



IN THE INTERNET WE TRUST: THE IMPACT OF ENGAGING WITH NEWS ARTICLES

A GALLUP/KNIGHT
FOUNDATION ONLINE
EXPERIMENT

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IN THE INTERNET WE TRUST: THE IMPACT OF ENGAGING WITH NEWS ARTICLES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The digital age has created easy access to mass amounts of quickly changing news that people can share, discuss and research within online communities. These abilities have contributed to the spread of misinformation — accidentally or otherwise — making the spread of misleading or inaccurate news a topic of interest for researchers, policymakers and the public at large.

Gallup and Knight Foundation completed an experiment to explore two prominent forms of digital engagement with the news — sharing the story and conducting internet-based research related to the story — and how these activities relate to trust in media. These two forms of engagement may be seen by some as counteracting behaviors. Sharing has the power to spread misinformation, while conducting instant research is, theoretically, one way people can quickly identify questionable news stories and therefore, perhaps, not pass them on.

This report demonstrates the relationships that sharing and conducting research have with trust in media by analyzing the results of the Gallup/Knight Foundation experiment, which used a custom-built news aggregation website.

THOSE WHO WANTED TO SHARE A NEWS ARTICLE TENDED TO HAVE HIGHER LEVELS OF TRUST IN THEIR ARTICLE THAN DID THOSE WHO WANTED TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THEIR NEWS STORY.

In the study, all participants were asked to rate how much they trusted each news story that they read. They also were prompted with an option to take further action based on which of two experimental groups they were in:

- **Sharers:** In this group, participants had the ability to share a story by following a link. Participants who did so were then asked a series of follow-up questions about why, how and with whom they would like to share.
- **Researchers:** Participants could follow a link to find out more about the news story they were reading. Those who did so were asked how they would like to learn more about the article.

Key findings from the experiment include:

- The act of sharing an article is generally associated with high levels of trust — 71% of articles that readers indicated they would share received a trust rating between a 4.0 and 5.0, with 5.0 as the maximum rating.
- Most people wanted to share an article for social or personal reasons, not because they were skeptical of the story. The top reasons for wanting to share were to call attention to the story (44%), to express one's interest in the topic (20%) and to engage with others (18%).
- Compared with those who would share an article, participants who wanted to engage the article by learning more about it were not as trusting of the news articles they read. In particular, participants who said they would learn more by visiting a fact-checking website or another news website were less trusting than those who said they would learn more by visiting Google or Wikipedia.
- Consistent with past research, overall trust in media is strongly influenced by a person's political affiliation and the ideology a particular news outlet is associated with.

INTRODUCTION

Americans have many opportunities to interact with the news today. Two prominent examples include 1) sharing, or sending a news story to others digitally through methods such as emailing, posting on social media or texting, and 2) conducting internet-based research that is motivated by reading a news story, to call attention to the story, to verify the content's authenticity or to reach related goals.

Gallup and Knight Foundation recently conducted an experiment to examine the extent to which the credibility of a news article influences news consumers to share or further research the piece — is trust a factor in these actions? This report attempts to answer this question by presenting the results of the experiment.

In the experiment, study participants were asked to rate how much they trusted each news story. And, depending on which experimental group they were in, they could indicate their interest in sharing the news story or learning more about it. If participants said they wanted to share the article, they were asked who they would share the article with, how they would share the article (e.g., social media, email) and why they would share the article. Meanwhile, those who said they wanted to learn more were asked how they would like to learn more — by searching another news website, by fact-checking the article, or by using Google or Wikipedia.

Study participants who indicated they wanted to share an article typically exhibited high trust levels (i.e., ratings of at least 4.0 on a scale with a maximum rating of 5.0) for the article. In this study, 71% of articles that participants wanted to share received a trust rating of 4.0 or higher. This suggests that trust is a factor when a person is deciding whether to share an article (putting aside the consideration of whether that trust is misplaced). And it seems that people share highly trusted versus less-trusted articles for good reason: The results of this study show that people most often want to share news stories with people they care about — their friends or families — rather than a larger social network.

Participants who indicated they wanted to learn more about the news article were less trusting of the news articles they read than were those who wanted to share articles. And, more specifically, those who said they would learn more by visiting a fact-checking website or another news website were less trusting than those who said they would learn more via Google or Wikipedia.

This analysis also shows that a person's overall political identification and the perceived political bent of the news source influence trust, as might be expected.

A reader's desire to interact with the article is not a determinant of trust, but, rather, trust is likely a consideration that a person takes into account when deciding whether to share a news article or determining why they might want to learn more.

Gallup and Knight Foundation acknowledge support for this research from the Ford Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Open Society Foundations.

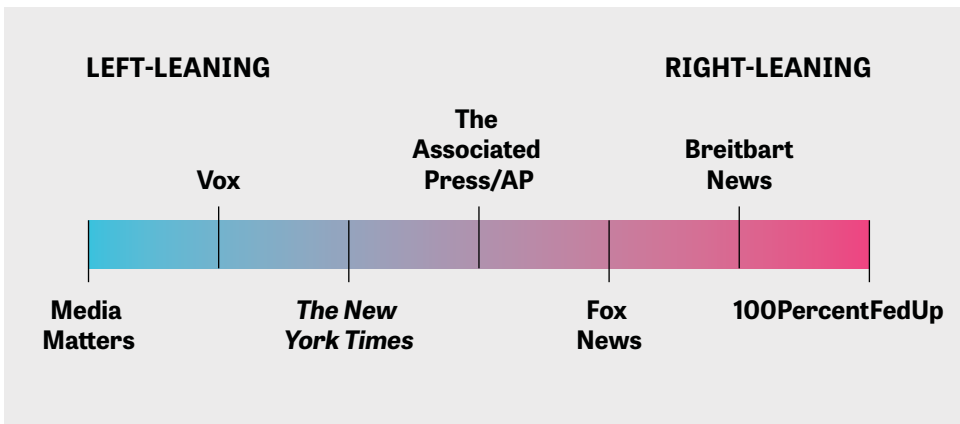
MOST OFTEN, PEOPLE WANTED TO SHARE A NEWS STORY WITH FRIENDS OR FAMILY MEMBERS RATHER THAN LARGER AUDIENCES ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENT DESIGNS

ABOUT THE EXPERIMENTAL PLATFORM

This study was conducted using Gallup's experimental news aggregation website. The platform regularly collects news stories from seven major news outlets, which represent various points on the ideological spectrum, from the far left to the far right.

Media Outlets That Appear in Gallup's News Aggregation Website



The main page of the website divides the news content into three categories: economy, politics and science. Users can view the headline, first sentence and source of the article on the main page, and they can click on the story to view the full-length article.

ECONOMY	POLITICS	SCIENCE
<p>ECONOMY Extracted on 25 Jan 2018</p> <p>Why Strong Growth Is a Headache for the European ...</p> <p>FRANKFURT — Mario Draghi, the president of the European Central Bank, has what might be called a happy problem. The ...</p> <p><i>The New York Times</i> Continue To Read And Rate ></p>	<p>POLITICS Extracted on 25 Jan 2018</p> <p>WOW! CONSERVATIVE FILMMAKER Dinesh ...</p> <p>In May 2014, Dinesh D'Souza pleaded guilty to one felony count of making illegal contributions in the names of co-workers. ...</p> <p><i>Independent Republican</i> Continue To Read And Rate ></p>	<p>SCIENCE Extracted on 25 Jan 2018</p> <p>Whopper: Burger King Thinks It Can Explain Net Neutrality ...</p> <p>Burger King has released a video criticizing the FCC's repeal of net neutrality by attempting to explain the issue through their ...</p> <p><i>Breitbart</i> Continue To Read And Rate ></p>
<p>ECONOMY Extracted on 25 Jan 2018</p> <p>Coal's Decline Seems Impervious to Trump's ...</p> <p>BOBTOWN, Pa. — When Nic Zmija applied for a job at the 4 West coal mine three years ago, he was tantalized by a fat raise and a ...</p> <p><i>The New York Times</i> Continue To Read And Rate ></p>	<p>POLITICS Extracted on 25 Jan 2018</p> <p>Trump just said he's "looking forward to" testifying under ...</p> <p>President Donald Trump told reporters Wednesday afternoon that he would testify under oath to special counsel Robert ...</p> <p><i>Vox</i> Continue To Read And Rate ></p>	<p>SCIENCE Extracted on 25 Jan 2018</p> <p>New Findings Could Save Lives of More Stroke Patients</p> <p>Many more stroke victims than previously thought can be saved from disability or death if doctors remove blood clots that are choking ...</p> <p><i>The New York Times</i> Continue To Read And Rate ></p>

RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENT DESIGNS

EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS

Once a user clicked on an article, the page with the full story asked all users to rate how trustworthy they found the content. Study participants indicated the degree of trust that they had in the article by rating it, with a higher score representing a higher level of trust. Users could indicate trust in half-point increments: The lowest score was 0.5, and the highest was 5.0, with 10 possible ratings.

Participants also saw one of two additional features, depending on which experimental group they were in:

- **Sharers:** For this group, a Share link appeared with each article. The news aggregation website did not allow study participants to actually share articles but, instead, measured intent to share. Participants who followed this link were asked a series of questions about why they wanted to share the article, how and with whom.
- **Researchers:** This group could click a Find Out More link. Study participants who followed this link were asked if they were interested in obtaining more information about the article they had just read, including via fact-checking websites. Participants who indicated they were interested in learning more about the article via fact-checking websites were asked if they had a preferred fact-checking website (Snopes.com, PolitiFact.com or FactCheck.org).

See the following sections of the report for details about the follow-up questions for each group.

RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENT DESIGNS

“SHARE” EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

To better understand the relationship between sharing an article and trust, participants who indicated they wanted to share an article were asked a series of follow-up questions about why, how and with whom the reader would share the article.

Follow-Up Questions for Study Participants Who Selected the Share Link

The image shows a screenshot of a NewsLens article page. The article is from AP (Associated Press) and is titled "Rate This Article's Trustworthiness". The article features a photo of a man and the text "CBS ALL AMERICA ORIGINAL". A yellow box highlights the "Share" button, with two yellow arrows pointing from it to three separate survey questions:

- Why would you share this article? (Select all that apply)**
 - To call attention to the story
 - To ask someone's opinion
 - To express your interest in the topic
 - To verify its accuracy
 - To engage with others
- How would you share this article? (Select all that apply)**
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Email or direct message
 - Text/WhatsApp
 - Other
- Who would you share this article with? (Select all that apply)**
 - Friend(s) or family member(s)
 - Work colleagues
 - People in your online social network
 - People in your local community
 - As many people as possible

RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENT DESIGNS

“FIND OUT MORE” EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

Study participants who clicked the Find Out More link were asked how they would like to learn more about the article they had read. Immediately after clicking the link, they were prompted with the question: Where would you go to find out more information? (Select all that apply).

Study participants who said they would like to find out more information at a fact-checking website were prompted further to identify their preferred fact-checking website.

Questions Related to Fact-Checking an Article

The image shows a sequence of three screenshots from the NewsLens website. The top screenshot shows a news article with a 'Find Out More' button highlighted by a yellow box. Two yellow arrows point from this button to two separate survey pop-ups below. The first pop-up asks 'Where would you go to find out more information? (Select all that apply)' and lists options: Fact Checking Website (checked), Wikipedia, Google the topic (checked), A different news website (checked), and Other. The second pop-up asks 'What is your preferred fact checking website?' and lists options: https://www.factcheck.org, https://www.snopes.com/, http://www.politifact.com/, and Other. Both pop-ups have 'Back' and 'Done' buttons.

RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENT DESIGNS

COMPARISON GROUPS: SAMPLE SIZES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Gallup recruited study participants via the nationally representative survey panel known as the Gallup Panel™. Gallup invited 30,062 panelists to join this study. The invitation, sent via email, also included a link to the experimental news aggregation website. Overall, 4,802 panelists clicked on the invitation link and were enrolled in the study, which ran from May 3 to June 4, 2018.

Gallup assigned participants randomly to one of two experimental groups. In the first group, 456 participants indicated they would like to share an article and answered at least one of the follow-up questions. In the second group, 770 participants clicked on the link to find out more and answered one of the subsequent queries. For the purposes of this analysis, these numbers will represent the total user sample sizes in terms of understanding the relationship between trust and the actions of sharing or researching.

The first group's 456 participants rated their trust level and shared 1,225 articles over the course of the experiment, and 48% of the participants shared more than one article.

Nearly half of the “Find Out More” participants (49%) reviewed and wanted to research more than one news story during the study.

Number of Participants and Article Ratings for Two Experimental Groups

	TOTAL
Sharers	
Number of users who rated their trust level and clicked Share link for at least one article	456
Number of articles with trust level rated and Share link clicked	1,225
Researchers	
Number of users who rated and followed Find Out More link for at least one article	770
Number of articles with trust level rated and Find Out More link clicked	2,227

Both groups of participants have different demographics than the overall U.S. population. This study had a slightly lower percentage of female participants (47% of sharers, 46% of those who wanted to learn more), compared with the U.S. Census estimate that 50.8% of Americans are female.¹ The study's groups were also notably older than the general population, with less than 40% of both groups falling under age 61. Furthermore, both groups had slightly smaller percentages of Republicans than the overall population, which had about 40% of Americans identifying as Republican or leaning Republican as of July 2018.²

Gender and Political Affiliation for Both Experimental Groups

	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	% OF PARTICIPANTS
Sharers		
Female	215	47
Male	241	53
Republican/Lean Republican	148	32
Independent/No affiliation/No answer	101	22
Democrat/Lean Democratic	207	45
Aged 18-40	25	5
Aged 41-60	124	27
Aged 61+	306	67
No answer	1	0
Researchers		
Female	354	46
Male	416	54
Republican/Lean Republican	250	32
Independent/No affiliation/No answer	188	24
Democrat/Lean Democratic	332	43
Aged 18-40	56	7
Aged 41-60	241	31
Aged 61+	472	61
No answer	1	0

Due to rounding, percentages per group may total 100% +/- 1%.

1 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045217>

2 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/15370/party-affiliation.aspx>

The Democratic tilt in participants, however, was not necessarily evident in the ideological markings of the most frequently read news sources. In both groups, the most-read news source was the nonideological Associated Press, which was the source behind 49% of all articles that readers wanted to share and 40% of articles that enticed readers to want to find out more.

The right-leaning publications, including 100PercentFedUp, Breitbart News and Fox News, collectively, were responsible for 29% of articles read by sharers and 38% of articles read by “Find Out More” respondents.

The three sources identified as being left-leaning — *The New York Times*, Vox and Media Matters — were responsible for 23% of the articles read and shared in this experiment and 23% of articles that inspired people to find out more.

Ideology of News Sources as a Percentage of Articles Read By Participants Who Said They Would Share the Article or Find Out More

	% OF ARTICLES READ BY SHARERS	% OF ARTICLES READ BY RESEARCHERS
Right-Leaning Sources	29%	38%
100PercentFedUp	8%	10%
Breitbart News	10%	15%
Fox News	11%	13%
Nonpartisan Source	49%	40%
The Associated Press/AP	49%	40%
Left-Leaning Sources	23%	23%
<i>The New York Times</i>	3%	3%
Vox	14%	13%
Media Matters	6%	7%

Due to rounding, percentages per group may total 100% +/- 1%.

MAJOR RESULTS REGARDING TRUST

OVERVIEW

The results of the two groups' experiments suggest that news readers who decide to engage further with a news story may believe the story is reliable — but not necessarily. *How* and *why* the person has decided to engage with the article is crucial to determining the reader's confidence in the story.

On the whole, sharing is a form of engagement typically done with trusted news stories, whether we define trust in absolute or relative terms. The average trust rating of all 1,225 articles that participants indicated they would share was 4.0, an average that is 29% higher than the comparable figure for articles in the Find Out More experimental group, which had an average trust rating of 3.1 for its 2,227 articles.

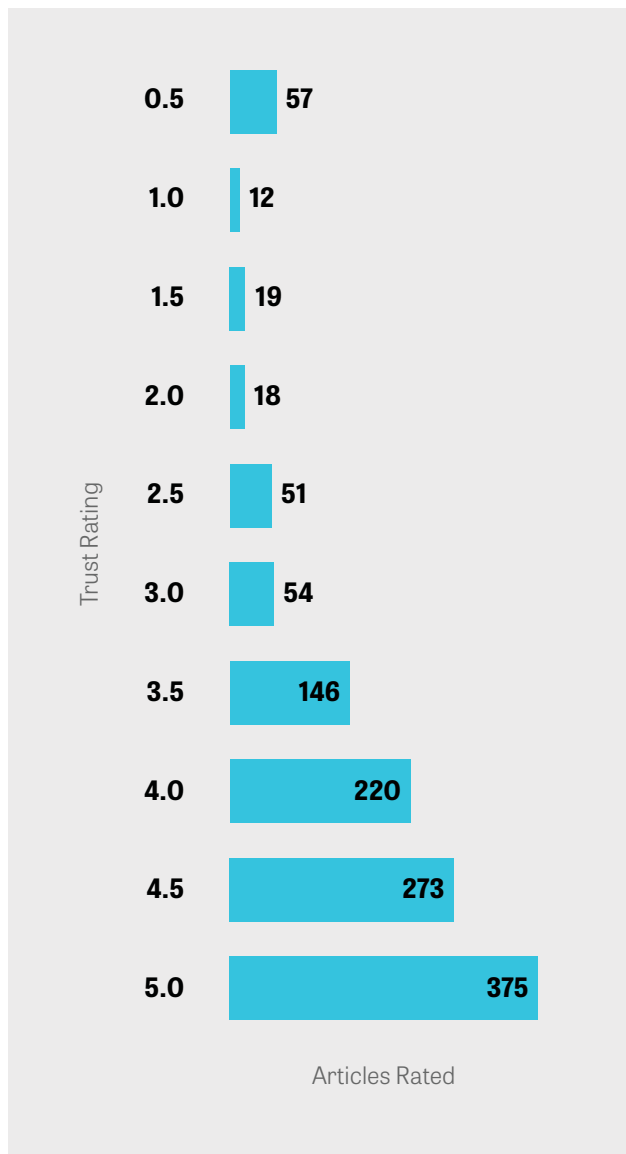
The average trust rating per user is, again, much higher for sharers than participants who wanted to learn more (3.9 vs. 3.2, respectively).

Average Trust Rating Per Article Rated and Per Participant, by Experimental Group

AVERAGE TRUST RATING ON SCALE WITH MAXIMUM RATING OF 5.0	
Sharers	
Average trust rating per article	4.0
Average trust rating per participant	3.9
Researchers	
Average trust rating per article	3.1
Average trust rating per participant	3.2

In an absolute sense, most sharers assessed their level of trust on the higher end of the scale, between 4.0 and 5.0. The below graph shows the overall distribution of trust ratings for those who indicated they would share an article. Notably, 71% of articles received a trust rating of 4.0 or higher.

Distribution of Trust Scores for Articles That Participants Indicated They Would Share



In both groups, participants' reasons for clicking the Share and Find Out More links related closely with varying levels of average trust. The next two sections look at the correlations more closely, first for the participants who indicated they would share the story and then for those who wanted to learn more.

THE AVERAGE TRUST RATING OF ALL ARTICLES THAT PARTICIPANTS INDICATED THEY WOULD SHARE WAS 29% HIGHER THAN THE COMPARABLE FIGURE FOR ARTICLES IN THE FIND OUT MORE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP.

MAJOR RESULTS REGARDING TRUST

WHY AND HOW PEOPLE SHARE AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHARING AND TRUST

Sharing, according to this study's results, is rarely done to skeptically investigate a news story, a finding that helps explain the high average trust ratings given by the people who said they would share an article. Ten percent of the articles that people indicated they would share would be promoted to verify the piece's accuracy, but the most common reason for sharing was, instead, to promote, not question, a news story, with 44% of respondents saying they would share an article "to call attention to the story."

Calling attention to a story may seem like an obvious reason for sharing an article, but past research has shown participants emphasizing the more human reasons people might share, including our desire to strengthen social bonds or signal something about ourselves. In this study, social motives — combining responses "to engage with others" and "to ask someone's opinion" — were 27% of the responses to the question of why you would share the article. One-fifth of responses cited the individual's desire to express their interest in the topic.

Why People Share

Why would you share this article? (Select all that apply)

	% OF RESPONSES
Reason for Sharing	
To call attention to the story	44
To express your interest in the topic	20
To engage with others	18
To verify its accuracy	10
To ask someone's opinion	9

Due to rounding, percentages per group may total 100% +/- 1%.

The only sharing motive that was associated with comparably low trust levels was the desire to verify the article's accuracy — the average trust rating was 3.2 for articles shared for this reason. All other sharing motives, when combining the social reasons, had average trust ratings at or above 4.0. The highest levels of trust were associated with the motives of expressing interest in the topic or calling attention to the story. The average trust rating for the group of participants who indicated they would share to express their interest in the topic was the highest of all groups, and the difference between this trust rating and the ratings of those who would share for social reasons or to call attention to the story was statistically significant.

Average Trust Rating Per Article, by Why Person Said They Would Share Article

Why would you share this article? (Select all that apply)

	AVERAGE TRUST RATING PER ARTICLE
Reason for Sharing	
Express your interest in the topic	4.3*
To call attention to the story	4.2
Social (to engage with others or to ask someone's opinion)	4.0
To verify its accuracy	3.2*

*Differs from all other reasons' averages in a statistically significant manner

Study participants also indicated, directly or indirectly, that their sharing would have a limited reach. For example, the primary mode that participants would like to use to share an article was email or direct message — 46% of sharing instances would have used this method. By the standards of the digital age, sending an email or direct messaging is a rather personal — often one-to-one — form of communication. By contrast, Facebook and Twitter, which are efficient ways of sharing content with a larger number of people, were named by sharers 25% and 7% of the time, respectively.

Furthermore, sharers prefer, far and away, to distribute news articles to friends or family members (53% of responses), compared with people in their online social network (17%), "as many people as possible" (14%) or work colleagues (8%).

How and With Whom You Would Share an Article

How would you share this article? (Select all that apply)

	% OF RESPONSES
Answer	
Email or direct message	46
Facebook	25
Other	12
Text or WhatsApp	9
Twitter	7

Who would you share this article with? (Select all that apply)

	% OF RESPONSES
Answer	
Friend(s) or family member(s)	53
People in your online social network	17
As many people as possible	14
Work colleagues	8
People in your local community	7

Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1%, per question.

MAJOR RESULTS REGARDING TRUST

LEARNING MORE ABOUT NEWS ARTICLES AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRUST AND ONE'S DESIRE TO FIND OUT MORE

An alternate form of engagement with a news article is to research some aspect of it, a task that one can accomplish easily and quickly using the vast amount of information sources that are readily available on the internet. This abundance of material may help explain why study participants who wanted to learn more about an article were largely divided on which source they would use. The most common response was “a different news website,” occurring 36% of the time. The popular search engine Google was mentioned 27% of the time. Twenty-two percent of responses were fact-checking websites. The option “Other” represented 10% of responses and Wikipedia, 6%.

Sources for Finding Out More

Where would you go to find out more information? (Select all that apply)

	% OF RESPONSES
Answer	
A different news website	36
Google the topic	27
Fact-checking website	22
Other	10
Wikipedia	6

Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1%.

As might be expected given the different purposes of these information sources, participants expressed, on average, various levels of trust in each source. Participants who said they would use Wikipedia or Google to research the article tended to trust the article they were researching more than those who wanted to use a fact-checking website, a different news website or some other source.

Average Level of Trust Per Article Read, by Where Reader Would Learn More

	AVERAGE TRUST RATING PER ARTICLE
Source for Learning More	
Wikipedia	3.6*
Google the topic	3.4*
Fact-checking website	3.1
A different news website	3.0
Other	3.0

*Differs from all reasons' averages that don't have an asterisk in a statistically significant manner

MORE THAN ONE-FOURTH OF RESPONSES SHOWED THAT PARTICIPANTS WOULD USE GOOGLE TO FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT AN ARTICLE.

These results are a good reminder that people have many different motives when researching a news story, and not all are of a skeptical nature. People might be driven by curiosity or the desire to better understand something mentioned in an article, goals that Wikipedia or Google are particularly well-suited for.

Participants who selected a fact-checking website were asked which website they would prefer to use. Although FactCheck.org was the most frequently cited website, none of the three explicit choices dominated with respondents — average trust levels did not vary in a statistically significant way among the response groups.

Preferred Fact-Checking Website, Among Those Who Selected “Fact-Checking Website” as a Source for Finding Out More Information

What is your preferred fact-checking website?

	% OF RESPONSES
Website	
FactCheck.org	37
Snopes.com	30
PolitiFact.com	25
Other	8

MAJOR RESULTS, BY SOURCE OR POLITICAL AFFILIATION

OVERVIEW

Past research on this news aggregation website has shown that trust is at least partially influenced by the political affiliation of the reader and the perceived political bent of the news source. Similar connections were seen across both groups in this experiment, with articles from AP receiving higher average trust ratings than either right- or left-leaning sources.

Among those who indicated they would share an article, participants who identified as Republicans or leaning Republican tended to give lower trust ratings, on average, than participants who identified as Democrats or leaning Democratic — in line with Republicans' generally more pessimistic attitudes toward the media.³ However, partisan affiliation was not a source of significant variation for those who said they wanted to find out more.

Average Trust Ratings, by News Source Ideology and Readers' Political Affiliation

	AVERAGE TRUST RATINGS OF SHARERS	AVERAGE TRUST RATINGS OF RESEARCHERS
News Source		
Right-leaning news sources	3.8	2.7
Nonpartisan source	4.2*	3.7*
Left-leaning news sources	3.9	2.9*
Readers' Political Affiliation		
Republican/Lean Republican	3.8*	3.1
Independent	4.0	3.1
Democrat/Lean Democratic	4.2	3.1

*Average trust rating differs from all other averages in the column, within a particular response category. For instance, the average trust rating among sharers reading nonpartisan sources differs in a statistically significant way from the average trust rating among sharers who read right-leaning or left-leaning sources.

The following sections will consider more fully how a news source's political affiliation relates to a reader's desire to click a Share or Find Out More link and their trust in the news.

³ <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/perceived-accuracy-and-bias-in-the-news-media>

MAJOR RESULTS, BY SOURCE OR POLITICAL AFFILIATION

SHARING

As might be expected, readers of different political stripes showed decidedly different preferences in terms of the perceived political association of the news outlet producing the article. Therefore, these results must be interpreted with caution, as participants were offered articles from only seven outlets, which may have skewed their typical reading or sharing habits.

In this study, Republicans were strikingly more likely to share an article from news sources most closely aligned to their political point of view than Democrats were to share stories from news sources aligned with their point of view. Interestingly, a majority of articles that Republicans shared (60%) were not from right-leaning publications; among Democrats, 77% of articles shared were not from left-leaning publications.

Percentages of Shared Stories, by Ideology of News Source and Political Party of Respondent

	REPUBLICAN/ LEAN REPUBLICAN	INDEPENDENT	DEMOCRAT/ LEAN DEMOCRATIC
	% of Shared Stories	% of Shared Stories	% of Shared Stories
Right-leaning sources	41	28	19
Nonpartisan source	41	42	58
Left-leaning sources	19	30	23

Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1%.

In terms of trust, Republicans' average trust rating of stories from left-leaning sources was lower, in a statistically significant way, than their average trust rating of articles from nonpartisan or right-leaning sources. Democrats' average trust rating of articles from right-leaning sources was lower, in a statistically significant way, than their average trust rating of stories from nonpartisan or left-leaning sources.

Average Trust Rating Per Article, by Raters' Political Affiliation and Article Sources' Ideology

	REPUBLICAN/LEAN REPUBLICAN	INDEPENDENT	DEMOCRAT/LEAN DEMOCRATIC
	% of Responses	% of Responses	% of Responses
Right-leaning sources	4.1	3.8	3.3*
Nonpartisan source	3.8	4.2	4.4
Left-leaning sources	3.0*	4.0	4.4

*Differs from all other averages within its column in a statistically significant manner

Overall, the sharers of different political affiliations tended to cite, with similar frequency, the same reasons for sharing; for instance, 44% of Republicans, 46% of independents and 43% of Democrats said they shared to call attention to the news story. Even when partisans shared stories from outlets that had ideologies different from their own, they tended to share for the same reasons. The only notable difference from this pattern is that Republicans were less likely to share a story from a non-right-leaning source for the reason of calling attention to the story than if the story were from a right-leaning source (40% vs. 50%, respectively).

REPUBLICANS WERE MORE LIKELY TO SHARE ARTICLES FROM NEWS SOURCES CLOSELY ALIGNED TO THEIR POLITICAL POINT OF VIEW THAN DEMOCRATS WERE TO SHARE STORIES FROM SOURCES ALIGNED WITH THEIR POINT OF VIEW.

MAJOR RESULTS, BY SOURCE OR POLITICAL AFFILIATION

LEARNING MORE ABOUT AN ARTICLE

Political affiliation appears to play a role in a person determining which source they would use to find out more information, at least to some extent. Republicans were notably more likely to say they would learn more at a different news website than were independents or Democrats. Democrats, meanwhile, were more likely to say they would use a fact-checking website to learn more about an article than Republicans were, 26% to 17%. This latter finding is in line with past research, suggesting that Democrats react to fact-checking websites more favorably than Republicans do.

How Readers Would Find More Information, by Raters' Political Affiliation

	REPUBLICANS/ LEAN REPUBLICAN	INDEPENDENTS	DEMOCRATS/LEAN DEMOCRATIC
	% of Responses	% of Responses	% of Responses
A different news website	43	34	31
Google the topic	25	28	27
Fact-checking website	17	21	26
Other	10	11	8
Wikipedia	4	6	8

Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/- 1%.

For all three groups, trust averages were higher for Google and Wikipedia than the other explicitly mentioned research options — a fact-checking website or a different news website.

Average Trust Ratings of Specific Sources for Finding More Information, by Raters' Political Affiliation

	REPUBLICAN/LEAN REPUBLICAN	INDEPENDENT	DEMOCRAT/LEAN DEMOCRATIC
Google/Wikipedia	3.5*	3.4*	3.4*
Fact-checking website	3.1	3.1	3.1
A different news website	2.9	3.1	3.0

*Differs in statistically significant manner from all other averages in each column

CONCLUSION

The digital age has empowered news consumers to engage with the stories they read in significant ways. People can share the stories that they read with, potentially, a wide audience; meanwhile, curious or skeptical readers can instantly investigate a news story that strikes their interest.

Whether these actions are motivated by trust — or if the credibility of a news story is a factor at all in these behaviors — has been unclear. This is an important question, especially with respect to sharing, through which people may unwittingly disseminate false information if they are not mindful to consider the likely accuracy of the story.

The results of this experiment, though not able to make strictly causal claims, suggest that trust in an article's accuracy is a factor in determining whether to share the story. People who said they wanted to share an article also tended to rate their trust high. People also indicated that, primarily, they wanted to share an article with people whom they are (theoretically) close with: their friends or family members.

And while sharers in this experiment could only select articles from a limited number of news outlets, it is interesting that partisans did not overwhelmingly indicate they would share articles from sympathetic news outlets. A majority of Democrats and a near-plurality of Republicans would have shared articles from the nonpartisan Associated Press.

By comparison, average trust levels of articles were lower for participants who said they wanted to find out more, especially if they sought to do their research on fact-checking websites or other websites besides Google or Wikipedia. Republicans tended to favor, in terms of frequency, slightly different research sources than the other partisan groups did, though it is not clear why. In line with past research, Republicans tended to avoid fact-checking websites more than the other two groups did.

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