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## Media trust and use among urban news consumers in Brazil

**Flávia Milhorance and Jane B. Singer**

*Around the world, polls show a crisis in trust in civic institutions, the media foremost among them. This study explores how audiences connect ethical precepts to media credibility and trust through research in Brazil, South America's largest democracy. Original focus group data are analysed in the context of exclusive questionnaire data from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism to understand why news consumers trust – or do not trust – their media, and the implications of those perceptions.*

**Keywords:** credibility, diversity, focus groups, media use, transparency, trust

Amid increasingly partisan discourse and within a fragmented news environment plagued by charges of 'fake news', concern about trust in the media has jumped from industry and academic circles to mainstream discourse. All over the world, people report declining levels of trust in a variety of civic entities but particularly in the media, now the least-trusted institution of them all (Edelman 2018).

Equally well-documented are declines in the use of traditional media formats and the revenue they generate. Contemporary news consumers turn to digital platforms far more regularly than to print, and social media and other digital-only providers make up a large portion of the typical news diet. Such massive changes in news consumption habits over recent years have undermined the business model that long sustained traditional news outlets, leaving many scrambling to survive.

However, relatively little current research has explored the relationship between these two declines, in trust and in usage, particularly outside the United States and Western Europe. This study focuses on Brazil, one of the world's largest democracies and South America's biggest media market (Carro 2016a). Building on data provided exclusively to the authors by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University, we also draw on original focus group data gathered in Rio de Janeiro State to understand why urban Brazilians trust – or do not trust – the media, the normative concepts they invoke, and the implications of those perceptions on their consumption patterns.

### **Media trust and transparency**

Abundant documentation indicates trust in the media is low and falling, though there is little agreement on exactly what people mean when they say they do not trust the media. 'Distrust happens when the news fails to address the world as the public recognises it,' suggest

Coleman and his colleagues (2009: 2). Kohring and Matthes (2007) propose four dimensions of trust assessment: trust in the selection of reported topics, in the selection of information included in those reports, in the way journalists have evaluated that information, and in the accuracy of their account. More broadly, Tsfaty and Cappella (2003) define trust as a consequential phenomenon: Trust leads to a greater likelihood of cooperative engagement, while mistrust reduces that likelihood.

A number of factors influence perceptions of trustworthiness. Lee (2010) found that trust in the news media was affected by audience members' political ideology, trust in government institutions and fellow citizens, and economic views. Others highlight media exposure and media reliance, as well as individual traits such as news consumption habits and even religious beliefs (Golan 2010). Individual and interpersonal factors seem especially important in assessing media bias (Eveland and Shah 2003); knowledge about media ownership also appears to affect credibility judgements (Ashley, Poepsel and Willis 2010). Attempts by news organisations to emphasise their own objectivity, particularly in branding themselves as impartial watchdogs of government, have left them open to substantive challenges by both scholars and citizens (Peters and Broersma 2013).

Scholarly work related to media trust has also drawn connections with perceptions of credibility and, conversely, of bias. Credibility has commonly been used as a benchmark of trust: Unsurprisingly, those who believe the media to be credible seem more likely to rely on the media than those who do not (Wanta and Hu 1994), though the relationship is not necessarily a strong one (Koussis 2001). The advent of the internet spurred comparison of the credibility of information provided online and in legacy outlets (Flanagin and Metzger 2007; Johnson and Kaye 1998). More recent studies have explored the perceived credibility of various online information sources, notably social media (Carr et al. 2014; Johnson and Kaye 2014; Westerman, Spence and van der Heide 2014) as well as other platforms and formats (Clerwell 2014; Neuberger 2014).

The ethical notion of transparency, which has gained traction in the digital age (Karlsson 2011), is similarly fuzzy, encompassing motives for covering particular information in particular ways on the one hand, and processes of selecting and gathering information on the other (Craft and Heim 2009). Scholars have defined it variously as involving 'truthful disclosure before and during an act as well as after it has been taken' (Singer 2007: 84) and as a demonstration of 'the processes by which facts, situations, events, and opinions are sorted, sifted, made sense of, and presented' (Ziomek 2005: 4).

Regardless of what, precisely, people are after when they call for greater transparency, the notion has been clearly connected to concerns about media bias as well as to scepticism about the value of objectivity as a journalistic norm or goal. 'Transparency subsumes objectivity,' Harvard technologist David Weinberger (2009) wrote. 'Anyone who claims objectivity should be willing to back that assertion up by letting us look at sources, disagreements, and the personal assumptions and values supposedly bracketed out of the report' (para. 9). Without transparency, he adds, objectivity becomes arrogance – and foolishness. Karlsson (2011; 2010) highlights the role of digital communication in fostering an increased orientation toward openness, though Chadha and Koliska (2015) suggest news outlets are seeking to appear more credible through limited and strategic use of transparency – but stopping short of actually offering substantive insights into journalistic processes.

## The Brazilian context

The present study focuses on media trust as well as use in Brazil, a nation whose media have had a vital role in shaping and reshaping power structures over many decades, functioning as ‘a crucial site for social, political, and ideological struggles’ (Matos 2008: 4). After a newspaper heyday in the 1950s, broadcast television has dominated media usage. Television remains the most important news source for the population overall, although overtaken by online sources among urban Brazilians (Carro 2016a).

Since the military dictatorship ended in the mid-1980s, legacy media in Brazil have been pulled towards commercialism and professionalism on the one hand, and political and social inclusion on the other (Matos 2008; Porto 2012; Waisbord 1996). Brazilian journalists give considerable weight to their public-interest role as government watchdogs (Mellado et al. 2012) – though a key motivation may be to drive sales in an increasingly consolidated environment (Waisbord 2000). In general, media market expansion has been integral to expanding democratisation of Brazilian society (Votmer 2013), but the period also has been characterised by a concentration of ownership and by ‘ideological biases, simplifications of debate and limited inclusion of these new publics’ (Matos 2008: 233).

In contrast to countries such as the UK, France or Italy, Brazil’s legal framework has historically been conducive to ownership concentration. Four family-owned groups currently enjoy an 89 percent market share of the print media, including giant publishing enterprises operating out of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (Moreira 2016). These conglomerates -- including the O Globo group, which owns *O Globo* newspaper and has extensive other Brazilian media holdings, and Grupo Folha, which owns *Folha de São Paulo* -- exert considerable influence on the direction of public debate. Their massive media properties in the two dominant cities are highly influential in setting the agenda for coverage in regional and other smaller metropolitan newspapers and broadcasters (Abramo 2007).

The past few years have been especially difficult for Brazil and its media. Although the nation weathered the 2008 global economic crisis in relative prosperity and stability, the situation deteriorated dramatically in the 2010s. The disclosure of corruption and a money-laundering scandal involving the Petrobras powerhouse led to massive street protests in 2013, generating turmoil that ultimately culminated in the controversial impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and her departure from office in 2016 (Garcia 2016). Much of the media coverage of the crisis, particularly in dominant newspapers such as *O Globo*, was out of sync with popular sentiment, generating considerable public displeasure (Nassif 2013) and a general perception of media bias. Indeed, observers have connected the upheavals to a perception that the Brazilian media not only failed to provide people’s basic needs but even seemed to work against those needs (Fontes 2015). The same media conglomerates that supported the military regime a generation ago (Matos 2008) have more recently been widely seen as amplifying the voices of political elites and legitimising Rousseff’s impeachment (Damgaard 2018).

As the turmoil escalated in 2013 and 2014, Brazilian newspapers lost nearly 9 per cent of their circulation (Associação Nacional de Jornais 2015); only one in 27 Brazilians read a newspaper in 2014, down from one in 10 in the 1950s (ibid.; IBGE 2014). In 2015, as the Brazilian economy endured its worst downturn in a quarter century and questions about credibility swirled around the legacy media, nine of the nation’s 10 largest-circulation newspapers lost readers, and 1,400 media practitioners lost their jobs (Carro 2016b). Though

the national press remains influential today, especially among elites, many readers and advertisers have migrated to digital media (Carro 2016a); an estimated 116 million Brazilians, roughly two-thirds of the population, are now connected to the internet (Simões Gomes 2018), while only 3 per cent of the nation's citizens cite newspapers as their preferred information source (SCS 2017).

Social media are enormously popular as alternative information sources. In the first five years after its Brazilian office opened in 2011, Facebook attracted more than 83 million users; nearly three-quarters of urban dwellers used it to access news by the end of 2015. In addition, 100 million Brazilians – nearly half the nation's population – used the WhatsApp messaging app (Carro 2016b). Other online media also have gained ground in Brazil since the turn of the millennium (Harlow 2017), a trend again accelerated by the recent turmoil. Digital-native media start-ups have emerged, including Midia Ninja, Ponte and Agência Pública (Maisonave 2016). As in the United States, Europe and other parts of Latin America, many of Brazil's alternative media are seen as associated with particular social and civic movements (Harlow 2017). And as elsewhere, many continue to struggle to secure audiences and financial stability.

Within this contentious environment, the matter of media trust in rapidly changing Brazil has attracted attention. In the rest of this section, we briefly outline information from diverse public opinion polling organisations, followed by a closer look at an extensive data set provided to the authors by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

Brazilians are more likely than media consumers in other countries to say they trust the media. About 58 per cent of the Brazilian respondents in a 2016 Reuters Institute study said they trusted the news 'most of the time', putting Brazil behind only Finland (65 per cent) and Portugal (60 per cent) among the 26 countries surveyed. Moreover, 56 per cent of Brazilians reported trusting news organisations in 2016, and 54 per cent said they trusted journalists – the highest level among any of the countries studied (Carro 2016a; Newman 2016). However, only 36 per cent also said they believed the Brazilian media were free from undue political influence, and 35 per cent considered it free of undue business influence (Carro 2016b).

Other public opinion surveys in Brazil have yielded broadly comparable results. A survey conducted by Edelman (2016) around the same time as the Reuters Institute survey showed that 54 per cent of Brazilians said they trusted the media. However, that number represents a drop of nearly 20 per cent over a five-year period – and declined further to 43 per cent by 2018 (Edelman 2018). Surveys conducted by the Brazilian government (*Pesquisa Brasileira de Midia* 2017; 2016; 2015) have also addressed levels of trust in news across multiple platforms; findings indicate lower levels of overall trust than suggested by the international studies, with distrust of digital media particularly pervasive.

Brazilians also report that they are prepared to pay for online news content: 22 per cent of the respondents to the Reuters Institute study said they paid for news, the third-highest percentage among the countries surveyed. That said, the average annual payment amount was among the lowest – only the equivalent of \$14.20 a year, mostly involving one-off purchases (Carro 2016b).

Before turning to our focus group data, we offer a closer look at the survey data gathered by the Reuters Institute. The Institute's *Digital News Report* constitutes the largest ongoing comparative study of news consumption around the world (Levy 2016). The word 'trust'

appears 284 times in the 2016 report – more than twice as often as in 2015 (134 mentions) and six times more frequently than in 2014 (just 47 mentions). Moreover, the 2016 report included a separate section devoted to issues of trust, based on closer examination of data from the United States and five European countries. Findings indicate no gender differences, but those under age 35 are less trusting than older news consumers. Political beliefs also are linked to trust in the news (Newman et al. 2016).

Additional focus groups data from the Reuters Institute indicated that trust in the news is strongly tied to trust in particular media brands. Long-standing legacy brands are more likely to be seen as primary news sources, with newer players thought of as secondary sources or ‘guilty pleasures’, even when they have a large reach (Newman et al. 2016: 94).

Although the institute published overviews of these findings, the more fine-grained data needed to provide context for our study were not made public. Institute colleagues shared their data from Brazil with us. Their questionnaire was completed by 2,001 Brazilians in 27 urban areas, including Rio de Janeiro. It encompassed questions about interests (business news, political news and so on), sources and platforms, along with demographic information and a host of other topics, including three of interest here: trust in the media, payment for news and frequency of news access. Tables 1 and 2 provide Reuters Institute data related to trust and payment for news in print and online media, respectively.

Table 1 suggests a trend: as trust in news increases, so too does the likelihood to pay for print news. Conversely, the number of people who do not pay for print news is higher among those who either are neutral toward or disagree with statements related to trusting news, news organisations or journalists. Relatively few people pay for online news, which makes interpretation of the Table 2 data more tentative. However, the general trend seems to hold: The more people trust the news, the more willing they are to pay for it, even online.

The institute data are even clearer in relation to perceptions of outside influence on the media. They show widespread belief that the Brazilian media are influenced by government or commercial pressures. Yet those who believe the media are independent of such influence are notably more likely to pay for print news and for online news – and much less likely when they believe the media to be shaped by either entity.

Our own data, gathered from three focus groups of urban news consumers in Brazil, provide further insights into the nuances of media trust in Brazil and the relationship between trust and economic imperatives. Informed by our interrogation of the Reuters data, as well as context provided by the literature, this study addresses the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do urban Brazilians describe their perceptions and attitudes about the media?

**RQ2:** What reasons do urban Brazilians offer for trusting or distrusting the news?

**RQ3:** How do these views relate to expressed willingness to consume and to pay for news?

## Method

This study draws on data from three focus groups conducted by the lead author in December 2016 in the state of Rio de Janeiro. This large urban area, home to 6.5 million people, was selected to produce data from a population comparable to those surveyed by the Reuters Institute. The largest and most dominant Brazilian media company, Globo, also is based in Rio and was referenced frequently by participants.

A total of 17 Brazilian news consumers, selected using a snowball sampling method with the goal of obtaining age and gender diversity, were included. Nine women – four in their 30s, one in her 40s, two in their 50s, and two in their 70s – participated. Three of the eight men were in their 50s, two in their 20s, and one each in his 30s, 40s, or 80s. None was a specialist in the media nor had worked in the news.

Participants were invited to discuss their views and experiences related to news consumption and payment; their perceptions of trust and the factors they considered important in assessing the trustworthiness of news content; historical or current events that affected these assessments; and their perceptions about contemporary media controversies involving fake news.

The conversations lasted from 35 to 70 minutes. All participants were guaranteed confidentiality and signed a consent form indicating their agreement to take part in the research, in line with the human subjects protocol required by the authors' institution. Focus group sessions were recorded, transcribed and translated from Portuguese to English. NVivo software helped the researchers identify key themes and concepts relevant to the topics indicated by the research questions.

## Findings

### *Consumption and payment patterns*

Our focus group participants reported that they consumed news several times a day, describing it as 'fundamental' and 'essential'. Older participants tended to think mostly about legacy print and broadcast outlets, while younger Brazilians reported more digital-only sources in their news diets. A majority said they did not pay for print or online news, in line with the questionnaire data described above; half said they had a subscription in the past but no longer had one. Participants generally cited free access to online or broadcast information as a key reason why they no longer paid for any news content.

However, the focus groups also revealed other rationales for payment decisions. Some participants said they paid for news out of habit or as part of another buying decision, such as paying for cable television in order to watch sports but then also watching news shows. Among those describing payment as a habit was the man in his 80s who said he was simply accustomed to buying a paper. Others said they consumed a range of paid media sources – including newspapers, cable TV, and magazines – because they valued being informed.

Findings also show changing consumption patterns associated with reactions to the coverage provided by specific outlets, rather than habit or convenience. As described above, the political and financial crisis in Brazil has left the nation in turmoil, exacerbating public anger and social unrest. The conservative position maintained by much of the media throughout the crisis alienated news consumers. A woman in her 70s explained:

I've never watched TV Globo news again since it started the debate on Dilma's impeachment. I found really exaggerated the way they faced this issue. I was tremendously irritated.

Similarly, a man in his 50s said he cancelled his *O Globo* newspaper subscription because he disagreed with its reporting of the political and economic upheaval. 'It began to bother me in such a way that I could not read virtually anything, the news was so biased,' he said. This participant said he had had a daily subscription in 2014, reduced it first to Thursday-to-Sunday, then cancelled it a year later. 'Today, I prefer reading indicators and facts alone and interpret them by myself,' he said. 'There is no columnist I trust reading.'

Another man in his 50s also said he had cancelled his *O Globo* subscription in 2015 for political reasons. 'I radicalised,' he said. 'I felt I had to react.' But he said he had re-subscribed a year later, feeling 'hemmed in' by the lack of other acceptable news options. He said he found online news 'difficult' and television news overly scripted. Besides, he said: 'I really missed reading the newspaper. It is a dynamic instrument of information. I like that.'

Participants recalled press censorship in the 1960s when some Brazilian publications overtly supported the military government. 'Our parents' generation grew up during the dictatorship, when there was no right to argue, no alternative sources,' a woman in her 30s said. 'The truth was absolute.' But others said not all outlets had fallen in line, yielding what a man in his 50s described as 'a bigger diversity of chroniclers' and making today's media worse in comparison.

### *Perceptions of media bias*

Focus group participants who said they distrusted the media discourse frequently cited what they saw as biased coverage of the crisis. One woman in her 30s said that as events unfolded, she realised that the forces in play were not made clear from the start. As examples, she cited a media campaign around labour regulations, lobbied by the industry sector and advocated by the government that gained power after Rousseff's impeachment. Perceived political leanings also evoked suspicions. 'Politics is more often misrepresented,' said one focus group participant. 'I distrust political themes more than others,' another added.

Respondents also cited perceived economic biases, which they described in three related but distinct ways. One involved a perception that media coverage of economic issues was ideologically slanted. Another involved concern about agenda-setting effects created by the selection and prominence of particular subjects. 'It is a matter of how they choose what is important,' said a man in his 30s. 'The way they select political or economic topics, or instead a picture of a pretty cat, is what makes them biased.'

The third concern related to media ownership. The fact that Brazilian news media are today largely in a few private hands, as described above, bothered some participants, who felt 'the big traditional media follows the interests of elites too much'. A man in his 50s said an economically driven agenda meant informed readers had to critically reflect on why the media were interested in some topics and not others.

The findings, then, suggest that distrust is linked in large measure to audience perceptions of political and economic biases of the news, a concern aggravated by the national crisis. But focus group participants believed that perceived biases also had other causes, including



ideology, a tendency toward interpreting the news rather than simply reporting it impartially, a lack of adequate context, and fragmentation of content. ‘They pick fragments that interest them,’ said a man in his 20s. ‘Sometimes they are not even lying; they are just constructing according to what they are interested in showing. Then we have to be careful and try to look at the bigger picture of what they are talking about.’

### *Transparency and diversity*

As described above, media observers have placed increasing emphasis on the need for transparency as a way to foster trust in a digital age. Transparency is seen as important not only in relation to reporting or editing methods but also to journalistic perceptions about what news is and how it should be conveyed to the public. A focus group participant in her 30s summed up this perspective in calling for more clarity about the ethical principles followed by news outlets: ‘I am not sure if the media should be biased or neutral,’ she said. ‘But they should have a better ethics code. They should have more criteria about the way they report.’

In Brazil, emerging journalistic and activist organisations have begun to challenge the traditional media view that objectivity and impartiality are incontestable values, instead urging not only greater transparency but also informed analysis and even overt advocacy. Our focus groups indicate the Brazilian public has taken note of new digital initiatives such as those highlighted above. ‘In the alternative media, their ideology is clear,’ a man in his 30s said. ‘In the corporate media, it is more difficult to see it. Their news is presented as “normal” or “natural” although it is not.’ A younger man agreed. Naming a popular online outlet that described itself as presenting ‘analytical content’, he explained that he trusted it more ‘because it is a type of text construction that is clearer. It is not fragmented. You can see where they collected the information from’.

Asked how the media in Brazil might become more trustworthy, a number of participants also cited a desire for diversity – in the number of viewpoints, media sources and people producing content. ‘We need a diversity of sources, so we don’t feel hostage,’ a man in his 50s said. ‘Diversity of opinions, ideological diversity, gender and race diversity: this is what makes news to be trusted.’ A man in his 30s agreed, explaining: ‘When you don’t see any diversity, you simply lose trust.’

### *The internet and the rise of ‘fake news’*

A final set of focus group insights related to perceptions about the internet and the pervasiveness of misinformation online. Overall, participants appreciated the expanded range of content and voices. ‘I felt a big improvement, because before we didn’t have a choice. Today, we have variety,’ said a woman in her 70s. A man in his 50s contrasted the limited media options of the past with the ‘range of good sources and journalists giving credibility to information online’ today.

However, participants had misgivings about the proliferation of bogus information and the commensurate potential to be misled. Although there are more sources, participants said that finding trustworthy ones remains difficult; they expressed concern about the speed, volume and nature of digital content in general and social media content in particular. ‘I don’t call this news,’ said a man in his 30s. ‘I call it gossip.’ A woman in her 50s likened the internet to ‘a broken telephone’.

Other participants recounted personal experiences. A woman in her 30s said she had received a WhatsApp message saying a controversial far-right candidate had been elected the most

honest politician in the world. ‘I laughed,’ she said. A man in his 50s said he feared that misinformation ‘intentionally grown’ or spread via social media could drive public opinion:

Some are extremely fake. Others distort the message with a political interest behind it, and people share it. In Brazil, social media has a very strong effect.

Yet focus group participants also pointed out that the internet had increased transparency in event coverage. When everyone has a mobile phone, mainstream constructions of news are easily challenged by citizens posting textual or visual content online. Participants cited recent street protests as examples. ‘The media cannot hide [the protests] anymore,’ a man in his 50s said. ‘Who guides the news? It is not only the traditional media. They cannot just ignore what is going on and being said on the internet.’

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Building on the literature and on unique access to detailed findings from the 2016 Reuters Institute study of trust in the media, this study used original focus group data to offer fresh insights into urban Brazilians’ perceptions about their news media. Our three research questions explored attitudes about the media, reasons for trusting or distrusting the news, and the relation between audience views and willingness to consume and pay for news.

Focus group participants supported the survey findings that Brazilians are heavy news consumers, indicating that they access news several times a day and believe it to be important. Although most do not currently pay for news, many did so in the past. Part of this shift is due to the ubiquity of free information, but this study indicates more subtle issues related to distrust stemming from perceptions of economic and political bias. Comments suggested a direct association between decreased trust and decreased spending on the news.

Focus group participants also raised a host of ethical concerns that have been at the heart of academic and industry criticism, related to impartiality, transparency, diversity, and the selection and presentation of content. Each relates to trust in nuanced ways. On the one hand, our participants criticised what they saw as overtly ideological coverage that undermined trust. Attempts by news organisations to brand themselves as impartial watchdogs of democracy have long been open to challenge (Peters and Broersma 2013). Our study suggests that in Brazil as elsewhere, attempts to sell an objectivity that cannot be delivered serve merely to create a gap between expectations and reality, with negative implications for the economics as well as the practice of journalism.

However, our focus group findings also suggest that greater pursuit of impartiality is not necessarily the best response. Importantly, several participants cited greater diversity of views as an optimal route to greater trust. Increasing the number of news sources and news providers, to better represent the different perspectives in Brazilian society, was highlighted as a way to provide vital context to contemporary issues and events.

But the factors behind public trust in Brazilian media go beyond normative issues commonly referenced in Western studies, emphasising the need for context in considerations of communication ethics. A long national history of continuous upheavals has progressively damaged the Brazilian public’s relationship with the media. Consequences of media support for the military government a generation ago still reverberate, manifested in a new wave of resentment during the latest crisis and, more recently, in fresh controversy over widely

distrusted coverage of candidates in the 2018 presidential election (Henningan 2018). The concentration of media ownership among the nation's richest families results in less diverse viewpoints and also is galling in its own right.

The internet adds more complexity. It provides a low-cost and democratic environment for alternative media outlets, and thus a home for new ideas and perspectives, which focus group participants saw as a positive development. Many expressed trust in such outlets, particularly in light of their ideological transparency. At the same time, participants also raised concerns about the lack of online controls, leading to low-quality content that diminishes overall credibility.

That said, although focus group participants talked about these digital-only news sources, their conversations were dominated by discussion of the mainstream media. Traditional Brazilian media, then, have an enormous opportunity but also face an enormous challenge. The opportunity lies in their brand association with reliable information; the challenge comes from the fact that many people do not see them living up to their reputation or their potential. A sense of disappointment, even betrayal, came through in our focus group discussions. In a time of crisis, people want to be able to turn to the mainstream media to learn what is happening and what they can expect next; when they do not find it, they turn away, not infrequently in anger. Yet they have significant misgivings about the most readily and cheaply available alternative source, the internet. At the moment, many of these news consumers seem to be drifting, with troubling implications for a massive democracy that urgently needs to find its collective way forward.

News companies around the world are increasingly seeking to brand themselves as trustworthy civic assets amid the spread of unreliable online information. Our findings suggest an optimal emphasis in this pursuit should not be on 'objectivity', a distrusted concept for which counter-examples can be readily found, but rather on transparency and diversity. Our focus group participants indicate that these ethical values should receive more concerted attention from news organisations hoping to be seen as more trustworthy – and to translate that perception into larger audience numbers and stronger audience relationships.

Like all studies, this one has several limitations. One is that we were unable to field our own survey of public opinion about the media in Brazil and, therefore, had to rely on secondary data, gathered more than a year before our focus groups, to examine how media trust related to news consumption and payment patterns. Our focus groups were of significant help in probing for the causes and implications of those linkages, as well as a host of interrelated concerns about the media; however, focus groups are an inherently subjective method and can only unveil the views of those who take part, shaped by their interpersonal dynamics. Moreover, we gathered views from people who lived in just one of Brazil's urban areas; although Rio is a media capital, half a dozen other cities also have populations greater than 2 million.

Nonetheless, we believe this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between trust and the future stability of legacy media outlets, a relationship that other work has rarely explored empirically. Our findings suggest that a lack of consumer trust, if not addressed, is likely to intensify the media's financial crisis. For ethics scholars, this study points towards the need for work that incorporates a range of factors influencing perceptions of trust and transparency on the one hand, and the impact of perceived bias on the other. It also highlights opportunities for further exploration of the concept of diversity, not only among news

providers or even in the voices being heard but also regarding the nature of news itself. News consumers know that trustworthy news is not one-dimensional. But we have much to learn about the complex interaction between credibility and multi-dimensionality in a contemporary news environment.

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### **Note on contributors**

Flávia Milhorange is a Brazilian independent journalist with more than ten years of experience as a reporter and editor. She has contributed to media outlets in Brazil and abroad, including *The Guardian*, BBC Brazil, *O Globo*, The Intercept Brazil and Mongabay News. She holds an MA in Financial Journalism from an Erasmus joint programme with City, University of London (UK), and Aarhus University (Denmark).

Jane B. Singer is Professor of Journalism Innovation at City, University of London, where she also serves as research lead for the Department of Journalism. Her research explores digital journalism, including changing roles, perceptions, norms, and practices. Recent publications include “Theorizing digital journalism” for *The Routledge Handbook of Developments in Digital Journalism Studies* and “Fact-checkers as entrepreneurs” for *Journalism Practice*.

**Table 1: Trust and payment for news in print in Brazil**

A total of 1,042 respondents (52 per cent) said they had not paid for a printed newspaper in the previous week, while 931 (47 per cent) said they had paid.

Data provided by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

<b>I think you can trust most news most of the time</b>					
<b>Have you paid for a printed newspaper in the last week?</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>No</b>	64 (62%)	214 (62%)	229 (60%)	457 (49%)	77 (32%)
<b>Yes</b>	37 (36%)	128 (37%)	143 (37%)	456 (49%)	167 (68%)

  

<b>I think you can trust most news organisations most of the time</b>					
<b>Have you paid for a printed newspaper in the last week?</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>No</b>	63 (71%)	226 (64%)	240 (56%)	451 (50%)	62 (27%)
<b>Yes</b>	23 (26%)	121 (34%)	179 (42%)	445 (49%)	164 (73%)

  

<b>I think you can trust most news journalists most of the time</b>					
<b>Have you paid for a printed newspaper in the last week?</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>No</b>	60 (69%)	239 (67%)	275 (59%)	400 (47%)	68 (29%)
<b>Yes</b>	24 (28%)	113 (32%)	184 (39%)	444 (52%)	166 (71%)

  

<b>News media in my country is independent from undue political or government influence most of the time.</b>					
<b>Have you paid for a printed newspaper in the last week?</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>No</b>	251 (62%)	245 (57%)	262 (59%)	221 (41%)	63 (37%)
<b>Yes</b>	152 (37%)	184 (43%)	172 (39%)	315 (58%)	108 (63%)

  

<b>News media in my country is independent from undue business or commercial influence most of the time.</b>					
<b>Have you paid for a printed newspaper in the last week?</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>No</b>	239 (63%)	270 (59%)	266 (57%)	231 (42%)	36 (24%)
<b>Yes</b>	139 (36%)	178 (39%)	188 (40%)	311 (57%)	114 (76%)

**Table 2: Trust and payment for news online in Brazil**

A total of 1,528 respondents (76 per cent) said they had not paid for online news in the past year, while 440 (22 per cent) said they had paid.

Data provided by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

<b>I think you can trust most news most of the time</b>					
<b>Have you paid for online news content in the last week?</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>No</b>	87 (83%)	285 (83%)	301 (79%)	705 (76%)	149 (61%)
<b>Yes</b>	16 (15%)	54 (16%)	74 (19%)	202 (22%)	93 (38%)
<b>I think you can trust most news organisations most of the time</b>					
<b>Have you paid for online news content in the last week?</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>No</b>	76 (85%)	295 (83%)	338 (79%)	687 (76%)	132 (58%)
<b>Yes</b>	10 (11%)	52 (15%)	83 (19%)	201 (22%)	94 (42%)
<b>I think you can trust most news journalists most of the time</b>					
<b>Have you paid for online news content in the last week?</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>No</b>	75 (86%)	304 (85%)	368 (78%)	637 (75%)	144 (61%)
<b>Yes</b>	11 (13%)	46 (13%)	91 (20%)	200 (23%)	91 (39%)
<b>News media in my country is independent from undue political or government influence most of the time.</b>					
<b>Have you paid for online news content in the last week?</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>No</b>	354 (87%)	351 (81%)	348 (78%)	371 (78%)	104 (68%)
<b>Yes</b>	50 (12%)	73 (17%)	88 (17%)	162 (20%)	67 (30%)
<b>News media in my country is independent from undue business or commercial influence most of the time.</b>					
<b>Have you paid for online news content in the last week?</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
<b>No</b>	331 (87%)	378 (83%)	354 (76%)	392 (71%)	73 (48%)
<b>Yes</b>	46 (12%)	67 (15%)	101 (22%)	148 (27%)	78 (52%)

