

Media Trust in America:

Examining the Perspective of VA College-Age Individuals

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Abstract

National statistics have been gathered for decades on public trust in mass media. Yet today, at a critical point in American history, this trust is on a severe decline. Are these findings reflective of the rising generation— that is, college-age youth? Data collected from college students in Southern Virginia reveal that there are significant different opinions, particularly in the areas of overall trust and the belief that trust can be restored. Additionally, college-age students show partisan divides opposite to the national average, as well as no variances between gender or race. These findings make it abundantly clear that actions should be taken to develop mass media in a way that reestablishes confidence from this coming wave of society.

Introduction

Introduction of Topic: Media Trust

In recent years, there has been an increasing divide and a decreasing confidence in mass media (Gallup/The Knight Foundation, 2018). While many Americans turn to the news to remain “in-the-know”, it is debatable as to whether or not the information they are receiving is trustworthy or not. Arguably, this is something of a problem, as knowledge is power, and knowledge is only as good as the truth behind it. Especially in a society where mass communications are becoming not only more integral to most jobs, but far more accessible due to the development of social media and digital journalism. The rising tensions between mass media and its consumers have not gone unnoticed by the American public, and they have not gone unnoticed by large institutions interested in documenting it. These groups, such as Gallup and The Knight Foundation, have been collecting the opinions of Americans on mass media for decades on a national scale (2018). The plethora of statistics they have gathered illustrate the way that media trust has both risen and fallen over the years. According to their most recent study, said trust is currently on a downslide (2018). The simultaneous increase of societal need for mass media and decrease of societal trust in mass media could be considered a dilemma at best, and disastrous at worst. Statistics provide a powerful tool for the examination of such unfortunate dichotomies, hence the decision to conduct the following study.

Statement of Problem: College-Age Demographic

The question is how reflective Gallup/The Knight Foundation’s (and other groups’) national statistics are of smaller societal pockets. When broken down to more particular aspects of the American population, which feelings become more prominent? While a national average is certainly a useful figure, it is interesting to explore the nuances of specific demographics. As those of current college age are, arguably, the next generation to lead America into the future, it

is worthwhile to discover the way they view the world around them. They may consume, be featured on, and/or write it themselves, so they are just as invested. A lot could be learned from the grievances they may or may not have with mass media, as these comments could be used to learn and change. Conversely, the things they consider to be trust aids – things that, to them, are considered indicative of good journalism – could provide insight into what the rising generation needs from their journalists to believe in them again.

Research Question: How Do College-Age Youth Compare?

When compared to national statistics collected in recent years, how do college-age individuals (specifically those located in Southern Virginia) feel about the mass media? How much do they trust, how much has their trust changed in the last several years, and do they believe their trust can be restored? What are their biggest problems with mass media? Conversely, what do they feel is mass media done right? Are there visible divides between political parties, genders, and other demographics? Finally, are the variances shown on a national scale echoed by these college-age youths, or do these more targeted statistics dispute the previously-collected national differences?

Methodology

A convenience sample (n=100) was collected from J. Sergeant Reynolds Community College students utilizing the platform SurveyMonkey. Respondents were given 10 questions regarding their trust in the mass media. 6 of these questions evaluated trust, whilst 4 catalogued demographical data for comparative purposes. Respondents rated their degree of trust in mass media (1), declared their increase/decrease/stagnation of their trust in mass media over the last ten years (2), selected all applicable items that decreased their trust in mass media (3), selected

all applicable items that increased their trust in mass media (4), declared whether or not their trust in mass media could be restored (5), and declared the amount of mass media they consumed on the regular (6). As far as demographics go, respondents were asked to declare their gender and age (7), their race/ethnicity (8), their political affiliation (9), and their income range (10).

These questions were designed to compliment (or entirely replicate) those used in national studies. So saying, the collected data will be cross-referenced with data provided by Gallup/The Knight Foundation, The Reuters Institute for The Study of Journalism, and the Pew Research Center, using the statistical process of hypothesis testing ($\alpha = .05$). Hypotheses will be tested between the data collected and this archival data (to evaluate the presence of significant differences between college-age youth and national averages), as well as between portions of the data collected (to evaluate the presence of significant differences between demographics within the pool of college-age youths). Conclusions will be drawn based on the existence (or lack thereof) of these significant differences.

Literature Review

Importance of Media Trust & Related Definitions

Mass media is a fixture of American society that is considered depended upon for “the functioning of American democracy” (Daniller et al, 2017). The news plays an integral role in the ability for an individual to participate in the political realm: “[News media] provide[s] necessary resources for facilitating and maintaining the political involvement of citizens”—those necessary resources being knowledge (Dahlgren, 2018). News media’s relationship with those that consume it is all about “how information can be accessed and utilized, and how knowledge can be generated” (Dahlgren, 2018).

The concept of “trust”, for the purpose of these studies, is “the confidence citizens can have in the information available and the knowledge they can attain from it” (Dahlgren, 2018). The concept of “Fake News”, as popularized by President Donald Trump and other aligning politicians, has become a part of the everyday conversation regarding American news coverage (Newman & Fletcher, 2017). “Fake News”, broadly, is a title given to a piece of journalism that is seen as misinformation. From their collected data, Newman and Fletcher found that “Fake News” could be broken down into five types: satirical, superficial/sensationalist, slanted by bias, seemingly paid-for by interested parties, or simply an ill-intentioned lie (Newman & Fletcher, 2017). A significant portion of the American public believes the mass media publishes this “Fake News” (Gallup/The Knight Foundation, 2018).

Current Trends in Media Trust

The highest point in American history – since Gallup/The Knight Foundation began collecting data on media trust – occurred in 1976, during the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal (Sharaf, 2017). Almost three-fourths of Americans had significant trust in the news media at this time, and this is credited to the news medias’ heavy role in reporting truthfully on the war and revealing the details of said scandal, respectively (Sharaf, 2017). Yet, since the build-up to the 2016 election, media trust has been on the decline (Sharaf, 2017).

In these recent years, the mass media has come under further and further scrutiny by the general American public. This decaying trust has created an “epistemic crisis in public spheres” (Dahlgren, 2018). While “doubt is a fine democratic virtue, one that generates dialogue, disagreement and deliberation ... competing versions of knowledge and facts arise, thereby generating incompatible views of reality, cementing and isolating incompatible discursive bubbles, and eroding the grounds for political discussion” (Dahlgren, 2018).

Between 2003 and 2016, the overall percentage of those who believe that the mass media is trustworthy dropped from just over 50% to almost 30% (Gallup/The Knight Foundation, 2018). Gallup/The Knight Foundation's findings from 2017 reveal this has gone up just slightly. Almost 70% of surveyed Americans report that their trust in mass media has declined over the past 10 years. Additionally, 30% of these individuals also believe that their trust cannot be earned back (Gallup/The Knight Foundation, 2018). This 30% is equivalent to 21% of all adult Americans (Gallup/The Knight Foundation, 2018). The study performed by Sharaf in 2017 for the French Journal for Mass Research discovered similar trends, reporting that over half of those surveyed had no trust in news media (Sharaf, 2017). Only a third reported some amount of trust, and a third reported being uncertain as to their level of trust (Sharaf, 2017).

Factors Affecting Media Trust

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism reported that over three-fourths of surveyed Americans believe that mass media is presented inaccurately due to any form of bias. A third believe this is due to political affiliation, 10% believe it is done for financial gain, and less than 5% believe the bias is product-oriented (Newman & Fletcher, 2017). Gallup/The Knight Foundation, in analyzing the reasons why surveyed individuals did not trust particular forms of media, also discovered a large amount of concern about inaccuracy and bias. Nearly half of surveyed Americans believe that there are news outlets publishing purposefully misleading information or outright lies. Just over 40% of respondents were concerned about unfair reporting. Additionally, a fifth of respondents worry over incompleteness in the narrative, and 10% are concerned with "clickbaiting", or the phenomenon where outlets publish sensationalist articles for the sake of views/(advertisement) revenue (2018).

There are some differences between various subgroups of those surveyed. Gallup/The Knight Foundation (2017) took demographic information down alongside their responses, and broke down their findings further. They found that men had seen more of a decline in trust in the past decade than women (76% v. 64%). White individuals had seen more of a decline in trust in the past decade than those who are nonwhite (72% v. 63%) Those who had not graduated college had seen more of a decline in trust than those who had done so (73% v. 61%). Gallup/The Knight Foundation did find, however, no meaningful variance between age groups (Gallup/The Knight Foundation, 2018).

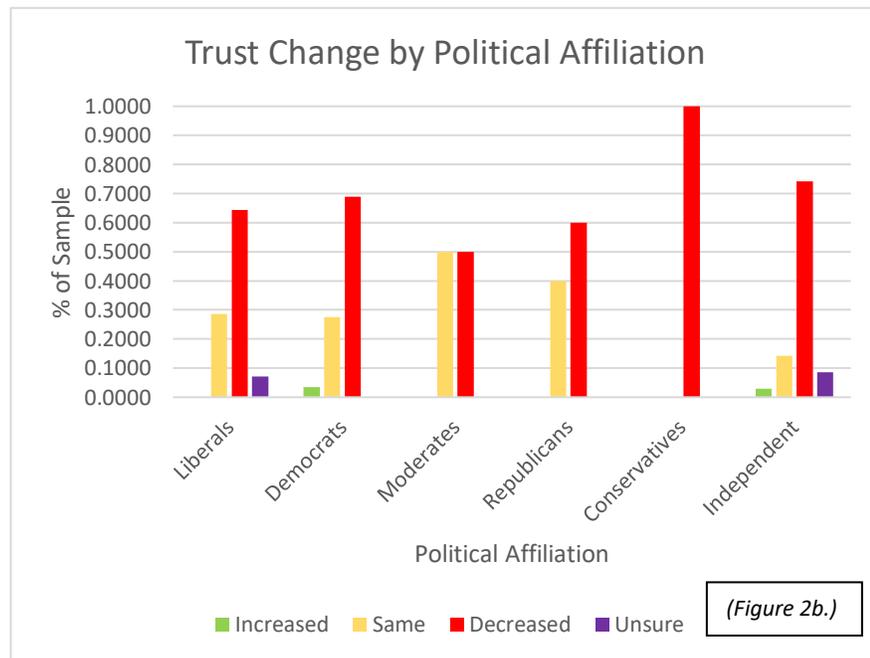
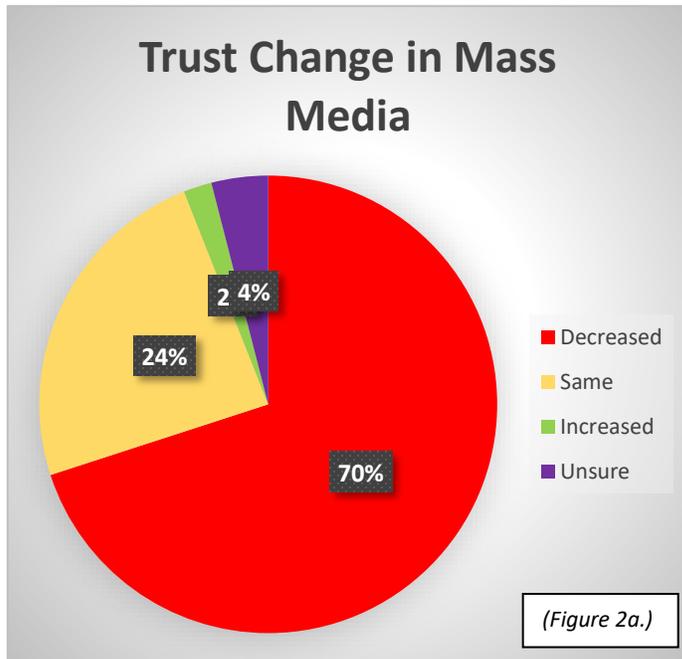
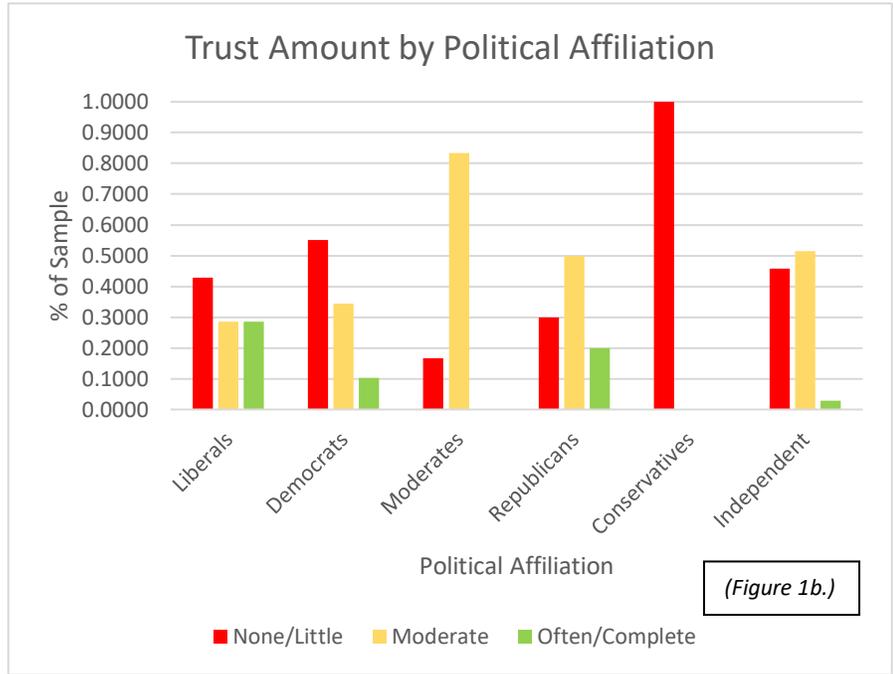
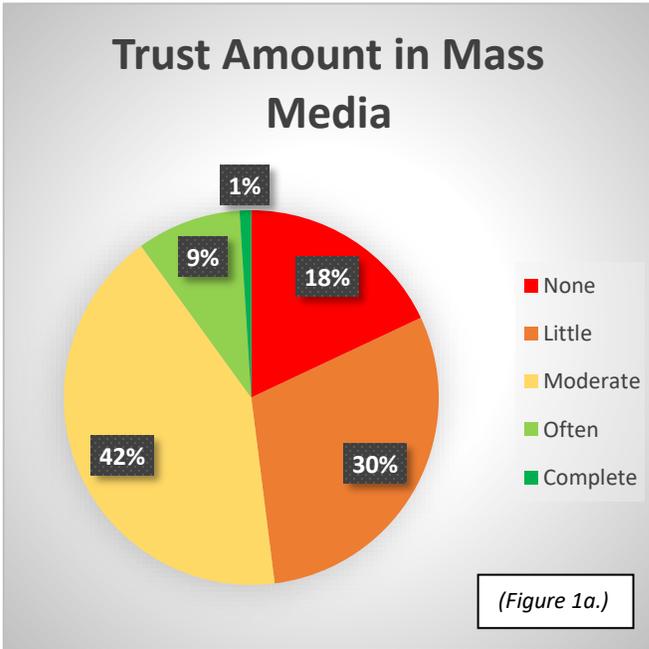
A similar study was performed by the Pew Research Center on trust between individuals. This study found significant differences between further socioeconomic groups and backgrounds. Their findings contradict Gallup/The Knight Foundation's claim that age is not a factor in media trust (Raine et al, 2019). Most of the adults surveyed considered themselves of "medium" trust level (Raine et al, 2019). Of "high" trusting adults, the majority were white, while Hispanic and African American individuals were primarily "low" trusting (Raine et al, 2019). The trend of trust draws a clear line through the ages: the youngest (18-29 years old) were the least trusting, and trust increased with age from there (Raine et al, 2019). The more education one had, the less "low" trusting individuals there were (Raine et al, 2019). Finally, the more wealth one had, the more trusting they were (Raine et al, 2019).

There are other trends between trusting groups regarding mainstream media. Gallup/The Knight Foundation discovered that those who pay the least attention to the news are the ones who are the least trusting of it. Almost three-fourths of those who do not trust the news, consume a moderate amount of news. Over half of those who do not trust the news consume a great amount of news (Gallup/The Knight Foundation, 2018). Daniller, Allen, Tallevi, and Mutz

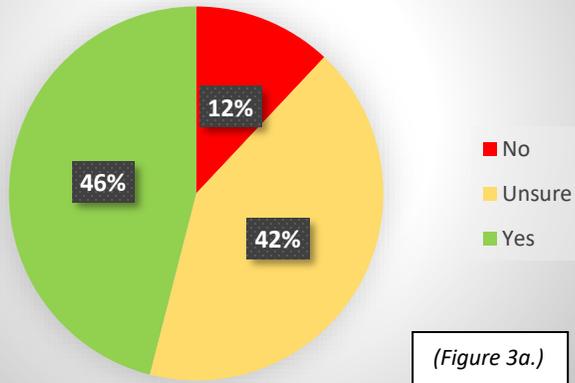
(2017) in their study of media trust discovered that it was more likely for respondents to answer negatively – that is, with little to no trust – towards the idea of “mass media” in general as opposed to when answering about specific media institutions (Daniller et al, 2017). There was also some reported bias regarding favored institutions: when responding about the institution or institutions that they preferred to consume their news from, those surveyed were more positive and trusting (Daniller et al, 2017).

More significant than any other form of variance, there are clear distinctions between political parties and their levels of trust. More than 9 in 10 self-reported Republicans say their trust in mass media has decreased in the past 10 years (Gallup/The Knight Foundation, 2018). Of self-reported Democrats, that number is only 4 out of 10 (Gallup/The Knight Foundation, 2018). Conservatives and Liberals echo this divide almost exactly. Democrats report both the highest levels of increased trust and non-changing trust. Independents and Moderates both have suffered significant losses of trust as well (Gallup/The Knight Foundation, 2018). Gallup/The Knight Foundation believe that the only reason the trust in the media went up in 2017 is because of how Democratic trust rebounded, skewing the data (Gallup/The Knight Foundation, 2018).

Presentation of Data

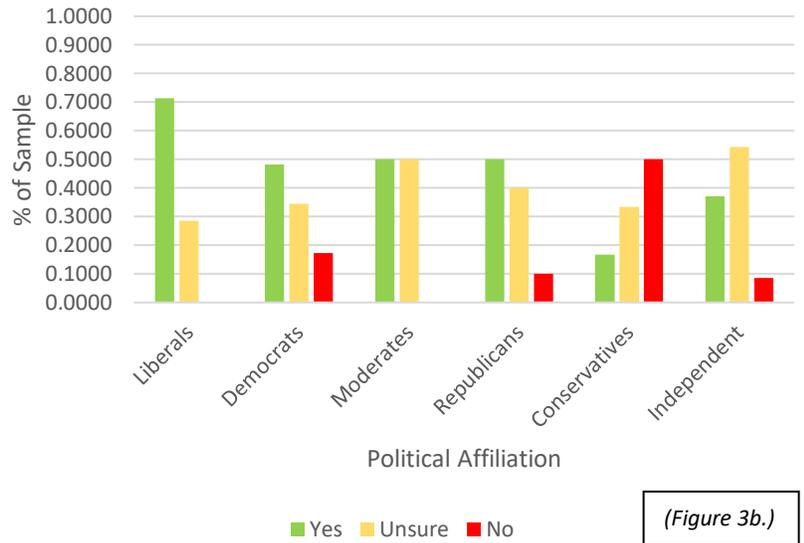


Trust Restoration in Mass Media



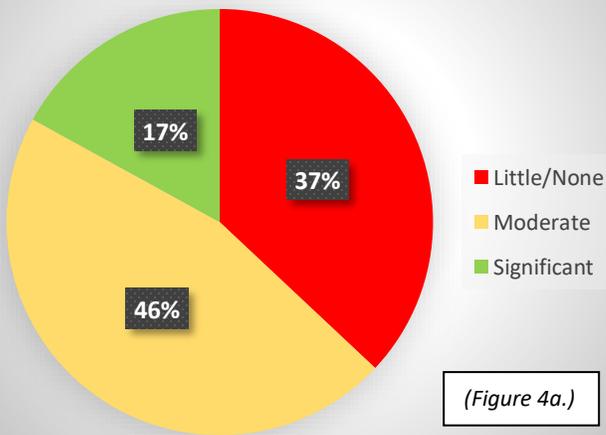
(Figure 3a.)

Trust Restoration by Political Affiliation



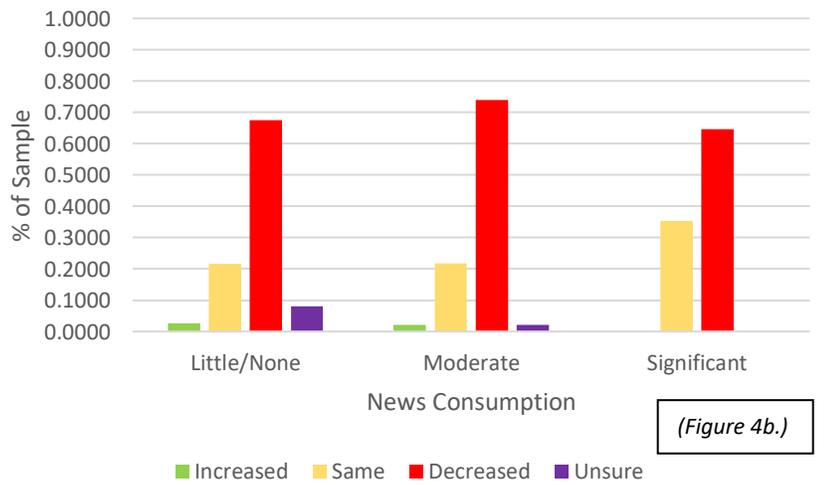
(Figure 3b.)

Mass Media Consumed



(Figure 4a.)

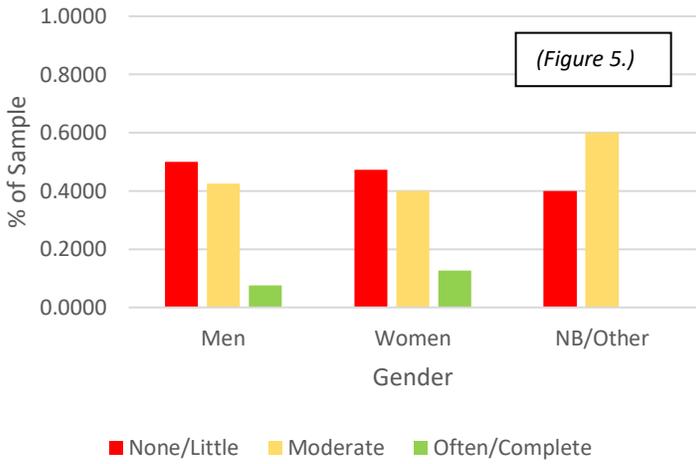
Trust Change by News Consumption



(Figure 4b.)

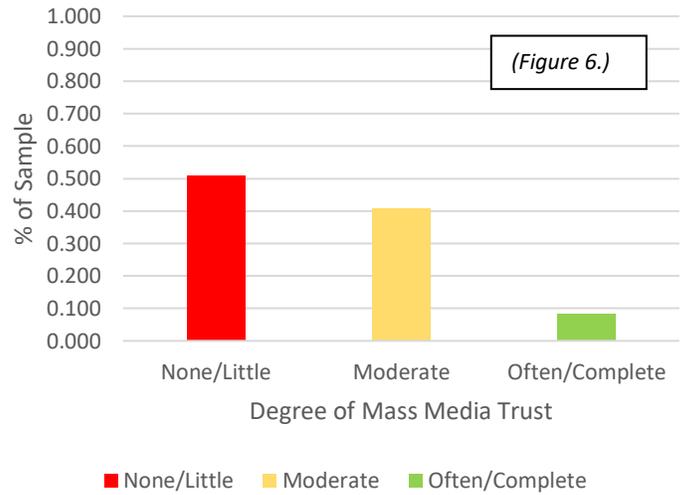
Trust Amount by Gender

(Figure 5.)



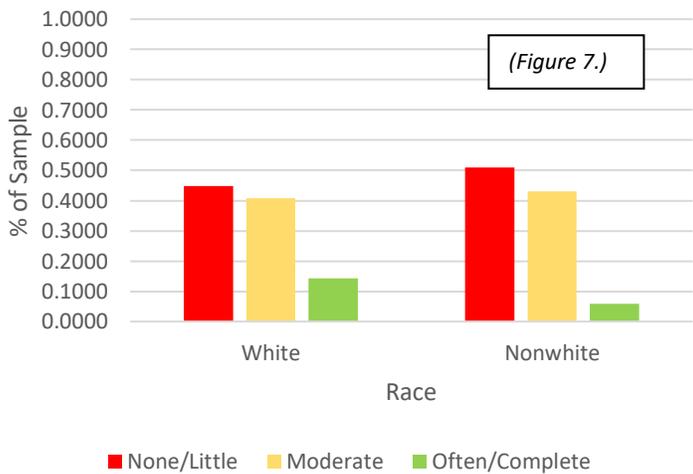
Trust Amount in 17-29 Year Olds

(Figure 6.)



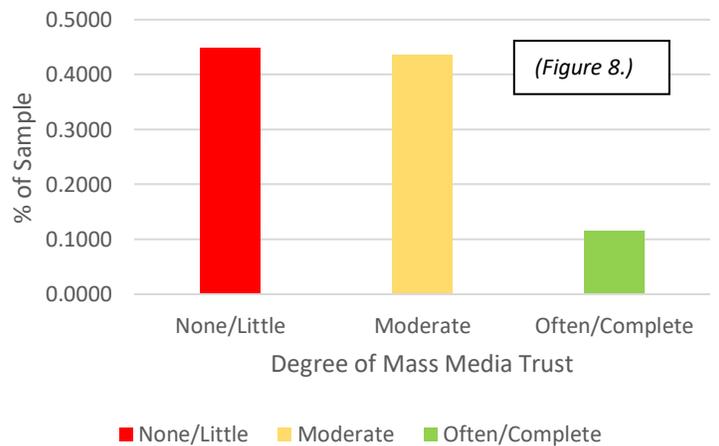
Trust Amount by Race

(Figure 7.)



Trust Amount in Income Range <\$30,000

(Figure 8.)



What Makes Mass Media <u>Untrustworthy?</u>	% of Sample Concerned
<i>Incomplete Story/Missing Pieces</i>	71%
<i>Misleading/Contains Misinformation</i>	68%
<i>Partisan bias.</i>	67%
<i>Sensationalism/"Clickbait"</i>	59%
<i>Opinionated Speech</i>	55%
<i>Monetary Motivation</i>	48%
<i>Product Placement/Trying to Sell</i>	32%
<i>Lack of Citations</i>	28%
<i>Lack of Listed Author</i>	24%
<i>Unfamiliar Outlet</i>	20%
<i>Lack of Professional Aesthetic</i>	10%
<i>Only Publish Negativity</i>	2%

What Makes Mass Media <u>Trustworthy?</u>	% of Sample Concerned
<i>Citations</i>	62%
<i>Little/No Opinionated Speech</i>	50%
<i>Identifiable Author(s)</i>	49%
<i>Little/No Partisan Bias</i>	47%
<i>Professional Aesthetic</i>	41%
<i>Familiar Outlet</i>	39%
<i>Little/No Advertisements</i>	37%
<i>None Of The Above</i>	12%

(Figures 9 & 10.)

Interpretation of Data

Degrees of Trust in Mass Media

The majority of respondents (48%) have little to no trust in mass media. 42% have a moderate amount of trust, and 10% trust more often than not. [Figure 1a.] These results are significantly different from the results found by Gallup and The Knight Foundation. Gallup found 16% have little to no trust ($p < .01$), meaning more college-aged youths are distrusting of mass media as compared to the national average. So saying, it follows that Gallup found 67% trust a moderate amount ($p < .01$) and 18% trust more often than not ($.02 < p < .01$), meaning less college-age youths trust in those degrees as compared to the national average (2017). Overall, college-age youths appear to be a generally less trusting group of individuals.

Changes in Mass Media Trust Within Last Decade

By a large margin (70%), college-age youths feel as though their trust in mass media has decreased within the last decade. 24% of respondents feel their trust has remained the same, and only 2% believe it has increased. [Figure 2a.] These results do not vary from Gallup's national survey in a way that is statistically significant (69%, 26%, and 4%, respectively— $p > .20$) (2017). College-age youths agree, in substantial volume, with society at large in that their faith in mass media has taken a toll over the last ten years.

Restoration of Mass Media Trust

Nearly half (46%) of respondents believe that their trust in mass media can be restored. 42% are not so sure, and only 12% believe that it has been lost forever. [Figure 3a.] Gallup does not provide data regarding surveyed individuals who were unsure of their belief. However, the results from this study do vary from the Gallup results in a way that is statistically significant.

Gallup found that 69% of respondents believed their trust could be restored ($p < .01$), so that would mean that college-age youths are not nearly as optimistic about a changing mass media. Gallup also found that 30% of respondents believed their trust could not be restored ($p < .01$), meaning that, while college-age youths are not anxiously expecting change, they do not feel that *all* hope is lost, either (2017). In this way, college-age youths display far more uncertainty than the national average.

Mass Media Consumption v. Changes in Trust

46% of respondents consume a moderate amount of news, while 37% consume little to no news at all. 17% reported significant news consumption. [Figure 4a.] Gallup drew a correlation between the amount of mass media consumed and the loss of trust within the last ten years, stating that, the less mass media consumed, the more likely an individual had lost trust in the past decade (2017). However, this was not the case with college-age youths. Of those who consume little to no mass media, 68% have lost trust; of those who consume a moderate amount, 74% have lost trust; and of those who consume a significant amount, 65% have lost trust. [Figure 4b.] There is no significant difference between any of these results ($p > .20$ for all). In this way, college-age youths display that the amount of mass media consumed has no correlation with their loss of trust within the past 10 years.

Demographic Variances: Political Affiliation

Regarding the degree of trust those of particular political affiliations have within the mass media, 52% of Democrats reported little to no trust, 35% reported moderate trust, and 10% reported trusting more often than not. 30% of Republicans reported little to no trust, 50% reported moderate trust, and 20% reported trusting more often than not. Finally, 46% of

Independents reported little to no trust, 51% reported moderate trust, and 3% reported trusting more often than not. Gallup's survey revealed that Republicans were the least trusting political party of those surveyed, which does not align with the results of this study (2017). The Democratic respondents have the highest percentage of little to no trust. In fact, the Democratic results from this study vary entirely and significantly from those of the national Gallup study. Only 2% of Gallup's Democratic respondents reported little to no trust, which is such a large variance from these college-age findings ($p < .01$). College-age Democrats are far more likely to distrust than the national average. So saying, college age students are less likely to trust moderately (35% v. 64%, $p < .01$) and more often than not (10% v. 34%, $p < .01$). College-age Republicans vary less so, though they are significantly more likely to trust more often than not than the national average (20% v. 3%, $p < .01$). Finally, College-age Independents are both significantly more likely to distrust mass media (46% v. 25%, $p < .01$) and significantly less likely to trust more often than not (3% v. 13%) as compared to the national average (2017). Overall, it would appear that college-age Democrats and Independents are more skeptical of mass media than the national average, while college-age Republicans are more forgiving of it. [Figure 1b.]

Regarding changes in trust over the past decade, college-age Democrats and Republicans are the only two groups that displayed statistically significant differences from the Gallup survey. No Liberals feel that their trust has increased, 29% feel their trust is the same, and 64% feel it is decreased, which does not vary significantly from the findings of Gallup (7%, 47%, 46%, respectively— $p > .20$ for increased and same, $.20 > p > .10$ for decreased). No Moderates feel that their trust as increased, while half feel it is the same and half feel it has decreased. Gallup's results (5%, 28%, 66%, respectively— $p > .20$) do not vary significantly. No

Conservatives feel their trust has increased or remained the same— all of them feel it has decreased. This lines up fairly well with the Gallup survey (.3%, 4%, 95%, respectively— $p > .20$). 3% of Independents feel it has increased, while 14% believe it has remained the same and 74% feel it has decreased. Again, the national average is very similar (2%, 23%, 75%, respectively— $p > .20$). However, while Democrats do not vary significantly in terms of an increase in trust (3% v. 10%, $p > .20$), they do vary significantly in trust remaining the same (27% v. 48%, $.05 > p > .02$) and trust decreasing (69% v. 42%, $p < .01$). Less college-age Democrats believe their trust has remained the same, and more believe that it has decreased, as compared to the national average. The trust of Republicans increasing does not vary significantly (0% v. .2%, $p > .20$), but trust remaining the same (40% v. 6%, $p < .01$) and trust decreasing (60% v. 94%, $p < .01$) vary significantly (2017). Opposite of the Democrats, more college-age Republicans feel their trust has remained the same, and less believe that it has decreased, as compared to the national average. Overall, it would appear that college-age Republicans are more stagnant and less pessimistic in their feelings regarding the mass media than college-age Democrats, who are seeing higher levels of lost trust. [Figure 2b.]

Regarding faith that trust can be restored, college-age Democrats and Independents are the only two groups that vary in a way that is statistically significant. College-age Liberals primarily believe it can be restored (71% v. 84%, $p > .20$) rather than lost (.29% v. 13%, $.20 > p > .10$) in a way that agrees with the national average. College-age Moderates are split exactly on the matter, and their results do not differ enough from Gallup's to be statistically significant. College-age Republicans are about as torn, half believing their trust can be restored (50% v. 60%, $p > .20$) and half believing it cannot (40% v. 39%, $p > .20$), similarly to the national average. The differences in college-age Conservatives who believe their trust can be won back

(17% v. 63%, $.20 > p > .10$) and those who believe it cannot (33% v. 36%) are not statistically significant. However, less college-age Democrats believe their trust can be restored than the national average found by Gallup (48% v. 86%, $p < .01$) and more believe it cannot be restored (35% v. 12%, $p < .01$). Similarly, less college-age Independents believe their trust can be restored (37% v. 70%, $p < .01$) and more believe it cannot be restored (54% v. 29%, $p < .01$). In this way, college-age Democrats and Independents are both less convinced than the national average that mass media can be redeemed for them (2017). [Figure 3b.]

Demographic Variances: Gender, Race, Age, and Income

The national Gallup survey found statistically significant differences between the genders and their respective degrees of trust, reporting that more men (76%) than women (64%) reported having less trust in mass media (2017). Findings from this study dispute this, with 50% of college-age men having little to no trust in mass media and 47% of women having little to no trust in mass media. There is no statistically significant difference between these two ($p > .20$), meaning there is no correlation between gender and degree of trust within college-age youths. [Figure 5.]

Similarly, Gallup reported that there was a statistically significant difference between whites and nonwhites in regard to their respective degrees of trust. Gallup's results displayed that more whites (72%) than nonwhites (63%) distrusted mass media (2017). Similarly to the above discussion on gender, the findings of this study do not agree with the national average. 44% of whites trust little to no mass media and 51% of nonwhites trust little to no mass media. There is no statistically significant difference between these two ($p > .20$), meaning there is no correlation between race and degree of trust within college-age youths. [Figure 7.]

The Pew Research Center, through its research, attested that younger people were less trusting than those who are older (2019), while the national Gallup survey claimed that there is no significant differences to be found between age groups (2017). Unfortunately, due to the limitations of the study performed (for later discussion), comparisons cannot be made between age groups as intended. However, the results of this study did not vary significantly from the Pew study, with the majority of 17-29 year olds trusting little (51% v. 46%, $p > .20$), a substantial portion trusting a moderate amount (41% v. 42%, $p > .20$), and only a small fraction trusting often (9% v. 11%, $p > .20$). No conclusions can be appropriately drawn about differences between age groups, but it is fair to state that college-age youths are predominantly low-trusting. [Figure 6.]

There are also limitations on the discussion to be had about income ranges and degrees of trust. The Pew Research Center's findings state that lower income brackets (that is, $< \$30,000/\text{year}$) were less trusting than higher ones. The findings of this study, again, do not vary significantly from that of the Pew study. College-age youths who trust little (45% v. 45%, $p > .20$) and trust moderately (44% v. 40%, $p > .20$) are about tied, with a small portion trusting often (12% v. 13%, $p > .20$) in ways that echo the Pew Research Center's findings. Though no meaningful conclusions can be drawn between income brackets, the same trends the Pew study found can be seen in these college-age youths regarding their income and relative trust. [Figure 8.]

Features of Mass Media That Influence Trust

Gallup's national study also accounted for the reasons people did not trust the news. The top most concerning categories included inaccurate/misleading reporting, biased reporting, incomplete reporting, and the implementation of sensationalist material (or "clickbait") (2017).

In this study, college-age youths indicated incomplete reporting (78%), misleading reporting (68%), partisan bias (67%), and sensationalism/“clickbait” (59%) among their top worries, as well, echoing the feelings presented by the national study. The Reuters Institute did a similar analysis, and found that bias of any sort was the largest concern (2018). College-age students seem more worried about accuracy than bias, though they are worried about it all the same. The Reuters Institute also reported that a very small portion of the nation worries journalists are just “chasing what sells” (2018). However, 48% of college-age respondents to this study believe the mass media only wants their money, and 32% think mass media is only trying to sell them something. Overall, it seems college-age youths agree that lying, incompleteness, bias, and monetary motivations are the top causes for mistrusting mass media. [Figure 9.]

While the Gallup survey does not discuss what the nation believes is journalism done right, the Reuters Institute discusses this to some degree. The Reuters Institute found that a portion of the nation simply believes in the journalistic process— this meaning the hard work of journalism, like proper research and the use of citations (2018). College-age youths wholeheartedly agree, as the use of citations is top of the list of trustworthy behaviors (62%). The Reuters Institute also cites the importance of particular brands – familiar faces and logos, things people are used to (2018). College-age youths seem to find less importance in this, with only 39% needing to see a familiar brand. Overall, college-age youths appear more engaged by careful reporting, good work ethic, and authenticity. [Figure 10.]

Conclusion

Limitations to the Study

There were a few unforeseen issues encountered during the conduction of the study. The platform used (SurveyMonkey) to collect responses limits the amount of questions allowed to be asked. Due to this, the age question was embedded into another question, and therefore was missed by many respondents, limiting the pool to only 66 of the total 100 sampled. Additionally, SurveyMonkey limited the total amount of responses to 100— additional data could have been collected, as there were students willing to answer, but the results were capped at 100 due to this. The statistical significance of this study could have been enhanced if either/both of these problem(s) had been alleviated.

There was also the matter of being unable to make comparisons between age brackets, a question that this study wanted to answer. However, 59 of the 66 respondents who reported their age were within 17-29 years of age. Similarly, income ranges could not be compared, as 78 of the 100 sampled reported earning less than \$30,000. However, there were still a lot of valuable information gleaned from this study.

In Summary: How Do College-Aged Youth Compare?

In large part, the results of this study would indicate that college-age students are generally less trusting of mass media than the national average. While they agree with national opinion that their trust levels have majorly declined, they are less certain about whether or not their trust can be restored. The amount of mass media consumed by college-age youths does not correlate with whether or not their trust in it changed this past decade, unlike the national opinion. Regarding the influence of political affiliation on the trust levels of college-age youths,

it would appear that Democrats, Republicans, and Independents show the most variance versus national opinion. College-age Democrats are overall less trusting, more likely to have lost trust, and more likely to believe their trust is lost forever. College-age Republicans are overall more trusting and less likely to have lost trust. Finally, college-age Independents are overall less trusting and more likely to believe their trust is lost forever. Regarding variances between the genders and whites v. nonwhites, college-age youths do not display any significant differences in trust levels. No significant conclusions could be made about age and income level, but the findings of this study do echo that of the Pew Research Study. Finally, college-age youth do agree with the national opinion that indicated incomplete, misleading, biased, and sensationalist reporting is among their top concerns, and that they value careful reporting with citations included.

Recommendations and Closing Thoughts

College-age individuals are a very important demographic, and deserve the attention of the mass media in regard to restoring trust. As they are the generation that will populate the workforce and largely operate under the news cycle to come, journalists should take their concerns seriously. If impartial, careful, complete reporting is what it takes to provide this generation with the news it needs, then there should be a concentrated effort to turn the tide away from partisan bias and monetary gains. As discussed earlier in this paper, knowledge is power, and it can be largely manipulated by those who present it— and, lately, it appears the opinion of society at large is that this is done with nefarious intent. Such a crucial fixture to American democracy should not be so despised. The findings of this study display that college-age youths are at a tipping point, and if action is not taken soon, it is entirely possible that more and more of them could decide that mass media has lost their faith forever.

References

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