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User Engagement Memo

As of this morning, Adam Shrier, Doha Madani, and I have interviewed twenty-three people, ranging in ages from 17 to 62. We’ve asked them to state their race/ethnicity and their occupation. Then, we asked them to gauge their interest in World News, National News, Local News, Politics, Social Issues, Finance, Sports, and Arts and Culture on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the least interested and 5 being the most interested.

Then, we asked them to rank their top five news sources. If they did not have five, we took as many as they had. We then asked them to state how they most preferred to get their news: via reading it (online/print), audio (radio/podcast), or video (TV/smartphone). We then asked them what kinds of stories they believed needed more or less news coverage. Finally, we asked them how journalists could better suit their needs.

In examining the results, I found surprisingly that more people read their news than I originally thought. Thirteen of the twenty-three survey subjects listed reading as their most used medium of news consumption. I also found that few people listen to their news, as only three of those surveyed listed audio as a medium they used. Four people listed video as a medium they used.

Another surprising find was the overwhelming thought that the news media focuses too much on gossip and sensationalism instead of actual news. Four people listed ‘Donald Trump’ as needing less coverage. Eleven people listed ‘celebrity’, ‘entertainment’, or ‘gossip’ as needing less attention in the news spectrum. Additionally, many of the subjects we spoke to remarked on the lack of nuance in political coverage. They referenced the focus on “politics” and “politicians” as opposed to the policies and legislation that the government enacts.

Finally, in looking to the news subjects that garnered the most interest, World News came out on top, averaging 3.93. Social Issues was second, averaging 3.91. The lowest averages were for Finance and Sports, which were 2.78 and 2.56, respectively. To me, this shows a lack of interest for sports. But more importantly, it shows a lack of understanding of finance and how it affects everyday people. Of the people surveyed, only one listed primarily financial news sources in their regular consumption, and he was a business student.

Overall, I believe that news consumers are looking for a more substantive, yet palatable news experience. They want less “fluff” news and more stories that affect their communities, stories about underrepresented communities, and stories about communities they aren’t aware of. Many of those we surveyed showed they were interested in learning more about world events, social justice, income inequality, and different perspectives. They also cited a large bias in the news media and were unsure of how it could be fixed.