuals are unable to initiate change. Overall, this demonstrates how, while SM may offer convenience and increased connection, this can be undermined by the distrust people experience and their inability to successfully navigate the terrain, often leading to increased complexity.

While the research focus on SM seems to suggest it is the sole, or most important, resource for news, people tend to rely on several media to create their news repertoire (Swart et al., 2017). Furthermore, Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink (2014) found that increased news engagement on SM platforms did not reconstruct participants' news behaviours, given that online news practices like commenting and sharing did not become central to participants' news engagement. Rather, SM seemed to facilitate some practices such as monitoring and scanning. Amid the complexity and overwhelm that people experience on social media, trust becomes a crucial factor in how individuals engage with news. Trust is a central element in navigating these varied sources, as it shapes how we interact with and interpret the news we encounter.

## 2.5 Trust and Veracity

Trust is an inherent propensity, a natural inclination, that helps us navigate the vastness of possibility we encounter in the world. Sokolowski (2008) describes *veracity* as the human tendency towards truth; an inherent desire for and disposition in our interactions, implying attention to accuracy, and care in what we disclose. Arguably, this disposition forms the foundation of how we trust, often in a diffuse manner spread across multiple agents and systems. We generally trust in the tendency to truth, knowing that it is not certain as someone can lie, deceive or simply be wrong. Yet, we hope for truth, trust it, and behave in keeping. By engaging in a communicative act, by merely undertaking the interaction, I imply that I am being genuine and that I desire to communicate honest and accurate information. We trust in this expectation and understanding of one another as creatures of veracity. By better understanding these dynamics, we can perhaps appreciate the complexities of news engagement and the role of trust in our daily lives.

Trust allows us to anticipate future experiences by generalizing from past ones, thereby generating some confidence in the outcome despite a lack of information (Luhmann, 1979). By disregarding alternative outcomes, we can experience a sense of certainty, even when no such certainty exists, and move forward with confidence. As a result, we experience a reduction in complexity by decreasing the unavoidable uncertainty in life (Luhmann, 1979). For example, when I trust a particular newspaper, I assume that the content it provides is accurate and I act in accordance: I do not have to question every article or fact-check the quotes and I continue my life as though it is accurate, making subsequent decisions and evaluations upon this assumption. Thus, trust enables us to project structure onto the indeterminate future, even though it does not eliminate the jeopardy and merely lessens the sense of risk (e.g., I still know the newspaper *could* be inaccurate, whether through mistake or malice). This relative reduction in complexity allows for greater tolerance of uncertainty and, by making other outcomes seem improbable, can neutralize associated fears, and limit their disruptive potential (ibid).

Trust also links to hope (Marín-Ávila, 2021). We can recognize that an outcome is beyond our control, yet still be willing to take action to cultivate it, deeming this effort worthwhile despite the accompanying risk and uncertainty. There is first a value judgment of one possible outcome as desirable (e.g., I want the newspaper to be accurate), then an anticipation of this outcome, (e.g. I

expect the newspaper to be accurate), despite knowledge that it may be improbable, (e.g. I know that there could be inaccuracies). Because hope acknowledges the uncertainty, it is always accompanied by an understanding of the potential for converse negative outcomes, which is manifested as doubt or fear (Marín-Ávila, 2021). While hope is largely an emotional attitude, trust is a practical one through which one actively makes oneself vulnerable, with the intention of realizing the hoped-for state. Vulnerability is an essential and interpersonal dimension of trust that anticipates the possibility of *harm* (Quepons, 2020). Thus, I know that the newspaper may be inaccurate and that I could be misled; however, by trusting the newspaper I assume its authenticity, thus demonstrating an awareness of the risk. When we trust, we invest in another or their actions, and become vulnerable to them, knowingly giving the other power (ibid).

This act of trust inherently creates a power imbalance (Marín-Ávila, 2021). The news organization has power over how I perceive and engage with the world based on the news they provide. The trust relationship is stabilized by the expectation that it should continue, as well as the threat of sanctions and morality judgments should the trust be breached (Luhmann, 1979). If I find out that the news they provided was inaccurate, I will question my trust and reliance on them as a news source, turning to others instead. In this way, control is built into the relationship and the trustee therefore is motivated not to abuse the trust.

Trust is learned through continual testing, as a byproduct of actions and awareness of the resulting consequences. This creates a framework of past experiences (assumed to be reliable) that are used to expect future experiences (Luhmann, 1979). My trusted newspaper is the one that has previously shown me accurate, valuable information, so I assume it will continue to. Embedded in this, is the recognition that the outcome is partly within the trustee's volition (i.e. the newspaper “controls” the information it publishes). Moreover, there is an expectation that the trustee will behave in alignment with their presented and socially available self. My trusted news source purports itself to be an independent, accurate purveyor of news, thus I expect it to act accordingly. The correspondence between one’s image and actions is tested through repeated interactions. This learning of trust can occur cooperatively and through social systems, for example, by living and experiencing life within a community. For instance, I have seen that my mother trusts certain news sources and they provide her with useful information; I am taught in school that certain sources

are respectable, etc. Positive trust interactions can be accumulated as a form of social capital, (i.e. repeated accurate news articles) demonstrating the symbolic nature of trust.

Further, Luhmann (1979) suggests that distrust is a functional equivalent to trust, rather than the mere absence of it, stating that a simple rejection of trust would restore the world to its full complexity, overwhelming one with potential possibilities and paralyzing them into meaninglessness. Conversely, distrust also reduces complexity and defines the limits of action, making rational responses possible. As such, distrust is in many ways more discerning than trust, and limits one to the information one is confident in, resulting in increased reliance on a narrower selection of information. This makes distrust a demanding strategy, often domineering one's attention and energy. Subsequently, distrust can make it harder for one to explore or adjust to an environment, limiting the opportunities for learning (ibid).

Choosing to trust, or distrust, influences which events are noticed and their perceived relevance, shaping interpretations and justifications for trust. For instance, trusting a newspaper may lead one to remember its accurate reporting, while distrust heightens awareness of inaccuracies. However, trust cannot be established through knowledge alone. Relying solely on factual presentation undermines trust, which is essential for navigating uncertainty (Marín-Ávila, 2021). Knowing a newspaper is accurate does not inherently foster trust; rather it may serve as a justification for pre-existing trust. True trust requires a blend of ignorance and information, as familiarity, the taken-for-granted assumptions with which we meet the world, is a precondition for trust (Luhmann, 1979). It is our trust in the life world that provides us with the security we need to engage and meaningfully orient ourselves in the world (Carolan & Bell, 2004).

In unfamiliar situations, we rely on unreflective trust, a practical assumption that supports daily life (Quepons, 2020). This contrasts with active trust, which acknowledges the risk of betrayal and diffuse trust, which occurs when we trust a system without full control or knowledge of it (Luhmann, 1979). For an example of diffuse trust, consider Laswell's (1948) model in Section 2.2. Thus, at which of those points am I trusting? Is it the newspaper, the journalists or the publisher that I trust? The local quoted in the story, or the legislation regulating it? Do I trust the accuracy of factual information, or that the perspective aligns with my own? We cannot know the intricacies and nuances of all aspects in the generation of news, and as such we rely on others to make the

appropriate judgments and trust them where we do not have access (Carolan & Bell, 2004). Ultimately, we must rely on others to make judgments when we lack access to complete information.

In conclusion, trust is a fundamental aspect of human interaction and understanding. It reduces complexity and uncertainty, allowing us to navigate a world filled with countless possibilities. We trust because it is a natural inclination that facilitates cooperation and communication, and we often do so in a diffuse manner, relying on multiple agents and systems. This trust is both a practical necessity and a hopeful endeavour, as it enables us to function effectively within our social networks. Furthermore, by examining trust through the lens of cognitive semiotics, we can gain insights into how it shapes our engagement with news and the broader social fabric.

## **2.6. The South African Context**

As mentioned in Section 2.4.1, news needs to be understood in the context of its construction, dissemination, and engagement (Wasserman, 2020). Therefore, to grasp the role that news (in different media) plays in a given society, we need to examine the specific social, cultural, and political contexts in which it appears. In South Africa, this means considering its unique generational legacy and current post-apartheid situation.

Informal circuits of information have historically played a crucial role in the African context, where mainstream journalism is often viewed with distrust due to its associations with government interests (Mano, 2007). Traditional news sources in Africa are frequently aligned with the incumbent government, contributing to scepticism among the public and increasing the attractiveness of alternative sources (Hove & Chenzi, 2020). Historically, alternative news sources have served as vital channels for information dissemination during periods when trust in state-run media has been compromised (Chenzi, 2021). However, this reliance on alternative sources also exposes individuals to increased risks of encountering disinformation.

While journalism has traditionally determined who is seen as a credible source, those once viewed as reputable are not always perceived positively today. In Africa, for instance, international news is often valued more than local reports, even on local issues. However, for some, the legacy



of international relations fosters distrust in these sources, making them seem distant compared to a relatable social media post shared by a neighbour (Wahutu, 2019).

Disinformation is widespread in Africa, with election "rumours" and falsehoods becoming a fixture of modern politics and often contributing to serious issues, such as post-election violence (Goldstein & Rotich, 2010). South Africans appear to be aware of this issue, as 76% report sometimes or often encountering political news they believe to be "completely made up" (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019). Africa possesses a distinct media landscape marked by unique situational and contextual factors that shape news engagement and dissemination (Mare et al., 2019). Consequently, there is a proliferation of theories on fake news and disinformation that often overlook the experiences of sub-Saharan Africa (Goldstein & Rotich, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial for future research to address this gap by exploring how various demographics, including age groups, interact with media within this specific context.

## **2.7. Age and Previous Studies**

There are also notable generational differences in media engagement habits. Studies conducted in Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa indicate that younger and more educated individuals are more inclined to seek information online (Pew, 2019; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019) and tend to rely more on SM platforms for news compared to older individuals (Conroy-Krutz & Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny, 2019).

A comparative study by Madrid-Morales et al. (2021) of sub-Saharan African countries found that people exhibit different misinformation behaviours depending on their age. Specifically, older individuals were more likely to share inaccurate information. This finding aligns with international studies that suggest older individuals tend to engage with more dis/misinformation, including news they share on their X (previously Twitter) (Grinberg et al., 2019) and Facebook feeds (Guess et al., 2019). This has been theorised to be due to either a) cognitive decline, reducing older individuals' critical thinking and memory (Mitchell & Johnson, 2009; Pennycook et al., 2018; Unkelbach et al., 2019); b) lower digital literacy, having learned to navigate media later in life, and being less likely to fact-check information (Amazeen & Wojdyski, 2018; Nightingale et al., 2017), or c) smaller social networks, especially on SM, leading to greater trust in information from

familiar sources (De Bruin et al., 2020; Wrzus et al., 2013). This trust is further enhanced by a general increase in interpersonal trust with age (Brashier & Schacter, 2020; Poulin & Haase, 2015). Additionally, older adults often engage in online political spaces out of a sense of civic duty (Ahmed et al., 2023) frequently motivating them to share misinformation, as in the case of Kenya and Nigeria, reported by Chakrabarti et al. (2018).

The relationship between youth and news, as well as disinformation, is influenced by various situational factors. Mainstream news often fails to resonate with the experiences of the poor and marginalized (Wasserman, 2017; Mare et al., 2019). South African youth, in particular, often feel alienated by mainstream news, even if they believe it to be truthful, as it seldom aligns with their experiences and frames of reference (Wasserman & Garman, 2014). Consequently, they are more attracted to alternative sources that present topics in a more relatable manner, as in the style of soft news. Such a colloquial and “friendly” tone is more commonly associated with fringe sites or disinformation than mainstream outlets, which tend to adopt a more formal, official approach (Wasserman, 2017). Research specific to media habits among older generations in southern Africa is limited (Harling et al., 2020), but studies from the USA and Europe suggest that older individuals generally spend more time watching television (e.g., Harwood, 2007; Mares & Woodard, 2006; van der Goot, Beentjes, & Van Selm, 2006) and reading newspapers (e.g., Burgoon & Burgoon, 1980; Lain, 1986; Malthouse & Calder, 2006; Schoenbach et. al, 1999) compared to their younger counterparts.

## **2.8. Revised Research Questions**

As discussed in this chapter, people’s engagement with the news in different media is influenced by many factors and experienced along many dimensions. Given this background and with the help of the concepts defined with cognitive semiotics, the research questions presented at the end of Chapter 1 can be revised and further specified as follows:

1. What kind of media do South Africans engage with for their news?
  - a) What media (e.g., radio, newspapers etc.) do they utilize?

- b) What do they value about different media, including sensory modalities, dimensions (e.g., synchronicity), and semiotic systems, in which the news is encountered?
- 2. What kind of news media do South Africans trust and why?
  - a) What news do they perceive to be trustworthy?
  - b) What behaviours do they adopt to ensure they are engaging with news they trust?
- 3. What is it that motivates South Africans to engage with the news?
  - a) What are their experiences of engaging with news?
  - b) What benefits do they perceive from engaging with news?
- 4. Does age affect any of the above?

# Chapter 3. Methods

## 3.1. Introduction

As indicated in Chapter 2, phenomenological triangulation is a key aspect of cognitive semiotics. First-person methods inform each step of the project and concern how my own reflections, knowledge and experience determine the course of the study, including the formulation and explanations of concepts, such as news and trust. The way first-person methods have informed the survey and interview design are discussed in more detail in the relevant sections below. Second-person methods were used in the photovoice and interview study where I, the researcher, and the participants jointly explored their experiences with the topic. This provides insight into the participants' experiences surrounding news and trust and how these affect their lives. Additionally, a second-person method was employed in engaging with the background literature in the previous section, as well as in interpreting this jointly with my supervisors. Third-person methods are most removed from the phenomenon. In this thesis, this took the form of an online survey that was statistically analysed and provides the basis for generalising trends and understanding how people interact with the news on a larger scale. These methods come together to provide complementary perspectives on the phenomena of news and trust to generate a deeper understanding. Table 3 summarizes the methods and perspectives used in this thesis.

This chapter outlines the study design, execution, and analysis. Section 3.2. details the survey methodology, and Section 3.3. outlines the photovoice (i.e. a method whereby participants use photographs to capture their experience of the phenomenon), as well as the interview methodology used in this study. This order not only establishes a logical progression for the reader but also reflects the study's actual progression, as conducting the survey first was necessary to identify and recruit potential participants for the interviews. The chapter then concludes with a brief account of the ethical considerations.

**Table 3.** *Phenomenological Triangulation as displayed in this study*

<b>Perspective</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Form in this study</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> person</b>	Reflections on researcher’s own knowledge and assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Personal reflection<sup>3</sup></li> <li>➤ Defining concepts</li> <li>➤ Designing materials</li> </ul>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> person</b>	Intersubjective understanding co-created through interactions between researcher and other subjects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Engaging with relevant literature</li> <li>➤ Discussions with peers and supervisors</li> <li>➤ Interactions with participants (Interviews and photograph discussion)</li> </ul>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> person</b>	Quantifiable (commonly agreed upon, understood, and interpreted) information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The quantitative analysis of the survey</li> </ul>

### 3.2. Survey

An online survey was conducted to ascertain general trends in how news was engaged with and perceived by South Africans. The survey was conducted first as it also acted as a recruiting tool for the second phase of the study, discussed in Section 3.3.

#### 3.2.1. Survey participants

126 participants were recruited through convenience sampling. The survey, with a plea to share the link widely, was distributed via my social network on platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram,

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<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, I attempted to employ methods from *Thinking at the Edge* (Schoeller, 2023) to explore how I interacted with and experienced trust and news. While typically an interview technique, I found experimenting with these methods highly beneficial and useful in structuring my exploration of the topic. I wrote and recorded my thoughts on these topics, exploring my own assumptions and experiences in order to make myself more aware of my own biases and expectations, including how they influence the way I engage with readings, participants and ultimately the thesis. This approach allowed me to engage with the interviews and transcripts openly, letting meaning emerge naturally (Hycner, 1985).

and Facebook (see Appendix A1). Participants had to be South Africans living in South Africa and over the age of 18. Participant demographic information is summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *Participants Demographic information*

<b>Demographic Category</b>	<b>Representation in Study</b>
Gender	Female:81 Male: 45
Age	18-24 years: 5 25-30 years: 23 31-40 years: 22 41-50 years: 9 51-60 years: 30 61+ years: 37
Ethnicity	White: 105 Coloured: 9 Black: 7 Indian/Asian: 3 Other: 1 Prefer not to disclose: 1
Education	Bachelor's Degree/Diploma: 46 High School: 40 Master's Degree: 19 Honours Degree: 18 PhD: 3

### 3.2.2. *Survey procedure*

The survey was released on 10/04/2024. When opening the Google Forms, participants were briefly informed about the study, what was required of them, and their rights (e.g. anonymity). Once participants completed the survey they were thanked for their contribution and provided with the link to information about the photovoice study. Interest in the photovoice study was collected in a separate form to ensure survey answers remained anonymous. The survey took roughly 10 to 15 minutes.

### 3.3.3. *Survey materials*

The survey collected basic demographic information to determine the representativeness of the sample and age information for analysis purposes. For the full survey, see Appendix B1. The

survey comprised 29 items (excluding demographic information), divided into six sections. Section one investigated the frequency of news consumption across different media (e.g., newspapers) and various media behaviours (e.g., skimming headlines). Section two ascertained the frequency with which participants engaged with hard and soft news and different styles of reporting. Section three assessed attitudes towards selection methods. Section four assessed perceived exposure to dis/misinformation. Section five identified participants' history of sharing dis/misinformation, differentiating between online and in-person experiences. Section six assessed participants' perceptions of who bears responsibility for preventing dis/misinformation. For a detailed breakdown of survey sections see Appendix C1. To maintain participant engagement, the question structure was varied, including "yes/no" questions, 5-point Likert scale ratings, and ranking items.

Additionally, one optional long-answer question was included at the end of the study where participants were encouraged to provide additional thoughts or comments regarding the study. This ensured participants had the opportunity to voice their opinions during and provide feedback on the survey.

#### 3.3.4. Analysis

Survey answers were analysed on SPSS software (2020) to determine general trends. Age was used as an independent variable. Participants were split into the following four age groups for analysis: 18-30 (n= 27), 31-50 (n=31), 51-60 (n=30), 61+ (n= 37). The groups were chosen to allow for roughly equal group sizes, as well as generally aligning with technological introductions in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> 20 items from the survey were combined to measure “news engagement”. These items were tested and produced a Cronbach’s alpha of .880, indicating a high internal consistency (for a list of combined items see Appendix D1). As the survey was conducted online and questions were compulsory, there was no missing data. The specific tests used to investigate each aspect are

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<sup>4</sup> Internet became commercially available in South Africa in 1993, meaning that 18–30-year-olds grew up with internet available. TV was introduced in 1976, meaning that generally, those below the age of 50 would have grown up with TV.

discussed in the following chapter to avoid repetition.

### **3.3. Photovoice and Interview**

Photovoice, a participatory action research method developed within psychology, uses photographs taken by participants to investigate a phenomenon in their daily lives from the participant's point of view (Tsang, 2020). This section details why photovoice was chosen and how the second phase of the study was carried out.

#### *3.3. 1. Photovoice introduction*

This study employed a version of photovoice to encourage participants' greater engagement with the phenomenon, facilitate deeper reflection on their lived experiences, and allow these to guide the interview (Plunkett et al., 2013) by building up participants' awareness of news stories and how they experience them. Furthermore, given cognitive semiotics research in polysemiotic and multimodal communication, photovoice provided insights into how participants can engage different semiotic systems to convey their experiences by including depiction.

#### *3.3.2. Photovoice and interview participants*

The participants were required to be 18 years or older, reside in the Western Cape (or be willing to participate online), and have access to a camera and internet to share photographs. Given the demands of the study, participants were informed in advance about the time commitment involved, including daily reflection on the topic as well as availability for interviews. After eligibility and understanding of the study were confirmed, briefing sessions were arranged. A total of 16 (10 females and 6 males) participants were included, ranging in age from 27 to 74.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Eighteen potential participants expressed interest after completing the survey and were sent more information on the photovoice methodology (see Appendix E1). One did not respond and was removed from the study, and another failed to attend briefing sessions and was thus excluded.



### 3.3.3. Procedure

The participants received a briefing session, where they were instructed on the topic and the methodology, after which they were asked for consent (see Appendix F1). Briefings lasted roughly 40 minutes and took place from the 04/05/24 to the 29/05/24.<sup>6</sup> After the briefing, the participants began their photography period during which they uploaded a maximum of 15 photographs, as well as contextualizing comments, to a VoiceThread (VT).<sup>7</sup> While creating the VTs, I asked the participants to reflect on how they decide which news to engage with and how they interact with news from various sources. I conducted the interviews roughly two weeks after the briefing session and no later than one month. Interviews ranged from 50 minutes to two and a half hours. The interviews, guided by the VTs, were audio-recorded for transcription. After the interviews, I offered each participant a 10€ online gift voucher as a token of appreciation. I also asked the participants to release their photographs for use in the study (see Appendix G1). Seven participants attended both the interview and briefing in person, six had the briefing in person but the interview online, and three completed both online via Google Meet or WhatsApp. In-person briefing sessions were held at coffee shops and interviews were done at participants' residences.

### 3.3.4. Materials

#### 1. VoiceThread

VoiceThread is a password-protected platform (<https://voicethread.com>) on which participants could post photographs to a thread shared only with me, the researcher. This platform provides participants with a unique space to collect their experiences (i.e. photographs and written descriptions) while using personal devices (i.e. phones) and has previously been used successfully in other research studies (e.g. Janesick, 2014; Schleien et al., 2016). During the briefing session, participants set up an individual thread for the project. I was notified as changes to the thread occurred, thus could monitor progress, and offer assistance where needed.

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<sup>6</sup> Where possible, participants were briefed in groups. This was efficient and facilitated discussion.

<sup>7</sup> Five participants had difficulty with the VoiceThread App. One shared their photos in a Google Drive, and four sent theirs in a designated WhatsApp chat containing only me (the researcher) and the participant.

## 2. Project instructions

I provided the participants with a detailed information sheet which included a summary of the ethical considerations when taking photographs, step-by-step instructions for VoiceThread, as well as a summary of the project intentions and the photovoice method (see appendix H1).

## 3. Interview guide

I designed a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix I1) based on my intuitions, previous research, the survey, and the photographs. For example, I developed general questions by reading all VTs and cross-referencing ideas that came up frequently across participants. This resulted in four general “topics” that were addressed in each interview and ensured that the research questions were answered: (a) how participants feel when engaging with news, (b) what do they gain from engaging with the news, (c) what do they perceive to be reliable and (d) does the presence of a visual component (i.e. depiction) alter their engagement.

Bevan (2014) helped to systematically structure the questions according to the three domains: first, *contextualisation* of participants' experiences through narrative and context-providing questions (e.g., Can you tell me about the first time you encountered this?), then *apprehending* it by asking descriptive and structural questions (e.g. What did you feel in that moment?) and finally *clarifying* it by varying the structure of questions and asking participants to consider variations on their experience (e.g. How would it be different if [condition] changed?)

Further, I designed specific questions for each participant based on their VT and asked them to elaborate on the experience they included and reasons for doing so. These questions focused on the emotional language and metaphors that the participants had used. Questions also enquired about what participants engaged with, what elements guided this engagement and how they managed their engagement. Moreover, the interview drew on photovoice interview guides and asked SHOWeD questions<sup>8</sup> (Plunkett et al., 2013; Tsang, 2020; Wang & Redwood, 2001) where

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<sup>8</sup> The acronym "SHOWeD" is frequently used in photovoice studies to guide discussions about photographs. It stands for: S- What do you See here? H-What is really Happening here? O-How does this relate to Our lives? W- Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist? D-What can we Do about it??

it was considered appropriate, such as asking participants “What is happening here? How does this relate to our lives?”

Where possible “why” phrased questions were avoided, opting instead for “what” and “how” to encourage detailed reflection and discussion. I employed active listening to foster an atmosphere of comfort and trust among the participants, encouraging them to correct any possible misinterpretations. Additionally, I took notes while the participants were speaking to ensure that I formulated questions using the participants’ language.

### *3.3.5. Data storage*

Participant identity was confidential, and the information provided was anonymized. Only, I, as the researcher, have access to identifying information which is stored separately from research data such as the interview transcripts. The audio material was kept on an external hard drive not connected to the internet.

### *3.3.6. Analysis*

The analysis was eclectic and drew inspiration from various phenomenological approaches, including those of Giorgi (2009), Hycner (1985), and Van Mannen (1990). As described by Keen (1975, p. 41): "phenomenology cannot be reduced to a 'cookbook' set of instructions. It is more an approach, an attitude, an investigative posture with a certain set of goals". The researcher must remain flexible, bracketing personal assumptions and focusing on understanding the participants' lived experiences by continually reflecting on the emerging data to identify key themes and meanings. Thus, it can be seen as a hermeneutic process that must develop by being responsive to the phenomenon (Hycner, 1985).

Once the interviews were transcribed, I re-wrote the participants' dialogue in third-person language, as suggested by Giorgi (2009) to focus on underlying themes rather than merely reporting the literal details of participants’ accounts, thus clarifying, and synthesising the report while maintaining the essence of the experience. Obviously extraneous information, such as detailed accounts of the forestry industry in the 1980’s, were not rewritten. When it was unclear if a description would be relevant, it was retained at this stage. My intention was to synthesize and

condense what participants had said without altering the meaning, utilizing the participants' original phrasing as much as possible (Hycner, 1985). This formed the "units of meaning" which were then considered in relation to the research questions, resulting in the following categories:

- Media: the media being discussed (i.e. radio, SM, etc.)
- News: the news being discussed (i.e. local, political etc.)
- Behaviour: actions being taken (i.e. seeking multiple sources, limiting engagement etc.)
- Experience: feelings described (i.e. empowered, overwhelmed etc.)
- Justification: reasons given for actions/feelings (i.e. corroboration, constant access etc.)
- Other: potentially relevant information not fitting into other categories

These categories were revisited, adapted, and continually redeveloped and reinterpreted throughout the analysis process, both at the level of individual transcripts and across the collective transcripts. Where possible, written reflections in VTs (see Appendix J) were considered as an extension of the interview data and analysed according to the same process.

Next, I grouped the meaning units according to these categories. For example, all extracts referencing newspapers were considered together to establish commonalities and differences, and these are referred to as clusters of meaning. The clusters were then considered in reference to one another to determine central themes and answers to the research questions (Hycner, 1985).

This resulted in the information presented in response to each research question. Where possible, I describe the themes and interpretations from the interviews using the words of the participants to maintain the integrity of the findings and ensure that the participants' experiences are represented (Pollio et al., 2006).

I shared the preliminary analysis with four (randomly selected) participants and asked for their feedback, either corroborating or contesting my interpretations. This was done to increase the validity of the data (Hycner, 1985; Van Manen, 1990; Zahavi, 2018). After reading the analysis in their own time, participants provided both verbal and written feedback. The consulted participants all confirmed that the findings aligned with their experiences.

### **3.4. Ethical Considerations**

Central to this research is an understanding and treatment of the participants as human beings who are choosing to make valuable contributions to the project. I informed the survey participants of their rights, encouraged them to provide anonymous comments, and invited them to contact me with any concerns. The online survey, available only in English, was limited to participants with internet access and proficiency in both English and technology. Distributing the survey through my social networks may have further restricted its reach. To address this, I collected basic demographic data to assess representativeness and encouraged participants to share the survey widely. Although no monetary compensation was provided, I thanked the participants for their meaningful involvement.

Photovoice and interview participants attended an in-depth briefing session which detailed their rights, including confidentiality measures and how to withdraw from the study if this was wanted. In the session, I emphasized ethical responsibilities when taking photographs, especially in public spaces or involving others, as well as addressing risks, power dynamics, and minimizing harm. Examples of inappropriate photos were discussed to guide ethical reflection, and alternative methods like blurring, cropping, and using metaphors were suggested to inspire creativity and steer the participants away from potentially problematic situations. I based this discussion on the guidelines in Sutton-Brown (2014) and Hannes and Parylo (2014) (see Appendix K1 for researcher briefing notes). I discussed ownership of the photographs with the participants after the interview and asked for their permission to use the images for secondary purposes, including inclusion in the final thesis. Due to financial constraints, the participants were required to use their own photographic devices which limited the reach of the study and excluded poorer demographics without access to these resources.

Photovoice and interview participants received a €10 online gift voucher, funded by the MA Program in Language and Linguistics, as a thank-you. They were encouraged to view their involvement as an enriching opportunity to contribute and have their voices heard while ensuring they were not misrepresented. Given the demanding nature of photovoice and interviews, I prioritized participants' comfort and understanding, maintaining transparency through frequent check-ins and offering opportunities for questions and feedback to create a positive experience.

Additionally, ethical approval for the study was granted by the Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town, South Africa (see Appendix L1).

# Chapter 4. Results and Discussion

## 4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study. Findings are presented in response to the research questions, combining the results from both the survey and interviews to present an in-depth coherent answer to each question. To enhance the context and relatability of the findings, Table 5 details basic information about the photovoice and interview participants, allowing readers to appreciate the backgrounds and viewpoints that inform the subsequent discussion.

**Table 5** *Participant information*

<b>Participant Code</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Place of Residence</b>
A	59	Female	George
B	74	Male	George
C	65	Male	George
D	64	Female	Cape Town
E	29	Female	Cape Town
F	38	Male	Cape Town
G	34	Male	George
H	27	Female	George
I	59	Female	George
J	36	Male	Cape Town
K	51	Female	George
L	30	Male	Pretoria
M	29	Female	Beaufort West/George
N	28	Female	Johannesburg
O	29	Female	Gamtoos
P	57	Female	Cape Town

## 4.2. Media Engagement Patterns: Preferences and Values (RQ1)

### 4.2.1. Media usage

The survey indicated that the participants engaged most frequently with internet-based media, while newspapers and unspecified "other" sources were used the least, with radio, YouTube, and TV engagement in between. A Friedman's test was conducted to determine differences in how frequently participants engaged with different media (for all descriptive statistics, see Appendix M2) which showed a significant difference in media usage,  $\chi^2(5, n=126) = 161.315, p < .001$ . Post-hoc comparisons using the Siegel test (with Bonferroni correction) revealed the following key differences in media engagement:

- Internet was engaged with more frequently than both TV and YouTube ( $p < .001$ ).
- Newspapers were engaged with less frequently than both radio and the internet ( $p < .001$ ).
- Other media were engaged with less frequently than both radio and YouTube ( $p < .001$ ).

In interviews participants most frequently spoke about their engagement with news apps, digital newsletters, and podcasts. Though discussed less frequently, some participants did engage with them regularly.

### 4.2.2. Media preferences: Perceived benefits and challenges with different dimensions

The participants in the survey ranked their preferences for "written only," "written and pictures," "audio only," "audio and pictures," "video," and "other" content. A Friedman's test found significant differences in rankings  $\chi^2(5, N = 126) = 93.443, p < .001$  for these preferences. Post-hoc comparisons using the Siegel test (with Bonferroni correction) showed the following significant differences (no other significant pairwise differences were observed):

- "Written with pictures" was ranked higher than "only audio",  $p < .05$ , "audio with pictures",  $p < .001$ , and "Other",  $p < .001$
- "Video", "only written", "only audio", and "audio with pictures" were all rated more favourably than "other" ( $p < .001$  for all comparisons)



"Written with pictures" appears to be one of the most preferred formats, especially when compared to audio-based formats or other unspecified media types, while "other" is the least favourable across the board. This suggests a clear preference for media formats that combine visual and written content.

During the interviews, imagery such as photographs or videos was often linked to evoking emotional responses, making news stories more memorable and impactful as reflected in extracts (1) and (2).

*(1) You build up a whole thing in your head around the picture [...] a picture stays with you, it's something you internalize because it's more of an emotive thing. – A*

*(2) Videos are very like on the ground, this is what's happening, and this is the reality [...] Bringing the viewer into what's happening there rather than just reading about it in a more detached way – E*

For some, visual content was too provocative especially when depicting violent content, leading some participants to avoid it (3). Participants also highlighted the role of images in enhancing comprehension and providing context to news stories, thereby making it easier to understand complex narratives, as described in (4). However, L qualified that this was dependent on “alignment” between the text and pictures saying they need to “speak to each other.” A also expressed distress in (5) when recounting how a picture and headline in an article appeared discordant to her.

*(3) I'm very sensitive, so if it is a violent topic I do not want to see the visual aids [...] I'm more comfortable conceiving words on a paper or listening to audio than I am watching something because watching something is similar to having a conversation with someone in person. It is right here. It's right now, even though it's a TV. It might be like previously recorded, for me, it's like right now because it's in front of you, literally. – M*

*(4) {A picture} also helps with the learning [...] you tend to contextualize things,*

*{pictures} enhances the understanding. – L*

*(5) They just don't talk to each other, and it just frustrated me. So mixed messaging [...] makes me distrust [...] if you get given the wrong pictures, you can go away with the completely wrong story. – A*

Visuals were also seen as providing tangible, supporting evidence that made it easier for audiences to believe the information presented, as shown by (6). However, participants felt that their inclination towards images left them vulnerable, potentially leading them to make assumptions and be less critical, as in (7). This doubt was heightened by awareness of possibly fake imagery circulating (8).

*(6) If you can see the tanks in the background and you can see the shooting that's going on I think it's credible [...] Its evidence. [...] until I see something happening, I won't believe it. – C*

*(7) {Pictures make you} jump to some conclusion when you're seeing something and maybe you're not listening as well to the words [...] that's when it becomes quite scary if the picture is also presented as an “actually for real picture” and it isn't. – P*

*(8) Now you don't actually know if it's true anymore [...] is this a fake photo or is this a real photo? Has it been manipulated or not? – J*

Participants' perceptions and interactions with audio media, such as podcasts and radio, reveal a nuanced understanding of how these formats fit into their broader media consumption habits. Many participants appreciated the ability to multitask while consuming audio content. They valued how podcasts and radio allowed them to engage with information while doing other activities, as noted in (9). This made audio particularly accessible and convenient for some. In contrast to audio, video formats, such as TV, were seen as physically restrictive (10), while others described using the TV as audio (11). This behaviour allowed them to have the benefits of audio (i.e. multitasking) while also able to causally engage with the images when it suited them. For example, F went on to describe how he would wander through when he was interested in seeing visuals.

*(9) I love that I can sort of do something else whilst like I can clean my room, I can*

*drive, I can walk [...], if I'm reading, I kind of just sit and read. – N*

*(10) With the TV, first of all, you sort of just sit and stare at a screen. So, you're more, tied down to that spot. – P*

*(11) {It's} sort of like listening to watching TV. So, I'll put the TV on in the other room [...] and then listen to it from the other room while I cook. – F*

Participants discussed two audio media, namely radio and podcast. Radio was valued for its brief, headline-style updates on local matters, which allowed listeners to feel efficiently informed (12). Additionally, its engagement with callers and the diverse perspectives it facilitated contributed to its appeal (13). Participants who favoured podcasts emphasized how they saw it as an opportunity to engage deeply with a topic (14).

*(12) {It's} relatively short little snippets, and actually what I really like about that is it's primarily local. – F*

*(13) People are calling and they will be sharing their different perspective on the news [...] you tend to see or understand people's perspective. – L*

*(14) It's in-depth. You're kind of sitting with two or three people who have an interest in something and they're having a conversation. It feels more natural. – H*

These preferences can in part be seen as reflecting different styles of reporting, with radio aligning with more traditional hard news styles, and podcasts potentially a more personal softer tone.

Furthermore, in the survey, participants reported how frequently they engaged with different reporting styles (informative, personal accounts, opinion pieces or news satire). A Friedman's test revealed that participants engaged with these at significantly different frequencies,  $\chi^2(3, N = 126) = 80.974, p < .001$ . Post-hoc analysis using the Siegel test found informative reporting was engaged significantly more frequently than other styles ( $p < .001$ ). Interestingly, a Friedman test revealed no significant differences in how participants rated their *enjoyment* of the different reporting styles,  $\chi^2(3, N = 126) = 5.301, p = .151$ . This contrasts with Bergström and Jervelycke Belfrage's (2018) finding (see section 2.4.1.) that indicated a preference for opinion-dominated news and suggests that while opinion-based news may be growing in popularity, people still prioritize factual,

informative content for its perceived value, even if it is not more enjoyable. This indicates a potential distinction between what individuals find enjoyable and what they consider essential for staying informed.

Similarly, a two-way repeated measures ANOVA found that participants engaged with hard news topics more frequently than soft topics ( $F(1, 122) = 29.129, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.176$ ), as well as trusting hard news topics more than soft news topics,  $F(1, 122) = 7.123, p = .009, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.055$ .

The participants also typically encounter this informative style and hard news topics in newspapers. Physical newspapers were often discussed with nostalgia when participants recollected childhood memories, as K recounts in (15). The experience of physical papers was characterised by awkwardness and difficulty in both acquisition and engagement, (16).

*(15) I really love getting a hard copy newspaper. There's something nice about the smell and the feel and I think it reminds me a lot of my dad. –K*

*(16) I always find it difficult to read the newspaper because we {are} so used to getting our news in a much easier format. {Newspapers are} printed once a week and I have to go and buy it somewhere [...] your hands get full of ink and that means I'm sitting down not doing anything {else}. – B*

Many participants noted the perceived decrease in both the availability and quality of printed media, as described in (17). The decrease in availability was usually linked to the increase in digital content. Digital sources were seen as more accessible, convenient, and time-efficient. E reflected on engaging with a physical newspaper compared to a digital newsletter (18). N also reflected on the temporal properties and volume of content with digital compared to print in (19).

*(17) They've become thin, very little in them. They don't feel, on the rare occasion I read them, they just don't feel very professional. – F*

*(18) The newsletter is a very concise summary of the news, and the newspaper is the actual full articles and I have never felt the desire to actually read through the newspaper [...] because I find them quite long and they don't have a lot of pictures and I find it harder to sift through them for the information that I want. Whereas*

*when it's just in the newsletter, I feel like I get the key points. – E*

*(19) {printed media is} like time-limited [...] It was accurate at time of print and not necessarily right now [...] It's like much easier access [...] if you finish the newspaper, you finish the newspaper. If I finish an article on a website, I can find millions of others. – N*

Similarly, participants noted the accessibility and convenience of digital content in SM and highlighted this as a primary reason for its frequent use (20). SM was also valued for its synchronicity. Participants noted that platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook provide real-time updates on local events, which they found valuable during emergencies or urgent situations. A described messages on SM as “alerts” explaining how she learned about a local disaster in (21). However, many participants felt conflicted about using SM for news (22).

*(20) {SM is} a quick and maybe a lazy way of getting information [...] I don't actually have to go and like trawl through 10 podcasts to get everyone's opinion. I can just look at something and see what people say. – I*

*(21) That's where I picked it up, before anywhere else because they're very instant [...] that's up-to-date kind of information [...] where do we get the local news? From the WhatsApp groups. – A*

*(22) I hate Facebook with all my heart and soul. But you know, at times like this, things like Facebook and WhatsApp groups really come into play [...] in times of emergency that is all you've got {...} Yet, I know that it's not trustworthy and it just adds this other layer of concern. – K*

This concern was echoed by others, who saw SM as particularly vulnerable to misinformation because of its limited regulation, as described in (23). However, this also led some participants to feel they had more “direct” access to news and people involved in events (24). Many participants felt overwhelmed by the vast amount of news content available online and its easy accessibility (25) and (26). This demonstrates the potential invasiveness of news and is one of the ways SM could blur the lines between entertainment and news. This links to the concept of ambient journalism discussed by Bawden & Robinson (2000) who explain that our increased access to information – made possible by the instantaneous nature of multiple news sources – has facilitated

its development. Through the constant connection afforded by the internet and social media news has become a constant feature of our lives (Facchinetti, 2021).

*(23) There's a huge role to play in those local groups [...] but that's also where there is even less ability to fact-check. And here's an even bigger kind of opportunity for misinformation. – A*

*(24) It feels more authentic. So, it's not an onlooker. These are participants. So, it feels more real. – D*

*(25) {Online news} makes you anxious because you're constantly feeding yourself with news and whatever you want to hear about [...] it's every 15 minutes something else happens. [...] Whereas back in the day you would read a newspaper, and it would be for the week. – J*

*(26) It's become a lot more invasive [...] you don't invite news in anymore, so in the past, you picked up a newspaper, you'd switch on your TV, you would choose to engage with the news [...] {but} news has become 24-hour cycles, you {are} constantly engaging, there's always news to be read, there's always new articles. That's also what's boundaryless, it's never-ending. [...] It's quite jarring. You're scrolling, and there's a dog, and a sunset, and then it's something happening in Palestine. – N*

Another element relevant for participants' engagement with news was local compared to international sources. Local news was valued for personal relevance of the content, while engagement with international news was seen as indicative of awareness at a greater scale. Thus, local often carried more emotional importance as participants felt more invested in local events and were more likely to engage in discussions about it (27).

*(27) In terms of South African news, that becomes [...] more personal [...] day-to-day things that matter in my life. [...] I might listen to the world news, and it might be interesting. But if I miss the bit of {local news} then that would be consequential. – P*

Many participants noted a degree of disillusionment with local news, particularly politics, which affected their news engagement (28). Some participants intentionally avoided local news,

particularly stories expected to be distressing or repetitive, such as crime reports. This selective engagement reflects the desire to protect their mental well-being, while staying informed on other topics and is discussed in more detail in relation to RQ3. Many felt that their local knowledge was lacking, as expressed in (29). Most participants expressed a preference for international political news, which they found more engaging. International news was seen as more distant and less immediately impactful on personal lives; thus, it was often regarded as informative and interesting but not directly consequential. Furthermore, the detached experience of international news made it more of an acceptable conversation topic than the emotionally triggering local news. This perspective is explained in (30) and (31).

*(28) {Local news is} one dimensional [...] crime stories and corruption stories and poverty. – F*

*(29) I don't really engage with like South African politics until it's like a voting year and things like that – N*

*(30) I'm not interested in what's happening around me so much. I know more about what's happening in other parts of the world than what happens locally actually. And that's because I found international news more entertaining [...] it doesn't necessarily impact me it's like watching a movie. It's all presented in the fast-paced way by very, very skilled presenters in such a way that you focus, it's like watching your story unfold and it's fascinating. – B*

*(31) International is not our problem, so we can debate it without worrying about it too much. Local is our problem and we all feel helpless and powerless to change anything {so we don't discuss it}. – D*

The scepticism around local news for some was in part due to a perceived lack of professionalism (32), or just lack of availability (33), especially when compared to international sources (34). This scepticism towards local news was also linked to the idea that local news might be biased or untrustworthy, as expressed in (32). International news sources like Al Jazeera, CNN, and the BBC were often perceived as more reliable and neutral compared to local sources. In an effort to avoid the perceived bias in local sources, many participants described accessing local news through international sources, as in (35) where O explained how she preferred to see local

news through an “international lens.” Many participants also felt that local news was something that they passively encountered while international news was something that they had to actively seek out (36).

*(32) I've found that the {local} news is not well presented [...] I'm not happy with the level of journalism [...] English grammar is up to maggots [...] I've felt it's not reliable. The government controls the TV stations very, very tightly [...] Most people wouldn't watch it and sometimes our government programs are very, very poor quality [...] I just don't trust their news. – B*

*(33) One of the like main ways I engage with news these days is through podcasts, and they're mostly through international creators. – N*

*(34) I'm not sure that the quality of our journalism in South Africa is as good. [International sources are] just easier to navigate, fresher, less advertising – F*

*(35) I'm not looking through the local lens because I don't always trust like my own culture to report what's happening in their own country. – O*

*(36) Someone around me is sharing {Local news} with me [...] if [...] it's local and it's relevant, I'm going to find out about it [...] but I won't find out about anything international unless I look for it. – H*

Participants appreciated the comprehensive and well-structured coverage of international news, often preferring its depth and quality as well as the user-friendly design, which made consuming international news more appealing. These findings echo Wahatu's (2019) observation that international news is often more highly valued than local news, even when dealing with local phenomena. However, these findings also suggest that the preference for international news may not only stem from its perceived credibility but also from the emotional detachment it offers. This distance allows participants to engage with global events without the same level of personal responsibility or emotional strain that local news often provokes, making it a more comfortable and manageable source of information.

The combination of platform affordances, scepticism towards media biases, the need for authentic experiences and informative reporting created tension for participants in their interactions. Table 6 displays the main points participants expressed towards information



presented with the semiotic system of depiction and the auditory modality. In summary, visual media plays a significant role in shaping the credibility, emotional impact, and understanding of news stories. While images can enhance engagement and provide tangible evidence, participants also expressed concerns about their potential misuse, leading to caution. Therefore, the alignment of visuals with textual narratives is crucial for maintaining trust in visual news reporting. Audio media were generally valued for their convenience, specifically their ability to facilitate multitasking.

**Table 6.** *Features associated with depiction and audio content*

<b>Depiction</b>	<b>Audio</b>
Emotionally evocative	Multitasking
Contextualizing	Convenience
Credibility	Efficiency
Vulnerable to abuse	

With regards to specific media, participants frequently discussed SM, newspapers, digital content, radio, and podcasts, within which the elements of synchronicity, interactivity, direct access, and vulnerability to misinformation were relevant to participants' experiences. SM was valued for its synchronicity and ability to provide direct access to news content, bypassing traditional regulators. However, it was also recognized that this left it more susceptible to misinformation. Newspapers were seen as limited yet nostalgic, while digital counterparts were seen as accessible but overwhelming due to the volume of content. This duality underscores the tension between nostalgic engagement with traditional media and the pervasive, often invasive nature of digital news consumption. Radio was valued for its brief informative headlines, as well as the platform it provided for diverse opinions to be shared. Podcasts were valued for presenting in-depth information and deep dives into topics, often in an approachable and friendly style. This is summarized in Table 7.

**Table 7.** *Features associated with different types of media*

<b>SM</b>	<b>Newspapers (physical)</b>	<b>Digital/ Internet media</b>	<b>Radio</b>	<b>Podcasts</b>
Synchronous	Asynchronous	Unlimited content	Synchronous	In-depth
Direct access	Limited content	Accessible	Interactive	personal style
Unregulated	Physically awkward	Overwhelming	Brief	
Potential for misinformation	Nostalgic		Informative style	

International sources were generally actively looked for and seen as more respectable, professional, and engaging while local news was seen as something that was relevant for daily life but passively encountered, and often viewed as biased and unprofessional. This is summarised in Table 8..

**Table 8.** *Features associated with international compared to local news sources.*

<b>International</b>	<b>Local</b>
Actively sought	Passively encountered
Professional and User friendly	Relevant for daily live
Entertaining	Biased

### 4.3. Securing Trust in News Media (RQ2)

#### 4.3.1. Trustworthy news

Participants, wary of misinformation, endeavoured to find credible news sources. This subsection explores how participants assessed the reliability of news sources, highlighting the importance of reputation, past interactions, professionalism, emotional neutrality, expert and eyewitness accounts, routine, and the use of photographs.

For many participants, the reputation of the source was important, as indicated in (37), including their own previous interactions with news sources. C recounted how he “wrote off” a news source after they were exposed for sharing misinformation (38). Similarly, K shared a more positive experience explaining how her previous interactions with a news source in times of crisis led to her continued trust. This demonstrates the symbolic (i.e. cumulative) and learned (i.e. established through ongoing testing) nature of trust as described by Luhmann (1979).

Another aspect that contributed to the perceived credibility of the sources was the appearance of professionalism, as indicated by factors like style, interface, and overall presentation. In (39), G specified the news sources that appeal to him, exemplified in VT12, Figure 5. As previously discussed, many perceived this to be lacking in local South African news media, which they cited as one of their reasons for preferring to interact with, and trust, international news sources.

**Figure 5.** *What I consider “news news”*



(37) *{I trust} established news organizations with a long history and with some level of oversight or accountability [...] it's sort of like a reputational thing. – F*

(38) *How do you believe them because they've given you a story that that's bull [...] so*

*why would you believe them on anything else? – C*

*(39) Very polished, very professional. [...] I like that formality {and} brevity. – G*

There was also an element of routine and familiarity linked to how people described sources they trusted. Many participants recounted their news routines detailing the regularity and consistency of their engagement. B spoke about this as a “ritual” in VTB4<sup>9</sup> (Figure 6). P summarized the feelings of ease this created in (40) and J described how the sources he consults have been established over time in (41).

*(40) There's a certain sort of lazy comfort in seeing something that's familiar. – P*

*(41) There's a few sources that I would use, guys that I've been following for a few years.  
– J*

**Figure 6. a) Daily Ritual: Breakfast and BBC**



**b) My dirty DSTV (and hot air)**



Participants identified the use of emotional language in reporting as a significant indicator of potential bias, raising concerns about the credibility of the news (42). C linked this emotive language to hot air while describing VTC3 (Figure 6b) in (43). He then also linked this to the dirtiness of the dish. This type of emotive language also contributes to the feelings of manipulation discussed in response to RQ3.

*(42) I will look at how something's written, [if] the words that are being used start to*

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<sup>9</sup> Abbreviation: VoiceThread, Participant Code, Entry Number

*give the impression of emotional opinion and bias, that's when I start to feel like I'm being fed something, [...] then I start to be cautious. – P*

*(43) The chimney is basically the hot air going up and the DSTV is the channel at the bottom. It's a lot of hot air. – C*

Many participants expressed this desire to hear things directly from the individuals involved and spoke favourably about sources that included expert or eyewitness accounts explaining how this contributed to feelings of confidence (44). For D, this connected to her love of SM, and TikTok in particular (45). Similarly, B felt that this reflected less bias because reporters are external observers who must interpret what is going on (46).

*(44) If this person is a known expert in the field that they're writing about, that gives me a greater sense of trust. – K*

*(45) It's done by people on the ground [...] that's first-hand experiences, it feels like it's less manipulative propaganda-wise [...] These are participants. So, it feels more real. You know, a journalist will always try to be an objective onlooker, {but with SM} you get more of a feel of a lived experience. – D*

*(46) A reporter [...] he's just interpreting something somebody told him. – B*

When participants described valuing more “direct” access to the news, we can consider that it is the steps in the transmission of news that are being cut down. Consider Laswell’s model (Figure 2) introduced in Section 2.2. When the steps in the transmission of news are reduced, there are fewer points at which the audience needs to invest trust; they do not need to trust the journalist and the news company, with SM, they may only need to trust the individual recounting their own story, thus leaving the trust less diffuse.

Eyewitness accounts were also perceived to humanize a story (47), and, in P’s words, “bring them to life”. However, the same participants also expressed a desire for factual reporting. In (48), H recounted a conversation she had with a convincing stranger, describing how the facts he possessed had made him persuasive.

*(47) {eyewitness accounts} make you like understand like the human element {and} brings that additional gravitas, makes things seem real. – N*

*(48) Having the quantities makes news more reliable, [...] it gives it that tangible quality. – H*

This aligns with findings from survey which suggest participants ranked the trustworthiness of reporting styles differently. Friedman test found significant differences in which styles were ranked as most trustworthy,  $\chi^2(3, 126) = 102.645$ ,  $p < .001$ . Post Hoc Siegel tests found that Informative was rated as more trustworthy than all other styles,  $p < .001$ .

As previously mentioned, many participants emphasized the role of photographs in making news stories more credible and trustworthy. This aligns with previous research by Fenn et al. (2019), which found that people are more likely to accept claims presented alongside images. Their trust was in part due to the perceived accountability of images (49). This indicates an awareness of the potentially constructed nature of news, with images being viewed as more impartial and less susceptible to manipulation.

*(49) I would trust something more when there are pictures to back it up, because there's evidence, it helps you kind of verify stuff [...] A picture is easier to kind of hold accountable because it stays and it's a picture of something. The headline is something somebody constructs. – A*

In summary, participants demonstrated a desire to find credible news sources amidst widespread concerns about disinformation. They emphasized the importance of reputation, professionalism, and emotional neutrality in assessing the reliability of news outlets. Additionally, participants liked factual reporting supported by expert or eyewitness accounts, which they found to be trustworthy and humanizing. Visual evidence, such as photographs, also played a role in enhancing the credibility of news stories. Ultimately, the participants sought out sources that aligned with their expectations of accuracy, consistency, and impartiality, reflecting a careful and discerning approach to news engagement. Thus, participants employed a multifaceted approach to assess the credibility of news sources, relying on established reputations, personal experiences, perceived professionalism, absence of emotional language, inclusion of expert and eyewitness accounts, visual evidence, and routine familiarity.

#### 4.3.2. *Behaviours and actions*

Participants attempted to deal with their uncertainty and mistrust of news by consulting multiple sources and consolidating information to form their understanding. Multiple participants referred to this as a puzzle (50). Having this wider base of information made participants feel more assured in their understanding, in part, because it was a way to account for bias. J, who described it as a spectrum felt that having multiple sources made information more trustworthy affirming “the bigger spectrum, the more trust.” (51) explains the connection between multiple sources and limiting bias.

*(50) [It's a] puzzle kind of thing if you have multiple perspectives, whereas if you only have your one source in front of you have one piece of the puzzle. But all of these things fit together somehow. And then from there, you need to take a step back and then look at big picture. – M*

*(51) {having} variety will give you a little bit more of a likelihood of getting an array of balanced views on the issue – F*

N visualized the spectrum in VTN2 (Figure 7) and noted the subsequent need for multiple sources by explaining how the same thing can appear differently (52). Acquiring this diverse array of views allowed participants to be more questioning and sceptical of what they encountered. One of the ways multiple sources added to credibility was through the idea of corroboration, and that genuine facts would appear repeatedly (53). In this context, having diffuse trust was seen as advantageous as participants felt that they could not place all their trust in a singular source thus spreading it out and cross-referencing allowed them to feel more confident.

*(52) It changes ever so slightly, ultimately, you're seeing the same thing [but] it's different. 3 journalists can write an article about the same thing, and it'll look different, sound different, have a different conclusion. – N*

*(53) It's triangulation [...] if you can look at a couple of things and they sort of come up with some common things then [...] you're pretty sure that that's accurate. – A*

**Figure 7.** *Distorted Perceptions*



To summarize, participants dealt with their uncertainty and mistrust of the news by piecing together information from multiple sources, likening this process to assembling a puzzle, while also alluding to a constructed understanding of news. By consulting various perspectives, they felt more confident in forming a well-rounded understanding and mitigating potential biases. This approach allowed the participants to cross-reference and corroborate information, enhancing their trust in the facts that appeared consistently. Ultimately, the participants used this strategy to create a more complete and accurate picture of the news, which they felt was essential for navigating an increasingly complex and fragmented media landscape.

#### **4.4. Experiences and Motivations in News Engagement (RQ3)**

Section 4.4.1 examines the experiences that the participants recounted when discussing their news engagement. Two key themes emerged from these discussions, namely, a) negativity and b) disinformation. Sub-section 4.4.2, addresses what motivates participants to engage with news by the themes c) sociality and connection and d) relevance. Table 9 summarises the themes by displaying the participant quote that represents it, as well as briefly introducing the content.



**Table 9** Themes, with typical quotations from participants and explanations

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Participant Quote</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
a) Negativity	"It's all this doom and gloom,"	sense of constant negativity in the news
b) Disinformation	"The wool pulled over your eyes,"	concerns about disinformation and feeling misled by media and news outlets
c) Sociality and connection	"A part of the world"	sense of connection facilitated by news
d) Relevance	"It's personal"	what news participants prioritise engaging with

4.4.1. Participant experiences.

**a) Negativity: "It's All This Doom and Gloom"**

(54) "News is very much about everything that's awful. It's all this doom and gloom... you're gonna think there's no hope, there's nothing left" – A

This theme captures the pervasive feelings of depression and emotional strain experienced by participants due to the overwhelming and negative nature of news. Participants discussed various factors that contribute to these feelings and strategies they adopted to manage them. The negativity of news content was commonly attributed as contributing to feelings of "mental strain" as G described in VTG1, Figure 8, (55), and effort, as explained in (56).

(55) *It's a shithole [...] that's the chaotic mess my mind tends to {when engaging with news} [...] that's what it can feel like.* – G

(56) *News takes headspace for me, and I don't always feel like I have the {emotional} capacity.* – E

**Figure 8.** “It’s a shithole”

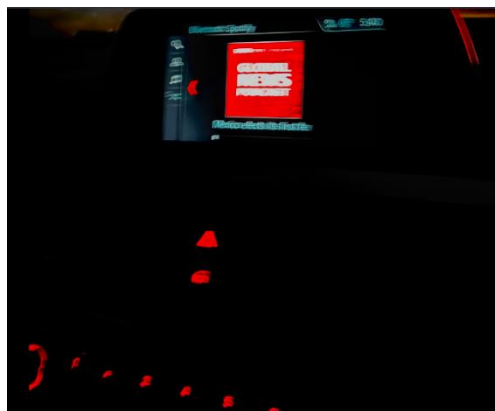


For participants, this was further emphasized by the sheer amount of content they felt they were encountering. Multiple participants described the news as “bombarding” and “noise” (57), as N spoke about in VTN6, illustrated in Figure 9. Participants often linked this to feelings of helplessness, for example, B described himself as “wallowing in the news” (58).

*(57) News just seems like noise and loud and overwhelming [...] it's boundaryless [...] it's like an endless cycle, it's like it all blurs together [...] sometimes like you need this warning on news. – N*

*(58) I'm not going anywhere [...] I'm not doing anything with it and it's covering, it's just there's so much of it... you're just sitting in the same thing. – B*

**Figure 9.** Endless cycle and blur: “red is a warning colour”



Participants described many strategies they used to try and manage the impact of news, all of which centred around controlling their engagement. This often took the form of limiting when they engaged with news or in how much detail. For example, G spoke about his attempts to attain a

“fine-tuned sort of balance” (59). This could be seen as an example of monitoring behaviour and perhaps contributing to its increase (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2014). Others were selective of what news they engaged with. This was particularly true for violent content which some participants purposefully avoided, as discussed in 4.2.2. Some participants were selective about the environments in which they engaged with news (60).

*(59) It involves awareness rather than maybe engagement [...] I look at the headline and that's it. [...] I like my news in little bits and controlled, the idea of just constantly following it is just horrible. – G*

*(60) I'm aware of a lot of things that are happening in this world that I choose to not follow [...] Sitting in the garden is a good balance because there I am in this peaceful, calm environment and then you read about this news out there and [...] that's happening there. But look at this. – A*

Participants also referenced an extreme version of this selectivity when talking about actively choosing to separate themselves from news. This was often described as “escaping,” “taking a break” or “opting out.” This left many participants with conflicted feelings around news (61). This illustrates that news engagement is not merely a matter of seeking or avoiding news (Elvestad et al., 2014); rather, it underscores the fluidity of news consumption, where individuals may oscillate between seeking information to stay informed and opting out due to the distressing nature of the content. Various factors can influence this dynamic behaviour.

*(61) There are times where I just don't want to deal with it. It's just too depressing and I just stick my head in the sand and ignore the news for a week [...] {It is a} love-hate relationship [...] I resent the bad news and the depressing news but still [...] I need to be connected. – K*

In summary, participants described emotional strain due to the overwhelming and negative nature of news. They employ various strategies, including opting out and selective engagement, to manage their mental health. Many remain conflicted, feeling both a need to stay informed and a desire to protect themselves from the emotional impact of the news.

**b) Disinformation; “The wool pulled over your eyes”**

*(62) I have a distrust for being led astray. Wherever they're trying to draw your attention isn't necessarily the most important thing [...] You don't want the wool pulled over your eyes in this world, this is a scary place [...] if you don't trust the main news sources and I don't trust the main news sources, then who the hell is driving the bus?  
– O*

Participants expressed uncertainty and feelings of manipulation related to their interactions with the news. Many voiced concerns over the accuracy and intent behind the information they received, highlighting a pervasive sense of mistrust. This scepticism was often linked to the perceived underlying motives of news organizations, particularly their financial and political agendas and was heightened by awareness of misinformation (63).

*(63) I don't trust the news because of misinformation [...] There's so many underlying propaganda and objectives and manipulation [...] the news feels [...] like grand puppet-masters, sitting across the world and making all these things and policies and happenings. – D*

Multiple participants expressed that their concern was linked to the selection of some news stories leading to the exclusion of others, resulting in over or under-representation of certain events (64). In VTL1 (Figure 10a), L likened this to looking out an airplane window (65).

*(64) You get told the news [...] but there's a lot of news you're not being told [...] I feel a little like the news is manipulating me. – P*

*(65) You don't get a true sense of what is there on the ground, but you can see it [...] you are fed something, but you don't know the true details, I cannot really pinpoint what is exactly there, but I can see something is there. – L*

**Figure 10.** a) *A true sense*



b) *The hidden hand of information*



The idea of news being something that is curated led many to feel mistrustful. This mistrust can be considered in terms of the news filtering system, described in Section 2.4, Figure 3. Participants expressed scepticism about how decisions were made on which stories gained prominence and on what basis. This mistrust extended to a broader concern that their perception of events was shaped by the selective presentation of information, raising doubts about what might be withheld or overlooked. Many believed that the prominence of certain stories was driven by the agendas of news agencies, which made them feel manipulated and uncertain about what they were not being told.

In (66), C described how he staged his picture for VTC4, Figure 10b, about YouTube to emphasise both the obscure nature of the information and the idea that someone is controlling the flow of said information. Demonstrating how this feeling of mistrust was linked to the perceived motives of the news source which was often assumed to be guided by their financial or corporate benefit (67). As a result, participants often described trying to ascertain the source of information to account for the potential motives (68). This led many to feel that they had to make an effort to find the “truth” or accurate information (69).

*(66) I decided against {a transparent pipe} because there is a lot of dark stuff going down the black pipe [...] And the hand is the visual aspect of somebody who's behind that {and} is in charge of YouTube that's deciding what's good for you. – C*

- (67) *The news organization that they're working for has a political agenda or has a financial agenda and then the information gets skewed to support that. – J*
- (68) *For me, it's very much about the source [...] What's the motivation for putting that information out? [...] Who's providing that information? How are they going to benefit from it? – A*
- (69) *I dig at something, and I'll dig away and determine for myself whether it is actually fact. – C*

In summary, the participants' mistrust of news sources was linked to their perception of manipulation and hidden agendas, whether financial, political, or otherwise. This led to a heightened sense of vigilance, with many feeling compelled to critically evaluate the information they encountered. This reflects a broader trend of scepticism toward traditional media and the complex landscape of information in the digital age.

#### 4.4.2. *Benefits of engaging with news*

Participants often questioned why they engaged with news, especially given the feelings of overwhelm and negativity previously discussed. This question addresses participants' discussions about the necessity of engaging with the news despite their misgivings and is broken down into two themes, c) sociality and connection and d) relevance.

#### **c) Sociality and Connection: “A part of the world”**

- (70) *. I feel connected by knowing what's happening [...] connected to the living world around me. [...] I feel like I'm a part of it in a way – a part of the world. – P*

One of the reasons participants felt the need to stay informed was because it allowed them to connect with others, from friends (71) to acquaintances (72). The frequency with which news was discussed and underlaid social connections was alluded to in many of the VTs, where participants frequently included pictures of people and references to news conversations, as indicated in Figure 11a (VTF3) and 11b (VTI1).

- (71) *[News and weather] are two things that you can talk to anyone about, it's this source of information that we can compare with each other [...] News was a*

*conversation that you would have with people, with your employees and that's a way that you connect to them [...] it's this relatability. It's the social thing to have news. To talk to people about it – H*

*(72) Everyone wanted to talk to me about it... I felt like they were trying to engage or connect with me. – M*

**Figure 11.** a) *Current affairs comes up*



b) *Gossip Girls*



This desire for connection extended beyond people. Participants discussed the value of understanding the world beyond themselves and their place within it (74). Being aware of news stories was seen as indicative of broader thinking (75), and some participants even expressed guilt when they were unaware of a news story.

*(73) We're a small part of the bigger whole [...] I think it's important to be informed because [...] we don't live in isolation. Being informed helps one [...] see the world and what's happening in it on a larger level. – P*

*(74) I think it makes me conscious of the world around me and in turn, I think more empathetic and more engaging with other people and experiences [...] it broadens my understanding of the world and people. – N*

Survey participants were found to engage with news in-person more frequently than online (Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test:  $Z = -6.965$ ,  $p\text{-value} < .001$ ), and subsequently to trust news shared in-person significantly more than news shared online (Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test:  $Z = -5.500$ ,  $p < .001$ ). It may be that news shared in-person was similarly seen as less diffuse with fewer steps in the process while also having the individual recounting the story somewhat more accountable.

Ultimately, it highlights the important role of in-person interactions in news engagement.

This supports Costera Meijer's and Groot Kormelink (2014) finding that while digital platforms facilitate behaviours like monitoring, they are not central to news engagement. Participants used digital platforms but frequently emphasized the social nature and motivations behind their news engagement. This underscores that focusing solely on digital or social media platforms overlooks a significant portion of people's news experiences.

**d) Relevance: “It’s Personal”**

(75) *It's personal. It's people I could know. It's an area I know well. [...] It's all about that's my life, that's close to me [...] so then I follow that. – A*

Participants valued engaging with news that felt personally relevant or impactful, reflecting a broader theme of seeking news that connects directly with their lives, communities (76), interests (77), and careers (78). M spoke about this in relation to VTM3, Figure 12, where she pictures a work document. Proximity also affected ideas of relevance and feelings of “tangibility.” For example, the George building collapse was discussed as relevant by multiple locals (79).

(76) *I don't want to stumble into dangers, [...] I'll have a quick squiz at it to see, is there anything that might affect me. – K*

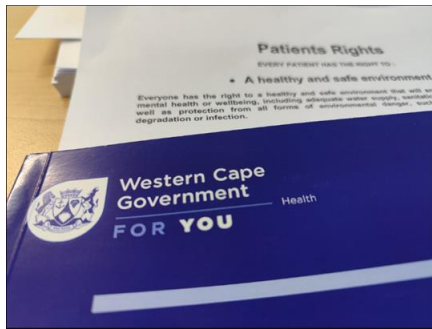
(77) *One of the things [...] I do follow in a bit more depth because it relates to my interests, and to something I feel I should be more knowledgeable about, is [...] climate change news. – A*

(78) *Those are the kind of things that I follow [...] Because it's in line with my work. [...] it's work-related. – M*

(79) *Suddenly it's a whole other step closer to us. It felt raw, it felt terrifying. It felt close. – A*



**Figure 12.** *News for you*



Being informed and aware of news enabled participants to feel empowered (80). This allowed participants to feel they could take action and affect change, as A describes her motives for engaging with particular news stories (81). This idea is also related to how the news can affect change in the wider world (82).

*(80) If I get news early enough, I have time to respond [...] You always feel empowered if you have the knowledge. – B*

*(81) {I follow it because} That's something where I could make a difference, and I could influence people. –A*

*(82) When you disengage you also like take away [...] the ability, in some ways, to like help people. I just think that engagement and interaction with news these days does have an impact. – N*

In conclusion, participants engaged with the news to stay connected, address personal impacts, and take informed action, despite their reservations. The news served as an important tool for understanding the world, making decisions, and connecting with others on both personal and broader levels.

#### **4.5. Age-Related Differences (R.Q.4)**

Overall, within the survey, only two differences were found between how different age groups engaged with the news (see Appendix N2 for nonsignificant results). One instance where statistical differences were found between different age groups was with regards to the engagement with different media types. Kruskal Wallis tests were conducted on each of the media to determine if

different ages reported engaging with different media at different frequencies. Only “other” had a significant difference between age groups,  $H(3) = 15.255, p < .05$ . Post hoc Dunns test showed significant differences between 18-to-30-year-olds and groups, 61 + ( $p < .001$ ) and 31-to-50-year-olds ( $p < .05$ ), suggesting that 18-to-30-year-olds report using “other” media more frequently. Participants who rated “other” highly were asked to provide a comment specifying what this entailed, these mostly mentioned SM (e.g. TikTok, Instagram), suggesting that people 18-to-30 may turn to SM for news more than older people. However, it is possible that other participants may have been grouping SM within the category of “internet.” Future projects need to clearly distinguish these to tease apart possible relationships.

The other difference was found when participants were asked to rank how enjoyable they found different reporting styles. A Kruskal Wallis test found a statistically significant difference in how participants of different age groups ranked their enjoyment of news satire/comedic commentary  $H(3) = 9.492, p < .05$ . Post hoc Dunns test was conducted and found that 18-to-30 ranked satire as more enjoyable than 60+,  $p < .05$ , but no other significant differences were found.

Within the interviews, despite the broad age range (27 to 74), no consistent differences were found in participants’ descriptions across age groups. To demonstrate, compare (15) by K (age 51) and (83) by N (age 28) where they discuss their views on newspapers.

*(15) I really love getting a hard copy newspaper. There's something nice about the smell and the feel and I think it reminds me a lot of my dad. – K*

*(83) We'd get a newspaper every day and, on the weekends, and we'd sit around and read the newspaper [...] there is something very homey about news and news sources. – N*

Notice the similarities between I’s (age 59) perspective in (20) and E’s (age 28) in (84) regarding SM.

*(20) {SM is} a quick and maybe a lazy way of getting information [...] I don't actually have to go and like trawl through 10 podcasts to get everyone's opinion. I can just look at something and see what people say. – I*

*(84) It's only taking me a few seconds to understand the concept and to frame that problematically [...] it's very short, in terms of literal time that you have to spend [...] I can just read [...] a few of the lines [...] to understand the situation [...] that helps me get a piece of news and a social commentary and something that can inform my opinion all in one package. – E*

O (age 29) and B (age 74) express the same sentiment in (35) and (85), respectively, about international compared to local sources.

*(35) I'm not looking through the local lens because I don't always trust like my own culture to report what's happening in their own country. – O*

*(85) If anything, worthwhile happens in South Africa, it will end up on [...] international news [...] then I will get an independent view. – B*

A (age 56) in (53) and N (age 28) in (86) both discuss the idea of corroboration.

*(53) It's triangulation [...] if you can look at a couple of things and they sort of come up with some common things then [...] you're pretty sure that that's accurate. – A*

*(86) Having a diverse array of news sources and there's commonality there, so obviously like if there's overlap and there's the same story being told, that makes sense, that's the story. – N*

K (age 64) describes the conflicted relationship with news in (61) and N (age 28) expresses this in (87).

*(61) There are times where I just don't want to deal with it. It's just too depressing and I just stick my head in the sand and ignore the news for a week [...] {It is a} love-hate relationship [...] I resent the bad news and the depressing news but still [...] I need to be connected. – K*

*(87) {I have} very mixed feelings. Like, I absolutely love the news, but also like absolutely terrified by some things in the news [...] that's the juxtaposition [...] the contrast, it's a trade-off. – N*

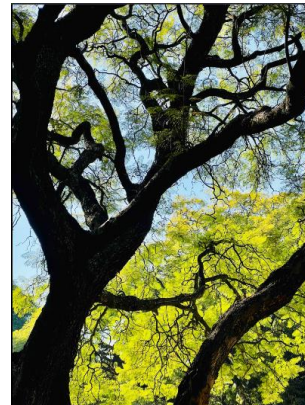
Finally, compare H (age 27) (71) and (88) by D (age 64) talking about the sociality of news.

*(71) [News and weather] are two things that you can talk to anyone about, it's this source of information that we can compare with each other [...] News was a conversation that you would have with people, with your employees and that's a way that you connect to them [...] it's this relatability. It's the social thing to have news. To talk to people about it. – H*

*(88) So really, we just do the same shit over and over again. So, what's the point? [...] Would I have the courage to cut myself off the news completely? Because I'm worried that it's gonna make me a very dull person. [...] The only point to be informed, really, is to have interesting conversation at dinner. – D*

In VTA6 (Figure 13a), A (age 59) spoke about how she used time away from news to reflect on it and its value, as did N (age 28), in VTN9 (Figure 13b).

**Figure 13** a) *Contemplating a world where it's peaceful*      b) *Reprieve*



Meanwhile, the three most avid radio listeners were M (age 29), F (age 38) and I (age 59). C (age 68) and J (age 36) referred to using YouTube as a news source the most.

In summary, this shows that little difference was observed between the participants of different ages. This may be in part due to the technological nature of the study. The survey was conducted online, necessitating a basic understanding of technology for participation. As a result, individuals who were less confident in their technological skills – perhaps those who often rely on traditional news formats like newspapers or radio – may have been unable to participate.

The survey was distributed through my personal social network, which likely limited the diversity of the participant pool. If participants shared similar social contexts and interests, this could lead to comparable media consumption habits. For instance, family discussions about current events or communal activities might encourage similar engagement strategies, regardless of age. Moreover, in tightly-knit communities, individuals of varying ages may share similar experiences and information sources, resulting in a more uniform approach to news engagement. Additionally, economic circumstances and employment status may also influence media access and engagement. As individuals from similar backgrounds might engage with news in comparable ways, further minimizing age-related differences. Importantly, since photovoice and interview participants were recruited from survey respondents, any sampling limitations present in the survey participants likely carried over to the interview participants.

Furthermore, the photovoice phase required participants to be comfortable taking and sharing pictures on their own devices which may have been intimidating for less digitally confident individuals. It is possible that this obscured differences that may be present in less technologically advanced populations. Additionally, as demonstrated by the demographic information in Table 4, participants in the survey (and subsequently the photovoice interview study) had a high level of education compared to the general population, which may have interacted with and obscured any age effects. As such, it is perhaps understandable that age, despite being a defining feature in other contexts, is less relevant within this sample.

# Chapter 5. Summary and Conclusions

## 5.1. Introduction

In this thesis, I examined news engagement in South Africa with the help of concepts and methods from cognitive semiotics, considering the various media, and the subsequent dimensions, through which individuals interact with news, as well as how in-person interactions shape their overall experience. To conclude, I first revisit the research questions and then return to the conceptual-empirical loop (see Section 2.2 Figure 1) to contextualize the findings of this thesis. Finally, I review the contributions made and suggest possible directions for future research

## 5.2 Research Questions

1. *What kind of media do South Africans engage with for their news?*

a) *What media (e.g., radio, newspapers etc.) do they utilize?*

The participants in the study primarily used internet-based media, while newspapers and other unspecified sources were the least utilized, and engagement with radio, YouTube, and television fell in between.

b) *What do they value about different media, including the sensory modalities, dimensions (e.g. synchronicity), and semiotic systems, in which the news is encountered?*

They valued visual media for its emotional impact and the context and credibility it provided, but they also recognized its susceptibility to manipulation. Audio formats were appreciated for their efficiency and convenience, particularly because they allowed for multitasking. Social media was favoured for its immediacy and synchronicity. Its unregulated nature was seen as both a benefit, offering "direct access" to stories, and a drawback, increasing the risk of misinformation.

Newspapers held a nostalgic value but were limited in both content and accessibility. In contrast, digital media was viewed as highly accessible with vast amounts of content, which often led to

feelings of overwhelm. Radio was appreciated for being both synchronous and informative, offering a platform for diverse viewpoints. Podcasts were considered to provide in-depth information in a more personable, engaging style.

International news was generally seen as more professional and user-friendly, making it a more entertaining and actively sought-out experience. Local news, on the other hand, was perceived as more biased and was typically encountered passively yet remained relevant for day-to-day life.

2. *What kind of news media do South Africans trust and why?*

a) *What news do they perceive to be trustworthy?*

The interview participants generally perceived trustworthy news to come from established sources with a long-standing reputation and accountability. Credibility was further linked to professionalism, factual reporting, and emotional neutrality in news stories. They valued news that included expert or eyewitness accounts, which they found more reliable and humanizing. Images also enhanced trust, as they were seen as tangible and harder to manipulate compared to written narratives. Additionally, familiarity and routine engagement with certain sources helped reinforce their trustworthiness.

b) *What behaviours do they adopt to ensure they are engaging with news they trust?*

To ensure they engage with trustworthy news, the participants reported consulting multiple sources and cross-referencing information, likening the process to assembling a puzzle. By gathering diverse perspectives, they feel more confident in mitigating biases and forming a well-rounded understanding. This approach involved verifying facts by checking if they appear consistently across different outlets. Ultimately, relying on a broad array of sources allowed them to question singular accounts and feel more assured in the accuracy of the news they consume.

3. *What is it that motivates South Africans to engage with the news?*

a) *What are their experiences of engaging with news?*

Participants' experiences with news were represented by the themes Negativity and Disinformation. Many reported feeling overwhelmed by the constant access to masses of negative content, leaving them emotionally strained. To manage this, they often engaged with

news selectively to reduce its emotional impact. Regarding disinformation, they frequently felt manipulated, distrusting the motives behind news selection and perceiving hidden agendas. This led to a generalized scepticism towards news and media, making them cautious and critical in their manner of engagement.

b) *What benefits do they perceive from engaging with news?*

The participants perceived two main benefits from engaging with news: social connection and relevance. Staying informed helped them feel connected to others and the world, facilitating interpersonal interactions and reinforcing their sense of belonging in a larger context. Additionally, they valued news for its relevance to their daily lives, using the information to make informed decisions and stay aware of their surroundings, which contributed to feelings of empowerment. Between the perceived benefits of engaging with news and negative experiences participants often described a conflicted relationship with news.

4. *Does age affect any of the above?*

Age appeared to play a minor role in how participants in this thesis engaged with news and media. Within the survey, minimal differences were found between age groups: 18-to-30-year-olds engaged with “other” media more frequently than 61+ and 31-to-50-year-olds, and 18-to-30 ranked satire as more enjoyable than the 60+ group. The interview participants of different ages expressed very similar experiences and perceptions, unlike in other studies, see Section 2.7. This may be due to sampling bias obscuring differences present in the larger population, or perhaps is something typical for the South African context.

### **5.3. The Conceptual-Empirical Loop and Future Directions**

To summarize the insights gained from this investigation, we can return to the conceptual-empirical loop and reflect on what this study has revealed about the phenomena of news and trust.

Firstly, regarding the first empirical question, 'What news do people engage with?', the results suggested that people in South Africa engage with news that is relevant to their lives and that they feel capable of engaging with, whether due to emotional or physical resources. From this, we can see that news informed how they navigated the world and influenced the decisions they made,



while also serving as a social tool. It became a topic of conversation and provided information that affected both themselves and those around them. This highlights what news represented for the participants in this study and provides insight into the conceptual question “What is ‘the news?’” This study also emphasizes the role of sociality in news and its ability to facilitate connection, underscoring the importance of considering news engagement as a whole, demonstrating how news is more than SM or equivalent. A deeper investigation into the specific perceptions and behaviours people use to navigate news would enrich our understanding of trust-building in news engagement.

In relation to the next empirical question, “Are people aware of disinformation in the news, and if so, how does it affect their engagement?”, participants were aware of disinformation, which heightened their mistrust and made them more cautious. As a result, they sought out what they considered 'reliable' sources – those they perceived as having an established reputation and being unbiased. To determine trustworthiness, they drew on their own previous experiences and questioned the motives behind the sources. Additionally, they also triangulated information by consulting multiple sources to avoid being misled. This highlights how trust in news involves consulting reliable sources to the best of one's ability, while maintaining a level of cautious scepticism and informs our understanding of the conceptual question “What is trust (in the news?)”

This also provides insight into the conceptual question “What is disinformation?” Disinformation, as experienced, extends beyond simply receiving incorrect facts. It is deeply tied to feelings of manipulation and distrust that is rooted in the perception that news is shaped by biases and agendas. This study highlighted the concerns people have about the selective nature of reporting, where the prominence of certain stories and the exclusion of others fostered a sense that information was being curated to serve political, financial, or corporate motives. Disinformation, in this context, is not just about factual inaccuracy, but also about how the construction and presentation of news creates a sense of distortion, leading individuals to question what is being withheld and why.

In response to the final empirical question “How do different factors (e.g. modality, semiotic system) affect which news people trust?”, the study indicated that participants engaged with news across various formats and media, based on personal preferences and convenience. For example,

some valued audio formats because they allowed for multitasking, while others favoured social media for its high degree of synchronicity, interactivity, and perceived 'direct' access to news stories. The semiotic system of depiction was frequently cited as enhancing trustworthiness, with visuals often perceived as adding credibility to a news story, as they appeared less 'constructed' and more independent.

Interestingly, and contrary to previous studies, this research found minimal to no differences in how participants of different age groups engaged with news. This finding emphasizes the importance of considering how contextual factors, such as location and demographic variables, interact to shape people's news engagement behaviours. More research is needed in South Africa to determine whether age distinctions play a significant role in news and media engagement or if this finding was unique to the sample used in this study. This research offers a fresh perspective on how demographic and contextual factors intersect with age-based differences in media interaction, which future studies could explore.

A study on news and trust holds particular relevance for the discipline of cognitive semiotics due to its focus on meaning-making across various semiotic systems and sensory modalities. Since cognitive semiotics has yet to extensively explore the realm of news, this thesis represents a novel contribution to the field, while also extending research in an under-researched environment.

This study's insights underscore the critical need to understand not only what people engage with, but how trust is cultivated and maintained in a dynamic media environment, particularly in an era of increasing disinformation and rapid changes in how news is consumed. It sheds light on how individuals engage with news, the factors that influence this engagement, their motivations, and the experiences they have throughout this process. Ultimately, this research highlights the complex and active role individuals play in navigating today's media landscape, making the study of news engagement essential for both scholars and practitioners seeking to foster a well-informed, critically engaged public.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A1

### Survey Recruiting Message

Hello!

I'm trying to learn about how people engage with, perceive, and make decisions about news. This survey is part of my Master's thesis at Lund University in Sweden and will ask you about your experiences. It is completely anonymous and will take about 10-15minutes. Follow the link to learn more and please share the survey with anyone you think would like to participate.

Thank you for your help! <https://forms.gle/FMdfyJ5S6u2LiKTD7>

If you have any questions contact me, Sarah Erasmus, at Erasmus.lee.sarah@gmail.com

# Appendix B1

## Survey

### **Attitudes and Perceptions of News and Media**

#### **Study Information**

Thank you for your interest in the study!

This study is about understanding how people in South Africa engage with news. The current world is saturated with vast amounts of information requiring people to make choices about what information, and specifically what news, they engage with. People interact with the news in different ways (some like a quick chat and others prefer an in-depth article). People also vary in what they consider to be news, for example, is celebrity or sports information news? We want to learn more about how you engage with, and what you consider, news.

I, Sarah Erasmus, am conducting this research as part of my thesis as a Master's Student at Lund University in Sweden. This survey is Part 1 of the study. If you are interested, you can learn more about Part 2 at the end of this survey.

#### **Participation**

The survey consists of 29 questions and should take about 10-15 minutes. It will ask you about how, when and where you engage with news as well as your perceptions about news. The questions will ask you to rate agreement or frequency, rank items for preference, and answer yes/no questions related to your experiences.

Before the study, you will be asked for some demographic information so we can know about representation in the survey.

After the survey, you can comment and give feedback. You can use the comment section to explain your answers, add something you think is important, or discuss your experience during the survey.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can stop at any time without giving a reason.

## **Data Processing**

The answers you provide are completely anonymous and cannot be linked back to you. You do not need to provide your name, contact details or any other identifying information.

## **Contact information**

For more information, queries, or inquiries please contact:

Researcher: Sarah Erasmus-[erasmus.lee.sarah@gmail.com](mailto:erasmus.lee.sarah@gmail.com)

Supervisors: Alexandra Mouratidou-[alexandra.mouratidou@semiotik.lu.se](mailto:alexandra.mouratidou@semiotik.lu.se)

Jordan Zlatev-[jordan.zlatev@ling.lu.se](mailto:jordan.zlatev@ling.lu.se)

Please note that ethical approval for this project has been granted by the Centre for Social Science Research (CSSR: [ethics.cssr@uct.ac.za](mailto:ethics.cssr@uct.ac.za))

*Finally, please share this survey widely with family and friends. It will help us get valuable information.*

---

## **Informed Consent**

Before we begin the survey we want to make sure you understand the study and consent to participate.

Participation in this study is *voluntary, anonymous* and *you can end* the survey at any point.

If you understand the instructions and agree to participate, please click the boxes below and proceed with the study.

- I am 18 or older
  - I am South African AND reside in South Africa
  - I understand the instructions and consent to participate
-

**Thank you for agreeing to participate!** We are grateful for your willingness to participate and for your time.

Please can you provide the following demographic information (questions are based on the South African census)

---

### **Demographic Information**

1. What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-30
- 31-40
- 51-60
- 61 or over

2. How would you describe yourself?

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

3. How would you describe yourself?

- Black African
- Colored
- Indian or Asian
- White
- Other
- Prefer not to say

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- No schooling/less than 6 years
- Primary School /Grade 7
- High School /Matric /Grade 12
- Bachelor's Degree or Diploma
- Honour's Degree
- Master's Degree
- PhD

Thank you! You will now start the survey.

There are **29 questions**. Please read carefully and take your time-there is no time limit.

**Section 1: News Engagement**

All scales have 5 *points*, if you are on your phone remember to scroll!

How often do you think about news on a scale of 1 to 5?	Not a lot (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)
How important do you think it is for <i>you</i> to engage with the news?	Not a lot (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)
How often do you engage with the news (e.g., skim headlines, read articles or discuss with friends)?	1. Multiple times a day	2. A few times a day	3. Once a day	4. A few times a week	5. Less than once a week
How often do you usually engage in the following behaviors around news (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	Not at all (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)
a) Full engagement (e.g. reading full articles/ watching full broadcasts)	a)	a)	a)	a)	a)
b) Monitoring news (e.g.	b)	b)	b)	b)	b)
	c)	c)	c)	c)	c)
	d)				

skimming headlines) c) Commenting on or discussing news online d) Sharing news stories online e) e) Commenting on or discussing news in-person	e)	d) e)	d) e)	d) e)	d) e)
How much do you enjoy engaging with the news?	Not a lot (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)
How often do you engage with news in the following (on a scale from 1 to 5)? a) Television b) Internet (excluding YouTube or podcasts) c) YouTube d) Radio (including podcasts) e) Newspapers f) Other	Not at all (1) a) b) c) d) e) f)	2 a) b) c) d) e) f)	3 a) b) c) d) e) f)	4 a) b) c) d) e) f)	A lot (5) a) b) c) d) e) f)
If other is high (i.e. 4 or 5) please specify					
How often do you discuss/share news <b>in-person</b> (e.g. face-to-face conversations) with friends and family?	Not a lot (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)
How much do you trust news shared with you <b>in-person</b> by friends and family?	Not a lot (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)
How often do you discuss/share news <b>online</b> (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp etc.) with friends and family?	Not a lot (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)

How much do you trust news shared with you <b>online</b> by friends and family?	Not a lot (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)
<p><b>Rank the following options according to which format you prefer your news.</b></p> <p>Select 1 for most preferred and 5 for least preferred.</p> <p>Please select each number/position ONCE for the options below in order to rank your preference.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Only written text,</li> <li>b) Written with pictures,</li> <li>c) Only audio,</li> <li>d) Audio with pictures,</li> <li>e) Video,</li> <li>f) Other</li> </ul>	<p>Rank 6 (Least preferred):</p> <p>Rank 5:</p> <p>Rank 4:</p> <p>Rank 3:</p> <p>Rank 2:</p> <p>Rank 1 (Most preferred):</p>				
If other is high (i.e. most preferred or 2nd) please specify					
How important do you think it is for <i>others</i> to engage with the news?	Not a lot (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)

**Section 2: News Type**

All scales have 5 points, if you are on your phone remember to scroll!

How often do you engage with news about the following (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	Not a lot (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) entertainment, celebrities, lifestyle, arts and culture, and/or sports?</li> <li>b) International events, politics, business and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a)</li> <li>b)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a)</li> <li>b)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a)</li> <li>b)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a)</li> <li>b)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a)</li> <li>b)</li> </ul>



economics, and/or education					
<p>Rank the options based on which you <b>engage with</b> most often.</p> <p>Please select each number/position ONCE for the options below in order to rank your engagement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Informative reporting,</li> <li>b) Opinion pieces,</li> <li>c) Personal accounts,</li> <li>d) New satire</li> </ul>	<p>Rank 4(Least preferred):</p> <p>Rank 3:</p> <p>Rank 2:</p> <p>Rank 1 (Most preferred):</p>				
<p>Rank the options based on which you <b>enjoy</b> the most often.</p> <p>Please select each number/position ONCE for the options below in order to rank your engagement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Informative reporting,</li> <li>b) Opinion pieces,</li> <li>c) Personal accounts,</li> <li>d) New satire</li> </ul>	<p>Rank 4(Least preferred):</p> <p>Rank 3:</p> <p>Rank 2:</p> <p>Rank 1 (Most preferred):</p>				
<p>Rank the options based on which you <b>trust</b> the most often.</p> <p>Please select each number/position ONCE for the options below in order to rank your engagement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Informative reporting,</li> <li>b) Opinion pieces,</li> <li>c) Personal accounts,</li> <li>d) New satire</li> </ul>	<p>Rank 4(Least preferred):</p> <p>Rank 3:</p> <p>Rank 2:</p> <p>Rank 1 (Most preferred):</p>				

**Section 3: News selection**

Every news website, mobile app or social network makes decisions about what content to show to you. These decisions can be made by editors and journalists or by computer algorithms analyzing information about what other content you have used, or based on what you and your friends share and interact with on social media. How do you feel about who or what makes these decisions?

All scales have 5 points, if you are on your phone remember to scroll!

Having stories automatically selected on the basis of what <b>I have consumed</b> in the past is a good way to get news.	Strongly Disagree (1)	2	3	4	Strongly Agree (5)
Having stories automatically selected on the basis of what <b>my friends have consumed</b> is a good way to get news.	Strongly Disagree (1)	2	3	4	Strongly Agree (5)
Having stories selected for me <b>by editors and journalists</b> is a good way to get news.	Strongly Disagree (1)	2	3	4	Strongly Agree (5)
Rank the following as to which you <b>trust</b> the most. Please select an answer for each choice. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) News selected based on my previous consumption</li> <li>b) News selected based on my friends' consumption</li> <li>c) News selected by editors and journalists</li> </ul>	Rank 3 (Least trusted): Rank 2: Rank 1 (Most trusted):				

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#### Section 4: Exposure to misinformation

All scales have 5 points, remember to scroll!

How often do you come across news about <i>politics, international events, business or similar</i> that you think is ... a) ...Not fully accurate? b) ...Completely made up?	Not at all (1) a) b)	2 a) b)	3 a) b)	4 a) b)	A lot (5) a) b)
How much of the news about <i>politics, international events, business or similar</i> that you encounter do you <b>trust</b> ?	None (1)	2	3	4	All (5)
How often do you come across news about <i>entertainment, sports, lifestyle or similar</i> that you think is ... a) ...Not fully accurate? b) ...Completely made up?	Not at all (1) a) b)	2 a) b)	3 a) b)	4 a) b)	A lot (5) a) b)
How much of the news about <i>entertainment, sports, lifestyle or similar</i> that you encounter do you <b>trust</b> ?	None (1)	2	3	4	All (5)

**Section 5: Sharing news stories**

Have you ever shared a news story <i>online</i> (e.g. social media, WhatsApp) that you <b>later</b> found out was made up?	Yes	No
Have you ever shared a story <i>online</i> that you knew or suspected <b>at the time</b> of sharing was made up?	Yes	No
Have you ever shared a news story <i>in-person</i> (e.g. conversations with friends and family) that you <b>later</b> found out was made up?	Yes	No
Have you ever shared a story <i>in-person</i> that you knew or suspected <b>at the time</b> of sharing was made up?	Yes	No

**Section 5: Responsibility**

All scales have 5 points, if you are on your phone remember to scroll!

How much responsibility does each of the following have in trying to prevent made up stories from gaining attention?	None (1)	2	3	4	A great Deal (5)
a) The government					
b) Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)	a)	a)	a)	a)	a)
c) Search Engines (e.g. Google)	b)	b)	b)	b)	b)
d) Watchdogs or Fact-checking sites (e.g. Africa Check)	c)	c)	c)	c)	c)
	d)	d)	d)	d)	d)
e) The public	e)	e)	e)	e)	e)

Thank You!

You have completed the survey. Your contribution is helping to grow our understanding of how people engage with news and media and is greatly appreciated.

If you would like to comment on your experience during the study, have any additional thoughts on the topic or would like to provide any additional information, you are encouraged to share it here. For example, you can use this section to clarify your answers, add something important, or discuss your experience during the survey.

**If you found this interesting or would like to explore your relationship with news more, consider taking a look at Part 2 on the next page.**

Comments:

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Congratulations!

You have completed the first part of the study. Thank you!

The second part of this study consists of a photovoice investigation and qualitative interviews. If you are interested in learning more or potentially participating in part 2 you can follow this link:

Photovoice study information and application: <https://forms.gle/yLArEnF5CcfwpUTJ7>

Please share this survey with friends and family!

If you would like a copy of the research once completed you can request it from the primary researcher.

Contact Details

Researcher: Sarah Erasmus-erasmus.lee.sarah@gmail.com

Supervisors: Alexandra Mouratidou-alexandra.mouratidou@semiotik.lu.se

Jordan Zlatev-jordan.zlatev@ling.lu.se

Please note that ethical approval for this project has been granted by the Centre for Social Science Research (CSSR: ethics.cssr@uct.ac.za)

# Appendix C1

## Survey Breakdown

Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2019) inspired many of the items in sections one, four, five, and six, and additional questions focussing on trust and separating out different aspects of media (e.g. semiotic systems) were added. For the full survey, see Appendix B1.

Section one, media engagement, contained 17 items investigating the frequency of news consumption across different media (e.g., newspapers) and various media behaviours (e.g., skimming headlines). For example, participants were asked, "How often do you comment or discuss news in person?" and "How often do you engage with news on the radio?"

Section two ascertained the frequency with which participants engaged with hard and soft news using two items from Fletcher and Kleis Nielsen (2019). It also included 13 items exploring participants' attitudes towards different styles of reporting. For example, participants were asked to rank their preferences for various reporting styles such as informative reporting, opinion pieces, personal accounts, and news satire.

Section three assessed attitudes towards selection methods using four items from Thurman, Moeller, Helberger, and Trilling (2019) and Fletcher and Kleis Nielsen (2019). Participants indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with statements like "Having stories automatically selected based on what I have consumed in the past is a good way to get news". This section also explored which news selection methods participants trusted.

Section four assessed perceived exposure to dis/misinformation using five items. For example, participants were asked how often they come across news about politics, international events, business, or similar topics that they believe are not fully accurate.

Section five identified participants' history of sharing dis/misinformation by inquiring whether they had knowingly or unknowingly shared inaccurate stories. The survey differentiated between online and in-person experiences.

Section six assessed participants' perceptions of who bears responsibility for preventing dis/misinformation. It asked participants to rate the responsibility of various entities, such as government and social networks.

## Appendix D1

### Items Combined to Measure News Engagement

How often do you think about news on a scale of 1 to 5?	Not a lot (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)
How important do you think it is for <i>you</i> to engage with the news?	Not a lot (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)
How often do you engage with the news (e.g., skim headlines, read articles or discuss with friends)?	1. Multiple times a day	2. A few times a day	3. Once a day	4. A few times a week	5. Less than once a week
How often do you usually engage in the following behaviours around news (on a scale from 1 to 5)?	Not at all (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)
a) Full engagement (e.g. reading full articles/ watching full broadcasts)	a)	a)	a)	a)	a)
b) Monitoring news (e.g. skimming headlines)	b)	b)	b)	b)	b)
c) Commenting on or discussing news online	c)	c)	c)	c)	c)
d) Sharing news stories online	d)	d)	d)	d)	d)
e) Commenting on or discussing news in-person	e)	e)	e)	e)	e)
How much do you enjoy engaging with the news?	Not a lot (1)	2	3	4	A lot (5)



<p>How often do you engage with news in the following (on a scale from 1 to 5)?</p> <p>a) Television</p> <p>b) Internet (excluding YouTube or podcasts)</p> <p>c) YouTube</p> <p>d) Radio (including podcasts)</p> <p>e) Newspapers</p> <p>f) Other</p>	<p>Not at all (1)</p> <p>a)</p> <p>b)</p> <p>c)</p> <p>d)</p> <p>e)</p> <p>f)</p>	<p>2</p> <p>a)</p> <p>b)</p> <p>c)</p> <p>d)</p> <p>e)</p> <p>f)</p>	<p>3</p> <p>a)</p> <p>b)</p> <p>c)</p> <p>d)</p> <p>e)</p> <p>f)</p>	<p>4</p> <p>a)</p> <p>b)</p> <p>c)</p> <p>d)</p> <p>e)</p> <p>f)</p>	<p>A lot (5)</p> <p>a)</p> <p>b)</p> <p>c)</p> <p>d)</p> <p>e)</p> <p>f)</p>
<p>How often do you discuss/share news <b>in-person</b> (e.g. face-to-face conversations) with friends and family?</p>	<p>Not a lot (1)</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>A lot (5)</p>
<p>How often do you discuss/share news <b>online</b> (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp etc)with friends and family?</p>	<p>Not a lot (1)</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>A lot (5)</p>
<p>How important do you think it is for <i>others</i> to engage with the news?</p>	<p>Not a lot (1)</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>A lot (5)</p>
<p>How often do you engage with news about the following (on a scale from 1 to 5)?</p> <p>a) entertainment, celebrities, lifestyle, arts and culture, and/or sports?</p> <p>b) International events, politics, business and economics, and/or education</p>	<p>Not a lot (1)</p> <p>a)</p> <p>b)</p>	<p>2</p> <p>a)</p> <p>b)</p>	<p>3</p> <p>a)</p> <p>b)</p>	<p>4</p> <p>a)</p> <p>b)</p>	<p>A lot (5)</p> <p>a)</p> <p>b)</p>

# Appendix E1

## **Photovoice and Interview Follow-up information**

Hi \_\_\_\_\_

This is Sarah Erasmus from the photovoice and interview study on news. I hope you are well! Thank you so much for taking the time to do the survey and for your interest in participating! I'm going to tell you a little bit more about the study and hopefully not overwhelm you! If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.

As you may have experienced, the world around us is full of information. There is news everywhere, we see it on our phones, hear it on the radio, or talk about it with friends. The sheer volume of it can be overwhelming and confusing. In this study, I want to learn more about how people make sense of all this information. For example, I want to explore how people decide what news they want to consume or share, and why they make these decisions.

I chose to use the photovoice method and interviews because these approaches give participants a chance to think about and explain their experiences in detail. Photovoice is a unique way for people to engage with the topic in their everyday life. Photographs can be a creative way to become more aware of how and when we encounter news. The photographs can also be helpful in the interview. They can make sure we talk about what's really important to us and help us remember.

As part of the process, we would need to meet for a briefing session between May 3-10. In this session, we will discuss the project and what you need to do. This will include practical details about taking and uploading photographs as well as a more general discussion about news. Then we would meet again about 2 weeks later (May 17-23) to discuss your experiences as part of the study in an interview.

If you are happy with this, I will add your name to the group of potential participants. We hope to make the final (random) selection by the 25th of April.

While the number of participants in the photovoice and interviews is limited, the greater the response on the survey the better. So please share the survey with friends and family and ask them

to share with as many people as possible. Each response matters and I am grateful to every person for their participation.

Once again, feel free to ask any questions. Hope to hear from you soon.

Kind Regards,

Sarah Erasmus

# Appendix F1

## Photovoice and Interview Consent Form

### Consent Form

Informed consent to participate in the study **A Cognitive Semiotic Exploration of News Engagement and Trust in South Africa**

<b>1. Background and purpose</b>	This study is part of a master's thesis, in the Cognitive Semiotics at Lund University. The purpose of the study is to understand how people engage with, perceive, and make decisions about what news.
<b>2. The study</b>	For this study, you will take part in a combined photovoice and interview investigation. For the <u>photovoice</u> , you will be asked to take photographs showing how you engage with news in your day-to-day life. You will upload and write a comment for each photograph on VoiceThread.  Photography period dates: _____ to _____  In the <u>interview</u> , you will be asked to discuss your photographs and how they reflect your experiences with the news. Please note that the interview will be audio-recorded.
<b>3. Handling and storing the data</b>	All data will be anonymized in the report. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The audio material will be kept on an external hard drive not connected to the internet. Observe that supervisors will also have access to the transcripts and photographs.
<b>4. Voluntary participation</b>	Participation is voluntary, and as a participant, you have the right to cease participation at any time and withdraw the information you have provided.  Your decision to release your photographs for publication or use in a public forum is completely voluntary. You may refuse to release your photographs for any secondary uses in this project.

<b>5. Compensation</b>	If you complete both the photovoice and interview you will be entitled to a 10 € online gift voucher as a thank you for your participation.
<b>6. Responsible persons</b>	<p><b>Researcher:</b> Sarah Erasmus  +46 72 994 3750  <a href="mailto:erasmus.lee.sarah@gmail.com">erasmus.lee.sarah@gmail.com</a></p> <p><b>Supervisors:</b> Alexandra Mouratidou  <a href="mailto:alexandra.mouratidou@semiotik.lu.se">alexandra.mouratidou@semiotik.lu.se</a></p> <p>Jordan Zlatev  <a href="mailto:jordan.zlatev@ling.lu.se">jordan.zlatev@ling.lu.se</a></p> <p>Please note that ethical approval for this project has been granted by the Centre for Social Science Research (CSSR: <a href="mailto:ethics.cssr@uct.ac.za">ethics.cssr@uct.ac.za</a>)</p>

I confirm by my signature that I have read the information about the study and that I consent to participate. I have also received the participant information sheet. Furthermore, by signing this I acknowledge that I have attended a briefing session that explained the study methodology, what is required of me, and the ethics regarding photovoice.

This form is made in two copies, one for me, and one for the responsible person.

Date, Place \_\_\_\_\_

Signature/clarification of signature \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix G1

## Photograph Release Form

Photovoice Project:

### **An Exploration of News and Media Engagement in South Africa**

Permission to images:

I understand that my decision to release my photographs for publication or use in public forums is voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw my permission at any time. I freely agree to release the photographs I have taken in connection with this research for use in the project, including publication. I have read and understood the above.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix H1

## Photovoice and Interview Information Booklet

### Information packet:

# An Exploration of News and Media Engagement in South Africa



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### Contents

1. Photovoice Information .....	1p
2. Voice Thread Instruction	
A. Starting a New Thread .....	3p
B. Adding to an Existing Thread .....	6p
3. Consent Form .....	8p

# 1. Photovoice Information

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. I am so grateful to have you and your contribution. This document contains a summary of the information discussed in the briefing session. If you are unsure about something and can't find the answer in this document you can contact me, Sarah. I will be happy to answer any questions and guide you through any problems.

## *Contact details*

Sarah Erasmus

WhatsApp: +46 72 994 3750

[Erasmus.lee.sarah@gmail.com](mailto:Erasmus.lee.sarah@gmail.com)

## **Things to think about**

We are looking for photos that help us understand how you engage with news and capture a part of your experience. I know that a lot of news is on your screen but try to avoid screenshots, see if you can find some interesting ways of getting around this.

It can be hard to get started, so here are some ideas to get you going. You can ask yourself these questions and think about the role news plays in your life.

- When do you engage with news?
- How do you get news?
- Who do you talk about the news with?
- Why do you consume the news that you do?
- Do you ever see “Fake News”?
- What news do you trust?

But remember, this is just a starting point, there are many other valuable aspects you could encounter.

## **Ethical Guidelines for Taking Photographs**

Your photos can be as creative as you like but please remember these important rules.

1. Don't take pictures of personal or identifying information



2. Don't take pictures where others are recognizable (e.g. avoid faces)
3. The photograph is not worth putting yourself or anyone else at risk
4. Be aware when taking photographs in public spaces. Respect people's privacy and try to be as unobtrusive as possible.
5. ask for permission before you take someone's photo.
  - For example, you can say "I am participating in a study taking photographs of how people engage with news. May I take a photograph of you? You will not be identifiable in the photograph".
  - If they want more information, you can provide them with the study details and contact information.
  - If someone does not want their photograph taken you cannot take it

### Alternatives

If you want to take a picture of something that you cannot share you can try these methods

- ❖ Blurring, covering, or cropping out parts of a picture
- ❖ Using a part of something to represent a whole (e.g. instead of a face show their shoes).
- ❖ Use something to represent something else (e.g. Instead of a picture of a child with a phone you could take a picture of a puppy with a toy).

If you are unsure if something is ok to photograph, err on the side of caution and try to use one of the alternative methods or check with me if it is ok to photograph.

## **Your rights**

You can find more information about your rights in the consent form, but this is a small summary:

1. You can end the study at any time.

You can choose to leave the study at any time, you don't have to explain why and there are no repercussions. Please let me know if you will be leaving the study.

2. Your identity is Private

Only I (Sarah) know who you are. Your identity is kept confidential and stored separately to all other data in the study. The information you provide for the study will stored, analyzed, and reported under a fake name.

### 3. Your Photographs

The photographs you take as part of the study are yours. After the interview, I will ask you for permission to use the photographs in further projects. You can choose which photographs, if any, you give permission to be used in future work, for example, the written thesis or related presentations.

### 4. Thank-you Gift Voucher

This is a time-consuming study, and I am very grateful for your effort and the insight you provide. As a token of appreciation, you will be given a 10€ (roughly R200) online gift voucher after the interview. You will only get this if you complete the photovoice study AND the interview.

If you have ANY questions, you can always ask.

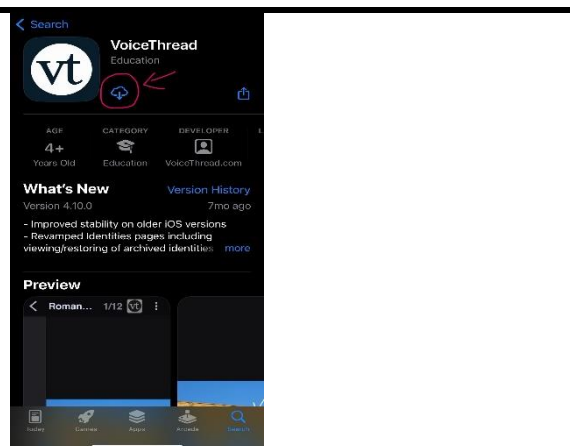
## 2. Voice Thread Instructions

### A. Starting a New Thread.

You only need to do this once. You will make one thread that you will share with me. You will add all your photos to the same thread (learn how to add to a thread in Section B. “Adding to an Existing Thread”).

#### 1. Download the App

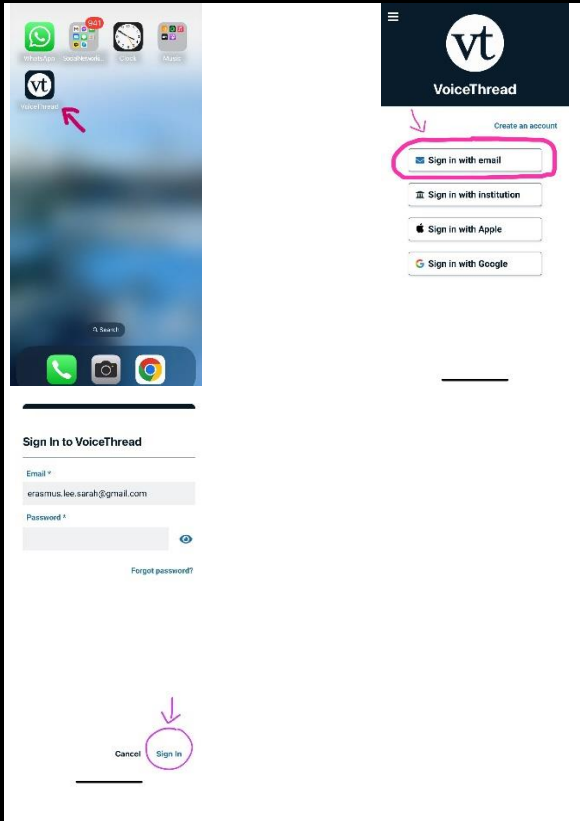
Search in the App Store or Play Store for “Voice Thread” and download. It should look something like this.





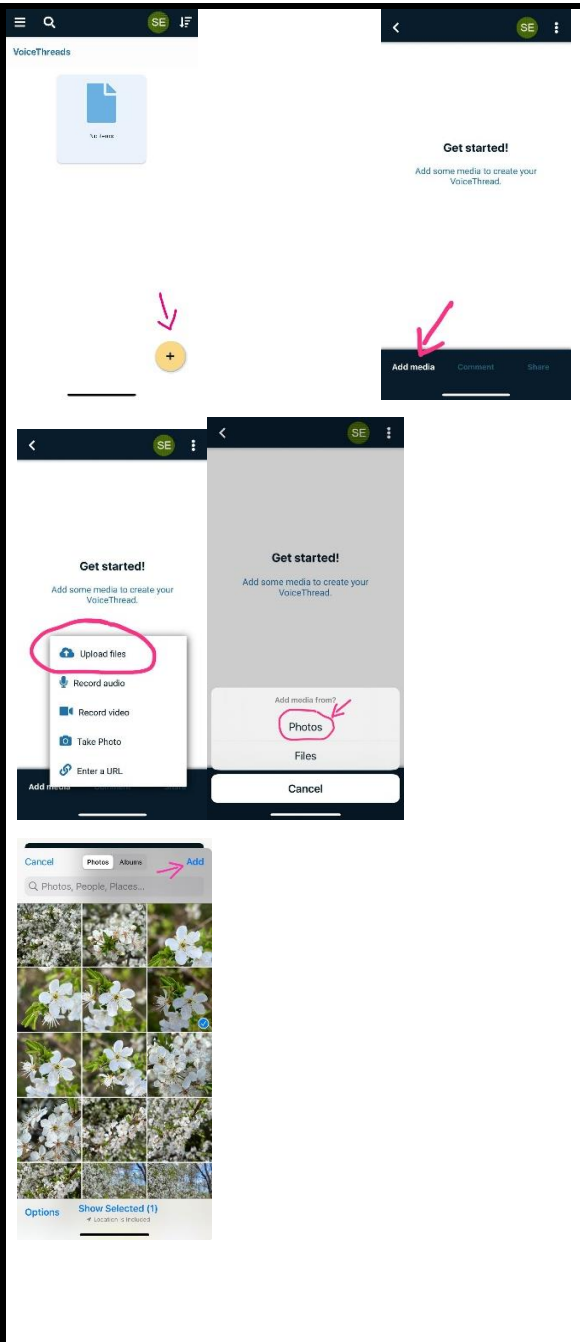
4. Sign in to your account

- a) Open the VoiceThread App.
- b) Tap “sign in with email”.
- c) Enter your email and password, tap “done” and then “sign in”.



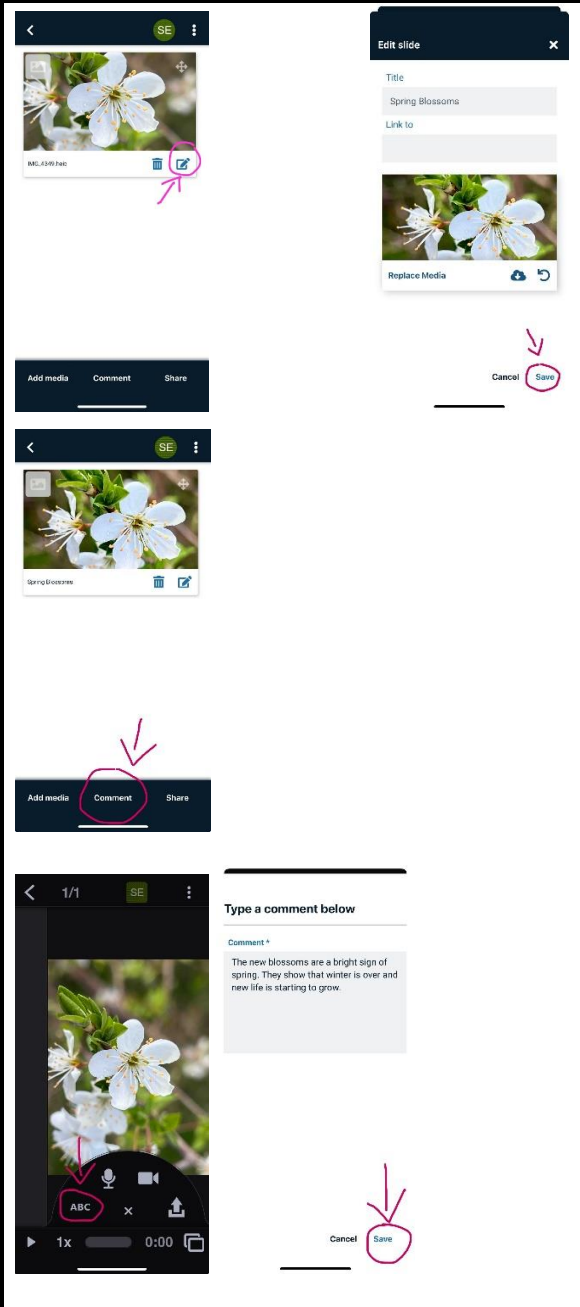
## 5. Create a new Thread

- a) Once you are signed you can see the home page (close any pop-ups that appear).
- b) To create a new thread, tap the circle with the “+” in the lower right corner.
- c) Then tap “Add Media” in the bottom left corner.
- d) Tap “Upload file” (Do NOT take photos in the App – it will freeze)
- e) When asked where to add media from tap “photos”. This will take you to your photo roll.
- f) Select the photo you want and tap “Add” in the top right corner.



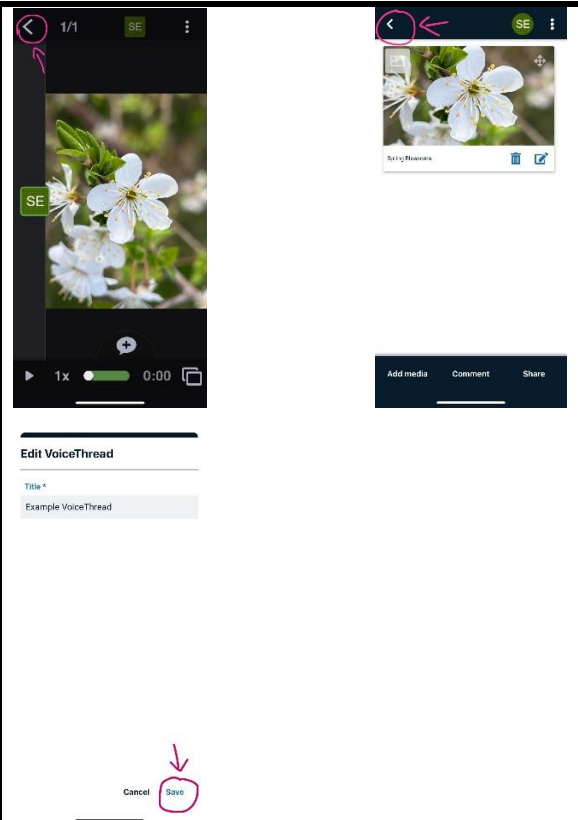
6. Edit the first photo

- a) To add a title tap the square with a pen underneath the picture, on the right.
- b) Write your title and tap “save” in the bottom right.
- c) To add a comment tap “comment” at the bottom center of the screen.
- d) To type your comment tap “ABC”.
- e) Type your comment, tap “done,” then tap “save”.



## 7. Save Thread

- a) Tap the “<” in the top left corner to exit the thread (if you do not see the “<” try tap the screen once).
- b) Tap the “<” in the top left corner to name your new thread.
- c) Type the title for your Thread, tap “done” then tap “save” in the bottom right corner.

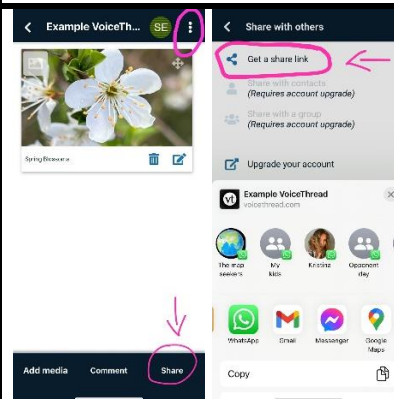


## 8. Share the Thread

- a) Tap “share” in the bottom right.
- b) If you cannot see the “share” button tap the three dots on the top right corner, then tap “share”.
- c) Tap “Get a share link” and send it to me/Sarah on a platform of your choice (e.g. WhatsApp or email).

WhatsApp: +46 72 994 3750

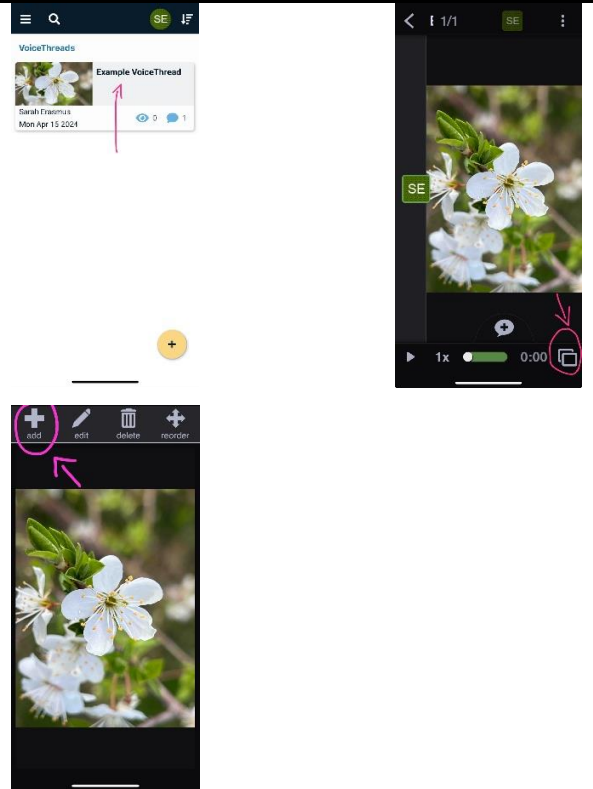
Email: Erasmus.lee.sarah@gmail.com



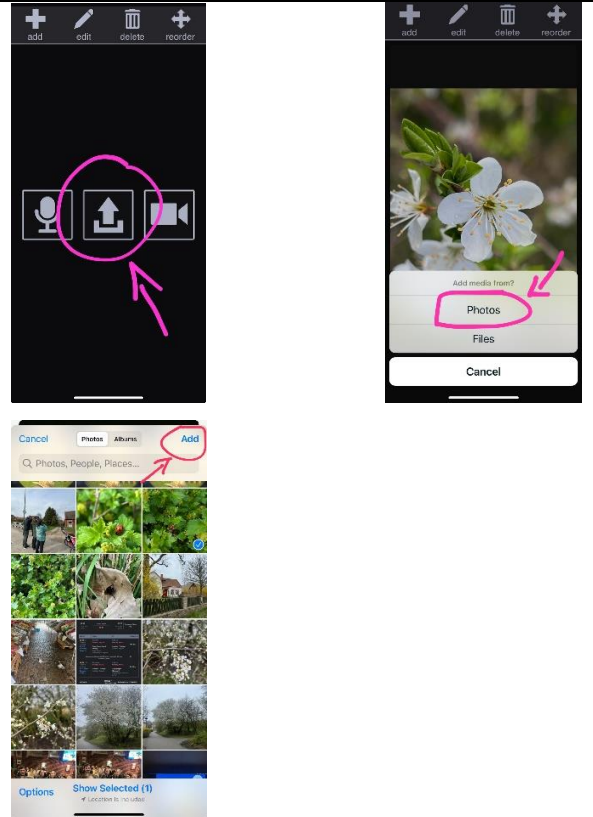
## B. Adding to an Existing Thread

Once you have created your thread you can add photographs to it by following the instructions below.

1. Open the App and tap the thread you want to add to.
2. Tap the two squares in the bottom right corner.
3. Tap the big “+” in the top left corner.  
(Do NOT take photos in the app – it will freeze).



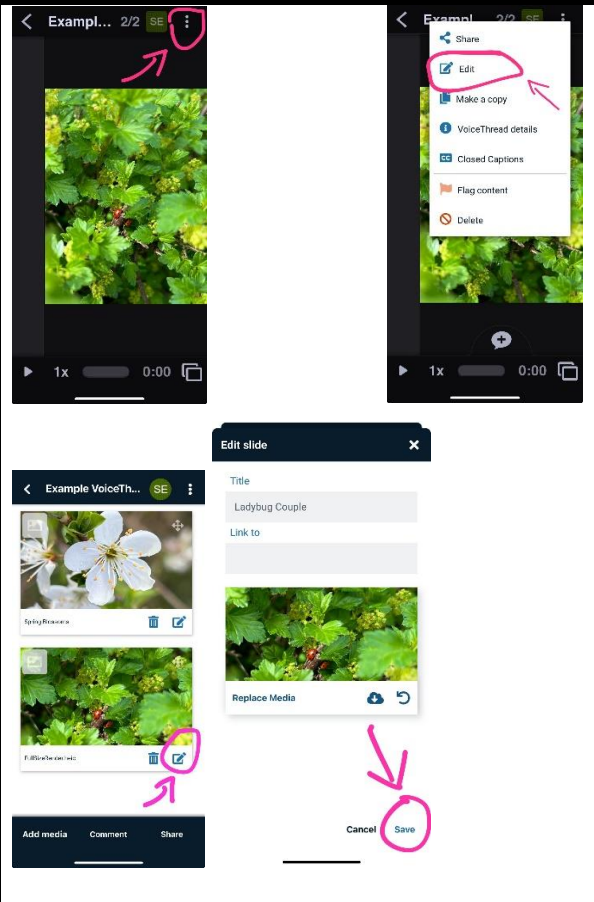
4. Tap the middle upload button.
5. Tap “Photos”.
6. Select the photo you want to upload and tap “Add” in the top right corner.





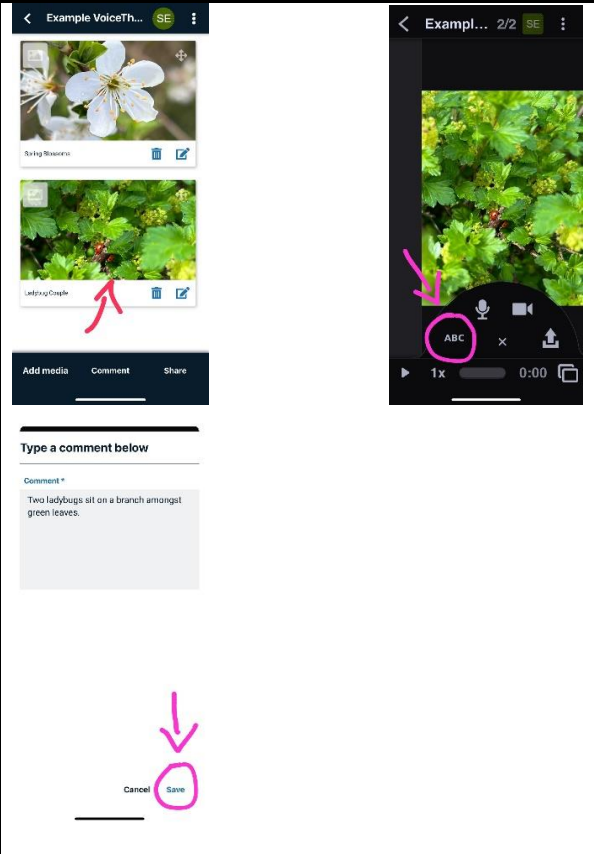
## 7. Add a title

- a) Tap on the photo you want to add a title to.
- b) Tap the three dots in the top right.
- c) Tap “edit”.
- d) Tap the square with the pencil under the photo you want to title.
- e) Type your title, tap “done” and tap “save”.



8. Add a comment

- a) Tap on the photo you want to comment on. (If you are inside the thread and can see previous photos, scroll to the photo you want to comment on.)
- b) Tap “ABC” at the bottom left.
- c) Type your comment, tap “done” and tap “save”.



9. To add another photo return to step 2.

# Appendix II

## Interview guide

### Introduction

1. General greeting and thank you
2. Outline interview: e.g. This is meant to be an in-depth interview about your experiences and perceptions of news. Because I want to really understand your relationship with news it may seem like I'm asking obvious or repetitive questions – this doesn't mean I'm doubting your answers or that I'm not paying attention. I just want to clarify and make sure I'm not making any assumptions. Please elaborate your answers and correct anything if you feel I'm not understanding you fully. The interview should take roughly one hour but depends on your answers and how much detail you want to discuss.
3. Interview will be audio recorded, and written notes taken.

### Opening Questions

1. Can you tell me about your relationship with news?
2. Did anything stand out to you while you were doing this project?

### VT1 Questions

1. ...
2. ...

### VT2 Questions

1. ...
2. ...

Etc.

### Closing Questions

1. Is there anything we haven't spoken about that you would like to discuss? Anything you want to clarify?
2. How was your overall experience taking part in this project?

### Phrasing Notes

- NOT why (what/ how)
- Tell me about...
- What about X was...?
- How can you tell...?
- How do you know...?
- What would be different if..?
- What made you include ...?
- Talk me through ...
- How does this relate to (news/life)?
- What was that like?
- What does this photo show?
- What is happening here?
- What does this tell us about news?
- What does this reflect about our relationship with news?
- What aspects does this highlight about news?

## **General Topics**

- How do you feel when engaging with news?
- What do you gain from engaging? What motivates you?
- What is reliable/credible? How do you know?
- Visuals (e.g. what would be different if there was a picture, what do you like/dislike about the images etc)

## **Wrap Up**

1. Thank you
2. Voucher information
3. Photograph release

# Appendix J1

## Participant VoiceThreads

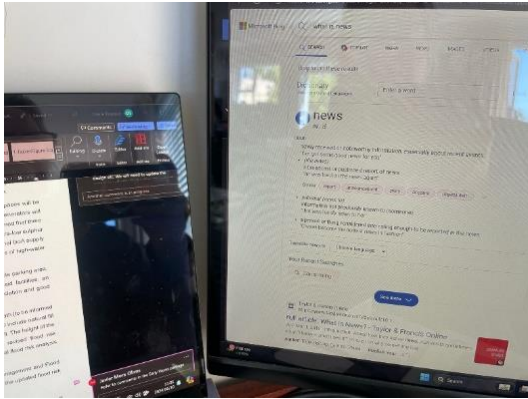
### *Participant A*



1. My Morning Ritual I scan the headlines in the newsletter I get for international news and Facebook and Instagram for local news to see if there is anything significant, I should know about. If so I go to trusted news sources to find out more and I also try to get a range of opinions on controversial news.



2. Watching a range of news items about the George tragedy to see if we can hear something new about what has happened. Esp caught up in the personal stories of people rescued and family of the missing as it gives an idea of how people are affected by the tragedy. The horror or it's so close to me makes it very poignant and personal.



3. Thinking about this project. Decided to do some research on how news is defined to help me conceptualise what news is to me and to help me be more focused on how I am engaging with it.



4. I watch the news often to get good news. Most often the news is doom and gloom and depressing and it's hard to think life is good. But there is good news amongst all of the bad and this finding of a survivor in the rubble after 118 hrs is one of those moments that brings joy and hope. And in this news story it's about what the survivor experienced and his feelings as he was so elated that the rescuers came back to him. The poignancy of hearing first hand how it was for him makes the moments even more real and relatable. I specifically like to follow news like this to balance out all the terrible things and to remind me to focus on the good and the good specifically in my life



5. Contemplating how confusing the news world is. This just jarred with me and made me think about the mixed messaging we get. The picture and the headlines tell a different story. Does this impact on the message I get I wonder? It makes me distrust the news give a bit as they did not think this through and if they did it think this through what was the intention. Or what else is not well informed or considered...

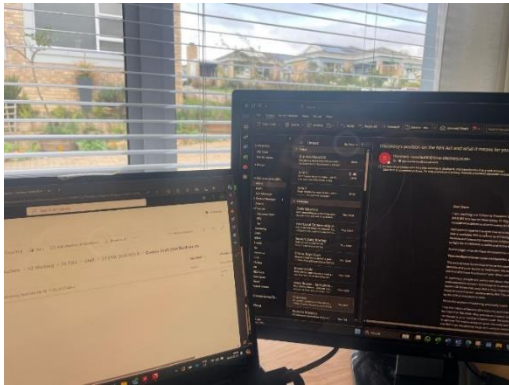


6. Contemplating a world where it's peaceful and slow and cut off from the craziness of life. And this makes me question how important it is to have as much news as we do in our lives. What is the quality of life it brings to me to know of all the disasters and corruption and bad people. On the other hand, other people's hardships make me appreciate my good fortune. All about balance I suppose but I am enjoying the down time away from it all. Brain shut down.



7. Been interesting being in a news free zone for a few days. I stopped checking news headlines. Only today did I check up on the building collapse and then just to see if anyone new had been rescued. And I can feel how the news detox has made me less anxious. Even when back in reception I have not looked at the news. Maybe it would be a good thing to have a regular news detox and to monitor the impact on one's well being. Esp interesting in the middle of the project that we did this as it may me more aware of the difference. I watched Zane though and he struggled to shut off and I saw he was constantly looking for internet to follow the news even in the most beautiful relaxed environment and then caught up first thing when back. Makes one really think about the role the news plays in our lives. Why do we want to interact with it so much and what value is it bringing. Or are there different types

of news that bring different values and impact us differently.



8. Thinking about news and how I decide what to trust in the myriad messiness of the information overload world. A big issue in SA is the passing of the NHI bill and the response to it. Most agree with the objectives. Many are concerned about implementation. Some hate the idea of it and everyone is worried about how they will be impacted. So who to listen to? Where to find the facts. I liked that discovery immediately sent out a letter to all their members explaining there position, the facts and how and when I will be impacted. This response to concerns from the organisation entrusted with my care

was comforting and allowed me to navigate the range of opinions presented in the media. So who to trust? Those that have the facts, and have a stake but are showing objectivity and calmness.



*Participant B*



1. Bed making ritual. Making the bed, getting dressed and preparing for the day is an ideal time to catch up on the world's news. A cell phone playing a podcast is an ideal means to do this. This is because it can play in the background while my hands are free to work. Usually I would listen to BBC, but this morning I listened to a podcast by Alec Hogg on Biznews that was sent to me by a friend. When I'm alone at home I let the media play on speaker. Then It feels like I'm not

alone at home. If other folk are at home then I play the media through my ear phones so that it does not disturb them. My concentration levels are higher with earphones - but there is always a risk that someone will start a conversation with you while your attention is focused on the podcast.



2. And so it is that we are keen on music. Most types. The Eurovision Song Contest has some vague fascination although they don't really seem to sing songs. Instead lots of really bright lights loud drum machine sounds and very very obscure lyrics. Either way, before going to bed I tuned in to UTube to take a look at some

of the semi finals. I feel sad after seeing the latest productions from some countries.

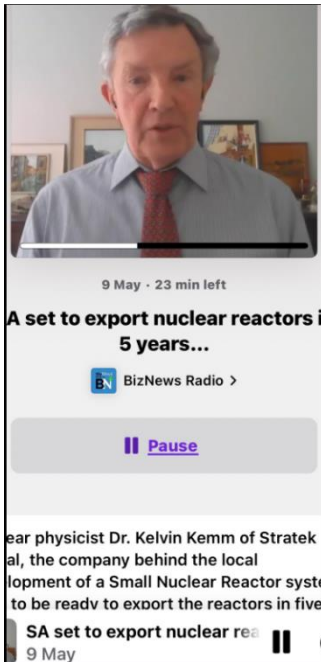


3. Local news has been distributed in a printed format for over 200 years in George. Distribution is on a weekly basis only. It is this weekly publication that forms a major part of my local news source. It is also (almost) the only news coverage that I get in a printed format.



4. Almost a daily ritual with me is to watch the international news at morning with breakfast. If alone I usually stream the news online on the TV, or when other folk are in the house - I use a laptop mostly with EarPods so as not to disturb anyone. My main focus is on international news so I focus first on what the BBC has to say. In my opinion they are free, fair and unbiased. I also watch CNN occasionally although they are somewhat left of centre. Their presentation though is good, and entertaining. I sometimes switch to Al Jazeera but they tend to be focused on an anti Israeli and western view which does not line up with my stance on world affairs. Very occasionally I may switch to local TV

stations but their presentation is usually shocking and very unprofessional



5. The supply of power in South Africa has been compromised by the corruption and incompetence of the ruling government party. This has had a major impact on all the citizens, businesses and ultimately economy in the country. It is thus that we follow any news on the provision of power in the country very closely. This morning I took a listen to a presentation by a SA nuclear physicist who heads the development of small nuclear reactors that do not require masses of water to keep cool. The presentation was hosted by BizNews an electronic news organisation that has very successfully filled the void left when the free printed media were captured by a consortium of State driven BBEEE front companies and subsequent trashed.



6. As a white South African, we often get accused of moaning about the loss of service delivery and very high levels of corruption by the government. In response to this we are told - we'll do something about it. My way of doing something about "it" is to support the free press. The Daily Maverick is an independent electronic media outfit that has taken on some of the most controversial cases in the country. Their independent journalists have exposed many cases of corruption. Despite facing masses of government funded propaganda trying to shut them down, and the distribution of fake news related to their funding - they continue to deliver high quality investigative articles. They do however face a major challenge as they are privately funded and do not have the support afforded to the government funded, online newspaper that is funded by China, PIC, GEPA and various other state supported organs. There are nearly 20,000,000 DM readers, yet only 20,000 of

these readers are subscribers. I am one of these subscribers as I believe in supporting free speech and journalists that hold those responsible for crimes against the poorest of the poor South Africans to task. A recent example of this is when a building collapsed my hometown of George. There was plenty coverage of this major disaster throughout the national and local news media. Within 2 days the DM had reported on the entire history of the project, the rezoning, the owners, contractors, engineers and all the information that is relevant to the case. There was no speculation of the cause, only information that cannot be disputed. At some stage accountability will have to fall on those involved to help the victims and families that have been severely affected. It would appear as though many of these victims are foreigners that could be taken advantage of.



7. So I spent a few days in the Addo National Park and stayed at this place that was fantastic, but, it did not have Wi-fi. This meant of course that I could not access my usual news media. I sort of held out well enough, but later one night I could not resist the temptation and switched on the TV installed in the lounge. Try as I might, I could not get the TV and satellite decoder to work. All I got was a lot of noise and static. I was aware at the time of the annoyance of fellow family members. How could I disturb the quiet charm of the outdoors with the same racket we have at home!!!!

And so, reluctantly, I did not try to get it going again. It made me realise just how fixated I am about the news. It's like a drug. I have to get my fix every day. Why is it that I need to know what's going on on the other side of the earth - when in reality - it does not have any impact on me at all? But, irrespective of motivation, I will pursue the news in any format available. As a school kid I would spend my pocket money on buying a paper, and then commence to read it from the top left hand advert on the front page, to the last full stop in the last sentence on the back sport

page - bottom right hand corner of course. It's a life long issue with me and irrespective of reason - I carry on regardless - wallowing in the multiple news avenues that are accessible today. Oh, and by the way, I did try in the morning to get the TV to work again. Alas - still no luck!!!

*Participant C*



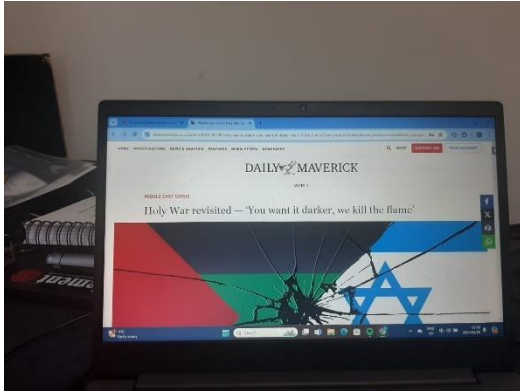
1. My Oak tree planted around 1976 in the time of the student riots on the smallholding

This is the picture of an oak tree that I planted years back in 76, just after the riots. And I thought it had a lot of historical significance. Much of my youth was during the apartheid era. And I suppose in some ways that this oak tree could tell a few stories.

I was born in what was called Northern Rhodesia in 59. And I spent nine years in Grahamstown or Mukunda, as it is known today. I was a boarder at the age of 9 and matriculated at 17. And my parents lived and worked in Zambia, so my exposure to any news was basically from the school. And I didn't get much influence from my parents.

So I went to the army for two years from 79 to 80. I never really questioned the conscription or the laws at the time. It was the done thing, and most youth rarely saw it as anything but an adventure didn't really get into the nitty gritty of the niceties. OK, so after Army I studied agriculture at Natal University, graduated with a horticultural degree. And hence my interest in farming. So, agriculture in general is stacked with very conservative thinking people. And at this time, Rhodesia, Zambia and South Africa were at war and the military was all consuming, I suppose. While I was at university, I was talking with cracked military soldiers.

At Peiter Maritzburg University and I gained an insight into the futility of the efforts in trying to achieve democracy. Without a majority rule, what we were told was that Rhodesians were fighting for Western values by the local press and white people in general were sucked into the Pro Ian Smith dialogue. OK, I think that's enough for the time being. A little bit of history



2. My Daily Maverick email. Today -HOLY WAR REVISITED-Leonard Cohen 'You want it darker, we kill the flame' This is killing on a grand scale. I am not certain that by destroying Gaza that Netanyahu has solved the Israeli problem. I opened up my daily maverick this morning. And I read this article about Israel. And I felt a little sad to see all the death and destruction. It seems to me the world is in a very dangerous place. The reason I chose daily Maverick is my newspaper. I had an option of the others, but daily Daily Maverick to me is credible. Previously there was

an independent online which is IOL. Described an incident in South Africa where a woman had produced 10 babies. And well, that article. Condemned them with me. I will never, never support them again. So as far as I'm concerned, definitely. Fake news.



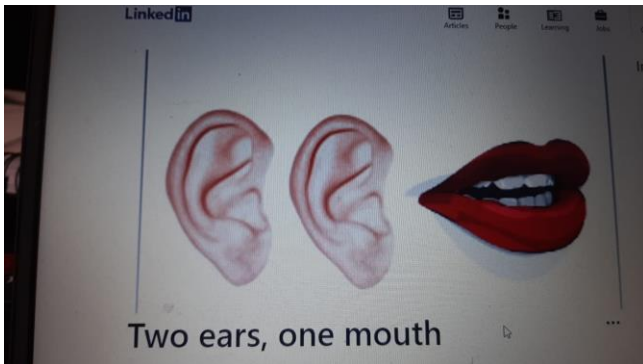
3. A picture of my dirty DSTV dish attached to the smoke chimney! I think it is apt for the news channels that I will chat about in the voice message. This is #3 just a quick rundown on all my DSTV channels that I look at, that's just for the news. I'll give you a rundown on my entertainment. Maybe tomorrow or the day after, but OK, let's go through. The BBC I look at around half an hour a day. It's mostly about British politics, but there is quite a lot of international news that is covered as well. CNN, I would say I look at that around about an hour a day. And the current trial that Donald Trump is having, the hush money trial, is quite interesting. And my personal feeling is that the outcome of the American elections in November will be crucial for worldwide democracy, and that's why I'm pretty much interested in what's going on on scene, and it is credible. To me, in my opinion. Sky, Sky News around half an hour. And the British

local elections have just passed by. And the Conservatives have been given a hiding by the Labour Party, so it is also relatively interesting, but not as interesting as the American situation. Three South African news channels that I look at 403, 404 and 405. At the moment it's quite boring for me. It's wall to wall debating about what's going to happen to South Africa at the end of the month. A lot of a lot of anxiety about who's going to join up with who, but still, I won't focus on that it's empty promises for job creation, crime prevention, rooting out of corruption, which I heard five years ago. I just hope Western province doesn't go the same route as the other provinces. And then Al Jazeera, I look at Al Jazeera quite a lot because they've got live cameras in Gaza set up and uh, I see. Honest reporting going on there as well, which you don't really see on the other channels.



4. U tube 🗣️ GOOGLE My go to channel for information.

Today my theme will be about the various Wi-Fi channels I use. I don't use TikTok, I don't use Facebook or Instagram. Or any other channels to communicate with others. I don't comment and therefore you would regard me as a passive user. As you see in my picture I've got YouTube, which is my main channel that I go to. What I look at, Ukraine and the Israeli conflicts, obviously. Local stuff like what's going on in George at the moment, with the collapsed building. And the companies that are look at the Telegraph. Midas touch. MSNBC, that is the American company, the Sun, and a lot of history channels. So just to get au fait with the history, OK, that's enough for today.



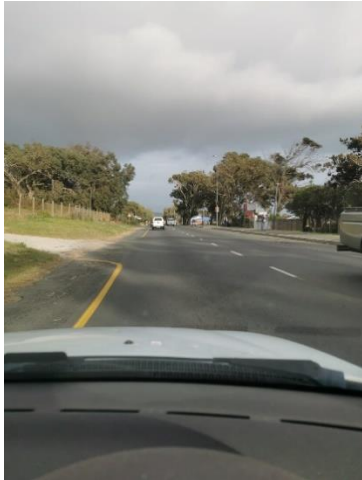
5. Here's my post for Thursday 16th of May. And the title today is 2 years and one month. In response to your request of why I engage with some new sources or not is because I need evidence before I'm convinced about anything. The reason I listen and try and not to speak too much is, especially with people that I don't know well, that my ideas and thoughts could be incredibly controversial. And to some, maybe even

dangerous. So, the people that I interact with must be able to listen without taking offense. Probably regarded as debate. But yeah, let's debate with evidence. Let's give an example, I studied as a horticultural scientist and I was exposed to Darwinian evolution. To me, an incredibly interesting subject, but it creates a lot of stress when aired with theists. We now know that Zeus and Thor etc don't exist. And even once upon a time it was probably heretical to even suggest that the earth revolved around the sun. Even today, there are some that believe that the earth is flat and that the moon landing is a hoax invented by the USA. I think that all the evidence is there, and I'm willing to believe that that actually happened. So yeah, I think we have science to thank for being able to close these gaps. But unfortunately, there are just too many that are not open to reason and debate. So, my point is, does one learn about science and then forget everything when you go into the church and you believe in creationism, which is exactly the opposite of Darwinian theory? So, it's all about evidence. Do the fossils exist? Does that prove something or are we all on a roller coaster of emotion? I think being out of being thoughtful and being scientific, it just means that you are not in the camaraderie of the millions of people that aren't prepared to listen to the evidence. OK, that's enough. Hope it's not too controversial.

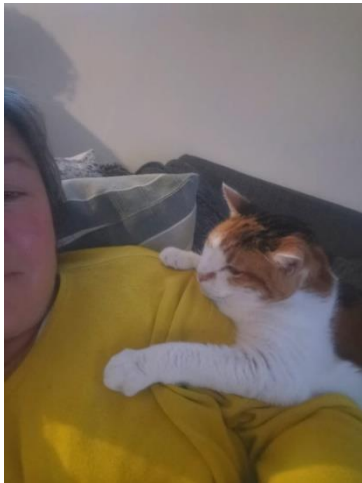
*Participant D*



1. First thing in the morning I open up my New York Times app - mostly to play word games but also scan through headlines. If anything catches my attention, I'll read the article. This is also the time I do a quick scroll through Instagram and Facebook. If anything catches my eye, I'll Google it to get more info. I feel deeply ambivalent about NYT reporting, because I feel it's biased.



2. Catching the news headlines on car radio while out to buy bread and milk. One news item caught my attention - will Google for more info because I want to discuss with a friend.



3. After dinner scroll through TikTok. At the same time got sent YouTube links by my friend via WA, one regarding international news, one local. The international story I've been following on TikTok for 2 days. My friend has only come across it on YT now. The story has been covered by various people on TT, giving different angles. The way I like it.





4. My colleague shares IG Reels with me about the Israeli war. He won't post these reels publicly - he sends it to people he knows share his opinion. It is his effort to make a difference by educating/informing people in his own circle.



5. Every Thursday night my friend and I meet up at a local restaurant for dinner. Without fail current affairs are brought up. We will sometimes exchange links beforehand about issues we want to talk about.



6. Listening to a voice note from my friend who has Talk Radio on at her house 24/7. She often shares her views of people phoning in and then gives her perspective. So I get updated on very current issues by proxy. 😊



7. Afternoon nap preceded by scroll through social media picking up on the latest trends.

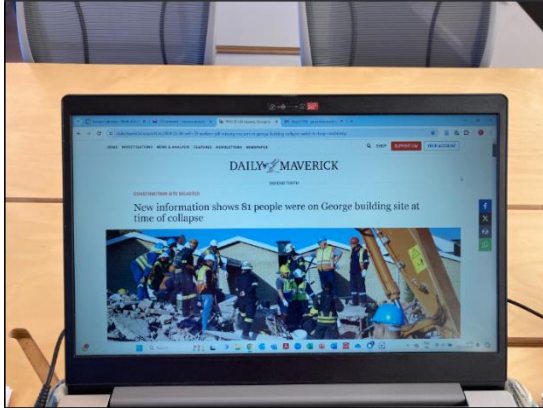


8. Coming back from my weekly dinner with my friend I googled 2 news stories he shared with me



9. Morning scroll through social media FB IG TT

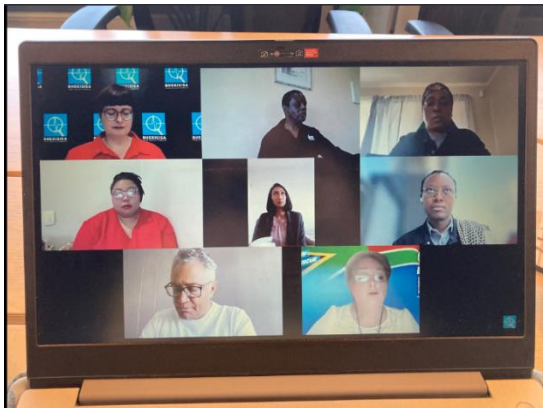




4. I get newsletters from the Daily Maverick and click on the links to the full article when I want to learn more. The building collapse rescue in George was devastating to hear about and I wanted to know if they had made progress with finding more people/bodies. I trust DM to provide news, but it's not always the latest updates since it's written up as full articles.



5. I value Zapiro's depictions of current affairs and its nuances.



6. Interesting webinar on what different parties plan to do with the health system. Dr T was representing the EFF and I was curious about how my different perceptions of her and the EFF struggled to adjust. I was trying to lean into critical thinking and form my own opinions about what was being said, but this is difficult for me.



7. When I'm in the car with my dad, we often talk about politics or news. I trust his synthesis of what's going on and his opinions on things. Sometimes he shares news articles with me on WhatsApp. This is also one of the bonding rituals we have.

*Participant F*



1. Every morning the first thing I do is have a cup of coffee on my balcony. As part of that “ritual” I open the BBC news app on my phone and catch up with international news. Sometimes, though not always, I open the local News24 app and scan the local news as well.



2. If I have arrived early for an appointment, I often pass the time by checking the news on my phone using news apps.



3. Current affairs and news usually comes up when one meets up with a group of people, including family. Some family groups are more interested or open to discussing news, while others prefer not to engage with those topics, especially if it is controversial.



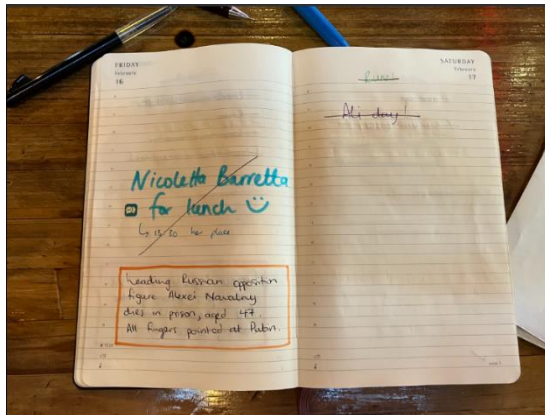
4. Occasionally while I prepare food in my kitchen (usually only if I'm cooking for a long time) then I'll put on live news on the TV in the lounge and listen to it from the kitchen (separate rooms). If I hear a particular segment I am interested in I'll come through and watch it.



5. These days I don't watch live news nearly as much as I used to, even though one of the main reasons I signed up to satellite tv was so that I had access to local and international news channels. But sometimes while taking a break or eating food I might turn it on. What I particularly enjoy though, is watching live news when there is a major breaking story, which I will usually be alerted to by scanning a news app on my phone, which I tend to do several times a day.



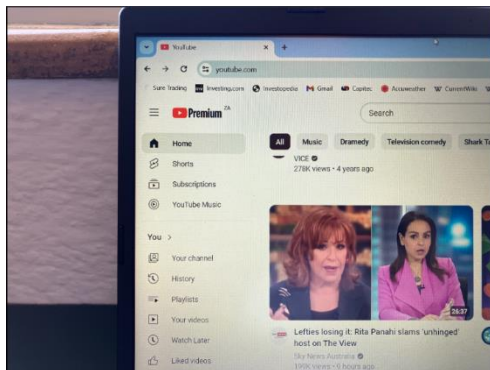
6. While driving I usually listen to the radio instead of playing music from my phone and I always listen out for the news bulletins when they come on.



7. I like making a note in my diary of any really major news events (both local and international) with the idea of having something to look back on years from now. I record a range of topics I consider worthy of keeping for posterity, including some news “predictions” that are made in the media. I often make use of a Wikipedia current events calendar to help remind me of what has been happening, but then I make sure to check the sources of the articles.



8. No screenshots allowed... when I open Google chrome on my cell, it lists a newsfeed with headlines and articles from a range of local and international news organisations and they make the headlines very tempting so I find that I regularly get hooked into opening far too many articles. But I do enjoy the mix. They are also clearly targeted to me specifically as there are always a few articles on specific recurring themes.



9. I don't specially use YouTube as a source of news, however occasionally there will be a short news clip that comes up in my feed and sometimes I watch them. Since YouTube is probably the closest thing to social media that I engage with (I don't use Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or anything else...) this is one of the few spaces where I might come across fake news, or more commonly, heavily biased news, such as in this photo.





10. Headline posters such as these used to be up on every lamppost every day - now they are all but gone, as are the newspaper sellers at the robots. I hardly ever see the posters anymore although occasionally a newspaper will put some up. The single only time in the last few years when a headline poster actually caught my eye and alerted me to a current news story was with the disappearance of Joshlin Smith a few months ago. (I used to collect some of these posters, many years ago when they were still ubiquitous, whenever I felt it was a piece of history.)

## Participant G



1. The news is not entertainment for me, but a necessary chore. I don't enjoy it but I can't afford to be completely unaware of the world. Controlling my engagement with news feels like trying to balance my desire to not be ignorant against the maintenance of my mental health.



2. Major source of news is AP news app. Generally my source for what I usually consider "news" news. American focused but also covers world. Get popup alerts with headlines, by and large I don't engage with them anymore than that. Just a glance at my phone or watch and that's it. Out of multiple headlines in a day I will maybe click through less than once a month on average. I intentionally limit the depth of my exposure to the news as I often find it stressful, but I don't want to be completely ignorant of what is happening. Especially for big, breaking stories. I find AP News style to closely conform to how I prefer News to be presented. Informative, unemotional, there is a specific formula that is followed and, at least in my opinion, that results in articles that are less biased. They do occasionally have more editorial type articles that are clearly more opinion based, I never read them. I am aware that there is no such thing as no bias, but this seems a good

approach to minimize it. My main issue with it at the moment is that doesn't address South Africa news, unless it is something that has popped up in the International news section. I haven't been able to find something that fits my criteria in the way this does for more local news.



3. Podcasts are one of my major sources of entertainment and news. Summary of points for later discussion: - I have been adjusting my feed a bit having moved to SA. - trying to find good source for SA news. Used to listen to Jacaranda but became overwhelming. SA options seem to be too frequent or too long. - added a lot of NPR podcasts. Various topics. Reasons I like NPR:-feels more neutral and balanced, professional/aligns with my view of what journalism should be - publicly funded - length of pods vs frequency



4. Upcoming elections: - been overseas, have no knowledge of SA politics in recent years - have been needing information, but did not have any sources that had the info I needed - was struggling to find anything that laid out information in a useful way for me - highlights why this is important - eventually found a nice summary from Maverick. Very helpful but have a slight unease that I am placing so much trust in a single source rather than my own opinions



5. Tv at the gym that was showing CNN news. I don't really watch this sort of tv news so scenes like this are the only time I come across it. Can talk about why dislike this sort of news.

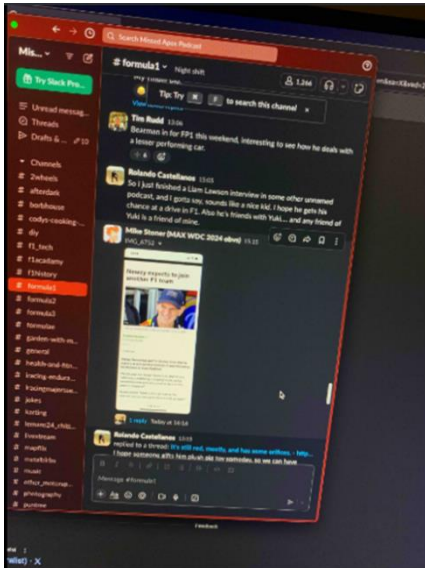


6. Two points for discussion with this one: - I actively distrust News a receive from my father. He is a fan of the Daily Maverick, even has a jacket with their branding, and that is what I wanted to actually take a photo of, but was tricky without including him. My father lives following news and talking about it. He dabbles in right wing media and lacks critical thinking skills to analyze the stories he is getting, so is very vulnerable to scare mongering and conspiracy theories. I try to avoid discussions of news with him and if I learn

something from him I usually go and double check it. - the branding of the Daily Maverick itself. The jacket my dad has continues the “truth, freedom” etc rhetoric. I’m not familiar with the DM but the fact they want to present themselves in that way makes me suspicious. Not so much that they are presenting themselves in that way, but they are appealing to people who would subscribe to that narrative. Might be the trauma of a post 2016 world but I feel like people that shout the loudest about truth are often speaking the most nonsense.



7. Goddammit I typed a whole thing out but it didn't save, so here's summary. Watching YouTube news over dad's shoulder. SA news channels, not familiar, not sure what to make of. Personal YouTube consumption, not usually news, unless on a special interest area. Use YouTube for entertainment, news is not entertainment for me, so only tend to engage beyond a headline when I feel a need to know. Sometimes feels like a chore. Vegetables of my media diet.



8. I follow F1, the main way I get news for that is actually a chat group. I spend no time actually looking up news on the actual sources as I know anytime anything happens the group is active enough that it will be addressed there. I find F1, and perhaps sports and entertainment news, suffers from low quality news more so than other types. The bar for quality seems to be so much lower. Websites and twitter accounts that just recycle stories from other places, focused entirely on generating content.

*Participant H*



1. Mum often shares news with me that she thinks is interesting - recently very much related to having a dog.

Sent the same day as the building collapse in George. Even though I live in the area, I wasn't one of the first people to know about the incident as I don't spend time reading local news ever.

Only when someone tells me then it's in my radar

Online Zoom class - Pretoria- lecturer made connection to our course and the accident \* highlighted the spread of information that I'm actually not even aware of/recognizing because I don't "partake" .



2. {No description submitted}



### 3. Tyla.

First African artist to win a Grammy.

African style of dancing - exploited/used in by American music videos

Only heard of this artist through local workers that help me with landscaping. Not my usual music style

- Perception of fame and making it big, vs reality of having your life on show

- celebrity lifestyle, paparazzi, and news Joe rogan episode

- Miley Cyrus - how what people wrote about her swayed her in how she was living her narrative

- gossip, marketing, entertainment, clickbait generated information ( is it beneficial (positive intent) to anyone?)

- SA Girlie at the Grammys

- news is good for the average local South African to have faith-dream



### 4. Slave tree George Herald

George Herald -slave tree

-tree was a sapling “stories about slave tree and people being hung” not feasible as tree was tiny

-name stuck and used as a tourism attraction

- basically front page news in George



5. Propaganda, mass misinformation to disconnect from nature

Misinformation about herbicides Dandelions as amazing medicinal plants Dandelions were targeted on herbicide propaganda

- people made the connotation Massive green lawns without any flowers = ideal Dandelion tea, dandelion roots
- useful medicinal plant (these have been strategically targeted and stripped from our culture and society leaving global populations dependent on food systems that are disconnected from natural reality of life on planet earth)
- dependence on herbicide, pesticide, mass production agriculture, monsanto, big corp, big pharma: through easy repetitive marketing over generations
- makes me think of how much misinformation and propaganda we are exposed to and how without awareness we are cultured into a specific mindset globally



6. Court House

Courthouse chats with random man and his son - Eskom, loadshedding and elections - amount of money government spent bailing out Eskom

- how rich individual South Africans can be 600k per anum taking the amount of money lost to corruption since ANC
- man very calculative, remembers figures and specific details about politics
- I don't remember specific details about news, maybe it is my lack of trust in it that makes me not interested in remembering details
- news is part of people's daily routines, set of rules and check-in boxes to live by
- interest in climate change and companies planting trees to offset carbon emissions
- mentioned spekboom as better carbon seq than trees and how large-scale companies and systems need to change rather than greenwashing next best thing



7. Podcasts as source of information

- patriarchy and capitalism
- I never understood politics, not something I invest a lot of time in
- patriarchy and feminism movement felt like right direction
- matriarchal societies, still intact, thriving healthy communities, equality in a sense not understood today in culture
- listening times a PhD doctor talk about her field, knowledge expertise and understanding much easier than doing the research on my own

Podcasts as source of information

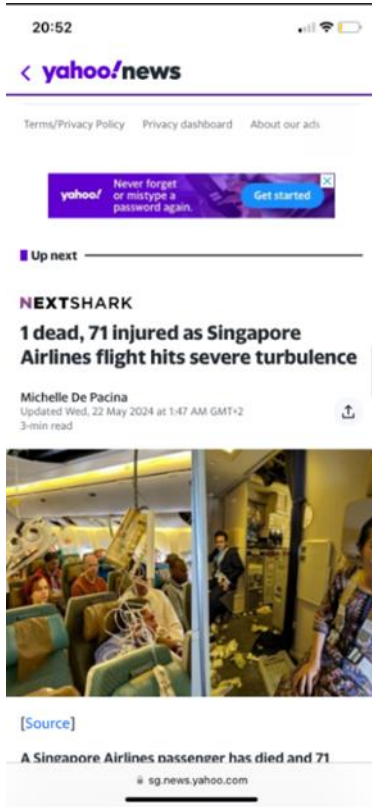


8. Scientific media in relatable ways to change mindsets.

More news out of Canada about pollinators, agriculture than South Africa

- local bubble of tree huggers
- global shift of climate change, green energy
- South Africa always behind
- how can I create scientific information in a relatable and easy to understand way to South African audiences?

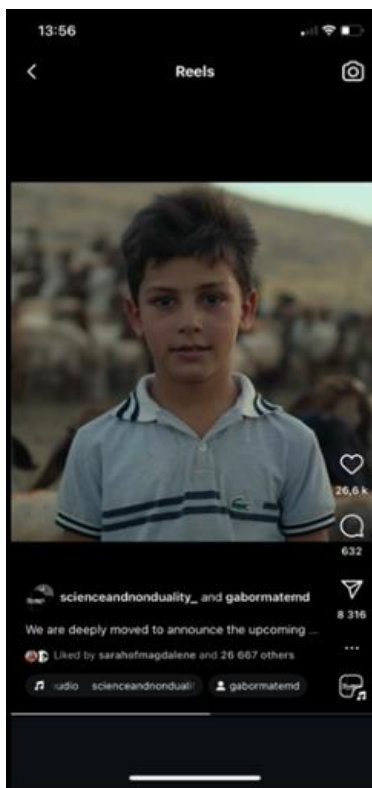




9. Yahoo as a reliable source? Vs social media?

Yahoo source promoted to me?

- safari search engine algorithm
- CNN vs yahoo
- who buys whose time (time it takes to read an article, to print the news, etc.) buy your clients
- types of authors /journalists
- clickbait news
- relevance of Singaporean airlines?



10. Raffa

Awareness of brutality in Palestine

- fear of misinformation and spreading misinformation because of family ties
- worry that enough of the realities of war is not told through truthful lens
- government agreements and land treaties overrule suffering of innocent people



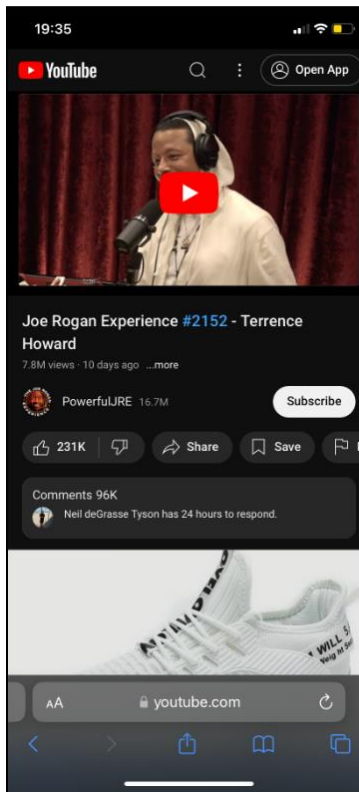
11. Spekboom - news as a talking point in society - like the weather

News from mum - asking about accuracy of plant identification

News is a way to stay in touch with family and friends - Connections to happenings and interests shared are discussion points

Hearing news from workers rather than reading it

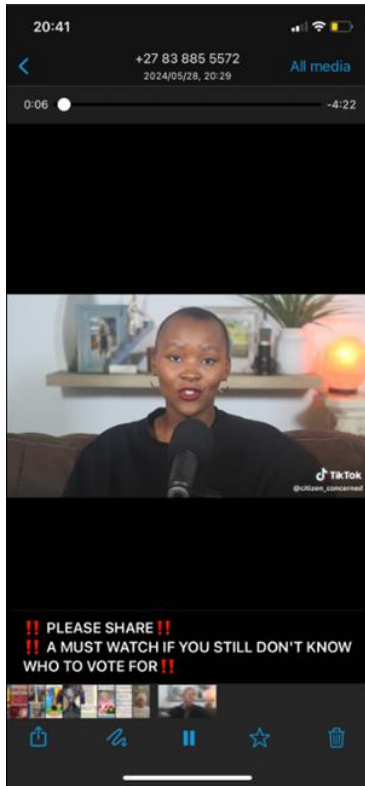
- get gist without time to discern for self
- mainly get out conversation and connection with people in my life
- rather than the irrelevant information the news is about



12. Joe Rogan news

Terrence Howard breaking science

- news controlled - science controlled by universities, funders, research-driven in direction of answers gained
- alternative theories to “science” - presented by an actor !?! - questioning mainstream narrative
- joe rogan spread of information alternative or according with elites?



### 13. Voting and political parties 2024

How I see news and politics

- South Africans bribed with t-shirts
- blatantly shaming political parties
- people trying to convince you of voting

*Participant 1*



2.The latest news





3. The chocolate isle



4. Wifi Hotspot

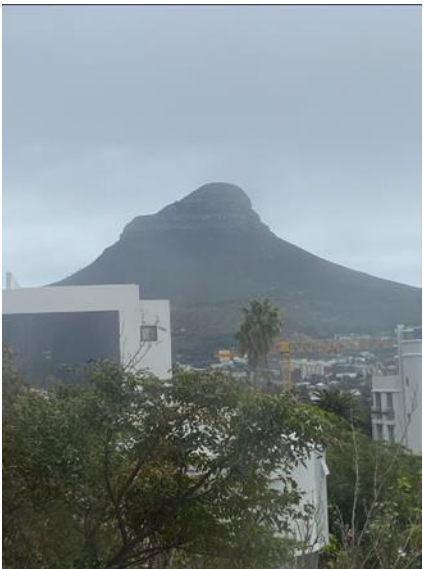


5. {No description submitted}

*Participant J*



1. Hiking with Carmen when we spotted this frog and wanted to find out what type of frog it was. Made us think of people specializing in frogs like some of the professors we met on expeditions.



2. SanParks Ranger shared news on the thieves that were caught and what happened at various places around the SanParks reserve.



3. Saw a car guard reading a newspaper and thought about how we used to receive news in the past as opposed to nowadays. Also made me think how some news papers are more reliable than other just like we have fake news on the internet these days with propaganda and agendas



4. News regarding our paragliding industry and the accident last year and all the developments and changes associated with it.





5. Discussions amongst friends about politics



6. Different physios have different backgrounds and experience and have questioned my trust in them.



7. Old time Hang glider pilot sharing news and events when he was an instructor in CPT. Met him in Barrydale



8. Had a few conversations with various people regarding the Garmin Inreach GPS systems and how it's saved a few people's lives. Podcasts also spoke about it



9. Hospital with Carmen



10. Court case



11. Conversation about the new Zim dollar system and the procedures that had to change in Zimbabwe.



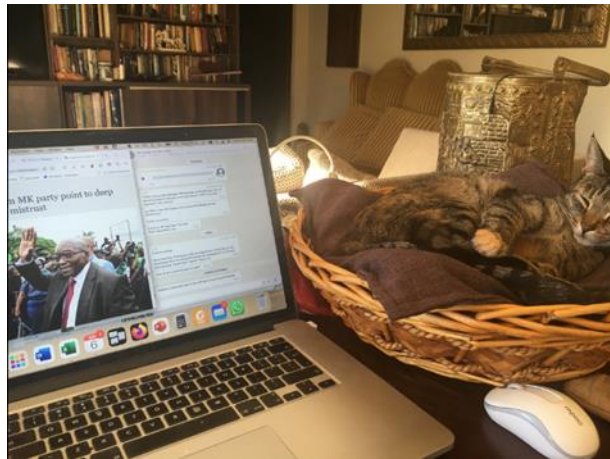
12. Discussed the news regarding World Champs and funding sources through a new system to allow pilots to fly internationally.

## Participant K



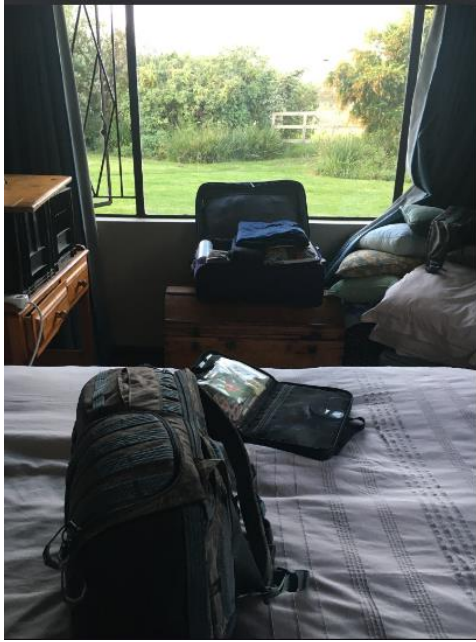
1. (5 May 2024) Reflecting on how much of my news is consumed through this device and under these circumstances- my husband watching TV in the background. I don't necessarily share what I am reading unless there is something of interest for him. I trust the Daily Maverick as a news source but always note the authors of the articles and trust some more than others. I like that I can research the author and understand the perspective from which the article was written. I was also thinking about how I also enjoy reading the comments related to the articles to give me insight into how readers are responding to the article. I am not much into opinion pieces but I do love looking at the general reader responses to news.

(Audio) Reading my daily Maverick, which comes on through to me on e-mail every day, one of my main sources of news which I get in my inbox, and it's not something that I generally share. Unless there is an important story that I feel someone might be interested in. So that's a test to see if I can use this app for the first time.



2. (6 May 2024 – Post 1) (Audio) Doing my morning news check. The first thing I do every morning, sitting here with my cat in her basket on her desk, love the morning light as it's coming through the window, checking out my daily Maverick as per usual, also politics web for political news, but with the politics web, I really just scan through the headlines unless there's something that really grabs me to read over. I find the politics rather depressing these days. Don't want to get too deep into it, just want to be aware of what's going on around me. I'm also checking on my garden route traffic group, just

to see if there's any accidents in the area I need to be aware of when I head out a little later to go do some shopping. Reading an article in the Daily Maverick about diseases, particularly avian bird flu getting transmitted to cows in the United States. Had a little chat to Pat about that, mentioned it to him. We spoke about disease transmission from animals to humans and how it's going to become more of an issue for us. So that's my news check in for today.



3. (6 May 2024 – Post 2) (Audio) While in the throes, I'm packing for Canada and I was on a video call with Anarie, whose husband works at the municipality, and during the meeting, her husband phoned to say that a building had collapsed in George. This is terrible news to hear, but it is news, nevertheless. I immediately phoned Pat to make sure he was alright, and he was fine and then tried to get details of the incident from him because his building is just around the corner. He, however, directed me to Facebook, which is really not one of my favorite places to go to, but in circumstances like this, and when you want up to up-to-the-minute stuff or information, it can be quite handy. Also, been consulting or looking at all the WhatsApp groups, the traffic group, the George Municipality has sent me an SMS. So, the news of this incident is flying in everywhere. Also, I shared it with Esther because her son works in construction and I wanted to make sure that he wasn't in the accident, so just another

example of how news can come flying in, but it is different in one way in that it's looking for up-to-date and very quick news when after incident has just happened, which sometimes can be challenging because there's no mainstream news on it yet. And that's when things like WhatsApp groups and Facebook can be very useful.



4. Driving to the airport (7 May 2024)

Having discussions with Pat about the news on the way to the airport. Sharing our views of what we read in the morning, sharing our opinions, and also reflecting on how true it may be.



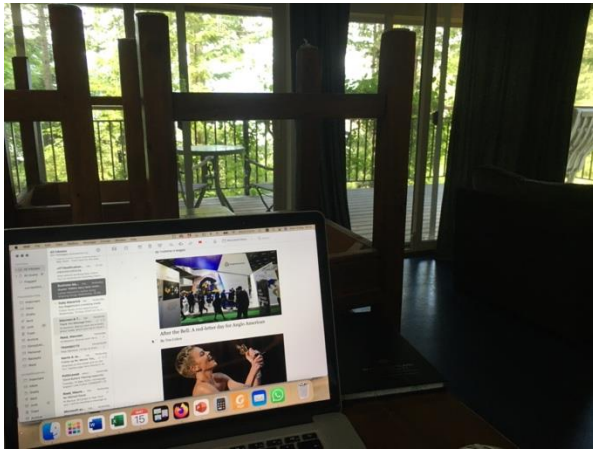
5. Newspapers @ the airport (7 May 2024).

Waiting to go through airport security. I appreciate the free newspaper for the plane but dreading the clumsiness of a big paper in a small space. Also considering the importance of the local news as I prepare to leave the country. It seems less important but still nice to get the news and have something to read on the plane. Also thinking how “old school” an actual newspaper is these days and reflecting on the days we used to get newspapers delivered to the door in the morning and how the student job of delivering newspapers is dying. There is just something about a newspaper that is comforting, is it the smell or the feel or the sound. I like “old school” things and still appreciate a newspaper, especially free ones.



6. Airport TV (7 May 2024)

Catching a glimpse of headlines on the airport TV news, love this way of consuming news on the go, it makes waiting time fly by. Did wonder what the source of it is. Some is marked “News 24” which I don’t perceive as the most high-quality source, it’s at most like junk news to me with poor reporting.



#### 7. Gambier Island (15 May 2024)

Catching up on news while I check emails. There is something comforting about finding out how things are at home, but I also double think the intrusion of bad news while I am in such a special place. I am saying to myself that I should not be doing this here. I should rather be out and about enjoying the amazing place I find myself in. I close the laptop and quickly also realise that the local SA news is not so relevant while I sit in

Canada, but also thinking how little Canadian news I have consumed while here. Walking though the world looking for the beautiful and good rather than news which is generally critical and negative. There is this YouTube channel called the good news which focuses on good news stories. I like the concept of that in, one way but also knowing the bad is important too, or is it...?



#### 8. Ferry News (15 May 2024)

Found a bit of Canadian news on the BC Ferry TV. It's interesting but feels less relevant to me. Weird how neither SA and Canada news feels relevant at the moment. I want to remain informed by feel it's not that relevant. I suppose I am really just wanting news that can affect me in my time and place.

Being mainstream TV news, I believe it to be trustworthy but really not that sure. Realising how hard it is to assess the trustworthiness and the biases that may be presented to me. Feel I need to discuss this with a local, get their opinions on it and chat to a few Canadians to get multiple views. It's hard to trust news in a foreign country without knowing the sources or being familiar with the reporters and different stations.

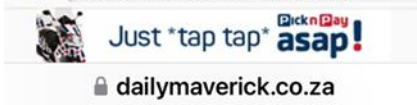


prerequisites has been complied with in the National Health Insurance (NHI) policy process. Instead, it has been characterised by a disregard for submissions and evidence, and an overemphasis on rubber-stamping.

Since 2007, when the NHI proposal first emerged at the ANC's national conference in Polokwane, to the present, no systematic research has addressed any of the five prerequisites. This is despite convening ministerial advisory committees and spending several billion rands on 11 failed "NHI pilot projects". The diagnostic is simply a retort: South Africa has a two-tier health system and it should be a single-tier health system.

**False assertions**

alternative to evidence, various



9. Screen Capture (20 May 2024)

Checking my phone, wasting time waiting for student presentation to start. Also, a day away from departing Canada, wanting to see what I will be coming home to, local news. Has become more relevant again. Also wondering if it's worth sharing our local news with Canadians. Would they be interested, doubt it, what's the relevance to them?

*Participant L*



1. {No description submitted}



2. {No description submitted}

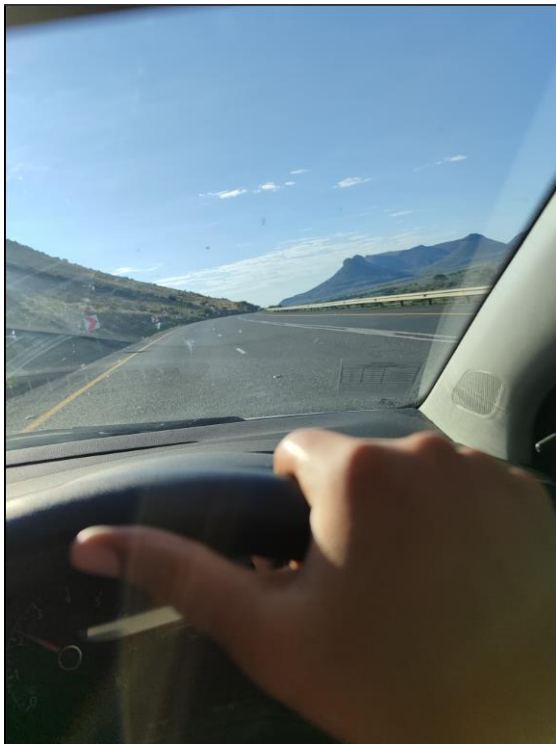


3. {No description submitted}

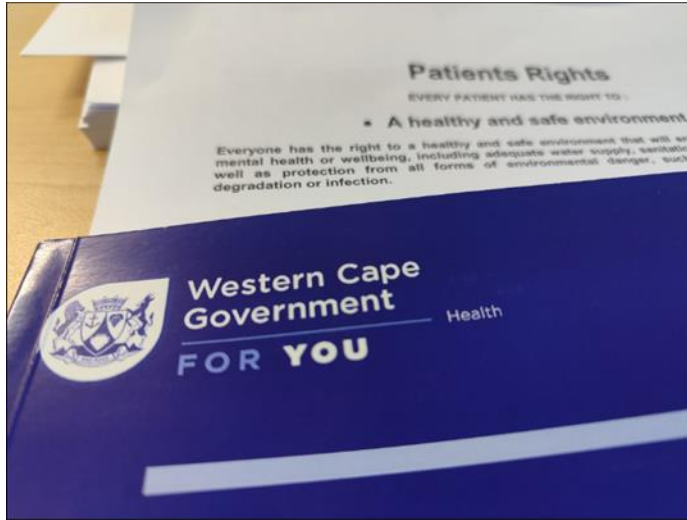
## Participant M



1. Driving into Murraysburg (rural town in the Central Karoo District that borders Eastern Cape and Northern Cape) and saw this recently painted mural. This is a rural town with limited service delivery where residents often cross provincial borders to access services because it is closer than the central town. Residents rely on outreach service initiatives. This is some of the ways they relate to international news.



2. Driving with colleagues and listening to the radio about news developing in my home town. While this news doesn't affect me directly it does make me feel that I should be updated regularly. It is interesting to hear opinions and theories from colleagues who consumed the same topic on different platforms (i.e. social media, TV broadcast). I wonder how much truth is in the updates I receive through these conversations.



3. When discussing work related legislation and linking it to current news I am acutely aware that my level of engagement and expression is influenced by the (professional) environment.

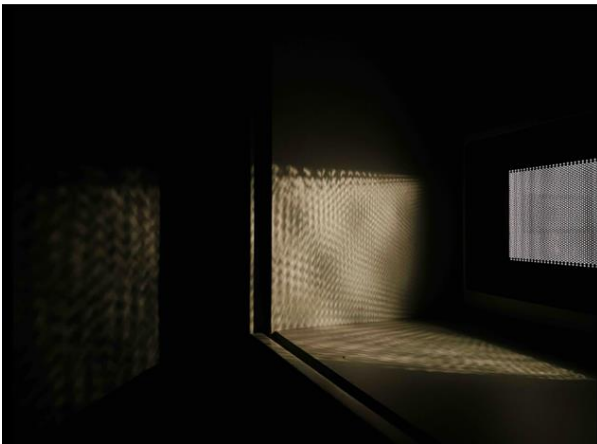


4. {no description submitted}

*Participant N*

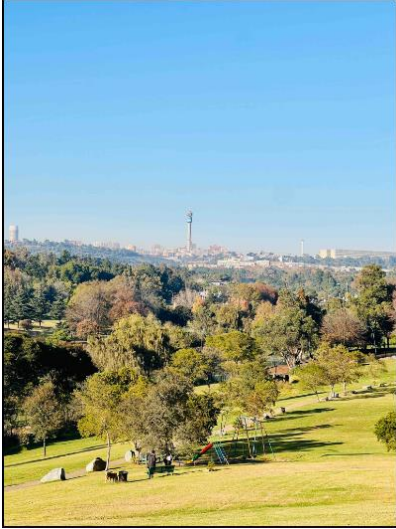


1. South African humor when engaging with the news

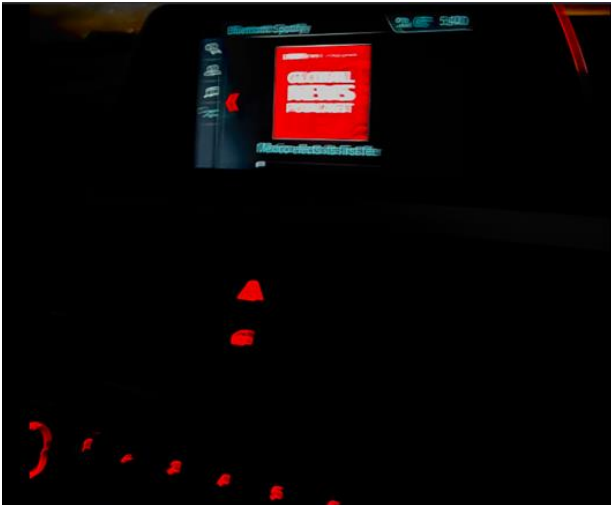


2. Distorted perceptions.





5. Infrastructure and facilities needed to support news.  
Astounding infrastructure and facilities to support news



6. Endless cycle and blur

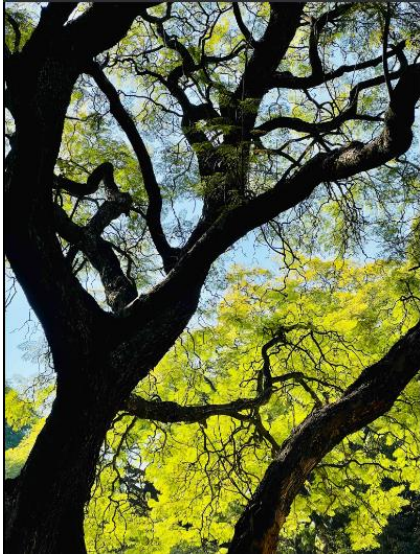




7. Comforts



8. Surrounded

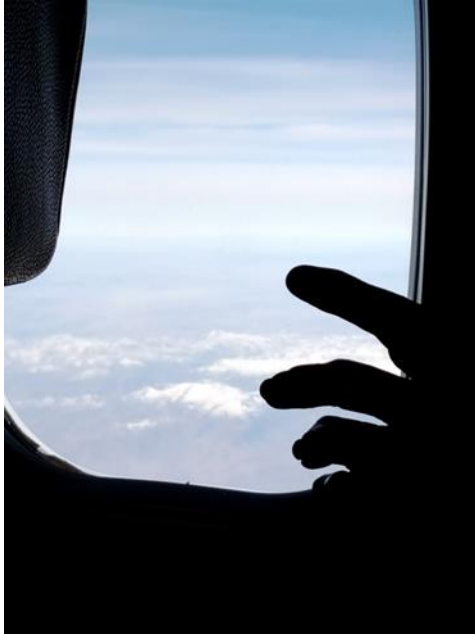


9. Reprieve

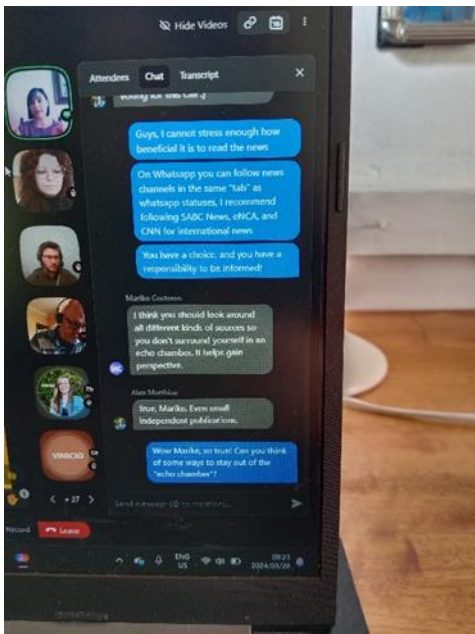


10. Reflection

## Participant O



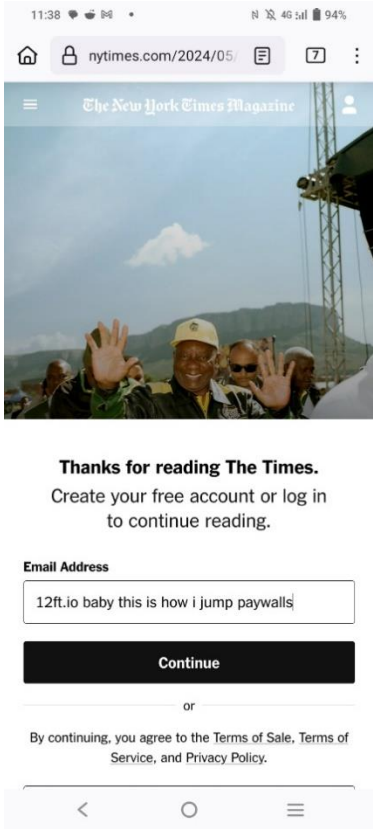
1. Conversation on the plane with a smart and kind antivaxxer



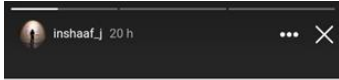
2. Election day discussion with students

{picture removed due to graphic content}

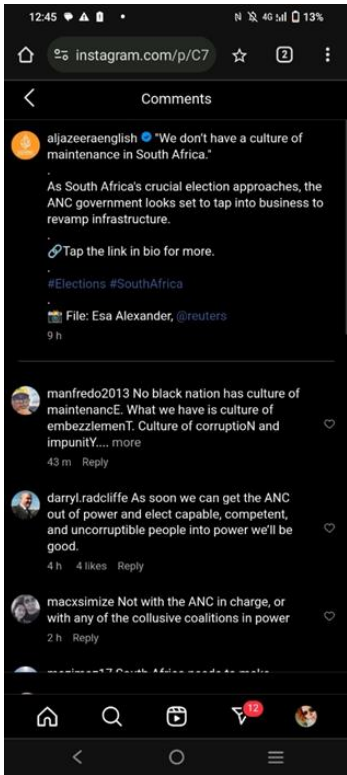
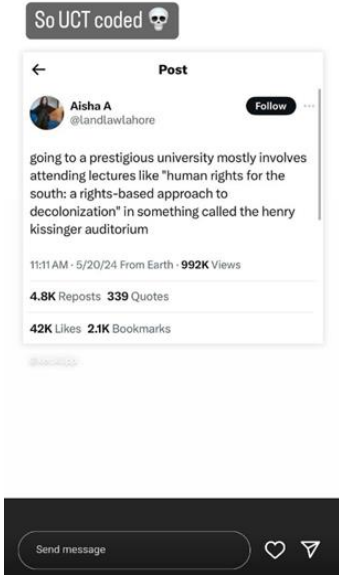
3. extremely graphic here because its been definitive of my news reading experience the last few months.



4. How do we get news for free



5. Instagram commentary



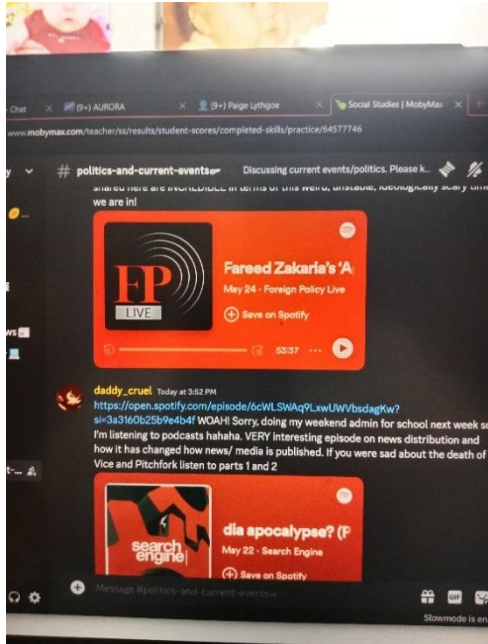
6. International news agencies reporting on SA

7. Memes

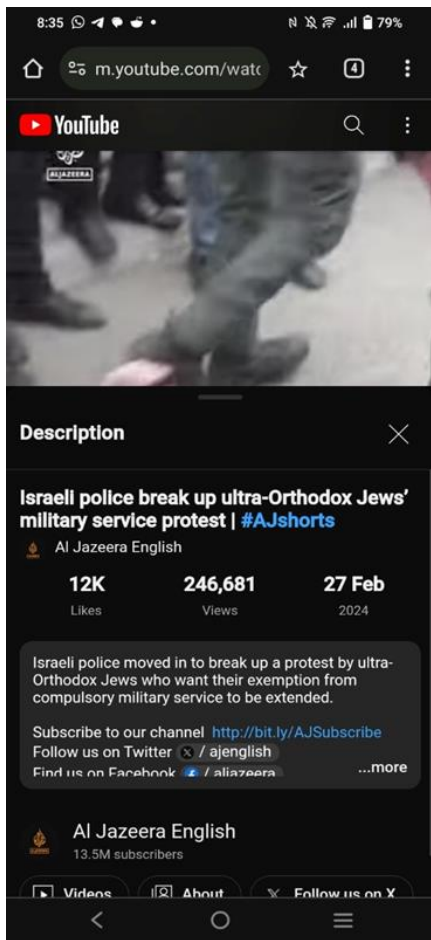


8. Misinformation culture news: Bong Joon Ho gets the final cut





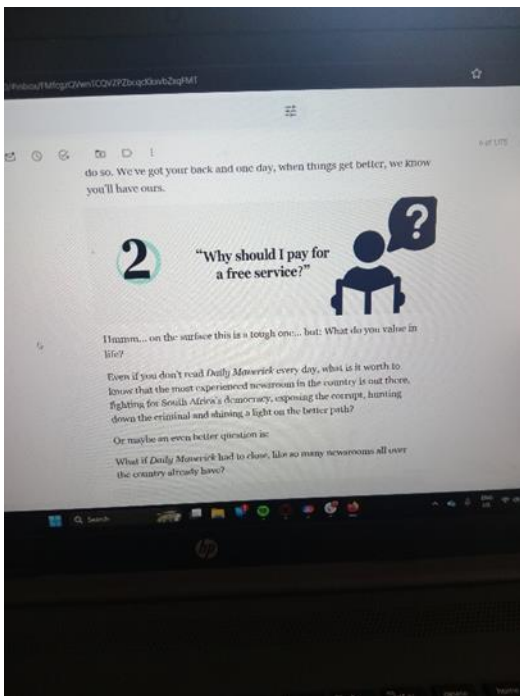
9. Podcasts-sharing-archiving



10. Religious news 1



11. Religious news 2



12. Should we be paying for media?





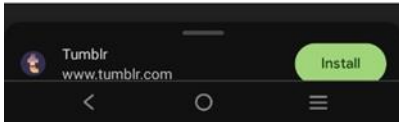
### 13. The tumblr method

Judges at the global court authorized an investigation by Khan's predecessor, Fatou Bensouda, in 2020 covering offenses allegedly committed by Afghan government forces, the Taliban, American troops and U.S. foreign intelligence operatives dating back to 2002. The United States are not a member of the court and do not recognize its jurisdiction.

The decision to investigate Americans led to the Trump administration slapping sanctions on Bensouda, who has since left office. However, the probe was shelved after Afghan authorities asked to take over the case — known at the court as requesting deferral.

The ICC is a court of last resort, set up in 2002 to prosecute alleged atrocities in countries that cannot or will not bring perpetrators to justice — known as the principle of complementarity.

When Khan sought last year to reopen the court's investigation, he said he now plans to focus on crimes committed by the Taliban and the Afghan affiliate of the Islamic State group, adding that he will "deprioritize" other aspects of the investigation.



### 14. vague anecdote about being buried alive

## Participant P



1. The convincing nature of fake stories.....

Today is the first day of my photovoice diary and I have been thinking about what I could share ... and then it came to me so unexpectedly when I found myself recounting a story about something that had happened to me over 6 years ago.



2. Today is the first day of my

photovoice diary and I have been thinking about what I could share ... and then it came to me so unexpectedly when I found myself recounting a story about something that had happened to me over 6 years ago.

Our happy little group was chatting about our recent voting stories which then led us to chat about the old style ID books versus the new ID cards. My husband reminded me of “the famous Caledon trip.” So, of course, I shared the story....how one of my sisters forwarded a notice on WhatsApp about the very imminent deadline to apply for a new ID card because the ID books would no longer be valid. My mother was with me at the time in Pringle Bay so we all agreed that it would be good if I took my mother with me to Caledon where we could both apply for our ID card at the local Department of Home Affairs office. We set off to Caledon in our little old Toyota Corolla which not only didn't have air conditioning but it also didn't have a working fan and we make the hour roadtrip to Caledon where the temperature was close to 40 degrees C. Fortunately when we arrived there, we were whisked to the front of the line because of my 87 year old mother, so we were spared a really long wait. As we were happily chatting to the nice official who was helping us, we explained our need and reason

for the mad dash to Caledon. It was then that we learnt that we were, in fact, victims of a hoax (fake story) doing the rounds on social media.... the old style ID books were not becoming obsolete!!! By that stage though, we were there and decided to apply for the new ID card in any case. And I am happy to have both my ID book and ID card.... useful and a good backup.

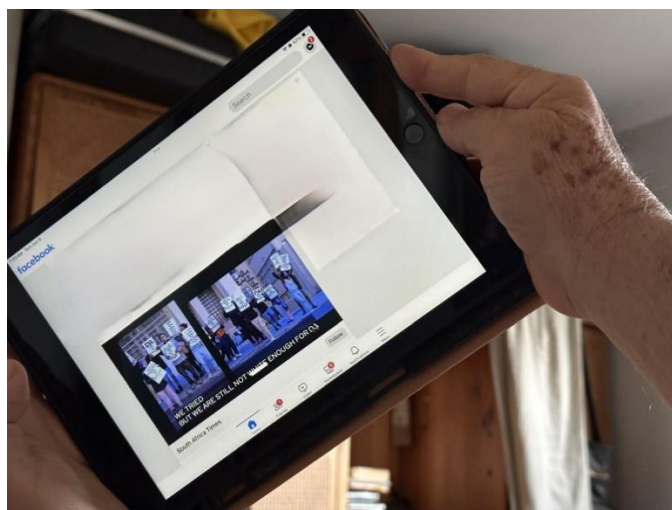
I wondered at the time, and have been thinking about it again today.... what was it that made me fall for the hoax and actually react to it with such decisive action even when it took time, resources and caused us discomfort on such a hot day? I think that there are many reasons... it sounded plausible, it was something important to us (affecting something that was so key in our lives as South African citizens), and it was something that I discussed with people whose opinions I valued (and we all believed that this was official/true information).



3. Today I have several comments from previous days ....

At the moment I am listening to a commentator chatting about the recent historic election in Mexico..... my husband has this playing on his iPad and I found myself getting caught up in what is being said. I often find listening to commentaries interesting as I hear different perspectives and learn a lot more background and details about some particular piece of news.

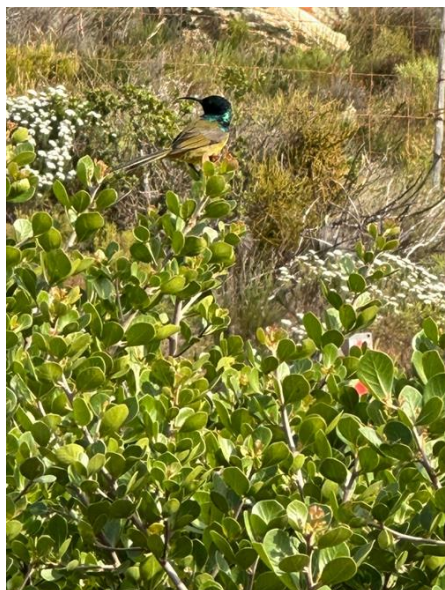
And I liked the background on the screen- having a map seemed to add a sense of authenticity and the impression of having a world view! 🌐



4. This morning my husband and I were

lazily lying in bed, warm in our cocoon of blankets and enjoying the view of the sea. I thought that I was just aimlessly watching the world outside from my nice, snug corner when I realized that I was listening with one ear to the news that my husband was playing on his iPad. He watches news a lot on his iPad... a major source for him.....and I tune in and out as suits me. But it did make me realize that I watch news/listen to news via

the internet and the various online website and social media than I gave credit for when I completed the survey. Because I am not always the one actively deciding to go to those sources, I underestimated the time I spend getting news from there. I think that we are often absorbing news “passively “ without realizing it. And this source of news is clearly a big source for me and I tune in or out as I wish if something catches my attention



5. Today I was sitting on the balcony, looking at a stunning bird, and I remembered that a friend had emailed me a link to something about renaming birds using Isuzu. And ping, the light 💡 went on in my brain.... That was news being emailed to me. So as I watched this little bird being gently blown in the breeze as it surveyed its world, I did some reading and learnt something which I may have otherwise overlooked.....

...” Terminology development is needed for effective science communication, planning, teaching, and learning in indigenous African languages. This need includes species-specific names in indigenous languages for wild birds, which are key indicators of biodiversity and the state of the environment. We report here the successful allocation of isiZulu names to all South African bird species, focusing on the final phase of naming species that are unknown or rare in KwaZulu-Natal Province (traditional home of the Zulu people) and thus have no indigenous naming history.”.....

<https://sajs.co.za/article/view/16184>

And something in my environment prompted me to make the effort to follow up on the news shared with me.



6. A TV!!!!

I have been on holiday much on my photovoice reflecting and have not been watching much TV. I believed that ny daily watching of news in the evening each day was a major news source. However, during this time I gave understood how much I actually do hear news from other sources as well



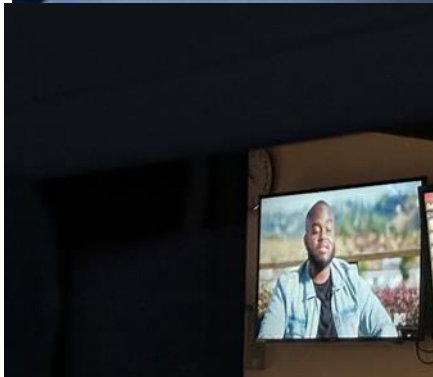
7. I am reclaiming this photo. My thoughts when I took this was that what I was listening too was an older episode of The Daily Show. I really like listening to news in this way as you really get to hear real news but presented in a way that also gives context of the wider social and political environment. It also highlights the way that people present “facts” with such biased and often nasty emotions. Etc. what I was also thinking that day was that this way of presenting news also serves a historical purpose for

me. I can go back to listen to something long after it was current and immediately be reminded clearly of some event/goings on. Reading a short paragraph or article somewhere wouldn't quite evoke the same richer recounting.



8. On Thursday a week ago, I was reflecting on how much I actually do get my news from the radio when I am driving.... Multitasking...driving, 🗎 spotting and listening to the radio! 🧐♀

Actually, I think that for me listening to the radio is a good moment to catch up. I am not distracted by lots of other happenings, chores, etc



9. A few nights ago, I was with an elderly friend who is in hospital. In all of the rooms, there was a big TV. This made me think. Sometimes we want to escape from being bombarded with news but sometimes we are in situations where we still want to keep anchored to what is happening

10. I may have forgotten to record some of what has been happening as I have been thinking about my interactions with different news sources and resources. I think (and hope) that I have recorded much of what I have been thinking about during this period. It had been an eye opener to really think about how I do interact with the news. I enjoyed the exercise!!!

# Appendix K1

## Photovoice and Interview Briefing Notes

Notes for me.

### 1. Greetings and introductions

### 2. Study Outline

- a. What the study is about
  - This study is about how people engage with media and news. We want to learn about what you like and don't like, what media you receive, what media you share, and why you made these choices.
- b. What is expected of participants
  - You will need to complete a two-week photovoice period, interview, and feedback on analysis.

### 3. Photovoice Outline

- a. Explain the photovoice method and why it is used (Including examples of how it is used).
  - Photovoice is used to help understand how people engage with something in their everyday life. Participants take photographs during their day-to-day lives to show how or when they encounter something.
- b. Why photovoice was chosen for this study
  - We chose to use photovoice because it can help make people aware of how they engage with something, making it easier to talk about in the interviews. Media is something we engage with all the time, and it can be hard to think critically about something we take for granted, this method gives you a chance to reflect on the topic and think critically about how it impacts your life. This also allows you to be creative in your responses, using the photographs to help express yourself and can remind you of how you felt at the time you took the photograph – making it easier to reflect on.

### 4. Photovoice/ Interview Procedure

- a. Participants will need to take a maximum of 15 photographs during two weeks and upload them to VoiceThread with a title and a comment. You can change and edit your photographs and comments at any point during the two weeks.
- b. Then we will meet for an interview. In the interview, we will discuss the photographs and use them to help us talk about your relationship with news. The photographs are meant to be a guide, and make sure the interview is about your experience and captures the complexity of the media you encounter. You can also bring up things not in the photographs.

## **5. Ethical considerations**

### a. Participant ethics

- Anonymity: Your interviews and photographs are anonymous and cannot be linked to you. A pseudonym will be used in the report to discuss your information. Your identifying information is stored separately from the information you provide for the study.
- Voluntary: You can withdraw from the study at any point without repercussion and do not have to explain.
- Compensation: After the interview, you will be offered 10€ (roughly R200) online gift voucher as a thank-you for your valuable contribution.
- Photographs: Photographs are used to focus the interview and convey your perspective. The photographs will not be analyzed but, with your permission, they could be included in a final report to help demonstrate your experience. After the interview, we will discuss this and you can decide if you allow all, some, or none of the photographs to be used.

### b. Ethics of taking Photographs

- It is important to be aware of ethics when taking photographs in your daily life. Think carefully about the photographs you are taking and if the information in them is ok to share.
  - o Do not take identifiable pictures of people
  - o Do not take pictures of minors
  - o Do not include personal or sensitive information in photos
- If you are taking pictures of other people, it is important to ask permission and explain the study to them. For example, you could say “I am participating in a study taking photographs

of how people engage with media. May I take a photograph of you? You will not be identifiable in the photograph.” If they want more information, you can provide them with the study details and contact information. If someone does not want their photograph taken you cannot take it.

- The photograph is not worth putting yourself or anyone else at risk. Your safety is most important.
- Be aware when taking photographs in public spaces. It is important to respect people's privacy. Try to be as unobtrusive as possible.
  - c. Ways to avoid unethical or compromising photographs. If you want to take a picture of something that you cannot share you can try these methods
    - o Blurring, covering, or cropping out parts of a picture
    - o Using a part of something to represent a whole (i.e. metonymy) e.g. instead of showing a person's face you could show their shoes.
    - o use something to represent something else (i.e. metaphor) e.g. Instead of taking a picture of a child with a phone you could take a picture of a puppy with a toy.
  - d. If you are unsure if something is ok to photograph, err on the side of caution and try to use one of the alternative methods or check with me if it is ok to photograph.
  - e. Short exercises brainstorming and discussing potential issues and ways to avoid them. Role-play different scenarios with participants.

## **6. Instruction on VoiceThread.**

- a. Detailed instructions on how to use VoiceThread, set up the shared thread together, and practice uploading photographs.

## **7. Conclusion of meeting.**

- a. Any final questions and clarification
- b. Signing of consent forms
- c. Setting up interview time and date.



# Appendix L1

## Ethical Clearance letter

**CENTRE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH**

University of Cape Town ▪ Private Bag Rondebosch 7701 ▪ South Africa  
Tel: 021 650 4656 ▪ Fax: 021 650 4657 ▪ Web: [www.cssr.uct.ac.za](http://www.cssr.uct.ac.za)



**TO:** Sarah Erasmus

**FROM:** Jane Kelly

Senior Research Officer, Centre for Social Science Research, UCT

**SUBJECT:** Research Ethics Review

**RESEARCH:** A cognitive semiotic exploration of news consumption in South Africa

**REFERENCE:** CSSR/REC/2024/02

Dear Ms Erasmus,

We have reviewed your research proposal and are happy to approve it.

We expect that you will continue to deliberate as necessary over ethical issues that arise in the course of the research, both within the team and with scholars outside of the team as appropriate.

Best wishes for your research and we look forward to learning about your findings. We would welcome you to present your work at one of your CSSR lunchtime seminars.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'JKelly'.

Jane Kelly

Senior Research Officer

Adolescent Accelerators Research Hub

Centre for Social Science Research

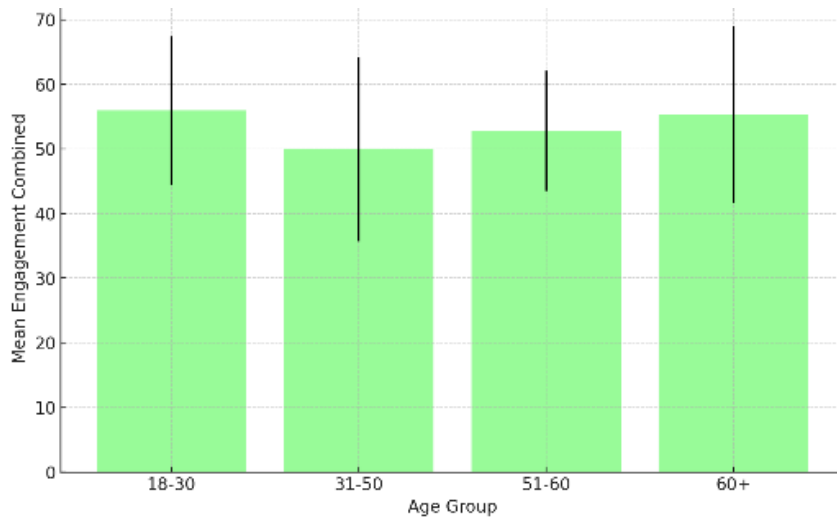
[Jane.Kelly@uct.ac.za](mailto:Jane.Kelly@uct.ac.za)

## Appendix M2

### Descriptive Statistics

18 to 30 reported the highest engagement ( $M = 55.93, SD = 11.48$ ), followed closely by 61 + ( $M = 55.32, SD = 13.61$ ), then 51 to 60 ( $M = 52.77, SD = 9.3$ ) and 31 to 50 had the lowest engagement scores ( $M = 49.93, SD = 14.27$ ).

**Figure 14.** Bar Graph displaying average news engagement scores per age group



**Table 11.** Table showing mean and standard deviation for frequency of engagement with different media

Age group (n)	TV		Internet		YouTube		Radio		Newspaper		Other	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<b>ALL</b>	2.09	1.29	3.18	1.148	2.29	1.289	2.58	1.254	1.62	0.97	1.79	1.053
<b>18 to 30 (n = 28)</b>	1.93	1.303	3.43	0.959	2.79	1.287	2.82	1.362	1.39	0.629	2.39	1.133
<b>31 to 50 (n = 30)</b>	1.77	1.04	3.17	1.234	2.23	1.278	2.77	1.305	1.40	0.855	1.77	1.278
<b>51 to 60 (n = 31)</b>	2.03	1.303	3.03	1.169	1.94	1.153	2.61	1.174	1.84	1.128	1.71	0.364
<b>61+ (n = 37)</b>	2.51	1.387	3.14	1.206	2.24	1.342	2.22	1.158	1.78	1.084	1.43	0.728

**Table 12.** Descriptives for ranked preference for different ways of presenting information, (1 being most preferred to 6 least preferred).

Age group (n)	Written Only		Written and pictures		Audio Only		Audio and pictures		Video		Other	
	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn
<b>ALL (n=126)</b>	3.22(1.464)	3	2.68(1.348)	3	3.37(1.501)	3	3.67(1.338)	4	4.43(1.632)	3	4.43(1.632)	5
<b>18 to 30 (n = 28)</b>	3.54(1.575)	3.5	2.57(1.526)	2.5	3.29(1.718)	3	3.46(1.347)	4	2.39(1.709)	2	4.43(1.709)	5
<b>31 to 50 (n = 30)</b>	3.40(1.404)	3	2.83(1.487)	3	2.97(1.542)	2.5	3.70(1.368)	3	3.27(1.639)	3	4.43(1.96)	5.5
<b>51 to 60 (n = 31)</b>	3.1(1.599)	3	2.58(1.089)	2	3.42(1.311)	3	3.61(1.16)	3	3.16(1.753)	3	4.19(1.579)	4
<b>61+ (n = 37)</b>	2.95(1.290)	3	2.73(1.326)	3	3.73(1.407)	4	3.86(1.494)	4	2.92(1.441)	3	4.62(1.34)	5

*Note.* 1 being most preferred and 6 being least preferred

**Table 13.** Table showing the frequency of news engagement and trust in online and in-person settings.

Age group (n)	Frequency of in-person		Frequency of online		Trust of in-person		Trust in online	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<b>ALL (n=126)</b>	3.12	1.136	2.13	1.105	2.92	.926	2.43	.916
<b>18 to 30 (n = 28)</b>	3.14	1.239	2.18	1.056	2.96	.838	2.54	.838
<b>31 to 50 (n = 30)</b>	2.77	.935	2.30	1.236	2.67	.994	2.43	.858
<b>51 to 60 (n = 31)</b>	3.13	.957	2.10	1.012	3.19	.703	2.32	.945
<b>61+ (n = 37)</b>	3.38	1.299	2	1.130	2.86	1.058	2.43	1.015

*Note.* Frequency and trust range from 1 (low) to 5 (high)

**Table 14.** Table showing rankings of frequency of different reporting styles

Age group (n)	Informative Reporting		Opinion Pieces		Personal Accounts		News Satire	
	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn
ALL (n=126)	1.67(.847)	1	2.37(.891)	2	2.53(1.001)	2	2.90(.995)	3
18 to 30 (n = 28)	1.75(.928)	1.50	2.46(.962)	2	2.61(1.197)	3	2.61(1.066)	3
31 to 50 (n = 30)	1.57(.728)	1	2.57(.898)	3	2.57(.935)	3	2.70(.988)	3
51 to 60 (n = 31)	1.61(.844)	1	2.39(.844)	2	2.48(.811)	2	3.06(1.063)	3
61+ (n = 37)	1.76(.895)	1	2.11(.843)	2	2.49(1.07)	2	3.14(.822)	3

Note. 1 indicates most frequent

**Table 15.** Descriptive statistics for rankings of enjoyment of different reporting styles. (1= most enjoyed)

Age group (n)	Informative Reporting		Opinion Pieces		Personal Accounts		News Satire	
	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn
ALL (n=126)	2.13(.991)	2	2.33(.866)	2	2.29(1.005)	2	2.44(1.190)	2
18 to 30 (n = 28)	2.54(1.17)	3	2.36(.911)	2	2.25(1.10)	2	1.89(1.166)	1
31 to 50 (n = 30)	2.07(.907)	2	2.33(.922)	2	2.57(1.04)	3	2.37(1.189)	3
51 to 60 (n = 31)	2.03(.875)	2	2.45(.888)	2	2.23(.990)	2	2.68(1.194)	3
61+ (n = 37)	1.97(.957)	2	2.19(.776)	2	2.16(.776)	2	2.70(1.102)	3

Note. 1 indicates most enjoyed

**Table 16.** *Table showing rankings for trust of different styles*

Age group (n)	Informative Reporting		Opinion Pieces		Personal Accounts		News Satire	
	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn	M(SD)	Mdn
<b>ALL (n=126)</b>	1.66(.831)	1	2.54(.882)	2	2.58(.933)	2	2.97(.894)	3
<b>18 to 30 (n = 28)</b>	1.57(.879)	1	2.75(.799)	3	2.82(.983)	3	2.93(.853)	3
<b>31 to 50 (n = 30)</b>	1.67(.959)	1	2.57(.971)	2.5	2.37(.809)	2	2.67(.994)	3
<b>51 to 60 (n = 31)</b>	1.65(.709)	2	2.52(.962)	2	2.71(.938)	3	3.10(.87)	3
<b>61+ (n = 37)</b>	1.73(.804)	2	2.38(.794)	2	2.46(.960)	2	3.14(.822)	3

*Note.* 1 indicates most trusted

## Appendix N2

### Tests Results

A Kruskal Wallis test of this variable revealed no significant differences in news engagement for different ages  $H(3, n = 126) = 5.611, p = .132$ .

Kruskal Wallis tests were conducted to compare age group rankings of each variable. As multiple tests were run a Bonferroni correction was applied and the significance level dropped to .001. No significant difference was found in how the age groups ranked the different modalities.

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine if there were differences in the frequency of discussing news online among the four different age groups. The test revealed no significant differences between age groups,  $H(3) = 1.289, p = .732$ . The same was done for frequency of in-person discussions, and similarly not found to be significant,  $\chi^2(3) = 5.257, p = .154$ . This suggests that the frequency of online and in-person news discussions is similar across the different age groups.

Kruskal Wallis test found no significant difference in how different age groups rated trust of news shared in person,  $H(3) = 5.592, p = .133$ , or online,  $H(3) = 1.134, p = .769$

A Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were differences in ranked frequency for different styles across four age groups. No statistically significant differences were found.

A Friedman's test found no statistical difference in how participants rated their enjoyment of the different styles,  $\chi^2(3, n=126) = 5.301, p = .151$ .

However, a Kruskal Wallis found a statistically significant difference in how participants of different age groups ranked their enjoyment of news satire/comedic commentary  $H(3)=9.492, p=0.23$ . There were no statistically significant differences in enjoyment for informative reporting,  $H(3)=4.954, p=0.175$ , opinion pieces,  $H(3)=1.356, p=0.716$ , or personal accounts,  $H(3)=2.962, p=0.398$  across the different age groups.

Post hoc Dunns test was conducted and found that 18-30 ranked satire as more enjoyable than 60+,  $p = 0.33$ , no other significant differences were found.

Kruskal Wallis test found there were no statistically significant differences in trust for any of the styles across the different age groups.