26th ISOJ New Understandings of “Journalist” and “Journalism” in the Age of Influencers

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- Chair and presenter: Amy Mitchell, executive director, Center for News, Technology & Innovation (CNTI)
- Oliver Darcy, founder, Status
- Carlos Eduardo Espina, content creator and nonprofit director
- Liz Kelly Nelson, founder, Project C newsletter about journalism and creators
- Ben Reininga, fellow, Harvard University, and former global head of editorial, Snapchat

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Summer Harlow Our next panel, yes, give him another round of applause. Our next panel I'm particularly excited about, well I've been excited about all of these, because it comes on the heels of a long project that we did with UNESCO all about influencers and journalism. And if you haven't been to the Knight Center website, I'm going to plug our e-book. It's called *Content Creators and Journalists: Redefining News and Credibility in the Digital Age*, so check that out. And meanwhile, our next panel is “New Understandings of Journalists and Journalism in the Age of Influencers,” and our chair for this panel is going to be Amy Mitchell, who is Executive Director of the Center for News, Technology and Innovation. So let's welcome all the panelists to the stage.

Amy Mitchell Thank you all. We're very excited to have this discussion and such a great group of folks, and I have the privilege of being able to both be able to moderate and also do a presentation myself. I'm not sure how I scored that, but I get to kick off. So I serve as executive director for Center for News, Technology and Innovation. We've been around for about a year and a half now. We are a global research center that focuses on issues at the intersection of journalism and technology. My background is research. I come from a long, many years, of doing research, and I'm thrilled to be leading this organization. We just did a series of surveys, four country surveys, of the public in the U.S., Australia, Brazil, and South Africa, which were preceded with focus groups in each of these countries as well, and then an international survey of journalists, which were done through member organizations like Global Fund for Media Development, Internews, Online News Association, and many others. So I'm going to share a little.

One of the areas that we talked about in this survey had to do with defining journalism, what distinguishes journalism from news, and who can produce it today. So I'm going to kick off with a few findings from those surveys, which you can find on our websites. So first of all, why are we even talking about this? Well, we're in a new era in many ways, and there are a number of ways why thinking about who's in the bucket or not in the bucket, and how do we think about not just on the creation side of it, but the way the public thinks about it is important for a number of different reasons. And one is that in the policy arena, we are at a place where we are proposing and passing more legislation globally that relates directly to journalism and news. And in doing so, inherently have certain definitions inside the language of those legislation that determine who's going to be in that bucket or not in that bucket in terms of getting funding or other kinds of things that are being dealt with in these legislative efforts one way or another. In the digital realm, we're also seeing with technology advancements, there are more and more ways of creating, of distributing, of sharing, accessing news and information that makes putting boundaries around what journalism is or isn't harder than ever, with the public being a bigger part of this than ever in terms of voice, and sharing, and being creators of news and information themselves.

And we're also in an environment today, as a lot of this morning's conversations were about, where we are seeing increased attempts of government control over our news and information landscape.

So if we look first at some of the results from the public focus groups, what we see first is people feel pretty good about their own ability to get informed. People have a pretty significant level of confidence about being able to keep up with the things that they care about and make sense of those things. They also recognize the value of news organizations and institutions that are those that employ reporters, so we see very strong majorities that see this as playing a very important role in society today. And when you ask people about what distinguishes those producers of journalism, what are the kinds of traits that one associates, there's a lot of really positive traits that come up, including mission-driven, thorough, well-researched, committed to, et cetera. But at the same time, there's very solid sense across these publics that anybody can be a producer of journalism today. And we ask this in two different ways, both whether can people who are not journalists produce journalism, as well as can everyday people produce journalism. And you can see here quite significant margins saying anybody can do this. And many are acting on that belief. We ask about whether you turn more to organizations or to an individual to get informed, and solid majorities are saying they still turn to organizations first. But pretty significant minorities in each of the countries that we survey that are turning more to individuals as their mechanism for getting informed today. And we also see technology as a very central element of getting informed today, a very central role to the way people go about and being able to get informed. Now, one additional question we asked in the US just specifically, and so, sorry, I forgot about the slide. So that's all to say the news media is not grandfathered in to the digital era. There are a wealth of choices that people have and make on a day-to-day basis.

One specific question that we were able to add in the US survey asked about getting news and information from creators and influencers. We did ask about those two together in the same question, and hopefully that's one of the things we can talk about a little bit in the panel later on. But we found that about a quarter, 22% of US adults, are regularly getting news through content creators and influencers. And you add in the “somewhat” and you're, you know, at a pretty significant percentage of folks that do. And so we look in more detail at the 22% throughout the rest of these slides that I'm going to show you. And one of the things that's nice to see is this number that we got here is quite in sync with some of the other research that's been done in the recent months on a similar kind of question. So it's always good to see when research is coming to the same sorts of numbers.

First of all, this group is pretty comparable across ages and across education. It's not all young people. If you look at the overall demographic, according to the Census Bureau data in the United States, the profile mix is about on par with kind of where we are in the country. Now, the older populations, those who never get news from influencers and creators are more likely to be older. But when you look at those who are turning regularly, it actually cuts across pretty evenly across a number of these different areas. They are also quite engaged news consumers. When we ask how closely people are keeping up with issues and events, those who regularly get news from content creators and influencers are saying they do so very closely at equal levels or higher than other US adults. And they feel particularly confident in their abilities to get informed, and here they stand apart from other groups. And they're not alone in saying anybody can be a journalist. So it's also not just primarily those who turn more to content creators and influencers who feel this way. That sensibility cuts across all these different groups.

One other thing that stands out quite strongly is that this group of regular consumers of this kind of news and information do put greater importance on the role of technology in their regular day-to-day news and information consumption. And very particularly on speed. We asked about a number of areas that things that could matter sort of in the ways that you make choices about how to get informed, and I think there were seven in total. And this stands out particularly among those who rely more on news and information from content creators and influencers is the importance of speed. They also see their future developments in technology and AI as particularly good for themselves, so they're much more likely to feel positive about the future developments in this space and for journalists' ability to do their work.

So we're going to take a quick look at how journalists responded in some of these different areas, and some of the ways there may be gaps with the publics'. So journalists, and this was something we talked about a fair amount in the sessions today and some yesterday too, journalists seem to know there's a problem. Only small percentages feel like they do a very good job of communicating the value of journalism to the public today. They also pretty much agree that others can produce journalism. But they don't have a lot of faith in the public's ability to distinguish between journalism and news. Fifty-one percent think the public can't tell the difference between journalism and news, which may also be tied to how good of a job they think they do in explaining that. In fact, those two are quite correlated in the responses here. They also don't have much faith in technology. This was a quote that came from a convening we did in Brussels, but came up in some of the other survey questions as well. And so if we think about sort of two offerings that come through journalism, one is that factual, thorough, mission-driven content. That is coming through and seems to be an area that is recognized by the public. But that offering number two, that public service component, serving the public's needs and interests in the ways that they are getting informed is where there seems to be a question.

So how do we come together and bridge the gap in these different kinds of producers of journalism? So a few thoughts. Understanding, first, and then respecting the public's choices and the way they're going about getting informed and why. Collaboration across providers who care. Hopefully we'll talk more about this today as well. Getting smart about AI and technology more broadly, that is critical in newsrooms. It was a part of a number of the sessions yesterday, but really having facility with technology, more than just a tool I use, but to really understand the way it's embedded. Experimenting, and letting the public know that you stand by your work. Thank you.

And now I get to go back to my other role and introduce Liz.

Liz Kelly Nelson All right, thank you so much, Amy. That was great. So I am here to talk to you today about kind of the news ecosystem in 2025. And great, it's up. All right. So basically, I want to talk to you about a graphic that I made that tried to map kind of like what the available choices are for the consumers that Amy is talking about right now. Basically, just to give you a grounding in who I am, I'm Liz, I run something called Project C. I write a newsletter about creator model journalism. I, along with five other instructors, train journalists who are launching their own direct-to-audience platforms and, along with some others, do some research so that we can better understand this space. And in February of this year, I made this massive graphic, which I know you can't read, because it's not made for a big presentation in a massive room like this, but we'll come back and zoom in on this in a second.

But first I want to tell you kind of the reasons behind why I put this together. Basically because we're undergoing a lot of changes right now in where consumers are getting their information from, and Amy talked about that a little bit a few minutes ago. But we are in a space where things are rapidly changing, and we aren't keeping up necessarily with how they're changing. So it made sense for us to pause a little bit and look at the range of what it is that's out there available to the public right now and what the characteristics of each are. And the reason that I cared about this is because there was a lot of confusion, I think, as we started seeing more people who were labeled as news influencers that were showing up in places where journalists have traditionally been the only people who were reporting. This happened in the fall at both the RNC and the DNC, where we heard a lot of angst around creators showing up at both of those conventions. So I wrote a piece back in January called “Who Gets to be Called a Journalist in 2025,” where I went into that and what I thought was, in many cases, kind of a fear-based response from us, and I very much count myself, I've been in journalism for 30 years, to something new that was happening. So I tried to break that down, but it wasn't enough. So I started thinking about it a little more deeply.

It matters for a lot of different reasons. It really is important for us to recognize these independent voices that are bringing community-driven, personalized content to audiences in a way that they're really responding to, especially younger audiences, Gen Z and Gen Alpha audiences, who are really making a connection with these new kinds of creators, and something that this morning, Katherine Maher, championed as new interlocutors who are reaching audiences in a way maybe we haven't been able to in the same way. It's also a new path for journalists and aspiring journalists who can find a sustainable career in another way. A lot of journalism students who I talk to are very curious about this, like do I have to go into a newsroom or can I launch my own thing? The answer's not going to be the same for everyone, but we want to understand that better and be able to map out what this looks like. And then I really want our industry, and for funders, and other stakeholders to understand what the landscape is and how all of this works together.

So again, here's that big graphic. It resulted in these eight categories or kind of like larger categories, buckets, of the different types of news producers that are out there right now. And to zoom in a little bit, the eight categories for you are the established for-profit media, new new media, established mission-driven, new mission driven, worker-owned collectives, content creator model journalists, news influencers, and then all the way at the right, AI-generated news content. And for each of those in the graphic, we went through and put together the definition, the business model, examples of each to help you understand practically who these folks are, what the biggest characteristics are that define each of them, and the pros and cons.

So zooming in even more, what we're going to talk about today is not that entire set of eight buckets because I don't have enough time, but we're going to zoom in on to the reason why I created this in the first place. It was really to put in context content creator model journalists and news influencers and to understand how they fit into that larger news ecosystem so that we could start understanding better how to work together and how to understand how these different categories play with one another. So to zoom in to the definition for content creator model journalists and news influencers. I'm going to start on the right with the news influencers. We heard a lot about news influencers in some of the earlier panels today. You know, that was actually talked about a lot in the session that Evan Smith hosted with the folks around the White House access, right? And so news influencers are people who deliver takes on the news. They are not producing original content, and so you think about this maybe as like the opinion section of the internet,

right? And so there will be responsible people who are out there generating opinions and putting them out. There will be irresponsible people. So you can think about it from anywhere from your Joe Rogan's to like my aunt in Florida who really thinks that she knows something and she's going to let everybody on Facebook know about it, right. She is influencing somebody. Not me, but she's influencing someone.

And then on the left, content creator model journalists. These are independent journalists who are actually producing original work, right, and using core journalistic principles to build personal brands and connections with their audiences through newsletters, podcasts, video channels on either TikTok or YouTube channels. And they are actually using a lot of similar components of what news influencers are doing it, but in a much more responsible way. The business model for them is most often a solopreneur. There are some on the content creator side who are reaching a critical mass. You could call them the top 1%, right? And they're able to build a team around what they're doing. So Oliver recently brought an editor onto his team. That's great. And we'll increasingly have people who are supporting them in the work that they do. But most of them, what I call kind of like the massive middle of people who are making a living doing this as solo creator model journalists are doing it by themselves, right? So not only are they creating the content, they are also registering as an LLC. They are figuring out, you know, how they have to pay their taxes, estimated taxes, every year. They are finding out ways to market themselves, where they might never have had to do that before. They are becoming every single department of what would have been a news organization writ large. So some examples of folks just, again, I think I already kind of went through who the news influencers are, but some examples I wanted to call out of view of great content creator model journalists who are out there working today are people like Emily Atkin, who writes Heated; Taylor Lorenz, who recently left The Post to launch User Mag; Casey Newton with the amazing Platformer; Joss Fong and Adam Cole, two video creators who I worked with to launch Howtown on YouTube; Bisan Owda, who reports from Gaza and has been doing that for over two years now; Marisa Kabas, with the Handbasket, who was actually the first journalist to break the federal funding freeze story back in January, all by her lonesome; and Oliver, here to my right, with Status.

In terms of characteristics of these folks, they share a lot of characteristics over both the news influencers and content creative model journalist space. Very personality driven, very much focused on building direct audience connections, right, by connecting and engaging with their audiences. And really, the thing that I want to point out here with the content creator model journalists is that there is a growing segment of expert-led content creator model journalists, who are out there building direct-to-audience platforms that they would not have had access to before. So people like Katelyn Jetelina who writes Your Local Epidemiologist, Katelyn was not trained as a journalist but during the pandemic launched her newsletter, which has now become a huge resource for people and one of the first places that many turn to when they want to understand what is going on in kind of the health policy space.

Pros and cons, I think some of these are very obvious. News influencers are highly engaging. They are accessible. They understand how to ride the algorithm, like pro surfers, but that also comes with a con, which is that often what pops on those algorithms are things that are divisive, that are salacious, that are going to go viral, and those are not usually the things that we consider to be credible journalism. So, you know, for our content creator model journalists, they are often trying to compete in that same space and dependent on algorithms in many ways. However, they are trying to build audience trust in a much deeper way by using the tools of transparency and credibility to make sure that

they're building a loyal audience. Again, the cons for the content creator model journalists is that they are often working by themselves in doing this. And they have a lack of support for a lot of the things that they do in their back office, and also risk a lot of legal liability, safety issues. I've talked to several content creator model journalists who have been targeted for doxing, who have been stalked actually in real life, and who are very scared of publishing because they don't have access to liability insurance in the same way that somebody working at a news organization does. And these are all things that I think are a problem now. I think that they will continue to be in some way, but I think we are on the ground floor of starting to build support resources for these folks. And that's work that I'm very involved in and wanting to make sure that we are trying to create a safety net for folks who are out there working independently.

So this is not the end for the massive graphic that I showed you. We actually have plans to go back and layer in some more information. We want to do an audience overlay because those eight categories that I showed you make sense to us, the people in this room. The audience often doesn't make a distinction, as we heard from Amy, between what their source is. So we want to understand what are the ways that these different categories are resonating with audiences and where do we see similarities, where do we see divergences, and what can we learn from that? We want to do a trust overlay. We want to understand how each of these categories builds trust and credibility with their audiences. That's work that I've been engaging in with the Trusting News Project. We actually have a big research plan teed up to understand more clearly what the trust indicators are that are working for content creator model journalists. That'll benefit us in continuing to understand the space, but also benefit the industry as a whole as we learn what is actually really making a difference for audiences these days. And then we want to zoom in even further, right? Like we've got these eight categories and the ones that I'm most focused on are the content creator model journalists and the news influencers, but even within that, there are probably eight subcategories that we need to understand at a much deeper level. So there will be more to come, but I really appreciate you giving me the time to talk about it here today and would love to talk to anybody after the panel who would love to engage in this work with me. There is a QR code here that takes you to a link to the massive graphic. And it is also available on my website, and I will drop it in the Slack after the panel. Thank you.

Amy Mitchell Carlos.

Carlos Eduardo Espina Hello everyone, I hope you all are doing well. My name is Carlos Eduardo Espina, and after this last presentation, I don't really know what I am. But yeah, essentially I am a content creator, law school graduate, community organizer, non-profit director, many things, which as I have learned on social media, you can be all of those and more at once. So before I get into how I got started, I want to show y'all where I am right now and then work backwards. So this next slide you will see that in the past 365 days on my TikTok account alone, my videos have gotten 7.2 billion views, 87 million profile views, 33 million comments. And what's really interesting is if you look at my demographics, you would think, you know, it's all Gen Z people who watch TikTok, but the majority of my followers are actually older than I am. And next slide shows that among whatever we are called, news influencers, content creators, I am the most viewed on TikTok, having last month alone over 800 million impressions.

Now, like I said, I don't know how I got here. This started as a hobby during the pandemic. Long story short, my family came from Uruguay, my mom's from Mexico, my dad's from Uruguay, came to the United States when I was five years old, and grew up here like many

other people, didn't know what I wanted to do. I wanted it to be a professional soccer player, but that didn't work out. And while I was in high school, I got interested in just helping people out. I started tutoring non-English speaking kids at my high school, liked it, and I decided I wanted to study political science in college. So I went to Vassar College in New York, studied political science, did a lot of nonprofit work while there. And when I graduated in May of 2020, I had a job lined up at a nonprofit organization, but that fell through because of COVID. So while I was figuring out what to do, I said, hey, I'm going to just start, you know, sharing my life and the work that I'm already doing on TikTok. I started teaching citizenship classes, you know, the 100 questions, who was the first president, and all that. And people liked it, I don't know why. I think maybe they thought I was entertaining. They were learning something new. The point is people started following me and asking for more. And, you know, given the situation, I said well I can share what I think about the 2020 elections that are coming up, and I just started getting news articles that were being published all over and saying this is my opinion. I think this is good. I think this is bad. I support Biden because of this. I think that this is bad about Trump. And next thing you know, I have millions of people following me, wanting to know what I think about politics, what I think about immigration policy, what I think about everything going on in the world. And it's kind of like Superman. You get called into it, and you just have to do it.

So I started doing more and more of that. But never really thinking about the impact and the responsibility I had as a content creator. I just kind of saw the numbers keep going up. And then eventually, when the vaccine came out, we were able to start going out a bit more. I remember I was in Dallas at this pulga, it's like a Mexican flea market. I was just walking around, and all these people are looking at me. I'm like, oh, what's going on here? And then they started coming up to me like, oh, I follow you on TikTok. And that's when I realized, back then I had 1.5 million followers, that those followers aren't just a number. They're real people who rely on you, who look up to you, who in many ways are inspired by the work that you do. Fast forward to now, I have 12.3 million followers on TikTok, so you can imagine I go to restaurants all over the country and the kitchen staff comes out, and they invite me, and they take a picture, and they hang me on the wall. Like when you go to Vegas, and they say, Obama was here, or some other celebrity was there. So I'll go back and be, hey, there's my picture.

But yeah, throughout this whole process, I really try to think, why are people attracted to what I do? And I think it is precisely because you can be so many things at once. And it's not just that I give news, and information, and my views on things, but I also share a lot about my personal story. I help people out. So people don't even see me as just a journalist, news influencer, they see me as a little bit of everything. And I'll have people come up to me and say, oh, how's your mom doing? I miss seeing her in your videos. I haven't seen her in a long time. And they know everything about my life, which is really interesting, and I think doesn't tend to happen, you know, in traditional journalism. But yeah, so now, being the most followed Spanish-speaking or just news influencer in general, I get a lot of cool opportunities. As you can see here, the Pew Research Center did a study on who people look for news here in the United States, and I'm right below Ben Shapiro and Tucker Carlson, which is not ideal. Hopefully I can surpass them pretty soon. But I am above Donald Trump, which is interesting. So when they think of news influencers, I'm right above him. But yeah, I just see these things, and it's just so honestly like surprising to me because that was never my intention. What I guess just started as a hobby, sharing, hey, I think this is good and this is bad, has become to me being on the list with all of these people that you see that you probably know a lot about. And it has also led to opportunities like this, making a TikTok with Biden in the White House, speaking with Obama, getting to interview Kamala Harris before any traditional media got to, which kind

of led to some controversy, and most recently doing some videos with United States senators. In fact, yesterday I was in the US Senate doing some other videos and just talking to people there. So it has opened a lot of opportunities, and I think it has really shifted the way politics works in this country. Because now you have someone like a president saying, hey, instead of going, you know, to the New York Times, let me go to Carlos Eduardo Espina, and he'll reach a bigger audience and maybe he'll be a little bit more favorable to my viewpoints, which is something we're going to talk about here because I always try to, you know, make very clear I don't intend to replace anyone. There's always this debate about traditional media versus news content creators, and I don't really see it that way. I see that, you know, more of a political commentator. I'm not here to take anyone's job or surpass them. But I have realized that sometimes it's not even about how you view yourself. It's how others view you. And I do get, for example, when the New York Times did a story on me, they titled it, "The One Man Telemundo," and I have my friends up from Telemundo be like, hey, why did they do this? I don't know why they just put us against each other.

But I really do think it is important, you know, that these new media, content creators, whatever we are, work with traditional media because at the end of the day, we rely heavily on traditional media. One great example of this recently, when they started sending migrants to Guantanamo Bay, I got the pictures that Kristi Noem posted on her Twitter, and I put them on my Facebook. And I got a comment from a lady who said, hey, that's my brother, and he's not a gang member. He's not a criminal. So I messaged her, and I started looking into it. She sent me all this evidence. I was like, I don't know what to do with all this information, but this seems like a story. So I posted it on my TikTok. And then a day later, I get an email from a bunch of news sources, among them being the New York Times saying, hey, can you pass us that source, and we can do a story on it. A day later, it's in the New York Times, hey, innocent people are being sent to Guantanamo Bay. Two days later, in the White House, they're being asked about it, and it becomes this whole national debate, which in many ways started from a TikTok video that I shared on my social media. So when you look at it that way, did I just break news? Did I just break national news? Some would say I did. I think I was just collaborating with these partners that already exist because I also rely on them. Much of what I do is me getting an article from the New York Times, from CNN, Telemundo, Univision, and saying, hey, this is the news, and this is what I think about it. So it is a very interesting dynamic, and I think we're going to talk a lot more about it in the rest of the panel.

And like I said, when people think about, why do they follow me, why are they so interested in what I do, is because while I do give my political opinions, and I do talk about the news, there's another component, which is, I share a lot of personal details, and I really help people, and I'm really embedded in the community. So beyond social media, I have a non-profit organization, and I help a lot of my followers with different things. Some of these images you see on screen is a backpack drive that we did in Houston. We gave out $20,000 to a family, so they could buy school supplies for their kids. I bought a van for one of my followers who has two kids with disabilities who are in wheelchairs. The third image is a kid that follows me. He went viral for working with one leg. He was hopping around carrying, you know, all this construction material. They sent me that video, and now we're able to fund him to get a prosthetic leg. And then this most recent one. I don't know if I'm even able to show a little bit of it. I don't know how that would work. But essentially, with all the ICE raids going on, a couple days ago, one of my followers contacted me and said, hey, my son, he's 20 years old. He's been detained by ICE for a month now. He has a $3,000 bond, but we don't have a way to pay for it. His mother, unfortunately, is blind, and she's the only one who he really has in his life, and no one could pay for the bond. So

I paid for his bond, and then I went to pick him up at the detention center. We made a whole video about it, and now he's with his family again. But the point of all this being is, I do these things that are not necessarily news, but many people see it as they are. But it does create some sort of attraction towards me that perhaps doesn't exist. You know, you don't see CNN anchors going and paying their followers' immigration bonds. Not saying that's what they should be doing. It's just we're working in very different, you know, realms. I have a different, I guess, criteria as to what I put out there about myself and the work that I do. But yeah, I think it's really interesting just seeing how people react and that's really one thing I try to figure out because while I do not consider myself a journalist or you know even someone who's breaking news, if people see me that way then in many aspects I have the responsibility to do everything that traditional journalism would do, which is to fact check, to make sure you're not just spreading outright misinformation. But at the end of the day, it's very complicated because other content creators are not following the same standards. We see a lot of people who just go on social media and just lie, and it's good for engagement, it's good for views, so how do you balance being engaging and being viral while at the same time being responsible? So yeah, that's the end of my presentation. I think I'm two minutes short, so thank you.

Ben Reininga Hey everyone, thank you very much to my co-panelists. Carlos, tough act to follow. But, yeah, my name is Ben Reininga. I spent about the last five years as head of editorial and news at Snapchat. Prior to that, I did a bunch of journalism in a bunch of different contexts, and then left last fall to take a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard, where I have been looking into news creators and how they connect with audiences. Or, as my husband says, a fancy excuse to watch a lot of TikToks.

And yeah, so I'm sort of going to present a couple of ideas that I've been working on here. It starts a little depressing, but then gets a little bit more optimistic. Obviously, just looking at the landscape from 30,000 feet, we're seeing a big loss in recent engagement from legacy news providers. By legacy news, I just mean entities that started before the current kind of technological distribution space. And along with that, we've seen a massive shift, that attention and that time and that engagement didn't disappear, I would argue that it's moving. And one of the places it's very clearly moving is to social media, where you see huge growth among creators, these sort of peer-to-peer spaces, short video, that are really doing interesting and new things in terms of how to connect with audiences. And so the sort of point of discussion where I'll present some ideas is that I think within these new ways of connection, there are some really interesting potential lessons and things to explore for how all of us can think about better reaching and connecting with audiences, both literally in terms of putting journalists forth as creators or working with creator communities, but also more broadly in kind of mimicking some of the forms and modes that are driving that connection.

So this is the depressing part. We'll zip through it quickly. News is obviously suffering a precipitous decline in both reach and revenue. This has been going on for quite some time. And along with that, we're seeing big declines in trust. In 2024, at least according to this survey data, we hit a pretty grim milestone, which is more Americans saying they have little or no trust in the media than those who have a great deal. And news avoidance is also soaring. Does this animate? Look at that. 43% of Americans say they actively avoid the news. And I wanted to pause for a second and just talk about some of the reasons why. None of this is obviously exhaustive or conclusive. Most of this comes from a recent Reuters Digital News Initiative study, but there's a lot of great literature around this. And when you look at that literature, you see usually some mix of the following, which is that news creators are elite, which is to say disconnected from my life, don't understand who I

am and where I come from, overly complex, life's too busy, I don't have time, I can't understand this, biased, which really just means that I doubt the person delivering the news or have a suggestion of an agenda, political agenda, economic agenda, it's depressing, it just makes me feel hopeless, it makes me feel terrible, or irrelevant, sort of similar to elite in the sense that it's just saying it's not for me. It doesn't have anything to do with me or my life.

So with this as the sort of grim one side of the coin, we're seeing a really interesting and huge attentional shift. These social platforms are hugely growing. I've got some usage stats and also some trend lines up there, but I was also just recently reading some stats saying that the average American spends about two and a half hours a day on a social media platform. And if you look at teenagers, it's 4.8, which means you can safely assume that other than maybe going to school or sleeping, this is the largest sort of attentional space for a huge generation of Americans. I should say these are mostly American stats, but I think broadly apply in other markets as well. And yeah, so along with that, you're seeing something of a trust and engagement shift. This is kind of a messy and complicated chart, but if you look particularly at the 18 to 29-year-old that left bucket, you'll see that the trend lines for who puts primarily their trust in social media over national news. And in this survey, they were presented as a dichotomy of which of these two do you trust more, you'll see those trend lines are pretty close to crossing. And even in the other cohorts, they're trending in a direction where you'll see that X moment in a number of years.

So, I'll talk for a second about my work at Snapchat. Snapchat reaches about 450 million people every day, 800 million monthly, only a small platform if you consider the Metas and the TikToks of the world. Pretty huge number of people, and they're predominantly really young. It's mostly 13 to 24-year-olds. And when I was there, we did a ton of surveys, focus groups, dug into the data, and just found repeatedly over and over again that the audience would tell us that one of the things they really wanted from us was more news and better news. News that they found more relevant, news that they found more engaging, and news that did not feel was trying to mislead or misinform them. Real hunger. And you could tell from the questions that there was also a knowledge level. They knew what they were talking about. And so it was my job as head of news to go out and talk to the great news producers of the world, big and small, and figure out how to bring that content onto the platform to try to meet that need. And you know, we worked with some really amazing creative partners and people who did some really cool stuff, but we did very often also encounter kind of a trope that a place like Snapchat is not a place for news. Sort of that the kids are a little vapid, you know, news is broccoli, they only want their cake. They just care about their TikTok dances. Perhaps you've heard things along this line, perhaps you think things along the line. But I got really interested in this, because it sort of was representative of like a supply-demand mismatch. There was sort of a translation gap. You had a huge engaged cohort saying they wanted more news, and then you had the people who were making the news saying they were having a hard time reaching them. And I think that's a really interesting place to put some thought and try to figure out kind of what's going wrong there or, you know, where that mismatch is.

So we did a ton of experiments at Snapchat to try to kind of crack the code on this. And I'll talk just briefly about one today. So Good Luck America is one of the very few shows that Snapchat actually produces. That was done by my team, and it's for years been a pretty traditional news show in that it's hosted by that guy, Peter, former CNNer, very kind of traditional journalist. And he would do a three to five minute daily news show breaking down topics of the day, you know, from a script, in a studio, lights on the ceiling, maybe a little bit of makeup on his face. Pretty similar to kind of a linear TV broadcast on Snapchat.

And we had several shows like this. And what we did was experiment with taking the hosts of these shows, kind of plucking them out and setting them up as creators, as independent entities, like on the right, under their own accounts. It was a pretty controlled experiment as far as you can do these sorts of things. Same guy doing the same news on the same day, but doing it very much using the production modes and sort of stylistic formats, the vibes, so to speak, of a social media video. So they were shooting mobily, talking into their phones, using the creative tools and editing tools of a platform like Snapchat, speaking unscripted, often filming in kind of intimate and informal spaces. And we were really surprised to see how quickly that second product, that Peter product, started to rival or even beat the audiences and the people it was reaching and also sort of the depth of engagement it was getting compared to a show like Good Luck America, which had had a several year head start in terms of building audience and also just a lot of institutional support along the way.

And so what I took from this is that if you look at these platforms as sort of communities with their own cultures, I think very few creators are setting out with deliberately articulated audience connection strategies. What I think rather is happening is kind of like infinite monkeys and infinite typewriters except it's infinite creators and infinite iPhones where you just have tons of people making tons of videos, watching each other, talking to each other mimicking each other, and sort of coalescing on a set of norms, styles, production modes that are proving really effective in connecting with audiences. And I think it's really interesting. This is not conclusive, but I think if you line some of these sort of commonalities of a lot of social media videos up with those reasons why people don't trust news, you see kind of a really interesting back and forth, right? If you think the news is too elite, a lot of creators are shooting in very infinite, rather intimate and informal spaces. I heard a creator on a panel the other day say, you know, it's hard to believe that someone is part of a cabal of coastal millionaires if you can see the dishes in their sink behind them. And I think there's some real truth to that. You know, if people don't like the news because it's too complex, you have a lot of creators presenting in a very simple, colloquial, and conversational way. You know if you're worried about bias, as Carlos was talking about, interestingly a lot of creators sort of show up with their full selves. You know where they're coming from. You know what their POV is. And you'll often also see a lot of process. Folks sort of laying out how they got to their conclusions, sort of transparency in that sense. You know, these spaces tend to be playful, even when they're dealing with more serious subject matter, it's often a lot less self-serious than some traditional journalism. And it can also be more diverse in terms of identity, in terms of the ages, in terms of the geography of these creators, and I think that can really cut against these notions of irrelevance because ultimately you're just looking at a person like you.

I can talk about this last bit for like an hour, but I'll leave it there for time. But really where I want to kind of lead it is I think correctly construed, this could be a really interesting sign of optimism set against some of the things that I was talking about at the beginning, which is to say there's a crew of people out there who have really unlocked a very interesting way to connect with audiences. And I think it's really interesting to explore and think about how we can bake that into journalism, again, whether that's literally, you know turning your journalists into creators or whether it's just sort of more broadly thinking about some of those principles, and how they might fit into reporting wherever you do it. Cool. Thanks

Amy Mitchell These are great. There's already so much information to be thinking about and so many ideas. Oliver gets the first tough question here.

Oliver Darcy Oh, great.

Amy Mitchell But really, it's just talk about your journey. There's been, you know, as you all know Oliver comes from a background of more traditional, institutional journalism, CNN, and is now doing your own thing. I'd love to hear about kind of your story, how you made the transition to getting to where you are, both from the kind of content, storytelling, reporting side of things as well as the business side, which is clearly a component of all of this as well.

Oliver Darcy Yeah. So, I was at CNN for seven and a half years, and I'm a media reporter. So, you know, I report on everyone in this room. I hope I haven't written anything, you know, offensive to anyone here. But, and, I loved my time at CNN. I just was looking around the landscape, and the landscape is now conducive to people like me, I think, succeeding in what is generally known as the creator economy. Ben, you were talking about should news organizations make their journalist creators, I would argue all journalists are creators. Everyone creates content, and that's basically what a creator is. I think that the trick is going to be, can those creators, the journalist creators, succeed in the creator economy? And I think that's where the news, the traditional establishment press, is going to have some difficulty if they're going to keep trying to do things the old school way, because I just don't think it's going to work. And anyway, I digress, but I was working at CNN, and the newsletter economy, I was writing Reliable Sources there, and the news letter economy has really grown in recent years with the advent of different publishing platforms. I'm on Beehiiv, there's also Substack, there's Ghost, and so I decided to bet on myself and take the plunge, and I thought, I think I had an audience that would follow me to my own independent venture. And so I launched Status. It covers the fourth estate, the big entertainment platforms, Silicon Valley, DC politics, kind of at the intersection of all of that, where they all collide, power really, the power corridors of America, and I've found success doing that.

And I think there's a couple reasons why that might be so. One, I think we're very authentic with audiences, and so we don't sugarcoat things. One of the problems, I'd say, with legacy press these days is they don't call things for what they are. They don't use plain language often. You know, someone like Dan Bongino, for instance, who is a right-wing extremist, a conspiracy theorist, almost never gets referred to like that in the traditional press for whatever reason. I think a lot of people are afraid to be considered partisan and, you know, I'm not. And so we refer to Dan Bongino as a known disinformation artist, a conspiracy theorist, an extremist because that's what he is. Unfortunately, a lot of legacy news organizations refer to him with sanitized language, like maybe conservative commentator, which does not cover it. And I think people gravitate towards Status because we are a no-spin zone. We don't sugarcoat things. We tell it how it is. But the real reason I think it works, and I think this is where some people, you know, it's going to be more difficult than I think people understand, is we are trying to deliver new information every single night to audiences. So it's a scoop-driven model. And information locked behind a paywall translates eventually into subscribers. I think one of the worrisome signs I see right now as there's this big discussion of people going independent, it's really, really tough to convert people from a free subscriber to a paid subscriber. Online fandoms do not equal paid subscribers. It just does not work like that. There are a lot of hot takes out there, all over TikTok, and Instagram, and X, and Blue Sky, and people frankly don't pay for that. They pay for information. And so I think when you're delivering high quality information, I apply the same standards I had at CNN to the work that I do at Status, I think that's what compels people to pay. And I'm really actually, to some extent, worried or concerned that people think that launching a Substack or a Beehiiv newsletter or whatever it may be is a get rich quick scheme. That, "Oh, I saw that Oliver's thing is doing really well. I can do that

too, and it's going to be like that." One, I work, like, probably 100 plus hours a week, maybe more. I mean, I'm just always kind of working from literally 7 a.m. until midnight 1 a.m. every single day, so there's a lot of work that goes into it. But we're also working to deliver scoops every single night, if I can. And I would be, I am a little concerned that I think that people that maybe are used to filing two stories a week, three stories a week at a newspaper, and there's no, maybe it's not a scoop-driven model, or they're used to just writing columns. I'm not, you know, it's going to be interesting to see if those outlets or those Substacks can survive in terms of providing enough money for these people to live. And so I think that's a little worrisome. It's not, maybe, as easy as it's been made out to be when you read stories in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal about the success of a limited few. I mean, I think there's a reason that it's a limited few right now. So anyway, I digress, I don't want to get too on.

Amy Mitchell Quick follow-up. You say "we." Can you share who the "we" is, and what was the kind of the run-up stage from sort of starting to where you thought, "Okay, this this is going to work."

Oliver Darcy Well, the other we is my editor, Jon. Jon Passantino is now part of Status. He used to work as the editor of media at CNN. And I've known Jon for, I think, a decade or so, and so we just gel really well together. And so I knew when I was going on my own, if I could hire someone, Jon would be the guy. Because, you know, we have a good mind meld, and I hope to hire more people. I really intend on growing this into being a business that covers the power quarters of America in a way I just don't think is being delivered by the traditional press. But I would say, I've never been shy about this, it was an absolutely terrifying thing to leave a well-paid corporate job with benefits at CNN with huge distribution pipelines and go independent. I mean, when I was packing up my office at CNN, I was thinking, what am I doing? You know, I hope this was the right thing to do. And I was highly confident that I could succeed, and that I would succeed. And I was willing to bet on myself, but it's not it's certainly daunting and, you know, it's rocky. It's kind of like like leaving a spaceship or whatever and when you're leaving orbit, it's like, you know, it's a little rocky. It's not like the easiest thing to do, and I would say that I was again confident from the beginning that it would succeed. But, you know, you always have these doubts, and like they're always some lows and setbacks. You know, now I'm in a much better position seven months after doing that. And I hope, you know, in two years we'll be talking, and we'll have a bunch of people working at Status, and it'll be a different story. But I'd say I guess after a few months it was pretty clear it was succeeding. At least it was going to be making, you know, a decent amount of money where I could live. But I'm thrilled at the response that we've gotten and that I can now hire others.

Amy Mitchell Carlos, how many hours do you work a day?

Carlos Eduardo Espina Well, I never really stop working. I'm just always like, it's not like a traditional job, you know, you're clocking in at nine and then you're out at five. It's like, I wake up, and I'm scrolling in my phone and saying, hey, you know what's going on? What can I talk about? And just constantly throughout the day, I'm on my phone, or I'm reading my messages. I'll go play soccer, and someone's like, "Hey, did you see this thing?" And I'm like, "No, I didn't. What happened?" They tell me, and then I'll stop to go make a video. So it's just like you're always in work mode, and I like it because I can do stuff that I want to do but then for example getting off this panel if I get to the car and there's something I'll just film there in my car ,and that's the advantage of being able to do stuff on social media. I really don't depend on like some huge production. I can really do stuff from anywhere, obviously like you have to have certain conditions. It can't be too noisy and all of that, but

at the end of the day, I am working you know basically the entire day. Since the beginning of this year, I've probably been making 15 videos a day on average, around a minute to two minutes each. And it just, yeah, it's like rapid fire, whatever is going on, and I think that's what people like about social media. As soon as something goes up, you're able to, you know, talk about it and react to it. I don't have to send it to an editor to then check it or someone else. It's just me doing everything, and I get to decide what gets posted, what doesn't get posted. But yeah, there really is no breaks because the difficult thing is, since there is no one else, if I want to go on vacation, there's no one who takes my spot. The people who take your spot are other content creators who want to be where you're at, so if you disappear for a week or two weeks and something big is happening, they're like people, either assume you don't care about the issues. So they're, like, “Oh, Carlos, I thought you cared about this, but now it's happening and you're not talking about it. So clearly you don't care about it.” Or two, you know, people are still going to find that information, and they're going to look elsewhere. I think I'm pretty unique in the sense that there really isn't much competition in my area. Because I do everything in Spanish, so it's a very uncrowded area, at least on social media, but it does require you to always be on top of everything. So yeah, that's kinda how I work.

Amy Mitchell Do you have a business model?

Carlos Eduardo Espina Well, my business model is mostly just the views, and then, for example, like, which goes back to like not doing news stuff, like TikTok Shop launched about a year and a half ago, and I was like, “Oh, I like that.” You know, started testing out, and they would send me products that have like nothing to do with anything, like teeth whitening stuff and hair products, because people like my hair and other things, and I would try them and I'm like, “Hey, I liked this.” So let me make a video saying, “Hey, I got this thing from TikTok Shop, and I like it.” People will buy it or those kinds of things. Or I'll have like collaborations. Like attorneys want to collaborate with me or banks want to collaborate with me, or remittances services. So that really is like the model, mostly collaborations, the views, and then some other stuff, you know. Some creators do like merch and that kind of stuff. I don't really do much of that. But there is a lot of different revenue sources. But I didn't start making money on social media until I had maybe two million followers. So it's like, you were mentioning earlier, getting to that point where you're able to actually live off of it. It can be very complicated, and many people can take that jump. I was fortunate that at that point I was in law school, and I had a full scholarship. So I was able to, you know, kind of live and do my content without making much. But once you do make it past that threshold, you do realize that life is pretty nice doing what you want to do on your own terms.

Oliver Darcy But that's a pretty incredible thing you're saying, after two million followers it took. And so when we talk about, again, when I was saying online fandoms don't necessarily translate into subscribers or success monetarily, I think that's a really interesting data point. Two million followers. There are not that many journalists that have two million followers. And I think what ends up getting people to pay and subscribe, and it's totally different than having a big follower account, is often original journalism and scoops and information that you have to pay to get. Otherwise, there are a lot of people out there who are providing, you know, takes and analysis, and a lot of it, most of it's free, to be honest, and it's on TikTok or on X or wherever, so.

Amy Mitchell Liz, how do you talk about that sort of the business side, and the decision making, and how to post and when, what kind of content decisions to make, et cetera.

Liz Kelly Nelson Yeah, that's actually more than half of what we teach the folks who come through the Going Solo workshop is how to do everything that you didn't learn in journalism school or in a newsroom, right? So from the jump, when people get into the course, we start telling them to think about themselves as founders, right? You know, we know that they're coming in thinking of themselves as journalists, but when you put yourself into that founder's mindset, you're suddenly thinking about, I'm the person who's responsible for so many different things. So like from the jump, we want them to have that fundamental change in how they are identifying themselves and their role in their own success. We also offer one full course that we call Financial and Emotional Resilience. We want them to understand what they're getting into. I mean, Oliver and Carlos aren't wrong. This is not a get rich quick scheme. So we take them through a workshop where they understand exactly how much it costs them to live their lives, right? Like to go through and actually make a budget, and it's like shocking how many of us haven't done that ever, especially those of us who have had full-time jobs. We've never really had to do it at that level. And then to think about what do you really need, right. So that you can come up with on a monthly, on an annual basis, what it is that you need to live the life that you want to live, pay your bills, put a little bit away, go on a nice vacation, put a kid through college, whatever it is that's important to you, and to understand what it is that you're going to have to make to support that. And to think about, can you really, do you see a path for yourself being able to do this? I mentioned emotional resilience as well. I mean, there's a lot of stress that comes with this. Oliver's talking about working 90, 100 hours a week. Carlos is talking about like, you know, going and doing a TikTok from his car after this. It's a stressful life. This is not something that if you are in a newsroom and you're thinking, I'm going to go take the easy path, like this is not the easy part. It's just a different path.

And then finally, we take our students through a deep grounding in the various revenue models that are possible. Newsletters are one model. TikTok and short form video is another. YouTube is an entirely different model, and understanding what the options are for them. And it's not always just sponsorships, advertising, subscriptions. There are grants, there are angel investors, traditional VCs that are starting to invest in this space now, so there's a whole mix. And for the folks that come through our program, we want them to understand that whatever the mix of revenue is that you choose, you need to be the person who goes out, and hunts it, and kills it, and brings it in. At least until you're able to hire a staff or, you know, if you start getting to a higher level in the game, you have agency of managers, that sort of thing. But again, you know, the folks that are working at Oliver's level and above, like, is a very small percentage. Like, as I referenced in my presentation, there is this massive middle of people who aren't making that much money doing this. I would also argue there are a lot of people working in traditional newsrooms who aren't making that much money either. Okay, so choose your poison.

Amy Mitchell Yeah, that's a really interesting point. Let's talk about in your time at Snapchat a little bit more, Ben. I thought the experiment that you put up was really fascinating. I thought that was really interesting. And thinking about, because one of the other things I want to talk a little about is how do these two come together? I mean, I'm curious about whether Carlos does research to do his reporting. I know you don't call yourself a journalist. There's, you know, that sort of really mission-driven, the rigor, that element of thoroughness that people really rely on. And Carlos has talked about partnerships. How does that work? And if a part of this, if you think about where journalism sat in the universe of the Snapchat content, I'd be interested in where, what did you guys think of as journalism? How did that connection in trying to move somebody from the traditional way they thought about telling their story to really how the culture in this space works as a journalist.

Ben Reininga Yeah, cool, I think that's a very interesting question. We would often encounter, particularly talking to young audiences, that some of the distinctions between sort of hard news and soft news, or what you might think of as entertainment news, weren't as crisp. I think those are in your head if you grew up reading a newspaper or a website where information is kind of organized into verticals. And obviously, if your primary mode is just a social feed, you know, it's all undifferentiated. It just comes as it comes. So I think often when our audience was talking about, you know, news, they really were talking about information about their world, like things that help them understand what's happening, and that could be, yeah, sort of from what you'd think of as high or low.

And in terms of what we would talk to when we talk to folks about how to exist on the platform, and these were mostly big established journalistic entities, you know, I would always kind of, we'd always try to think about like, I think there's, this is sort of an interesting space to think about what your journalistic non-negotiables are and sort of define those. Because if you're clear on factual rigor, transparency, and fairness, you can hold those close but then maybe also use that as an opportunity to look at some of the other things that might be getting a little conflated with those principles, which is to say, I think having correct information is important. I'm not sure that presenting that information as a foregone conclusion rather than sort of showing your work and explaining how you got there, like that bit really matters. I think it's good to have done the research so that you can speak authoritatively on a topic. That sometimes seems like maybe it gets confused with like an authoritative tone of voice or a voice from the heavens, an all-knowing sort of journalistic presence. And those I actually think are different things. Like I think you can hold firm to the former, sort of keep those core principles, but also work on new and creative ways in terms of those modes, which I think is like what the point of the Snapchat experiment was, which is that the same good, rigorous information presented through a different sort of style and mode can reach people more effectively, and you're not really compromising on any of those journalistic principles. You're compromising on sort of a more aesthetic, vibe sensibility of that if that makes sense.

Amy Mitchell One of the things you talked about was, you used the phrase in asking what people think about news as, but really that it's the information and the issues that they care about in their world. And we tend to, whether we're researchers or other folks that are in the news industry, think about the labels we use are local versus national or international, or it's a very topic-specific, and you talk, Carlos, about you cover immigration issues, you do politics, you talk about things in your own life, and a lot about your community. Are the labels of what kind of content your bucket of news falls into, is that changing as well? Should we be thinking about those kinds of labels differently when we're talking to the public? I'd be interested in anybody's thoughts on that.

Carlos Eduardo Espina Yeah, I can share. I think one of the reasons I've had so much success on social media is because I found I know my audience so well that I automatically, I'll read 100 news articles, and I'll say, of these 100, these are the five that they care about. So people feel like I'm doing that work of sorting things out for them, and I'm only going to post about something people actually care about. And when I think about how accessible that is, for example, my audience are many people, middle class, lower middle class, you know, who have maybe two, three jobs. You don't have time anymore to go home and turn on Telemundo or Univision, and watch for an hour or two, and say, hey, what here might interest me? You'll say, hey, I'll go to watch Carlos, and in five minutes I'll be caught up on everything relevant that matters to me, and then I can go spend time with my family, or be with my friends, or, you know, the limited free time that I do have. Or you

can even watch me on the job. You just go on my TikTok, and you'll see, oh, you know, Carlos did the work of finding the interesting things that I care about, and now I can just go watch him. So, you know, really focusing, in my case, on very specific topics. Like, no one's going to go to my page to find out about medicine because I don't know anything about it and because I don't know what people want to know about those topics. So I think, as a content creator, finding your area and one that you are experienced in because many people think, oh, content creators are just people who get a phone and start talking about stuff. But I went to college. I have a degree in political science and Latin American studies. I went to law school. So it's not like I'm talking about things I have no idea in either. I know there's people who are doing that, who are just talking the talk, but people also in a way see me as someone who is knowledgeable on the topic, who knows experts. Now, even when it comes to politics like hey, if I have a question, I can text the Senator's staff and be like, hey, is this really going on? And then people have that trust in me. So I think really focusing in and building that credibility with your audience, which might not look in the traditional sense, but people still see it that way. So I think that's really important.

Ben Reininga Yeah, I would just add to that that I think in a world where, you know, as a lot of stats have come up, you know, some 43% of people are actively avoiding the news or whatever dire statistic you want to use, it's interesting to just think about like not letting perfect be the enemy of the good, or sort of the more information is better than no information. And maybe trying to relax a little bit some of the hierarchies of there being sort of more important like broccoli stories and sort of less important. And really just thinking about ways to connect people with the information that they care about. You know, in the old local news paradigm, I feel like people loved their local newspapers, maybe because they did big investigations about corruption in City Hall, but they also did restaurant reviews and covered the local high school soccer game, and there was real utility and some soft stuff. And all of that sort of came together to forge that connection and that relationship. So, yeah, just another piece of that.

Amy Mitchell I'm going to ask one more question, and then I'm going to turn to all these great questions from the audience. I'm going to use the T word, which is trust. We've seen slides on trust. There's been a lot that's been talked about on trust, and we constantly see low numbers when we're asking people about trust. But at the same time if you look at the numbers, and I did a lot of this data collection over many years, constant low numbers. It's really just interesting to see the social media uptick at this point in time. But people saying they don't trust what's on social media for news. They don't trust it as a source of news, but are still going there. Is trust the right word? Do your followers trust you? Do the people who subscribe to you, trust you? Is it relevance? What is it that is bringing them to your information and the content that you're producing day in and day out to come back to? Is there another way that we should be thinking about this beyond trust?

Oliver Darcy Well, I think our subscribers trust us, and you know the things that I report end up bearing out. And so I think that helps add to the element of trust where people know that okay, "Well, he reported that you know MSNBC's chief was considering resigning, and then two months later she's gone." Right? And so there's clear proving that the scoop that we reported, which they denied on the record, was actually accurate. And I think in terms of trust, I don't think, I think it's really difficult in today's information environment to have broad trust where Republicans and Democrats all find this one source of information to be a credible source of information. And I think news organizations are somewhat diluting themselves to think that that's a business model or plan that they should aspire to. I think the idea of a shared reality has been ruptured largely by Donald Trump, but also by just the new media ecosystem that's been disrupted

by technology and other things. And so, you know, when we look at news trust being down, I think it depends on like, who are we asking? And like, you know I think like, a lot of people on the right trust Fox News quite a bit, and a lot of people on the left do not. And a lot of people on the left trust the New York Times, and a lot of people on the right do not trust the New York Times. And I have a hard time thinking we're going to exit this world, or into a world where everyone trusts the New York Times, and everyone trusts the Associated Press, and everyone trusts CNN. It just seems like that's a long gone world. And news executives unfortunately, I think, don't want that world to be gone, even though it is. And so unfortunately I think what you see now is them muffling a lot of the coverage. So I think you're seeing news organizations right now muffle coverage on Donald Trump because they don't want to alienate potential audiences on the right. And by not being forthright with their audiences about what Donald Trump is doing and what his minions are doing in Washington, they're actually alienating the people that do want to trust them and do trust them, which tend to be on the left, center left. And that's decreasing trust all around. So, you know, I guess on trust like I don't think there's a world we're going to live in where everyone considers one new source to be an objective source of information, and people really probably shouldn't kid themselves into believing that's going to happen.

Liz Kelly Nelson I can weigh in. I think it was pointed out in one of the panels this morning that there's a difference between trust and being trustworthy. On the trust side of the equation, several studies, but there are several studies that point out that just trust in institutions in general has bottomed out. It's not just in news and media. It's in institutions in general, especially marked among Gen Z. They're just very not willing to put their trust into the institutions that their parents, previous generations, have. And so they are connecting with creators in a way that builds trust very differently. And it's often built around things like what Carlos was talking about, like they know who your family is, they know who your mom is, they see you as a human being. And so it builds trust because you say, I see a real person. It's another difference between what content creators are doing versus AI, right? Like there's no trust coming from the AI side, and I think that that's something we'll continue to see. But there is a difference between that kind of trust and being trustworthy. And what we're seeing with the creator journalists is that there are some really good models developing in how that trustworthiness is being modeled and shown to folks. Folks like Casey Newton, who has a really robust ethics policy that is posted on platform, that he refers to often. Corrections are done in a very different way for creator journalists. They are often like made very evident to the followers, versus being hidden or put at the end of something. And then the creators are often in conversation with their audiences in the way that brands are not, right? So your audience is actually calling you out if they see something that smells off, right. So these are the kinds of things that, again, I'm working with Trusting News on kind of sussing out what this looks like. But it is, that was a great, great way to go because it's a very important part of this.

Amy Mitchell Yeah, I see Carlos nodding. Okay, there are three, we're basically out of time, but I see three questions that are kind of together here that will be our audience questions as I merge them in our final question. So this is a combination of balancing the need for attention grabbing headlines. So sort of thinking about in this tech and algorithmic driven arena of needing attention grabbing headlines, how that helps or hurts your decision making process as you also focus on accuracy and trustworthiness, and then combined with what responsibility do influencers or content creators have in spreading disinformation or fact checking against that. How do those things come together, and how do those approaches work in this era?

Liz Kelly Nelson Well, I mean in terms of writing the algorithm with you know headlines that are going to get a lot of eyeballs, but maybe spread disinformation, I mean that's kind of a no-brainer, right? Like we want to make sure that the work that we're supporting as an industry is falling on the side of the, you know, the right and the good, and that we are making sure that things are fact-checked, that we are not just going after eyeballs. It's just, it's a real different way that we're going to have to think about this work going forward, but very important.

Carlos Eduardo Espina Yeah, in my experience, I think there are a lot of people ask me about my style, because I'll like yell in some of my videos and do stuff like that. But I believe if the information you're giving is factual, the style is just like how the game has to be played. Unfortunately, I don't agree with it, but that's what attracts the algorithm. And that's something that's out of your control. And the way I think about it is if you're so formal, and that you're almost boring, no one's going to watch you, and they're going to watch someone else, who probably is lying to them. So I would rather be exciting, but say the truth than be boring and also say the truth, and then no one watch me. And it is very delicate. It's very hard to balance that because you also don't want to be like too over the top. But unfortunately, in many ways, even as content creators, like you'll say, oh, you have 12 million followers. But at the end of the day, I do have to play by the algorithm's rules because I can have 12 million followers, but if tomorrow I start, "Oh, I have breaking news," people are like, this guy sucks, and then they're going to watch someone else. So you do also don't have complete liberty over what you're posting because you do have to understand how things work and adapt to it. And it's always changing. It's not like there's one set model. So you always have to be watching other creators. "Oh, this guy's doing something that actually works. Let me adopt that, let me change this." And that's kind of the hard thing that many people don't seem to understand about social media, the algorithm.

Liz Kelly Nelson And it's not new either. I mean, like we've been talking as an industry about click bait for years. I mean so it's just not creators. It is, you know, endemic.

Ben Reininga Yeah, I would maybe just add one final thought, which is I think that on the subject of mis- and dis- information, I think that there's lots of smart people out there trying to fight it and figure out ways to remove it, platform policy and other media literacy efforts, and I think that's great and super important. I guess I just also feel like if you look at the platforms as these massive places where people are spending so much time, maybe another interesting way to think about combating misinformation is really to work on the flourishing of kind of good information to make sure that there's a solid counterpart that's sort of fighting the good fight against the misinformation. Because if you remove all the COVID misinformation from a platform like Snapchat, but there's no actual rigorous, engaging, and interesting good information, you know, then you've just gone from bad to nothing. So interesting to sort of think of the flip side of that coin as well.

Amy Mitchell All right, we are going to leave it at that. Thank you all so much.