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### Research Paper

How can a reader tell the difference between good and bad journalism? How can a reader know that the news they are reading is coming from a trustworthy source? These two questions might be common and regularly asked before. Once people find a news source that they like and trust, they will keep going back to it. It is important for outlets to be as unbiased as possible, reliable, and provide the public with necessary information. In a world where citizens have access and availability to multiple sources, many have different reasons for what they choose to utilize and why. The digital world has changed the way things run. News is released instantly and streams are able to run daily with updates. “The New Yorker” was created in 1925 and covers political and societal news stories (The New Yorker, 2021). With so many resources and news outlets to choose from, it is important to choose the right one. “The Plague Year” by Lawrence Wright in “The New Yorker” is a trustworthy source of news and information and an example of good journalism because of their fact-checking process, the background given on each of their contributors, the credibility of Wright himself, and the fact that they themselves utilize other reliable sources.

Many things happen before a story is actually published and printed. There is the research and interview process, building the story, writing, and then editing and publishing it. Fact-checking stories is a part of the process at “The New Yorker”. This is important because it provides security and reasoning behind why a source might have said something, or where they

got the information from. It is important that points made in pieces are verified and validated. Names or dates mentioned will be cross-checked and, “staff will endeavor to speak to every person mentioned even if they’re not quoted” (Columbia Journalism Review). Things can get clarified this way too. If something is not clear, going to the source a second or third time can help further explain things. It can also bring up more topics and talking points, once more research has been done. When building a story, a reporter might have more questions the more research that they do. If things are developing as a story is being written, the author might have to continue to regularly interview their sources. Well-done stories have multiple layers and get readers thinking about more than before it was read. If this is the process that “The New Yorker” is said to regularly do, it can be assumed that “The Plague Year” is no exception and has been cross-checked. By the time stories are in print at “The New Yorker”, they can ensure that they have been verified. The fact-checking process is one reason why “The New Yorker” is a trustworthy source.

Who are the authors that write these stories and how did they get to where they are? Knowing about what staff writers have written in the past, or how long they have worked for a publication is key insight to know when looking into if a source is trustworthy or not. It is important to know what a writer is the most knowledgeable on, and if they are qualified to write the types of stories that they are putting out. “The New Yorker” has a “Contributors” section on their website that users can go to, click through the various authors, and find out where they went to school or what some of their most famous pieces of work are. The site is easy to navigate, which makes it seem as though they are not trying to hide who they hire. Obviously, only positive information is shared, but this can still be helpful when researching authors. Experience and prior knowledge can make for informed reporting which can lead to better stories. The fact

that “The New Yorker” ensures that their contributors are trustworthy, makes them themselves a trustworthy source for news and information. Lawrence Wright, the author of “The Plague Year”, has his own profile on “The New Yorker” contributor page. He is an award-winning author who has been writing for The New Yorker since 1992 (The New Yorker). He attended Tulane University and has written novels and plays along with his work for the magazine; Wright’s awards include a Pulitzer Prize and being a New York Times Bestseller (Lawrence Wright website). Because of his years of experience in the field and the awards he has received, it proves the argument that Wright’s piece “The Plague Year” is good journalism that can be trusted.

Important worldwide stories are arising every day, and often different news sources break it first. One source might get a break before everyone else. After the first story, not long after many outlets have reports on the same things. If people go to more than one outlet for a story, they are likely to have a broader, more well-rounded perspective because they might get both sides to a story. This can be another form of verification; if the same general information can be seen across sources it makes sense that it is likely to be true. The Columbia Journalism Review did a report with BuzzFeed readers versus The New Yorker readers and described that reputation and trustworthiness of the author is what has an effect on what people choose to read (CJR). On the Media Bias/ Fact-check website, they reported that “The New Yorker” has a high credibility rating. Good and extensive reporting can result in good credibility. The magazine also uses other reliable sources such as “The New York Times” and “Boston Globe” for information according to the fact-check website. If they are turning to other reliable sources for information, or to ensure that they are providing the proper information, it helps add to their credibility. The magazine has a good foundation of sources and writers; when good journalism is the goal from the beginning, better reporting can be done down the line. By turning to other outlets for

verification, “The New Yorker” can be trusted to provide news and information. Properly informed citizens are able to contribute knowledge and action in society. It is important to be knowledgeable about what goes on from the level of local communities to a global scale. If something is worth sharing, or important to share, journalists should be reporting on it. Where people get their information from is just as important and adds to the argument. Sometimes, a lot can be shown about a person depending where they regularly turn to to get news. There are things to check and look into about various sources that can verify their credibility. “The New Yorker” fact-checks their stories, provides a background on all contributors, and uses other reliable sources themselves. These three factors are what make “The New Yorker” a trustworthy source for information and news. Good journalism provides good stories, and shows what to look for when researching to become more knowledgeable. “The Plague Year” is a form of good journalism for its extensive research and coverage.

Finding credible sources is essential to build trustworthy and informative stories. Where the source might work, their background, or their beliefs can all affect why they might be used or why they can be trusted in the first place. Once a source or news outlet is deemed trustworthy, people will want to continue to go to them for information. A connection can be built with the journalists or reporters. Not only should the writers be experts, but for interview purposes experts in whatever field is being discussed should be talked to. As stated in the SPJ Code of Ethics journalists should, “provide access to source material when it is relevant and appropriate.” If something is newsworthy, it should be reported on. When sources are used, it is important to state who they are and who they work for; it provides necessary context for readers. There are very few instances when a source may stay anonymous. That happens if they make a reasonable request and it can be justified by the journalist. The sources used in “The Plague

Year” by Lawrence Wright contribute to the trustworthiness of the piece because of the organization's credibility and first hand-accounts given by professionals. Throughout the piece Wright has information from people in the White House, as well as various doctors.

Bias plays a role in sourcing as well. Dictionary.com defines bias as, “a particular tendency, trend, inclination, feeling, or opinion, especially one that is preconceived or unreasoned”. It is important for sources to be as unbiased as possible, so as not to influence the audience in any particular way to believe in something. This could lead to false information being spread. False information has the possibility to reach a large audience which can lead to greater divide amongst believers. Wright quotes John Brooks in the piece who is noted as “the chief medical officer of the COVID response team at the C.D.C,”. Brooks is a doctor and a professional in his field, and the C.D.C is a federal agency that is dedicated to discovering things about diseases, which the article discusses. The qualifications of the sources being used adds to their trustworthiness in the article. They would be considered experts in their field. Throughout the piece, a lot of context is given and the readers are able to figure out why that person is being included. They are included because they provide valuable information and might be at the root of problems being discussed. FDA doctor, Dr. Timothy Stenzel was included as well as Senator Murray from Washington. The FDA is the Food and Drug Administration that is “responsible for protecting the public health by ensuring the safety, efficacy, and security of human and veterinary drugs, biological products, and medical devices,” as said on their website. When a source is interviewed directly by the person writing a piece, it makes the account of a story as accurate as possible. In person interviews are the best option when interviewing someone. The source should be notified what the interview is for, and if the conversation is being recorded to ensure they are not misquoted. Not only are interviews done for quotes, they are also done to

build the story itself for context and to possibly chase other leads. The American Press Institute has discussed the “Hierarchy of Accuracy” and why it is important to have information not go through so many channels before reaching the final source. It is only natural to have the possibility of things getting misconstrued the more people the information is told to, and if it has not been verified yet. The more people are interviewed, the more outreach there is. “The Plague Year” is roughly 61 pages and goes into detail about what played out throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic. It shows that extensive research and reporting was done. Stories from experts in the field were shown, as well as families that have been affected. Because COVID-19 had a world-wide effect, it is important to interview the various types of people impacted. Time was put into this piece of writing which helps prove that it is a good form of journalism that can be trusted. Not only time, but it is clear there was extensive research and reporting which helps elevate the writing.

Context is another key thing to include in stories and when providing information so that the full story and understanding is given. Wright includes direct quotes from conferences and interviews during the time when COVID-19 was continuing to develop, making them more credible. This allows for reasoning behind doing something, and where a source might be coming from. “The Plague Year” begins by explaining what was happening behind the scenes when COVID was first emerging. The reader is able to have context, and is set up for what they will be told throughout the piece; this helps with credibility. Various people included are talked about more; context is provided as to how they got their jobs too. Having insight into what was going on before everything unfolded how it did, is key information. Qualifications, interviews, and context are all things included in Wright’s piece that add to the trustworthiness in sources. How the sources were chosen and what they provide to the writing are all important factors that

contribute to this. All journalists should strive to keep these things in mind when choosing what they want to write about, and how to get the proper information. By providing context and utilizing proper sources, Lawrence Wright is able to prove that his piece “The Plague Year” is a good form of journalism.

The questions asked in the beginning can be answered by looking at what “The New Yorker” does, and reading “The Plague Year” by Lawrence Wright. Good journalism includes credible sources, provides context, and does good research. Trustworthy sources verify their information, provide a background on their authors, and use other reliable sources themselves. “The New Yorker” and Lawrence Wright have done all of this in their work. It is a good source that provided information on a topic that had a worldwide effect. COVID-19 is still changing everyday things, but reading how it unfolded from the beginning is important journalism. Sources should be trusted to cover what is important. As discussed, with so many outlets to choose from, “The New Yorker” is a good option. Lawrence Wright is a trusted author and utilized sources to develop his story.

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