TESTING BEHIND THE STORY CARDS

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Austin, TX – January 30, 2020 – We know that readers and journalists alike think newsrooms could be more transparent. To this end, a team at McClatchy designed a Behind the Story card inspired by previous research from the Center for Media Engagement and Trusting News.

In this study, we explored whether the placement of the Behind the Story card on a news organization's website affects readers' recall of the card and trust in news. We found that:

- When shown a Behind the Story card outside the context of an article, a majority of readers said the card would improve their trust in a news organization.
- Although the Behind the Story card appealed to most readers, a majority of readers did not notice it, and its presence within an article did not affect trust in the news organization.
- Non-subscribers noticed the Behind the Story card more often when it was placed in-line with the article text than when it was placed at the bottom of the article.

Readers reported that a Behind the Story card would increase their trust in news organizations, which is in line with findings from our previous study on boxes that explain the story process. In this experiment, however, few readers noticed the card when it was included in the article. "What this tells us is that readers value the transparency that the card provides, but newsrooms need to ensure that the card is noticeable," says Center for Media Engagement researcher Caroline Murray. We suggest that newsrooms and researchers continue testing different design factors that could draw readers' attention to trust and transparency efforts.

Based in part on this research, McClatchy has been working on redesigning their article page. "This study and other user research we've conducted at McClatchy shows that readers skim over elements outside the story body, especially non-text-based elements that can be confused with advertising. We are in the process of streamlining our story pages, including moving to a rail-free design, so readers can identify and pursue the highest-value action on our story pages. Ultimately, building trust is a long-term play with many interconnected factors. The behind-the-story card and author bio cards are a couple of pieces in that puzzle," says McClatchy Senior Manager, UX & Strategic Projects Abby Reimer.

To read more about the findings, access the full report on our website:
https://mediaengagement.org/research/behind-the-story-cards

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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.