STORY LABELS ALONE DON'T INCREASE TRUST

Austin, TX – October 3, 2019 – Labels like *news*, *analysis*, *opinion*, or *sponsored content* are a common addition to a news story. The thinking is that using story labels will increase trust. In our latest research, the Center for Media Engagement set out to test if story labels actually increase trust and if readers notice and remember the labels.

The study looked at two types of labels: an above-story label often used by news organization and an in-story label that gave a detailed explanation of the type of story. We found that:

- Labeling stories did not affect trust.
- Nearly half of the participants did not notice whether the story was labeled. Those who reported seeing a label were not particularly accurate in recalling the type of label.
- Of the two labels, recall was better for the in-story explainer label.

The findings suggest that newsrooms should not use labels as a stand-alone method for increasing trust. If using labels, newsrooms should place them in a highly visible location and consider using the in-story label that provides a description to educate readers about the story type.

"Using story labels alone may not be effective for conveying credibility, but they may be helpful when used with other techniques for conveying trustworthiness," says researcher Cynthia Peacock. Our previous research shows that using a combination of trust strategies – like story labels, journalist biographies, a description of how and why a story was chosen, footnotes for citations, and a description of involvement in the Trust Project, an international consortium of news organizations – can increase trust.

This research was supported by the Democracy Fund, the Hewlett Foundation, and the Rita Allen Foundation. To read more about the findings, access the full report on our website: https://mediaengagement.org/research/story-labels-and-trust

###

The Center for Media Engagement, part of the Moody College of Communication at The University of Texas at Austin, provides research-based techniques for engaging digital audiences in commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways. Learn more at mediaengagement.org.