

Truth and Trust: How Audiences are Making  
Sense of Fake News



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Stella Zaryan

Advisor: Annette Hill

Examiner: Joanna Doona

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# Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between news media and trust from the perspective of the individual audience member using the term “fake news” to do so. This thesis set out to understand how audiences were engaging with and defining the term “fake news” in our contemporary media environment and if and how this was affecting their overall engagement with news media. To do so, the study used an inductive and qualitative approach wherein in-depth interviews were conducted with twelve transnational individuals, both men and women, ranging from 25-35 years old. This was done in order to examine how transnationalism of audiences could further affect their use of the term “fake news” , their trust of certain information sources, and their overall engagement with news media.

Recent polls have shown that trust of journalists and mass media has been dwindling in the West for several decades. Instead of conducting further surveys, this thesis allowed for the individual transnational audience members to more comprehensively express their perceptions and experiences with the use of the in-depth interview process. The term “fake news” was used as a case study to explore this trend and to better understand who it was that they trusted for providing them with truthful information and how they made these assessments.

The results from this study suggest that audience interpretations of the term were approached with three different types of judgements: factual, political, and ethical. The different types of transnationalism that existed within the group of twelve interviewees also affected how they defined the term “fake news” , who they trusted, and how they engaged with news media. The interviewees did express that there were particular sources that they did depend on for supplying information — most often established from their familiarity with the outlet. All twelve expressed that they used triangulation as a method to either compare representations of news story or to corroborate information supplied by news media. The use of triangulation revealed that the interviewees approach news media that they are uncertain of with a default system of distrust in order to avoid being deceived.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Public trust in news media has been experiencing a steady decline in many parts of the Western world and the situation feels evermore calamitous with the fragmentation of media consumption and the entrapment of algorithmic echo chambers. For decades pollsters have been producing data which shows a deterioration in audiences dependence and trust of the mass media in providing accurate and unbiased news (Swift, 2016). The diffusion of news audiences and partisanship of news media in digital and paper forms has further complicated the problem. The profit-driven market of information dissemination and the speed at which information is expected to be distributed and consumed has further enflamed the news media climate and forced traditional journalism to turn into “churnalism” (Jackson and Maloney, 2016).

Scholars have debated the current “crisis” in journalism (Zelizer, 2009; Alexander et al. 2016). Numerous shifts in the journalistic profession caused by technological advancements, a changing workforce, and heightened dependence on advertising revenue over the last two decades has also tremendously affected news media’s role as purveyor of public knowledge. With the transition of journalism from print to the networked online sphere, what becomes most noticeable is that unsubstantiated rumors and flat-out lies are engaged with by audiences just as much, if not more so than authentic, well-researched

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information. A recent analysis of the fabricated stories going around during the 2016 U.S. presidential election campaigns found that the top five most viral “fake news” stories on Facebook had generated more engagement than content from 19 major news outlets combined (Silverman, 2016).

The notion of fake news is connected to the complex situation of a decline in public trust coupled with the current state of journalism. In October 2016, the term “fake news” experienced a dramatic surge in Google searches, going from a relatively unsearched term to a trending topic (Google Trends, 2017). Jokes, rumors, lies, deceit, and propaganda had all gotten a new name. Today, there exist Wikipedia pages under the headings “fake news” and “fake news websites” proving the desire to contain the term neatly. Fake news, however, has proven to be an elusive term. Within the media itself, its definition includes satire, hoaxes, poorly reported news that often gets retracted, a misuse of data, and imprecise and sloppy journalism (Johnson, 2016; Schow, 2017). It includes both misinformation that is spread without an intention to deceive and disinformation that is deliberately false.

Oxford Dictionaries chose “post-truth” as its word of the year and Time Magazine in its April 2017 publication asks on the cover “Is truth dead?” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016; Time, 2017). Neetzan Zimmerman, former writer and specialist in viral stories at American online tabloid Gawker has put it quite succinctly. He says, “Nowadays it’s not important if a story is real. The only thing that really matters is whether people click on it” (Holmes, 2014). Facts, as Zimmerman suggests are secondary to circulation, and if people do not share news, then it is not news at all. While some scholars have talked about the internet’s potential to act as a public sphere and enhance democracy, the iron gates of social media platforms like Facebook (where many online audiences receive their news) have also created the worry of “misguided mobs instead of informed publics” (Viner, 2016).

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The perplexity and wide definition of the term was further convoluted after the U.S. presidential election culminated. In November 2016, it was time to cast votes and Donald Trump received the electorate majority necessary to become the 45th president of the United States. Shortly after, only weeks into his presidency, the term “fake news” received a massive overhaul. While the American mass media were writing about stories that were fabricated as being “fake news”, Donald Trump seized the term as his own. He began using the term as a label for entire media organizations rather than single news stories. In February 2017 for example, he tweeted “The FAKE NEWS media (failing @NYTimes @NBCNews @ABC @CBS @CNN) is not my enemy. It is the enemy of the American People” (Trump, 2017). A varied range of reactions from utter disgust of the president for attacking journalism to ones of total agreement can be found in the polarized responses.

Lies, deceit, and deception are not new concepts in relation to news media and politics. Since the beginning of news media, the spread of information has caused worry over the possibility of said information to be misconstrued, incomplete, or entirely fabricated. The world wide web however has transformed the potentials of such conceivable deceptions in allowing us to both connect to and create seemingly infinite amounts of information. A resource many use in their daily lives in gathering news about the world has also become a place where people potentially engage with fake news. While web 2.0 has democratized people’s voices it has also brought about the necessity of audiences to use trust/mistrust to guide them in being informed by the news media while avoiding deception.

Journalistic errors mixed with online trolls making up click-bait articles is where the common definition of “fake news” seems to currently stand. News media is ever-the-more important to discuss during this shifting era of information. As citizen journalists and live feeds on Facebook become more popular, it becomes



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important to ask how and who audiences are depending on in building and reinforcing their world-views. While journalists and politicians have categorized and discussed what they think “fake news” is and what implications they think it might have in the current news media context, no one has ever asked audiences. To overlook the audiences who either engage or disengage with fake news would be to ignore many key dimensions in the discussion of fake news and how it fits into current era of current affairs dissemination.

The main aim of this study is to understand how news media audiences engage or disengage with fake news within the context of news media. The thesis builds on critical knowledge of news media through an empirical and theoretical analysis of audience engagement and the trust or distrust of fake news. To do this, key concepts about power, trust, and transnationalism will be looked at. To begin the inquiry, 12 transnational individuals ranging from 25 to 35 year-old men and women have been interviewed to learn about their perspective on what “fake news” should include, how they engage and disengage with media online, and how trust plays a role in these encounters. It will become evident that when inquiring into audience perceptions of fake news, dilemmas emerge. Tangled terms like “fake news” lead to tangled definitions and defining the real becomes ever more so complicated. Despite the entanglements, common themes of how audiences were engaging with fake news and how they used trust to engage with new media did emerge amongst the interviewees. While trust has been analyzed by many scholars in the field of media and communication studies (and social studies more generally), very little audience research exists on the matter. Asking audiences what they define as fake news, how they watch, read or listen to news, and who they trust in the contemporary news media environment could actually help us understand the value of news as a resource for citizen knowledge in mediated public spheres. This thesis hopes to make a contribution to knowledge in better understanding news audiences and how they engage with journalism in the public sphere.

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The following research questions were formulated to address the main objectives of this study:

1. How do transnational audiences define and understand fake news in the context of online news media?
2. In what ways do audiences engage or disengage with fake news?
3. What implications do thin and thick trust have on the audiences relationship with news media?
4. In what ways does trust play in their engagement or disengagement with news media?

## Chapter 2

# Framing “Fake News”

Discussions of fake news in academic journals published in the last few years have not used the term the way it is currently being used. Instead, fake news has previously been used to discuss American political satire and parody shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* as being “fake news” (Borden & Tew, 2007; Amarasingam, 2011; Reilly, 2012; Balmas, 2014). The way in which the term is being defined and used today is quite different but the previous use adds to the present obscurity and indistinctness of the term. Journalists have attempted to define the term and what has been brought forth includes a multitude of examples. The *Columbia Journalism Review* for example created a list which includes: authentic material used in the wrong context, imposter news sites designed to look like brands we already know, fake news sites, fake information, manipulated content, and of course not leaving out parody content (Wardle, 2016). The complicated nature of the term and the lack of academic discussion of how it is being used today has created a pressing need for an analysis and synthesis of research on news and related fields of study in power, knowledge, trust, and truth in the public sphere.

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### 2.1 Exerting Various Forms of Power

The study of the way in which media are contextualized within currents of structural, political, social, and cultural power is the aim of scholars both within and outside of media and communication studies. The power of the media is considered an uncontested reality. Referred to by Marshall McLuhan (1964) as “an extension of man”, the power of the media aids us to see and sense what we might otherwise never be able to attain or access. Scholars like Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp (2017) building on Livingstone’s notion that “everything is mediated” (2009: 2) go so far as to argue that the nature and dependencies of the social world are heavily dependent on media contents and infrastructures. They call it a “deep mediatization” (Couldry & Hepp, 2017: 215).

As Dahlgren argues, it is both a power over the media alongside the common notion of power of the media that must be considered (Dahlgren, 2009). Scholars (and audiences) for example have regarded the systemic power of the media as disconcerting. In the American context for example, television industries vast majority of broadcast and basic cable networks control by eight corporations has caused worry (Steiner, 2015). Others see the steady amalgamation of media as being a deterioration to journalism and democracy (Fallows, 1997; Barnett 2010; McChesney, 2014).

In *Media Concentration and Democracy* (2007), Edwin Baker highlights a few reasons for opposing media concentration. Baker takes issue with media concentration arguing that “concentrated media ownership creates the possibility of a individual decision maker to exercising enormous, unequal, and hence undemocratic, largely unchecked, potentially irresponsible power” (Baker, 2007:16).

The structural power of the press and their allowance to operate with very little

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regulation arguably diminishes citizens potential to engage with a diversity of perspectives and opinions (Splichal, 2002; Baker, 2007). According to Baker, this lack of diversity has detrimental effects to the formation of public opinion and thus democracy. He writes that “in any large society the mass media constitute probably the most crucial institutional structure of the public sphere” and that “the media, like elections, constitute a splice between public opinion formation and state will formation” (Baker, 2007: 7).

The net however has afforded audiences to connect to a plethora of new discourses, perspectives, opinions, and sources of information. It is not only the form of news media, however, that has seen such adaptation and growth. All media has grown. There are more network TV programs than ever before, more books, more YouTube channels, more radio stations, more streaming services, more blogs, more articles, more tweets, and ultimately more information (for better or worse).

Mark Andrejevic (2013) calls this phenomenon “infoglut”. The “infoglut” is what modern digital audiences are currently experiencing in the endlessly interconnected, severely uncontainable circumstances provided by the world wide web. There is an infinite amount of information, overwhelming the modern news consumer and changing the way he or she engages or disengages with media and information technologies. In addition to the polls mentioned above about declining levels of trust amongst audiences, recent polls and academic research concede that audiences have a heightened sense of perceived bias on the part of journalists (Marchi, 2012; Heimlich 2012). The production and inflation of narratives and counter-narratives provides audiences to experience a feeling of incompleteness to any individual account. According to Andrejevic, the “era of information overload coincides, in other words, with the reflexive recognition of the constructed and partial nature of representation” (Andrejevic, 2013: 3).

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This is where a further notion of power arises: the power of the algorithm. In studies of mass media, Facebook and Google’s algorithmic power has been discussed in relation to the visibility (or invisibility) it grants different information (Bucher, 2012). Bucher references the many ways that visibility has been previously discussed: as framing (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993), as gatekeeping (Meyer & Schroeder, 2009), and agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). She writes that the algorithms have the power to act as “a sociotechnical actor capable of influencing users’ practices and experiences on the Web” (Bucher, 2012:1165). Web 2.0 essentially becomes governed by the multiple organizing and filtering algorithms which decide what audiences encounter online and thus acts as another player of systemic power (Beer, 2009).

In order for discussions of systemic power of the news media – whether it is structural or algorithmic – to be a topic of interest for scholars and audiences, there must first exist the notion that there is power of the media (Dahlgren, 2009) or as Corner (2011) calls it, “soft power”. This soft power is what John Corner describes as “the capacity of the media to contribute to the way things are in society, to circumstances and events, as a result of the perceptions they encourage, the information they provide and the feelings they generate, whether directly or in combination with other factors” (Corner, 2011: 14). Media scholar John Street writes in *Mass Media, Politics, and Democracy* that news media wields this power in the “way it privileges particular discourses and constructs particular forms of reality” (2001:232). Although data about media ownership is demonstrable evidence of media power, it is the symbolic power of news media which develops into cultural and social aspects of power. These are argued to impact individual perception, knowledge, emotion, and create the groundwork from which behavior and actions arise (McNair, 1998; McCombs et al 2011).

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### 2.2 News Media as Public Knowledge

News has long been regarded as a purveyor of information and the news media as the way in which the world came to know about itself, whether it be through newspaper, broadcast news, or news dispersed through modern information and communication technologies that we see today (Pettegree, 2014). The news is thought to “serve a vital democratic function” and that it “constructs a symbolic world that has a kind of priority, a certification of legitimate importance” (Schudson, 1996: 33). News media enable us to come to know about both domestic and international current affairs. Whether the discussion is of cultural, social, economical or political current events, the normative view of news media is that it aims to inform publics about the world around them. The news is thought to act as a resource when people are ready to take political action. Schudson claims that this “is the necessity and the promise of public knowledge we call news and the political culture of which it is an essential part” (ibid: 33).

Schudson albeit makes a distinction between being an “informational citizen” and an “informed citizen” (ibid: 169). While his writing is over 20 years old, his distinctions can be transferred to the late modern globalized world we find ourselves in today. The informational citizens that we witnessed then and still do today is defined by their familiarity with a catalog (now an infinite one) of available information about the community, domestic or global, and the natural world around them. The informed citizen however is defined and contrived by his or her formed set of interests “that make using the catalog something other than a random effort” (ibid: 169). According to Schudson, the news media increasingly provide resources to create the informational citizen but they do not and cannot create the informed citizen. He argues that the informed citizen is not a function of individual character but caused by a broader political culture, or as will be discussed next, as a product of civic culture.

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In the 1920's the American writer Walter Lippmann wrote a trilogy of books about news media's role in the public sphere and democracy. (1919; 2003; 1993) In the three books, Lippmann argued that the public were largely incompetent and incapable of contributing rational democratic deliberations. In response to Lippmann, philosopher John Dewey in his book *The Public and Its Problems* (1991) countered Lippmann's claims by arguing that the public was capable of these deliberations and that their participation was crucial to the functioning of democracy.

Dahlgren's (2009) circuit of civic cultures and the six interdependent dimensions he lists becomes useful for examining how the news media could serve to promote or hinder participation and thus civic engagement. He insists that the media act as a “prerequisite for molding the democratic quality of society” (Dahlgren, 2009: 108). News media and the relationship to Dahlgren's six civic dimensions (knowledge, values, trust, spaces, practices, identities) play a large role in the private sphere and in shaping citizens to act as civic and political agents. Elements from the private sphere are thought to then transfer to the larger public sphere, to prompt citizen engagement and thus bring about a robust civic society (ibid).

The first key dimension of civic cultures include *knowledge* about the political world and one's place in it. To many scholars, it is news media which provides this political knowledge to citizens in its most basic form. It has been written about as the ‘life blood’ of democracy – supplying vital resources for gathering and processing information in the form of reports, portrayals, and analysis in order to allow citizens to deliberate and act (McNair, 1998; Dahlgren 2009; Fenton, 2010; McCombs et al, 2011).



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### 2.3 Searching for Truth in the Current Media Context

In 1996, sociologist Michael Schudson wrote a hypothetical scenario as an introduction to his book *The Power of News*. Twenty-two years ago he asked his readers to “imagine a world where governments, businesses, lobbyists, candidates, churches, and social movements deliver information directly to citizens on home computers. Journalism is momentarily abolished. Citizens tap into any information source they want on computer networks. They also send their own information and their own commentary; they are as easily disseminators as recipients of news.”

Today’s online news seeker can access thousands of public affairs outlets and millions of pieces of information with relative ease and at little to no cost. In turn, publishers lean on advertising as a source of viability. This makes traditional news media outlets yearning for as many clicks as possible, packaging them into little data sets and selling them off to the highest bidder. The new digital world that news publishers find themselves in is further complicated by the sheer amount of space available. Whether good or bad, this infinite amount of space is eagerly filled with a never-ending production of content, whether by traditional or alternative news media platforms, and evermore so by citizen and eyewitness journalists.

News media companies have been forced to adapt with the technological advances and societal habits that surround them in the digital public sphere. Over the last two decades, print journalism has seen a drastic decrease in readership as information has become more readily available and cheaper to access online. In this digital context, everything is free and fleeting so a very small percentage of news audiences are willing to pay for information. Instead, news audiences pay by creating data about their private online practices. Because of this trend, traditional news media has struggled to keep up with the

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speed and supply of information online.

Jürgen Habermas posits that “when reorganisation and cost-cutting in this core area jeopardise accustomed journalistic standards, it hits at the very heart of the political public sphere. Because, without the flow of information gained through extensive research, and without the stimulation of arguments based on an expertise that doesn’t come cheap, public communication loses its discursive vitality” (Habermas, 2007).

In addition to the industrial downscaling of journalism, the platform crisis of social media as news distributor, there is a socio-cultural crises of the epistemological devaluation of verifiable truth. Andrejevic writes that “a reflexive awareness of information overload – of the futility of gathering all the evidence in order to adjudicate between multiplying competing accounts – mark the collapse of a residual faith” (2013:115).

Coleman & Ross argue however that “the mediated world entails three kinds of witnessing: the object that is witnessed; the subject who witnesses; and the testimony that arises from their encounter. Each of these poses questions of veracity and trust” (2010:144). They further ask if a mediated account truly represents the original event and if the witnessing subject be trusted to see and understand with any degree of objectivity? They argue that witnesses offer plausibility, not absolute truth and that the media can only ever offer more or less vivid accounts of social reality, but never an objective or final description.

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### 2.4 Global News and the Transnational Audience

To further add to the discussion of how media technologies have altered modern daily life, a consideration of globalization and transnational audiences must be made. The advanced technology enabling “instantaneous electronic communication isn’t just a way in which news or information is conveyed more quickly. Its existence alters the very texture of our lives (Giddens, 2002: 11). The texture of our lives is altered by the newly established capabilities to view news media from other places in the world, sometimes even live while they’re happening. This has transformed the position of the news consumer. The digital advances in media technologies have provided room for globalization, bringing about the notion of transnational audiences (Athique, 2016). “In the twenty-first century, any community imagined through media use is likely to be shaped by transnational patterns of cultural consumption and association, since what most characterizes contemporary media is its multiple sources and its intertextuality. More and more viewers now interact with this ‘smorgasbord’ of available discourse” (Athique, 2014:11)

This transnationalism has expanded the news and along with it *world-views* that modern audiences are exposed to and experience. A new plural subjectivity emerges from transnationalism. Shohat and Stam argue that this has afforded the “transcendence of rigid ideological and political divisions, and the worldwide availability of cultural products and information” (Shohat & Stam, 2003:384). Shohat and Stam do however see that there must be recognition of the “asymmetries of power between different parts of the globe in terms of both media ownership and the volume of media content being produced and distributed” (Shohat & Stam 2003:384).

Athique writes that “it is equally critical to keep it in mind that media audiences cannot be encapsulated within any single instance of reception. Matching people

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to a single source of media content, while interesting in itself, cannot provide for a theoretical understanding of transnational audiences or their broader social experience. A model for transnational media reception must deal more explicitly with the ‘channel-multiplication’ that is inherent to globalization” (Athique, 2014:7).

### 2.5 Trusting the Messenger

As both interpretations of “fake news” become more and more everyday in our media environments, trust becomes an interesting phenomenon to inspect. Seeing both the virality that many fabricated stories have had just in the last year alone plus the popularity of the way “fake news” is being used by powerful figures like President Donald Trump justifies this.

Trust has been defined as an emotion that cannot be lived without, a basic fact of social life. As Luhmann drastically put it, “a complete lack of trust would prevent [us] from getting up in the morning” (1979:4). Trust begins by being built with those nearest to us, both physically and socially. It commences in early age when we undergo experiences that relate to dependability and deceit. We begin to *learn* how to trust. This includes organizing who we can trust, in what scenarios, and to what intervals. On a personal level, we practice trusting with our friends and family. We use the experiences we have with them to determine their trustworthiness. We then define a scale of trustworthiness based on these *past* experiences. The more interactions we have with others, the better we become at judging when and how much trust they should be awarded, if any at all. This familiarity makes it easier for us to foster reliable expectations from individuals, in turn managing the risk contained in their possibility of deceiving or destroying credence.

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Trust and the potential of risk have also been a common theme for scholars. Luhmann for example formulated trust “as a gamble, a risky investment” (1979:24) He writes that “trust therefor always bears upon a critical alternative, in which the harm resulting from a breach of trust may be greater than the benefit to be gained from the trust proving warranted” (ibid). Luhmann further argues that to avoid risk, one can simply refrain from taking action, to avoid engagement. In his theory of risk society, he labels trust as an “uncertainty absorption” (1993:199) and posits that “trust functions so as to reduce complexity” (1979:30). Anthony Giddens in agreement with Luhmann writes that “risk and trust intertwine, trust normally serving to reduce or minimize the dangers to which particular types of activity are subject. Giddens claims that attitudes of trust or distrust towards specific systems can be strongly influenced by experiences at access points. He writes that “bad experiences at access points may lead either to a sort of resigned cynicism or, where this is possible, to disengagement from the system altogether” (Giddens, 1990: 91). For Giddens, the emergence of modernity is characterized by a shift in the principle mode of organising social relations from an unexamined and accustomed confidence to a more actively bestowed trust.

To Peter Dahlgren trust is one of the most fundamental and crucial aspects to a vigorous civic culture and democracy. Trust has been discussed in many contexts which relate to civic culture, and democracy, and more recently in media studies. It has been regarded both as an issue in respects to trust of institutions or government but also as a theme among or between groups of citizens. In the former scenario, citizens are regarded as the bearers of trust while institutions, or representatives of the institutions, are seen as the objects of trust – the truster and trustee respectively. In the latter case, the trust is among or between individuals or groups. The current conception in late modern society is that trust is atrophying and that this spells bad news (Duffy et al, 2004). Many scholars argue that this degradation of trust matters because there are strong links

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between levels of trust and all sorts of positive social, political and economic outcomes (Putnam, 2000; Dahlgren 2009). Dahlgren focuses his discussion of trust on that which is had between individual citizens and groups of citizens instead of between citizens and institutions. He borrows Putnam’s (2000) concept of ‘thick trust’ (that which is embedded in personal relationships) and ‘thin trust’ (a more generalized social trust which extends from the individual’s actual network) to frame the dimensions of trust he sees imperative to civic culture. He argues that without this latter form of trust, collective political action becomes impossible and undercut by suspicion (Dahlgren 2009).

Polls have shown over the last several decades that suspicion is growing while the thin trust described by Putnam and Dahlgren has been shown to be deteriorating over the last several decades. In the UK, trust has been shown to be in decline since the 1950’s (Duffy et al., 2004) in the U.S. since the 1960’s (Putnam, 2000) and steadily in Australia as well (Hughes et al., 2004). Bakir and Barlow further this debate by explaining that while this generalized trust is low in Western countries like the U.K. the U.S. and Australia, trust in institutions like the media is even lower (2007). These definitions of thin trust and thick trust at first glance seem meaningless and maybe inappropriate in analyzing audiences’ trust with news media if news media is thought of as an institution. However, thinking about news media and its use of reporters, journalists, experts, and hosts, interpersonal trust with audiences again becomes in their everyday lives. The concept of trust also rears its head in relation to news media and fake news as more and more of digital news conception happens on Facebook – shared either by “friends” that we know or strangers that we come across online.

Trust involves a judgement to “accept vulnerability to the potential harm in exchange for the benefits of cooperation” (Warren, 1999: 1). Various scholars have debated about the role of trust and what it means for democratic societies.

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Some try to explain why there is a lack while others insist on the importance of the phenomenon in relationship with news media and amongst citizens themselves. Coleman and Ross (2010) for example argue that trust becomes an issue when audiences are treated as spectators. Referencing BBC’s then director-general Mark Thompson, the two argue that the public’s distrust is thought to be caused by the public’s feeling excluded. They write that it is less a disbelief in the accuracy and honesty of media reports and more so due to a “nagging suspicion [that] authoritative knowledge is always someone else’s” and that power is always remote to the audience (143). Other scholars who discuss trust have a slightly different approach to where it should be bestowed. Phillips, Couldry, and Freedman (2010) write about trust that must be afforded to journalism: “Journalists depend for their position in society on the trust of their readers/viewers/users and central to that trust must be the assumption that a serious and respected newspaper will attempt with sincerity to be truthful (61).

Trust towards institutions such as media agencies has seen a steady deterioration over the last few decades. A Gallup poll from 2016, which has been conducted since 1972, recently showed that U.S. audiences’ trust in the mass media "to report the news fully, accurately and fairly" is at an all time low (Swift, 2016). This poll paints a worrisome picture if trust is to be regarded as a “self-evident good thing” where the more the better and that declines in trust automatically mean trouble (Dahlgren, 2009: 112). Dahlgren however might question if negative polls about trust in the media are a self-evident bad thing. He writes that it might be “patently foolish to blindly trust” and argues that it might be best to have a sort of “trust with a built-in antenna for scepticism” (ibid:114). In our era of information overload, Dahlgren’s call for skepticism seems necessary. While Dahlgren writes that trust is crucial in the working of civic culture and society at large, he nevertheless admits to trust’s ambivalent nature. He concludes that some degrees and forms of trust will always be necessary but that the specific trust to distrust ratios will vary in differing scenarios.

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David Lewis and Andrew Weigert posit that “trust succeeds where rational prediction alone would fail” and that “trust in everyday life is a mix of feeling and rational thinking” (1985:969, 972). Guido Möllering (2006) agrees that trust should be approached and conceptualized as having a rational and emotional dimension. While trust and distrust with news media are central to the discussion of fake news and news media in its entirety, the collaboration of emotion and reason becomes valid when exploring the fake news phenomenon and our engagement and participation in civic culture. The tug-of-war between the two mental processes has been discussed widely by a profusion of thinkers, both in relation to knowledge creation and also to the influence it has on actions and reactions. Citizen participation for example has been examined and discussed for hundreds of years with reference to which of the two is the most optimal for deliberation. In the Kantian tradition, the health of a democracy was based on citizens’ capabilities to use reason and make rational decisions; anything that involved the affective, the emotional, or the passionate was largely ignored or criticized (Dahlgren 2009).

More recently however, scholars have argued that before the practice of making rational decisions even arises, citizens must be motivated to participate and that their motivation most often is catalyzed by passion (Hall, 2005; Dahlgren, 2009). Besides the motivational aspect, many writers have considered passions and the affective in how people make democratic decisions and how they *feel* when doing so (Coleman, 2013; Papacharissi, 2015). Cheryl Hall (2005) argued that democratic theory discounts the propinquity of emotion and reason; she insists that our emotions have reason and that one incorporates the other. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (1991) with his theory of “somatic markers” also countered any previous consideration of the relationship between emotion and reason by advocating that emotionality is not paradoxical to rationality, but an indispensable part of reasoning and decision making. According to Damasio, “it



## 2. Framing “Fake News”

is as if we are possessed by a passion for reason, a drive that originates in the brain core, permeates other levels of the nervous system, and emerges as either feelings or nonconscious biases to guide decision making” (ibid: 245).

## Chapter 3

# Researching (with) the Audience

Taking oneself out of the research process is an impossible task to take on. Like in the discussion of journalism, objectivity becomes an issue. Therefore, this is a good time to mention my own subjectivity within this research. I am an audience member who fits well into Athique's description of a transnational. I grew up in a social and cultural environment different to my own ethnic background which exposed me to diasporic media in a foreign language and media produced locally in English. I also have the opportunity to be exposed to and engage with an increasing amount of media produced globally from many parts of the world. My current status as a non-citizen and international student at Lund University in Sweden has further pushed the boundaries of this transnationalism. Questioning what affects these transnationalist perspectives had on my own engagement with news media, there was a desire to explore this further in my own research. This eventually became an aspect I looked for when sampling the interviewees.

Another subjectivity worth mentioning here is my educational background. As a scholar of media – both from my undergraduate background in the humanities (Film and Media Studies) and my current graduate studies in the social sciences (Media and Communication) – the constant negotiation of the media's positive and enabling 'power to' in addition to the dilemma of 'power over' have never

### 3. Researching (with) the Audience

been far from mind (Lukes, 1974; *ibid*, 2005).

I am aware as a researcher that I have empowered individuals and given them voice to critically think about and express their experiences and interpretations, but also that they as I are human and will engage in what Erving Goffman has called “impression management” (Goffman, 1959: 208). This becomes noticeable when one of the interviewees says things like, “Okay, now I have to sound smart.” This impression management could lead to the interviewees not always saying what they think or meaning what they say (Bruhn Jensen, 2012). Many of the interviewees expressed that they had never thought of some of the things that I was asking them, replying often “ah, good question. I’ve never thought about that”. With the idea that impression management naturally occurs in social interactions, especially a formal one like an interview conducted for an academic study, it is important to acknowledge where we find ourselves epistemologically. In *InterViews*, authors Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale highlight differences between knowledge “collection” and knowledge “construction” (2015; 57). This study has taken an approach somewhere in between these two methods of collector or creator, from and with the audience.

Another important aspect to consider here, and thoroughly analyzed within this thesis is the concept of trust. Trustworthiness as a concept in the research process has only been talked about in relation to the findings and knowledge that are produced from a qualitative study (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). Trust however becomes meaningful to take up in the process of these interviews as well. The interviewees ranged from acquaintances to strangers and the trust between interviewee and interviewer could potentially play a role in the data collected from the interviews.

### 3. Researching (with) the Audience

#### 3.1 Ethical Considerations, Recruitment, and Sampling

To prove my trustworthiness to the interviewees, the following ethical principles were considered: informing the potential recruits as thoroughly as possible what the research was aimed at, asking for their consent to participate in the interview and have their voice recorded and lastly ensuring their confidentiality.

All of the interviewees were above the legal adult age so no measures for accommodating minors needed to be taken. All were also informed of the conditions of their involvement prior to the interviews. Confidentiality was promised to the interviewees in verbal form and their consent to be recorded was given on voice recording. All participants were promised anonymity and for this reason fake names in order to protect the interviewees identities.

To recruit the interviewees, I first began with asking acquaintances if they knew someone who would be interested in talking about fake news. A few interviewees were found using this method. The journalists, for example, were all recruited using this method. I felt that it would be very beneficial for this study to have their insider insights and perspectives. To recruit the remainder of the interviewees, public posts were made on Facebook where I stated that I was “looking for people who want to talk about FAKE NEWS”. Nothing further was specified for the purpose of not contriving the type of audiences into my own tailored version of fake news. The reason for not specifying further than that the study was about “fake news” allowed for different definitions of the term to be possible with the sample. Many interested respondents sent inquiries asking what kind of “fake news” the research was about, proving that there were different definitions to be examined.

Using Facebook as the recruiting platform also entrusted that all of the interviewees were active on Facebook. All 12 interviewees stated Facebook as

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one of their means of acquiring news, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. Snowball sampling was used in two occasions where interviewees recommended others to get into contact with (Gobo, 2004). No incentives were provided to the interviewees in exchange for their participation. A total of 14 interviews were conducted in total, but direct quotes from the two pilot interviews are not used since they were not recorded.

Another thing to consider was that all of the interviews from which data was collected was with interviewees who's mother tongue was not English. This may have limited the interviewees ability to accurately express their thoughts. There were many instances where the interviewees who knew I spoke some Swedish switched from English to better express themselves. Overall, the English proficiency in the respondents interviewed did not pose any major problems to the study. The interviewees agreed to be contacted again if need be and were urged to contact me as well if they felt something was left unmentioned or if they wanted to more thoroughly express their ideas.

## 3.2 Piloting

Before beginning to recruit interviewees, two pilot interviews were conducted: the first of the interviewees brought up trust many times during the interview and this is where the idea to include this theme came into the interview guide and ultimately shaped a large section of this thesis; the second pilot confirmed the topic of trust was important for the discussion of "fake news". During both interviews, the topic always began and ended with a wider discussion about news media. It was impossible to discuss fake news with the interviewees without them talking about news and journalism more generally. Only notes were taken during the pilot interviews (no recordings) thus no transcripts were made.

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The pilot interviews proved helpful as they aided to hone in on what research questions were suitable to ask in such a study, how to structure the interview guide, and what the best sample was for interviewees. From the pilot interviews, one of the respondents was not an avid news consumer and it became evident that this could not be so beneficial in a study so centered around the genre. From this realization, it became obvious that to discuss “fake news” and trustworthiness of news media outlets, the interviewees needed to be relatively heavy news media consumers. This was the only inclusion criteria that was determined (Robinson, 2014).

### **3.3 Design**

The method of semi-structured interviews was used in this research in order to analyze the ways in which audiences were experiencing and engaging with news media and fake news media, in how they defined the term “fake news”, and how they used trust to navigate the current news media landscape. In-depth interviews with 12 individuals were conducted in total.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is built upon socially constructionist ideas with affinities to phenomenology and hermeneutics: the former in the way this research explores the audiences experience of news media and the latter in the individual meanings the interviewees applied to the term fake news. The social constructivist approach realizes that “meaning does not exist in its own right”, that it is constructed by humans in their interactions with each other in their attempts to make sense of their world (Robson, 2011 : 24). This approach also focuses on the multiple perspectives of the interviewees and aims to understand from the interviews. Thus the assumption was made that the audiences ideas are not only valuable for others to understand, but that they would be best revealed through the exploratory method of in-depth interviews

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(Robson, 2011).

The in-depth interview is arguably one of the most appropriate qualitative research methods since “the best way to find out what the people think about something is to ask them” (Bower, 1973: vi). Burgess calls the interview a “conversation with a purpose” (1984: 102) and Kvale called it a “professional conversation” (1996:5), but whatever way you put it the best way to find out what audiences are thinking about something is to talk to them about about it. For that reason, the qualitative, semi-structured interview felt most suitable for the endeavor of finding out how audiences were defining fake news, how they were building trust with news media outlets and if and how either altered their engagement with news media.

The interviews ranged from one to two hours and most were conducted in-person. Three of the interviews were conducted through online video calls. While some nuance is lost in the virtual conversations, it could also be argued that they provide a more relaxed setting for the interviewee to share their views from a space which they feel is comfortable. While the preference is always for a face-to-face interview, the online video interviews were completed just as smoothly, with even less environmental distractions.

While this thesis does not use a case study in the formal sense, the term “fake news” was approached as a case to research audiences perceptions of the factual genre of news and to research how trust played a role in these expressions towards the news media. Using the term “fake news” as a case study however did have some limitations. Since this thesis was conducted in Europe and mostly with Swedes who have English as a second or even third language, it may have not had the same nuance as it would to English speaking audiences – especially those of the United States where the term is most significantly used. As one interviewee said, “When you say fake news I guess, when you say it in English, I

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kind of associate it with Trump. It's his his term. He's news and you're fake news. But if you say like falska nyheter or whatever I would associate it with something different." It is impossible to say nonetheless if there would have been differences to the data, whether subtle or severe. The case in this particular context still led to insights about the way audiences labeled current affairs information and how they navigated around possible deception.

Despite conducting research outside of the geographical location where the term arose, it became clear that this thesis would be fruitful being conducted with Non-Americans. The transnational audience proved to be a very informative group to sample. All interviewees were also familiar with the contrasting ways in which the term was currently being used prior to the interviews (1. to reference fictional stories and 2. as an attack applied generally to news media). While doing this study in a European context may have been limiting, it did make room for the transnationalism in the interviewees to shine through.

### 3.4 Data Coding and Analysis

Once I felt that I had a sufficient amount of data, I decided to stop conducting interviews and move onto the coding and analyzing steps. After the first five interviews, patterns along with the interviewees individual contextualization of "fake news" began to emerge. As each interview was being completed, the interview was transcribed in order to begin the coding and theming process. This process was started at about halfway through the interviews. As time was of the essence in the completing of this thesis, I settled on a total of 12 interviews and began to be mainly involved with the analyzing process. Notes were occasionally taken during the interviews to mark when they used different expressions (laughing, quotation marks in air, etc.) All interviews were transcribed and printed out. A combination of open coding and in-vivo coding



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was utilized to code the interview transcripts by hand (Seale, 2012:371).

After transcribing all of the interviews, they were printed out and highlighted by hand and coded alongside the margins of the paper. The codes were themed in handwriting but transcribed versions of them also exist in the appendix as an example. At this stage, I looked for similarities and topics of discussion amongst the data produced from the interviews. This along with the actual write up of the study was the most difficult part of the entire thesis process. From the topics, I moved onto categorizing into themes such as “online use”, “familiarity of source”, “uncertainty”, and “the whole truth”. By creating themes, both the individual voices of each interviewee along with their overall similarities became visible.

## Chapter 4

# Negotiations in Determining Fakeness: The Findings

While news outlets, journalists, politicians, and academics have had the chance to define the term “fake news” and comment on what is to be included within the phenomenon, audiences have been forgotten. What is it they consider fake? How do they go about defining the phenomenon? Does trust play a role in coming to a concrete definition? In the following section, these questions will attempt to be answered and the voice of the audience will come through. Their engagement with both the term “fake news” and the ways in which they engage or disengage with news media will be analyzed.

All of the interviewees exemplified in their responses the trouble of applying a concrete definition to what fake news actually was. The way in which scholars and journalists approached the term “fake news” as in the completely fabricated stories that were spreading online (i.e. Pope endorses Trump, etc.) was not the only way in which the interviewees engaged with the term (CNBC, 2016) . While they did mention complete fabrications or photoshopped images and such, discussions of objectivity, misrepresentation, and framing also emerged in the interviews within the theme of fake news. It became clear after all the interviews were conducted that the term was used subjectively. While different interviewees

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had different definitions of fake news, some similarities of how it was defined did emerge. The largest similarities between the respondents were found in the strategies they used to consume news in order to avoid being misled or deceived by possible fake news.

The interviewees also expressed reflective modes of engagement with news media characterized by John Corner as ‘looking at’ and ‘looking through’ in this case the truth claims in the genre (2005). In the following chapter, both the variety of responses the interviewees expressed when they were defining the term, as well as the common patterns in their reflective engagement with news media will be presented. To begin, the various contradictory judgements that the interviewees utilized to characterize fake news will be examined.

### 4.1 Judgements of Fakery

#### *Factual Judgements and Subjectivity*

When questioned about the term fake news, the respondents interviewed clearly had different approaches to defining what it encompassed. The interviewees displayed three major lines of judgement in how they were defining the term – factual, political, and ethical. First, the factual stance was based on the provability or falsifiability of a news story in order to determine if it was fake news or not.

My first thought is to say untrue but what is that in these times? I mean it's stuff, it's stories that actually can be proved wrong. There is evidence that proves it's wrong. So fake news to me is untrue stories that can be proved wrong.

(Ivana, Montenegrin-Swedish, journalist, 29)

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Ivana, for instance, demonstrated a factual judgement when reasoning with what fake news is, after a little comment exemplifying her reflective engagement with the genre and the blurriness of truth it presented. Her definition of fake news however depended on the possibility of Popperian style falsification of the data contained in the news story. If anything in the story could be proven to be wrong, then the news piece itself would be labeled fake news. Complications arose however when Ivana was asked if there could be cases where this rational deliberation based on falsifiability could not be applied. She says:

Maybe sometimes it's hard to deem if it's true or not. You can't find a source anywhere and you have to have some kind of probability involved for saying like, 'hmm, it's highly unlikely' or whatever. So sometimes, yea of course, you can't always be 100% sure.

(Ivana, Montenegrin-Swedish, journalist, 29)

As demonstrated in the interviews however, there are many instances where the interviewees did not contain enough knowledge to be “100% sure” of the factuality of a news story. This then caused them to depend on subjective deliberations in determining if they should/should not believe the truth claims contained within. Corner writes that our subjectivities, “both in relation to our own perceptions, the perceptions of others and to the larger structures within which we live, clearly provide the basis for all engagement with the ‘realities’ of the world and judgment upon them” (Corner, 2011: 89). The ‘realities’ of the world represented in news media however pose problems as Ivana states above. There is an adequate amount of time where audiences cannot be 100% sure of the veracity of the news story, and when they cannot, they often depend on themselves to be the truth judge. In the possibility of engaging with fake news, the dependence on subjective judgements however becomes worrisome. If audiences are judging the fakeness/realness of news stories based on their own

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subjective reasoning of claims being true or not, then there is a good chance that they would either uncritically accept some stories or reject others that seemed “highly unlikely”.

Subjective techniques of negotiating realness or possible fakeness of news stories were expressed in various fashions throughout the interviews. Interviewees Astrid and Richard for example say they depend on their “gut” to guide them in the news media landscape and don’t question stories that “sound reasonable”.

I guess I go with my gut-feeling. You can’t just go with the gut-feeling, but it’s one of the things, and maybe like research a little bit more.

(Astrid, Swedish, design student, 31)

I usually go with my gut feeling. If something sounds not much true, maybe then I look for other sources, checking or covering the same thing and see if it was or wasn’t true. If it sounds reasonable, then I usually don’t bother checking.

(Richard, Swedish, social worker, 28)

This use of the gut to judge veracity based on the likelihood of things or if something “sounds reasonable” (Richard) is not new to the news media world. Political satirist Stephen Colbert’s discussed this use of the gut and popularized the term “truthiness” to explain this strategy of how truth claims were both produced and received in the media. Merriam-Webster listed the word as its word-of-the-year in 2006 and definitions include “Truth coming from the gut, not books” and “Preferring to believe what you wish to believe, rather than what is known to be true.” (CBS, 2006). While the interviewees did not explicitly state that they believed in whatever they personally thought was true, many depended on their “gut” and their own subjective judgement to guide them in

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determining possible fakery. Alejandro and Richard, for example, when asked how they navigate and who they trust to provide the real news said that they rely ultimately on themselves to be the judge.

I trust my ability to read and point out something that like ‘ahh, there’s something missing here’. So mostly I trust my ability to know if something’s off.

(Alejandro, Argentinian-Swedish, journalist, 29)

Q: Who do you trust for the real news?

A: Myself?

(Richard, Swedish, social worker, 28)

Many of the interviewees expressed that they depend on their own previous knowledge, own previous subjective positioning to determine if the news story is “highly unlikely” (Ivana) to be true. This subjectivity also appeared when they determined when to question and verify the truth claim, for example, if “something is like too unbelievable” (Hedvig). The quotes above clearly demonstrate that the audience’s engaged with news media in a subjective way, using prior experiences and feelings, to determine factuality and to not be fooled by fake news.

#### *Political Judgement and Subjectivity*

The second definition of the term was found in the interviewees who approached it with a political judgement. Some felt that the term “fake news” was defined as a political strategy to deter audiences from certain news stories by diminishing their credibility. Others when asked what it encompassed answered that politicians were the first thing they thought of when thinking about “fake news”. Astrid, Malee, and Hedvig were the interviewees who approached “fake news” with more of a political judgment.

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Fake news is something made up by...what can you say...governments so they can put a stamp on certain stuff. Like 'fake news' on this, so people will just ignore it.

(Astrid, Swedish, design student, 31)

Not all fake news is fake. But it's just like...the person who doesn't like it, tries to discredit it. And by giving this name, like 'fake news' just to discourage people to not like really follow it.

(Malee, Thai, journalist, 31)

Astrid and Malee above felt that the term was a political strategy where communication was used as a weapon in order to muddy the waters and benefit certain groups. Media policy expert Damian Tambini highlights three main beneficiaries of the use of the term: populists who use the notion of “fake news” to undermine legitimate opposition; those on the wrong side of recent historical events (both the Brexit vote and the Trump victory have been argued to have been influenced by “fake news”); and finally the “legacy media” who want to discredit the ‘wisdom of crowds’ and aim for a return to trusted news brands (Tambini, 2007). But besides viewing “fake news” as a political tactic, other interviews expressed that politics, in general, was what came to mind when they thought of fake news. Hedvig’s statement below demonstrates this coupling.

So fake news...everything Donald Trump tweets I consider fake news. As well as anything put up on this SD [Sverigedemokraterna] webpage. So even if the article might be real and the photos and everything, the story is real, it's still when it's too vinklad [biased], then it's not real news.

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(Hedvig, Swedish, receptionist, 29)

Hedvig's statement above leads us again from one kind of judgment (this time a political one) to a judgment based on subjectivity in defining the term "fake news". She says that when stories become *too* biased, then they are not real anymore. It can be argued here that her judgement of how far is *too* far past the tipping point of being biased is determined subjectively, thus subjectively coming to a determination of what the label of fake news should encompass. This stress on bias further leads us into ethical judgement that the interviewees were using in negotiating what fake news constituted.

##### *Ethical Judgement*

The ethical stance was utilized to define fake news and was based on the news' ethical treatment of a happening or group of people, most often in relation to media bias. Alejandro was one of the interviewees who reasoned with an ethical judgement to characterize what fake news is.

News based on fake facts or wrong facts. And news that are so biased but you know in like a secret way, that are biased and try to hide it in a way. But I mean that's a scale because all articles are biased in some way I think. But when it gets over a certain tipping point – I couldn't say where that tipping point is – but for me it becomes like fake news in a way. But I would say that wrong news, news based on wrong facts are fake news to me and also news that are too biased.

(Alejandro, Argentinian-Swedish, journalist, 29)

Alejandro's judgement of fake news fits well into Roger Silverstone's (2007) perspective of the mediapolis as a moral space. Throughout his interview Alejandro stressed the responsibility of the news media and makes ethical



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delineations between what is “right” to do and consequently what is “wrong”. The perceived bias of news stories was a mistake that many of the interviewees voiced in their ethical judgement of what is to be considered fake.

Hedvig for example says, “News can be fake if they’re not factual enough. If they don’t leave you with any kind of information that isn’t biased to anyone.” Arash adds that “as long as the news is biased, it’s fake to me. Even if it is full truth but still biased, it’s fake.” These interviewees felt that bias in the news media was an ethical issue and expressed that there was a threshold of balance and factuality that needed to be reached in order for the news story to be marked as true. Bias was viewed as an unethical obstruction of truth, prompting them to use the label of fake news.

Silverstone argues however that there is a dilemma with truth in the modern media climate. He writes that there is no such things as truth in the mediapolis and that to assume that there is, is both arrogant and wrong (2007: 158). Hedvig for example vocalized this impossibility. She says, “There’s always, of course they aren’t perfect, but it’s also...I mean it’s just a fact with news, not even if I would see an actual event happening right before my eyes, I can’t be 100% certain of what happened. So, the question is whether the news is ever 100% right.”

Silverstone argues that this is because the accounts that any given mediator will offer of the complexity of the world “will inevitably be partial, provisional, and incomplete” (ibid: 158). The interviewees vocalized their knowledge of the news media incompleteness in their need for the unbiased, “whole picture” and their use of triangulation techniques – which will be discussed in a later section – to gather information from the web.

Silverstone, however, poignantly argues that “in our skepticism and effective disbelief in the possibility of truth, we nevertheless expect our media to be

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truthful, for without the expectation they have no value – they become mere noise” (ibid: 158). Truth in the news media, thus, becomes an anomaly. The paradoxical dilemma of truth in the media is perfectly summed up in Richard’s conflicting feelings towards the news. His contradictory stance can be seen in the two quotes below, one in the beginning of the interview and one further on.

It’s not like the truth that’s coming out in the news. It’s a certain angle of truth.

(Richard, Swedish, social worker, 28)

I’m critical of this post-modernism perspective, “oh there is no objective truth...everything is just relations of power so everything is justified, so you have to fight for your own perspective to dominate the others.” That I think is bullshit. I think there is objective truth in some sense and people should be very...more careful with their words.

(Richard, Swedish, social worker, 28)

Richard and many other interviewees reflectively engaged with the representations presented in news media and questioned the possibility of truth to be found within news media stories while demanding that it supply it nonetheless. Hill (2007), in her study of factual genres (documentary, news, reality TV) found that “audiences want to trust the news, but they also know that news is a representation of reality” (Hill, 2007: 135). Naturally within the task of defining fake news, there was a constant negotiation the interviewees engaged in, deliberating if news could actually provide ‘the truth’. Their actually wanting to trust the truth claims in the news genre however was a little more mixed. This will be brought up in a later section.

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As displayed above, the definition of the term fake news was deliberated using various criteria (factual, political, ethical). These criteria were used to make subjective judgements about what was real and fake and what was right and wrong in the news. Another judgement of fake news arose when interviewees found ethical issues with how certain parts of the world were representing and being represented in news media. This will be discussed in the next section.

### **4.2 The Transnational Audience and the Problem with Representation**

This section focuses on the transnational audience and how it impacts their defining of fake news in relation to bias and representation problems in the news. The following part will first point out the different kinds of transnationalism that the interviewees in this study exemplified in order to analyze the differences in how this motivated their definitions of fake news. The globalization of the world (including the media which represents it) along with the movement of individuals from certain cultural/social contexts to others, and the rapid technological advances that have made them possible. Robertson in her book *Global News* writes that technological advancements have “made it possible for people to extend their bodies in space” (2015: 2).

The increasing globalization of the news media and the transnationalism of audiences has allowed greater access to a plethora of global news stories from differing perspectives. As far back as the 1990’s scholars were ready to explain how the global world would change us as audiences. During the 90’s, Appadurai wrote that ‘electronic mediation transforms pre-existing worlds of communication and conduct’ (1996: 3). For Castells (1996), the coming of information technology and computer networking that put us together globally formed us into a “network society”. Anthony Giddens later wrote that “instantaneous electronic communication isn’t just a way in which news or

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information is conveyed more quickly. Its existence alters the very texture of our lives” (Giddens, 2002: 11). This alteration from the 1990’s forward provided by the global scope of the world wide web has “served to ensure that online audiences are inherently transnational” (Athique, 2016: 9). These changes caused by the technological advancements beginning in the late 20th century and progressing in the 21st century alter how audiences are watching the news and *seeing* the world. The transnationalism of the audiences further strengthened their reflective engagement with media and news media more specifically. It is brought up here because it also affected how the audience engaged with the term fake news.

Of the twelve individuals interviewed, all should be considered transnational as they consumed news media from different parts of the world. This first typification of the transnational audience includes all of the interviewees. Every single interviewee acknowledged that they consumed news media produced by multiple countries. The only thing that limited their consumption was a language barrier. As more and more of the world becomes bilingual (usually with English as the second language) and more and more media content is made with the intent of global distribution, audiences are offered an exponentially growing amount of news media products to engage with. These products provide audiences with news media with different framing and different stories.

The second typification came from interviewees, Alma, Arash, Luis, Malee, and Svend who were citizens of different countries than the ones they currently lived in: Colombians currently living in Germany, Thai living in Finland, and an Iranian and Dane living in Sweden. These five respondents read local and global news in English and also followed the news produced in their home countries.

The third typification of transnationalism was found in the individuals who were Swedish citizens with foreign backgrounds. Nader, Alejandro, and Ivana for

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example were Swedish nationals who had a foreign background (either immigrants themselves or children of immigrants). Two of these interviewees (Ivana and Alejandro) followed news in a third language in addition to English and Swedish (Serbo-Croatian and Spanish, respectively).

These different types of transnationalism that audiences now experience have a distinctive impact on them, makes them more aware of media representations and alters their engagement with certain news media sources. Our interaction with these global news stories gives us fresh perspectives and has the potential to change our world-views. This change in engagement and transformation of world-view is exemplified by Alma's statement below about her "world opening up" and "perspective changing" after she started reading news media produced from a different point of view. While she was in Colombia she was reading a particular newspaper she had grown up seeing her father reading. After moving from Colombia to Sweden and then to Germany, she had a different perspective on the very same publication, caused by interaction with news media products from a different geographical, political, social, and cultural context.

When I came here and I started reading them, like from here, my perspective changed. My world opened up and I saw that this newspaper is completely conservative and has a lot of weird stuff that I hadn't thought about before until I went to another reality and I started reading German news and stuff like that. I could compare it and I saw that it wasn't so good so I stopped following those newspapers.

(Alma, Colombian, industrial designer, 31)

Alma's diasporic transnationalism and her engagement with news media from different regions of the world altered her perception of news media texts and made her more aware of differing media representations. Representation was

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something that many of the interviewees found issues with. Ivana, Malee, and Alejandro who have worked as journalists for example saw a problem with Western hegemonic representations in the news media.

When asked what Ivana disliked about news media, this is how she responded:

As an editor you always have to choose or make selection of what are you going to broadcast or what stories you're gonna tell and I dislike sometimes like the values we use when we decide what to select. Meaning sometimes I think it's too much of a Western focus and it's always this like 'how close is this?'...And from a globalized world that's kind of alienating.

(Ivana, Montenegrin-Swedish, journalist, 29)

Malee, however, mentioned that while the West still had a command of global news, she felt that the this discursive power was being dispersed.

A: I might be a very narrow person when it comes to news. I just follow like these two camps. Like the Western part and the American part. These two are like the most influential countries that make the world we live in today. And when I say Western I mean UK mostly because that's the only language that I can read.

Q: How do you feel about the power that these two have?

A: I think it will change soon. And I think it's changing right now. I think it's good. You see the power kind of scatter into other parts of the world but you can't really feel the effect yet, the impact of it yet. It's coming gradually. You still see and feel these two major players playing most part into world politics right now.

(Malee, Thai, journalist, 33)

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Both of these interviewees were reflective about the hegemony that the West had on the global news media market and felt that it “alienated” audiences from other parts of the world and other points of view. As Malee says there are only a small group of elites who “make the world we live in today” but both journalists were happy to see that this was changing. These reflective engagements brought on by the transnationalist mindset of the interviewees eventually led to their use of the term fake news in defining transnational texts which they did not agree with.

The different kinds of transnationalism of the audience mentioned above did not only alter perceptions and bring awareness of how current affairs and world events were being represented but it also influenced the use of the term fake news. Alejandro, for example, saw problems with how the world outside of the West is being portrayed by western media. He brought up how Venezuela for example is portrayed in Swedish media, which he saw as being “problematic”.

If I just read the news articles, I probably wouldn't call them fake news, like the single articles. But if seeing the whole picture, I would call that fake news, because as I said they're creating an image of a country that is wrong, that is fake. So, that in a way becomes fake news...like in a big picture, even though the article itself might get be correct, like get the facts right. But in leaving out other facts, thats also a way of...I don't know if I would call that fake news because you always can leave facts out. Thats also like a, I don't where the tipping point is but I think that's, yeah. It's very complicated to me actually, what fake news is!

(Alejandro, Argentinian-Swedish, journalist, 29)

Like many others, defining what was fake and what was real was convoluted and

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required some sort of truth spectrum. As Alejandro states above, he is not sure where the “tipping point” is. Nevertheless, the tipping point on this truth spectrum seemed to be deliberated with a subjective standpoint. Sure, maybe selecting only negative news stories coming from Venezuela painted a squalid, one-sided picture of the country, but the stories however negative they were, were *somebody’s* truth in Venezuela.

Like Alejandro, in attempts to define fake news, Arash also repeatedly mentioned representations (in this case about Iran) which he found unsettling. In the example below, he discusses content on Sweden’s national public television broadcaster (SVT) about the middle-eastern country saying he does not like the representation depicted because it’s “not the whole truth.”

It’s not even 55% of the truth. But the advantage is that they are not telling lies. This is good. But maybe not the whole truth. As I said, you can tell a lie, you can not tell the truth, or you can tell the truth. To me, other than the full picture, it’s fake news. Because it goes into my mind and gives me a bad impression and then you cannot correct that with millions of hours...I could see that, especially since I’m from Iran, the news about Iran on CNN or other media, were never or most of the time not correct, or exact. So I always had this notion in my mind that fake news exists. I mean it’s telling lies. I can tell you a half truth, I can tell you the whole truth, I can tell you lies. But even a half truth is a kind of lie, especially on a news media with millions of people in the audience. That’s easily a lie.

(Arash, Iranian, mechanical engineer, 31)

Both Alejandro and Arash were not happy about the way Venezuela and Iran were being treated in the news media and worried that people would form



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perceptions of these countries based on partisan representations. It was these partisan representations that they ultimately deemed to be fake. Alejandro and Arash's statements about partial representations being fake news and their quest for "the full truth" were reciprocated by many other interviewees. While the others may not have explicitly used those words, they exhibited the same ambition in their news consuming strategies. In their quest for the "whole picture" and "the full truth", every single one of the interviewees depended on a method of triangulation. By using this technique of information gathering, the interviewees demonstrated an understanding of Silverstone's view that news media representations were always "partial, provisional, and incomplete" (2007: 158).

### 4.3 Triangulation: "The Whole Picture" for "The Full Truth"

I think the fake news that comes from the mainstream media is much bigger. It's usually the things that they leave out. There are so many big events that are happening in the world that they do not cover which should have coverage. If you only read the mainstream media, you won't have any good picture of what's going on in the world.

(Richard, Swedish, social worker, 28)

The interviewees shared that they had a certain method for engaging with news media since they had formed the outlook that nothing was the full picture of reality. Triangulation is a qualitative research technique to test validity through the convergence of information from different methods, theories, or sources. Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) establish four types of triangulation: method triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and data source

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triangulation. This last type of triangulation, data source triangulation, was the strategy that the interviewees were seemingly employing when consuming news. Again, the interviewees were concerned with differing representations of reality that news media outlets were engaged in and utilized the method of triangulation to avoid being misled or deceived about a certain current affair. Arash for example had a telling technique of consuming news in our current globalized news media world.

For example if you want to follow what's happening in Russia, go to US media. If you want to follow what's happening in the US, go to Russian media. I mean even the details, not the details. Even the small news. I don't think they are 100% trustable because they cover the news that are in their national interests or in line with their corporate interests. So that's why I follow different news and I have to follow many, not just one.

(Arash, Iranian, mechanical engineer, 31)

Arash and Richard were just two of the many interviewees who were very careful of how each nations media was representing the world. Arash for example felt that to get the best representation of reality, one must look at many representation (opposing or not) to get "the full picture." Triangulation by reading, listening, or watching different sources was a tactic that all of the interviewees were engaged in. Not a single one of them depended on one source. All of them mentioned that they were reading, watching, and listening to many sources and checking for the portrayals of news stories and comparing their truth claims. Sometimes the interviewees expressed that they wanted to witness how different news outlets were covering the same story or looking for confirmation and corroboration in plurality of outlets. Below are some of the most concrete examples.

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Like if somethings caught my interest more than others and Im like dry skeptical and I really wanna know what exactly was behind a certain thing, I guess you just google around and see different sources and whatever and try to make up another side of it.

(Nader, Iraqi-Swedish, filmmaker, 29)

Obviously I get irritated if I go into Aftonbladet...I'll get irritated about the kind of news making headlines. Sometimes you react to how they describe certain events. But I mean thats also why it's important to read news to actually think. So you don't just read. And to read things from different sources so you don't just read the news as 'this is the fact of what happened.'

(Olof, Swedish, architect, 29)

If there's an event going on it can be portrayed in so many different ways. In order to get a good understanding about what's going on, you have to read several different sources. That's what I try to do.

(Richard, Swedish, social worker, 28)

It's good to have different sources you know, to compare how and what different outlets say about the same event.

(Ivana, Montenegrin-Swedish, journalist 29)

If something really interests me, if I'm into something that's happening, I don't just follow one media outlet. I always try to watch what other and even what the ones I don't trust, what they're writing. And I try to get

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like a full scale of like ‘gimme the whole picture.’

(Alejandro, Argentinian-Swedish, journalist 29)

So I search, I use the keyword to search for the story that I’m really interested in. I read into it. I look for more like different websites, different pages. That type of thing. Look into comments, almost every comment sometimes. And looking at different platforms and seeing like how the original story has been generated and what makes people report it differently.

(Malee, Thai, journalist, 33)

I just like to see which one is writing, how they are writing...like when there is a big news in Europe or whatever, I like to read it from this point of view [European press].. I also read what they are thinking in Colombia. How are they publishing the news, that same news that I’m aware of here?

(Luis, Colombian, financial controller, 31)

While many of the interviewees expressed that they did indeed trust many various sources to provide factual information (Ivana, SVT; Malee, Reuters; Alejandro, BBC World, Hedvig, TT, etc.), their method of engaging with the news exemplified otherwise. In BBC’s Reith lectures, philosopher Onora O’neill discusses these contradictions. In relation to audience’s verbal expressions of mistrust to pollsters, she questions: “Do action speak louder than words? Are the ways we actually place our trust a more accurate gauge of trust than our comments to pollsters?” (O’Neill, 2002). Her argument in the lectures is that a lot of the times the complexity of our trust is not able to shine through in short responses to polls and that our actions stand in contradiction to the data

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gathered that shows we have high distrust. She elaborates that maybe we simply have to rely on institutions and persons although we do not really trust them. She asks, “How can we avoid the news as represented or (mis)represented, if we have no other sources?”

The difference now, 15 years after these lectures, is that we do have a multitude (and growing amount) of choices. So if we ask this questions again – Do actions speak louder than words? – we find that although some of the interviewees do verbally express high trust in the media to provide them with balanced and informative news, their actions exemplify otherwise. In their method of triangulating news by looking at many different sources, the interviewees exhibit an almost default distrust when engaging with news media.

Silverstone argues that from “both technological change (digital and interactive media of different kinds) and societal change (migration and the life-style driven fragmentation of cultures), the total media environment is being transformed”. (Silverstone, 2007: 80). In the new news media contexts where we have 24/7 access to news, live coverage, and more and more foreign agencies are becoming accessible in English, we reach what Andrejevic called the “infoglut” (2013). Andrejevic argues that this never-ending, uncontainable amount of information ultimately urges us to think about and interact differently with media.

Equipped with the capability to access an immense plurality of voices and events, commentary and analysis, it becomes too enticing to not start engaging and searching for the news ourselves instead of passively being consumers of it. In this sea of happenings and information many of the interviewees concluded that their tactic to deal with the possibility of perspective and angle, fake news and real news, was one that was guided by suspicion rather than faith and exemplified by their triangulation techniques.

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Many of the interviews responded that to cope with the possibility of falsity and fakery in the news media one could “always be suspicious at least” (Nader) or that the best and quickest remedy in consuming news was to “Be suspicious. Never 100% trust” (Arash) or that they “blindly distrusted” (Olof). The interviewees seemed to be implying that the best approach with the news media was what Paul Ricoeur called a “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Ricoeur, 1970). While this hermeneutics of suspicion in regards to the news media was vocalized by all of the interviewees, there was still a variation as to when the decoding of news media texts were approached with this apprehensiveness.

#### **4.4 (Dis)Trust and the (Un)Familiar**

The data collected from the in-depth interviews demonstrates the contradictory nature but also the diversity in how contemporary audiences approach trustworthiness in the news media environment and how they bestow their trust to this genre of factuality. In this section the audiences trust of news media will be examined since the “acceptance of truth claims within the news is reliant on a robust contract of trust which once broken is difficult to repair” (Hill, 2007: 137).

In our daily lives trust is awarded to different people and things, in different scenarios, to differing degrees. The twelve interviewees’ expressions of how they trusted exemplified these varying characteristics. Some trusted particular outlets while others were suspicious of the same outlet. Some of the interviewees had higher levels of trust while others had lower. For example, in reference to Swedish news agency TT, Hedvig declares, “I believe them almost blindly” while Olof jokingly says about news media in general, “Well I never blindly trust. You should never blindly trust. I blindly distrust.” Arash in the meantime responds that he trusts what he reads, “But not 100%. Just take everything with a grain of salt. Not 100% trust but different people, different levels of confidence and

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you add all of it together. You make a conclusion.” In their expressions of who, when, and how they trust, the interviewees had many similarities and differences as well. These many ways of trusting or not trusting will be explored below.

The interview data brought to light how trust or distrust of the news media was formed in many of the interviewees was based on their familiarity with it. I use *it* here as either the news media in general, certain news media outlets or journalists in particular, or with a particular news story. The familiarity as described by Luhmann (see chapter 2), was in fact a major resource the interviewees used to determine if a journalist or news outlet was trustworthy or not.

Of the news media in general, the journalists in the group for example had an overall higher level of trust which they directed at their experiences of working within journalistic production. Journalist Ivana responded surely when asked if there were certain sources she trusted. “Yea, I mean I trust my employer [laughs] because I work there and I know the inside of it, like what happens behind the scenes.” Ivana, a journalist who works for Sveriges Radio exemplified high trust based on her familiarity and insider status of news media production. Another interviewee, Malee, has worked on stories for Associated Press. She mentioned that while her insider status provided her with a trusting outlook to news media she was not sure she would have it if she hadn’t worked in media before. For Malee, it was her identity as a journalist which heightened her trust of truth claims made by journalists and news organizations.

I’m not some general people that consume news without knowing the way they produce it. I have more insights. I could say that I know people who make it and I know how they work and that’s why I say I trust them because I know how they work. And I used to work there too and I see how it goes. So basically, I used to have my hand in it. I know the feeling. I

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know how they incorporate it and why I can trust them. But if I never had that experience I wonder myself if I would ever trust anybody either.

(Malee, Thai, journalist, 33)

31 year-old Arash for example had formed a personal trust for journalists who provided him with information from the scene. His trust was not exactly insider status like Ivana or Malee's but it was also based on a personal trust he had built with certain people. He says:

I have reporter friends from around the world so I get their Facebook live and I see what's happening there...I get it from people first hand.

(Arash, Iranian, mechanical engineer, 31)

Familiarity with news media from early age was also a reason interviewees gave for why they trusted news media. Hedvig, a 29 year-old Swedish woman displayed a high regard for news media formed by her upbringing. She had many memorable experiences with news media beginning in childhood. When asked how she built her trust of news media she responded that the familiarity of seeing her grandparents and parents reading newspapers did it for her. Trust of news media and certain outlets for her were transferred over from familiar experiences of growing up with familiar people whom she trusted. She says, "I think I'm just brought up in like 'you should read the newspapers'... So i think it's from the general upbringing. They always had the newspapers at home." Hedvig also expressed that the "blind trust" she had for Swedish news agency Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå (TT) for example was something she also says came from the familiarity of the outlet. When asked why she was prompted to trust that source in particular she again brought up her upbringing. She says,



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I also think it was part of the upbringing. I think it's from [school] that we learned that TT is like the God of news because we learned journalism and stuff...I think TT, I've learned to trust them. Jesus Christ it's like 16 years ago, and as of this day I can't say that Ive ever been failed by them.

(Hedvig, Swedish, receptionist, 29)

Hedvig in her 16 year experience with TT “had never been failed” by her trust for TT. She depended on the longevity of this relationship in what Luhmann describes as an “overcoming an element of uncertainty.” He writes that “familiarity in this sense makes it possible to entertain relatively reliable expectations and, as a consequence, to contain the remaining elements of risk as well” (Luhmann, 1979: 19) The general trust that Hedvig had of certain news media was outlets seemed to be transitively applied from a personal trust she had of certain people and aided by the positive experiences she had had in the longevity of the relationship.

The personal trust that Hedvig built with those around her is what Putnam and Dahlgren would call the “thick trust” as mentioned in the literature review. In general, Hedvig used this thick, personal trust she had with people and depended on it when forming thinner, general trust with her interactions with news media. She however admitted that she was less trustworthy and approached news about things that mattered to her with more skepticism and suspicion. Like many others she wavered between what she called “both very trusting and quite cynical and skeptical”.

Similar to Hedvig was 31 year-old Alma. She explained how she also depended on familiarity and thick trust in forming a general trust of certain news media outlets. When asked how she came to reading the sources she did, she also mentioned her upbringing.

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At the beginning I was following certain Colombian newspapers that I follow because my Dad follows and I trust my Dad's judgement a lot.

(Alma, Colombian, industrial designer, 31)

Alma described how she chose what newspapers to read in Colombia based on what her father, whom she trusted, read. Again, the thick trust with a certain individual and what news media outlet they trusted was seemingly transitively adopted by the interviewee. If Parent/Grandparent/Teacher was trusting of news media x and interviewee was trusting of the Parent/Grandparent/Teacher, then interviewee was more likely to also trust news media x. But as previously mentioned in the transnationalism analysis, Alma's trust of this particular news media outlet built from personal experience changed after she left Colombia.

While familiarity was something that aided Ivana, Malee, Hedvig and Alma, and Arash in building trust with some news outlets, familiarity also aided in some of the interviewees mistrust. Luhmann theorized that familiarity "denotes neither favorable nor unfavorable expectations, but the conditions under which both are rendered possible" (Luhmann, 1979: 19). In other words, familiarity is a precondition for both trust and distrust. While familiarity in relation to thick trust (among people) encouraged thin trust with media outlets, familiarity in relation to a thick mistrust seemed to have the opposite effect. The familiarity created from past experiences can just as well determine unfavorable expectations as well as favorable ones. To reiterate, it simply catalyzes the conditions necessary for these expectations to arise. Simply put, it brings about the possibility for trust as well as distrust. As Nader, a 29 year-old film-maker states, he was always skeptical and uncertain in the home and this suspicion and mistrust led to a general mistrust of media outlets.

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I grew up in a home where it was really hard to know what's the truth or not. So just by generally speaking in the home, I didn't trust my parents, what they said. So I guess it goes all the way back.

(Nader, Iraqi-Swedish, filmmaker, 29)

Like Hedvig and Alma, Nader connected the discussion of trust to something that he related back to his upbringing. In this case, Nader's general skepticism towards things that he read or watched was directed back to a learned distrust that was produced from interactions with the people closest to him. The respondents dilemma of building thick trust transferred over to his management of general, thin trust with media organizations. Nader justified his distrust of news media by connecting it to the skeptical identity he has formed, again from past experiences. When asked about this distrust, Nader explained that he hoped it never changed: "I don't want to be naive. And it's not that I think that people are lying all the time. For me, it's a sane thing to always have."

Familiarity also reared its head when respondents spoke of how they determined trustworthiness and what tactics they used to avoid fake news. Some interviewees said that if they were to check if the info they were reading was fake or not, they depended on the familiarity of the outlet to determine if it should be awarded their trust. For Ivana, this depended on the recognizability of the source to determine its trustworthiness. Her first tactic in determining trustworthiness was to check the source. She says,

The easiest way is just to see what type of site it comes from, if you recognize it, if it's a reliable source or not that you recognize or have been familiar with.

(Ivana, Montenegrin-Swedish, journalist, 29)

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Ivana was critical and skeptical to outlets she had never heard of and had a generally higher degree of trust to the outlets that she recognized, outlets that were *familiar* to her. Coleman and Ross write that “while creating unprecedented opportunities for groups and individuals to produce and distribute their own counter-narratives and alternative forms of knowledge, the Internet has also given rise to new ways of describing, collating, and tagging the mass of online data from which “useful” information can be selected. Where there are only a few information sources to choose from, decisions about what to trust tend to rely upon institutional reputations” (Coleman & Ross, 2010: 99). This trust of reputations build on familiarity was vocalized by Ivana as mentioned above and by other interviewees mentioned below.

She later teased about the public's desire (including her own) of wanting current events “confirmed by the big media houses to believe it's true.” There was a certain dependence of these “gammelmedia” [old/legacy media] in being trustworthy. Like Ivana, when asked as to how they formed their trust with the mass media, many of the interviewees expressed that it was due to longevity, a trust built over time.

I think based on what they have done before, if they haven't broken the trust in very serious ways I guess, how long of a history they have and what kind of things they've done.

(Ivana, Montenegrin-Swedish, journalist, 29)

Well I trust Reuters, I trust AP. I'll tell you why. I think they are doing their best. They have their name. They are credible. They try to make less mistakes because that means that a lot of reputation that they have to create if they make a big mistake. AP, Reuters, that sort of thing. I rather

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trust those...They have their name out there for a long long time like for a century so why not? If they're really bad at what they're doing they're not going to stay this long right?

(Malee, Thai, journalist, 33)

I read the gammelmedia [old/legacy media], the established media. I mean Dagens Nyheter, Aftonbladet, Sydsvenskan. They've been around for a century, probably all of them...you know these names and you take them as trustworthy.

(Olof, Swedish, architect, 29)

As mentioned above, however, despite describing who they trusted and justifying why they trusted them, the interviewees actions spoke louder than their words. They always showed inconsistency and contradictions when describing their behavior. Richard for example read alt-right blogs that some of the other interviewees considered fake news (Nyheter Idag, Fria Tider) while also reading things that he found problematic and had little trust for as well (Metro, Dagens Nyheter, ETC). Ivana didn't trust Al Jazeera as much as SVT or SR for example but admitted that she still read and watched Al Jazeera's Balkans division for news from the region. While all the interviewees depended on some form of journalism to represent the world to them, all showed skepticism and suspicious in their method of triangulation when engaging with news media.

This seemed to be a tactic that the interviewees used when reducing the complexity in the modern news world. As Giddens, Luhmann and others have discussed, one of the biggest complexities with modern life is our referential attitude to it, our reflexivity to it. In the case of trust, scholars like Luhmann appropriated the emotion of trust to a reduction of complexity of the modern

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world. I would conclude however, that nowadays, audiences seemed to be dealing with the complexities of modernity by not trusting. Instead of Luhmann's reduction of complexity by trusting, *the interviewees seemed to be reducing the complexity of the modern information age with distrust*. By emphasizing the importance of reading different sources, the interviewees clearly exemplified that they held a default position of distrust.

When asked what they thought of having high trust in the media or of others who had high trust in the media, this is how some of the interviewees responded:

They will get hurt someday. I think so. They will have problems someday. If we have high trust in something and someday they lie about that topic that I care about, then that's the day that I get hurt.

(Arash, Iranian, mechanical engineer, 31)

Q: Do you think [news media] trust should go up?

A: I don't want it to go up. I don't want to be naive. And it's not that I think that people are lying all the time. I just think it's [skepticism] a sane thing to have.

(Nader, Iraqi-Swedish, filmmaker, 29)

For Nader, the distrust and suspicious was "a sane thing to always have." Malee, when asked what she thought of people who had high trust says,

I think they are really narrow-minded in that sense. They don't open up for other sources while you can get more from other sources, you know and they have a very strong belief in something. Basically, well, honestly they should not. They should be more open to everything. But how are you

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going to tell them?

(Malee, Thai, journalist, 33)

In the current media landscape the interviewees exemplified that they were careful to not be duped or deceived by “fake news” and used precautional techniques like triangulation to avoid deception and find “the full truth”. But in this era of information overload, how long will the audiences active engagement with news media and their desire to be self-informed citizens really last? Many of the interviewees expressed their exhaustion with trying to stay informed with the current affairs of the global world.

I think that that might be the problem with news, that you want to be...a part of you just wants to be cut off from it. You don't want to know about all the bad things that are happening. You rather live in a little bubble of just cute things.

(Hedvig, Swedish, receptionist, 29)

I feel like I miss out [when not consuming news]. But does it affect my life so much? Not really, if I don't go somewhere risky or lose any benefit, no. It actually kind of makes myself more peaceful than it was to follow it.

(Malee, Thai, journalist, 33)

I told you, I don't like news [laughs]. No I don't like it. I want to not listen to any news and just listen to music. Thats what I want.

(Arash, Iranian, mechanical engineer, 31)

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I try to get a broad spectrum of news. But there's a part of me that says I should not read the news at all.

(Richard, Swedish, social worker, 28)

These final quotes bring into question the decreasing symbolic power that news media has on the public sphere and on civic culture. The interviewees were constantly in a battle between consuming news to feel included in the public sphere while questioning what influence it really had on their well-being as persons, their actions as citizens, and their role in society.



## Chapter 5

# Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to understand how news media audiences were engaging with the term “fake news” and what they consider it to encompass within news media. The main objective was to understand how this interpretation was affecting the larger engagement with the news media genre. The audiences trust of news media and what relation it had to their news media consumption were also explored. Incorporating the transnational audience perspective to this research ensured to reveal the influence that consuming online news media would have on what they defined as fake news, how they watched, read, or listened to news, and who they trust in the contemporary new media environment. After interviewing 12 transnational individuals some clear patterns have emerged. The results will be presented in this chapter in relation to the research questions posed to conduct the study: How do transnational audiences make sense of fake news and how do they engage with it? How do these audiences engage or disengage with news they think could be fake? And in what ways does trust affect audience engagement or disengagement with news media?

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Judgements of Fake News - The Issues

The term “fake news” has proven to be an elusive one and has experienced many differing definitions and encompasses varying types of news media. In journalism alone, some of the definitions include fabricated stories like hoaxes, stories/quotes/images taken out of context, and satire or parody news stories. In their defining of fake news, the interviewees also exemplified the blurriness of the term and their uncertainty in trying to contain it as one specific thing. Responses like “It’s very complicated to me, actually, what fake news is” (Alejandro, 29 year-old journalist) vividly exemplify this ambiguousness and uncertainty. Nonetheless, with careful examination of the data collected from the interview process, it became evident that in their thoughtful attempts to define the term, the respondents utilized three modes of judgement: the factual, the political, and the ethical.

The factual judgement was used in an attempt to falsify any information contained within the news story. If anything could be proven to be false, then the story was labeled as fake news. Ivana for example when asked what she defines as fake news responds, “I mean it’s stuff, it’s stories that actually can be proved wrong. There is evidence that proves it’s wrong.” While a pragmatic and rational approach, the challenges this judgement poses however is that trust of news media remains vital. Without it, audiences would be required to do the job of the journalist themselves, making sure that each news story contained no factual errors. As the internet provides for the interaction with an increasing amount of news sources, the thought of verifying all bits of information from all sources beings to sound ludicrous and dizzying. The need to do so however is evident in the recent and drastic increase of the amount of fact-checking and hoax-busting organizations available on the web. Their very existence proves that their is audience demand for either verification or corroboration.

## 5. Conclusion

The political judgement of the term was looked at from a few sides: in this judgment the moniker “fake news” was viewed as a political strategy to deter audiences from engaging with certain news content, whether from politicians or mainstream media itself. There was the notion that “not all fake news was fake” (Malee, 31, journalist) and that the audiences were reflective in dismissing them too quickly. Some of the interviewees also expressed that politicians and politics is what they thought of when hearing the term fake news. A good example can be seen in Hedvig’s (29, receptionist) statement: “So fake news...everything Donald Trump tweets I consider fake news. As well as anything put up on this SD [Sverigedemokraterna] webpage.” This judgment unfortunately has the potential to create animosity and hostility between audiences and antagonism between people based on what news sources they choose to engage with.

The ethical judgement which led to the label of “fake news” to be used came from the interviewees who felt that the media was failing in their responsibility to be hospitable and fair. Throughout most of the interviews, the topic of bias came up in definitions of fake news. Many interviewees viewed the news as failing to be responsible and ethical in their treatment of news stories and subjects. Silverstone highlights the audience’s demand and media’s responsibility to be hospitable in his book *Media and Morality*. (Silverstone, 2007). Bias in the news media was an ethical issue that the interviewees brought up and expressed that there was a threshold of balance and factuality that needed to be reached in order for the news story to be marked as true. Bias was viewed as an unethical obstruction of truth, prompting most of the interviewees to use the label of “fake news”.

The transnationalism in some of the individuals interviewed for this study exhibited heightened sensitivity to how current affairs and world events were being represented and also induced the use of the term “fake news”. The transnational audience, as described by Vertovec (1999,2009) and Athique

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(2016) is one affected by the reconstruction of place and locality characterized by which “a high degree of human mobility, telecommunications, films, video, and satellite TV, and the Internet have contributed to the creation of trans-local understandings” (Vertovec, 2009:12).

In these trans-local understandings of the world, representations – or misrepresentations as the interviewees more so described – came up as a reason to define a news story as fake news. Often times, the representations shown in news media were thought of from the perspective of the individuals interviewees as incomplete and inadequate thus not providing “the whole truth” (Arash, 31 year-old, mechanical engineer). When the news media didn’t offer the interviewees “the full picture” (Alejandro, 29, journalist), thus not allowing the whole truth to be shown, the use of the label “fake news” ensued once again. The problem with dismissing these partial realities and demanding “whole” or “full” realities or truths is that single news media stories simply cannot supply this. It simply cannot be a fulfillment to every single individuals personal realities.

Within all of these three judgements there was a strong reliance the interviewees had on their own subjectivities when using the term “fake news”. The interviewees expressed that there were times when they could not make up there minds about an event or issue with the information provided by news media, revealing a high sense of uncertainty. To counter this uncertainty, they would use their subjective judgements to contemplate the veracity and robustness of the news text in an attempt to make an informed opinion.

When they were not sure of the news stories veracity, for example, they depended on their own personal, subjective judgments to determine if the story was “highly unlikely” to be true (Ivana, 29 year-old, journalist). Other interviewees for example say they depended on their “gut” (Astrid, 31 year-old, design student) to guide them in the news media landscape and did not question

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the veracity of stories that “sound reasonable” (Richard, 28 year-old, social worker). All of these strategies in defining fake news or making sure that one did not engage with it were dependent on the audience’s subjective determination. Corners discusses this as both an engagement and involvement. He writes that in these instances what is seen, read, or heard is placed “within an existing schema of knowledge and feeling” and writes that there will be wide variations in the scale and nature of this type of processing (Corner, 2011: 91). This type of engagement with media texts reinforces the likelihood of resorting to a confirmation bias when deciphering its veracity.

### **5.2 A Default Distrust - Cause for Worry?**

In an attempt to find what some of the interviewees explicitly labelled as the whole truth, all of the respondents utilized a method of source triangulation. It is not that they distrusted every source they were reading, but they distrusted that any source was giving them the full scope or full account of the current affair of which they were interested in. To cope with this, the interviewees expressed that they were looking at multiple different sources about the same story. Other times, they used triangulation to confirm the truth claims they had read, seen, or listened to in the news media. None of the interviewees depended on only one news source to provide them with such information. All of them wanted to see how each source portrayed a certain event in order to make the final judgement themselves or to confirm in numbers that what they were reading was corroborated by many different and potentially opposing sources. There was even an occasion when one of the interviewees stated that he even read a source that he did not particularly trust in order to judge the representation provided there along with the others’ he was consuming. A possible issue which should be brought up with this technique is what psychologists call “the illusory truth effect” (Arkes et al. 1989; Fazio et al., 2015).

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The illusory truth effect shows the tendency to believe things that are repeated. This poses a problem for one main reason. In this era of misinformation, where anyone can write anything online, creating the appearance of diversity of sources is easy and affordable to do. If audiences are only looking for multiplicity of sources, then there is a high chance that they will be led to make certain beliefs solely based on multiple exposures to the same content without engaging with it critically.

Depending on the longstanding, reputable sources for news and information about current affairs, especially those who are lawfully responsible for what they publish, becomes naturally the best method in avoiding fake stories and fake facts. While this seems like a good strategy to use, it puts traditional outlets at an incredibly higher power position in providing us with information and portraying current affairs happening both locally and globally. As some of the interviewees expressed, a lot of stories about the happenings of the world will not be found there.

With the exponential growth of the world wide web and the production of information from all corners of the world, our experiences of the global world becomes ever more complex. To deal with and reduce this complexity people formulate different methods to make daily life bearable. Niklas Luhmann (1979) argued that inaction in certain situations reduces potential risks? and if we take here for instance audiences choosing to disengage or distrust news media in order to avoid the risk of being deceived or misinformed, this inaction does make sense. But Anthony (Giddens, 1990) argues against Luhmann's notion that "if you refrain from action you run no risk" (Luhmann, 1979: 100). In agreement with Giddens, the point to raise here instead is inaction is a risk as well.

If audiences choose to start distrusting news media and journalists or choose to disengage completely from news media, the function of news as a form of public

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knowledge evaporates. This leaves us with the risk of solving this problem or potentially being wildly uninformed. As displayed within the interviews, the general trust for journalism and journalists to provide the truth seems to be questioned with reference to many different outlets. If this thin trust for journalism continues to fade, the idea of news as a civic good can no longer be assumed, and complications to be informed and engaged citizens arise. As Dahlgren (2009) highlighted in his circuit of civic cultures, knowledge and trust are two very necessary components to producing active, engaged, and informed citizens.

The audiences tendency of default distrust in their engagement with information provided by news media in the changing media landscape is a telling sign for latent future problems in civic life and democracy. If audiences are believing content that is not true, or not trusting in news media content that is true, then “fake news” undoubtedly complicates knowledge acquisitions and has the potential to perturb civic society. Democracy and civil society depend wholly on informed citizens and a strong citizenry depends on well functioning information sources. Without the latter, the former will have difficulties in surviving. If news media is to act as a resource for informed citizenship, then “fake news” becomes a barrier. This is a great time for news media organizations to reflect on their own power and responsibility in our society to be balanced and truthful, otherwise an informed citizenship cannot be sustained and the future of civic culture becomes defective. News media is a big resource for democracy and audiences must trust it to function so.

As exemplified by the interviewees, the problem of fake news is not single-faced but is complex and multi-faceted. I hope I have adequately described with this thesis the usefulness of understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of the audience. I hope my thesis has contributed to an understanding of the many ways in which news media research can be approached, especially in relation to

## 5. Conclusion

the transnational audience member.

Further research with news audiences and deeper inquiries into what audiences consider real and fake and how they use trust to guide them in the new news media environment could prove beneficial for journalism studies, media studies, and social studies more generally. Understanding the current pitfalls of our information economy from the experience and perspective of individual audience members can highlight crucial steps necessary in creating a democratic society where citizens can engage and make informed decisions. For further audience research, it could be beneficial to have a broader age-range, socio-economic status, and geographical spread of participants in order to see if these characteristics played any major role in the findings.



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# Appendix A

## List of Interviewees

Richard, Swedish, social worker, 28 years-old. Interview on 23 March 2017.

Ivana, Montenegrin-Swedish, journalist, 29 years-old. Interview on 23 March 2017.

Astrid, Swedish, student, 31 years-old. Interview on 24 March 2017.

Svend, Danish, client manager, 29 years-old. Interview on 26 March 2017.

Alma, Colombian, industrial designer, 31 years-old. Interview on 26 March 2017.

Hedvig, Swedish, receptionist, 29 years-old. Interview on 27 March 2017.

Arash, Iranian, mechanical engineer, 31 years-old. Interview on 28 March 2017.

Malee, Thai, journalist, 33 years-old. Interview on 29 March 2017.

Nader, Iraqi-Swedish, filmmaker, 29 years-old. Interview on 30 March 2017.

Olof, Swedish, architect, 29 years-old. Interview on 31 March 2017.

Alejandro, Argentinian-Swedish, journalist, 29 years-old. Interview on 31 March 2017.

Luis, Colombian, financial controller, 31 years-old. Interview on 2 April 2017.

# Appendix B

## Interview Guide

### NEWS HABITS

Can you tell me a little about your news habits?

What sources do you use to follow the news?

For what reasons do you follow the news?

What do you like about following the news? Anything you dislike?

### SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

2. When you read the news, do you talk about the stuff you read with your peers?

Can you give me some examples

-Are you active on different digital platforms (social media, forums, blogs, etc)?

Commenting or discussing...

-Do you share the news you read in real life or digitally?

FAKE VS. REAL Have you heard the term fake news? Where did you hear the term 'fake news'?

What do you consider is fake news?

What is the difference between fake and real news?

-Can you give some examples?

What kinds of ways do you check for the truth when reading the news?

## B. Interview Guide

TRUST AND KNOWLEDGE How do you feel about the knowledge that you gain from following the news ?

-How do you feel about the information that is provided by mainstream news media versus alternative sources?

4. Are there certain sources or people you trust for information?

-How did you come to trusting them?

-Are there certain sources you do not trust?

Why?

-How do you decide if the information provided by a source is reliable or not?

-Is there something that the news does not provide you with that you wish it did?

## FAKE NEWS AND OTHERS

6. What do you think it is the source of fake news?

-What do you think causes fake news to spread?

-What do you think of other people who share fake news with you?

-How do you feel about politicians using the term fake news?

-Do you think the problem can be solved? How?

Is there anything else you wish to add?

## Appendix C

# Transcript Samples

March 27, 2017 Swedish, 29 year-old, female, receptionist

What are your news habits?

I check like Aftonbladet, stuff like that. I have an app, Omni, which gives me like the updates when its really happening real-time and then we have newspapers at work since I'm in the reception area they want us to be updated in the local area if they've said anything about us so its Göteborgs Posten and GT I think we have. Then of course its like through social medias, Twitter and Facebook. Instagram doesn't have that news thing going on quite yet but Twitter...at the time Im in like a news low because of Trump because I can't even with him...its like 'what?'...everything he says its like I cant tell if it's real or not. So at this time, its like these. I try to get it from the main sources. I know that Omni, they get it from like Sveriges Radio or TT or something like that. And since I have a huge crush on England, I always check like BBC and I follow a lot of people who are politically interested but based in London mainly.

Any other international sources?

No I don't think so...I do have television but I always like stream things so I barely like use them. I think I might have like CNN or something on there but I don't look at it so, nehhhh.

So you don't really watch the news?

No no. Its like this typical of my generation that it has to be instant almost so I rarely have the whats its called...I don't take the time to just sit down and watch the news because I want to read it because then I can tell by myself 'what do I want out of this' so I rarely ever look at news, filmed news. I rather just read it. I look at clips but they have to be like maximum of 1.5 minute because then my attention span is up [laughs].

For what reasons would you say that you follow the news?

I mean the standard is to say that I want to be updated but then its like why do I want to be updated [laughs] and but I think it might be the bottom is that you don't want to be the last to know about something. I tend to follow them to be...that must be why I have this omni app because I get like notifications if something happens and then I can be the first to tell people. Im not sure what that really is of use in my life but for some weird reason I like to know when something happens. And because of the general...its much like people are going crazy, like terrorists and stuff like that in areas where you might be, or someone I know might be. So I want to keep updated if there is any risk that could involve someone that I know. Just to be on the safe side. But I think the main reason is to keep up and to not be left out of the conversation. And if its something that interests me, of course I will try to find more info about it but mainly its just like this has happened, and then its like fine lets move on.

Is there anything else you like about following the news?

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I think Im just brought up in like ‘you should read the newspapers’ ‘you should keep up’ because there are very rarely news that are positive that get out there which means that most of the things that get to me are bad things that have happened. So i think its from the general upbringing. Both from my parents who are both educated as well as my grandparents. They always had the newspapers at home and before. . .since I lived before the internet [laughs] I knew if you wanted news from other countries you had to go to like the library and read papers from there or find it from somewhere else. . .text TV [laughs] I remember that I used to check them before internet. I checked a lot of text TV. And of course I do get a lot of news and since I studies art history I like news regarding cultural events and stuff like that and those aren’t negative [laughs] but thats like my personal interest. Its like people who like sports keep up with that. So its just sad things and culture.

Is there anything you dislike about following news?

Well sometimes it can be just too much. I think thats why I’m in a low period right now because otherwise I might be even more read-up on whats happening in America right now. Since they voted for Trump I started to feel like, ‘what the heck are you doing?’ ‘why?’ And then its feels like it just shifts from one day to another. I think Ive just started to like yeah, Im gunna check in on this like travel ban in a month or something and see if they have really started that and who was affected. I think thats a big reason as why I dont. . . its such an impact on everything that Trump is in power right now and I still cant wrap my head around that a country that has Obama on for 8 years is now like ‘yeah, we’ll do this one now. it will probably not turn out weird!’ Jesus. [laughs]

Do you talk about the stuff that you read with your peers?

I try to. The person that I spend the most time with is my colleague, she’s 64 and I dont think were into the same kind of news because of course I find news regarding LGBTQI questions or like ethnicity or race because those are things that are really close to me heart. But she’s not like into them as much. Then of course if something happens like the thing that just happened in London. Those things we might say like ‘that happened’ and she’s like ‘ohhhh, its so bad. the world is going crazy’. And then its not much more about that. So I dont think I really talk much news with the ones that I talk to if its not like in general terms. Because when I talk to friends or like parents, we mainly have something in particular we have to discuss. We do talk more about news when its an election. We talk about like what the different parties stand for. Its not much to talk about when. . . of course its terrible when things happen around the world but, there is only so much to say about a crazy person like bombing something or killing someone. Its not much to really talk about. Its more like ‘yeah, that happened’.

How about digitally? Do you share on forums blogs, commenting. . .

I used to. I was a lot before but. . .I think like Twitter is the easiest one to share or retweet and like things. Then on Facebook, theres so many fake news, then I try not to. If theres something there that I want to share or like or something like that, I really check that out before I take a stand. Sometimes, well the discussion, even if the the news is fake or the quote is from the wrong person, the essence of the discussion can still be something to discuss. The problem is that my Facebook is very much of people that are like me so its very rare that I see things that I feel I need to discuss. We’re quite like the same crowd on there. Now since Facebook updated there thing that you cant see in chronological order and you see it depending on how much you like what someone else has put up, thats. . .I don’t see the ones that might put something up that Id like to discuss. I don’t really have the energy to take discussion then and there. Facebook is a place where you can but it rarely happens. Twitter isn’t a place where you can discuss but you can share what you think and people might get upset but they cant do really much about it. But I think its a huge, like social networking, its really, its so much everyday life, and of course there is a lot of news there as well. I think I might follow some news on there but as of now, I think its like Buzzfeed news or something like that [laughs]. With Facebook I try to keep out of it as much as possible. Im not super big fan of Facebook. I like more instagram. There are not as much politics on there, at least what Im following.

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Do you actively try to keep the news out of those places?

I think so. I think I might be doing that without really noticing it myself. Since I don't follow any accounts that I can think of that give me news or information. I think that since I have this app that gives me the news straight away, I don't feel that I have to do something else to keep me updated. That's enough. And they're really good actually. They only give like push notification when it's something really big happening, like the events in London. I think that's good because then I can by myself choose when to see it. And then on FB since I'm not really into FB, I think I just keep it to the people that I need to have on there and just keep updated on their lives rather than general life.

Where did you hear the term fake news?

I think it was... I mean we've always been... since studying communication and stuff like that you always have this *thiskällkritik*. You always have to be very critical of what you read and what you see. So I always have this like cynical, skeptical approach to basically everything I read [laughs]. And then I saw that people started posting... sometimes it was people sharing things and others were like 'you know that's not real news, right?' And then I could only see in the comments that it wasn't real news. But then it started popping up, I think it's like when they have this like red stamp on where it says like 'fake' or something like that and I'm not sure if that's just a certain page or if it's people doing that themselves. But I think that I've just learnt that if you read something that doesn't seem credible, it probably isn't real. In the beginning I try to... I think it was when SD started popping up and people started sharing from like Nya Tider or like Fria Tider, their own news webpage and I think that's when I started to actually get involved in telling people that those news are not real news. Those are really... well if they're news they're almost always portrayed by someone who is a Nazi or a fascist at best. I haven't seen it a lot lately. It feels that people have learnt that not everything is real so you have to check it before. And I think that people who shared things that weren't real got embarrassed that they hadn't themselves known that those weren't real. So I think people got more careful about what they share as of news articles and stuff like that. I have such a bad time perspective but I want to say it was like 2-3 years ago, that's when I started really noticing it because that was when SD got into government.

What do you consider as being fake news?

Well apart from like the obvious articles that just aren't, where you can see it's photoshopped or stuff like that, because those do exist. I also consider news from sites or papers that aren't like *politisk obunden*. On the other hand I like blindly almost, well not anymore but I did before, like *Aftonbladet*, I always sided with them. On the other hand they are a socialist paper from the ground. So fake news... everything Donald Trump tweets I consider fake news. As well as anything put up on this SD webpage. So even if the article might be real and the photos and everything, the story is real, it's still when it's too *vinklad*, then it's not real news if you haven't at least tried to be a bit objective in what you're writing, like 'All Muslims are bad people and Islam is a dangerous thing'. That is fake news because it's not true.

What is the difference between fake news and real news?

I just thought about that. Where does the line go? What does make the difference? But I think it is that the author or the journalist tries to be objective and tries to give facts rather than their own opinions. I mean I would never think of a debate article as fake, because you can debate anything because it's your own personal opinion and that's why you're writing a debate article. But when it comes to news, it has to be factual. You can't start being too biased. I think that's the main... news is facts and information and not opinion and thoughts, because that's a different kind of journalism almost. And then when it's election and political articles and stuff like that then you always know it's going to be opinionated unless it's polls that show how Sweden should have voted right now if it was election day. When it comes to everything else, and its opinions. I mean a review can never be false really, I mean unless it's like total nonsense, but otherwise as long as it's an opinion it has to be real. But news can be fake if they're not factual enough. If they don't leave you with any kind of information that isn't biased to anyone, then it's

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too biased. I'm not sure what I said now. So I think its like weather can be news because they're facts. . . they can also be lies, dammit! [laughs]. Yeah I think thats what I at least distinguish as news, they have to be informative and they have to be facts. Since I have all these academic studies, you learn so fast which words are. . . what they mean. . . depending on which words you use like they're positive or negative but someone who may not have learned that, how would they know? And then its like this subconscious way to say things are good or things are bad. Also if someone uses those kinds of words in a news article its like a red flag immediately. I start to think like 'woahhhh. what are you writing here? why are you putting it like that?' And that must be super hard if you're a journalist as well to like. . . you have learnt all these words but you cant use them so sometimes I can see that the journalist is trying to be a bit more educated or a bit more posh. It might just be bad for the whole article. In Swedish its called värdeladdade ord and you should use them in facts or information. And then when those pop up its like 'hmmm. I don't like how they use that word.' And it could be both positive and negative but I don't like it when they put that in the news. I want it to be short and precise. Just an easy read. . . mainly because I want everyone to have the ability to take part in the news. And I think thats why we still have paper issues of papers because I sometimes think about them. . . they must have dropped so much in sales after internet and webpages, but I still think that they have a useful purpose in our community. I still really like them. And Im one of those people like likes to have things, like books and stuff like that. I don't want to read it on the tablet. I want to have it at home.

Do you see a lot of the sources you read using these loaded words you mention?

I think that. . . which is actually kind of interesting because sometimes I think of that kind of writing is almost like very easy-going. Its someone who is trying very much and not really getting there. So I always kind of think they are apart of GT, GT Expressen, and I dont think highly of them at all. I think they're crap but on the other hand Göteborgs Posten uses like similar ways of putting things. I think that the problem there with the wording is that they're trying to fill in a certain different columns and stuff like that. Like 'dammit. I have to put something else in there. It doesn't look good'. But a webpage or when I get these push notices its so small. The smaller the better. Then they don't have to think as much about what words to use. They just use the easiest words. But then its also, I am very biased to Aftonbladet since I know where they come from and since Im myself on the red side of politics. But I also know that they're crap. It like Blaska. Its like a crappy magazine. Im not really sure where it comes from though. GP is seen as a fancier magazine and I have no idea why because they're printed as often. But its more of a prestige to have GP then expression or aftonbladet, they're tabloids. And in the general eye, they're just not as appreciated, they're not as trustworthy as GP or DN or something like that. And Ive tried to. . . Ive had subscriptions of both DN and GP because I have this thought that I might be a bit more posh almost [laughs] and then I realize that its the same crap, its just fancier words so I decided that I don't like them either. Thats when I turned to omni and TT and stuff like that.

Would you say that you trust them more than the others?

I actually I think of when it comes to those two, Omni and TT, they are at the top. Its like I trust everything almost. Because when this incident happened in Oslo and the summer camp, they first said that they thought it was some kind of like islamist terrorist, and then it turned out to be Anders Breivik.

Who said it?

I think it was at that time Aftonbladet. At that time, I didn't have a smart phone or have those kinds of apps and it was quite a few years ago. I remember I was at work and I saw this on Aftonbladet and I had a panic attack because my sister was there by then. And I think that is why I am so obsessed with having these notifications because of that event that happened. And thats why I really want to know these kinds of things. After they put up. . . theyre like so. . . they were really eager to be first with the news that they almost didn't take into account what they were publishing. I think that they learned from that, partly not to publish who it



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might be if they have no idea who it might be but also when it comes to like facts of casualties or stuff like that. They dont put too many, rather they put too few and go up rather than go down in casualties and people who are hurt and stuff like that. But when it comes to TT, I believe them almost blindly. And I know that Omni gets a lot of news from them. So if I see something from TT published in the newspaper, well not online because someone can always alter that information, but if I were to go to TT's hemsida and see it then, then Id believe it. They're like my absolutely most trusted sites of sources of information.

Can you tell me how you came to trusting them?

I also think that it was a part of the upbringing. I think about TT is that when I went to gymnasiet they were media towards radio and not even when I studied that, radio was really a thing. I think its from there that we learned that TT is like the god of news because we learned journalism and stuff. Ive never seen them be wrong. I mean Ive seen aftonbladet doing these terrible mistakes and Ive seen other major newspapers and such do these. And I remember, it was like Dagens Nyheter that did something about this whole 'hen' debate and I got so pissed off and I decided to never read them again [laughs]. Cause I don't see why a paper should make a stand in that. So of course its like when they do stuff like that that also affects you. I think with TT, Ive learned to trust them, jesus christ its like 16 years ago, and as of this day I cant say that Ive ever been failed by them. I can see it in the other articles I read when they are the sources, so even though I might not believe everything int he article, I know that the basic facts are correct and that the actual happening has happened [laughs] Theres always, of course they aren't perfect, but its also. . . I mean its just a fact with news, not even if I would see an actual event happening right before my eyes, I can't be 100

Is there anybody on the opposite of your trust? Anybody you absolutely do not trust?

Well I dont trust like smaller, independent, or actually quite dependent websites which are like SD. Im not sure if its Nya Tider or Fria Tider. I mean getting news from there its like well you could have just gotten news from Mein Kampf then. It isn't news. And then if you take like Aftonbladet or Expressen, Im gunna say its like 50

What kinds of ways do you check for the truth?

I do google but then I also go through the first two or three pages of hits just to see how or where this information comes up, especially when its comes to Facebook because its so many people just fabricating lies and cutting things that are essential for an article and then republishing it, just being very. . . partly googling it but also checking the address to the page really closely. . . seeing if. . . its so easy to do a website that has such a similar name to the real one and then its not the real one. And I think thats also the mentality of this age when its so much spam and viruses and everything. So I think that people in general are more. . . they question more to click a link because you never know whats going to pop up there. But its been quite a while of me googling whether or not something is true. I think that the general public is getting better at not sharing things that obviously aren't real. Or if they do, they almost always put something in there. I was thinking bout this interview yesterday and I was like maybe I should think a bit of what Im thinking of this [laughs] I think I did an interview sometime and they were like 'what do you think of this, what do you think of that?' and I was like 'dammit I should have thought of this beforehand'. But I think its like starting to more, just thinking about fake news and does it have a use. If there is something obviously fake somewhere, could it still be of use and I realized that sometimes when people share fake news, that the discussion about it is still real. That is still of something of use. As long as everyone is aware that this isn't an actual news, then it can actually be of some use to people. But I don't have those people anymore in my feed so I don't know.

Did you used to have them?

Yeah, I did. It was like when you went to school and you didnt. . . It wasn't like academic studies so it was more like gymnasiet or högstadiet and stuff like that and you couldn't really choose the ones. you just had to have people on facebook. but then I realized that my facebook account isn't a place just to keep people just because of it, so Ive started to. . . well the ones that

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Ive realized that I don't even want to say happy birthday to on their birthday, then we probably aren't even friends so uhh, goodbye. And that is also people that of course can be of thinking like me or having a political stance like I do, were just not friends anymore. I just try to sort these people out and I mean its quite some time that I graduated from gymnast now so the ones still are on there are people that I actually talk to. So the reasons why they're not there anymore is just that we are not friends anymore because we are so different. But I can see, I have a friend who is a truck driver and he's really red in his political opinions. He's really read into current events and he's really fun to discuss with. He has a lot of colleagues who are more of the typical truck driver than he is. And I can see that he has these discussions with people and I remember having them but it was quite a while ago. People got really angry when you talked against them and they deleted you from their Facebook and then you couldn't continue the discussion. Because I know that I usually... the main thing that I discussed with people was like how to bring up kids according to gender or like this whole genus discussion that boys only play with cars and boys only play with dolls. That may have actually been the last Ive discussed with someone that actually turned into a discussion. But then again, the written word is so hard to communicate with. It isn't nuanced as body language or talking directly to someone. So it was hard and some people got really upset about things that I wrote that weren't meant to be read the way they heard them I suppose. It was a bit dangerous that way but it is quite a while ago. If I see those kinds of discussion, Im not always keen to go into them either. It doesn't always turn out right. It just always goes to shit.

You mentioned earlier that you googled when you were looking for information you saw on the news. Can you tell me more about that?

I think the first was to see the sources, like where the quotes came from, where the articles came from and just to see because if the first hits is something like Fria Tider then its not... im not gunna believe in it. But if I find an article or a topic discussed on SR or like... well actually it has to be from like BBC, SR. I forgot to mention that before. SR is a good way to get news as well. And like TT or omni. Otherwise if they're from Aftonbladet or Expressen and things like that, Im not really... well its a true news [laughs] but its not trustworthy as a news article. I think when it comes to these Aftonbladet and Expressen, since your so keen on getting news out there you dont see the quality which is the difference, at least what I feel with TT or SR for example. I think that the quantity is the main thing there. They have to have a lot of news, have a lot of articles. But the other ones are more prone to keep to the truth and shorter articles and actual facts.

I recently saw this article about a guy who made up some fake news to see if the newspapers would pick it up. Made up a story about pulling out a bunch of cash from the ATM.

Ahh yeah! Yeah.

What do you think of the whole thing?

Well actually now that you say it, I remember reading it and I remember thinking not that it was a fake news but I thought that... 'how could he do that?' I like to see my brain in small portions and I remember registering it and having a very quick thought about it and then it just disappears. Even if I... I must have taken it in as real news because I remember it as real but on the other hand its a no-news, its not of an importance to me. But I know I read about it at least at Aftonbladet. Because I must have read it on Aftonbladet to believe in it because I havent seen anything about it being fake. On the other hand, because Aftonbladets one of those sites when I go to work I scroll through when I have the first cup of coffee [laughs] and then I dont... Ive done the news deed for the day. So I remember reading about it but Im not sure if I read the article or if I just read the little headline.

Is this the first time you're hearing that its not real?

I cant remember anything... since Aftonbladet is my main source at work on the computer, while omni is more this... omni I check before I go to bed see if somethings happened during the day or these notices, but then it has to be something big that has happened and I dont get these everyday. So in the morning when I check Aftonbladet, they must have just taken it

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down or something because if they would've put it up and said it was fake then I would have registered that as fake. Because I only remember... yeah it was something about like the cash machines in Malmö being broken and he took out like 800,000 or something. But I remember thinking 'why would an ATM have that much money in it? How many times would he have to do that?' My brain always fires away in these not-thinking-about-the-actual-thing-that-happened but starting to think about all these other little things. And its not like 'oh damn you Swedbank you da-da-da technical error!' its always like 'how much time must this have taken? This must have taken so much time to take out 800,000 because whats the greatest amount?' It starts those questions and thats why I know that Ive read it. Because I remember these little details. But I never saw anything about it being fake. I know that when papers print something mistakenly, they always have a 'were sorry section' which is like this big [shows one cm with fingers] in the beginning of the papers the next day. And Ive never seen that on webpages. I never seen them saying sorry we were wrong.

How do you feel about that?

Well I think that Ive personally developed a method for stuff like that when Im wrong—because I have a tendency to get stuff wrong—in general I believe in what people say to me. I just shrug it off and Im like okay well that wasn't real and well life goes on. What I think of is if Aftonbladet were feeling stupid for posting it, since I haven't seen... I mean news from those pages, they just disappear like that [snaps fingers]. Its there from one minute to the other so I just thought that maybe... when things like that disappear its more of a question of 'oh well it wasn't that important anymore'. I think that I posted something on Facebook sometime that wasn't a real news. And people were like 'oh you know thats not real right?' and I felt really stupid for posting it and after that I think I was really hesitant to what to post on Facebook because you don't want to look stupid because thats almost one of the mortal sins in this country but I don't feel like Ive been fooled or tricked by Aftonbladet or anything like that, its just that, I don't know. I don't really know how to think. Because since it wasn't a fact or news that wasn't of essence to me, then I don't really see the use of it. But on the other hand if I were to be sitting in our lunch room and talking about it I would've felt really stupid. Tomorrow I would've gone in to work like 'hey, you know that thing I told you about that guy. Well it wasn't true.' I still like the fact that he did it. I don't know it was a documentary or if it was just a clip on youtube. It was similar to this but I don't think it was in Sweden. It was also this he tried to get papers to publish his stories and he got like massive response and everyone wanted to write his story. So the question is rather, like, how should the news publishers, how much do they actually check on things that happen or not happen. But I never saw anything about it on TT or Omni. It was on Aftonbladet. And theres the quantity and not the quality.

How do you feel about the action of these people testing the news?

Well I am a supporter of the arts [laughs] so I kind of like... its a bit similar to a swedish artists who portrayed being really mentally ill, being admitted to the psych ward in stockholm and she did that as an art project. The discussion about it was huge because that was her end project for the entire studies. I think I kind of like that. I like to see how people can try and use things that arent real and actually get like news out of it. I understand that he didn't do it as an art project but its also... it is a really big question. Like how do news publishers actually look into what's real and whats not. Did they just phone him up and were like, 'okay. we heard this' and 'is it true?' and he was like 'yup!' and that's it? Thats all they check? Im actually more on the positive side that they actually publish things like that because it shows how much of an importance it is that the news are fast and there rather than true. So I kind of like it because that makes, hopefully makes, the publishers think of what they are publishing. And it might actually, sometime or at least if it happens enough times, it might actually trigger them to take into account that what someone is reporting might not be the real deal. I mean in this particular case I think that no one was really hurt and its like okay that happened or it didn't happen. I think its a good example as well because its not like someone died or someone got

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really hurt or a bomb or anything. So its a good example because it... well in my eyes it did draw a lot of attention but it fell out of my attention span almost as quickly as it entered. I kin of like it. I like this kind of questioning of news. Because news is almost, or at least by so many, seen as an absolute truth which it isn't. On the other hand, if the papers dont say that this was wrong, this didn't happen, then we'd never know. Because if you need to do extra research to find out if something is real or not, then how much of it is real, how much of it isn't? People should always regard everyday on Swedish media webpages as first of April because they try to post something silly there. I never find it because they're like 'oh we've hidden a joke!' and its like 'but everything here could be a joke!' and then when they tell me what it is, its like 'how should one know?' I think for a couple of years ago it was like 'ABBA is reuniting!' [excited tone] and I was like 'okay thats cool.' [neutral tone] And then the day after it was like "haha! April April!" and its like "thats not even funny!" So if everyone was to read the papers like it was the first of April everyday, we'd actually get some kind of reflection as to whether the news are real or not. And sometimes you just don't even have to reflect on if its real or not because it doesn't... its not of any use.

Would you say that there is any news that you actually do use to make decisions in your life?

I think the only news that I use is like foreign politics. Like I went to Turkey twice this fall and I think it was like 2 or 3 weeks after I came home the second time that the events in Turkey really got even worse than it was before, so I wouldn't go there again because it would be risky. And I use that. Me and my whole family is going abroad when I turn 30. So we planned a trip and I have always been very very... Ive always liked the U.S. and Ive always wanted to go to New York and I went there two years ago I think it was but as of the new travel bans, or not bans, or things that get though or not, in fact I don't want to go to the States. Just for like solidarity reasons. And also because of the fact that my sister has now been to like Russian and North Korea and Im not sure if she can even get in on her passport anymore [laughs]. So I use it more of a question of where to travel. Its one of my main things to do in life. I love traveling. But on the other hand, I mean I just booked a trip to London. Im not afraid of going there because its more of a one off than the fact that Trump is the president and Turkey is stupid. I know theres a lot of people that are like 'oh I should sell my stocks' because Trump is in power and I was like 'What? Why?' I cant keep up with economics. I don't understand it. But apart from that, its only really for foreign politics just because I love to travel. And the arts and the cultural news as well. I try to keep up on Kobra and like still in the game. Im not that good at it but Im trying to. But not other than that. Not many news... its like how do you use it in everyday life? How should I use a bombing of a refugee camp in Syria, other than feeling sorry, and then I feel bad for feeling sorry, and then I should give money? Its like, its a weird mentality. I want to know it but its also very hard knowing about it and feeling like the only thing that I can do is giving them my money and hope that it reaches them. On the other hand, like politics in Sweden... I mean work very hard with like West Pride and stuff like that and also with integration and always... like my colleague that I spend most of my time with, she's a bit främlingsfientlig. Its such a hard time working with someone who is like that and at the same time, its not racist, but its like borderline racism. So, I do try to discuss that in more of a general idea than maybe trying to connect it to some kind of news event and it always feels like its in the news, either the hostility or this with the transponders in America. Those affect me on a private level. I think that was something that didn't come up on my Facebook feed, about the bathrooms. But people were like of course very positive to the idea of choosing your own bathroom. Thats also like international news. Im probably gunna think of a lot of more things later, but just keeping up with politics to see if something is going to affect me directly.

What do you think is the source of fake news?

Yea from the top of my head I want to say that its very connected to the politics in Sweden, the SD and the fact that people wanted to have the news that actually condoned the things that they were doing. And I think that thats why even this paper that they have started and

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I think that people that... its so dangerous to call oneself a racist or a nazi, of course because its crap. And then these papers came and they can share things from it and all of a sudden it was like 'this is exactly what i mean. this is exactly how Im thinking' and I think that that was created as a way to... because I dont see it as real news but its served a purpose to those who wanted to show their support. Like yeah the immigrants are coming and they're all our jobs and our sociala bidrag. Its like "how, how, how?" And I think people needed those fake news to kind of... saying that its okay to think like that and its okay to feel like that because its a fact. And then its like, but it isn't a fact. You found this on a news site that isn't right. I wanna say it started as a way of like giving the people what they wanted so that they can feel like what they feel is validated by something bigger than themselves. But it turned out to be crap anyway. I almost never see anyone sharing things from that site because they were branded as racist, as they are. Of course its also this like trolling, just to see if people would believe, what they would believe. The kind of fake news that I encounter most isn't fake in that sense of like trolling. Its more fake in the sense of like statistics and facts. Now if I see anything thats branded fake, its mainly some kind of facebook post which has been screen shotted and then people have altered the comments and stuff like that and then it isn't real. Im not really sure what they're about because I dont really take the time to read it. I suppose the purpose that it serves is that it kind of tries to get some kind of medhâl (agreement) getting people to join in in these news that dont seem as radical as they actually are. A bit of like propaganda I think. Otherwise I cant really see the use of fake news. This guy that took out a lot of money, I can see the use of that as a questioning of how we post news. And I can see the purpose of political news that aren't real. But I cant see how fake news about deaths or something like that would be useful if they arent true. Because news about deaths, I mean if you were to check death tolls in war zones, or in Africa, or in the middle east then it would be real but we wouldn't believe in it, that they would still be real news. But otherwise I cant really see the purpose of this big 'the boy who cried wolf.' I think its come to that, now that we started to not believe in things that actually are real. Because were so used to being fooled by now with all spam mails and stuff like that. At least I want to think that were better in checking out sources and seeing, trying to find out if things are real or not before we actually believe in it.

Where would you put yourself on a spectrum of trust or suspicion?

Well I would've wanted to, before we started this, say that Im pretty skeptical to anything but since I've realized that I actually believe the news about this guy with the ATM, I am pretty trusting. The hard thing there is like that it wasn't news that was important for me to actually... well it was good now because now I can reflect on it, but it wouldn't be of any use for me in my everyday life. So even though I trusted that article... I think Im pretty trusting in general. I mean I believe what people tell me. But if it was to be something that was of importance to me, if it was something about the toilets in the U.S. for example and if I was so sees something about that then I would probably check that once or twice before believing in it. As well as when same-sex marriages were actually voted through. I didn't really believe that in the beginning because it was almost too good to be true. Im prettily trusting when it comes to things that doesn't really make a difference to me whether or not they're real or not. When it comes to important questions then Im more skeptical. Then I want to know a bit more before I actually take a stand or before I actually talk about it. It swings both ways, both very trustworthy and quite cynical and skeptical. But its like I have this like life motto which is to always trust because if you start to distrust everything then its not a life worth living. Its like if I start to distrust people around me, then I start to distrust society, then I start to distrust this and this and this and why? If you cant trust anything, how the hell are you going to make a bareable life for yourself? So I know that its my general way towards everything in life is to be quite trusting because... unless if its in a situation where this person would really benefit if they were lying. Otherwise I don't see the reason why not to believe in them until proven otherwise. I think thats the same with news and pretty much everything.

How do you feel about the people that are very distrusting?

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If it were just regarding news, fine! But I have an issue when Im talking to someone and we might be discussing something and they're like 'oh well, I don't believe in that.' And then its like 'but yea Ive been studying this for 3 years about this particular subject so I know that its not true. And they're like 'nah, I don't believe you anyway' and I hate that. You have to believe that the person isn't just making things up just for the benefit of themselves because I just don't see the use of it. When it comes to people in my life, I think that I actually need them to be quite trustworthy as in they also believe in what I say. And how cynical or skeptical you are towards news since I don't generally discuss it in everyday life, Id not encounter that problem as much. And the things that I actually do discuss with my peers, its either like 'this happened and thats bad' or 'this happened and thats good'... 'yea thats really good'. Its not like big discussions about it. But those are gunna enter when its an election. I need to gather up energy for that. If the other person wasn't to trust what I was saying, how can we...if I trust the person saying everything and they dont trust anything that I say, I can't really see that as a good discussion or dialogue at all. So I think that the people that I surround myself with are quite trusting people. Its like the same values and same thoughts on life because cynics can be very draining of energy. So if I was to talk to someone and telling them about this ATM story and they even say that they thought it was real, I mean I wouldn't be disappointed at all. I would be like 'wooh, I wasn't alone! It wasn't just me who thought that.' Even though its just such a little thing. Id rather just surround myself with people who actually believed until proven otherwise.

How do you feel about politicians using the term fake news?

Well since I was brought up in Sweden and we have this... when it comes to news and TV we haven't got the same like structure when it comes to journalism and stuff like that. Löfven couldn't just go out and say "well SVT is fake news" because they get money from the state. And since Im not really aware of the structure in America Im not quite sure how it works, but if...ahhh when it comes to Trump I get so...how can one person believe that he has more credibility than CNN. I want to say that it hurts him when he says stuff like that because I mean who believes that. On the other hand, I know that he is the president now so many people must be listening to him. I think that its so dangerous for someone in his position to call news agencies for fake news. I know that that's his rhetoric because he has a lot of skeletons and they're not even in his closet anymore. They're just out dancing. Im just terrified of that person. If he keeps doing this, he's going to be like a dictator soon. The freedom of speech as in, in journalism, is so important and its so important that people believe in it. So of course it is dangerous when fake news are published. But on the other hand, its so little of the total amount of news that is published and that is out there so its better if people were to believe in something that maybe wasn't true just to believe in the rest of it and things that actually are true. Ive never ever heard of anyone targeting journalism in that way in a country... its just so weird. Its so weird doing that. And Ive never encountered anything... of course politicians could say like 'well you posted that. thats a lie.' but like to just put that mark on an entire... I cant wrap my head around it. Its just too weird. And not to pinpoint like 'that one! that is a fake news' but to say 'all of this! all of what you do is fake news!' It like... but how? How can everything be fake news? What? I never heard or seen anything like that before. The only place apart from like North Korea and maybe China, its Russia that has this mentality to 'yeah you can print whatever you want but you cant criticize me'. Well that is one of the main things about a dictatorship, you start censoring. And to call out something that big as a fake news, to start trying to censor it because people will stop listening to it... I don't really know how he thought there. Is he gunna tweet true stories from his Twitter account? Does the US not need news? I don't know! I don't want politicians meddling in something that is free speech. Its like if we were to start meddling in arts or movies and stuff like that. Thats not okay. It has to be... I know in Swecen we have armlängs principen. Its like everything, even if its funded by the state, it has to be an arms length from the state because the state is not allowed to influence or decide how to do it. I know that both SVT and SR and like some art schools get funding from

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the state, but its doesn't have to serve in the states purpose as some kind of like glorifier of our regent. I don't want politicians to meddle in that at all. They should just stay out of it. And if they print something bad then just don't say anything about it, Jesus.

Anything else that you want to mention?

No I had that 3 minutes in the shower when I was like I wonder what Im gunna say and what the interviews gunna be about and Im pretty sure that Ive covered those 3 minutes [laughs].

March 28, 2017 Iranian, 31 year-old, male, mechanical engineer

What are your news habits?

Daily basis, one to two hours. Usually after work at around 9 to 10, somewhere around that. So I usually get my news mostly from facebook because my feed is basically full of news especially since Facebook live is introduced, I get live fee from different. . . I have reporter friends from around the world so I get their facebook live and I see whats happening there. Before that I was using periscope. I was for a while active on Twitter but not anymore. Just whenever something big happens I go on Twitter but not often anymore. Because Im a little tired with the amount of news you get. I get a lot of news from my facebook too. I mean I just don't. . . its not only that I get it from the people, like websites CNN, facebook. I get it from people first hand. Thats what Im focused on on Facebook. Even some eyewitness. For example something happened in France and my friend wrote to me that something happened even before it was in the news. Some of them are journalists and some of them are just normal people.

Besides friends that are all over the world, what sources are you following on Facebook?

You mean the media name. . . like CNN, Fox, BBC Perisan. TV4 for example. These are my favorite ones that I watch everyday. There are some Persian ones also, radio fardah, that I watch. Its a radio but its also a news feed. There are also groups that people put some news on. Like for example recently I. . . the Dakota Pipeline, I was interested in that so Im in a group where people put like for example when the police was evacuating the area, I was getting a live feed from there. I get live feed from wherever I like to get some news.

Do you read or listen to radio news or is it mostly Facebook. Do you watch?

I watch TV on the internet. For example CNN, I see clips of the news. What Im telling you is mostly visual. I watch. When I go home Im too tired to read that much for 2 hours so I prefer to watch it for a few minutes.

What do you like about following news?

Yea I mean I dont really like news or politics. But politics like me [laughs]. Because when something happens, if you just see that cross-section of time or that happening you have no background about that. You can not know about why this happened, how this happened. So its very hard to judge from one section of the happening or occurrence. But if you know why this happened, how this happened, this is important for me to know. For example in France, this happened. Why? How? And what is the connection between France, or I dont know, Sweden. Is there a pattern thats happening the same in England or wherever. SO its important to me to have a background of whats happening and how its happening basically. I want to be able to judge. I mean its like you tell me, I dont know, Venezuelan president said this and I said 'oh, he's a good guy' and then tomorrow they say 'oh he said this' and I say 'oh he's a bad guy'. I want to see the whole picture, not just whatever the news tell me. One day, he's good an one day he's bad, I dont like that.

What else do you dislike about news?

Fake news [laughs] Yea I mean the thing that really bothers me about the news is that, especially the corporate media, basically I have no 100

Do you talk about news?

Sure. With friends, whoever is interested. Mostly friends but anybody open minded enough.

How about online? Rarely. Comments maybe. But I dont share much. Maybe on my FB for

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my friends but Im not doing that anymore. There was a time I would do that but not anymore. The torrent of the news is so much that if you want to share all of them, then normal people not interested just want one 15 minutes in the evening at night. Then they will be news insensitive. They cannot react on the news anymore.

Do you feel that way?

Not yet [laughs] Thats why I cut the Twitter for example. Sometime I get all of them removed from my facebook and shut myself off for a few days and work on my mindfulness then I come back. I did that 4 months ago for the new year. I just felt that I need to change my mood for the new year, just more relaxed because I also have my own life. I have my own problems to think about. So I removed this part, its not necessary.

You said before you did comment before, how did it change?

I mean I used to share more. Because its different. . . in different times the focus, at least for me, is on different issues. But after a while with sharing, any news that I felt important, I found out that the amount of likes I get is declining [laughs] then I noticed whats important for me is maybe not that important for everybody. And I think that the amount of news that they get is too much that they become insensitive to any happening. 'Oh okay, 2000 people died here. Ok. No problem. Yesterday also 2000 people died.' So thats why I cut on that. I try to just save it for very important times. I had a page that I made on FB where I had like 12000 people.

What kind of page was it?

It was like a fun page maybe. Ill give an example, like occupy democrats. I mean in the beginning it was just fun page. It was serious when there was occupy wall st. Then it became a fun page, sharing memes and funny pictures. Then after trump became president it became serious news. So mine was the same. I basically was thinking to start of it for making flashmobs. That was the first idea. It evolved from there going up and down left and right. So I cannot say what is it exactly. Sometimes its fun things, some news also.

Are you commenting on other peoples news posts?

Sometimes but not very often. Especially, I comment on Fox news fan, to see how they react, to get a feedback. Its mostly curiosity. Sometimes I see a news that is interesting and then I say okay lets see how other people react to my comment. I see sometimes that there is a discussion in the comments going on for example. Sometimes my comment is my actually opinion and sometimes I intentionally poke them in the eye. So it depends what mood I am in.

Can you give me an example?

Recently for example, there is a woman who has been appearing on fox news alot. John Morgan. He;s a very adamant proponent of gun carrying. He has a shooting range. And for example he said that they are going to take away carrying guns in Arkansas or something like that and then I made a comment like "oh this is stupid. Democrats are destroying your country" to see what people would say. Im just poking trying to test, to see what reactions I get, to see how many like I get agreeing with my opinion. Do you know Tomi Lahren? Last week I saw the news that said she was pro choice and then I said "wow! what! she said that? oh thats fine. what a good thing." But then 2 days ago I read that they fired her from the show. I wanted to make a comment but I haven't done that yet. To see what will happen [laughs]. I think Facebook already knows my opinion because they analyze your likes and whatever you say so I like all the pages for example so they cannot say that oh you are just a democrat. Have you ever watched the youtube video, How to make yourself radicalized with the help of Facebook.

So you've purposely liked very many pages. . . is it because you want to make FB confused or you want to know what is being said?

Both I would say. At least in the US I have many american friends and they are like either right or left, its not middle or something so I think both.

Where did you hear the term fake news?

I was familiar with 'ahh this is not true' But after it became a trend and became like to me, it was existing before but it became something against the media that we are using it. It became a tool against themselves to muddy the waters. like for example, I also sometimes read



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the Breitbart, the gay guy. I mean I could not continue reading that because its so much false. I mean fake news its basically like a falsification. It acts like one piece of truth, one piece of half truth and the conclusion is fake or false. And then before that, I could see that, especially since Im from Iran, the news about Iran on CNN or other media, were never or most of the time not correct, or exact. So I always had this notion in my mind that fake news exists. I mean its telling lies. I can tell you half truth, I can tell you the whole truth, I can tell you lies. But even half truth is a kind of lie, especially on a news media with millions of people in the audience, thats easily a lie. IT bothered me that, since many years ago, seeing this trend in British media, French media or US media. I follow US medias because they have a lot of coverage and they influence a lot of people. For example, something happened in Europe, for example in France, and French media are not talking about that but in the US they are covering 24/7. Why are you doing that? A few days ago I saw an interview on Channel 4 in UK, the guys said the terrorist, or any bad guy, they just want publicity and you the media give them what they want. And many people die everyday in accidents. Why dont you mention them? Why dont you have a good news, bad news? I mean look at Trump, how he got his nomination, just slurring accusations. Before Trump we had the same person in Iran, Ahmahdinejad. I know what Trump is like and feel like and how he will act. ITs not new to me. Basically they just get famous because they are opposing. Its like if I stand up here and start cursing, everybody is gunna be like 'Why is he doing that?' Negative famous. I wont say notorious but being famous for bad things, for getting attention. Nowadays people are becoming a little conditioned by media because for example nowadays, the span of the peoples concentration is like 8 seconds or something like that so they just want something to come in and go out. But the same media that has caused this are using that to just inject to you what they want. Its just like the headlines just go in. '2 people were killed.' For example if something happens in the US about black people, I have a picture actually. Maybe one picture speaks a thousand words, if I can find it. But I also have a lot of friends in different parts of the US, thats why I get a lot of news live.

Is the live part of it important to you?

Yes very important because I should see it myself to believe it. As I say, I dont have 100

If I ask you definite fake news then, what would you say?

I think as I said, its first a half truth. Its partly truth with a wrong conclusion or covering. Covering the same news maybe but with the intention that you want other to see. As long as the news is biased, its fake to me. Even if it is full truth but still biased, its fake. If it is half truth, it is fake.

Can you think of anything that is unbiased?

No, not really. Thats why I have to follow many news. If I would trust one source of information that would be good, but not really. To my mind, different news, I want a background. I dont want to change with remote control and say 'this is good news' for example not know why this is good news. Have you heard about infowars? Alex Jones? I mean I saw a documentary, I didn't know that it was Alex. It was so good. I mean I really liked it. And then I saw Alex Jones, Inforwars. To my mind, every media have a rating and its constantly changing. I say for example CNN, 70

Is there a real news to you?

Real news is whats happening. Thats the real news. But if its reflected as it is, thats good. Thats the real news. For example on average, I think people watch the news during the whole day only half an hour. So there are a few questions to be answered. What is the most important thing that people need to know right now? This is one question. Then comes that it shouldn't be tinted by bias, interest or falsification or stupid commentators. If a news that doesn't have these characteristics, then thats a real news. Thats good. Sometimes I believe the news and say okay I believe this is good and then 2 days later I find out no it was wrong. So I said CNN is trustable in this area, so its good and then I watch it and then its like, oh thats not the truth.

How do you check from the truth?

Through my sources [laughs] I dont know. I know people and even the people I dont know,

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I read their weblogs. I mean maybe the weblogs I read they have like 500 people reading that. I dont expect everybody to be an expert on the political level but nowadays fake news is so much advanced I should say that you need to have some level of expertise to tell the fake news from the real news. Its like shopping for a tomato, good tomato and bad tomato, it need some expertise to tell.

What is expertise that people should have?

Thats a good question. I cant say I have a magic pill but I think nowadays that its so bad that you need to have the background and then rate it. Or at least rate what you're being fed to your mind. And then I dont know actually. Its very hard. If you dont want to spend time on following the history, thats very hard. I mean you can always be suspicious at least. Thats the best and quick remedy. Be suspicious. Never 100

How do you feel about the knowledge that you gain from the news?

Maybe some TED talks I watch and learn something [laughs] but not from the news. I dont have the feeling that news can add something to your knowledge or your information. I dont think it makes us more informed. Maybe the commentators discussing after it add something to you. But the news itself I dont think it adds something. I mean flood in somewhere, accident in somewhere, it doesn't add anything. Its not useful in my life. Its just adding anxiety and making me feel bad about my own world. I sometimes tell my friend I can show you a documentary about cats and the diseases that they can transfer you so that you so that all of you go and kill your cat [laughs] I have two cats. Don't worry. Its how you feel. So I don't think any information is added to you.

What are your perspectives on the mainstream media vs. alternative media.

The problem is that any news agency needs money. So it should come from somewhere and when there is money, there is interest. So I dont think you can find such a nice people that they dont influence the news because of their interests. I dont think you can find any.

How about the people that you follow on FB?

Only reliable source that I can say is that I see it to believe it and of course I believe citizen journalism is much better because I have seen in during 2009 in Iran. I think when there are many people reporting from the same place, even 2 conflicting reports, not everybody can be telling the truth. But when you have 10 people you are like okay this can be more closer to the truth, this image that these 10 people are giving.

You trust your own eyes but dont you have to depend on somebody to show it to you?

Yeah. But thats what Im saying. If there are 10 people, I can see if from different angles. If it is all the same angle, no. The interval of confidence is low. Its all about the statistics. You take a sample, you say that this is from CNN so CNN history is statistically like this so its trustable or 10

Who would you say that you have high trust in regularly?

Thats a good question. I had high trust in channel 4, UK tv for example. It was pretty good until before this, a few months ago they started about Syria. They started some fake news and claims.

Like what?

For example a big fake news to me is like Syria. A few months ago they say 'oh the Assad's take over the ISIS and the city sounded and everybody is dying and there is one American, Abdul Kareem or something. And he was reporting 'oh they are killing' and march for Aleppo. So that was a big lie. I had sources like in Syria telling me that whats happening. Maybe they were not completely from ISIS side but that was a big lie what was happening. And I think that was one of the biggest fake news I have seen. But they say 'oh there has been massacres' but the number of the people. . . I mean Im not saying no one got killed but it was not different than yesterday. But like 2 days ago the US bombed a residential area in Syria and 200 people got killed and there was no news about that. Thats one of the biggest fake news and also the white helmets. They are I think that they are an accomplice to the Al Qaeda. I dont know if they are exactly related to ISIS but they got an Oscar. And in the news they pretend that they

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are very good, George Clooney is making a doc about that. But as much as I know, they are just accomplice to terrorists.

Where did you get that info?

My sources [laughs]. The people.

And you trust them?

Yea, yea. But not 100

This channel 4 story about Syria that made you lose trust?

About this topic. But before that I had a good trust i them.

How do you decide your source that you're watching online?

I check them. Thats why Im saying its statistics. For example, there is a one guy that I have a good trust. Its a person with a live secular talk. He is a very fair guy.

You trust him?

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Is there anything about him that makes him trustworthy?

No he just tells the news and adds his comment that is really close to the reality that I know. And it matches with my evidence and reports and sources of information. Its a very hard issue because You should be fair all the time, trying not to have a biased judgement. Its hard. I mean even not about news, just in your daily life when you meet different people. Especially girls. They have a 30sec something judgement of people. They say you never have a chance to make a second impression with a girl [laughs]. So it was statistics. And I try to be impartial as much as I can and when I see that I cannot be impartial then I try to be logical. Because 2+2 is everywhere 4. But in other sciences everything is subjective to your feelings. To me nothing is more accurate that, for example, whatever works with mathematics. Logic, reasoning, and everything. So I try to conclude that way if I am in doubt. Thats how I work at least.

Is there any source that you really do not trust?

For example I see a news agency, I follow them and then I see they are not good. Done. Like Sputnik, I dont find it good at all. Its from Russia.

But so is RT

Yeah but thats different. Thats statistics I mean. The news that I get and check with the others and I see oh this is curious but its lot of bs I dont know where do they get it?

How do you check?

With other sources, other people, other reports. Sometime it takes time. Its not like ah I do it now at the moment. I call my friend. Maybe it takes one week. But I don't it after one week and see like okay, this news was wrong.

Are you doing this with everything you read?

No. Just the important things. I mean the ones that are important and maybe its affecting... sometimes I can tell you that if you get into the news business you will see that the most important news that affects peoples lives, its not in the news. Its just quiet and silent. A bill passes and nobody cares. And then okay flood or two people die, I mean its good to have compassion and be aware whats happening but if you were more focused on what affects your own life and living then thats good for people. So i think 50

What do you want more from the news?

I told you I dont like news [laughs] No I dont like. I want to not listen to any news and just listen to music. Thats what I want. But I cannot put out the fire of curiosity and not be an informed citizen. I cannot do that. And keep the burden of being ignorant.

Does us knowing about a flood or bombing make us more informed citizens?

No. I told you it doesn't add anything to you. Thats what Im saying. Why is it so important? Okay you say that this happened. I am a member of Oxfam or whatever. They say this happened and we are doing this. But when I just say this happened, so what shall I do? What can I do? Like oh there was an accident on the highway. Let me go and help? Have you ever done that? No nothing. They just muddy the water. I dont think its useful. If someone is interested in a topic, like I am interested in the nature... then I say okay... for example the dakota pipeline is

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rarely in the news. I havent seen any news about that. But its important to me so I follow that. I think if any news is important for somebody then he will follow that. Lets say your passion is animals and lets say oh there is bill that will do harm to the animals. Then you follow that and you act with your people, your organization. But if Im sitting here, okay 10000 animals will be killed for example by this municipality. If its not important to you, why should I know that? One example that I can give you is the girl that wanted to kill herself medically in the US. Brtiney something. And then there was movement after that to make it legal. And they are doing it in some states. They funded an institute, I don't know exactly what it is. But they are working toward that and people are helping or whatever. So if they have a purpose they are doing that.

What do you think of people that have very high trust of the news?

They will get hurt someday. I think so. They will have problems someday. If we have hight trust in something and someday they lie about that topic that I care about. Then thats the day that I get hurt. Like 'I didn't know that!' or "Why wasn't it on the news?" So yeah, what goes around comes around.

Have you seen anyone share fake news on your FB?

News agencies or people?

Both.

Sputnik also shares. Its on Facebook or its a website and it shares fake news. Or when I say Sputnik its 90

How do you feel about politicians like Donald Trump using the term Fake news?

Yea they use it now. But I told you it exists. But after it became very systematic and a tool against themselves, now they made it to I think some kind of fight back against their critics. And also its a bit like a double edged sword. Its good if you use it good and its bad if you use it bad. I think we should also be worried about the bad side that they are going to censor people or voices that they dont like. I dont see them that much separate (politicians and media). I was at a lecture at UPF. The guy said all the TV channels in UK, all they talked about Brexit they brought some people that are not really experts in the area and thats why everyone was like oh brexit was a good idea. But then nobody talked with me. They just talked with some stupid commentators. And 70

How do you feel about the state media?

Its the same. I mean in Sweden its a little bit better the situation in general in comparison to the US or Iran or Russia but its still. . . they are more delicate. For example I can tell you about Iran. In Sweden, the news maybe its not so interesting to me, it doesn't influence my life but the way they cover things are more delicately not very true. They dont tell lies, but they also are not telling the truth. I think many Iranians who came here for asylum. Exiled journalists who are now working for Sydsvenskan or SVT. There is a person, Nahid Pershoon. He makes docs about Iran on SVT. I really dont like that. Because its really not the whole truth. Its even 55

Is there anyway to fix this?

Just nice people. Honest people. Impartial. Thats it. There are people. But nobody gives them money or voice. Thats my opinion at least. Jimi Hendrix, you know "there must be some kind of way out of here said the joker to the thief" [laughs] both of them are not good guys. But there must be but I dont know so far.

Is there anything else you want to add?

No actually with this topic I think I said everything I was thinking at the moment. I can not think of anything extra. If I remember I will write to you.

# Appendix D

## Data and Coding

Political attachment	No. I would say I definitely associate it with Donald trump. I probably heard it before but when you say Fake news that's what im thinking about...the way he started using it. The way he popularized that expression. (11)	When I see these things that Donald Trump says and that he says he wants to fight corruption, I totally see why people voted for him. I feel its good. I feel he's popping a bubble (3)	So fake news... everything Donald Trump tweets I consider fake news (6)	I think in a decade, when people look back to everything thats been written about fake news and Donald Trump and populist politics, people will...when someone says "I don't trust this media!" People will be like, "Why!" It wont be as easy to discredit people I think. (10)			

D. Data and Coding

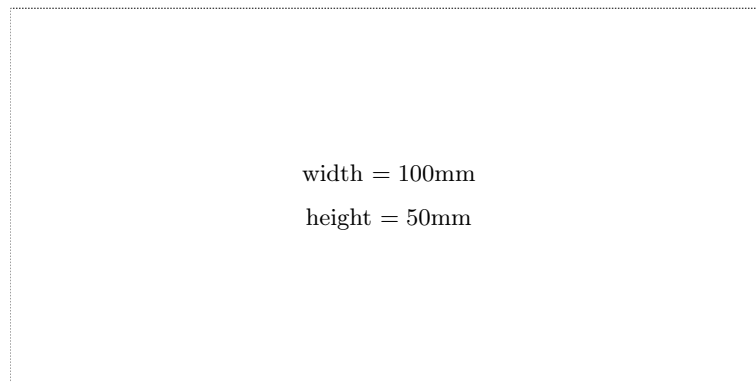
<p>ethical attachment</p>	<p>bias</p>	<p>It felt really biased too, it felt that they were taking a stand for the police opinion of it having... yea..its bad...and didn't take in consideration all of the privacy issues. I was like this is so weird because I know, one its not true, and its really biased too. (2)</p>	<p>So its like people don't want media to be biased, they don't want media to push an agenda but at the same time people are saying that they do [laughs]. (2)</p>	<p>I dislike when it's biased, like some news are. And I don't like the feeling of that you maybe don't know if these news are real or not, and I feel that today about most news. Like is this something, it feels like most of the times I choose to believe because I don't possess the answer of is this real or not. Because there are so many news, there are two stories of everything it feels like nowadays every news. Yeah thats what I don't like, the uncertainty. (3)</p>	<p>But news can be fake if they're not factual enough. If they don't leave you with any kind of information that isn't biased to anyone, then its too biased. (6)</p>	<p>As long as the news is biased, its fake to me. Even if it is full truth but still biased, its fake. If it is half truth, it is fake. (7)</p>	<p>News based on fake facts or wrong facts. And news that are so biased but you know in like a secret way, that are biased and try to hide it in a way. But I mean thats a scale because all articles are biased in some way I think. But when it gets over a certain tipping point —I couldn't say where that tipping point is—but for me it becomes like fake news in a way. But I would say that wrong news, news based on wrong facts are fake news to me and also news that are too biased, which is a very vague answer [laughs]. (11)</p>
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## D. Data and Coding

<p>strategies in consuming</p>	<p>I really wanna know what exactly was behind a certain thing. I guess you just google around and see different sources and whatever and try to make up another side of it. (3)</p>	<p>I think I believe that people should be reading news and they should read news from different sources and not just... otherwise all the...I really try actively to go into news on a daily basis so I dont just get all my news from my feed, cause then I know that my news will be very specific and there'll be things that I have no idea about. (10)</p> <p>you have to watch different sources of news and you have to have...the idea of critical thought (10)</p>	<p>I think I believe that people should be reading news and they should read news from different sources (7)</p>	<p>In order to get a good understanding about whats going on, you have to read several different sources. Thats what I try to do. But then, there is certain things that like only one side of the spectrum is actually reporting. (1)</p>	<p>I dont know, I dont follow Al Jazeera that much actually. Like for some stuff I do. I mostly follow their Balkan station. But its good to have different sources you know, to compare how and what different outlets say about the same event. (2)</p>		
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