

STUDY: ADDING TRUST INDICATORS TO AN ARTICLE CAN INCREASE TRUST IN NEWS

(Dec. 12, 2017), Austin, TX – A new study finds that adding Trust Indicators to an online news article improves evaluations of a news organization, including ratings of its trustworthiness, credibility, and reliability.

To examine trust in the news, the University of Texas at Austin's [Center for Media Engagement](#) (formerly the Engaging News Project) conducted a survey-based experiment with 1,183 U.S. adults. With funding from the [Trust Project](#), an international consortium of news organizations hosted by Santa Clara University's Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, the Center for Media Engagement asked study participants to read a news article that contained, at random, either Trust Indicators or no Trust Indicators. The Trust Indicators are news transparency tools, designed by the Trust Project, that aim to make it easier for people to assess the credibility of the news. The Trust Indicators tested were:

- 1) The reporter's picture and job title, with a link to further information;
- 2) A label indicating that the article was "analysis" (as opposed to "opinion," "news," "review," or "advertiser content");
- 3) Footnotes within the article text that offered source material;
- 4) A "Behind the Story" section that described why and how the article was written; and
- 5) Information about the news organization's participation in the Trust Project, including a reference to best practices.

Study results show that the presence of these Trust Indicators affected how participants evaluated a news website created for the study.

When the Trust Indicators were present, study participants evaluated the news organization and the reporter more positively. For example, the news organization was seen as being more reputable, and the reporter more qualified to write the article, when participants saw articles with Trust Indicators. Participants were also more likely to say that they would seek out more news from the organization and talk to friends and family about the article.

After providing all study participants with details about the Trust Project, participants were asked whether they would be willing to pay to access a news site if they learned that the news organization was involved with the Trust Project. Eight percent indicated that they were much more willing to pay, 25 percent somewhat more willing, 58 percent would not change their willingness to pay, and nine percent indicated that they were somewhat or much less willing to pay.

A majority of those participating felt that noting a news organization's participation in the Trust Project would increase their trust (63 percent), as would including a "Behind the Story" section on reporting methods (59 percent), and providing a list of best practices such as an ethics policy (53 percent).

"Our findings suggest that when it comes to improving trust in their organizations, newsrooms have some options," said Alex Curry, research associate at the Center for Media Engagement. "A common thread among the indicators we tested is that they all help part the curtain, giving news consumers more details about the article, the reporter, and the news organization. It could be that adding indicators like those we tested provides a level of transparency that leads to more trust."

Trust Indicators like those evaluated in this study have been incorporated on several news organizations' websites and will be used by companies like Google, Facebook, Twitter and Bing.

About the Center for Media Engagement

The Center for Media Engagement envisions a vibrant American news media that more effectively empowers the public to understand, appreciate, and participate in the democratic exchange of ideas. Learn more at mediaengagement.org.