

NEWS TO YOU: AN EXAMINATION OF WHAT STUDENTS CONSIDER NEWS

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ABSTRACT

Pressley Baird: News to You: An Examination of What Students Consider News
(Under the direction of Ferrel Guillory)

As information barriers to entry continue to decrease, it is important to examine what young people consider to be news.

This study seeks to provide an idea of both how young people define news and how they get their news through in-depth interviews with high school seniors.

This study offers a definition, from a high school senior's perspective, of news: any piece of new information that's relevant to a wide group of people. Young people consider both hard – such as politics – and soft – such as sports – topics to be news. They find most of their news through social media sites and gravitate toward news stories that are entertaining and interesting to them. They feel informed on national news but bemoan the lack of easy access – or the quality – of local news. This study uses these observations to offer a road map for news outlets on reaching a younger audience.

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Literature Review

News consumption habits

In 2009, Jarvis, Stroud and Gilliland asked where college students got their news and which sources they trusted, with the goal of determining how to make news compelling and credible to young people. They determined that these students were most likely to get their news through the most convenient sources, such as the Internet and comedy television programs, even though they considered other sources, such as the daily newspaper and cable network news, to be more trustworthy.

This idea that a source's convenience dominates its other aspects could be influential in understanding why young people turn to the sources they do and, in turn, what they consider news. If young people gravitate heavily toward comedy television programs, which typically do not cover local news, will young people still consider local news to be news?

This study also provides the question that this thesis will work to answer: "Future efforts should investigate how young people define news, what it means to them, and where — in their minds — it is located" (37).

Henke argued cohort analysis — in which "specific age groups are viewed as unique within the framework of their historical context" (431) — is key to understanding news consumption. In her 1985 study, Henke argued that specific age groups develop different news consumption habits because each group is exposed to different kinds of media "at the time of socialization to news media use" (431). Henke makes the point that the Baby Boom generation in 1985 is especially important to study because the number of news sources to which they have access is increasing dramatically at that time. Henke's main example is the rise of the Cable News Network, or CNN.

The same argument can be made for the high school students studied in this thesis: They are living through a period of significant disruption for the media industry, with the decline of newspapers and broadcast news and the rise of social media and the Internet, making them an ideal group to study. News is presented differently on social media and the Internet – there is less of a news hierarchy on online news websites or in a user’s Twitter or Facebook feeds, for example. Because of these differences, it is often difficult to discern the kinds of information a user is consuming online. Details of Justin Bieber’s latest album may be presented with the same urgency as a terrorist attack in Paris. Do these carry equal weight in a high school student’s mind? Are both of these items “news” to a high school student?

Diddi and LaRose, writing in 2005, make a similar point about college students in the mid-2000s, saying that they are the first “Internet generation.” They argue:

As with the Baby Boom “television generation” cohort (Morton, 2001) that spawned them, today’s students may be expected to undergo a sea change in news consumption patterns coinciding with the increasing use of this new medium. (197).

They also point out that “news consumption patterns of a lifetime form around the time young people leave for college” (196).

This thesis will take that idea and expand on it: What do the students’ news consumption habits look like before the major life change, when they are high school seniors? Are there certain things they are or aren’t doing now that could continue into their college news habits? How do their families’ news consumption habits influence the formations of the students’ news consumption habits?

This proposed study will interview high schoolers in an attempt to see the beginning formations of those news consumption patterns from the angle of how the young people define news. Knowing what a young person considers to be news — and, perhaps more importantly, what they don't consider to be news — will give researchers new insights into how these news consumption patterns form. Tying the definition of news to the early formations of news consumption habits has not yet been done.

Huang is one of the few researchers who incorporated high school students into his study. He put high school and college students through three in-depth interviews, all conducted by email, about their media habits. He found that students overwhelmingly preferred to get their news on the Internet, relying again on displacement theory to explain that online news was replacing newspapers.

Huang's study also offers a key piece of research that comes close to examining students' definition of news. Huang does not directly address the idea of defining news, but he does ask his participants to “propose and explain their solutions to the problems in their news consumption” (115). Students wanted news that they could customize to their own news preferences, and they wanted news that was relevant to them in three ways: in its content, in its length (with students preferring short, direct stories over longer ones) and in its medium (with students preferring the Internet for its low cost, constant updates and interactivity, among other things) (115-116).

It is crucial here to understand that the Internet is not a source of news. Instead, it is a news delivery system. Saying that a person gets news “from the Internet” does not distill down into what that person is actually consuming, since the Internet includes both the day's front-page story from the New York Times and the top-trending listicle on

BuzzFeed. But the Internet as a news delivery system, obviously, cannot be ignored. This study – and future research – will strive to illustrate the differences between the online aggregators that act as a delivery mechanism (such as social media sites or email newsletters) and the actual news content that students consume. In this study, the students interviewed must go deeper than merely saying they read a story on the Internet – or that they saw a story on Twitter or in The Skimm. What news outlet wrote or produced that story? What was the content of that story? Why did the student decide to read, watch or listen to the story – and why did he or she consider it to be news?

Kwon, Wilcox and Shah also looked at high school students' media use, though their study compared students' television and online news consumption with their consumption of entertainment television and online games. While the researchers concluded that all of this consumption made the students better communicators, it should be noted that this study only focused on certain types of students' news consumption.

Uses and gratifications

The uses and gratifications theory — the idea that audiences select news sources based on the sources' ability to gratify needs for information, entertainment, social interaction or escapism — has been used in many media studies to determine how people interact with or use the media they consume (Blumler and Katz). But little has been done to show how consumers' needs – and how they define those needs – are changing. To a high school senior, is the story that Kendall Jenner walked the red carpet at the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show entertainment news – or is it information news?

Diddi and LaRose also use the uses and gratifications theory in their study, and they introduce the important idea that all news habits are “good” news habits. The goal of their study was to determine why students picked one type of news medium over another.

While the media students are choosing is interesting, it has also been studied extensively. This thesis will instead delve further into the first idea – that all news habits are “good” news habits. What kind of news is going into the media habits that high school seniors are creating? Why do these students consider those items to be “news”? How does that affect how the journalism community will define “media diets” going forward?

Ha and Fang use the uses and gratifications theory to introduce displacement theory – the idea that one medium permanently replaces another after a group decides that the first medium is better at meeting their needs – in their 2011 study of how college students’ time spent on the Internet affects their time spent on traditional news media sources (177). The pair found two key things in their study: that the Internet is partially displacing traditional media sources and that, as people gain more experience using the Internet, they gradually find it to be a better news source than traditional media sources (184).

But Diddi and LaRose point out that the “question of media displacement has become somewhat moot because the same news organizations that dominate the old media world also dominate the new” (197). A student may get the bulk of his news from CNN – he just may get that news solely online. Many researchers have talked about how this online-only consumption will affect students. Tandoc, in his 2014 study of undergraduate journalism students’ perceptions of a journalist’s role in society, looked at how the rise of the Internet will affect news organizations. Students who got their news online felt that journalists’ most important duties were the role of journalist as interpreter and the ability of a journalist to get people information quickly. Tandoc ties the idea of a journalist’s most important duties to students’ social media connectedness. He points out

that because news outlets are trying to appeal to students who are on Twitter or Facebook, these news outlets are also changing the standard of journalism.

“How do long-form investigative stories fit into the 140-character limit on Twitter? In adjusting to the habits of young people, the news media are also nurturing them into non-traditional journalism practices. . . . In adjusting to the media habits of today’s generation, the news media are also reworking the standards that this audience will use to evaluate them now and maybe in the years to come” (264).

Today’s students

High school seniors are 17, 18 or 19 years old. They are on the bottom edge of the Millennial generation – a group that many studies point out is staying informed through different methods than earlier generations. The American Press Institute’s Media Insight Project looked at Millennials in two studies in 2015, focusing on how they get their news and the “types” of Millennial news consumers. Social media factors in heavily here, with students gleaning most of their news from sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Some students are, as the American Press Institute says, “unattached,” meaning they merely bump into news on these sites, while others are “explorers”: actively searching for news to consume and share.

The Pew Research Center has also studied Millennials’ news habits extensively, finding that the Internet is the main source of news for 71 percent of Millennials (Caumont) and that people of all generations – not just Millennials – are turning away from some kinds of news sources in favor of others, like the Internet (Kohut). A solid 29 percent of people age 25 or younger surveyed in the study Kohut authored consumed no news the day before they were surveyed (Kohut).

Kayany and Yelsma looked at this extensively in 2000, when they studied families' media consumption and how generational differences affect how we consume news. The researchers found, as in many other studies, that online media is replacing television as the primary information source. Children in the study spent more time online than the adults studied did.

The idea that students spend far more time online than adults is a crucial piece of research for this study. It sets up the format for this study – examining students' media consumption and how their home life affects that – but it also provides a research question to build on. How has news consumption changed in 15 years? While it is important to look at what students and their families are reading, watching and listening to, it is even more important to examine why they are choosing to consume those stories. Why do they consider them to be news?

Methods

This study took a qualitative approach to determining how young people define and consume their news. To answer these questions, this study used focus groups with high schoolers from several local high schools.

Students were interviewed in small focus groups, conducted by the researcher, about their thoughts on what defines a news story and how they get news. The goal here was to make students comfortable and willing to speak frankly about their viewpoints by placing them in groups with their peers. Students were contacted for potential participation in the focus groups through their schools.

It is important to note that this researcher followed the procedures of the N.C. Department of Public Instruction and local school districts for interviewing students. All

students are asked to sign a media release form at the beginning of each school year, indicating that they consent to be interviewed for journalistic stories. Only students who have signed these media release forms were allowed to participate in the groups.

Students were chosen from several high schools in the Triangle – specifically in Durham and Chatham counties and in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro school district – in an effort to generate more diverse focus groups. Durham and Chapel Hill-Carrboro are more urban areas, while Chatham is more rural. Choosing a wide range of high schools among the three school districts also allowed the researcher to interview a group of students with a wide range of socioeconomic and racial differences. Students with different backgrounds have been exposed to different news habits in their households and have access to a range of news consumption methods now. Incorporating all these viewpoints ensured that the researcher does not get an inaccurate view of what high school students consider to be news.

In the groups, the students were told that this researcher, who is acting as moderator, is interested in learning what they consider to be “news” and how they consume news. They were then asked a series of questions by the moderator, including:

- What’s the first thing you read, watch or listen to when you wake up in the morning?
- Do you remember a particular event or “story” happening recently? When did you first hear about it? How did you hear about it?
- How do social networks like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram contribute to how you find out about things? What about email newsletters, like The Skimm?
- Where do you get information on what’s happening at your school?

- What's your idea of what "news" is?
- What isn't news?

Findings
Introduction

Raleigh, N.C., resident Akiel Denkins was shot and killed by Raleigh police officer D.C. Twiddy in February 2016.

Denkins was 24. He was black. D.C. Twiddy is 29. He is white.

The shooting was the latest in a series of highly publicized killings of black men by white men. It came almost two years into the Black Lives Matter movement, which called attention to racism across the country, particularly in black people's interactions with police departments and experiences in criminal justice system.

If you Google Akiel Denkins, you get more than 53,000 hits.

So it's no surprise that Nonso Nwogalanya, a black senior at Hillside High School in Durham, N.C., had heard about the shooting. In fact, it was the news event that first popped into his mind during a March 2016 conversation.

How did he hear about it? Did he see news of the shooting on TV, or read about it in the local paper?

No. He heard about it on social media.

"One of my classmates, he had it on Snapchat. He went down to the protests," Nonso said, referring to a downtown Raleigh gathering protesting and mourning Denkins' death and calling for changes to how the Raleigh police force handles crime.

"He was talking about it on Twitter and stuff. He's very into stuff like that," Nonso said.

Nonso learned about what was going on in his community. He knew it was an important issue. He called it news. But he didn't turn to a traditional media outlet to help him learn more.

For high school students like Nonso in and around the Triangle, the news is not what shows up on a doorstep each morning or appears on a television screen each night.

Instead, “the news” is broader. It’s the information that stands out as interesting, new and relevant from their hand-picked social media feeds filled with information news outlets, real-life friends, celebrities – and entertaining distractions.

The news is old-school social media, too: the stuff learned by talking to teachers or friends, by listening to morning announcements that come over the intercoms at their schools, by stopping in the guidance counselor’s office.

What’s not news? That’s tougher to define. Lots of things can count as news – but if you don’t care about it, it’s harder to consider it news. News, in high schoolers’ minds, is different for different people.

Researchers agree that the Millennial generation – including the 18-year-old high school students interviewed here – is using emerging or new media sources far more than traditional news outlets. But what researchers often don’t discuss is how the use of these new sources has affected young people’s perception of the news.

In-depth interviews with 37 high school seniors in four North Carolina towns – Durham, Chapel Hill, Carrboro and Siler City – show that students define news in a broad way. (See Appendices B and C for a list of students interviewed and a guide to the focus groups, respectively.) To these students, news is any piece of information they didn’t know before that’s relevant to a wide group of people. So the 2016 presidential election is news – but so is who won the Super Bowl (if you care about it) and what the Jenner sisters did yesterday (if you care about it) and what’s happening in your town (if you care about it).

Key Takeaways

The top four takeaways from these interviews show how the media landscape is changing and serve as a roadmap for news outlets. If you want young people to consume what you create, you must know:

1. Students can be picky with what they consume and still feel informed about national news.
2. Students don't feel that they have easy-to-access local news – or, if they do, they feel that it doesn't cover the substance of their community.
3. Students don't consciously consume news.
4. Students' news knowledge is wide, not deep.

Students can be picky with what they consume and still feel informed about national news.

In a saturated media environment, these students have no need to read a morning paper or watch a broadcast television show. This finding aligns with the research in “The News Gap” by Eugenia Mitchelstein and Pablo J. Boczkowski, which found that the rise in niche content has decreased the importance people place on traditional media outlets. Since almost all news content is now available online, often in triplicate, these students no longer have to rely on news organizations to tell them what's important to know each day. They can decide for themselves.

Students don't feel that they have easy-to-access local news – or, if they do, they feel like it doesn't cover the substance of their community.

Local news is a bit different, and the variations among the different towns are telling. (See data sources in Appendix A.)

According to 2014 census data (U.S. Census Bureau):

Siler City: 8,273 people
Carrboro: 20,984 people
Chapel Hill: 59,376 people
Durham: 251,862 people

According to 2015-16 school attendance records (N.C. Department of Public

Instruction):

Jordan-Matthews High School: 759 students

52 percent Hispanic
29 percent white
14 percent black

Carrboro High School: 813 students

59 percent white
14 percent Hispanic
11 percent black
8 percent Asian

Chapel Hill High School: 1,463 students

54 percent white
14 percent Hispanic
13 percent Asian
12 percent black

East Chapel Hill High School: 1,360 students

51 percent white
19 percent Asian
11 percent black
11 percent Hispanic

Hillside High School: 1,305 students

82 percent black
15 percent Hispanic
1 percent white

The more populated city of Durham got far more media coverage than the smaller towns of Siler City, Chapel Hill and Carrboro. Durham has its own traditional newspaper, an alternative weekly newspaper and a TV station based in and largely dedicated to Durham news. The town is also covered by the Raleigh-based newspaper and Raleigh-based TV stations, both of which focus on statewide issues but heavily cover the Triangle. Chapel Hill and Carrboro have a weekly paper (which is part of the Raleigh newspaper), a daily student paper and a news radio station. The university and some town news are heavily covered by the Raleigh-based newspaper and Raleigh-based TV stations. Siler City, on the other hand, has one weekly newspaper. It's right on the cusp of the coverage area for the same Raleigh-based TV station that devotes much airtime to Durham, Chapel Hill and Carrboro.

As a result, students in Durham said they felt informed about their local community – a statement they backed up with their ability to talk about local news. Their main source of local information was the Durham-based TV station. Siler City students said they did not consider themselves informed residents. They didn't like being uninformed, but since their town wasn't "interesting enough" and local media sources were too difficult to access (in their minds), they didn't see themselves becoming informed anytime soon. When Chapel Hill and Carrboro students were asked if they felt informed about their local communities, the general consensus was "kind of." Students there said they felt informed about certain aspects of their communities, but not their communities as a whole.

Siler City, Chapel Hill and Carrboro and Durham are three distinctly different communities, in size, location, economic status and racial diversity. The schools these

students attend have different racial compositions. The students' communities and schools, as shown throughout this research, affect how they consume and think about the news they read, watch and listen to.

Students don't consciously consume news.

There is a conscious and constant consumption of social media, and students stumble on news through their social media networks. Students say they know they don't actively consume media. Their reasoning? It's too difficult to find, or it's not interesting enough. "It" here means traditional media – a newspaper is too hard to find; a local TV station's evening show is not interesting enough. Twitter, on the other hand, is inherently interesting because the students have decided what accounts to follow. If one tweet doesn't hold your attention, scroll to the next.

Research backs up the idea that these students were getting news from social media. In a 2015 Pew Research study of adults 35 years old and younger, 49 percent said social media sites like Facebook and Twitter were the most important or an important way they got news (Barthel 13). But these students are somewhat distinctive in their collective love for Twitter. Among adults surveyed, Facebook is far more popular – 66 percent use it, and 44 percent get news there (Barthel 13). Just 17 percent of adults surveyed use Twitter, and 10 percent get news there (Barthel 13). To these Triangle young people, Facebook is where their parents hang out – so they'd rather be on Twitter.

These students use Twitter at higher rates than their peers nationally because their schools and school districts have embraced it. In Chapel Hill and Carrboro, for example, many students checked Twitter as soon as they woke up each morning because they knew their schools would have posted a tweet. The Twitter usage in these communities is

cyclical: The schools began using Twitter because students were there – and students have stuck around because the schools are there.

Students' news knowledge is wide, not deep.

While the students interviewed here are clearly knowledgeable about what's happening in the country, it's not clear how deep that knowledge goes. These students are drawn to bite-size news presented in video form, specifically tweets, online videos and short TV news stories. For the most part, they do not want to spend the time reading a long article or watching an entire news broadcast. The students vocalize this desire by saying they feel that they don't have the time or the interest to devote to consuming lengthy news coverage.

It should also be noted that the time they spend consuming media of any kind is stretched across several different avenues. All of the students interviewed had either a Facebook or Twitter account; most students had both. The majority of the students also had other social media accounts that they used frequently, including Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube. They decide whom to follow and what to consume on each of these accounts. Students said they set up their social media platforms so they could follow anything or anyone who was interesting to them. News is just a small fraction of the overall social media platform.

Because news is incorporated in small doses in the students' social media lives – and because social media is the primary place where the students get news – their news knowledge is, for the most part, wide and shallow. They know just a little bit about a wide range of issues in the news. However, if a student is interested in a topic, they will learn more about it – developing a selectively deep knowledge about that one issue.

Why high schoolers' news habits matter

It may be easy to dismiss the opinions of 18-year-olds as unimportant. But these students are in the earliest stages of forming their news consumption habits, which should make them matter immensely to news organizations.

For example, one of the first questions asked in the interviews with students was what they did when they woke up that morning. All of them reached for their smartphone. Almost all of them opened their Twitter app. Many scrolled through another social media platform: watching a video on YouTube, checking their notifications on Instagram, looking at photos on Snapchat.

Three of the 37 students read a newspaper (the News and Observer or the New York Times). Two of the 37 students watched a TV news show (ESPN or CNN). But they all still managed to consume news, even if, in many cases, they didn't consciously understand that was part of their morning routine.

These students have a forgiving definition of news. If it appears in one of their social media feeds or they hear about it at school and it's interesting to them, they often consider it news. To stay relevant and attract a reader base that often seems elusive, news outlets – particularly local news outlets – should take advantage of this loose definition.

In short: Hire the friend that students like Nonso turn to for their news, and give them freedom to cover issues using the tools and methods they know best.

Defining and Consuming News as a High Schooler

Students define news as what's happening and what's relevant.

Students at Jordan-Matthews High School in Siler City have a basic definition of news.

Anabelle Maya says it's "things that affect us." Nick Guariglia says it's "information relevant to a general amount of people." Evan Teague says it's "new information."

Notice what's missing from their definition: News is not what shows up in the newspaper, or what's on TV or the radio. Instead, these students get most of their national news through Twitter. That's where they heard about diversity controversies surrounding the 2016 Oscars, and the terrorist attacks in Paris in late 2015, or Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump mocking a disabled reporter.

When the students are asked about stories that don't fit into the traditional hard news category – sports news, or celebrity stories, or magazine feature pieces – it's harder for them to come to a consensus on whether that's news.

Sports stories are news because "a lot of people watch it; a lot of people care about it," Cristina Cetino said.

She often watches the Cosmopolitan channel on Snapchat. (She does not read the print Cosmopolitan magazine.) At first, she says that's just something fun to do when she's bored. But when she's asked again whether what's in Cosmopolitan is news, she says, "I guess it could be. It keeps you informed on what's going on."

Bryan Guerrero sums it up: "To some people, it might not be news, because they don't care about that. But to others, it is, because they care."

These students are accustomed to the idea that news naturally fits into niche categories, and they don't feel that you have to consume everything to be an informed citizen – only what you're interested in.

The students in Chapel Hill and Carrboro largely agree. To them, news is a new event or piece of information that many people care about. Again, caring about something breaks down differently among different people. Davida Halev, who attends East Chapel Hill High School, uses President Barack Obama's March visit to Cuba as an example.

"If you lived in Cuba and you were like, 'Obama came,' you'd be like, 'Oh, that's news.' But if you lived in Cuba and Donald Trump did (something), you'd be like, '... Oh,'" she said, shrugging her shoulders.

But just because a person or group of people – like Cubans, or like these high school students – don't care about a news story doesn't mean it's not news.

"If I don't care that Obama nominated a Supreme Court justice, that doesn't make it not news," said Carrboro High School senior Kate Wood, referencing Obama's March nomination of federal judge Merrick Garland. "If it's not important to you, you don't have to care about it, but I still think it's relevant to the rest of the world."

For students at Hillside High School in Durham, the "it's news if you care" definition applied to an event that many journalists would unequivocally consider to be news: Hillary Clinton visiting their high school during her campaign to become the Democratic presidential nominee.

"It's not news," Daeshawn Stephens said. "She's a celebrity and all, but she's no celebrity (we care about). We prefer somebody like an athlete, like Kobe Bryant."

To Kelsey Gyant, Clinton’s visit was “news to everybody else,” not the high school students.

(The high school students in Chapel Hill and Carrboro all felt that Clinton’s visit would have been huge news at their schools.)

The Hillside students’ bold statement that Clinton’s visit was not news seems “wrong” to anyone who subscribes to a conventional or traditional definition of news. But that’s the point these students are trying to make. To them, using their definition of news, Clinton’s visit is not news. Like Daeshawn said, he and his classmates didn’t care about Clinton’s visit. That lack of interest means it is not news to them. As Kelsey points out, other people cared about Clinton’s visit, so it was news – to the people who cared. Her comments illustrate the idea that news is different for different people.

Despite their claims that Clinton’s visit wasn’t news, many of the students attended her rally. Nonso took photos for the school. He says he’s voting for Bernie Sanders – though he notes, “I rocks with Bill (Clinton); me and him are close like that” – but he thought it was “kind of cool” that Hillary came to Hillside.

“She can make history, so it was kind of cool,” he said.

How does he know that? He’s paid attention to political news, including stories about Clinton – despite his and others’ claims that her visit wasn’t news.

A similar situation happens at Jordan-Matthews when Cristina begins describing the story of a man who was murdered in town.

She sounds like a crime reporter’s best source – or the crime reporter herself – as she lays out the timeline.

“There was this guy that had been murdered. He went missing, and then everybody found out he was missing, and then everybody found out who did it, and then everybody found out his killer was dead,” she said.

“Everybody found out” because it was on Facebook, or Instagram, or the Hispanic news outlets, she said.

But she didn’t call it news – she just said it was something “everybody knew.”

The varying pieces of information students offer as examples of what’s news and what’s not show that they are informed, on some level, about their communities and about the country. These students often have a selectively deep news knowledge: They know a lot about just a few issues.

David Mindich, in his book “Tuned Out,” attributes that selectively deep news knowledge to a decline in newspaper readership and television viewership (4). He also says the Internet has not filled this hole and has, instead, given young people the ability to be very informed on just a few things they find interesting: “While the Internet has allowed many to develop expertise in their own narrow interests, fewer are willing or able to develop a generalist’s gaze. Knowledge of sports and celebrities continues to rise, but local and national political literacy has plummeted” (4).

Mindich argues that young people can afford to be selective because of the 24/7 media cycle and the rise in news on the Internet as well as the new ability to access entertainment 24 hours a day (39). This rise, Mindich says, has prompted many news organizations to move toward more entertainment-based news in order to keep viewers around (40). The students interviewed here – 12 years after Mindich’s book was published – affirm this theory. The news they consume the most is the news that is most

interesting to them – which often has some entertainment aspect. Sometimes, if the students are uninterested in the topic, they don't even consider it to be news.

Six years before Mindich wrote his book, in 1998, Pew Research Center looked at the same issue. The Center did a two-year study of the content in 16 newspapers, nightly news programs and news magazines, looking at more than 6,000 stories (1). The researchers found that there had “been a shift toward lifestyle, celebrity, entertainment and celebrity crime/scandal in the news and away from government and foreign affairs” (1). As the researchers put it: “(T)he data clearly indicates that there have been major shifts in how the news media define the news” (2).

It's no surprise, then, that these students – who were born the year the Pew study was published – are also including entertainment or interest in their definition of news. They've grown up in the environment laid out in the 1998 study as well as the environment laid out in Mindich's 2004 book – and they're establishing their news habits in a time when the media landscape continues to proliferate.

One thing that stands out about these students' media consumption is their preference for television news over most other media. Other than coming across a story on social media, students were most likely to refer to watching a news story on TV than reading a story in a newspaper or online or hearing a story on the radio. Students also use the language of TV news when talking about news – saying they'll search for another “channel” or “station” or talking about placing their trust in “anchors.”

Pew's study on Millennials' political news consumption backs this up. Other than Facebook (61 percent), a significant portion of Millennials got some political news from TV stations, such as CNN (44 percent), local TV stations (37 percent), ABC News (32

percent), Fox News (30 percent), NBC News (27 percent), MSNBC (22 percent) and CBS News (19 percent) (Mitchell). This reliance on social media and TV news holds true for the students interviewed here.

Students want more – or more substantial – local news.

When it comes to what’s happening in the Jordan-Matthews students’ town – Siler City, N.C. – the students say they don’t feel informed.

But they acknowledge that’s by choice.

“It’s kind of hard to get invested in stuff that’s not really interesting, and there’s nothing really interesting that happens around here,” Evan Teague said.

Anabelle agreed – she wasn’t interested in what happened in the community.

“I don’t really know where to look for information about Siler City. I know there’s a newspaper, but I don’t look at that, and I don’t know if they have a website or anything,” she said.

When asked how they found out about news at Jordan-Matthews, the students’ definition of news got much more information-based. They talked about how they found out about when the SAT or ACT would be held, or what homework they had that night, or if school would be delayed or closed for bad weather. Those details, they said, came from their principal – who “just talks a lot,” said Raul Leyva Hernandez – or from their teachers, who all have Twitter accounts.

At Hillside, the students want that same kind of information: news you can use. They listen to their morning and afternoon announcements, read the information sent to their school emails by their teachers and principal and visit their student services office.

“We have some really cool people in there, so you can go there and talk to them about anything and they’ll try to help you out,” Noah said. “All of us seniors are really focused about scholarships and what college is coming to our school and what opportunities we have.”

Noah and his classmates – and the Jordan-Matthews students – liked this kind of news and this delivery method for one big reason: It was tailored to them. The students could ask for or seek out a particular kind of information and get a customized response. This is why Twitter is so popular among these students. They can, in effect, curate their own morning paper or TV show. They can follow accounts that tweet about their school and their town while also keeping tabs on their friends, celebrities and whatever kind of entertainment they most enjoy.

The Hillside students, living in Durham, N.C., said they feel very informed about what’s going on, evidenced by their ability to talk in-depth about recent issues in the community. And they say they want even more coverage about what’s happening in Durham.

Daeshawn and Gregory Brockington use the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, as an example. Daeshawn said he’s heard of it and felt bad for the people in Flint, but he wondered how it affected him as a North Carolinian. Gregory said he thinks Durham officials need to take a look at their own water.

“At Hillside, they started a Flint, Michigan, water drive,” he said. But “if you empty one of those water bottles and fill it up with water from one of these water fountains (at Hillside), you’re not going to see through that bottle.”

In this way, the Flint water news has affected Gregory's perception of his local community: It's made him think about issues, like bad water, in his own town, and it's made him wonder why a national news event like Flint's water crisis takes precedence over a potential water crisis locally. He wonders if a potential issue in Durham is being ignored because of news coverage of the same issue in Michigan.

The students at Jordan-Matthews would rather – and do – consume more news about national issues because it's easier to find out about and it's more interesting to them.

The gaps in the Jordan-Matthews students' news knowledge are a direct result of their consumption habits. Their ignorance about what's happening in their town is somewhat willful, Jaime Nunemann said.

“It's not that we don't have the resources. We do have websites where we can find out all the news about Chatham County,” she said. “It's just that we're busy high school students, and we don't take time out of our day to go look at the newspaper that Dad picked up because he's old and he's going to read it.

“It's not that we don't have the resources,” she said again. “We just don't use them.”

Students at Hillside don't feel that way. If they want to find out what's happening in Durham, they have several resources, most of which they access through Twitter.

Daeshawn gets his news from friends' Twitter accounts or the accounts of ABC 11 and WRAL. Gregory follows the City of Durham Twitter.

Instead, the gaps they see are in the kinds of news coverage they read.

“You’ve got to relate to it. It’s got to have substance,” Noah said. “We don’t care about flowers growing on the side of the road. It has to relate to the community.

“It has to make us want to challenge, or think, or have our say in what goes on,” he said. “That type of stuff, that gives substance.

“We should talk about what makes Durham, Durham,” he said. “Let’s talk about the tobacco industry, let’s talk about Hayti (a historic African-American community started by tobacco workers in south Durham). Let’s talk about the stuff that we care about, that we put in hard work for.”

What do they not want to see? At Hillside, they aren’t fans of odd news.

“One day, I was watching the news with my grandma, and they had on the news a lady in the snow. She rode her horse to work,” Kelsey said. “That’s not substance for us. We don’t care. I don’t care that you rode your horse to work, even though (the reporters) rode behind her the whole way there.”

Her classmates started laughing.

“Congratulations!” Janina Spencer said, poking fun at the idea that riding a horse to work is a big accomplishment.

But the story illustrates a bigger disconnect between news outlets and the community. Editors, producers and news directors may think the unusual aspect of a snow-covered horse ride to work will draw viewers. But to these high schoolers, it’s a turnoff. Give them something substantial instead.

Mindich makes this same argument:

“... (Local) TV news, with its 90 percent crime and PR content, is useful only if we value the staccato reports of crimes and press conferences; it is a poor way to

learn about the workings of a community. Further, while the local newspaper does provide some political information, that kind of news is shrinking fast. And remember, the vast majority of young people are not reading the newspaper anyway” (82-83).

In Chapel Hill and Carrboro, Chapel Hill High senior Morgan Brandewie illustrates Mindich’s example almost perfectly when she talked about her experience voting in the March presidential primary.

“I would say I’m more informed on world views and the country as a whole,” she said. “For example, when I went to vote, I knew exactly who I was voting for president. But then I was like, ‘Commissioner and mayor? Do I know these people?’ No.

“I guess you would say I know what’s going on in my high school and in Chapel Hill, in a sense, but then, political wise, no.”

As a result, Morgan thinks news organizations in Chapel Hill and Carrboro should include more information on local politics. Editors at local news outlets would protest that they already do. The Daily Tar Heel – produced by students just a few years older than Morgan – had several days of coverage on this year’s town and county races (Daily Tar Heel staff). But Morgan didn’t read it – because it didn’t appear on her news radar. She didn’t stumble on it.

Students stumble on news through social media.

Most of the news students at East Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, Carrboro, Jordan-Matthews and Hillside take in is accidental consumption. Few of them seek out news. Instead, they see it because it’s on their Twitter timelines.

Most students in Siler City and Durham actively checked their Twitter accounts each morning. In Chapel Hill and Carrboro, students checked it if they had a notification from the social media platform. Their morning media consumption was largely dictated by those notifications: If their notifications from overnight were only from Snapchat, they'd only check Snapchat. But usually, they said, they had notifications from several different social media platforms – as well as text messages and notifications from other apps. (The March Madness app, run by the NCAA, was especially popular during these interviews on Tobacco Road.)

But, for these students, Twitter is not the new morning newspaper – a one-stop shop for everything they need to know about what's happening in the world on any given day. It's a way to read funny things posted by their friends and random people on the Internet – the students' phrase for Twitter users they don't personally know. And usually, it's one of those random people on the Internet who leads the students to “discover” news. The random users retweet a link to a news story, or post a tweet offering an opinion about a news event. That sparks a student's interest, and he or she looks for more information.

“Whenever something big happens like that,” Evan said, referring to Donald Trump mocking a disabled reporter, “it's usually trending on Twitter, so I just go there and see what's up.”

All of the students also used their Twitter accounts to follow people or organizations connected to their schools: their teachers (most popular at Jordan-Matthews), their sports teams (most popular at Hillside) and their student government representatives (most popular in Chapel Hill and Carrboro).

Mindich argues that this rise in niche and user-curated content leads to isolated news consumers and communities and young people who are uninterested in and unaware of the news altogether (4). The lack of interest does not hold entirely true for the Triangle students interviewed here. These students all say they are interested in at least a few types of national news, and all are informed about at least a few types of national news.

But a lack of interest in local news does come up, specifically among the Jordan-Matthews students, who say their town's news is uninteresting to them. The Jordan-Matthews students say they don't know what's going on in their community, and some of them are fine with their willful ignorance. Their town is boring, they say. They don't really care about what happens there. But others say they'd stay more informed if the local information was easier (in their minds) to find. They know what's happening in their school because their teachers use Twitter – the students' preferred method of getting information – to communicate.

In Chapel Hill and Carrboro, Twitter is important – but so are Snapchat and Facebook and their morning announcements and fliers in the bathrooms. Twitter gives them national news; Snapchat, Facebook and the other methods keep them informed about their schools. The Chapel Hill and Carrboro students also used a handful of news apps, unlike students in Siler City and Durham. The Chapel Hill and Carrboro students said that they felt very informed – almost saturated – about their schools, but only somewhat informed about their communities.

It's important to note these interviews were conducted during the primary season of an election year. This election was especially interesting to these students for two

reasons: It marked the first time they could vote, and news consumers consider it one of the most prominent and interesting news events happening right now (Gottfried).

Eighty-three percent of young Americans (ages 18 to 29) learned something about the election in the last week, according to the Pew study (Gottfried 2). Mitchelstein and Boczkowski, in their book “The News Gap,” argue this heightened interest is common during election seasons, because it’s a time when readers’ and journalists’ interests match up (55). The authors write about an example from Election Day 2008, using the websites of CNN and Washington Post:

“Journalists on both sites selected public affairs topics for all of the ten most newsworthy stories, and public affairs news accounted for the majority of the consumers’ ten most popular stories (80 percent on CNN, 100 percent on Washington Post)” (55).

This is far different from the normal interest disparity between journalists and news consumers. Journalists almost always consider public affairs stories to be the most newsworthy, but consumers usually click on non-public affairs stories (Mitchelstein 27). When there’s not an election, there’s an average 18 percentage point gap between journalists’ top stories and consumers’ top stories (47).

So if these students had been interviewed in a different year, their news consumption and knowledge may have looked entirely different.

As Mitchelstein and Boczkowski put it, “. . . in a high-choice media environment, consumers all over the world are more capable of following their interests, which, according to this study, don’t coincide with those of journalists” (47).

The students are interested in this election for two big reasons: The candidates are prominent, engaging people, and the students can participate (for the first time) in choosing which candidates will be in the general election. This combination fits in perfectly with their definition of news: Stories about the candidates are interesting, because the candidates and their actions are interesting, and the stories are relevant to the students, since they can vote. Journalists and news outlets should keep this idea of interesting participatory journalism in the forefront of their conversations about news coverage in order to keep attracting high school students to their stories.

Students struggle to distinguish between news and opinion, real and fake.

This gap between journalists and consumers goes beyond story preference. There's also often a clarity gap, with some students saying it's hard to determine on the Internet what's news and what's opinion.

The Jordan-Matthews students say they just have to read the story to figure it out.

"Usually, if they're more reporting the news, they present both sides of the opinion, how people will interpret the news," Anabelle said. "If it's just opinion ... they're only presenting one point of view, and they're saying that this is the best point of view, or this is not a good point of view."

But what if that opinion is written without any of those clue words? Nick says he often reads posts on Tumblr about social justice issues.

"A lot of times, you get posts that are extremely well-written that may just be straight opinion, but it can be interpreted as news," he said.

Anabelle has a tactic for figuring this out.

"I think that's where it's important to check other news stations as well," she said.

In Chapel Hill and Carrboro, Morgan feels that it's impossible to get a completely unbiased news report.

"All media has some sort of opinion in it," she said. "They're all trying to sway people one way or make someone look bad just because of their political views or something. On blogs, it's obviously opinionated, but a lot of people don't realize that all media has some sort of bias in it, and they're always trying to push you one way, whether it's obvious or not."

In Durham, some students say the same thing – news is factual, and opinion is what you think, Gregory said, so it's easy to differentiate between the two. But Gregory's statement soon turns into a big discussion about whether the news is actually factual.

"There's so much stuff that gets cropped and edited out," Noah said. "There's so much that goes into like a process, a machine, until it finally appears on your television screen. Whatever you see on a television screen is a small portion."

The idea that issues or stories may be left out of news coverage turns many of the Hillside students off.

"For me, not telling the full story is a lie as well," Zac said. "I don't feel like it's factual."

Zac's statement prompts a long discussion about news events the students have experienced firsthand that have not been portrayed accurately on the news. Most of the stories revolve around one of their classmates or friends being shot.

"When it comes to people around our age dying ..., it's funny how, on the news, they talk about it and make it seem like one thing, but all of us in the school, we know what really happened, or we have an idea of what really happened," Janina said.

“We know people who were there or people who had communication with people in the situation,” she said. “Or you were there yourself.”

Gregory has perhaps the most nuanced view of incomplete or incorrect news coverage among the Hillside students, something he acquired after his sister was killed.

“When my sister got killed and (news outlets) were reporting on it, they were reporting what they were told ... by the community,” he said. “A lot of times, when (a situation) just happened, police are not releasing anything. I think, a lot of times, that’s what it comes down to – they were told false information.”

And if that false information fits with an established narrative, it becomes the story.

“They do it based off of the viewers,” Noah said. “They’re like, ‘OK, we know what our viewers want to see. They want to see the black guy as the bad guy and the police officer as the good guy, so we’re going to make sure throughout this story, that’s the story we tell.’”

Gregory pushed back against this idea.

“The news can be really effective when it comes to just breaking news type stuff,” he said.

Gregory’s concerns over news bias stem from news coverage of political issues. He uses Hillary Clinton’s visit to Hillside as an example.

“I feel like they made it seem like students wanted her here,” he said. “(Political) stuff like that, that they’re using to get views and promote something that could be one-sided (is biased). But when it comes to, ‘This is what’s happening in your community,’ ... I think they’re pretty spot-on with it.”

Clinton's visit also solidified an assumption the students already had about traditional news media outlets: They don't report everything. Students said the school was spruced up with new paint and planted trees before Clinton's visit. Students were pulled from the crowd to sit behind Clinton and cheer when she spoke, even though "they probably didn't even know half the things she was talking about," Priscilla Page said. What looked like student-made signs were actually made by the Clinton campaign.

None of that was mentioned in any news stories the students saw. Nor was the fact that the Hillside student body is primarily black.

"We're all seniors here, so we all took civics, so we all know how elections work," Noah Thompson said.

Or, as Priscilla Page put it, Clinton came to Hillside for "the same reason that Donald Trump kissed a black baby."

"Bernie (Sanders) is beating (Clinton) in the black community, as well as the young black community," Zac Kea said. "All she was trying to do was come to a school that was primarily black and get some projection from that."

Zac's observation is not entirely correct. Clinton won the North Carolina black vote overwhelmingly, according to CNN's exit polls: 80 percent of black voters chose Clinton over Sanders in the March Democratic primary (CNN). However, Sanders did edge out Clinton with younger voters. Fifty-nine percent of 17- to 44-year-old voters chose Sanders in the primary (CNN).

Zac's comment also illustrates a larger point, which NPR reporter Sam Sanders covered during the South Carolina primary: Young black voters are diverging from their older black relatives when it comes to whom they vote for (Sanders) – just like young

people of all races are diverging from their older relatives when it comes to the media they consume. The Hillside students felt that since statements about why Clinton came to Hillside were not included in the news reports they saw, the news had somewhat of a political bias.

The Hillside students' opinionated discussions about the accuracy of the news also represents an issue distinctive to their predominately black high school and community: They feel like they are not accurately represented by the mainstream media, pointing out that stories about their peers only revolve around negative aspects of their lives. This discrepancy has been brought to light most recently through the Black Lives Matter movement (Richardson). While none of the students reference Black Lives Matter specifically, many of the issues they mention here with the mainstream media mirror that of Black Lives Matter.

Students at Jordan-Matthews had the same thoughts about politically biased news, something Librado said is especially prevalent in the Hispanic community.

“The Hispanic news channels make (Republican presidential candidate) Donald Trump really seem like a horrible person. It’s all about him, but they forget about the rest of the candidates,” he said. “So they focus on what he’s saying, the bad things he’s saying, while the other (news channels) bring in Donald Trump with the other candidates.

When she felt like a news account might be biased or untrue, Jordan-Matthews student Daisy Gonzalez-Ramirez used Twitter to get a fuller picture of the story.

“Usually, whenever you go on Trending, a lot of the news accounts have already added in and you can make sure, like, ‘Oh yeah, then it’s true,’” she said. “(A news account) is a reliable source, so it’s like, ‘Why would they lie about that?’”

Jordan-Matthews student Bryan takes a similar approach.

“Whenever I believe it’s kind of fake, I go on a news website and see if it’s real,” he said, noting that CNN was usually his top choice.

These students know not to believe everything they read on Twitter because they’ve received the standard high school lecture of finding reliable sources – also known as “don’t use Wikipedia as a source for your papers.” But they’ve also experienced how easy it is to be duped by what looks like a legitimate news website.

Anabelle reminds her Jordan-Matthews classmates of a lesson they learned in their sophomore English class, when teacher Doug Riggs was teaching them about satire.

“One of the videos he brought up was from The Onion,” Anabelle said, referencing a popular news satire site. “The parents had taken away (a girl’s) Facebook. They made it seem like she was dying and had this terrible, un-name-able disease.”

Her classmates start laughing at the memory. Many of them fell for the story, which seemed like a clip from a TV station covering a health news story.

“The way they presented it, it seemed like a news story, so I was tricked for a few minutes in the video,” Anabelle said.

Because of experiences like this – and the onslaught of media they consume each day, through Twitter and other sources – they’re somewhat savvier about sussing out what is news and what is not.

But Elizabeth McBurney, from Chapel Hill High, pointed out that if information comes from what seems like a reliable source – in her case, a traditional TV news station – she’ll take it “at face value,” she said.

“It seems like they know more about (an issue) than I do, whether that’s true or not,” she said. “It may be biased, it may not. It probably is. But I don’t know. I just don’t question immediately everything I hear. I think whenever someone’s in more of an authoritative position, then their viewers or consumers – you just automatically believe everything they say.”

Davida said she felt like most high school students felt this way.

“A lot of teens especially just take everything for granted as being valid and true. No one really double-checks things,” she said. “Even on a BuzzFeed post, you’re like, ‘Oh, BuzzFeed, this is real.’ But it may very well not be. I think a lot of kids just take what they see and run with it.”

Elizabeth noted, though, that if something appeared on Twitter from a random user, she wasn’t as trusting.

“I probably would be more skeptical about him, her, whoever it was than someone on CNN or a prominent, widely viewed news station,” she said.

A study from the Pew Research Center found that Millennials are about as trusting of news outlets as their Gen X and Baby Boomer predecessors. A person in any of the three groups trusts about 40 percent of the news sources they’ve heard of and distrusts about 20 percent (Mitchell 4). Millennials tended to have more trust than distrust in sources like the ones Elizabeth mentioned: legacy news outlets, such as ABC News, CNN, The New York Times and NPR (15). Millennials also trusted some newer news outlets more than older generations did (15). Those outlets included Huffington Post, the Colbert Report and the Daily Show (15). Davida’s theory did not hold true: BuzzFeed was more distrusted than trusted among all three generations (15).

Conclusions and Major Observations

If a news outlet is trying to reach young people, it's important to remember students' definition of news: News, to these students, is any piece of information they didn't know before that's relevant to a wide group of people.

These students are informed and interested in hard news – politics, crime, what's happening in their communities. They're also informed in soft news – sports, celebrities' lives, music – and often find this type of news more interesting than hard news.

Two big issues for these students when they consume news are trust and bias.

Students are less concerned about whether a story has factual news or presents a journalist's opinion. Instead, the students worry about whether the story is “real”: Did the news event actually happen, or did a satirical outlet create the story to trip up unsuspecting readers?

All of the students have this concern, which largely stems from their knowledge that information does not have to be vetted before it appears on social media – the main place where these students get their news.

Students' take on bias is also slightly different than traditionally thought. Students are not concerned with whether a journalist has, for example, a political agenda. Instead, students – especially the black students from Hillside – wonder whether they get an accurate portrayal of what actually happened in a news story. If one of their classmates was killed in a shooting – something the students at Hillside were intimately familiar with – why did that shooting happen? Did a reporter include all the details about the victim's life, or did he choose to mention, for example, his three-day suspension from school and fail to report on his university scholarship?

It's easy to see the students' mental wheels turning as they think about what's news and what's not, what they can trust and what they should stay away from – and what news they actually consume.

They know what they “should” consume. But that's not always what they turn to.

To them, news has to have some interesting or relatable element. That's why they know a lot about the 2016 presidential election: It's the first election they'll vote in, and it's the one of the most dramatic presidential campaigns in recent history. Nadeem Ramadan, a senior from East Chapel Hill High, watches comedian and political commentator John Oliver's show every morning to hear what he has to say about the election.

To these students, this presidential election is the best of both worlds: interesting and important. But more often, those two things don't overlap. Take reality TV show “The Bachelor.” To Chapel Hill High senior Kate, it's news – sort of.

“It's what's happening. It's being broadcast out to everyone,” Kate said. “It's not really relevant to the world. It's not going to affect any of our lives if the bachelor gets married or not. But it is what's happening in the world.”

Chapel Hill High senior Elizabeth eloquently struggles with this idea.

“I watch E! News, with all of the celebrity drama. I find it really fascinating,” she said. “But at the same time, I think it's more superficial. Global relations and things that are going on in the world – that, to me, is more significant than whether somebody gets married or not.”

“Part of me is more interested in watching E! News and all the Kardashian drama,” she said. “I think I can relate more with that because it’s more similar to high school. People are always fighting and gossiping about each other.

“So it’s harder for me, as a high school senior, to be as invested in finding out about a Supreme Court justice. I think that’s really, really important, but also, I don’t have anything that connects me with it. It does impact me. But not in the same way.”

Elizabeth’s thoughts sum up what her peers in the Triangle are experiencing. They know what kind of media they “should” consume. And many times, such as in the case of the 2016 presidential election, they’re even interested in the news stories they “should” know about.

But in a media landscape where everything can be a news story, and everything is online, it’s harder to focus on what students “should” know. Like Elizabeth says, it’s much more tempting to become an expert in Kylie Jenner’s latest Instagram posts than it is to learn all about Merrick Garland.

These students have developed a new, wide-open definition of news: a new event or piece of information that many people care about. Often, what these students care about are the stories that are presented as the most interesting or as the most relevant to them.

News outlets should see this as an opportunity. Talk to these high school students. Find out what they find interesting and important. Cover those issues. Put the stories on social media. The students will keep coming back.

What News Outlets Should Do

To reach young people, news outlets of all sizes can take four steps.

1. Cover hard news (especially if you're a local outlet).

Students want to read, watch or listen to substantial stories that tell them about what's happening in their local communities, their country and the world. They especially feel that there is often a lack of this coverage in their local outlets. For example, students were uncertain about who to vote for in their local elections because they felt the candidates' platforms had not been covered (or covered enough) in local media.

How to do it:

Pick stories that value information over oddity. Instead of covering a woman riding her horse to work in the snow, write about how students' school schedules will be affected by multiple snow days.

2. Embrace all forms of social media (especially if you're a local outlet).

These students use Twitter as their information source for everything. Their schools have embraced this and put out all kinds of information – homework reminders, event announcements, sports scores – on Twitter. Many news outlets are already successfully using Twitter to connect with their consumers.

But students are on other social media sites, too. The students in Siler City talked about a double murder wrapped in drug money. The students learned about this story piece by piece in Instagram comments from their friends. The students in Durham talked about a protest over a young black man shot and killed by a white police officer. They watched the protest unfold on Snapchat.

How to do it:

Talk to young people about their favorite social media sites and plan to use those in coverage. If a television reporter is shooting footage for a story on the 6 p.m. news, she should also be required to use Snapchat to record small snippets of the story throughout the day. (Young reporters are probably already doing this.)

3. Remember that “interesting” is important.

The 2016 presidential election is unlike any other in history, and students find the candidates’ antics fascinating. These students consumed many stories about the election not to make a better decision in the voting booth or develop themselves into better citizens: They just found election coverage interesting.

How to do it:

Portray news events like actual stories. Who are the characters? What is the conflict? Do some groups see one character as a hero and another as a villain?

4. **Value video.**

Students’ trust issues with the media stem from problems in portrayal. If a news organization’s story doesn’t match up with the one they know to be true from their own witnessing of an event, why would they continue to follow that news organization’s coverage? With video, students can see what actually happened and come to their own conclusions about the story.

How to do it:

Avoid “he said, she said” narratives. Try to get video of an incident instead. Reporters can shoot this with their smartphones, or news outlets can work with organizations (police departments, community activists, bystanders) to retrieve video after the fact.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the willingness of these students to speak candidly about their news habits and their thoughts about the news industry, these interviews did not cover everything.

There is no good way, from interviews, to fully gauge how deep the students' news knowledge is. It is clear they are somewhat informed on a broad range of news, but how informed is somewhat? How broad does that range reach? A better way to tackle this would be through a news quiz or a news diary, where students recorded what news they consume over a certain period of time.

The small-group interviews also rely on the idea that the students are telling the truth and not fudging their answers in order to impress peers or the moderator. One-on-one interviews, although more time consuming, may have made the students more comfortable. While it is unlikely the students were dishonest here, in a one-on-one interview, they may have been able to go deeper into their own nuanced thoughts about the news.

While the groups did discuss the difference between news and opinion, biased news coverage and how to determine the accuracy of a story, interviews did not touch on the difference between news and advertisements. It's becoming more difficult to tell what's an ad and what's news, with promoted tweets, sponsored content and native stories. (Students are clearly aware of the concept, though: When asked about the email newsletter *The Skimm*, one student joked about whether the question was "sponsored" by *The Skimm*, causing everyone to laugh.) Future interviews and studies should work to determine whether students can tell the difference between the two and how they feel about potentially deceptive advertisements.

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APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHICS IN CITIES AND SCHOOLS

Carrboro

2014 population: 20,984

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

http://www.census.gov/popest/data/cities/totals/2014/files/SUB-EST2014_37.csv

Carrboro High School

813 total students in 2015-16 school year

59 percent white

14 percent Hispanic

11 percent black

8 percent Asian

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction's Grade, Race, Sex data

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/accounting/data/>

Chapel Hill

2014 population: 59,376

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

http://www.census.gov/popest/data/cities/totals/2014/files/SUB-EST2014_37.csv

Chapel Hill High School

1463 total students in 2015-16 school year

54 percent white

14 percent Hispanic

13 percent Asian

12 percent black

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction's Grade, Race, Sex data

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/accounting/data/>

East Chapel Hill High School

1360 total students in 2015-16 school year

51 percent white

19 percent Asian

11 percent black

11 percent Hispanic

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/accounting/data/>

Durham

2014 population: 251,862

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

http://www.census.gov/popest/data/cities/totals/2014/files/SUB-EST2014_37.csv

Hillside High School

1305 total students in 2015-16 school year

82 percent black

15 percent Hispanic

1 percent white

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/accounting/data/>

Siler City

2014 population: 8,273

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

http://www.census.gov/popest/data/cities/totals/2014/files/SUB-EST2014_37.csv

Jordan-Matthews High School

759 total students in 2015-16 school year

52 percent Hispanic

29 percent white

14 percent black

Source: N.C. Department of Public Instruction

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/fbs/accounting/data/>

APPENDIX B: STUDENTS INTERVIEWED

Carrboro High School

Peter Cohen

Kate Wood

Chapel Hill High School

Elizabeth McBurney

Morgan Brandewie

East Chapel Hill High School

David Halev

Nadeem Ramadan

Hillside High School

Nonso Nwogalanya

Noah Thompson

Priscilla Page

Zac Kea

McKayla Jackson

Gregory Brockington

Alton Brown

Edward Walker

Christian Coleman

Xochitl Cahua

Daisy Salinas

Janina Spencer

Devin Reavis

Gwen Payne

Kelsey Gyant

Daeshawn Stephens

Nielah Hicks

Jordan-Matthews High School

Librado Mendoza Sosa

Daisy Gonzalez-Ramirez

Cristina Cetino

Nicholas Guariglia

Miguel Watson

Jake Weaver

Evan Teague

Madison Walters

Raul Leyva Hernandez

Jaime Nunemann

Anabelle Maya

Bryan Guerrero

Daniel Ocampo

Miguel Angel Martinez-Camposeco

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Moderator introduction

Overview of study

We are going to talk about what kinds of things you consider to be news and what kinds of news you read, watch or listen to. I want to hear your opinions and thoughts.

Setting ground rules

Respect all participants' opinions, but feel free to disagree.

Wait until another person is finished speaking before you speak.

Remember that there are no right or wrong answers.

Participant introduction

Please tell us your first and last name.

DISCUSSION

Warm-up

GOAL: Make students comfortable with a basic question that ties into the idea that most young people get their news online.

How much time would you estimate you spend online – on a laptop, desktop, your phone, a tablet – each day?

Questions

GOAL: Find out what students consider to be newsworthy.

What's the first thing you read, watch or listen to when you wake up in the morning?

Do you remember a particular event or "story" happening recently? When did you first hear about it? How did you hear about it?

How do social networks like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram contribute to how you find out about things? What about email newsletters, like The Skimm?

Where do you get information on what's happening at your school?

What's your idea of what "news" is?

What isn't news?

Follow-up questions

GOAL: Address any additional questions that came up as students were having discussion.

Questions may include ...

Is a story where a writer expresses his or her opinion "news"?

How informed about current events do you feel like you are?

CLOSURE

Do you have any questions about the study or what we talked about today?

Thank you for participating!