News for the Powerful and Privileged: How Misrepresentation and Underrepresentation of Disadvantaged Communities Undermine Their Trust in News

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TRUST IN NEWS PROJECT

Contents

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Acknowledgements

1. Introduction and Key Findings

There is no single trust problem, and therefore there is no single trust solution. This point has been a common refrain over the course of the past two and a half years of the Reuters Institute Trust in News Project. As audiences often have different reasons underlying their scepticism and distrust, news organisations that seek to maintain and rebuild trust must first grapple with *whose* trust they seek to engender and consider the distinct trade-offs associated with catering to different segments of the public (Toff et al. 2020; Toff et al. 2021a). It is not possible to be trusted by all people, nor are all people looking for journalists to serve them and their communities in the same ways, even if in the abstract there are many shared values around what constitutes trustworthy journalism.

This lesson was at the forefront of our minds as we set out in this study to consider the distinct perspectives of audiences who are particularly underrepresented in news coverage and/or hail from historically marginalised groups. Previous survey research, including our own, has shown differences in trust levels and perceptions of fairness in some places based on particular demographic variables, such as race (or caste in India), gender, social class, and age (Newman et al. 2021; Toff et al. 2021c). However, there are limitations to using survey data to understand many of these smaller subsamples. To gain a more granular understanding of what these differences mean and how they may relate to other factors or experiences, qualitative methods are particularly useful.

This report uses data from 41 focus groups convened in the four countries at the centre of this project – Brazil, India, the UK, and the US – strategically selecting participants from disadvantaged communities whose perspectives and experiences may plausibly differ from majority or dominant groups in important ways. Specificall , we focus on how differences along lines of race, caste, religion, class, and place may point towards distinct needs and expectations around news and how this intersects with people's sense of trust in important ways. In Brazil, we focused on **Black and mixed-race audiences** (people who identified as either *preto* or *pardo*);[1] in India, we focused on **audiences from marginalised castes or tribes** and **Muslim audiences**; in the UK we focused on **working-class audiences**, and in the US we focused on **Black** and **rural** audiences.

We chose to focus on these audiences based in part on roundtables and interviews we previously held with journalists and senior managers in newsrooms (Toff et al. 2020; Toff et al. 2021a), many of whom asked how they could better engage with audiences who have been historically underserved or marginalised in their country's news coverage, often acknowledging that chronic deficiencies in reporting – or worse, coverage that has actively harmed groups – has strained bonds and may lie at the heart of many communities' distrust. Moreover, qualitative research about trust in news among specific subgroups has been especially limited with the few existing studies focused almost exclusively on single subgroups in the Global North (e.g. Kilgo et al. 2020; Nadler et al. 2021).

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[1] We use the race categories employed by Brazil's Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE): *preto* refers to Black, whereas *pardo* refers to brown or other mixed-race backgrounds. Throughout the report, as a shorthand we will refer to them as Black audiences, mirroring the IBGEs grouping together of *preto* and *pardo* identities.

To some extent, much of what we heard in these focus groups with regard to trust aligns with our previous findings and the   ork of other scholars: many people expressed a generalised sense of scepticism towards all news media, not necessarily differentiating between distinct sources; many held a deep suspicion about the motives of news organisations they assumed manipulated the public for commercial or political aims; and audiences frequently attributed their distrust to what they saw as chronic bias in reporting that purported to be fair and impartial. Such attitudes are far from unique to the groups we focus on here.

However, among focus group participants, these ideas were often rooted in perspectives that come from identifying as part of a group that is marginalised or situated far from the centres of power. In other words, the critiques may resonate as similar, but the stakes were often higher. Privileged audiences may be concerned about, say, sensationalism, but they rarely pay a personal price. Disadvantaged communities do. The lens through which many saw the failings of the news media in their countries was in large part (although not only) related to problems they saw in how people like them were portrayed in the media. And while some groups articulated complaints in similar ways as other audiences when it came to concerns about misrepresentation, underrepresentation, and perceived inaccuracies in coverage, the examples they offered often made clear the extent to which frustrations with news were not simply reasons to distrust it, but sources of palpable harm to communities already disadvantaged in society.

Such perceptions and experiences inevitably shaped peoples' sense of trust, but often in nuanced ways. Conversations about trust refle ted participants' wide-ranging and complex views and expectations about news and what it should be. Many held multiple notions about what news they could and could not trust – and what for – and the circumstances under which they might change their minds. While participants extensively discussed the kinds of initiatives they wished news organisations would undertake to improve their journalism, it was not always clear that any of these changes would necessarily be enough to regain their trust. There are no easy fi es for problems that are deep-seated and long-running. Conversely, some were willing to place trust in particular news organisations despite what they saw as chronic problems with their coverage, precisely because they already held low expectations about most institutions in society when it came to catering to people in their community and doing right by them.

Our findings here are important or several reasons. First, they highlight in concrete terms the impact that inaccurate and inadequate representation in news coverage can have on the lives of people belonging to marginalised and other communities distant and disconnected from those parts of society that are privileged and powerful. While some of the critiques raised in this report will sound familiar to many journalists, the deeply personal stakes articulated here, which involve potential for profound harms, ought to lead some to refle t on whether their own organisations' commitments to these matters are duly aligned with the urgency of the problems as perceived by many in the communities we have focused on here.

Second, and related to this point, while there are concrete steps that can be taken to address many of these issues, which we focus on in our concluding section – and indeed a few newsrooms in some countries have sought, to varying degrees, to do so – taking these steps may require reallocating often scarce resources. This comes down to a question of priorities – just as *not* taking such steps is also a choice. In other words, there is no neutral path here. Each involves, to varying degrees, editorial and other trade-offs that we have sought to highlight throughout

this report. The perspectives captured across many of these focus groups refle t frustrations with news media that too often defaults to forms of coverage that purport to be fair and factual, but which often refle t and reinforce a narrow view of the world shared by dominant groups in society, while systematically excluding the points of view of those who have not historically been afforded a voice in newsrooms to weigh in on such matters. Better representing marginalised and underserved communities in news coverage requires a willingness to confront and rectify these disparities, not simply an acknowledgement of the problem.

Third, despite real differences in perspectives about how people evaluate news in their countries, we also think it is worth underscoring that many of the changes that participants wanted to see refle ted in coverage of their communities do not require a fundamental re-engineering of news values. In fact, many expressed quite similar sentiments about what they ultimately want from news: unbiased, fair, and accurate coverage of matters relevant to their lives. Although many differed in what they thought that might look like in practice, they were not calling for a wholesale abandonment of journalistic approaches that prize the pursuit of objective facts, as elusive as such a concept may be. They want news that delivers on that mission, and we have tried to faithfully capture such sentiments in the pages that follow.

1.1 How this report was constructed

This study is based on a series of focus groups conducted in December 2022 and January 2023 in Brazil, India, the UK, and the US – four countries that are the focus of our project – which vary considerably in their cultures, politics, and media systems (see Toff et al. 2020). We worked with local research firms: Inteligência em esquisa e Consultoria (IPEC) in Brazil; Policy and Development Advisory Group (PDAG) in India; Differentology in the UK; and State Public Policy Group (SPPG) in the US. They organised and conducted 41 separate sessions: eight each in Brazil, the UK, and the US, and 17 in India. Focus groups consisted of 4–15 participants for a total of 322 people. Screening and recruitment varied by country, focusing on the relevant subgroups summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Breakdown of how focus group participants were selected in each country

Country	State/Region	Audience subgroups	Number of groups
Brazil	Bahia	Black and mixed-race audiences	4
	São Paulo	Black and mixed-race audiences	4
India	Haryana	Audiences from marginalised castes or tribes	4
		Muslim audiences	4
	Jharkhand	Audiences from marginalised castes or tribes	4
		Muslim audiences	5
United Kingdom	Yorkshire	Working-class audiences	4
	Greater London	Working-class audiences	4
United States	Iowa	Black audiences	4
		Rural audiences	4

Note: In India, caste and religion intersect in complex ways. In Haryana, while participants for half of the groups were screened on the basis of their caste, several also identified as Muslim. As such, in practice, six of the Haryana groups included Muslim audiences.

With finite time and resour es, we have necessarily been selective about which audience subgroups to focus on. In doing so we have considered important cleavages documented in prior research in each country, but most significantly e have drawn on our own conversations with journalists and editors, who often discussed and/or asked about how to better serve these particular segments of the public. Our decision to focus this report in this way, however, by no means implies that these are the only important audiences, nor does it follow that other marginalised and underserved groups can be expected to have similar experiences or views. In fact, not every participant would necessarily consider themselves personally disadvantaged. (Indeed, rural groups in the US included a couple of participants who had worked in government.) Still, we hope that by shedding light on some of the similarities and differences within and across these groups, our study will contribute to more broadly underscoring the importance of paying attention to the unique perspectives among different communities and how social identities often play an important role in shaping different audiences' relationships to news.

In addition to recruiting participants based on these particular sociodemographic characteristics in each country, we also generally split focus groups along lines of gender and age, resulting in separate focus groups for younger men, younger women, older men, and older women in most locations. This was done for both practical and analytical purposes: on the one hand, we wanted to help minimise power dynamics among participants due to gender and age differences that might inhibit participation in the groups themselves. On the other hand, we wanted to facilitate an analysis of the data along what scholars call 'intersectional' lines (Cooper 2016; Crenshaw 1991), recognising the need to account for how different forms of structural oppression or exclusion can converge, shaping the experiences of those who occupy identities at these intersections in distinct and important ways.[2]

We sometimes focus on these important intersectional perspectives, but just as our research design involves trade-offs around what groups to recruit and exclude, we are also limited in how much detail we are able to go into in this report when it comes to these many lines of difference. Lastly, we note that in three of the four countries, groups were convened in two distinct geographic locations. These were selected in consultation with the partner firms to allow for regional variation as well. We provide more detail about these locations and our rationale for selecting them in the Technical Appendix.

Focus groups typically lasted 90 minutes, although some in India were shorter and structured differently, refle ting the unique challenges associated with some of the populations sampled there. Excerpts from the focus groups are identified using pseudonyms to pr tect the identity of the participants.[3] We have also identified which group each participant was a part of nd provide more detailed information on the characteristics (e.g. age range, gender, location) for each individual group in the Appendix. During the groups, trained moderators guided the conversations through four main topics: identity; what news people used and why; perceptions of journalism and trust; and representation in the news.[4]

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[2] Central to intersectionality is the understanding that the intersection of identities such as race and gender are 'unique and cannot be understood by simply adding together ingredients of each separate identity' (Ghavami and Peplau 2013, p. 114).

[3] While we have done our best to ensure proper identification of spea ers, in practice, doing so was often challenging, especially when only audio recordings were available. When in doubt, we have opted for identifying only the group and not the specific speaker, but it is also possible that in some instances speakers have been misidentified

[4] A member of the Reuters Institute research team observed most sessions in person to provide feedback and oversight.

1.2 Considering the complexities of identity

In foregrounding the perspectives of populations that have been marginalised and/or underserved by news organisations in their countries, we have sought to capture relevant thematic similarities across these groups. Conversations often made plain the extent to which the various identities examined here meaningfully shaped people's lives in important and often patterned ways. During the first portion of the ocus groups, participants refle ted extensively on how their identities often came hand in hand with experiences of confronting structural disadvantages, exclusion, stereotyping, overt discrimination, and even violence. Likewise, within subgroups, perceptions of and experiences with news were often expressed in ways that echoed one another. We emphasise these commonalities in many parts of our report.

In so doing, however, we are not in any way suggesting that the experiences of marginalisation or exclusion across these different groups – from news or from society more broadly – are equivalent or comparable. There are very real and consequential differences between these groups' experiences, as well as considerable variation in the range of perspectives we heard within groups. We hope some of these differences come through in the main sections of this report, though admittedly there are many aspects of individuals' unique experiences that we are not able to document thoroughly here.

In addition to many individual differences, there was also important variation both within and across groups in terms of how central the specific identities (e.g being Muslim, Black, working class, or rural) were to participants' sense of self,[5] or how any given category was symbolically constructed and experienced in local contexts (e.g. differences in how Blackness was articulated or experienced in Iowa versus Bahia versus São Paulo, or differences in how caste or ethnic identity was experienced in Haryana versus Jharkhand). Moreover, and as noted above, these identities inevitably intersected with other identities, were sometimes experienced as being 'in tension' (e.g. people with 'mixed' identities, such as mixed-race participants or participants whose families were split in terms of socioeconomic class), and other times had a degree of fluidi y (e.g. age or class shifting over time).

Furthermore, given how intertwined race and class are in many places, group conversations sometimes addressed issues of identities that weren't the primary focus of the group (e.g. some of the working-class participants in the UK groups were Black or Asian and discussed matters pertaining to race in addition to class; some of the Black participants in Brazil also brought up issues pertaining to class). In short, identities are immensely complex and none of these groups are monoliths.

Lastly, in setting up our findings we want to be clear in communicating their limitations. While our intent is to highlight and lift up the voices of segments of the public that are often overlooked in audience research – and rarely, if ever, in an internationally comparative manner – the findings here ne essarily involve peering through a small window into a much larger set of phenomena. Indeed, it is impossible to capture the full spectrum of experiences of Black

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[5] In most of the focus groups (except India, where the sensitive topic of identity was addressed more indirectly), we began the conversation allowing participants to freely discuss what aspects about themselves were important to their sense of who they were. While some brought up the categories of interest immediately, others tended to focus on personal characteristics such as their personality, their values, or other identities, such as their gender.

people in the US based on groups conducted solely in Des Moines, Iowa, or the multiplicity of experiences of people belonging to marginalised castes or ethnic identities in a country as large and diverse as India. That is, the individuals included in this study must not be taken as stand-ins for marginalised or underserved groups writ large, or for all members of their specific communities – a frustration that often came up in conversations about news coverage doing precisely that. Our approach is intended to bring depth, nuance, and precision to the issue at hand, not broad, sweeping generalisations. We offer this because we believe that highlighting these perspectives in participants' own words offers a valuable starting point for conversations about how newsrooms can better serve audiences that have been historically overlooked or maligned.

1.3 Key finding

Although there were distinct differences in how study participants saw the world and criticised news media for their coverage of people like them, there were also many commonalities in frustrations about news expressed across these groups. Most saw news media as not only out of touch but at times an especially harmful force that did real damage to their communities, either through neglecting them altogether or exploiting them, reinforcing harmful stereotypes, or sensationalising in divisive and polarising ways. Ultimately, many were distrusting of news for these reasons, but the link to trust was not always straightforward. Below we summarise key takeaways that we identified   y analysing transcripts of the focus groups:

- **Despite the diversity of groups assembled across a range of media environments, participants expressed similar frustrations about not being heard**. Many felt wronged by what they saw as persistent misrepresentation and underrepresentation in coverage of people like themselves. Although groups varied in the depth of their concerns, participants often focused on common critiques ranging from relentless negativity and unfair treatment to harmful stereotyping and inadequate attention.

- **Among individuals from marginalised communities, many saw news media as biased, sensationalistic, or depressing, with distinctly personal and consequential stakes**. For those who felt that negative coverage intentionally targeted their communities, such news was described as taxing on a uniquely personal level. In particular, coverage of crime and violence was often seen as a way to boost ratings or get clicks at the expense of vulnerable communities.

- **The news media as an institution, especially in the UK, the US, and India, was often viewed as an extension of systems aligned to serve those in power – systems many felt excluded from**. Impressions about mass media were often intertwined with broader concerns about inequalities such as racism, classism, and casteism. News media were rarely seen as catering to the entire public so much as reinforcing the interests of those already most privileged and powerful.

- **Many groups saw journalists as out of touch, lacking the lived experience or knowledge to understand their realities, or even prejudiced, but many also gave positive examples of journalists they thought of as exceptions.** Others distinguished journalists from the organisations that employ them, more typically blaming companies and broader commercial pressures for shortcomings they saw in coverage.

- **Most described trustworthy journalism in ways aligned with other audiences, saying they wanted more impartiality, transparency, and accuracy in coverage.** At the same time, ideas about what is newsworthy, what stories should be covered or ignored, and whose voices deserve to be highlighted were also often rooted in people's distinct vantage points, which could be quite different from one another.

- **Focus group participants differed on the degree to which they valued the importance of journalists themselves coming from diverse backgrounds.** Many, especially Black participants in the US, saw it as critically important that newsrooms improve diversity among both their reporting staff and their senior management to better refle t the communities they seek to serve, but groups were also wary of tokenism and suspicious of performative efforts they dismissed as pandering.

- **Many spoke of the importance of niche and, in some cases, local news sources they felt more fairly and fully represented people like themselves and their interests.** Younger people especially talked about relying on individuals, often non-journalists, whose content they accessed via social media, podcasts, or online video services they trusted, to speak more reliably to their concerns and highlight the stories that mattered to them. Others highlighted the importance of ethnic or community media for serving these purposes.

- **Representation matters for trust, but concerns raised often went beyond trust.** Many said restoring their sense of trust would require news organisations to pay better attention to their communities' concerns, genuinely and consistently, and represent the full range of their experiences and perspectives more fairly and positively. At the same time, not all were confident that such changes ould ultimately alter the way they felt about news, and others were more willing to trust specific n ws sources even as they agreed that news in general ought to better live up to its purported ideals of serving the entirety of the public, not just the privileged and powerful.

2. Shared Concerns over Misrepresentation in News Coverage

In this section, we examine the most common themes voiced by focus group participants about how the news media in their countries represent people like them. We find that people across the four countries, despite hailing from quite different backgrounds and circumstances, often articulated concerns about people like themselves being misrepresented in news coverage in highly similar ways.

The findings in this se tion expand on previous survey research, which has documented some quantitative differences in perceptions of trust or news fairness among most of the groups we focus on here. For example, the Reuters Institute *Digital News Report 2021* found that Black people in the US were more likely to say people like them are covered unfairly compared to white people, and people living in the North of England were less likely to perceive coverage as fair than those in London (Newman et al. 2021). However, these patterns – and quantitative data more generally – are limited in their ability to tell us what about news people find to be unfair or untrustworthy, and they may also fail to capture significant qualitati e differences. By documenting in their own words how people from each of these distinct groups think about representation in news coverage, we can better understand the link between trust in news and specific per eptions people hold about how well – or how poorly – the news media performs when it comes to covering the communities to which they belong.

On the next page, we highlight fi e ways many believed news media misrepresented people like themselves. The problems of misrepresentation include: 1) emphasising negative news; 2) treating groups unfairly; 3) perpetuating stereotypes; 4) failing to cover them altogether; and 5) promoting divisiveness between groups. While these fi e points of criticism were broadly echoed across all four countries, and in many ways overlap with one another, we also note that the first three ere less frequently expressed in India, whereas the last two were invoked more often there. While we underscore similarities in how these groups talked about perceived problems in coverage, we also seek to highlight some variation in how these complaints were articulated in practice. In addition, we draw out the specific ways that the onsequences of misrepresentation are often experienced on a deeply personal and potentially harmful level, especially when it involves audiences already marginalised or disadvantaged more generally.

Figure 1. Five concerns about misrepresentation and underrepresentation
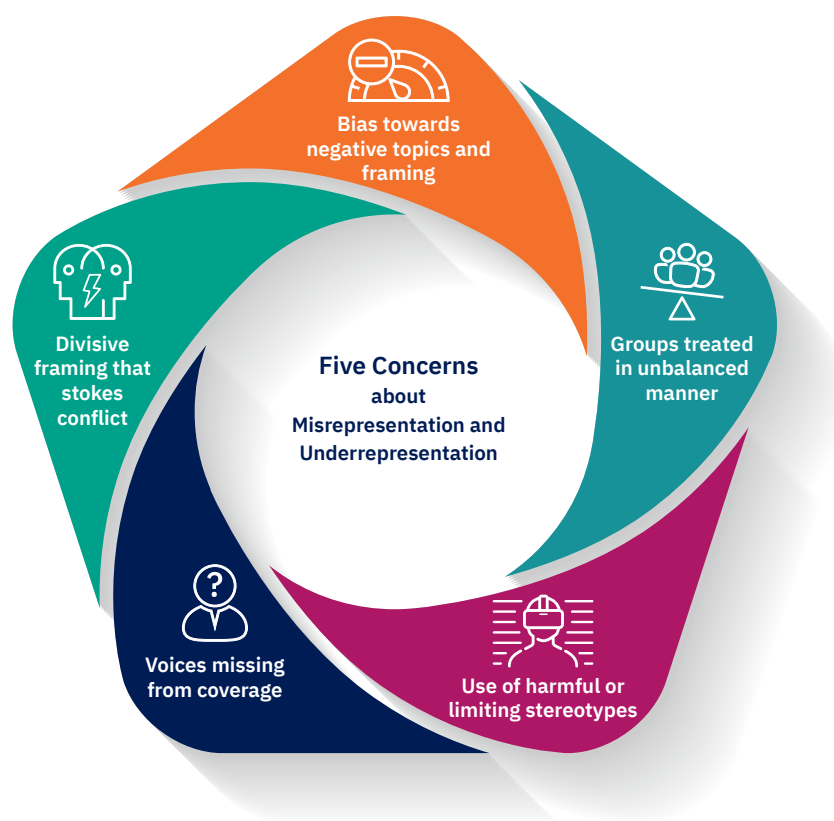
2.1 Coverage of communities is relentlessly negative

The first and most voiced complaint among participants in Brazil, the UK, and the US was that news coverage of people like them tended to be about negative topics (i.e. story selection) or reflecting them in a negative light (i.e. story framing). Many expressed the sense that people like them only appeared in the news when something bad happened. For example, Maria (BR-03) suggested that mainstream news 'only talk about tragedies. And, you know, Black and brown people are not just the focus of tragedies; there are successful people among us'. Marcus (UK-01) described the news he encountered about working-class women as fundamentally negative: 'It's normally quite trashy news ... I'm thinking of the Coleen Rooney [coverage][6]... And that was, like, a really, kind of, trashy news court case.' Matthew (US-08) made a similar point talking about coverage of rural areas: 'If you look at the national news, the only time you hear about rural issues is if a tornado went through a trailer park, or if this whole section flooded or if, whatever. I mean, it's only when you have a natural disaster component that I think you get rural people in.'

> *In the news, you kind of see low class and high class. That's it. So, for example, there was an incident that happened around where I live locally, where two young boys were killed and ... they've basically gone, 'Oh, yes, all this area, it's a working-class area,' but they're making it out like it's the most grungy, dirty area, because it's not as high class as North London. And it's, kind of, the way they're putting across people in the working class. They're putting them down.*
>
> Charlotte (UK-03)

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[6] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-61719250

Among Black participants in the US and Brazil (in addition to several Black participants in the UK), many complained that news coverage about Black people emphasised 'poverty, crimes, violence' specificall , as one Brazilian participant expressed it (BR-05), or as Gabrielle (US-01) said, 'It's death, like crime, murders, shootings.' Rebecca (UK-03) sensed that news coverage about rising knife crime in the UK, and the negative connotations surrounding it, was typically associated with Black people: 'It's always done in a negative light, even if the person was just an innocent bystander or innocent victim. It's always "They're gang affiliated , and stuff like that.' This often came hand in hand with the sense that news organisations only visited certain neighbourhoods when it's 'something that's crime related,' as Michelle (US-02) put it.

> We are the target for, you know, not being well treated. We stole, we robbed, we killed. We don't hear that about white people. And everywhere – TV, online, radio, everywhere – that's what you hear. They don't treat us with respect.
>
> Inácio (BR-06)

Among UK participants, many felt that news tended to depict the working class as a nuisance or burden on society. Many raised the issue of how news organisations portrayed welfare benefits and recipients. For instance, Paul (UK-02) recalled some years back when news coverage focused on younger women purportedly 'having children to get a council home or something; trying to beat that'. Tracey (UK-04) suggested that this kind of coverage 'makes us sound like we're all poor or spongers'. Others centred their complaints around unfavourable depictions of strikes, such as Allan (UK-06), who felt that reporters actively sought out people who were unsupportive of strikes for their stories: 'The people that they interview, the commuters, yeah, they only find people that will omplain.' Similarly, Hugh (UK-06) suggested, 'They're being portrayed as bad people, especially the train drivers,' adding that 'none of them [news outlets] seem to be reporting much on their side of it.' In their view, such coverage emphasised labour strikes as an inconvenience and blamed working-class people for them.

The flipside of this negati e coverage, many suggested, was that news typically overlooked the triumphs or contributions of people like them. In Lucas's (BR-04) opinion, 'They never mention our accomplishments, our victories; it's only what Black people do wrong.' Similarly, Doris (US-02) noted how the tendency to prioritise negative news meant positive stories were overlooked: 'We have so many men, young and old, and just in this community, they're doing great things. But you want to focus on all the bad stuff. I don't really see a lot of programming around the lifting up … and assisting the community. I just don't see it.' Meanwhile, Clare (UK-04) criticised the lack of appreciation towards working-class people during the pandemic: 'I'm a bit disappointed that the working-class people who did support the COVID situation, were not recognised … we know [about] the nurses, and we loved that, but there were lots of other people that put themselves on that line.' This skew away from positive news perceived by many resulted in depictions of their communities that were viewed as distorted or outright inaccurate.

> We have places here in Salvador. We have this amazing culture, musical culture, that developed around that place. But the way that they show it, the only thing that people see are tourists and violence. And that's not the reality.
>
> Caio (BR-08)

12

In India, many Muslim participants expressed frustration about negative news coverage of the Muslim community. Most frequently, this discontent was illustrated using the example of news coverage about the Tablighi Jamaat, a religious gathering that took place in Delhi and was widely reported as having been a COVID-19 super-spreader event.[7] In Asmina's (IN-05) words: 'Constantly, Muslims have been blamed for this particular disease … Yes, absolutely. They have blamed the whole Jamaat for it … This is wrong.' Similarly, Bala (IN-02) noted how 'even during corona, the only thing they were fast in showing was the Jamaat incident; [the] rest was not there in existence'. Bheeru (IN-02) agreed: 'Day in and day out, they were showing the exact same thing, that is, because of the Jamaat, COVID is spreading. No matter when you open the channel, this was the only news they had.' These participants felt that coverage of the Jamaat had negatively and inaccurately depicted the Muslim community as responsible for the spread of the virus in India.

Some participants emphasised not just the exploitative nature of negative coverage, but the personal toll it took on them, often leading them to avoid or disconnect from news. This was especially the case among Black people the US. Indeed, prior research has shown that negative emotions associated with news consumption can contribute to news avoidance (Toff and Nielsen 2022). However, for participants who felt their communities were directly targeted by negative coverage, such news was taxing on a uniquely personal level. For instance, Caio (BR-08) described a sense of fatigue around watching repetitive news about violence among Black people in Brazil, which in turn contributed to a sense of distrust: 'At times I don't want to watch violence. I don't want to watch about crimes or anything … Because the TV has that; they talk about the same piece of news all day long.' Similarly, Barbara (US-02) described her need to 'disconnect from even the local news or the national news just because it is just too dang much'.

> *If it's a Black person that's dead or something happened, it's shown to the point where we become numb, kind of, looking at it because we see it so much … I don't think other races have to deal with, like, looking at their dead grandma laying on the street.*
>
> Jocelyn (US-01)

News coverage about topics such as high-profile cases of poli e brutality came up often in these conversations and were felt by some as compounding experiences of racism and discrimination they faced in their everyday lives. Many were suspicious of how the news covered police-related issues generally, as Lorena (BR-05) explained: 'News about the police, I don't trust it completely. The news is distorted, and media plays a huge role in distorting this news.' For participants like David (US-03), news about police violence, particularly the killing of George Floyd, was distressing in a very personal way. Over time he said he 'stopped watching news because I got numb to all of this stuff'. He saw such stories as embedded in a larger historical arc of injustice that made the weight of the news that much more difficult to bear [8]

> *We always knew this was happening throughout history to the lynchings and through the Civil Rights era. These things were always known, but seeing it broadcast every day, week after*

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[7] See https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/india- oronavirus-tablighi-jamaat-delhi/2020/04/02/abdc5af0-7386-11ea-ad9b-254ec99993bc_story.html and https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/coronavirus-tablighi-jamaat-30-per-cent-of-coronavirus-cases-linked-to-delhi-mosque-event-government-2206163

[8] For a review of imagery depicting racial violence against Black people in the US, see Lovett (2021).

week, month after month, year after year, it's mentally and emotionally exhausting, and I just couldn't keep up with it.

<div align="right">David (US-03)</div>

2.2 The news media systematically treats groups unfairly

Complaints about negative news often came hand in hand with a sense that coverage was particularly unfair towards their group. Such critiques typically involved comparisons with groups believed to receive more favourable treatment. For example, Mark (UK-02) suggested working-class people were given less time in the news than their wealthier counterparts: 'There'll be a news story about a billionaire or something, and they take 15–20 minutes. And then, you know, there's a coal miner strike or something, and they get about a minute. And you go, "What about the people at the coalface?"' Similarly, Afrin (IN-15) suggested that news organisations are more sympathetic towards (also marginalised) Adivasi communities than they are towards Muslim ones: 'We are also all educated, but still, we are not given preference for anything … Yes, they do show that Muslims have a lot of inadequacy. In the news also they portray us wrongly. They show us with hatred.'

While some Brazilian and American participants offered examples of unfair treatment of Black celebrities such as athletes or politicians, the most frequent and detailed examples of unfairness centred on crime coverage. An extension of concerns about negative coverage, many felt news stories only emphasised the race of a person who committed a crime when they were Black. Along these lines, Mariana (BR-07) commented: 'When it's about Black people, they say "Black man kills his wife or partner" … [But] when it's about white people, they [just] say "Wife got killed by husband or partner".' Some highlighted other ways they believed news coverage gave preferential treatment to white people. For example, Michelle (US-02) said she had to 'watch out for the language they use and how they report it. Like, if it's a white kid, you'll hear that he was a boy scout or all this positive stuff. If it has to be, like, a Black male, then you hear all this negative history that has nothing to do with what just happened.' In a similar vein, Gabriel (BR-06) also noted that 'When a Black person goes to jail, they make fun of us. No one interviews those [people] or anything. When a white person goes to jail, "Oh, my God, poor person." They are interviewed and all that. They are treated respectfully.'

> *When someone white that went and did something just as horrible, you know, you get to see them all cleaned up and showered, or it's a photo of them when they're so much younger. And then they're called a child even though they're 21. But the 16-year-old Black 'man' in his orange suit … So, I've always had disdain. That's why I get a little militant with it. I don't like it.*

<div align="right">Miriam (US-02)</div>

Others described how these dynamics played out in the uneven treatment of victims, suggesting news stories were less sympathetic or even disrespectful when covering the loss of life among people like them. For example, Harsh (IN-08) criticised the lack of empathy and interest in crimes committed against people from marginalised castes: 'If there is a lower-caste kid, they buried the news after two days. They killed him and buried the news. What can anyone do? … That's why our trust in news is eroded.'

<div align="center">14</div>

Many in Brazil and the US felt stories about Black people often slipped into victim-blaming. Heitor (BR-06) commented: 'The white person is never disrespected. They never say that your daughter was killed because you're a criminal. Oh, and if it's a Black person, they're going to say, you know, your son or your daughter was killed because you were a criminal.' For Alexandra (US-01), this grievance was especially personal, following the coverage of her own father's murder, which happened in a public park while he was playing a game of dice: 'The way he was portrayed, they just were so focused on the dice game and gambling. Everybody gambles. Like, you go to Prairie Meadows right now, you're gonna see 1,000 white men in there gambling, [but] because he was outside shooting dice in a park, "He's a gangster, he's a monster".' She added, 'They always make it seem like they deserved to die.'

> *Even the pictures that they use on the death tributes. Like, the whole Shanquella Robinson [case].[9] They keep using this picture, her whole upper body is naked, and just, like, her hair is covering her nipples, which, it was a birthday shoot picture, but it's like, why not choose a [different] picture? And she was murdered! They're doing a murder investigation, a homicide investigation, but to me, it's, like, trying to paint the picture of her.*
>
> <div align="right">Alicia (US-01)</div>

2.3 Media misrepresentation perpetuates harmful or limiting stereotypes

Third, and closely related to the first t o themes, participants often voiced concerns about media representations reinforcing stereotypes that were damaging or simply limiting. These discussions often highlighted the very real impacts of how problems in media affect people's everyday lives. Many described how stereotypes could mould how others perceived them or even how they – and their children – perceived themselves. When discussing frustrations about representation in general, but especially when discussing stereotypes, the boundaries between news and non-news media were often permeable – as they can be in peoples' conceptions of media – with some participants going back and forth between news coverage and other media.

Of course, the precise stereotypes participants were concerned about varied depending on the group. Avijit (IN-10), for example, refle ted on how Indian news both refle ted and reinforced stereotypes about Adivasi people held by those 'in high ranks': 'They used to think that Adivasis are mean, very stupid people, and very wild people, and who don't understand anything, and that the Adivasis don't understand development or progress.' Rural participants in the US complained about depictions reducing rural areas to 'corn fields and pig farms (Mary, US-06) and of people like them as being a 'bunch of hicks' (US-06).

Many of the stereotypes mirrored the negative or unfair coverage discussed above. Some complained about stereotypical representations of Black people as poor, violent, or aggressive. Augusto (BR-06) suggested coverage was unfair because news organisations 'believe we're poor'. Heitor (BR-06) added: 'They say that the Black people are criminals. Only Black people are thugs. We are the only menace society faces.' Charles (US-03) made a similar point, noting: 'I think America has altered the perception of what Black people are, too, because, like, if you look at movies and television … they depict us as very intimidating, aggressive people … Whenever

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9 https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/23/us/fbi-cabo-mexico-shanquella-robinson.html

you see a Black man in a suit or what have you, and he talks sophisticatedly, that's not expected, you know.'

Just as many raised concerns about the intersectional stereotype of Black men as dangerous, others criticised hypersexualised depictions of Black women. As Jocelyn (US-01) put it: 'They show us "ratchet". They show us fighting Breaking up marriages. Sitting around. City girl. Twerking. Ratchet. Stripping. Promiscuous. Yeah, we want to be represented in other lights.' Similarly, Hannah (US-01) complained about how 'Black women are hypersexualised from a very young age' through depictions 'making our women look very provocative and promiscuous'.

> I remember this lady. She was at the terreiro [a space where Candomblé and other Afro-Brazilian religions carry out rituals and organise] … She was there, and she was stabbed. And the journalist went to her boyfriend's home and said, 'After this amazing night with the boyfriend, she was stabbed.' And she was not there … She was at the terreiro, but she was Black and poor.
>
> Gabriel (BR-06)

Prevalent stereotypes UK participants said they saw in the news depicted working-class people as lazy or rabble-rousers. In Marcus's (UK-01) words: 'I feel like when I read about working-class people, it's normally working-class British *white* people … and it's normally, kind of, demonising everything about that culture. And it's the flags and it's the hooliganism. And it's that kind of stuff.' Nicholas (UK-01) added: 'A lot of the reporting of the working class is struggling, for example, or ones that are on benefits It's always, you know, "Get up and find   ork." It always treats them as lazy.'

Some of the examples highlighted here point to a particular concern voiced by several people about how the stereotypical individuals presented in the news symbolically stand in for the larger group, shaping how others perceive them, regardless of how inaccurate they may be. Refle ting on his experiences watching crime coverage, Warren (US-04) expressed such concerns when describing, with some embarrassment, 'How many times I watched the news and, I'm sorry, but I'm just gonna be transparent, I'm just, like, "Please, don't be Black."' Florence (US-02) likewise said she felt reporters seemed to 'pick the person who is not really equipped to be on TV … and then unfortunately everyone thinks that's a representation of everyone else'.

Several others spoke about how media stereotypes often homogenise and fla ten out certain groups in ways that are not intrinsically bad but nonetheless limiting. Charles (US-03) explained: 'There are things in our mind that aren't even achievable to a certain extent because we don't see people like ourselves.' In a similar vein, Mathias (US-03) expressed frustration at how stereotypes could feel constraining: 'You always hear about the Black basketball player doing something … spectacular … Just these generalised roles that we're supposed to be automatically going into.' Underlying Mathias's frustrations was also preoccupation with how media stereotypes could feed into very confined narrati es about what young Black people, such as his children, could aspire to:

How about you show us something different, more than just the Black man that can run? … Show me the scientists that just made something new … I don't want to just see, you know, the girls shaking their butt … Regardless of negative or positive, how about the media show these other different things, you know? That's just the biggest thing for me, you know, don't shove basketball down my son's face, man.

<div align="right">Mathias (US-03)</div>

In the UK, Marcus (UK-01) believed that 'the working class is kind of portrayed just as a homogenous group, as opposed to, kind of, men and women and kids'. On a similar note, Charlotte (UK-03) complained: 'They have seven days of the week to report on, and they can't have a variety of different people; they choose to choose the same type of people.' Others discussed how working-class people only appeared as groups (e.g. nurses, miners, teachers), symbolically stripping them of the individuality that other groups benefit from

2.4 Feeling altogether overlooked

A fourth common criticism had less to do with what was in the news and more with what was absent from it. Indeed, many of those we spoke to felt like they rarely, if ever, saw people like them in the news, especially when it came to more intersectional identities. For example, discussing news coverage of Black women specificall , Florence (US-02) said she didn't think they were, in fact, represented 'unless it's someone's grandmother who's on TV crying because her grandson got killed. That's it'. Andrew (UK-02) noted that despite reading the news every day '[I] don't see much mention of [the] younger working class'. Similarly, Olivia (UK-04) saw a lack of news focused on 'working-class women at the moment'.

> *[I] feel like this country is very multicultural; a lot of races, a lot of different cultures and religions and experiences, and I don't feel the news reflects that at all. I don't think it reflects the diversity in this country.*

<div align="right">Nicholas (UK-01)</div>

The feeling of being altogether overlooked in coverage was especially common among Indian participants, who frequently expressed that they – and their needs – were particularly invisible to the news media. As Kailash (IN-08) said: 'On labour and hunger, there is no coverage or no attention. No one comes and asks what the problem is, what is your livelihood, and how is it going. There is not a single report on that.' Likewise, Asmina (IN-05) said: 'No one is bothered. Even if we die, no one is bothered.' Waheeda (IN-05) agreed: 'We are poor, we only exist, but people only care about the Dhingras [more privileged caste].'

> *Ma'am, we are still no one; we are labourers. But Rahul Gandhi took out a rally: Bharat Jodo. There is a lot of shouting and crying in the entire Indian nation about it. But if something happens in our area, on the road, it will never be covered.*

<div align="right">Harsh (IN-08)</div>

Many Indian participants believed their perspectives were missing from coverage about topics that were relevant to or about them, especially in relation to current 'land wars', in

which marginalised castes have been disproportionately affected by forcible displacement and dispossession (Nielsen et al. 2020). In Asad's (IN-11) words: 'The media did not represent the side of Muslims. Otherwise … we too would have gotten our rights and we would have been farming now, but we are not.' Neha (IN-12) also suggested that 'they did not convey our message. We had asked for compensation for our land and told them that we want to see that being shown … They heard, wrote things down, but they did not convey our request'. Akash (IN-10) agreed: 'They had all the information, but nobody wrote anything in our favour.' Kailash (IN-08) added: 'Nothing [news] comes that we would like. Nothing useful for us.'

Similar sentiments were expressed elsewhere. Participants in the US and UK criticised the news for overlooking their communities' needs and failing to shine a light on their reality. Alexandra (US-01) regretted the news media's failure to sufficiently   over the large number of Black people killed in Iowa in the 1990s – 'Des Moines was so crazy at that time' – referencing a mural painted in the city during those years that memorialised 'hundreds' of names.[10] 'It was just all people that were murdered, and we never got to hear about none of that.' Chloe (UK-03) suggested that 'news is quite broad, and it's not always relatable. So, I guess and in, sort of, those aspects, I tend to stay away from some parts of the news if I don't feel that really represented'.

Perceptions of invisibility were sometimes shaped by general notions about who news was *for*. Discussing how irrelevant news coverage sometimes felt to her, Charlotte (UK-03) suggested news 'is aimed towards upper-class people'. Similarly, when discussing the absence of working-class people in the news, Andrew (UK-02) suggested: 'I don't think that middle-class people really want to read about working-class people and beyond … what affects them.' Some held very pragmatic views about why people like them might be largely absent from news. For example, Jake (US-08), a rural participant, pointed out that 'news markets are in the bigger cities, and … I guess they figured out that if ou try to cover small towns, that doesn't drive up their numbers'. Collin (US-08) made a similar point: 'With less and less young people in rural communities, it just makes sense that they are going to be covering where people are more and the numbers that are more prominent.'

While Black participants in all countries frequently expressed a desire to see more of themselves refle ted in the news, this was not the case for everyone. Indeed, expectations of representation were often intertwined with perceptions of newsworthiness. For example, Jessica (US-05) suggested that fewer newsworthy things were happening in rural areas: 'I'd agree, you're going to get more news from the bigger areas where there's more things going on.' Working-class participants in the UK were more split on this point. Some resented the lack of coverage and wished to see more of themselves in the news; however, others viewed their absence somewhat matter-of-factly. Allan (UK-06) described working-class life as the antithesis of newsworthiness: 'Working-class people don't make news … To be working class is to be unexceptional.' Others suggested that working-class people were largely absent from the news because they were less involved in newsworthy things – politics, in particular.

Ryan (UK-05), for example, believed that news ends up focusing on the upper classes 'by default', simply because 'politicians are spoken about a lot and stuff, which, you know, seems

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[10] https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/2018/05/29/gun-violence-mural-des-moines-iowa-creative-visions-crime-homicide-shooting-asphate-ako-abdul-samad/641799002/

more of an upper-class thing,' adding, 'There's more to talk about – politics – than there is with, like, bricklayers, for example.' Or as Alison (UK-08) put it: 'There's very little working class [in the news] because working-class people have very little say in, like, the running of the country and things like that.'

2.5 News coverage is intentionally divisive or polarising

A smaller number of participants suggested that news coverage about people like them was often divisive and polarising. Such sentiments came up especially in India and the UK. In India, this point was particularly common among Muslim men, who felt like news often stoked divisions between Hindus and Muslims. Bhura (IN-04) maintained that where he lived, news incorrectly reported that there 'has been a fight bet een a Hindu and a Muslim. We are least bothered by all this … In my village, if death or anything happens, we are beside them in their pain and vice-versa. But, if you check the news, they will always tell the opposite tale'. Pintu (IN-04) agreed: 'All these are inflammato y topics they try to light a fire y.'

> *Every news [story] is about Hindu-Muslim, Hindu-Muslim, Hindu-Muslim. We don't feel like watching it at all! … The real news won't come [out] unless this stops.*
>
> Umaira (IN-16)

Such concerns were sometimes articulated in stark contrast with these participants' ideals about peace. For instance, Bala (IN-02) suggested that 'a ban should be put on such discussions' and 'those who want the general public to figh '. He added: 'We want to live in peace and harmony. In our village, Hindus and Muslims have never fought each other. We want our nation to develop and not go back in time.' Zain (IN-02) echoed a similar point: 'The harmonious balance of this country should be maintained; hence, we don't recommend watching just one channel for information.'

In the UK, several participants suggested that news representation often pitted social classes against each other. For example, Anya (UK-04) bemoaned 'negative publicity' around how the working class was depicted as 'free-loading' and portrayed 'quite badly, especially with, like, the upper classes, you know, that all we want to do is just get more benefits more money'. Stephen (UK-02) criticised the 'divisiveness' and 'blame' embedded in much of the coverage of 'benefit culture'. Meanwhile, Paul (UK-02) described British coverage as 'pitting different sections of the working class against each other, when in my opinion, when in reality, it's actually what you would call those "at the top" who are causing problems for their personal benefit but at the cost, at the expense, of everyone else'.

While less common, we did also hear examples of similar sentiments elsewhere. Discussing prejudice within the Black community, Helena (BR-03) maintained: 'I think that they help to have this divided instead of working to unite us; they set to divide us even more.' Meanwhile, Miriam (US-02) suggested that certain partisan outlets 'touch into white people feelings, so they're not telling it from facts, they're just talking from your feelings, like "you don't want the Black person to come move in beside you and steal your home, and your property is going to go

down". Meanwhile, Erica (US-06) bemoaned coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement, as she considered it 'despicable when they use instances like this as political fuel. I'm like, "You are not the parent of one of those kids."'

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As we have sought to convey in this section, focus group participants were largely dissatisfied with how people like them were represented in the news and media more generally, which they often articulated vis-à-vis real-life consequences for them and their communities. Participants often felt maligned or misrepresented by news coverage, or entirely overlooked, and often described these criticisms about problems with representation in similar ways. In the next section, we turn to how perceptions of news representation informed – and were informed by – certain beliefs about news as a powerful institution and journalists as often privileged and disconnected from the realities and lived experiences of underserved audiences.

3. Perceptions of News Media as a Powerful Institution and Journalists as Privileged Individuals

As some of the illustrative examples in the previous section suggest, consistent criticisms about representation were often embedded in broader concerns about the news as an institution, its role in society, and journalists as professionals who were falling down on the job. In this section, we take a step back from a focus on representation in news coverage to examine the observations focus group participants made about news more generally and journalists specificall . We find that especially in the UK, the US, and India, grievances around deficient or harmful coverage often co-existed with perceptions of the news media as enmeshed with broader power structures that actively marginalised people like them. We also show how news use and trust perceptions more broadly were intertwined with participants' social identities and positions in society.

When speaking about journalists, most were seen as lacking experience or knowledge – or both – which participants often believed kept journalists from understanding the realities of communities outside of their own. Such impressions were often supported by the idea, whether implicit or explicit, that journalists came from backgrounds that were not only different but also more privileged. This disconnect made it hard for many to trust journalists, although some expressed nuanced views about how and how much lived experience mattered to being a good journalist. Moreover, while unfavourable impressions of journalists as out of touch or even prejudiced were pervasive, many did provide examples of journalists they believed were exceptions: individuals who managed to do a better job. Furthermore, many differentiated between reporters and the organisations that employ them, holding the latter as mainly responsible for the most persistent and objectionable editorial failings of the news media.

These views led many to turn elsewhere beyond the dominant news media in their countries to fulfil their needs Some talked of relying on specific niche outlets to fill   ten longstanding historical voids left by mainstream or conventional news. Others turned to social media where particular figures often non-journalists themselves, could be counted on to provide more relatable, genuine, or uplifting news as alternatives to more conventional sources.

3.1 Viewing news as intertwined with power structures and social identities

While there was considerable variation across and within groups, people's understandings of news as an institution or their relationship to news in their daily lives was often shaped by their own position in society. In three of the countries, some voiced critiques of journalism as a powerful institution that was connected to or reinforced broader power structures that excluded or oppressed them. Furthermore, in all four countries, patterns of news use (or non-use) and trust were often shaped by people's social identities in both symbolic and material ways. Given that many hailed from marginalised groups in society, that meant that accessing news was often equally intertwined with such power relations.

MANY SEE NEWS AS SUPPORTING SYSTEMS OF MARGINALISATION OR OPPRESSION

News organisations were described by some, particularly in the UK, the US, and India as extensions of systems that were aligned to serve those in power – systems they often felt excluded from. In some cases, these beliefs are consistent with the idea of a 'trust nexus' (Hanitzsch et al. 2017), which suggests that trust in the news media is strongly linked to how publics look at political institutions. More specificall , many people saw journalists as either complicit with or close to the political establishment (see also Palmer et al. 2020) or, at the very least, populated by the same kinds of people. For Marcus (UK-01), the infamous 'Partygate' in the UK that preceded the resignation of Boris Johnson was a clear example of such complicity: 'I think, you know, with lockdown for politicians, I mean, parties, people continuing to see their families was very much like, "We don't care about you, and we are, kind of, in cahoots with the people who were in charge of these papers."'

> *I don't like journalists. I don't trust them. I put them in the same box as politicians and estate agents. I just don't trust them.*
>
> Julie (UK-04)

Many participants made the link clear either by grouping politicians and journalists together in their discourse, or by slipping back and forth between talking about journalists and politicians, sometimes inadvertently. For example, Juhaid (IN-02) described feeling abandoned by those in power: 'No … No … no one came. It was a disaster in the village. There were two situations when there was a clear public panic and distress – corona[virus] and demonetisation. And no one came from the government or the media.' Similarly, in describing the feeling that news media only listened to people in rural areas when they needed something from them, Timothy (US-07) commented: 'I think what the media gets wrong about rural areas is the fact that the media or journalists don't use the "golden rule" [treating others as one wants to be treated],' placing them in the same category as 'politicians' who use rural areas for brief campaign photo-ops and then leave.

> *Rural Iowa is going to have a bad view of the media or Washington, DC, when all they do is want to come here for just five seconds and then as soon as they get your vote or get whatever accomplished, then they're out of this place.*
>
> Timothy (US-07)

Other times, the link between journalism and broader power structures was quite subtle, with participants implicitly associating journalism with societal oppression or marginalisation beyond the news. Conversations about media bias sometimes veered into conversations about racist stereotypes in the broader culture. For example, responding to Doris's (US-02) comment about the media wanting to 'be in control of this situation so that they can portray what they think [about African Americans]', Evelyn (US-02) shared her sense that 'society as a whole is more intimidated by a strong, intelligent Black woman', and Shirley (US-02) talked about barriers she faced as the only Black woman in past jobs. In a different focus group, Jane (UK-03) responded to a question about unfair media representation, discussing unequal crime sentencing, for instance: 'When a Black person will do a crime and a white person will do exactly the same crime, but the Black will get more time … this is crazy to me.' In other words, perceptions about the news media were often entangled with other forms of discrimination

people felt their communities were often subjected to. Journalism was not seen as distinct or independent from these broader systems.

Some people believed news consistently drew attention away from issues that really mattered to their communities or others considered to be marginalised. Nicholas (UK-01) made this point explicitly, saying 'it's like they're diverting attention' by focusing on 'things that are inconsequential and have little relevance and will inspire little change'. Alexandra (US-01) also criticised how 'a lot of these news outlets think they're TMZ … It's always like everybody's just, kind of, focused on their main story, which will be something about the celebrities and, like, that's why it's hard for people to even know what's going on, because that'll be at the bottom of the screen'. Zain (IN-02) also alluded to this sense of exclusion from the news: 'Their profits and losses are n t related to us. We're not benefiting from an thing that's happening in the world.'

> *I often feel like news makes you feel purposely overwhelmed and like you're powerless, and that makes you less likely to engage politically, or go beyond that into that action. You just feel sad … It's just, like, you're barraged by things that make you feel a bit hopeless, and then you accept your standard of living.*
>
> Emily (UK-03)

How social position and identity shape a lack of engagement with news

Many people described not only a perception of news shaped by their social position but also a lack of engagement with news that was in many cases indelibly intertwined with their identities as marginalised or on the peripheries of society. Nowhere was this more visible than in India. Living in poverty and working very long hours often meant that news consumption was simply not a possibility for many. As Azam (IN-06) bluntly put it: 'Ma'am, the people here are mostly poor. How would one take out the time to read the newspaper?' Raees (IN-02) further emphasised this point: 'The cost of living went up too much – at times, it's the mobile bill or it's the gas bill or petrol bill. What will anyone do in this kind of situation, earn 500 rupees or listen to the radio?' The perceived irrelevance of news made it even less important for people like Naseer (IN-13), who underscored that not only was there 'no time to watch news', but also 'it is useless to watch the news … Many media outlets talk about useless and meaningless topics'.

Other factors related to social position and identity shaped news consumption in significant ways. For example, many Indian participants had limited formal schooling or were functionally illiterate, making certain forms of news inaccessible. As Adil (IN-04) noted: 'The majority of the villagers are not able to spare time from their laborious work and others are illiterate. Generally, if I want to check the news, it is mostly television, not the newspaper.' Material limitations were also significant in shaping n ws consumption. One respondent (IN-01) explained that they didn't watch any news 'as we don't have a TV'. Afrin (IN-15) noted that she used to have a newspaper subscription but now lacked the income to pay for it: 'Will we eat or buy newspapers? You are going around, you will be seeing there is a lot of poverty.' Others noted that while they would typically rely on an internet connection for information, 'some of the phones are not working' (Sita, IN-03).

In some cases, news access was also wrapped up in traditional gender roles. For instance, Seema (IN-03) depended on her husband to watch news because she did not own a mobile phone

23

herself. She explained that 'when our husbands come back from work and watch news on their phone – mine likes watching news a lot, so I sit with him sometimes, if I am free, and watch the news'. Other women suggested that domestic labour often kept them from news, which has been documented in other contexts as well (Toff and Palmer 2019), or in more extreme cases, participants alluded to conservative and limiting gender dynamics, such as being prohibited from consuming news by other family members: 'Our children are all grown up now, so they don't even listen to us, they don't watch the news and don't let us watch it as well.' (Reema, IN-01). Waheeda (IN-05) explained that for women in her community, owning phones was 'out of the question' and that watching television was 'seen as a haram [forbidden by Islamic law]'.

> *Since they are men, they will sit on the chair comfortably and definitely see the news. We do not have time while brooming and mopping. If we have time, then we just ask about the voting trends.*
>
> Tania (IN-12)

While the role of identity in shaping news consumption was clearest in India, perhaps in part due to the more extreme precarious conditions in which many of the participants lived, elsewhere social identities also played a more subtle but no less important role in shaping what news people accessed or avoided. For example, Miriam (US-02) echoed the idea that caretaking left her without energy for news: 'It's hard. After I had my son, I disconnected from the news. It was just too depressing in the morning with a newborn and trying to work through it.' Emily (UK-03) said she often lacked the emotional bandwidth to stress over things 'happening in a different continent'.

> *If you are worried about putting food on the table every day … you don't have as much empathy or space.*
>
> Emily (UK-03)

Mirroring the point made by various Indian interviewees, Ryan (UK-05) likewise pointed to the material limitations of being able to afford subscriptions, noting how 'if you're struggling with bills, [news] is not really something you prioritise'.

When we asked people to refle t on whether their own identities shaped their news consumption, many offered a variety of responses. Some said they did not think their identities mattered in this respect, but others suggested that their social standing shaped what they found relevant or interesting. For instance, Tyler (US-08) described how '[I] personally have never held an interest in, like, the *Wall Street Journal* or the *New York Times*, just because I've grown up and I live in a rural setting … At times I use the *Des Moines Register*. But outside of that, I've never been drawn to a national publication, I guess'.

> *I don't think that there's an involvement or an investment in the working class, and, therefore, I'm not necessarily interested in reading about it. Whereas if I go to work … people that come from middle class are far more likely to talk about politics.*
>
> Marcus (UK-01)

Some working-class women implied their backgrounds perhaps shaped their taste in news, particularly with regards to tabloids. While acknowledging that it was a bit of a cliché, Clare

(UK-04) suggested that 'working-class [taste] would be about more gossipy, a bit more, because, as I said, those other things are not relatable, those other [topics] like mortgages'. Meanwhile, Tracey (UK-04) believed her affluent friends ould find it 'hilarious' if she talked to them about the *Daily Mail*.

Other participants felt compelled to consume more or specific kinds of n ws to fulfil needs deriving from their circumstances, including certain inequalities. For instance, Rodrigo (BR-02) felt pressure in his work to go above and beyond in terms of being up-to-date on current affairs: 'It's demanded from me to be well-informed, to be more skilled and capable than the white person, so I have to be informed all the time.' Alicia (US-01) commented: 'With my race, and like y'all said, especially being a Black woman, I need to know, like, how these things that are happening are going to affect us, like, oil rates going up … I need to know these things because I am on a budget.' Meanwhile, Mary (US-06), a participant from a rural area described 'religiously' watching the news with her grandparents as a child because they needed to follow news related to farming, such as grain prices and the weather.

Furthermore, social ties played an important role in shaping the news people learned about and trusted, and to the extent that social ties often involved other people like themselves or could reproduce power dynamics within communities, that often meant such relationships reinforced the importance of social position and identity in how people related to news. Many learned about news often – primarily even – through word of mouth. For instance, Binti (IN-05) noted: 'Men folk, when they see or hear something over their mobile, they let us know and keep us in the loop of updates.' Seema (IN-03) likewise acknowledged that 'we mostly get to know from each other; we show it to each other on the phone'. Rebecca's (UK-03) main source of news was her mum, who just 'seems to know everything about everything'. And Oliver (UK-01) relied heavily on 'word of mouth, my colleagues or family, my friends' to stay informed.

Many also used their social ties to guide them in what to trust, a point we have found in previous research as well (Ross Arguedas et al. 2022). Zaad (IN-13) explained that 'we come to know what is real and what is fake. If ten people are sitting, the majority of them will tell the correct things, so one will trust that'. Diptesh (IN-10) added: 'We ask each other. Like, for instance, if we hear something, then we ask each other if this is right. This is how we get to know.' In some of the Indian groups, trustworthiness appeared to be shaped by characteristics such as age and gender. Answering the question of how they know what news is correct, Heena (IN-01) said they 'go to our elders or bigshots to seek advice'. Similarly, Sanam (IN-03) maintained: 'At home we have our elders. They usually know better.'

3.2 Perceptions of journalists as mostly out of touch with limited agency

When it came to discussing journalists specificall , participants held a variety of perceptions and critiques, some of them quite nuanced. In general, most of those we spoke to sensed that journalists lacked the lived experience or knowledge to understand the realities of what their lives were like and the needs of their communities. Most groups saw journalists as out of touch, aloof, or even prejudiced. This was often anchored in beliefs, implicit or explicit, that journalists came from more privileged backgrounds – something that is generally backed

by evidence.[11] Some did, however, hold more ambivalent views about the importance of this underrepresentation when it came to journalists' abilities to do good journalism, while still others were more focused on the organisations they worked for as ultimately responsible for the most prevalent problems they saw in news coverage.

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND GEOGRAPHIC DISCONNECTION

The sense that journalists did not truly understand their communities was common in our focus groups. Participants from India believed this lack of knowledge was refle ted in how news coverage got even basic details wrong. As Drishti (IN-12) explained: 'If an accident happens, then they report it to be happening in a different place or to a different person … They mix things up.' Others, such as Naseer (IN-14), emphasised how journalists failed to come to their communities at all, a basic prerequisite for understanding their experiences: 'The media people did not even used to come here. How could they speak the truth?' Or as Rafiq (IN-14) pointed out: 'If the media person comes to the colony, only then can they know the truth, right?' Meanwhile, asked if he had ever seen a journalist reporting in his village, Bheeru (IN-02) responded: 'Never … Not a single time.'

> *If [journalists] come … they will go to the village head's house, have good food, talk about something that is of no importance, and then go back. They never mingle with the general public.*
>
> Bheeru (IN-02)

In the UK, many emphasised the idea that journalists seemed out of touch or disconnected from their reality, especially in light of the cost-of-living crisis, where many mocked tips offered by the news media that they considered absurd. For example, Marcus (UK-01) mentioned some news outlets were pushing ideas like 'stop paying for your Netflix subscri tion' as a solution to the housing crisis. Emily (UK-03) offered a different example to illustrate the disconnection: 'There's obviously been lots about housing prices, and, you know, the classic article was about how millennials spend too much money on coffee and avocados. That's things that so many different outlets have done.'

> *How about this shit, again, with, like, the tools and hacks to help? Some of them are ridiculous. 'Oh, don't buy yourself that new pair of jeans you wanted.' Who's buying themselves jeans? … Have you actually seen the wages they're getting, compared to what it costs to live now?*
>
> Charlotte (UK-03)

Geoffrey (UK-06), a working-class participant from Leeds, suggested this disconnection was clear in the reporting of the last general election, when 'most of them [journalists]' simply 'didn't know' what was going on with working-class voters: 'They didn't have the finger on the pulse on the issues that affected the people …' He added, 'You're sort of out of touch with what's going on up here,' referring to the geographic gap separating his community from newsrooms in London. Sean (UK-05) also underscored this intersection between class and place as magnifying the sense of being misunderstood for participants living in northern England: 'London won't know what actually goes on up here, no doubt, beyond just counting the money down there.'

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[11] Indeed, where data has been collected, it suggests that Black people are underrepresented in newsrooms in Brazil (Jornalistas&Cia et al. 2021) and the US (Arana 2018); working-class people are underrepresented among British journalists (Ofcom 2022; Spilsbury 2022); and lower caste people are underrepresented in Indian newsroom leadership and bylines (Oxfam India and Newslaundry 2019).

Some rural participants from the US raised similar issues. Laura (US-05) was irked by the fact that one local channel 'got that new weather guy – and I know that's weather, not news – but he doesn't even know how to say the names of the places … How can I believe anything you're saying because you didn't even care enough to find out h w to say Ma*drid* versus *Ma*drid, Iowa? … So that makes it untrustworthy.' Timothy (US-07), who described journalists as 'Des Moines people 365 days a year', narrated an amusing kind of scene he sometimes saw on TV:

> *I always think it's laughable when a rural area has a crisis, like the school burns down or the hospital got bombed or something, and these big city – which I call Des Moines the 'big city' – the reporter gets sent out to Humeston, Iowa, and they show up in the TV news van, and they're all decked out in their Des Moines gear, and they got mud on their shoes, and they're like, 'I'm gonna record this real fast. I'm getting out of here because I might die tonight.'*
>
> Timothy (US-07)

NUANCED VIEWS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARED LIVED EXPERIENCES

When discussing journalists' lack of knowledge about their communities, many focused on how they perceived journalists' backgrounds as very different from their own. Guilherme (BR-04) explained: 'No, [they do] not really [understand]. Because they haven't experienced that. Unless you experience it, you live that, you don't.' Krishna (IN-08) also suggested that 'no one understands the problems of caste'. Jacqueline (UK-04) expressed a similar view: 'I don't think they really do understand how people are … unless they've actually been there, you know, the struggle and hardship [of working-class life].' Or as Joshua (US-07) put it: 'I don't think they necessarily cover what they should be covering because they don't know what they don't know.' In sum, many believed reporters had to live through hardships or even discrimination to understand what life was really like for them.

> *You can hear from the way they talk, they're obviously private-school educated, probably went to Oxford or Cambridge … So you look at that, you think, would they know what it's like for someone who's struggling to pay their bills, and all that kind of stuff? … For a lot of them, they're coming from a position of sympathy as opposed to empathy. They don't know what it's like, they're just watching.*
>
> Paul (UK-02)

Some interviewees did refer to particular journalists whom they considered exceptions to the norm. Ricardo (BR-02), for example, explained that 'some people specifically can [understand] . As did others in the Brazil groups, he singled out a particular Black television journalist 'from the eastern region of São Paulo, so she knows what it's like', adding that 'where she comes from is a lower-class area'. Valentina (BR-01), likewise compared being interviewed by a white journalist versus the same Black journalist mentioned by Ricardo: '[The Black journalist] will know exactly my reality, but not the other one who is white … because they don't know anything of what they're saying. They have never lived our reality.' This connection could also lead to a greater sense of trust:

> *When you see a Black woman who[m] you can relate to, you can trust them more easily. When you see someone who has gone through a similar economic status as you, you feel like you can trust them with what they tell you to do with your money.*
>
> Hannah (US-01)

But even as some believed lived experience was a prerequisite for truly understanding their reality, others were somewhat more confli ted on this point. Many appreciated seeing journalists taking the time to diligently research and genuinely listen to marginalised groups, regardless of their own identity. Ravi (BR-04) was ambivalent on this point, on the one hand saying that 'if white journalists talk to many Black sources, they can understand, and they can become experts'; however, he ultimately concluded: 'But you know what? At the end of the day, I don't think [they can fully understand].' Meanwhile, Edna (BR-03) brought up a particular white journalist as an example of someone she could trust because 'he has this expertise; he's been a journalist for, I don't know, 40 years, and that load of experience – he knows how to do the right thing.' Similarly, Clare (UK-04) believed it was largely a matter of empathy: 'Even if they haven't got the lived experience, if they're in a situation, and it's heartfelt to them, you can see that.'

Others pointed out that a shared identity did not automatically mean journalists would represent their points of view. As Flora (BR-01) refle ted: 'A Black reporter doesn't necessarily represent me. Maybe this Black journalist does not represent me because he has a different point of view. Maybe he's a yellow journalist, sensationalist.' Another Brazilian participant highlighted how intersectionality, especially around race and class, meant that different aspects of journalists' identities could resonate in different ways: 'Black people who can go to private schools, go to college; these people are different from what we are because I know that not every Black-skinned person has the same opportunities.' Meanwhile, Felipe (BR-06) expounded on how a journalist from a similar class background could relate to his own experiences: 'He's like us. He's always among us, the people. His roots are the same.'

> The skin colour doesn't matter. If the person has never lived in the periphery [deprived areas], in the outskirts of the city, they won't know how those things take place and why they take place. It's superficial information.[12]
>
> Wilson (BR-08)

JOURNALISTS UNDER THE THUMB OF THEIR EMPLOYERS

Perceptions about journalists were complicated by what many saw as a lack of editorial independence at most news organisations. Participants were more likely to place blame on journalists' employers and wider commercial pressures for what they saw as the profession's many shortcomings. Indeed, despite often seeing journalists as out of touch and rarely having shared life experiences, many also emphasised what they believed were considerable constraints journalists faced when trying to cover news stories. For instance, Lucas (BR-04) attributed a negative experience he personally had with a journalist to forces higher up: 'They do understand [the lives of Black people]. But they cannot just say whatever they think. It's an edited text. … You know, they can write something, but their bosses can shorten it. It can be censored.' Tiago (BR-04) likewise suggested that journalists risked getting fired or covering certain kinds of stories.

> I think that you can trust the journalists to do their job, but they are still doing their job. So, they're still expected to deliver what their bosses want them to deliver … I kind of look at their body language to see if it's something that they were made to say versus something that they wanted to say.
>
> Florence (US-02)

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[12] Brazil's 'urban peripheries' have been the subject of considerable attention (see Richmond 2018; Richmond 2022).

A handful of participants in India and the US expressed similar sentiments. Bhura (IN-04), for example, recalled how one specific journalist 'used to work to uplift the poor' but had to leave 'because he, too, saw where the channel was heading'. He added: 'All of their hands are tied. There is a controller who oversees, who watches that. There is no top reporter or channel; all of them hide.' Meanwhile, Amanda (US-05) acknowledged that 'there are good journalists out there' but suggested that their employers were ultimately in control: 'Like, if you have a journalist for the *New York Times* … they're going to write the way that the *New York Times* wants them to.' In other words, they ultimately placed the responsibility for deficient or unsatisfying coverage, including coverage that they saw as detrimental to their communities, more squarely with publishers or owners rather than with journalists.

> *I think that they do understand [our experiences], but they cannot say anything about it because they don't get paid for that.*
>
> Helena (BR-03)

Looking beyond the 'mainstream' to fulfil needs

Given the many critiques raised about mainstream national sources as out of touch at best and maliciously targeting people like themselves at worst, in some instances focus group participants described turning to other kinds of media altogether to find sour es that better spoke to the needs, concerns, and experiences of members of their community. Niche news outlets or targeted television shows were often important in helping fill these informational voids.

The role of Black-focused publications such as *Ebony* was especially salient among some Black participants in the US, where the Black press has historically played a key advocacy role, which continues to this day (Washburn 2006; Williams Fayne 2023). Jordan (US-01) described actively seeking out 'news sources from either Black reporters or Black publications if I can … So I'll look at my article still on, like, *Ebony* magazine, even though it's mostly digital now. That's going to be my go-to or, like, BET', referring to the television network. For Andre (US-03), these sources had been a part of his life since he was young: 'I love to read. And it goes back to, like, me being as a kid. We had *Vibe* magazine … *Ebony* and *Jet* … So, I got the opportunity to see my community.' Others mentioned newer outlets such as The Shade Room, The Root, TheGrio, and podcasts that focus on specific audien es.

> *You can find the people on, like, Instagram, Twitter, and then they'll point you to their podcasts where then they go further in depth. I follow [a podcast] called Earn Your Leisure. It talks about finance and it's basically trying to educate specifically Black people to kind of get them caught up and up to speed.*
>
> Hannah (US-01)

Participants elsewhere also alluded to important sources more specifically tailored to their communities. For example, Tina (IN-03) underscored that some channels were 'based on Dalit community, then they show news related to the community'. Adil (IN-04) also recognised that channels such as Samta 'pick topics from OBCs (Other Backward Class) and other marginalised groups'. In Brazil, Mariana (BR-07) enjoyed a show called *Conversa Preta* (Black Talk) on Globo affiliate T Bahia, and Vera (BR-07) watched *Mosaico Baiano*, which aired on the same channel. 'They talk about our work. They talk about our culture, our roots. They talk about

the peripheries of the city,' Vera explained. Meanwhile, other participants in the US described using Christian television or radio, or in Timothy's (US-07) case, a radio programme focused on farming, which he listened to while on his tractor: 'We're just talking about the markets, we're talking about the weather, we're talking about cows, or we're talking about if the corn came up today, right?'

Other participants discussed turning to social media to fill voids, especially in the US and Brazil. Many felt they were able to find more representati e and relatable content on platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. Carla (BR-03), for example, enjoyed watching channels 'from Black people, Black groups, Black women. This is the type of content I like. Not that I don't access others'. Carlos (BR-02) agreed that 'Instagram now offers lots of content about poverty, racism. I find l ts of important stuff on it'.

> *I search for these channels made by Black people. You know, a channel about Black beauty. It's people talking about topics that I like ... They bring topics about racism, about things pertinent for your daily life. When it comes to information, what really matters is your reality; if it brings something that makes sense for your reality.*
>
> Flora (BR-01)

The specific oices followed in these spaces were often seen as more reliable than traditional news, even though information encountered on platforms was typically approached with considerable caution. Many said they preferred getting news from regular people on social media who they felt were more similar to them and thus more sincere. For instance, Jordan (US-01) liked getting news on social media 'because I know I'm gonna get it raw. Even if I know that they're probably gonna give some of their opinion in it, I know that about them, so, I have the ability to not just take their opinion or whatever, but I'm still gonna get a raw news'. Taís (BR-01) made a similar point, noting that 'we resonate more to that specific n ws source because we find oursel es refle ted there'. Jordan (US-01) said she enjoyed following Black reporters on social media, mentioning one in particular as her 'favourite':

> *One of the things that I really appreciated about [her] and how she did news was, even though she couldn't really put her opinion on it because she's reporting the news [on television], when you go to her social ... you are [able to tell], you know, where she's at with it.*
>
> Jordan (US-01)

Some sources on social media were described as shining a light on things they believed organisations were covering up or overlooking. Charlotte (UK-03) described farmers on social media setting the record straight about price hikes on eggs: 'We're getting told all over the news, "Oh, it's avian flu ...," but then you've got farmers directly coming out going "No, they're charging you £2 more in the supermarket, but they're still paying us the price they were paying when it was £1.20."... It's kind of [like] we're getting the sources directly from the people themselves.' Similarly, Bruce (US-03) valued using social media to keep up with stories he thought conventional news organisations tended to downplay. For example, he described learning about a case of racial profiling via Tik ok and Twitter 'that wasn't anywhere in the news'.

It is unlikely – impossible, even – for any given news organisation to be all things to all people, and when it came to more specific needs other forms of media at times seemed better suited. That said, the appeal of specific individuals on social media – especially those whom participants felt a common bond with – as more genuine or more reliable than other sources of news may prompt further refle tion from news organisations about the individuals they choose to represent them in public spaces, and on what terms. Indeed, any given journalist with their own intersectional identities will inevitably represent some groups and not others, and the perspectives that for some will engender trust, may alienate others.

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As we have demonstrated in this section, focus group participants often saw news as an institution enmeshed with broader power structures in society that actively reinforced inequalities or harmed people in their communities. On the one hand, as we also showed, participants' social identities and positions in society shaped many aspects of their relationships to news, which also informed perceptions about the types of groups that news media catered to most often. On the other hand, when it came to perceptions about individual journalists, many held nuanced or ambivalent views about whether they needed to come from similar backgrounds in order to effectively cover their communities. Many highlighted what they saw as deeper structural problems surrounding news media. In the next section, we focus on what study participants told us might work for them as strategies for restoring their own trust.

4. Possible Strategies for Restoring Trust

In this last section, we summarise the changes focus group participants most frequently said they would like to see news media in their countries take up to improve their sense of trust. We highlight four main points below. Issues pertaining to representation and diversity were important to many – especially when it came to racial divides – with participants often underscoring their desire to see more uplifting news about people like them in addition to news that was more useful or relevant to their lives. Others, including some of those who didn't necessarily expect news to be *about* people like them, raised the importance of seeing people who *looked* like them or *sounded* like them reporting or simply delivering the news, whether for the sake of credibility or relatability.

Figure 2. Recommendations from disadvantaged audiences for building trust

1 Focus on accuracy and reduce bias
Deliver impartial news that more fully, faithfully, and fairly captures diverse perspectives and does not treat the views of the privileged and powerful as more accurate by default.

2 Tell more complete stories
Provide more positive coverage about diverse communities to counteract chronic problems of negativity, unfairness, and invisibility.

3 Diversify newsrooms and improve training
Hire more journalists who better reflect the communities they serve, including among those who lead and manage news organisations.

4 Appreciate distinct needs of different audiences
Truly listen to individuals in diverse communities and demonstrate a genuine commitment to understanding their concerns.

On the other hand, many of the other recommendations that participants made were similar to ideas we have heard other audiences express before (e.g. Toff et al. 2021b, 2021c), at least on the surface, and were not always, strictly speaking, expressly focused on matters of representation or diversity. That is, participants often focused on wanting to reduce what they saw as unfairness and inaccuracy, sensationalism, and bias, which many associated with hidden agendas that shaped editorial practices at many media organisations (e.g. Ojala 2021; Palmer et al. 2020; Toff et al. 2021b). However, such notions could also be traced back to specific oncerns many participants articulated about the way their own communities had been historically mistreated by the media. In other words, many saw flaws in the n ws media as disproportionately targeting people like them (e.g. exploiting their suffering or ignoring them altogether) and having done so for a very long time. This meant that although we found striking commonalities across groups in the kinds of things people said they expected of news – they wanted journalism that is impartial and fair, more accurate and transparent, and ultimately

less sensationalised – that does not mean all audiences ultimately said they wanted the same journalistic content. Efforts to proactively counter misrepresentation and shine a light on some groups' experiences was sometimes seen by other groups as evidence of precisely the divisive and polarising editorialising they wanted to see less of.

These differences in audience perspectives suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to building trust will almost certainly fail. As news organisations consider what to prioritise in their coverage, hiring, and other matters, they must be attentive to the *specific* concerns that different communities are raising, and the histories of exclusion that many groups have experienced, which lead to quite different needs and expectations and, in turn, shape how audiences think about what news they can trust.

4.1 A common desire for accurate, transparent news, free from bias

On one level there were striking commonalities across these disparate groups in how they described what they wanted from trustworthy journalism. Many said they wanted news organisations to focus on delivering impartial news that fully and fairly captured the true state of the world. Most said that even though they appreciated hearing opinions and different perspectives, what they wanted most from news were facts, free of bias, so they could come to their own conclusions. At the same time, members of these groups often viewed the world quite differently from those in a position of power and privilege.

IMPARTIALITY, ACCURACY, AND TRUTH

First, and perhaps most frequently, participants emphasised their desire for news to be more impartial – that is, more fair, balanced, and objective. As Abbas (IN-04) put it: 'News channels have the responsibility to present us with an unbiased understanding.' Or as Erica (US-06) said: 'Give the stories straight, leave your opinions out of it.' Melanie (US-01), for example, said she valued 'neutrality' above all else, citing the BBC's more understated style as emblematic of the approach she was most drawn towards: 'It feels more factual and to the point.'

Commentary about impartiality and fairness, however, was often intertwined with ideas many participants expressed about what they perceived as hidden agendas behind many news outlets' editorial practices. Many said they wanted news organisations to stop 'spinning' stories, pushing 'narratives', or otherwise manipulating audiences, especially in the UK and the US. Andrew's (UK-02) recommendation to news outlets was: 'Tell the news and don't manipulate it to suit your agenda.' More specificall , he asked that they 'stop manipulating the working-class people'. Jessica (US-05) wanted news outlets to 'become more neutral and not agenda-driven … but not to guide one way or the other based on what they want to have you believe'. Jason (US-07) valued interviewers from NPR because he felt like they 'go right to the point, and I kind of like that part. There's not a lot of spin-doctoring on it'.

> *Just report the facts to me, and we'll take care of the rest as a reader.*
>
> Joshua (US-07)

A desire for impartial news was often expressed in more general terms as a desire for news organisations to do a better job in getting their facts straight or to simply tell the truth. This was especially common in India, where many felt like they were overtly lied to or about. Bhura

(IN-04) said: 'We would like to see more truth, fewer lies.' Azam (IN-06) believed that 'any news should be 100% correct, one can still work with 1% here and there. When one looks at the correct news over and over, they will be able to trust the source'.

> *They should go out to hunt the real truth. They should try to find out who is speaking the truth and who is standing far away from the truth. How long can they fool the public with fake news?*
>
> Rohail (IN-02)

Similar sentiments came up in the other countries as well. Heitor (BR-06) urged journalists to do a better job at telling 'the news as it is', clarifying that in making this point, he was not only talking about coverage of 'Black or brown people'. Raíssa (BR-01) recommended: 'Oh, always bring on the truth.' Tracey (UK-04) asked that news organisations do better at 'getting the facts, right. Stop bullshitting.' Or in Deb's (US-03) words: 'Get the facts straight, get the numbers straight.' Anya (UK-04) wanted news that was 'more factually correct'. Other US participants said they wanted 'facts, facts, facts' or for news outlets to simply 'tell the truth' (US-02).

TRANSPARENT EDITORIAL PRACTICES

Transparency came up across some groups as one way news organisations might reduce concerns about *why* they made the decisions they did regarding what sources to quote (or exclude), what stories to cover (or ignore), and what aspects of news were deemed newsworthy (to whom and why). It is worth keeping in mind that many people, including some of our focus group participants, are 'casual' news users who are unlikely to actively engage with transparency efforts, but their stated desire for more is important nonetheless.

Such views about the importance of transparency came up more often in the UK groups than in other countries. Simon (UK-05), for example, suggested that it would be helpful for more news sites to make it easier for audiences to assess the credibility of journalists: 'If there's some way of like, say, at the bottom of the page, you could just click on the journalists name, and it somehow brought up a page of the research they've done for this topic, who they are as a journalist.' Jade (UK-07), likewise, wanted news organisations to be clear and explicit 'on what their political stance is' and where their funding was coming from, given her concern that 'the headlines are so much to do with the advertising'.

> *BBC One: you know where they're getting their money from – it's TV licence money, you know? What about everybody else?*
>
> Jade (UK-07)

Just one or two participants specifically ocused on the importance of news organisations highlighting their corrections policies or providing audiences with better labelling around separating facts from opinion content – approaches that have received some attention in prior studies on trust (Karlsson 2020; Masullo et al. 2021; Peacock et al. 2020). Ian (UK-02), for example, said: 'The corrections at the end of articles … I'll read, and then they'll be, like, "Oh, we made a mistake." And for me, that's quite trustworthy that they actually recognised that and published it in a comment at the end.' Meanwhile, Ryan (UK-05) wanted news outlets to better distinguish fact from opinion: 'Make it clear and separate … [that] "this is the fact" [versus] "this is what I think of it".'

Other participants wished to see more about where information was coming from. Taís (BR-01) noted: 'Most journalists work with information and data, but they have to bring the evidence.' Similarly, Chloe (UK-03) agreed with this: 'I need sources, evidence.' Harriet (UK-07), too, wanted to know more about where news organisations got their information: 'A little behind the scenes of where their stories come from. Like, is this from interviews? How have they collected the data?'

Others articulated a desire for transparency more in terms of needing to see proof backing up whatever claims were being made. As Heather (UK-07) put it, she appreciated seeing 'a fact and a figure like, actual evidence'. Abbas (IN-04) also expressed a preference for television news, which he saw as more transparent and trustworthy than news transmitted in text, which he thought could be more easily manipulated: 'Live telecasting is something I believe in.'

> *I need receipts, honestly. I need to see proof … audio and visual. I need proof.*
>
> Alicia (US-01)

CHECKING BIASES AND CLARIFYING INTENTIONS

One reason audiences emphasised the importance of impartiality and transparency is that many also expressed concern that news organisations were particularly motivated by agendas targeting people like them and the communities they were a part of. In that sense, although the recommendations offered above sound similar to those we and others have previously captured in research on trust in news, concerns were sometimes rooted in quite specific critiques about subjective journalistic judgements that were oblivious at best and malicious at worst. As Edna (BR-03) described the media: 'It's always biased and they talk about Black people in slums, in the communities, they bring us down … they belittle us.'

Other groups expressed similar sentiments. In the UK, some believed particular news outlets had an axe to grind against working-class people. For instance, Nicholas (UK-01) criticised reporting for being 'inaccurate, biased against the working class, for the most part'. Alexander (UK-01) suggested certain tabloids were more evidently biased against immigrants and the working class: 'Yeah, I think their sort of rhetoric is a bit clearer.' Jade (UK-07) was especially critical of one channel, which she believed constantly made working-class people look bad: 'You can just tell what their interests are … It's all, "You're on benefits you're no good, you're fat, you're poor, you need a better job."' She went on to suggest such news was aimed 'at people who are gonna then demonise those [working-class] people that they're talking about for political votes'. Thus, it was not just that such coverage was deemed negative, but that it was believed to be motivated by a political agenda.

Several participants suggested that journalists intentionally chose stereotypical people to serve as unfla tering exemplars of their group or play into broader narratives about them. Emily (UK-03) critiqued how impromptu interviews on the street often seemed to intentionally put people on the spot: 'If it's more of, like, working-class people, it'll be just, like, the poor people on the street. And they have those conversations, which … people haven't had time to prepare or think about what they're actually saying.' Similarly, Florence (US-02) implied that reporters preferred emphasising individuals who refle ted poorly on Black people: 'I feel like that's who they want to interview. You will have six Black women in there under that age that meets the criteria for the interview. And then you get Miss Bonnet at the end of the thing who just had fi e coffees and is not quite right … and that's who they interview.'

Savannah: *They absolutely do not do a good job of painting a picture of a small community. And I think for that reason is they're going to pick the most eccentric, you know, hillbilly?*

Brenda: *Exactly, three teeth in their head.*

Savannah: *Whatever, yes, like that.*

Deborah: *Lost his trailer during the tornado, they interviewed him twice and you couldn't understand a word he said. Pick that – like you said – that guy, of all the people.*

Savannah: *But I think that fits the national narrative, yes, and so that is why they would choose that person.*

(US-06)

In India, complaints about media bias among those from marginalised castes often centred on the idea of 'paid media'. Similar to what we have heard before among other populations (Toff et al. 2021b), those in our focus groups suggested that omissions and outright fabrications they saw in the media about land disputes or other issues that mattered to them were a by-product of corrupt media practices. Krishna (IN-08) explained: 'In India, the saying is that the media are sold out. Why? Because in 100% of news, there is only 10% news which is correct, but people suppress that also.' Likewise, Ila (IN-12) complained that 'the media has not raised our issue, and they have hidden things. They used to print misleading news by reporting small issues; they use to convey wrong information to the others'.

> *The Muslims of Hindustan and Pakistan are being defamed. They talk about sending the Muslims of India to Pakistan. Hindu people are saying that Muslims force them to be in purdah. We see this on the mobile phone, internet, Facebook, etc. They say that they are not even given food. It's all nonsense.*
>
> Samreen (IN-16)

Talk of paid media was also bound up with perceptions about ties between news outlets and those with political power. Bala (IN-02), who accused the news media of 'acting like puppets, and [being] morally and financially bought   y Modiji', referred to the news media as 'the Godi media',[13] and he was not alone in this perception. Naseer (IN-14) commented: 'There will be no good reporter as long as Modi is there. He corrupts everyone by giving money. And if someone deviates from the channel to speak the truth then he gets thrown out from the channel.'
As noted previously, such critiques were often entangled with other perceptions about the mistreatment of groups more generally by those in positions of power and privilege.

> *They are all sold to the government. They get bribes from the government and write what they are being told to write. They do not listen to what the public tells them.*
>
> Madhu (IN-12)

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[13] *Godi* means *lap* in Hindi. *Godi* media, coined by Indian journalist Ravish Kumar, is a pejorative term to refer to media organisations who are seen as being 'lapdogs' (rather than watchdogs) of the political establishment. See: https://thewire.in/media/backstory-how-gautam-adani-became-the-story-for-the-media

4.2 Telling a more complete story about diverse communities

A second set of recommendations we heard repeated across groups was a desire for more positive coverage of the communities people belonged to. Many participants said they wanted news to provide more, and more positive, coverage about people like them to counteract the negativity, unfairness, and invisibility many also saw as chronic problems in the way news media represented people like themselves. A desire for more attention from news organisations also came with considerable reservations about what scrutiny from journalists could look like, especially when it came in the form of sensationalism – another common critique we heard repeated across groups. While many voiced concerns about news media sensationalism in general terms, in some instances audiences saw it as intentionally aimed at people like themselves and the communities they belonged to. Sensationalism was not simply a trivial matter of clickbait but at times seen as an effort to rile up the public in ways that could be especially harmful, even dangerous.

More (and better) representation

At the most basic level, a great number of the participants in our focus groups simply wanted to see more of themselves in the news. Ricardo (BR-02) expressed the desire for news outlets to 'give more room, more space' to Black people. Others said they would like to see more positive news about their community specificall . Helena (BR-03) wished news would 'show the brighter side, a more positive side, to bring more positive news about us; that are there working every day'. Some spoke about how they believed more favourable news could have a positive impact on their communities. For instance, Zain (IN-02) had a desire for news that did more to contribute to peace in his community, in line with his desire for 'love, peace, and harmony'.

> *We don't have a lot of victory news, empowering news … I think it will be good and not only good for us, but good for the children to see who[m] they could become.*
>
> Clare (UK-04)

A desire for more positive coverage did not mean people simply wanted news that papered over actual challenges in their communities. In both India and the UK in particular, there was a desire for more news that addressed their problems and needs, or was simply more useful or relevant to people like themselves. As Sita (IN-03) pointed out: 'When they show something from our surroundings, we watch with interest and more people watch. And if we develop this habit and the news remains interesting, then we will also try to watch news regularly.' Bheeru (IN-02) noted that 'what we have to see, sir, is our benefit … If the thing is not benefiting us in any manner, then why should we bother to watch that?' Chloe (UK-03) also believed that making news relatable would increase her interest in it: 'If the news is constantly talking about things which don't actually affect you, you're not going to want to stay tuned.' Meanwhile, Thomas (UK-01) said he would appreciate news that was either 'uplifting or advising people' with 'genuinely helpful information, like, financially .

> *We are influenced by the news that affects us, and we do take more interest in such news. There was news about the land acquisition here; Government was acquiring land here. We take note of things like if a new institute is being built on the main road or whether Panchayat elections are happening on time or not.*
>
> Narayan (IN-17)

That said, many participants were also wary of what it might mean for news to pay closer attention to people like them. Many were clear that they did not want coverage that was condescending or treated them like victims. Paul (UK-02) disliked the 'preachy tone' he noticed in some opinion pieces. Carla (BR-06) strongly disliked when news 'portrays us as victims'. Heitor (BR-06) also complained about this, noting: 'They show us as the poor victims. We've got nothing or we're criminals. And again – we're back to prejudice.' Meanwhile, Elenir (BR-03) criticised news coverage that depicted Black communities through a lens of pity, as people who 'do not have enough to eat, who are poor, who can't get jobs'. Mathias (US-03) made a similar point, criticising 'liberal' media that tries 'to put plights on us that may not necessarily be plights on us' or uses a patronising tone.

> *We Black folks, we have struggles we go through, but we ain't no Raggedy Anne on the side of the street. We're not just, 'Oh, we just need so much help'. You know, we [don't] just think, 'God bless this white man that came and gave me a chance to be on TV. Tell me about how the tragedy of George Floyd is going to change my life forever.'*
>
> Mathias (US-03)

Some tensions also arose between what different participants considered ideal when it came to highlighting the achievements of others like them. For example, while Jocelyn (US-01) said she wanted to see more stories celebrating Black achievements, such as the 'first Black judg ', which she currently felt like she only found on social media, some older Black women in Brazil experienced this kind of differentiation as a form of othering. Adriana (BR-03) complained: 'To talk about our ethnicity they insist on labelling us – "The first oman to be vaccinated". And that is bothersome. And my boyfriend is always telling me that I have a trauma. No, it's not trauma. You know, the first Black oman to be vaccinated. Why do they have to say that? What if she's just a woman?' In other words, audiences were not monolithic and did not necessarily view attention paid to their communities in the same ways.

SENSATIONALISM AS TRIVIALISING, EXPLOITATIVE

In addition to a desire for diverse communities to receive more positive and more extensive coverage, many also expressed reservations about what they saw as the news media's tendency to sensationalise subjects, which meant that many had little confiden e in the news media's ability to cover their communities with the full complexity and care it deserves. Concerns about sensationalism were quite common and were most often voiced in general terms regardless of the subject. For example, multiple men in the UK groups said one thing that would improve their trust was if news organisations 'try not to play with people's emotions' (Robert, UK-02) or publish fewer 'trivial, irrelevant pieces that you just forget about' (Ian, UK-02).

However, in some instances, focus group participants were explicit in linking sensationalism to their own communities, noting how coverage could be particularly damaging, even exploitative. Given the salience of crime coverage in conversations about representation, it is perhaps unsurprising that critiques about sensationalism among some participants often centred around this subject in particular. Some implied that news coverage of violence, which in practice was often coverage about their communities, was used to boost ratings. Carlos (BR-02) maintained that certain news organisations 'focus on violent news and some people spend so much time listening to those violent facts …They're glued to their TV sets, and it's basically

marketing'. Caio (BR-08) agreed 'they only mentioned the Black and brown [people involved in stories] because that brings audience ratings'.

They show what they feel is loaded with masala [spice] … They are not bothered about the problems or what we want or need.

Heena (IN-01)

In a similar vein, Oliver (UK-01) suggested that news stories about working-class people tended to be negative 'because drama sells more than positivity'. Emily (UK-03) noted that particular outlets, such as tabloids, 'seem to target more marginalised people', noting their tendency to sensationalise such coverage: 'The language is always very loaded. It's like a "crisis invasion", you know, "floods – dehumanising language to describe people.'

[When a major manufacturer shuts down its plant], the community is already going through a loss. The news spin trying to get the headlines is all about the tragedy which just keeps perpetuating the loss. And that's why I think sometimes the news needs to understand that there is a point to report it and there is a completely different point where they keep reiterating.

Matthew (US-08)

4.3 Diversifying newsroom staff and better training journalists

In addition to editorial recommendations about impartiality, fairness, and sensationalism, participants also made a variety of suggestions focused more explicitly on matters of representation and diversity within newsrooms, and how journalists are trained when it comes to covering underserved and marginalised communities.

HIRING JOURNALISTS WHO REFLECT THE COMMUNITIES THEY SEEK TO SERVE
For some, the most obvious pathway to improving representation in news was by being better represented among the journalists who cover the news. As such, many focused on hiring practices geared at increasing the diversity of viewpoints within newsrooms. Among Black participants in both Brazil and the US, a recurring phrase was 'hire Black journalists' (Paulo, BR-04). Some participants also alluded to the value of hiring Black people in other kinds of roles as well. Guilherme (BR-04) suggested that 'if we could add the process of engaging more Black people in the press itself, in the press as a whole, that would give us a voice. Who is behind the cameras?' Miriam (US-02) also noted that: 'There are other careers that you can pursue, lighting, producer, etc. If you get more people involved in the beginning. You'll have it going further up.'

Indian participants also underscored that it was fundamental to have people coming from diverse backgrounds in order for their own experiences to be properly refle ted. Tina (IN-03) said she would be more inclined to trust someone from her community 'because he will show the correct situation …. No one wants to tarnish the image of their own village outside, hence they will show the reality and not fake news'. Bhura (IN-04) believed a journalist from a similar background 'will understand the pain, and then he will push it further to be highlighted'.

Channels should look for reporters or journalists from the villages. A new form of media is required where they see how a village boy works to provide true and grassroot level of news.

Rohail (IN-02)

In the UK, participants expressed a desire to see more journalists from working-class backgrounds, the main focus of the groups assembled there, and from other backgrounds too. For example, Nicholas, (UK-01), wished news organisations would 'recruit people from more working-class, diverse backgrounds', and Ian (UK-02) made the case for hiring 'journalists from the North' in addition to 'working-class journalists', highlighting some of the regional divides that also intersect with class in the UK.

What about making sure that people are coming from local areas or coming from more diverse backgrounds? They've not just been to Oxbridge and then done a degree because – it's the same with any recruitment, isn't it? If you have a room full of the same looking people and sounding people, you're not going to get the challenges.

Paulina (UK-08)

While many centred on the importance of people like themselves having a say in shaping editorial decisions within newsrooms, others were especially interested in seeing and hearing themselves refle ted in the delivery of news, especially on television and radio. As Barbara (US-02) explained: 'I don't see too many Black women on the TV, on the news on the local news. They're not in, and if so, they're not in the lead.' Conceição (BR-07) acknowledged a gesture towards representation that went beyond the news itself, celebrating one channel that uses 'animations made for the Black people'.

Furthermore, participants in India and the UK, especially those from Leeds, talked about the importance of hearing their languages and accents captured as well. At the most fundamental level, people need news to be delivered in a language they can understand, something especially salient in a country with the linguistic diversity of India. However, beyond the ability to communicate, hearing accents similar to one's own also contributed to making news feel more relatable and was often intertwined with other identities rooted in place and class (Singh 2022). As Pintu (IN-04) expressed: 'The channel we mentioned targets local news in the local dialect. They are people like us, thus the relatability factor increases a lot. We do believe what they portray and project to us.' Similarly, Heather (UK-07) expressed a very strong preference for hearing a 'Yorkshire accent' on TV, noting that 'if there was someone with, like, a very posh accent [presenting the news], I don't think I could bear to listen to it'. Harriet (UK-07) agreed with this sentiment: 'If it was an RP [Received Pronunciation][14] accent, like, a posh accent, I wouldn't relate to it as much.'

A focus on management and training

Several participants stressed that beyond more diverse newsrooms, news organisations also need to focus on diversity 'in the upper management because that's where most of the decisions are made' (Nelson, US-04). Such sentiments came up most often in the US groups and echo some prior research that has also focused on representation in newsroom leadership specifically (e.g. Eddy et al. 2023; Nishikawa et al. 2009). As Florence (US-02) put it: 'I think they

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[14] Also referred to popularly as 'the Queen's English' or 'BBC English'.

need to diversify their executive offi ers who make those decisions. It starts at the top because a lot of the time those reports do want to give facts, but then they are stalled or hindered.'

> *It can't be a bottom-up thing. It has to be a top-down thing. And so, until that piece of it happens, you don't really have a buy in.*
>
> <div align="right">Hannah (US-01)</div>

Others acknowledged that improving representation and covering people in their communities more fairly requires more than just changes to hiring practices, it needs improved training too. As Gabrielle (US-01) said, rooting out bias and unfairness in coverage is the responsibility of white journalists as well, who need to better address issues of diversity and representation in their reporting: 'There needs to be a level of self-awareness with people outside of the Black race, just learning your biases, learning your racism ... like, untangling that and then putting that into where you work.' Carlos (BR-02) likewise believed people of other races could be trained to better understand 'that experience of living in a Black community'.

> *Even if you can't get someone that looks like us ... can you please, can you at least train them to not be so scared – train them to at least be able to have a logical conversation?*
>
> <div align="right">Miriam (US-02)</div>

CONCERNS ABOUT TOKENISM AND PANDERING

Views around diversity and inclusion were not always uncontroversial or straightforward. For example, some older women in Brazil were clear in expressing that they did not want preferential hiring practices – opinions that were often connected with broader ideas about how to best address issues of equity and inclusion in workplaces more generally. Gisele (BR-03) disliked corporate policies that made her feel like she was not 'hired based on meritocracy' but rather 'based on quota'. Juliana (BR-03) recalled an offensive experience she had gone through in her own professional life at a company that hired her because 'we don't have this Black quota filled . Discussing quotas for Black students in universities, Vera (BR-07) also expressed concern about possible unintended consequences of such measures since she believed 'society sees it as if we are stealing the white people places'.

Others expressed concerns around the idea that 'they just hire us to look good in the picture', as Ticiana (BR-03) put it. Many, especially in the US, said they were wary of efforts to improve diversity that came across as performative or inauthentic. Charles (US-03), who was very much in favour of improving representation, criticised efforts that he saw as tokenism, because it often 'feels generic, it feels not authentic'. He explained: 'It feels like you're doing it to engage, like, "Look at my African American here. Look at him. Look, Black people. Look, we have one. We are doing the thing".' He further described these efforts as a 'tightrope' where there needs to be representation, but it has to be 'authentic enough where it doesn't feel like this person is being put here for a specific reason – to cater to the Black audience'. Concerns around tokenism also connected with participants' own experiences, as in Alexandra's (US-01) critique: 'They literally grab a face just to have them as a token. For a long time at my job downtown, I was their token. And it was petrifying. They were, like, "We love that Black girl. We love that you're Black." Like, don't say that to me.'

> *Stop pandering. To everybody: stop it.*
>
> <div align="right">Mathias (US-03)</div>

<div align="center">41</div>

In addition to some acknowledging the burden it placed on Black individuals to occupy the role of the 'token Black person', others raised concerns about how 'the one outlier', as Hannah (US-01) put it, could be weaponised to misrepresent the broader community. Melanie (US-01) highlighted the case of a particular news channel she did not trust: 'There are Black people on there, but where did you come from? … So, I think it goes deeper than just hiring people to ensuring such individuals are broadly in "alignment with the consensus of what Black people's feelings are".'

4.4 Appreciating the distinct needs of different audiences

The fourth set of recommendations participants offered involved better listening to and addressing the needs of diverse audiences. Many expressed a desire to feel heard by journalists, without which it was difficult to eel cared about. Some singled out specific n ws organisations, frequently local and regional news outlets that they thought did a better job at understanding their needs or depicting them fairly.

LISTENING TO COMMUNITIES

Aside from wanting more and better representation and more diversity in news production, many participants simply wanted news organisations to do a better job at listening to their communities. That is, they wanted to feel heard. (As with calls for more transparency, an express desire for more direct engagement is important irrespective of whether individual focus group participants would themselves find the time to engage) Rafaela (BR-01) suggested journalists should 'talk more to the Black community', and Raíssa (BR-01) suggested that 'maybe the people who are part of that piece of news should have more of a voice'. João (BR-02) made a similar point: 'We should be heard. We should have a voice – and we don't have much of a voice.' Many saw news organisations taking the time to listen as an indication of their priorities.

> *I think* you *taking an interest in us makes* us *more interested in you.*
>
> Deborah (US-06)

Listening was about more than just taking in feedback; it needed to be genuine and refle t a real commitment to understanding. Michelle (US-02) pointed out news organisations need to 'actually listen, too, because a lot of times, I feel like some of them, it's almost like they have their question prepared and they didn't really listen to what the person said'. Likewise, Vera (BR-07) wanted to see 'more research in the community, qualitative and quantitative, to understand our difficulties how we feel, what bothers us'.

Many emphasised the importance of putting resources behind being physically present in communities in order to understand their concerns. As Florence (US-02) said: 'If you want to be able to connect with them, go into their areas, share their stories.' Or as Amanda (US-05) put it: 'Go in there and get it from the horse's mouth, you know? Just let them tell their story.' Meanwhile, when discussing the local land struggles, Harsh (IN-08) agreed that nobody had come 'to listen to and understand our problems. We are giving you our advice that the media should come'.

Media should go where the incident is happening, and they should find out all the facts, and then do the reporting. Like when the [village] movement was happening, there were many media reporters who would find out from other reporters the incidents that had happened the day before. So, what would happen is that they would write the facts incorrectly … They should talk to the right people and report correctly.

Avijit (IN-10)

Others raised concerns about forms of listening that were more surface level, such as 'parachute journalism' done in relation to specific ommunities. Mark (UK-02), for example, said it was disappointing to see journalists covering places like a 'homeless shelter' or a 'food bank' and 'just turn up for an hour and write and talk to three people'. While he acknowledged it was costly to do more in-depth reporting, he believed journalists needed to 'be there for days, find out what it really is tually like' in order to get beyond 'a couple of soundbites'. These comments often alluded to a common desire for people in the news to be respected and acknowledged.

Showing the human element … why someone might be going through something, and just to, I guess, have a bit more sympathy with the people they're reporting on.

Julie (UK-04)

The value of local connections

While most voiced complaints about the news media in general, participants across all four countries also sometimes highlighted news outlets they thought did a better job in covering them or more often got things right. For example, Matthew (US-08) recognised that some 'news stations have made an effort to get out into their rural spaces … I think it's been nice to see those coming up'. Meanwhile, Ian (UK-02) felt like journalists at one outlet 'tend to sympathise [with the] working class, especially people, those that have to, want to, strike'.

The media played an important role during the [village] movement. When the movement began, the village was quite close to the big city and the media was used to coming and going here and when the movement began … the response of the media was also good.

Avijit (IN-10)

Quite consistently across the four countries, especially among participants who were in locations far from nation capitals, there was a fairly common tendency to separate out local and regional news organisations as doing a better job at depicting them. Local news was often seen as more humanising, better at highlighting positivity, and even on their side. Patrícia (BR-07) suggested that the efforts of a local station to showcase a particular region in Salvador that people had previously been afraid of going to had helped improve its public image: 'And people are not afraid of going there anymore because it's not a dangerous area … Bahia TV, they made an effort of showing it.' Meanwhile, Jade (UK-07) underscored how, unlike national news, local news is better at 'showing you the work the food bank does … or showing you what some disadvantaged primary schools have gotten up to. That's really good. You know, it's more showcasing positively rather than the negatives of this group in society.'

Savannah: *I think our local news does a great job of painting a good picture.*

Erica: *And I think more of them probably came from small towns originally.*

(US-06)

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In this section we have focused on a range of strategies and recommendations that study participants said they wanted news organisations to prioritise when it comes to building trust with them and others in their communities. While some of these possible solutions, especially when it comes to editorial practices and removing bias, may sound similar to those singled out by all kinds of audiences, others, especially around hiring practices and engagement, are more clearly rooted in the specific xperiences and perspectives associated with being from a marginalised community or one that is otherwise on the periphery of power.

It is worth noting that not everything people said they wanted changed about news in this section is likely to lead to greater trust, or greater trust among all audiences. For example, as Harriet (UK-07) said, while otherwise quite critical of representation in the news: 'I don't know if representation would sway my trust.' Some ultimately held news in such low regard that it was unclear if there was anything news organisations could ultimately do to regain their trust. As Nicholas (UK-01) put it, once it's been lost, 'it's really hard to regain people's trust'. Over time, providing communities with the kinds of journalism they say will better meet their needs may well develop into a more trusting relationship, but expectations were often low. Many said they believed journalists should make these changes to the way they report the news because it would make their journalism better, even though that was not necessarily going to be enough for them to suddenly trust them.

It is also the case, however, that news outlets cannot be all things to all people and must make choices around how to deploy what are often scarce resources – which, in many cases, are only becoming scarcer. Each of these approaches comes with difficult trade-offs which must be clearly weighed, refle ting judgements about editorial priorities and values, a point we have written about in the past (Toff et al. 2021a), and which we return to in this report's conclusion.

5. Conclusion

In this report we have analysed the perspectives of 322 individuals from disadvantaged or historically underserved communities who participated in 41 focus groups convened across Brazil, India, the UK, and the US. We highlighted common concerns around inaccurate and inadequate representation in news coverage, broader perceptions about news as an institution and journalists as professionals, and in the previous section, recommendations we heard focus group participants articulate around possible solutions for building or restoring trust with them personally and others in their communities. These last points are arguably the most critical, as they suggest possible ways forward for news organisations to address the varied concerns raised throughout these pages. They include (a) rooting out bias and inaccuracy with more transparent and factual coverage; (b) telling a more complete story about diverse communities through less sensationalised and more positive coverage relevant to their lives; (c) diversifying newsroom staff and management and better training journalists; and (d) doing a better job of listening, engaging, and being present in the communities where people live and work.

None of this is easy. Much of it requires substantial changes to existing editorial practices and pursuing them will often require newsrooms to shift scarce resources. The decision of whether or not to do so is a question of priorities and sometimes trade-offs.

Building and maintaining trust in news requires attending to the distinct concerns shared by different segments of the public when it comes to their unique relationships to news. Some of the concerns we have captured in this report will resonate broadly with critiques expressed by majority and minority groups alike; others are more specific to the perspe tives of audiences on the peripheries of power. Although many may feel that the news media do a poor job of accurately reporting on what matters to them, for marginalised groups and those historically underserved by the news, such critiques have higher stakes and greater potential for infli ting harm on their communities. When the news gets things wrong or poorly attends to the critical information needs of already disadvantaged groups, it can have a profoundly damaging impact on those in society who are already facing significant stru tural barriers in many other realms of life. That makes the concerns expressed by such groups all the more urgent.

To be clear, these differences in perspective are not always apparent if one focuses only on the surface-level language of people's critiques about what is untrustworthy about news. Focus group participants across the four countries often described what they expected of news using similar language; when most said they wanted fair, factual, and impartial coverage that spoke to relevant matters in their lives with less opinion and less bias, that didn't mean they would evaluate the same piece of news content the same way as each other. At the same time, what these marginalised and underserved audiences typically saw as problematic about news was fundamentally quite similar: too often, the dominant sources of news in their countries, at best, ignored people like them and, at worst, consistently maligned and misrepresented them. They wanted to see and hear from people like themselves in coverage and know that those reporting and delivering the news understood the lived experiences of people outside of the privileged bubbles that many believed journalists operated within. News media, it often seemed, mostly catered to the already comfortable while affli ting the affli ted, rather than delivering on the

time-honoured ambition to do the reverse.[15] Reform-oriented reporters, and scholars attuned to the ways in which the profession often falls short of its stated purpose and principles, have long argued that journalism needs to reckon with the representational harms it has caused or been complicit with – and is still causing and complicit with – and with the hard question of who is not served by current forms of journalism (e.g. Callison and Young 2019). Many of our focus group participants are calling for a similar kind of reckoning, and earning their trust will involve a long-term commitment, not a few tweaks on the margins.

Our findings in this study unders ore the degree to which ideas about news and journalism are often closely intertwined with broader notions about ingrained inequalities and the way power is wielded in society more generally. Many saw news organisations – if not necessarily individual journalists, to whom many were more willing to extend the benefit of the dou t – as carrying out the bidding of larger commercial or political interests, which they perceived as caring little about genuinely helping people or making their lives better. There is a substantial body of research that has previously identified the importan e of this 'trust nexus' (Hanitzsch et al. 2017; Ladd 2012; Palmer et al. 2020), but as long as many audiences view the news media through much the same lens as they view these other institutions, simply recognising that fact does not make it go away.

An individual news outlet may wish that audiences would refrain from lumping them together with the worst offenders in their market, or perceive them as independent from the governments and corporations they cover, but the notion that they are, in fact, distinct from these other powerful institutions in society is not at all self-evident. Many who hail from marginalised, disadvantaged, and underserved communities see chronic neglect and, even worse, harmful and exploitative coverage as evidence otherwise.

Some in the news industry may feel such criticisms are not fair, but there is strong evidence corroborating many of the views focus group participants expressed concerning the systematic underrepresentation of key groups in newsrooms (Jornalistas&Cia et al. 2021; Oxfam India and Newslaundry 2019; Spilsbury 2022); the status quo bias in political coverage, which leads to over-indexing of debate among those already in power (e.g. Lawrence 1996); and other concerns about news media historically reinforcing negative stereotypes (Entman 1994; Fonseca et al. 2019; Lane et al. 2020; Quirino 2017; Shabir and Khan 2022), sensationalising (Larkins 2015; Umamaheswar 2020), and ignoring some groups altogether (Kureel 2021; Oxfam India and Newslaundry 2019). The issues here are not superficial but substantial and addressing them will require real, fundamental change over time.

But it is also worth underscoring how similar issues have been raised by study after study after study for a very long time. More than half a century ago, in 1968 (see Byerly and Wilson II 2009), the Kerner Commission critiqued the US news media's distortions and inaccuracies in its coverage of Black people, its use of 'scare headlines', its dependency on inexperienced or prejudiced officials as authoritati e sources in stories, its bias towards divisive racial framing of confli t, and a general neglect of the lived experiences and perspectives of Black people and the discrimination they regularly experienced. While our report echoes many of these concerns in a wider variety of places and among a broader range of groups, the participants in our study

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[15] https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2014/today-in-media-history-mr-dooley-the-job-of-the-newspaper-is-to-comfort-the-affli ted-and-affli t-the-comfortable/

are but the latest in a long line of people from marginalised and underserved communities voicing versions of the same frustrations about news media. Those who lead and manage news organisations may feel they are already making good progress towards addressing many of these concerns, but on what timetable and with what urgency? It is not at all obvious to the people who participated in our focus groups that there is any sincere reckoning in the news media, let alone commitment to substantial change.

Of course, there is no quick fix to rebuilding trust where it has eroded o substantially, and news audiences are rightly sensitive to efforts they perceive as pandering or tokenism that fail to grapple with more fundamentally ingrained challenges within the news media across all of these countries. Our aim in this report is to capture, in their own words, how members of these particular groups see news media in their countries when it comes to representing people like themselves and what steps they would like to see news organisations take towards rebuilding trust with members of their communities. What news organisations choose to do with that information is up to them as they weigh their own strategic priorities and budgets. We have illustrated what is at stake and what the relevant trade-offs may be for newsroom leaders as they consider these choices.

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Technical Appendix

Participants in all four countries were screened in relation to the identity of focus for that location, in addition to their age[16] and gender. As such, participants in Brazil were asked to state their race, and those identifying as Black or mixed race (*preto* or *pardo*) were included; participants in India were asked to state their caste/tribe and/or religion, and those identifying as coming from a scheduled caste or tribe (e.g. Dalit, Adivasi) or being Muslim were included; and participants in the US were asked to state their race and the level of urbanity of where they lived, and those identifying as Black or African American or as living in 'the country' or 'a town or small city' were included. In the UK, given the more diffuse nature of the category of socioeconomic class, inclusion in the focus groups was determined on the basis of a combination of questions about participants' education level, their household income, the occupation of the primary earner in their home, their parents' careers, and an open answered question asking them what social class (if any) they identified with [17]

However, we did not split by age in the US rural groups given concerns about the difficul y of sampling younger participants. Moreover, in Brazil, due to concerns about potential power dynamics along socioeconomic and educational lines hindering participation during the focus groups, especially among older people for whom these differences are more pronounced, we also screened and recruited on the basis of education level among the older groups to ensure participants were from a relatively similar educational background. Since we were limited to only four groups of older participants, we split them such that older women in Salvador were all from a more educated background and those in São Paulo were from a less educated background, meanwhile the older men in Salvador were from a less educated background and those in São Paulo were from a more educated background.

During the screening process, participants were also asked about their news use habits, their levels of political interest (except in India where it was considered a sensitive question), and their levels of trust in news, in addition to various other country-specific sociodemographic questions, which provided us with additional context about each participant – although these were not used as criteria for inclusion or exclusion from the group. Some of these supplementary questions were asked in a less systematic fashion in some of the India groups, given the challenges of the field ork in some of the locations.

Regarding the regional variation, in Brazil we conducted groups in Bahia and São Paulo, which in addition to political differences (the state of Bahia has been governed by the Workers' Party since 2006 and overwhelmingly supported Lula da Silva in the 2022 election, unlike São Paulo, where a majority voted for Jair Bolsonaro), differ considerably in their racial makeup (81% of

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[16] The exact age cut-offs varied slightly by country based on recommendations of the firms e worked with and shaped in part by the feasibility of recruiting these specific groups The younger groups were either under 30 or under 35, whereas the older groups were either over 35 or over 45.

[17] Also due to the nature of the category and the challenges around recruitment, the class-related cut-offs were more fl xible as responses were considered in combination with each other. A hard cut-off was used for annual income (personal income had to be under £30,000 for those living alone and household income under £40,000). A small number of participants, however, expressed that their own experiences were in some ways more advantaged than others whom they viewed as more traditionally from working-class backgrounds.

the residents of Bahia identify as Black compared to only 37% in São Paulo).[18] In India, the groups took place in Haryana and Jharkhand; the former is characterised by entrenched caste-based discrimination and violence,[19] while the latter has a history of Adivasi assertions (e.g. a strong tradition of activism and local claims-making over the land and economic and civil rights) and a presence of indigenous media.[20] Meanwhile, the UK locations are intended to more broadly refle t the UK North/South divide: London, the wealthiest region in the UK is also the hub for British media – criticised by some for being London-centric – while Yorkshire is among the bottom half of UK regions in terms of income. Moreover, London is first and orkshire third in terms of inequality in the UK.[21] In the US, where we looked at two subgroups, we only conducted focus groups in one location for each, both of them in the state of Iowa.[22]

The focus groups were conducted in English in the UK and the US, in Portuguese in Brazil, and in Hindi in India. All were moderated by trained and experienced professionals working with our partner firms and all participants provided verbal consent and were compensated for their time. While members of our research team attended and observed all the groups in Brazil, the US, and the UK, given the number of focus groups in India we were unable to have a research team member present during all of the groups. All focus groups were recorded using video (in Brazil and the US groups that took place in Des Moines) or audio (all the other groups). Transcriptions for all groups were provided by the partner firms

In total, given our desire to split groups along both age and gender lines, we aimed to have four groups per category in each location: one with older women, one with younger women, one with older men, and one with younger men. However, we conducted one extra group in India because the first group was smaller and had ewer participants than expected. As such, there are two groups with older Muslim men in Jharkhand.

For reference, we enumerate the focus groups in the four tables that follow, detailing where each was held and the breakdown of relevant screening characteristics used in assembling each group.

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[18] See https://sei.ba.gov.br/images/publicacoes/download/textos_discussao/texto_discussao_17.pdf and https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2022/11/23/populacao-negra-de-sp-e-10-vezes-maior-no-jardim-angela-do-que-em-moema-diz-mapa-da-desigualdade-apartheid-territorial-diz-professor.ghtml

[19] http://www.ticijournals.org/the-dynamics-of-caste-violence-and-struggles-of-dalits-in-haryana-insights-from-the-field/#sd ootnote9sym

[20] According to 2011 India census data, scheduled castes make up roughly 20% of Haryana's population, whereas scheduled castes and tribes make up 38% of Jharkhand's population. Muslims are a small minority in both places (around 7% in Haryana and 15% in Jharkhand), as they are in India more generally (14% of the total country's population).

[21] See https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/dvc1370/ and https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/compendium/economicreview/february2020/analysingregionaleconomicandwellbeingtrends

[22] More specificall , the Brazil focus groups were conducted in Salvador (Bahia) and São Paulo (São Paulo); the India focus groups were conducted in in two different villages in Haryana and one village in Jharkhand (not specified to pr tect the identity of the participants); the UK focus groups were conducted in Croydon (Greater London) and Leeds (Yorkshire); the US focus groups were conducted in Des Moines and rural Iowa.

Brazil

Group	Race	Gender	Age	Location
BR-01	Black	Women	Younger	Southeast (São Paulo)
BR-02	Black	Men	Older	
BR-03	Black	Women	Older	
BR-04	Black	Men	Younger	
BR-05	Black	Women	Younger	Northeast (Salvador)
BR-06	Black	Men	Younger	
BR-07	Black	Women	Older	
BR-08	Black	Men	Older	

India

Group	Caste/Tribe	Religion	Gender	Age	Location
IN-01	Scheduled Caste / Dalit	-	Women	Older	Haryana
IN-02	Scheduled Caste / Dalit	-	Men	Younger	
IN-03	Scheduled Caste / Dalit	-	Women	Younger	
IN-04	-	Muslim	Men	Older	
IN-05	-	Muslim	Women	Older	
IN-06	-	Muslim	Men	Older	
IN-07	-	Muslim	Women	Younger	
IN-08	Scheduled Caste / Dalit	-	Men	Older	
IN-09	Scheduled Tribe	-	Women	Older	Jharkhand
IN-10	Scheduled Tribe	-	Men	Older	
IN-11	-	Muslim	Men	Older	
IN-12	Scheduled Tribe	-	Women	Younger	
IN-13	-	Muslim	Men	Younger	
IN-14	-	Muslim	Men	Older	
IN-15	-	Muslim	Women	Older	
IN-16	-	Muslim	Women	Younger	
IN-17	Scheduled Tribe	-	Men	Younger	

Note: Dashes denote that participants in the group were not screened based on that characteristic. In practice, all participants in the nine groups assembled on the basis of religion (IN-04, IN-05, IN-06, IN-07, IN-11, IN-13, IN-14, IN-15, IN-16) identified as being from Other Backward Classes. Participants in IN-01 and IN-02 identified as Muslim, whereas participants in IN-03 and IN-08 identified as Hindu. We did not collect data on the religion of the participants from Scheduled Tribes.

United Kingdom

Group	Socioeconomic class	Gender	Age	Location
UK-01	Working class	Men	Younger	Greater London (Croydon)
UK-02	Working class	Men	Older	
UK-03	Working class	Women	Younger	
UK-04	Working class	Women	Older	
UK-05	Working class	Men	Younger	Yorkshire (Leeds)
UK-06	Working class	Men	Older	
UK-07	Working class	Women	Younger	
UK-08	Working class	Women	Older	

United States

Group	Race	Rurality	Gender	Age	Location
US-01	Black	-	Women	Younger	Iowa (Des Moines)
US-02	Black	-	Women	Older	
US-03	Black	-	Men	Younger	
US-04	Black	-	Men	Older	
US-05	-	Rural	Women	-	Iowa (Runnells)
US-06	-	Rural	Women	-	
US-07	-	Rural	Men	-	
US-08	-	Rural	Men	-	

Note: Dashes denote that participants in the group were not screened based on that characteristic. In practice, all Black participants lived in the city and all rural participants identified as white. Additionally, rural participants were not screened on the basis of their age, but only two participants were younger than 35 years old.

RISJ PUBLICATIONS

SELECTED BOOKS

Hearts and Minds: Harnessing Leadership, Culture, and Talent to Really Go Digital
Lucy Kueng

Worlds of Journalism: Journalistic Cultures Around the Globe
Thomas Hanitzsch, Folker Hanusch, Jyotika Ramaprasad, and Arnold S. de Beer (eds) (published with Columbia University Press)

NGOs as Newsmakers: The Changing Landscape of International News
Matthew Powers (published with Columbia University Press)

Global Teamwork: The Rise of Collaboration in Investigative Journalism
Richard Sambrook (ed)

Journalism and the NSA Revelations: Privacy, Security and the Press
Risto Kunelius, Heikki Heikkilä, Adrienne Russell and Dmitry Yagodin (eds) (published with I.B.Tauris)

Something Old, Something New: Digital Media and the Coverage of Climate Change
James Painter et al.

Journalism in an Age of Terror
John Lloyd (published with I.B.Tauris)

The Right to Be Forgotten: Privacy and the Media in the Digital Age
George Brock (published with I.B.Tauris)

The Kidnapping of Journalists: Reporting from High-Risk Conflict Zones
Robert G. Picard and Hannah Storm (published with I.B.Tauris)

Innovators in Digital News
Lucy Kueng (published with I.B.Tauris)

Local Journalism: The Decline of Newspapers and the Rise of Digital Media
Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (ed) (published with I.B.Tauris)

Journalism and PR: News Media and Public Relations in the Digital Age
John Lloyd and Laura Toogood (published with I.B.Tauris)

Reporting the EU: News, Media and the European Institutions
John Lloyd and Cristina Marconi (published with I.B.Tauris)

SELECTED REPORTS AND FACTSHEETS

Race and Leadership in the News Media 2023: Evidence from Five Markets
Kirsten Eddy, Amy Ross Arguedas, Mitali Mukherjee, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (Factsheet)

Women and Leadership in the News Media 2023: Evidence from Twelve Markets
Kirsten Eddy, Amy Ross Arguedas, Mitali Mukherjee, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen (Factsheet)

Journalism, Media, and Technology Trends and Predictions 2023
Nic Newman

How Publishers are Learning to Create and Distribute News on TikTok
Nic Newman

How We Follow Climate Change: Climate News Use and Attitudes in Eight Countries
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Changing Newsrooms 2022: Media Leaders Embrace Hybrid Work Despite Challenges
Federica Cherubini

Born in the Fire: What We Can Learn from How Digital Publishers in the Global South Approach Platforms
Rasmus Kleis Nielsen and Federica Cherubini

The Trust Gap: How and Why News on Digital Platforms Is Viewed More Sceptically Versus News in General
Camila Mont'Alverne, Sumitra Badrinathan, Amy Ross Arguedas, Benjamin Toff, Richard Fletcher, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

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Snap Judgements: How Audiences Who Lack Trust in News Navigate Information on Digital Platforms
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Depth and Breadth: How News Organisations Navigate Trade-Offs Around Building Trust in News
Benjamin Toff, Sumitra Badrinathan, Camila Mont'Alverne, Amy Ross Arguedas, Richard Fletcher, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen

Overcoming Indifference: What Attitudes Towards News Across the Global North and South Tell Us About Building Trust
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