

## User Research

### **Design Problem Statement:**

American citizens generally do not know what is going on in the world of politics, leading them to make uninformed decisions.

We will create an app that can provide up-to-date information on the current Presidential Candidates for the 2020 election, help people register to vote, and go further than the Presidential election and keep user retention with the next elections.

### **Defining Users:**

The users of this app can be placed into two broad groups: American citizens and students over the age of 18 who have voted in the past, and those who will be able to register to vote in the upcoming months. We believe that these two groups will benefit the most from the app because they either are or will be voting. The app will consolidate information on the many different candidates, drawing in more users because of its unbiased form on the subject. The users we found are people we already know through JMU and the different activities we participate in. There is a broad enough demographic here that we could choose different types of people for the interview process.

Flynn Sexton: A friend from high school, Flynn is a sophomore geology major at JMU from Stafford, VA. He considered himself knowledgeable in politics but has some qualms with how American media outlets portray current events. He feels like his, “parents have groomed [him] to register and vote.”

Julia McGroarty: A friend from the MRD Trumpet section, she is a English major at JMU from New Jersey. She votes absentee but only for Presidential elections. She isn’t as informed as she would like to be and her parents have had little influence on how she gets her news. Most of her critical thinking comes from conversations with friends after a big event happens, such as a mass shooting or when abortion laws get passed.

Willie Wilder: Willie is a Junior Business Management student from Richmond, Virginia. Willie is an extremely social and academic 20 year old, serving as a JMU FROG this past summer. He is not registered to vote, but both of his parents are.

Meg Allen: Meg is a Junior JMU Business Major from Richmond, Virginia. This past summer, she worked for the state senator of Virginia. She is politically interested, but feels she could still be way more informed on the current election. Meg is registered to vote and plans to vote in the upcoming election.

Sophie Johnson: Sophie is Junior Architecture major at James Madison University. She was born and raised right outside Philadelphia. Sophie has never shown interest in politics but keeps up to date with the national news. She has expressed her concerns with our current president and

has mentioned her plans to vote in the next primary election. Her parents are extremely political and mentions the impact they had on her.

Brooke Townshend: Brooke was a IDLS Major and also received her Masters degree from James Madison University in 2017. She grew up and is currently living in Herndon, VA, where she is teaching 3rd grade at a public elementary school. Brooke has never shown an interest in the primary or local elections and has never voted before. She is considered one of our extremes because of the level of uninterest and uninvolved she has towards politics. She typically is on her phone a majority of her freetime but doesn't keep up with the daily news.

### **Interview Process:**

Madisen's interviews were conducted in Harrison Hall at 3:30pm and recorded with both a Nikon 1 camera and a USB microphone. Screenshots of the interviews will be posted below. Both people were asked the same set of questions along with a few follow up questions depending on their answers and different lifestyles.

Olivia's interviews were conducted on the third floor of Carrier in a quiet study room, and in my personal home. They took place on September 18th at 5:50pm, and September 19th at 5:30pm. I interviewed both students with my laptop, asking the same set of questions listed above.

Paige's interviews took place in person at her house at 3pm on Tuesday September 17 and lasted around 30 minutes. Her second interview took place over facetime on Tuesday September 17 around 6pm and lasted about 35 minutes.

### **Questions:**

#### Introductory Questions:

What is your name, age, and major?

Where are you from and where do you live now?

#### Voting:

Are you registered to vote?

What led you to choose to/not to register?

#### Political Influences:

How did your parents influence your stance on politics?

Who and what else influences you?

#### News and Information:

Do you stay informed in politics?

How do you get your news?

Where do you go to get news?

Which do you prefer: newspapers, TV stations, radio, apps, news alerts, or other? (explain other)

On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being very hard and 10 being very easy, how difficult is it for you to get current events?

*Digging deeper on Involvement:*

Do you want to be involved in the political process? How?

What do you know about the current 2020 Presidential Candidates?

*Technological Influences:*

How has technology helped you learn more about politics?

Where have you seen technology used in past elections?

*Follow up Questions for Flynn:*

Do you think you had a choice in registering to vote?

Do you use the TV to get your news?

Any other specific places, websites, or stations you prefer?

Why do you give it a 10?

Do you view bias as a negative thing in politics?

If you didn't have your computer, do you think you're motivated enough to go out and search for news?

*Follow up Questions for Julia:*

Do you think you tried to deviate from your parents?

How often do you think you and your friends discuss politics?

Have you ever used any other sources to get your news like TV, radio, or a website?

Where do your parents get their news?

Do you prefer social media for how you get your news?

Does having bias in your reading and current events bother you?

What would you like to do to try and be more involved if you could?

Why do you think that is?

Do you see technology as a positive or negative sort of thing on our political process?

If there was an app you could get with unbiased information and current political events, would you be interested?

Do you think you would be more inclined to participate in smaller elections as well if you have that app?

Since you're from New Jersey, do you vote absentee or in person?

#### Follow up Questions for Willie:

Do you want to become more involved with politics?

Would you sign up to vote on campus?

What kind of Social Media Platforms do you use for your news?

If there was an app you could get with unbiased information and current political events, would you be interested?

Would this app encourage you to vote in the upcoming election?

#### Follow up Questions for Meg:

Does time have a big impact on your ability to stay informed on politics?

Does being at home vs. being at JMU impact your political stance?

Why do you think our generation has become increasingly less involved in politics?

If there was an app to lay out the Presidential candidates and information about them, would you use it?

Do your friends influence your political opinion?

Why do you think you are so uninformed on the upcoming candidates?

#### Follow up Questions for Sophie:

You're from New Jersey, do you vote absentee?

How did you go about signing up for the ballot?

Why did your parents have such a strong opinion on elections?

Did they always disagree with each other?

Where did your parents get their information on candidates?

what do you think the problem is with current elections

Do you and your friends discuss politics? Do you feel like they know what they're talking about?

Do you have a way to access unbiased information on candidates?

If there was an app that gave you this information would you use it?

Follow up questions for Brooke:

What social media platforms do you use?

Which one do you spend the most time on?

How often do you download new apps?

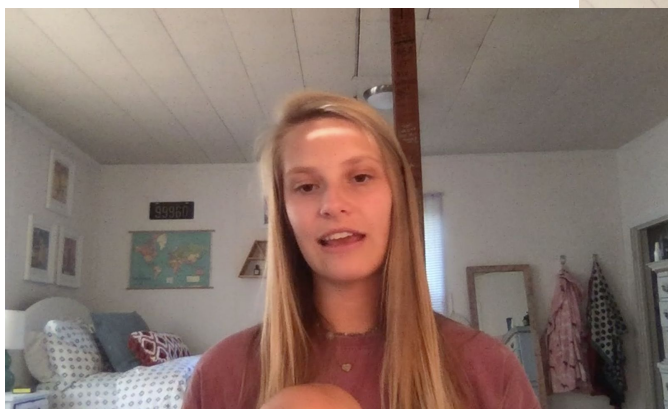
Do you and your friends ever discuss politics?

Why did you not vote in the last election?

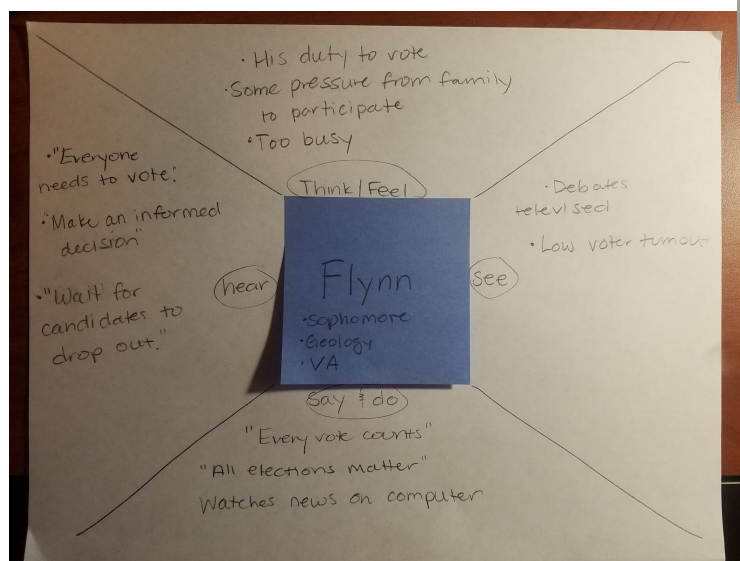
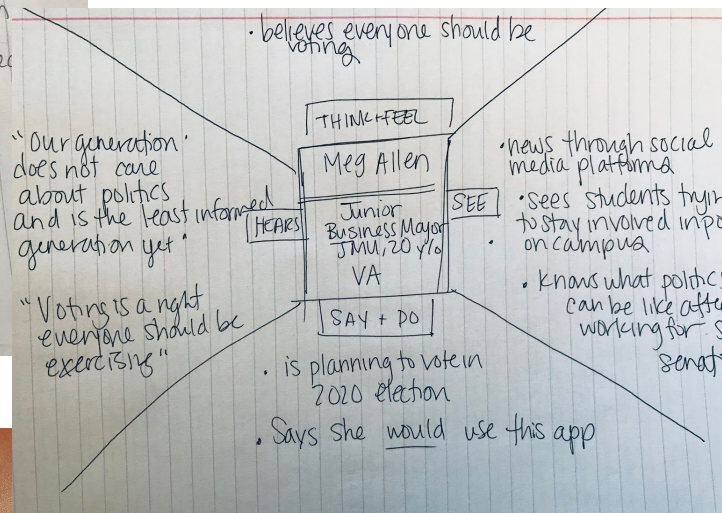
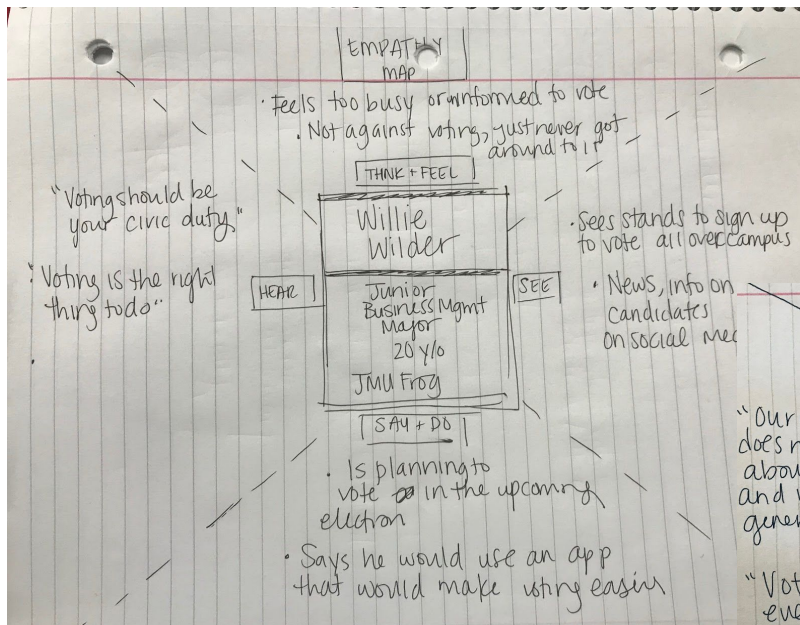
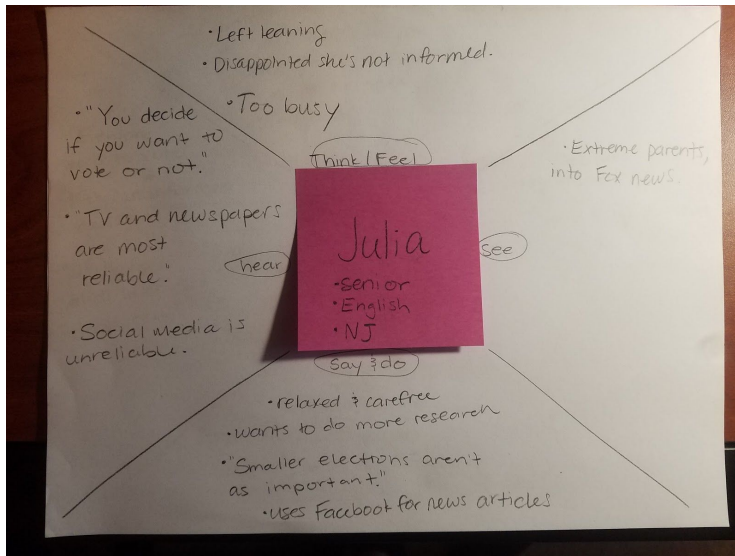
Do you think if you felt informed on the election you would go and vote?

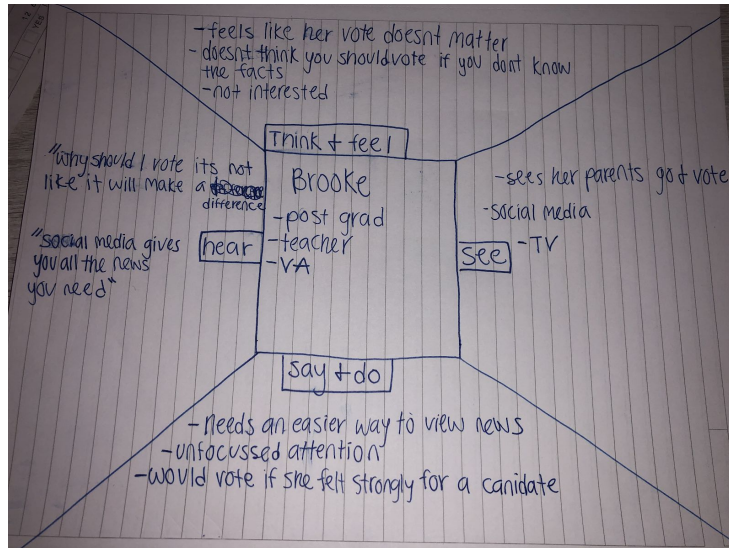
Do you have a way to access unbiased information on candidates?

## Interview Photos:

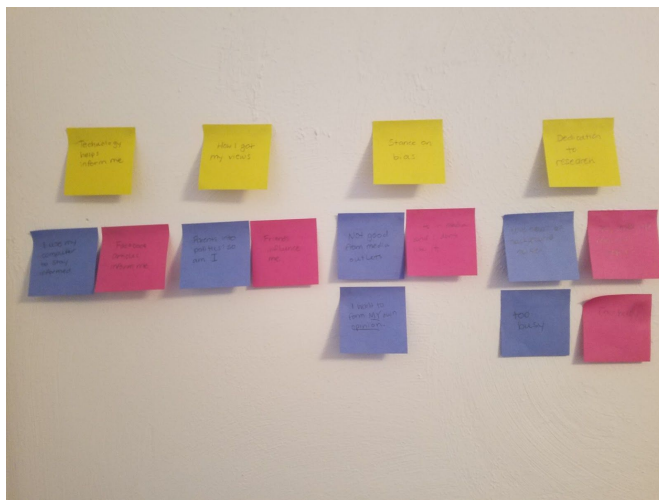








## Card Sorting:





Technology  
helps  
inform me

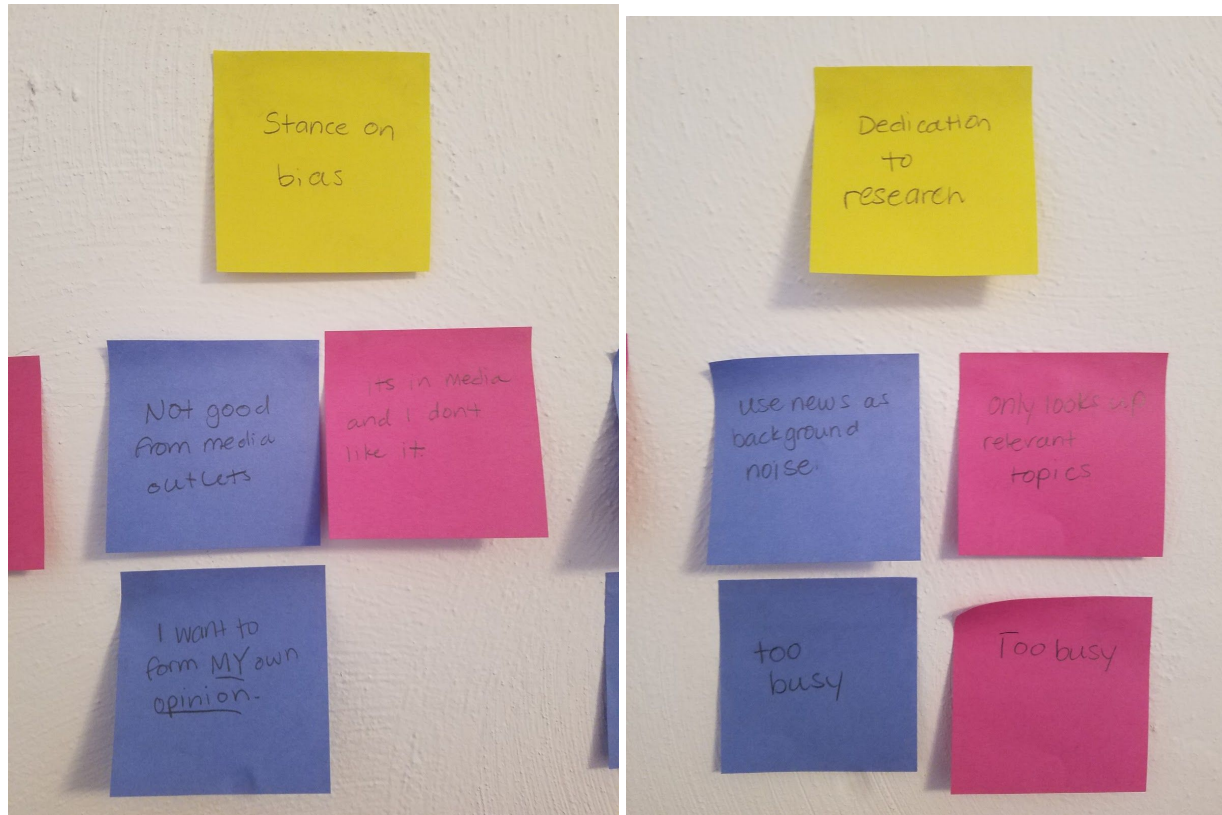
I use my  
computer  
to stay  
informed

Facebook  
Articles  
Inform me

How I got  
my views

Parents into  
politics: so  
am I

Friends  
influence  
me



Flynn and Julia both wanted to be more involved in the political process than they already are, regardless of their current involvement. They use technology to get their news but view it as not the best source. Flynn is a skeptic of media outlets and has to take the time to filter through statements made by news corporations in order to form his own opinions. Julia doesn't have the time to do her own research on the candidates running for office and holds some guilt about that. She wants to be more informed as well.

I coded the responses that Flynn and Julia gave me into four categories that I saw fit for their answers. These categories are "Technology helps inform me", "How I got my views", "Stance on bias", and "Dedication to research". The blue sticky notes indicate Flynn's responses and the pink are Julia's.

While these two people I interviewed have different views on what they think is important, overall they both want to see less bias in news and would like to do more research if they had the time.

When asked about an app that could help them filter through the bias and get straight to who these Presidential candidates are and what they stand for, both these people were interested. Flynn was hopeful about having an app for his phone because he uses it for a lot of other things, while Julia was hesitant in how possible it would be for the app to be a success.

After interviewing Willie, I think he became more cognisant that he would like to become more politically involved. I interviewed him while his friends were also in the room, those of which are all registered to vote. He informed me that he knows he should be a registered voter, but he just never really felt pressure to be politically involved. His parents are both registered voters, and he is starting to feel responsible to vote as his civic duty. Willie stressed that he doesn't get much of his news information from true scholarly sources, but mostly from social media. He said he finds out about most topics from Snapchat or Twitter. Since he is an avid phone user, I prompted him with a lot of questions about apps regarding voters.

Willie said that if there was an app that could clearly and concisely layout all of the candidates and their standpoints, he would use it. He claimed he is planning to get more politically involved, and an app that can quickly communicate his questions with unbiased information would be quite useful to a new voter.

Following my interview with Meg, I am confident an app like the one we intend to create will be very useful for young students like herself. Meg is a registered voter, and she stressed that she believes that voting is an important right, especially for women. Both of her parents also encouraged her to vote, in which she admitted she typically believes and agrees with the beliefs of her parents. Meg also explained that her news sources depend on her location. When she is home, her parents expose her to the local television news, but at school she depends on social media to keep her somewhat informed. This mainly includes Twitter and Snapchat. Meg is in the same boat as Willie, it is not that she doesn't want to stay informed, but the fact that she is hardly willing to go out of her way to be exposed to factual and unbiased information. She stressed that if this app existed, she would happily stay updated on candidates when she could.

After we created our empathy maps, I went back and read through all of the notes I took during my interviews. As I read I compared the answers from each interviewee and looked for similarities and differences. Similarities included high usage of social media, parental influence, and societal influences. While differences were found in level of political knowledge and views on the importance of voting. From there we split our findings into categories "Technology helps inform me", "How I got my views", "Stance on bias", and "Dedication to research" Brooke's answers being in blue and Sophie's in pink. Both Brooke and Sophie claimed they spent most of their free time on social media and use it to get updates on news. Sophie would use Twitter and other news outlets to get her information while Brooke spent most her time on Instagram. They both shared their concerns on the increasing amount of "fake news" and their inability to find unbiased information online. Brooke was almost unaware of all of the bias news around her, but as we discussed it more she became increasingly aware of the prevalence. Both participants listed their parents as a large influence on their views politically, Sophie's influence being to stay

informed and make a knowledgeable decision on candidates, while brookes influenced what party she follows. Brooke although not politically involved said she would be interested to find out more about the elections. They both agreed that there needs to be an easier and quicker way to get news/ knowledge on upcoming candidates, and that they would definitely try our app and encourage their friends to do so as well.

