



# Can We Rebuild Broken Relationships? Examining Journalism, Social Media, and Trust in a Fractured Media Environment

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Journalists' ability to produce work for and connect with their audiences through social media has contributed to the blurring of boundaries around professional journalism (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018). Research has considered questions of who or what is a journalist in this new environment, who comprises the audience, and the ways that social media influences relationships between journalists, news, and audiences (Hermida, 2014, 2020; Singer et al., 2011). In this messy media environment, in which professional journalists compete with everyday users—some with bad intentions—to produce and circulate news and to get their content in front of audiences, issues of (mis)trust have become so pervasive that scholars and pundits alike have raised alarms over this crisis (Coddington & Lewis, 2020; Fink, 2019; Lewis, 2020). Collaborations, organisations, and initiatives around the world are working to rebuild audiences' trust in the news and in journalists and are attempting to leverage the same social media tools and platforms that have played a role in the diminishment of trust in journalists and journalism.

The issue of trust is central to this on-going crisis and proposed solutions (Lewis, 2020). Therefore, in this chapter we first conceptualise trust and then turn to current research about journalism, social media, and trust. This includes

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research about news industries and audiences. We then transition to a case study about the Trusting News Project, a non-profit education and training initiative that focuses on trust-building strategies for journalists and newsrooms.<sup>1</sup> In this section we examine how the organisation defines trust, the frameworks it employs to help journalists develop relationships built on trust with their audiences, and how social media plays a role in building these relationships. We conclude by discussing future economic, political, social, and practical challenges. We also highlight opportunities to rethink several long-standing assumptions about journalism that could promote relationships built on trust between journalists and audiences, including rethinking news values, journalistic practice, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in journalism.

## CONTEXT

As we entered 2021, Americans trusted news at alarming low rates. According to the Reuters Digital News Report 2021, only 29% of Americans agreed with the statement, “I think you can trust most news most of the time,” the lowest percentage in the 40 countries surveyed (Newman et al., 2021). These low levels of trust persist around the world. Finland ranks highest in trust in news at 65%, a percentage that still means 35% of Finns do not have a lot of trust in journalism. In France, only 30% of respondents agreed that “you can trust most news most of the time” with similar numbers in Greece (32%), Taiwan (31%), and Argentina (35%), among other countries (Newman et al., 2021).

When trust was measured slightly differently, Toff et al. (2021a) found that 66% of Americans “trust information from the news media in the United States ‘completely’ (15%) or ‘somewhat’” (51%). The percentage was even higher (78%) for trust in news, “that you choose to use.” However, the United States still showed the lowest trust across these two measures when compared to the other countries in the study, Brazil, India, and the UK. Gallup data also show that trust is low in the United States with 36% of participants having a “great deal” or “fair amount” of trust in the news (Brenan, 2021).

In the United States, trust in news differs along demographic and political lines (Newman et al., 2021). For example, The Pew Research Center found that eight in ten Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents have “a lot” or “some” trust in the news compared to only three in ten Republicans (Gottfried & Liedke, 2021). This gap is the most significant partisan gap since 2016. A Gallup poll shows a similar divide with 68% of Democrats trusting the news and only 11% of Republicans (Brenan, 2021). Regarding social media and the news, Americans tend to trust social media and the news they get from it even less. For example, only 35% of Americans either trust news “somewhat” or “completely” on Facebook, 29% on Twitter, and 22% on YouTube (Toff et al., 2021a). Republican trust in social media is at 19% compared to 34% of Democrats and Democrat-leaning independents.

<sup>1</sup><https://trustingnews.org/about-us/>

These low levels of trust reflect a key challenge for journalists and newsrooms. As Fink (2019) puts it, lack of trust is the “single biggest challenge” for journalism (p. 40). So how do journalists contend with this? How do they respond to their audiences not trusting them or what they produce (news)? Could journalists’ use of social media contribute to building or rebuilding trust? Journalists have engaged more with their audiences over social media during the last two decades. Despite this, journalists and newsrooms still struggle to understand their audiences and to deliver the kind of news and information audiences need and want (Nelson, 2021). Journalists also share and produce their work through social channels, including using social media and crowdsourcing to gauge public opinion (McGregor, 2019). But this engagement and use of social media for myriad professional and personal reasons has blurred the boundaries of journalism even further (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018). This blurring contributes to the challenges of addressing issues of trust. Given this context, the next section examines trust as a concept and considers its key elements to better understand how to address the “trust crisis” from a standpoint that is grounded in research and practice.

### TRUST AND RELATED CONCEPTS

Trust is a complex, multidimensional construct (Ardévol-Abreu & Gil de Zúñiga, 2017; Toff et al., 2021a). As such, its definition and measurement are often debated. It captures a relationship that includes both “different dimensions of trust as well as different objects of trust” (Toff et al., 2021a, p. 10). The dimensions include cues, preconceptions, and experiences with the news. Cues emerge from deliberate public discourse that focuses on claims about the news itself. Preconceptions are normative beliefs. And experiences are related to journalists’ performance, usually resulting from commonly associated terms such as fairness, bias, accuracy, transparency, among others (Strömbäck et al., 2020; Toff et al., 2021a). Objects of trust include news brands, journalists, and content (Strömbäck et al., 2020). By thinking about different levels of trust, we can better interrogate how audiences are perceiving and receiving the news. Trust is closely tied to audiences’ abilities to traverse information, critically think about sources, and build a healthy dose of scepticism (Toff et al., 2021b). Toff et al. (2021a) found that “those who trust news the least also tend to be the most dissatisfied with democracy” (p. 23) highlighting the link between the democratic role of the press and perceptions of the public. Despite the disagreements, a few key concepts consistently emerge as the building blocks of trust. These include objectivity, transparency, credibility, and accuracy. The next sections briefly explore these concepts as they relate to trust broadly and their implications on social media and journalism specifically.

### *Objectivity*

Walter Lippmann contended that the role of journalism in a democracy was to help citizens understand world affairs. This was done through journalists' authority to question political figures and demand involvement in political discourse (Lippmann, 1920), and was essential for a democratic society and a free press to exist (Pickard, 2020). Journalism's relationship with public figures was important for maintaining integrity and credibility (Ryfe, 2012), and therefore objectivity would serve as an essential norm in journalism—creating an image of a responsible but detached press able to cover key issues of the day (Ward, 2004). Journalistic objectivity became a part of professionalism and was enculturated in newsrooms (Evenson, 2002; Maras, 2013). The normative roles that were established as part of the institution of journalism (Schudson, 2001; Tandoc et al., 2013) meant that journalists increasingly became aware of their potential to contribute “truth” in service of democracy (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). This also meant that these norms were shared among journalists (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003) and are often considered ritualistic opportunities of socialisation (Schudson, 2001), and position institutional identity at the forefront of value construction (Zelizer, 1993). Objectivity is also valued by audiences who connect it to trustworthiness and reliability and consider it in assessments of journalistic performance (McQuail, 1992).

For the concept of journalistic objectivity to remain powerful, journalists must enact and perform this value so that audiences continue to accept it as part of the journalistic process (Tucher, 2004). Yet, for some, journalistic objectivity is not only an unattainable standard, but also closely attached to a status-quo in journalism that excludes marginalised voices and continues to perpetuate social inequality. This critique hits the entire premise of objectivity and questions if it was ever even possible. These critiques emerge from analysing coverage and journalism institutions, which have continually shown the exclusion of marginalised populations. Varma (2019, 2020) contends that journalism must bring the experiences of the marginalised into focus. In doing so, journalism contributes to heightened awareness of social justice, something traditional conceptions of objectivity would advocate against. In their research on Black news audiences in the United States, Brown et al. (2021) show that Black people are “not overly pleased with the performance of the news media coverage of protests” (p. 7) for Black Lives Matter. Increased stereotypical coverage of Black communities and an erasure of Black life in the news “further erode Black people’s trust of news organisations and others in their community” (Brown et al., 2021, p. 8). How the news frames images of Black and brown people has the ability to influence social movements, civil unrest, and at-risk and marginalised audiences’ emotions. A conflation of events in favour of objectivity can “delegitimize social actors and obscure their issues” (Stamp & Mastro, 2020, p. 619). The critiques of journalism and objectivity emphasise its problematic connection to trust as “being objective” is purely in the eye of the beholder.

The concept of objectivity, despite journalism's century-old subscription to it, is problematic if we are in search of a more diverse journalism and a return of trust in the institution. Shifting from objectivity is "seen as a threat to the standards and normative ideals of journalism" (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020, p. 176). Shifts are necessary to attempt to win back the trust of all, rather than maintain the status-quo. From this, three other concepts related to trust emerge—transparency, credibility, and accuracy. Each addresses a key facet of trust, while also departing from the problematic, privileged, and white history of objectivity (Callison & Young, 2019). In fact, rethinking objectivity and moving away from its current usage in journalism may be essential to rebuilding trust between journalists and audiences, particularly among communities who have been least served and even harmed by journalism (Usher, 2021).

### *Credibility*

The concept of credibility emerges vis-à-vis discussions of honesty and authenticity. Perceptions of media trust are directly linked to perceptions of media credibility (Strömbäck et al., 2020; Enli & Rosenberg, 2018; Kioussis, 2001). Credibility emerges and is signalled in three ways: message credibility, source credibility, and media credibility (Fisher, 2018; Metzger et al., 2003; Schiffrin, 2019). The use of social media by journalists has slowly dissolved the boundaries among these three categories. Because it is harder to separate these categories, how audiences perceive journalists' biases becomes increasingly more difficult to understand or measure. In essence, social media complicates journalists' perceived credibility and therefore if and how audiences trust them (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018). Credibility is linked to the presentation of self to others and how this presentation is then rewarded or punished (Benet-Weiser, 2021). Because of their use and presence on social media, journalists are increasingly vulnerable to audience reactions, which can lead to increased transparency in their process and accuracy in their work as a way to build credibility, and perhaps, trust.

### *Transparency*

Transparency has been considered as a possible replacement for objectivity (Vos & Craft, 2017) as a norm in journalism (Karlsson, 2010). The value is enshrined in the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics as their fourth pillar. It is an attempt to mitigate perceived bias in coverage or process and a way in which news outlets can increase their credibility with audiences (Masullo et al., 2021). Transparency is seen in the journalistic process when reporters discuss the work that led to production of "the news." The concept helps journalists to shed light on motives and actions, both their own and those of others (Balkin, 1999). In doing so, transparency becomes part of truth telling and building trust inside and outside of newsrooms. The desire to be transparent lends itself to reducing uncertainty in relationships (Cotterrell, 1999).

As a form of truth-telling (Singer, 2007), transparency can lead to more trustworthy journalism (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

Conceptually, transparency is seen as an element of disclosure, or one's ability to be open, honest, and up-front about the process and practice of their actions. The desire to disclose is considered responsible and ethical, and a chance to reduce bias in one's work and activity (Granados & Gupta, 2013). The advent of social media and journalists' place in and on it shifted the role of transparency in news making. Journalists' capability to present themselves on Twitter, for example, allows for audiences to be invited into the processes and provides a different level of involvement in news production (Revers, 2014). The heightened level of accessibility lends itself to more opportunities for transparency and correction (Karlsson et al., 2017), thus shifting journalists' ability to maintain their professional authority and autonomy (Singer, 2007). Yet, unlike objectivity, transparency relies on openness and situates journalists in a place of visibility, which could contribute to building trust.

### *Accuracy*

Journalists' obligation is to report the truth and to do so accurately. Accuracy arguably is one of the most significant concepts to journalists' ability to develop and maintain trust. However, Mitchell Charnley's (1936) study of accuracy in the news showed that nearly half of news articles contained errors. Work like Charnley's continues nearly a century later (e.g., Maier, 2005; Porlezza et al., 2012). Accuracy is also elevated by the Society of Professional Journalists in their Code of Ethics where it is linked to transparency in the Code's fourth pillar.

Kohring and Matthes (2007) identify accuracy of depiction as one of the four dimensions to measure media trust, and accurate depictions are directly linked to the credibility of the journalist. Accuracy's role is connected to both transparency and credibility. In the age of social media, the ability to report accurately is often in contention with the desire to report quickly as journalists and newsrooms chase clicks and shares. The need to produce correct information and to do so openly and honestly necessitates a careful and deliberate respect for information and people, which is challenging in a social media environment that does not often prioritise either (Chambers, 2021).

## TRUST, JOURNALISM, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has played an evolving role within journalism; as such, the implications of it on public trust in journalism have also evolved. Early uses of social media assisted in the shaping of editorial decision-making in newsrooms (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018). The inclusion of social media provided opportunities for resources to be allocated differently thus prompting newsrooms to change hiring practices, resource allocation, and interactions with audiences (Neilson & Gibson, 2021). Early work for social media producers and editors in newsrooms included increasing readership and traffic, and the role was usually

reserved for a more tech-savvy journalist (Wasike, 2013). The BBC used social media to push the newsroom to emphasise values of truth and accuracy and made transparent impartiality a part of trust-building with their audience (Bélaïr-Gagnon, 2013). But this early social media adoption in newsrooms also meant the line between the editorial and advertising departments would decline, which in turn led to the role of social media in journalism evolving.

As new social media platforms emerged and established newsrooms declined, social media became an opportunity for newsrooms to market themselves and their content to audiences. The gradual erosion of economic capital in journalism pushed newsroom leadership to rely on social media for more innovative needs (Tandoc & Vos, 2016), and did so at a rapid pace (Assman & Diakopoulos, 2017). Audience engagement would become a core tenet of social media jobs in journalism. Now, journalists would be using social media metrics to change their news gathering and editorial practices (Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018), or chase clicks to determine what content will be published (Petre, 2021). Journalists would now use social media to gauge and write about public opinion and polling in real time (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018; McGregor, 2019), and be able to build audience insights to increase revenue (Neilson & Gibson, 2021). Changing newsroom practices meant news content could spread more widely and quickly, but that also meant the audience's trust in the content being produced began to face increased scepticism. Journalists would now need to think more about how information is shared via social media, technology changes professional roles, and relationships are built in order to develop and sustain trust with their audiences.

When the media system relies on professional journalists to convey information, trust goes up; however, the use of social media means other actors, including citizen journalists and individuals with “bad” intentions, can share news. The need to maintain trust in the profession of journalism is a primary driver of journalists *not* using social media (Heravi et al., 2014). The level of trust isn't linked to a journalist's scepticism, but instead reflects concerns about the medium itself (Heravi & Harrower, 2016). The diffusion of information through social media channels, especially from actors who aren't professional journalists, complicates public trust, with audiences becoming more distrustful given exposure to a wide variety of information (Ceron, 2015; Hermida, 2010). Audiences are increasingly needing to rely on news literacy behaviours (Vraga et al., 2021) to navigate the social media ecosystem; and journalists are having to contend with misinformation (Benkler et al., 2018) and attacks on their integrity to build trust with their audiences.

The lack of trust in social media doesn't deter journalists from using it. Rather, journalists have a high adoption rate of social media (Heravi & Harrower, 2016) and the technologies are pushing them to modify their professional norms and practices. This shift has also meant journalists moved to social media to market their own content and interact with their audiences (Mellado & Hermida, 2021). The blurring of personal and professional on social media has led audiences to question how and if journalists are engaging in ethical

journalism in their use of social media (Crilley & Gillespie, 2019). Journalists can now be seen as a promoter, a celebrity, or a joker (Mellado & Hermida, 2021). Social media helps journalists to be humanised and their emotions to become important in building and maintaining relationships with their audiences, which is both an opportunity and a challenge for trust-building.

Some scholars claim that professional journalists should be enhancing interpersonal relationships with their audiences in an attempt to build both trust and credibility. When interpersonal relationships are emphasised, audiences are more likely to trust the news being shared with them (Toff et al., 2021a). These interpersonal relationships allowed social networks to move beyond newsrooms sharing information (Turcotte et al., 2015). Journalists' ability to personally interact with one another and their audiences (Lewis & Molyneux, 2018), as well as orienting audiences to political news and public affairs (Kreiss & McGregor, 2017) leads to tangential impacts such as political decision-making and trust in other institutions like politics (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018) and science (Huber et al., 2019). It also has implications for both trust and democracy (Crilley & Gillespie, 2019). Creating these relationships may just be what journalists can do to bolster their trustworthiness.

Newsrooms and journalists have the potential to utilise social media for purposes of truth telling and trust-building. Social media offers an opportunity for newsrooms and journalists to engage with and for their audiences differently. Serving audiences becomes a form of accountability; it forces a form of honesty. Journalists must navigate, negotiate, and defend their credibility, and do so championing transparency as a form of trust. The immediacy of social media reporting affords a heightened need to get facts right, and to correct misinformation when possible. It also means that newsrooms must situate themselves within a framework that is open to commentary and critique. In doing so, and by using social media as a trust-building mechanism, journalists and newsrooms may find themselves being able to rebuild the trust they've lost through deliberate journalistic practices.

### CASE STUDY: THE TRUSTING NEWS PROJECT

Several government and non-profit organisations are working to rebuild trust in the news. For example, in the United States, the government is seeking to invest in local journalism through the Local Journalism Sustainability Act (United States Congress, June 16, 2021). In 2019, the Knight Foundation announced it would provide \$6 million in funding to rebuild trust in media (Knight Foundation, March 31, 2019). CNN recently launched an educational programme called CNN 10 to bring news into the classroom (CNN, 2021). The American Press Institute and Knight-Lenfest Newsroom Initiative's Better News project attempts to solve the crisis of declining trust in journalism by providing resources to newsrooms around the country. One module, "Building Trust," offers guidance to understanding the issue, while also giving newsrooms different strategies and tactics they can use. These vary in complexity, something the

Better News project identifies for each strategy, and purpose (Griggs, 2017). The Trust Project also houses resources that emerged from trust indicators they developed from speaking directly with people about what they value in their news. The Trust Project is a global initiative and positions their 8 “Trust Indicators” as having global reach and impact. These indicators for a trustworthy news outlet include best practices, journalist expertise, type of work, citations and references, methods, locally sourced, diverse voices, and actionable feedback—as having global reach and impact (The Trust Project, 2021). The Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin consistently makes trust a key component of research. In 2019, they found that balance and transparency are critical to newsrooms increasing public trust in their content (Chen et al., 2019). The research and subsequent report were done in partnership with the Trusting News Project, the case study presented below.

Trusting News is a joint project with the Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) and the American Press Institute (API), two organisations whose missions include “strengthening journalism in the service of democracy.”<sup>2</sup> and advancing “an innovative and sustainable news industry by helping publishers understand and engage audiences, grow revenue, improve public-service journalism, and succeed at organisational change.”<sup>3</sup> Relatedly, the purpose of Trusting News is to “demystify trust in news and empower journalists to take responsibility for actively demonstrating credibility and earning trust.”<sup>4</sup> Together, the staff, led by 20-year professional journalist and educator, Joy Mayer, promotes ethical journalistic practices through coaching, research, and partnerships. Each area contributes to how the organisation understands, defines, and builds trust; this includes how they utilise objectivity, transparency, credibility, and accuracy in their work. This section focuses on the trust-building work promoted by the organisation, as well as how social media mitigates trust between newsrooms and audiences.

Trusting News blends research and professional training to lead newsroom partnerships into more trusting relationships with their audience. From the opening newsletter, known as “Trust Tips,” Mayer presents trust as a human act that takes time, “Then show up and listen. Respond to questions. Thank people for sharing their observations. Delete comments that violate your comment policy. Defend your work, but don’t be defensive. Be human. Be accessible. That earns trust.”<sup>5</sup> There are now over 150 “Trust Tips” that build on each other and extend the work. Beyond the newsletters, Trusting News offers different training modules that focus on how to respond to credibility attacks by centring accuracy and transparency. To Trusting News, rebuilding relationships is possible if newsrooms are willing to listen and adapt. This

<sup>2</sup><https://rjionline.org/about-rji/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/about/about-us/>

<sup>4</sup><https://trustingnews.org/about-us/>

<sup>5</sup>Trust Tips 1, <https://mailchi.mp/2c81eb173569/trust-tips-1-ask-how-you-could-better-earn-trust?e=%5BUNIQID%5D>

includes being intentional, accessible, and accountable.<sup>6</sup> Trust requires audiences to invest into and buy into the credibility of the newsrooms; it also requires newsrooms to invest in accuracy of information and transparency about processes that are shared with audiences. To model “accuracy,” Trusting News suggests that newsrooms must learn to tell their own story and to consider the impact and scope of the information they are presenting.<sup>7</sup> Transparency involves sharing financial disclosures, ethics statements, and comment policies.<sup>8</sup>

Attention to ethics is a core responsibility of building a trusting relationship between newsrooms and audiences. Part of the training of journalists includes asking questions associated with the ethical guidelines outlined by the newsroom. For example, “what sources of data and officials do you trust?” While this asks journalists to think about their practice, Trusting News wants newsrooms to take that one step further by making audiences aware of that process. They again engage a reflection of accuracy and transparency to address concerns of neutrality and distrust. Trusting News found that feelings of distrust are linked to perceptions of bias and fairness because “people are susceptible to misinformation that comports with a partisan identity.”<sup>9</sup>

Trusting News presents a cogent vision of trust and distrust with the goal of improving journalism. Moving forward, Trusting News sees a need for “A Road to Pluralism,” which focuses on the lack of trust coming from conservative audiences of mainstream journalism. This programming relies on similar strategies as the rest of Trusting News’ training materials with a focus on specific audiences. The research behind this initiative shows that newsrooms need to navigate conservatives’ lack of trust in institutions broadly in order to address the lack of trust in the news they produce (Duchovnay & Masullo, 2021). To do this, journalists and newsrooms must acknowledge their generalisations, polarisations, perception, and bias (Duchovnay & Masullo, 2021). This means drawing from the box of trust-building tools they already created and focusing on accuracy and fairness in their coverage. These two values are critical regardless of political leaning, but their research shows that accuracy and fairness are even more important with conservative audiences (Duchovnay & Masullo, 2021). Although in its early stages, Trusting News’ focus on political divides and newsroom distrust is needed if journalism is to move forward in its trust-building endeavour in highly polarised political environments, like the one that exists in the United States.

Trusting News sees social media as a means to build trust, despite its role in undermining trust in journalism, as long as newsrooms and journalists change

<sup>6</sup> [https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1OXWxG3\\_BNm-fAYIydpGDONHddXzxcLmcrbzdU-9\\_vvk/edit#slide=id.g9791c77fb6\\_0\\_74](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1OXWxG3_BNm-fAYIydpGDONHddXzxcLmcrbzdU-9_vvk/edit#slide=id.g9791c77fb6_0_74)

<sup>7</sup> [https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1WAR0P53Pv1L65h4qUSYQqkVLZncATaPPHd4PLMloTiQ/edit#slide=id.g91be4942df\\_0\\_1319](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1WAR0P53Pv1L65h4qUSYQqkVLZncATaPPHd4PLMloTiQ/edit#slide=id.g91be4942df_0_1319)

<sup>8</sup> [https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1WAR0P53Pv1L65h4qUSYQqkVLZncATaPPHd4PLMloTiQ/edit#slide=id.g91be4942df\\_0\\_1319](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1WAR0P53Pv1L65h4qUSYQqkVLZncATaPPHd4PLMloTiQ/edit#slide=id.g91be4942df_0_1319)

<sup>9</sup> [https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1JwQNGHUqVqQs4nXbTmBWCE\\_N0Fm-3gx\\_cp4KV8dOyHs/edit#slide=id.g88226bfc38\\_0\\_18](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1JwQNGHUqVqQs4nXbTmBWCE_N0Fm-3gx_cp4KV8dOyHs/edit#slide=id.g88226bfc38_0_18)

their practices. Trusting News suggests that social media can be used to add details and context to a story,<sup>10</sup> as a form of outreach and connection,<sup>11</sup> as an opportunity to present wire content accurately,<sup>12</sup> as a means of building subscriptions and getting to know the staff,<sup>13</sup> as an acknowledgement of error and correction,<sup>14</sup> and as part of outreach to enhance relationships with audiences of colour.<sup>15</sup> The link between trust and social media has been central to Trusting News since its first “Trust Tips.” For example, Trusting News encourages newsrooms to post on their social media prompts such as “We’d love to hear from you: How could we better be worthy of your trust? What questions can we answer about how our newsroom operates?”<sup>16</sup> Trusting News’ commitment to trust-building through engagement with audiences and dedication to accuracy, credibility, and transparency is evidenced in the way social media is presented as an avenue for building trusting relationships with audiences.

### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

More recent research advocates for a deeper understanding of the audiences journalism serves (Nelson, 2021) and those it leaves out (Usher, 2021) and a deeper interrogation of identities and diversity in newsrooms (Callison & Young, 2019; Usher, 2021) to build credibility and to serve audiences who are often, rightly distrustful of the broader institution of journalism. Others posit that work needs to be done to increase news literacy behaviours of audiences to strengthen their ability to decipher the information coming across on their social media feeds and to act upon news and information in ways that are meaningful (Tully et al. 2021; Vraga et al., 2021). We believe rethinking institutions and audiences is imperative to the future of developing relationships built on trust. For example, Robinson (2019), offers four responses from journalism to address distrust: (1) reclaiming the journalism narrative; (2) reminding citizens that journalists are individuals, too; (3) enabling citizens with solution-based journalism; and (4) developing alternative revenue streams.

Journalists can also address long-held assumptions and norms of their practice. For example, news values<sup>17</sup> are a bedrock of journalism education and

<sup>10</sup>Trust Tips 142, <https://us7.campaign-archive.com/?u=2e8df9994daec8138ea3d757e&id=70780b5b20>

<sup>11</sup>Trust Tips 139, <https://us7.campaign-archive.com/?u=2e8df9994daec8138ea3d757e&id=e9dbefa747>

<sup>12</sup>Trust Tips 134, <https://us7.campaign-archive.com/?u=2e8df9994daec8138ea3d757e&id=d12b900a2a>

<sup>13</sup>Trust Tips: Talk about the cost of journalism, <https://mailchi.mp/26b6f80d1e32/trust-tips-talk-about-the-cost-of-journalism?e=%5BUNIQID%5D>

<sup>14</sup>Trust Tips 144, <https://us7.campaign-archive.com/?u=2e8df9994daec8138ea3d757e&id=c6575b83f9>

<sup>15</sup>Trust Tips 147, <https://us7.campaign-archive.com/?u=2e8df9994daec8138ea3d757e&id=7d5362603b>

<sup>16</sup>Trust Tips 1, <https://mailchi.mp/2c81eb173569/trust-tips-1-ask-how-you-could-better-earn-trust?e=%5BUNIQID%5D>

<sup>17</sup>Most commonly held news values include timeliness, proximity, prominence, conflict, impact, and human interest.

practice. Harcup and O'Neill (2017) believe news values to be subjective judgements to help justify stories in the news cycle. They become the way in which we understand the newsworthiness of an event. Counter to the breadth of work in journalism-constructed news values, Edgerly and Vraga (2020) foresee audiences as being critical to the development of news values, something they see as “news-ness.” The audience-centred shift means accepting that defining what is newsworthy is no longer as clear-cut as the values imply. It also means reframing the relationship between audiences and newsrooms to accept this co-creation of news values. This evolving concept of news-ness is directly tied to the trustworthiness of a newsroom and social media. These values are ingrained through different socialisation and professionalisation opportunities, and then enhanced and solidified in professional newsrooms worldwide. Two of the most common—timeliness and conflict—are elevated in the social media era. The desire to be first, and to break news on social media, and not always to be right, calls into question the role timeliness plays in trust-building through social media moving forward. The public vitriol and political contention on social media also highlight the challenge of seeing “conflict” as a bed-rock news value. We believe that building or rebuilding trust and using social media to do so requires reframing values and approaches to journalism. *Trusting News* does just this by finding ways for newsrooms to reposition their coverage to enhance audience’s trust. By encouraging newsrooms to use their social media platforms to engage with audiences and as an opportunity to be more transparent in their work, *Trusting News* believes that newsrooms will build their credibility as a starting point for relationships built on trust.

The relationship between newsrooms and audiences must be maintained. We contend that a care-based approach is necessary. If journalism takes an ethic of care approach to their practices, relationships will become central to the work they do. *Bothsidesism* would become an approach of the past. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice would become core to the missions, practices, and assumptions of journalism. We see this playing out in how journalists use social media to engage with their audiences. To start, it is shifting from a conflict- or timeliness-driven approach to producing content. It becomes about interacting with audiences about their concerns and reporting on issues that matter in audiences’ lives. Coverage on social media would emphasise personhood, communities, and consequences. A care-based approach would also translate to how journalists interact with their audiences. Saldana and Vu (2022) found that when journalists reply to comments directly and civilly, the comments that follow are more civil. Journalists, in a sense, are modelling behaviour and engaging in dialogue in meaningful ways. Centring audiences, considering emotion, elevating equity and justice as institutional needs, and using social media as a means of connection to and with audiences will offer a way forward to journalism that is premised on earning, building, and maintaining trust.

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