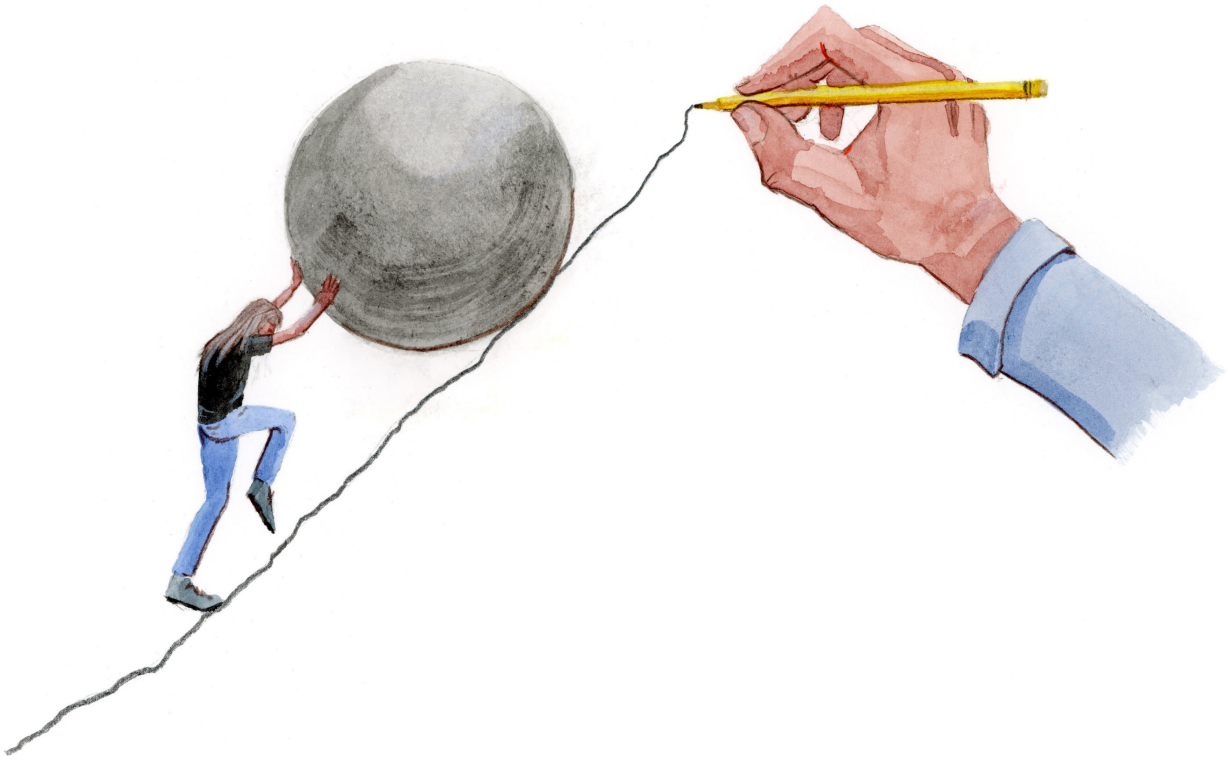
NEWS AVOIDANCE of LGBTQ+ communities and coverage

a report published by

TRUSTING NEWS

Johnson, P. R. (2026). News avoidance of LGBTQ+ communities and coverage. (White paper). Trusting News.



Principal Investigator: Patrick R. Johnson, Ph.D., MJE

Project Manager: Mollie Muchna

Special thanks to Phylix Asilevi for her research support, Liam Porter for his illustration work, and the participating journalists and community members for their time, energy, and work associated with the data in this report.

Project funding provided by Marquette University and Trusting News

executive summary

Journalists know news avoidance is rising. This white paper focuses on what that avoidance means and does in the lives of LGBTQ+ news consumers, and what it asks of newsrooms that want to rebuild trust through everyday practice. It is also about news storytelling on the LGBTQ+ community and how audiences engage with and respond to it, and how journalists make sense of the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals in their practices. Lastly, it is grounded in a core orientation: trust is earned when journalists listen with humility, make their work legible, and take responsibility for demonstrating credibility through daily transparency and responsive public-service reporting.

WHAT THIS PROJECT DID

With support from Trusting News and seven participating journalists, we conducted interviews with 50 community members across the United States. Thirty-one interviewees identify as LGBTQ+. 19 interviewees who do not identify as LGBTQ+ described how LGBTQ+ topics show up in their news habits and information environments. Interviewees are anonymized throughout, and the report avoids reproducing slurs or dehumanizing rhetoric verbatim as a care-based reporting choice.

This is not a prevalence study. The goal is to surface recurring audience perceptions, map how trust breaks down and concentrates within this marginalized community, and translate that evidence into practical reporting and editing strategies.

WHAT LGBTQ+ INTERVIEWEES SAID ABOUT AVOIDANCE

LGBTQ+ interviewees did not describe disengagement as ignorance or civic indifference. They described it as boundary-setting in a news environment that often feels costly to enter and hard to withstand. Avoidance often appeared as controlled engagement: scanning headlines, restricting sources, taking breaks during intense cycles, and monitoring specific topics for personal safety, while limiting everything else.

Three pressure points repeatedly clustered in LGBTQ+ interviews:

- Emotional self-protection: News was described as capable of triggering immediate stress responses and longer-term exhaustion, especially when coverage is conflict-forward, hostile, or framed as a referendum on LGBTQ+ legitimacy.
- Low utility and powerlessness: Interviewees stepped back when stories delivered a threat without traction: little context, no orientation, no credible next steps, and no usable information for daily life.
- Integrity judgments: Trust decisions were shaped not only by factual claims but also by perceived intent: whether the newsroom clarifies reality or manufactures reaction, names harm directly or launders it through "debate," serves public understanding or serves engagement incentives.

WHAT INTERVIEWEES SAID ABOUT TRUST AND CREDIBILITY

Trust did not rise or fall primarily because of one story. It shifted through repeated cues and patterns in stories, journalistic practices, and audience responses, both in stories (through quotes) and on social media platforms through posts and comments. Across interviews, journalists' credibility, in particular, was weakened by conflict-first framing, thin context, euphemisms that obscure the stakes, sensational headline practices, and "both sides" structures that place evidence and dehumanization on the same plane.

Interviewees shared that trust strengthened with them when journalism looked like public service: clear explanations, factual rigor, visible sourcing, accountability practices visible to audiences, and

coverage that reflects lived experience and community complexity rather than a crisis-only or "flashpoint" version of LGBTQ+ life. This aligns with a vision of journalism that is responsive to people's needs, equips them to navigate their communities, and reflects diverse priorities and values.

WHAT NON-LGBTQ INTERVIEWS CLARIFIED ABOUT THE WIDER CLIMATE

Non-LGBTQ interviewees do not speak for LGBTQ+ lived experience, but they clarified the environment LGBTQ+ coverage moves through. They described:

- A public-facing cycle in which LGBTQ+ topics often surface through scandal, spectacle, or controversy rather than through steady, contextual beat reporting.
- Confusion and fragmentation in information streams, including sharply inconsistent narratives across outlets and platforms.
- The continued presence of moral opposition in the broader ecosystem, which helps explain why LGBTQ+ interviewees anticipate harm and why "debate" framing can feel like an invitation for hostility, not fairness.
- The outsized interpretive weight of small newsroom cues, including polarized reactions to inclusion signals like pronouns.

WHAT WOULD MAKE RE-ENGAGEMENT MORE LIKELY

Many LGBTQ+ interviewees described clear conditions under which engagement feels survivable and worthwhile again. In the report, these are organized as six "Chosen" conditions:

- Chosen care (reduce preventable harm in framing and delivery)
- Chosen clarity (context, definitions, legible consequences)
- Chosen receipts (show your work with primary sources and sourcing visibility)
- Chosen repair (public accountability and correction practices that audiences can see)
- Chosen truth (moral clarity when facts point to harm and rights violations)
- Chosen joy (coverage that reflects thriving, resilience, and ordinary life, not crisis alone)

These conditions are not branding requests. They are audience standards for whether journalism deserves access to their attention, time, and vulnerability.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR NEWSROOM PRACTICE

Interviewees offered a practical path forward that aligns with a focus on active trust-building: listening, humility, and transparent explanations of integrity in day-to-day work. This report translates the evidence into newsroom strategies across framing, context, sourcing, language precision, correction practices, representation, and follow-through.

If you only do a few things first, start here:

- Tighten headlines and framing to reduce conflict-performance and anticipatory harm.
- Build "orientation by default" into LGBTQ+ policy and accountability stories: define terms, explain the process, and spell out the consequences.
- Add receipts consistently: link primary documents, explain verification, and make sourcing visible.
- Make repair public: corrections and updates should be explicit, not silent.
- Expand story types beyond flashpoints: include community competence, resilience, and lived reality alongside harm reporting.

That is the core throughline of the white paper: avoidance is not just an audience behavior. Avoidance is feedback on how journalism is landing, and it gives newsrooms a concrete set of choices to change

the report

introduction

Journalists know that many people are stepping back from the news. Audience research can describe patterns of attention and avoidance, but those patterns do not always capture what it feels like to disengage from coverage that touches on identity, safety, or daily life for specific marginalized populations. The Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2025, for example, includes first-person accounts in which news avoidance is framed as a response to hostile public discourse and personally consequential coverage. One respondent in the report describes avoiding the news because "it's upsetting to see inflammatory stories that directly affect my life (e.g. coverage about homophobia and transphobia)" (Digital News Report 2025, p. 27). That kind of explanation is not simply "too much news." It is avoidance grounded in lived consequence.

This project focuses on that gap. With support from Trusting News and seven participating journalists, we conducted interviews with 50 community members across the United States, 31 of whom identified as LGBTQ+. The purpose of this white paper is to share what we heard from those interviews in a format usable by journalists and editors working on LGBTQ+ coverage, as well as by researchers seeking to understand another facet of both news avoidance and trust.

WHY "AVOIDANCE" IS NOT A SINGLE BEHAVIOR AND WORTH A NUANCED LOOK

News avoidance is not a single phenomenon, and the research makes that clear. Scholars have repeatedly noted that news avoidance is defined and operationalized in inconsistent ways, including differences over whether it is treated as a momentary choice, a stable pattern, or a label reserved for people with persistently low news consumption.[1] This matters because Palmer and colleagues find that definitions shape who is counted as an "avoider," and that these definitions can obscure how avoidance is constrained by structural inequalities rather than driven by preference or attitude.[2]

Related work also shows that avoiders are not a uniform group. Researchers have identified different types of news avoiders with distinct motivations and orientations, which complicates

1. Palmer, R., Toff, B., & Nielsen, R. K. (2023). Examining Assumptions Around How News Avoidance Gets Defined: The Importance of Overall News Consumption, Intention, and Structural Inequalities. Journalism Studies, 24(6), 697–714. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2183058.
2. Ibid

any one-size-fits-all explanation.[3] This helps clarify why the same headline can feel "informative" to one person and "not worth the cost" to another, and why newsroom strategies that assume avoidance is just disinterest often miss the point.

A growing body of research also suggests that avoidance is frequently tied to emotion, anticipation, and self-protection. Work on "anticipated anxiety," for instance, argues that people sometimes avoid news because they expect it to make them feel worse, and that this anticipated emotional cost can become a barrier to engagement.[4] Psychophysiological research pushes this further by questioning a common assumption that emotional activation always increases attention. Carbone and colleagues argue that activation can plausibly motivate prolonged attention in some people and avoidance in others, depending on how that activation is experienced and managed.[5] They emphasize that it may not always be the case that people pay more attention to content that arouses them more, and that avoidance can be driven by "too little or too much" activation. This line of scholarship aligns with broader information-avoidance research that treats avoidance as a meaningful response to stress, threat, and uncertainty rather than a simple failure of civic motivation.[6]

News avoidance is also connected to trust, but not only in a narrow do I believe this outlet sense. Some trust scholarship treats trust as relational and cumulative, shaped through repeated encounters and expectations rather than single moments of credibility assessment.[7] Other work highlights that trust can be reinforced through habit, emotion, and identity, not just through information accuracy.[8] Still other research suggests that citizens' self-perceptions and identity work can shape how they approach journalism and how they evaluate who is "gullible" versus "savvy."[9]

Finally, avoidance does not only operate "out there" among audiences. News avoidance also becomes meaningful inside newsrooms, where journalists interpret avoidance as a problem to solve and, at times, as a threat to journalism's standing. Research on journalists' perceptions of avoidance describes it as a form of boundary work, in which journalists defend journalism's value while trying to make sense of why people leave.[10] We need to care about this because newsroom responses to avoidance can either widen the gap with communities or open space for repair.

This points to a core takeaway that shapes this white paper: avoidance is rarely just "not caring." It is often an active judgment about emotional sustainability, anticipated harm, utility, and whether journalism serves as a trustworthy institution in a community's life.[11] This white paper extends the audience turn by focusing on lived consequences.

Nelson and Lewis[12] argue that journalism often imagines audiences at the extremes: audiences as allies of journalism who want good-faith engagement, or audiences as antagonists who are quick to lash out. Between those extremes, they suggest, sits a large "apathetic" public that does not care enough about journalism to

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3. de Bruin, K., Vliegenthart, R., Kruikemeier, S., & de Haan, Y. (2024). Who Are They? Different Types of News Avoiders Based on Motives, Values and Personality Traits. Journalism Studies, 25(12), 1404–1422. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2024.2321537
4. Toff, B., & Nielsen, R. K. (2022). How News Feels: Anticipated Anxiety as a Factor in News Avoidance and a Barrier to Political Engagement. Political Communication, 39(6), 697–714. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2022.2123073
5. Carbone, M., Soroka, S., & Dunaway, J. (2024). The Psychophysiology of News Avoidance: Does Negative Affect Drive Both Attention and Inattention to News? Journalism Studies, 25(12), 1460–1475. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2024.2310672
6. Foust, J. L., & Taber, J. M. (2025). Information Avoidance: Past Perspectives and Future Directions. Perspectives on psychological science : a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, 20(2), 241–263. https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916231197668
7. Koliska, M., Moroney, E., & Beavers, D. (2025). Trust Through Relationships in Journalism. Journalism Studies, 26(16), 2092–2109. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2209807
8. Ross Arguedas, A., Mont'Alverne, C., Toff, B., Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. K. (2024). Ritual Reinforcement: Habit, Emotion, and Identity as Attributes of Trust in News. Journalism Studies, 25(15), 1875–1892. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2024.2401403
9. Nelson, J. L., & Lewis, S. C. (2023). Only "sheep" trust journalists? How citizens' self-perceptions shape their approach to news. New Media & Society, 25(7), 1522-1541. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211018160
10. Palmer, R., & Edgerly, S. (2024). How Journalists Perceive News Avoidance: Reactions and Solutions to the Missing Audience as Boundary Work. Journalism Studies, 25(12), 1555–1572. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2024.2345672
11. Andersen, K., Toff, B., & Ytre-Arne, B. (2024). Introduction: What We (Don't) Know About News Avoidance. Journalism Studies, 25(12), 1367–1384. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2024.2393131
12. Nelson, J. L., & Lewis, S. C. (2023). Only "sheep" trust journalists? How citizens' self-perceptions shape their approach to news; Nelson, J. L., & Lewis, S. C. (2025). Allies, Antagonists, and Apathetic: A Synthesis and Path Forward for News Audience Research. Journalism Studies, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2025.2601794

engage with it or meaningfully undermine it.[13] This white paper suggests a related, but different, problem for LGBTQ+ coverage: some forms of disengagement are neither antagonism nor apathy. For many LGBTQ+ interviewees, stepping back from the news functioned as a protective practice shaped by vulnerability, accumulation, and lived consequence. That distinction matters. When avoidance gets flattened into a broad audience trend, it becomes easy to miss how newsroom routines can unintentionally intensify harm, and how small, consistent practice shifts can change whether engagement feels possible.

My own prior research suggests that LGBTQ+-focused work matters because "LGBTQ+" is not simply another demographic variable in audience analytics. It is a lived position regarding risk, visibility, and institutional power.[14] Research on news avoidance, emotion, and trust helps explain why people disengage, but it rarely tests how those dynamics operate when the news is entangled with politicized identity and conditional safety. That gap matters, and it becomes harder to ignore when viewed alongside scholarship on LGBTQ+ experiences inside journalism and across journalistic memory.

In my work on LGBTQ+ journalists, I show how queer professionals navigate the intersection of professional norms and personal safety, including the emotional and cognitive burden of "re-coming out" and the ongoing negotiation of visibility, authenticity, and risk in newsroom life.[15] This work clarifies why LGBTQ+-related news can feel uniquely consequential: identity is not peripheral to journalistic practice. It shapes sourcing relationships, newsroom dynamics, and mental health. It also helps explain why certain framing choices can land as threat, exhaustion, or exposure rather than as information. Throughout journalism history and ethics, LGBTQ+ lives and experiences are routinely rendered partial, delayed, or erased in journalistic memory, shaping what becomes legitimate public knowledge and whose harm is narratable.[16] This shows how the conditions for disengagement build over time, including across different generations, publications, and geographies. When communities repeatedly see themselves distorted, minimized, or missing, distrust is not an individual attitude problem. It is a rational response to patterned visibility and patterned neglect.

And in my care-based journalism work with Sue Robinson, a project that inspired this one and is modeled after it, we argue that repair is not an easy chore and should not be overlooked in journalism practice. It is a set of care-based practices oriented toward acknowledging harm, tending to relationships, and rebuilding conditions of engagement for communities that have learned through experience that news can cost them something.[17] Through all of this work, we've learned that journalists must treat harm and negative news experiences as central to understanding disengagement, and emphasize practice-oriented values that help journalists re-enter relationships with communities that have stepped back.

This research does not claim that LGBTQ+ news avoidance is already well understood. It argues the opposite: the field has assembled the conceptual tools that make LGBTQ+ disengagement visible as a distinct, ethically charged form of avoidance, and it is time to study it directly. LGBTQ+ news disengagement is not niche. It is a direct test of whether journalism can function as public service for people whose identities are routinely politicized, whose safety is conditional, and whose trust is shaped by cumulative exposure to framing choices, institutional silences, and uneven care.

WHAT THIS PROJECT IS FOR

The purpose of this white paper is to share what we heard from those interviews in a format usable by jour-

13. Nelson, J. L., & Lewis, S. C. (2025). Allies, Antagonists, and Apathetic: A Synthesis and Path Forward for News Audience Research.
14. Johnson, P. R. (2025). The Weight of the Rainbow: LGBTQ+ Journalists' Navigation of Mental Health and Identity in Digital News Ecosystems. Digital Journalism, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2025.2573080; Johnson, P. R. (2025). Revisiting the (Queer) Ghosts of Journalism's Past. Journal of Media Ethics, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/23736992.2025.2566127
15. Johnson, P. R. (2025). The Weight of the Rainbow: LGBTQ+ Journalists' Navigation of Mental Health and Identity in Digital News Ecosystems.
16. Johnson, P. R. (2025). Revisiting the (Queer) Ghosts of Journalism's Past.
17. Robinson, S., & Johnson, P. (2024). Rectifying Harm Through Care-Based Practices: How Journalists Might Tend to Disengaged Communities. Journalism Studies, 25(1), 99–116. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2289889

nalists and editors working on LGBTQ+ coverage, as well as by researchers seeking to understand another facet of both news avoidance and trust. The aim is not to evaluate individual outlets or offer an exhaustive account of LGBTQ+ news use. It is to surface recurring audience perceptions and identify opportunities for newsrooms to reconsider how everyday practices shape trust.

For LGBTQ+ interviewees, avoidance was frequently described in relation to emotional strain, anticipatory harm, and a sense that coverage can miss or distort lived realities. Interviewees described their relationship with news, how they decide what to consume, and what prompts them to step away. Their accounts complicate common assumptions about avoidance as apathy or indifference.[18] Across interviews, LGBTQ+ interviewees described managing their mental health, weighing whether coverage felt safe to engage in, and reacting to the consequences of framing choices. Each feeling is tied to the previous work.[19]

These interviews also suggest that disengagement is not always a retreat from civic life. Many interviewees want to stay informed, but they weigh the personal cost and the likely payoff. They ask whether coverage will offer clarity or confusion, context or conflict, information or another legitimacy fight. This white paper is an invitation to understand those judgments and to consider how journalism can better meet the needs of audiences who are asking to be seen, respected, and informed.

HOW THIS REPORT IS ORGANIZED

This report is designed for newsroom and research use. You can read it straight through, but it is also intended to be entered at multiple points. The early pages give you key findings from the project. The middle sections present the evidence and explain what the interviewees meant by describing avoidance, trust, and harm. The final sections translate those insights into practical opportunities for reporting, editing, and transparency.

Here is the story the report tells:

- "Key Findings" summarizes the most consistent patterns that emerged across interviews.
- "Chosen Boundaries" centers LGBTQ+ interviewees' accounts of why LGBTQ+ coverage can feel unsafe, exhausting, or not worth the cost, and what makes engagement more sustainable. It also attends to their news avoidance.
- "Chosen Proximity" centers non-LGBTQ interviewees' descriptions of how LGBTQ+ topics appear in news coverage and in the broader environment surrounding it, including supportive, neutral, and opposed orientations.
- "Showing up with Care" turns patterns into reporting and editing recommendations, emphasizing framing, context, sourcing, clarity of language, and accountability.
- "Keeping the Door Open" summarizes the most actionable changes and where newsrooms can start.

A NOTE ABOUT THOSE INTERVIEWED

The report draws on 50 interviews. Thirty-one interviewees identify as LGBTQ+. Nineteen interviewees do not identify as LGBTQ+ and shared perspectives as people who encounter LGBTQ+-related coverage from outside the community. To match the report's structure, the two core evidence sections are voice-specific: the LGBTQ+ news avoidance section includes only LGBTQ+-identified voices, and the non-LGBTQ section includes only non-LGBTQ voices. All other sections draw on patterns across the full dataset unless explicitly stated otherwise.

Interviewees are anonymized. I do not use names, pseudonyms, or numbered IDs. Quotes are attributed using broad descriptors (for example, "LGBTQ+ interviewee" or "non-LGBTQ interviewee"). When a non-LGBTQ interviewee's orientation toward LGBTQ+

18. Nelson, J. L., & Lewis, S. C. (2025). Allies, Antagonists, and Apathetic: A Synthesis and Path Forward for News Audience Research.
19. Carbone, M., Soroka, S., & Dunaway, J. (2024). The Psychophysiology of News Avoidance: Does Negative Affect Drive Both Attention and Inattention to News?; Ross Arguedas, A., Mont'Alverne, C., Toff, B., Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. K. (2024). Ritual Reinforcement: Habit, Emotion, and Identity as Attributes of Trust in News; Johnson, P. R. (2025). Revisiting the (Queer) Ghosts of Journalism's Past; Johnson, P. R. (2025). The Weight of the Rainbow: LGBTQ+ Journalists' Navigation of Mental Health and Identity in Digital News Ecosystems; Park, S., Fisher, C., Tandoc, E., Dulleck, U., Yao, S. P., & Lukamto, W. (2025). The relationship between news trust, mistrust and audience disengagement. Journalism, 26(11), 2285-2304. https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849241299775

topics is directly relevant to interpretation, I include a stance label: supportive, neutral, or opposed. These labels describe an interviewee's expressed stance toward LGBTQ+ topics in news coverage, not their identity.

This is qualitative evidence. The report documents patterns in interviewees' descriptions and explanations of their decision-making. It does not claim that these patterns are universal, nor does it make causal claims about what "drives" audience behavior or newsroom outcomes. When the report names a pattern, it should be read as "This showed up across multiple interviews," not as a statement about frequency in the broader public.

I also made a care-based reporting choice in how I present evidence. When interviewees referenced hostile rhetoric, slurs, or dehumanizing language, I do not reproduce that language verbatim. Instead, I describe the content and its function so readers can understand what is happening without re-amplifying harm.

-- PRJ

key findings

What interviewees described is not just a story about personal media habits. It is a story about how LGBTQ+ coverage functions in the public sphere and how that public environment shapes engagement. LGBTQ+ interviewees spoke from lived experience about harm, trust, and safety. Non-LGBTQ interviewees clarified how LGBTQ+ topics move through public life, including support, confusion, disengagement, and opposition. The findings below translate that shared environment into clear patterns that newsrooms can act on.

FINDING 1. ANTICIPATORY HARM IS A SIGNIFICANT REASON LGBTQ+ INTERVIEWEES AVOID LGBTQ+ COVERAGE.

LGBTQ+ interviewees often described avoidance as a decision made before they even click. They expect misrepresentation, hostility, or a familiar story frame that turns their rights into a debate. Over time, that expectation becomes a learned warning system. Certain headlines, outlets, or story topics signal "this will cost me," and disengagement becomes the safer choice. This is why avoidance shows up as routines, not exceptions. People scan rather than read, skip entire news brands, and step away during major cycles when coverage becomes relentless and conflict-heavy. **For newsrooms, the takeaway is blunt: distrust is not only about factual mistakes. It is also about whether audiences expect the story structure itself to treat them as human.**

FINDING 2. EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD PUSHES INTERVIEWEES TOWARD SELECTIVE MONITORING INSTEAD OF "STAYING INFORMED."

Avoidance showed up less as apathy and more as management. Interviewees described tight boundaries around how much news they can take in before it becomes destabilizing, exhausting, or numbing. LGBTQ+ interviewees often linked this overload to identity-based threats and recurring crisis narratives, especially when coverage feels like an unending series of attacks, losses, and debates about legitimacy. Some non-LGBTQ interviewees described a different but related fatigue: a sense that the news is always conflict, always anger, and rarely oriented toward clarity or resolution. The shared pattern was controlled engagement. Interviewees described short check-ins, selective sources, and periods of stepping away for self-preservation. **For journalists, this finding matters because it reframes "engagement" as a pacing problem: people may want to know what is happening, but they need coverage they can withstand.**

FINDING 3. TRUST BREAKS THROUGH REPEATED PATTERNS IN FRAMING, NOT ONE-OFF MISTAKES.

Interviewees did not mainly describe a single article that went wrong. They described patterns: sensational headlines, conflict-first framing, thin sourcing, euphemisms that hide stakes, and "balance" structures that elevate hostility as a legitimate viewpoint. LGBTQ+ interviewees often described these patterns as dehumanizing and unsafe, not because disagreement exists, but because the same framing returns again and again across outlets and across time. That repetition creates the sense that harm is built into the system rather than accidental. Some non-LGBTQ interviewees also recognized inflammatory coverage and described it as politically driven or intentionally provocative, which reinforces that these cues are publicly visible, not only felt within the community. When those patterns repeat, interviewees stop treating coverage as information and start treating it as exposure. **The result is withdrawal because they no longer believe the newsroom is trying to inform in good faith.**[20]

FINDING 4. NON-LGBTQ INTERVIEWEES HELP CLARIFY THE BROADER CLIMATE THAT LGBTQ+ AUDIENCES ARE RESPONDING TO.

Non-LGBTQ interviewees cannot speak to LGBTQ+ lived experience, but they do clarify how LGBTQ+ topics move through public life and why LGBTQ+ coverage often lands in a contested environment. Supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees described concern for loved ones, anxiety about policy impacts, and frustration with misinformation that spreads faster than corrections. Others described low awareness and disengagement, which helps explain why shallow narratives can persist unchallenged and why audiences outside the community may not recognize the stakes embedded in policy or recurring "culture war" storylines. A small number expressed opposition to LGBTQ+ identities or objected to LGBTQ+ topics appearing in news at all. I do not reproduce hostile language from these interviews, but these perspectives matter as evidence that "both sides" structures can function as an invitation for hostility rather than a commitment to fairness, especially when legitimacy is treated as a debatable viewpoint. **Newsrooms should treat LGBTQ+ coverage as public-facing civic information designed for mixed publics, not as "community news" aimed only at LGBTQ+ readers.** That means building relationship infrastructure with LGBTQ+ organizations and community leaders for ongoing context, designing stories to include orientation and clarity for low-context audiences, and adopting sourcing and framing practices that inform without laundering rejection narratives as legitimate debate. It also means investing in authentic, community-grounded storytelling and newsroom professional development so coverage consistently reflects lived reality, policy stakes, and public-service utility.

FINDING 5. REPRESENTATION INSIDE NEWSROOMS FUNCTIONS AS A CREDIBILITY SIGNAL BECAUSE IT AFFECTS ACCURACY.

LGBTQ+ interviewees described trust rising when coverage demonstrates basic competence: accurate terminology, relevant sourcing, and an understanding of community context beyond stereotypes or sensational narratives. They described trust dropping when stories signal that journalists do not understand the topic well enough to avoid common pitfalls, especially in coverage involving trans identities, policy threats, or moralized "debate" framing.[21] This is about visibility and symbolic inclusion, as well as reducing preventable

20. Pew Research Center's Pew-Knight Initiative study helps contextualize why interviewees in this report framed distrust as cumulative and pattern-based rather than triggered by a single "bad" article. Pew finds that Americans regularly encounter uncertainty about what is true, and that they are far more confident in their own ability to check the accuracy of news than in other people's ability to do so. That broader climate of verification labor and perceived unreliability helps explain why repeated cues in coverage (sensational headlines, conflict-first framing, thin sourcing, euphemism, and "balance" structures that elevate hostility) can shift news from "information" to "exposure" over time, and why withdrawal becomes a rational response to a pattern rather than a reaction to an outlier. For the full report and its companion analysis on accuracy-checking, see Pew Research Center's "Americans' Complicated Relationship With News": https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2026/02/11/americans-complicated-relationship-with-news/ (especially "How Americans check the accuracy of news").

21. One practical way to reduce these predictable pitfalls is to use Trusting News's Dimensions of Difference work, developed in partnership with Spaceship Media, as a newsroom tool for building reporting competence across identity and difference. The framework is designed to support listening practices, improve sourcing and framing, and help journalists make trust-building decisions more legible to audiences, especially in high-stakes coverage where moralized "debate" framing can amplify harm. Project overview: https://trustingnews.org/dimensions/; full newsroom guide (recommended): https://trustingnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Dimensions-of-Difference-Newsroom-Guide-1.pdf

harm and getting the story right the first time. When interviewees sense that a newsroom lacks lived experience or community knowledge in decision-making, they anticipate mistakes and treat the coverage as risky. When they see signals of competence and care, they are more willing to stay with difficult stories. **In practice, this finding points to representation as an issue of accuracy and accountability, not branding.**

FINDING 6. CLARITY AND DEFINITION ARE EXPERIENCED AS CARE, ESPECIALLY IN POLICY AND ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTING.

Interviewees repeatedly described jargon, euphemism, and vague wording as barriers to understanding. In stories about legislation, schools, healthcare, or courts, unclear language can hide what is changing and who is affected, leaving audiences to piece together consequences on their own. LGBTQ+ interviewees often read vagueness as avoidance or minimization, especially when the stakes are concrete and immediate. Some non-LGBTQ interviewees also wanted clearer explanations because ambiguity makes it harder to correct misinformation in families, workplaces, and communities. Clarity is not just a style preference here; it functions as a signal that journalism is taking the audience seriously, naming what is happening directly, and prioritizing understanding over optics.[22] **For newsrooms, the implication is simple: define terms, explain processes, and write as if readers should not have to translate the story to grasp the stakes.**

FINDING 7. UTILITY KEEPS PEOPLE ENGAGED MORE THAN URGENCY DOES.

Interviewees described staying with coverage when it provides context, explains consequences, and offers practical orientation. For LGBTQ+ interviewees, utility often meant knowing what is changing, what the impact is, and where credible resources exist, especially when policy threats or public rhetoric create fear and uncertainty. For non-LGBTQ interviewees, utility often meant straightforward explanations that reduce confusion and make it easier to talk with others without spreading misinformation. The common thread is that **people want journalism that helps them live with the information, not just react to it.** When coverage repeatedly raises alarms without offering context or direction, interviewees described disengaging as a way to conserve energy and avoid feeling powerless. **For newsrooms, this finding argues for an everyday utility mindset: anticipate what audiences will need after they read, not only what they will feel in the moment.**

FINDING 8. TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES ARE A ROUTE TO RE-ENGAGEMENT.

Interviewees described trust rising when newsrooms show their work: explaining decisions, correcting errors publicly, and being clear about how information was verified. These practices matter because they counter the perception that journalism is driven primarily by ideology, commercial incentives, or performative "balance." For LGBTQ+ interviewees, transparency often functioned as a safety signal, suggesting seriousness and responsibility in coverage that can carry real-world consequences. Accountability here is not abstract. Visible behavior tells audiences whether a newsroom deserves another chance, which, in many cases, includes the use of pronouns in bylines. **When interviewees can see how reporting choices were made and how mistakes are handled, they are more willing to believe that journalism is acting in good faith, even when the topic is contentious**.[23]

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22. This "utility" preference aligns with solutions journalism, which focuses on rigorous reporting about responses to social problems placing efforts in context, examining evidence of results (including limitations), and surfacing what can be learned, rather than stopping at conflict and alarm. For a clear overview and tools for newsroom adoption, see the Solutions Journalism Network's definition and basic toolkit: https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/who-we-are/solutions-journalism and https://www.solutionsjournalism.org/learning-lab/toolkits-guides/basic-toolkit

23. This finding maps directly onto Trusting News's core premise: trust is not something audiences grant on faith, and it is not something newsrooms can restore through messaging alone. It is earned through visible, repeatable practices that make journalism legible, accountable, and human. Across Trusting News's work, the emphasis is on practical transparency moves that reduce audience guesswork and make "good faith" easier to recognize, especially in high-stakes coverage where communities are already scanning for safety and intent. That includes explaining reporting decisions ("why we covered this," "why we used these sources"), showing verification ("how we know," "what we checked"), correcting publicly rather than quietly, and creating consistent cues of respect and competence, such as accurate naming and pronouns, or optional pronouns in bylines when staff choose to use them. For newsroom-ready guidance and examples, see Trusting News's approach and resources: https://trustingnews.org/ and its transparency-focused tools: https://trustingnews.org/trustkits/ (recommended starting point).

chosen boundaries: lgbtq+ individuals on avoidances, harm and trust

Across this project, collaborators did not describe their disengagement from news as apathy or ignorance. Instead, they framed avoidance as a rational and often necessary response to the information environment they inhabit. LGBTQ+ audiences, in particular, shared that they routinely encounter coverage that is emotionally draining, inaccurately framed, or dismissive of their lived experiences. Over time, these patterns erode trust not only in specific outlets but in journalism as an institution.

Collaborators were clear about this: news consumption has become a calculation. They weigh the emotional cost of staying informed, the likelihood that coverage will provide usable context or resources, and the degree to which a newsroom's values align with their own. When those conditions break down, avoidance becomes a method of survival rather than an abandonment of civic life.

This section examines how and why LGBTQ+ audiences disengage from news and how coverage decisions shape their trust, skepticism, and patterns of engagement. This section outlines the mechanisms people use to manage their exposure to news, the impacts of current coverage on trust and emotional well-being, the ways collaborators interpret and evaluate specific news organizations, and the opportunities they identified for journalism to earn their attention and rebuild credibility.

The story of the LGBTQ+ individuals interviewed for this project illustrates a central dynamic: news avoidance is deeply intertwined with trust. Collaborators do not simply step back from news because of volume or negativity; they do so because they feel journalism, as practiced today, does not consistently meet the standards of accuracy, integrity, or humanity they expect. At the same time, they were eager to name concrete practices (e.g., transparency, accountability, solutions-oriented reporting, and authentic representation) that can meaningfully rebuild engagement.

> "i did actively avoid the news until keeping up to date with the news became a matter of personal safety for me"
>
> ***LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY MEMBER***

HOW AVOIDANCE WORKS

Avoidance rarely amounted to "no news, ever," as several interviewees noted. More often, LGBTQ+ interviewees described controlled engagement: they kept themselves oriented while limiting exposure to coverage that reliably escalated stress, anger, or exhaustion. That control showed up in repeatable habits such as checking headlines without opening stories, relying on summaries rather than full coverage, setting time limits, and stepping away during intense cycles.

One of the most common forms of controlled engagement was source filtering. Interviewees did not treat "the media" as a single entity. They described a layered trust map that distinguished between journalism as an institution, specific outlets, and individual journalists or independent creators. Avoidance often happened through narrowing the list: choosing a small number of sources they could tolerate and actively refusing others. In practice, this meant replacing broad news consumption with a smaller diet built around outlets they associated with factual restraint and lower emotional manipulation (for example, wire services, public media, foreign broadcasters, nonprofit investigative outlets, and independent journalists).

For some, the control was also structural and practical. They described deleting apps, disabling notifications, or changing routines to reduce the ambient pressure of constant updates. One interviewee described deleting a news app because the stream of alerts and headlines became intolerable: "I deleted the news app from my phone because I'm like, I cannot keep seeing this… I'm not clicking on it and fully reading the article, because most of the time it's like, it's awful." This form of avoidance is not ignorance. It is an intentional redesign of the information environment.

Avoidance was also situational and predictable. Interviewees described stepping back when they knew the news cycle was likely to become destabilizing or when they were already having a hard day. One described taking mental health breaks when the scale of events became too much to hold: "Sometimes, when it gets to be too much, I will definitely take a mental health break. Like the world is on fire… but also it gets to be too much." Another described avoidance as mood management: "I think if I'm having a difficult day, I won't turn on the news, because… the impact it can potentially have on my mood."

Finally, a subset of interviewees described selective engagement for safety. Some wanted to avoid the news but felt they could not fully disengage because staying informed had become tied to personal security, especially for trans interviewees monitoring policy and legislative risk. One interviewee described that shift directly: "I did actively avoid the news until keeping up to date with the news became a matter of personal safety for me… it's really not feasible in this country at this time for trans people." Others described engaging strategically to gather what they needed for daily life, including what one LGBTQ+ interviewee called "information in my tool belt." In this mode, engagement is not driven by habit. It is targeted monitoring under pressure.

WHY AVOIDANCE EMERGES

Across LGBTQ+ interviews, avoidance was explained as necessary when three pressure points clustered together: emotional self-protection, low utility and powerlessness, and judgments about newsroom integrity and intent. These pressure points showed up in how interviewees described their bodies, their attention, their trust, and their decisions about which sources deserved access to their lives.

Pressure Point 1: Avoidance as emotional and mental health protection

For many interviewees, the emotional cost of staying informed eclipsed the perceived benefit. They described news as capable of eliciting immediate stress responses (e.g., anger, anxiety, dread, numbness), especially when coverage centers on hostility, threats, or debates over its legitimacy. One interviewee described taking breaks because the cumulative weight becomes too much to carry. Another described avoiding the news on difficult days because it affects their mood.

One described this as a deliberate boundary: "I made a conscious decision to not read the news… to decouple myself from the atrocities at large… I had to decouple myself… in order to take care of myself." Another described how constant exposure to horrific events can make a person feel trapped and diminished: "You just genuinely feel like trapped… unable to do anything personally can make you feel like a bug." In these accounts, avoidance is not a personality trait. It is a protective practice.

Importantly, emotional self-protection was often con-

nected to specific newsroom styles and formats. Interviewees described pulling away from coverage that felt like a performance of conflict, a cycle of outrage, or a "soap opera" model of attention. This is where outlet filtering becomes a mental health strategy: narrowing to sources that feel calmer, more fact-forward, and less engineered to provoke.

Pressure Point 2: Avoidance as a response to low utility and powerlessness

Avoidance also emerged when news felt like it delivered a threat without traction. Interviewees described stepping back when stories presented harm, conflict, or catastrophe without providing orientation, context, or a clear sense of how to handle the information. One interviewee said, "I feel so hopeless, and like that I can't do anything about it, so I just won't do it." Another described how news they cannot affect becomes demoralizing: "Reading things I can't do much about… just depresses me and demoralizes me."

Several framed this as energy budgeting: "I think it's a waste of my mental energy. Unless there's something I can actively do about it… I avoid that." The same interviewee expanded the logic: "I just try to save my energy for something I can actually do something about, instead of… consuming a bunch of bad news, and then feeling bad, and not being able to do anything."

This pressure point helps explain why some interviewees gravitated toward outlets they associated with practical clarity: reporting that is more likely to provide timelines, definitions, policy detail, or actionable orientation. It also explains why some interviewees described engaging only when they needed safety-relevant information or when coverage provided something usable in daily life.

Pressure Point 3: Avoidance as a judgment about integrity, values, and intent.

A third pressure point was moral and evaluative. Many interviewees described making credibility judgments not just about facts in a story, but about what a newsroom seems to be doing with those facts: whether it is clarifying reality or manufacturing reaction, whether it is naming harm or laundering it through "debate,"

TRUST SIGNALS

What decreased trust

Events and practices interviewees named as trust breakers

Coverage that treated authoritarian risk as routine politics

Interviewees described trust dropping when high-stakes democratic threats felt normalized rather than interrogated.

Conflict coverage that felt like a loop

Some described fatigue when stories recycled outrage without added context or consequence.

Misleading headlines and sensational packaging

Clickbait and mismatch between headline and story were described as instant credibility hits.

Perceived owner or institutional influence

Trust declined when interviewees suspected corporate or political pressure shaping decisions.

LGBTQ+ rights covered as legitimacy fights

Repeated framing as debate or moral panic shifted coverage from information to exposure.

Interviewees rarely pointed to one article that went wrong. More often, they described repeated cues that shifted coverage from information to exposure. This graphic highlights common trust-breaking patterns interviewees named, including sensational packaging, conflict loops that add heat without clarity, perceived institutional pressure, and story structures that treat rights as legitimacy fights. These patterns should be read as diagnostic signals: what audiences said they notice, what they interpret as intent, and what makes them step back.

whether it is pursuing public service or feeding a revenue model.

Some interviewees described pulling back from news they experienced as emotionally manipulative–coverage that "riles up your emotions" or functions as rage-driven propaganda rather than reporting. Others described disengaging when the environment turns openly hostile. One described an immediate exit response: "When I see hate speech about me or my identity, I will dissociate and like nope out of whatever article… I don't like seeing bigotry aimed at me."

This is also where outlet reputations mattered. Interviewees described actively avoiding sources they experienced as hostile toward LGBTQ+ existence or reliably sensational. They described conditional trust toward some legacy outlets, sharper distrust when coverage crossed specific ethical lines, and stronger trust in sources they associated with restraint, independence, and transparent intent. In this framing, avoidance becomes both self-protection and refusal: a decision not to grant attention to outlets that feel morally evasive, commercially exploitative, or structurally committed to conflict.

These avoidance practices are not separate from trust. They are one of the main ways trust is expressed. Interviewees described making real-time judgments about which sources feel safe, sound, and credible enough to carry, and those judgments reshape how they relate to journalism long after a single news cycle ends.

HOW AVOIDANCE RESHAPES TRUST

Interviewees did not describe trust as a simple question of whether a story contains correct facts. They described trust as something that forms through repeated signals: whether an outlet seems competent, serious, humane, and accountable, especially when the subject matter carries personal risk. In that sense, avoidance and trust are mutually reinforcing. When coverage feels harmful, incomplete, or morally evasive, it creates emotional strain, reshapes credibility judgments, and pushes people toward tighter forms of controlled engagement: narrowing sources, scanning instead of reading, or stepping away during major cycles.

Across LGBTQ+ interviews, trust erosion emerged in five recurring shifts. These are not claims about what all LGBTQ+ audiences think. They reflect how interviewees explained their decision-making and interpreted newsroom behavior over time.

Shift 1: Integrity becomes the central test

For many interviewees, the most important trust question was not "Is this technically balanced?" but "Is this morally honest about what is happening?" Neutrality and "both sides" structures were repeatedly described as an integrity problem when human rights and safety are at stake. Several interviewees argued that journalism loses credibility when it treats LGBTQ+ existence as a debate or when it refuses to name discrimination and political extremism directly.

> "if you're going to use specialized terms, if you're going to use buzzwords, if you're going to use anything that has come along in the last 20 or 25 years as a term, define it in the article.
>
> ***LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY MEMBER***

One interviewee described this as a breakdown in plain language and moral clarity: "If you are not going to call fascism what it is… if you are not going to call discrimination what it is, why should I trust you if you can't call a spade a spade?" Another put the expectation even more directly: "Integrity demands a choice… if we are debating whether or not trans people have human rights, there is a moral stance you need to take." A third described how "neutral" coverage can legitimize cruelty once it becomes socially common: "Mainstream media is going to treat an opinion as legitimate as soon as it gets held by enough people… regardless of what is true or reasonable or compassionate."

This is where trust breaks fast. Interviewees were not asking journalists to become partisan. They were asking journalism to be honest about harm, to stop laundering dehumanization through "debate," and to stop presenting legitimacy as negotiable.

Shift 2: Commercial logic becomes a credibility problem

Interviewees also described distrust when coverage felt shaped by profit and attention incentives rather than public service. They talked about sensationalism, clickbait framing, and fear-based storytelling as evidence that the news is built to provoke rather than inform. When that perception takes hold, people not only disagree with a story. They begin to doubt the newsroom's motives.

One interviewee framed this as the basic structure of the industry: "These are businesses, and these businesses are motivated by first money… then they are about public good." Another described the trans community as a reliable engine for engagement, arguing that outlets can treat trans coverage as a "golden pig" because it generates clicks across the ideological spectrum. Others described a structural bind: accurate, niche, safety-relevant information is often the least likely to be monetized or paywalled in ways that match community need.

This shift matters because it changes what interviewees do next. When coverage is interpreted as engagement-maximizing, many interviewees respond by narrowing their media diet toward sources they associate with restraint and lower incentive to inflame. That is one reason "controlled engagement" and outlet filtering appear so consistently as means of how avoidance works.

Shift 3: "Both sides" framing becomes a harm amplifier

Interviewees did not only object to sensational headlines. They objected to story structures that manufacture equivalence between evidence and bigotry, or between scientific consensus and fringe narratives. "Both

sides" framing was described as a credibility failure because it makes harmful claims seem normal and invites readers to treat rights as debatable rather than factual.

One interviewee used an analogy to illustrate the distortion: when a story pairs one denier with one expert, it can look "balanced" while masking the true weight of evidence. Another described withdrawing because outlets were "normalizing things that shouldn't be normalized" and failing to call out hypocrisy plainly. A third emphasized that "both sides" coverage on human rights issues can normalize harm by presenting dehumanization as just another viewpoint.

The practical point for newsrooms is not simply "don't do both sides." It is that story structure teaches audiences what the newsroom considers debatable. When coverage is organized as a legitimacy fight, it invites readers to treat LGBTQ+ rights and existence as an open question, even when the factual claims and real-world consequences are not symmetrical. Interviewees described learning, over time, that certain formats reliably produce heat rather than clarity, and they adjusted accordingly: skimming, stepping back preemptively, or refusing a story entirely.

For journalists working in mixed communities, this finding points to an actionable alternative: cover disagreement without staging it as a debate over personhood. Represent what people believe as a social reality, but report the truth claims through evidence, policy detail, and consequences. Make the story's spine verification and accountability, not "two sides." That approach serves readers who disagree, readers who are confused, and readers who feel directly at risk, because it reduces the chance that the newsroom unintentionally launders dehumanizing narratives into civic legitimacy. In many places, journalists could replace debate-style "two sides" framing with evidence-forward explanatory reporting that tests claims, clarifies consequences, and avoids making LGBTQ+ legitimacy the organizing question.

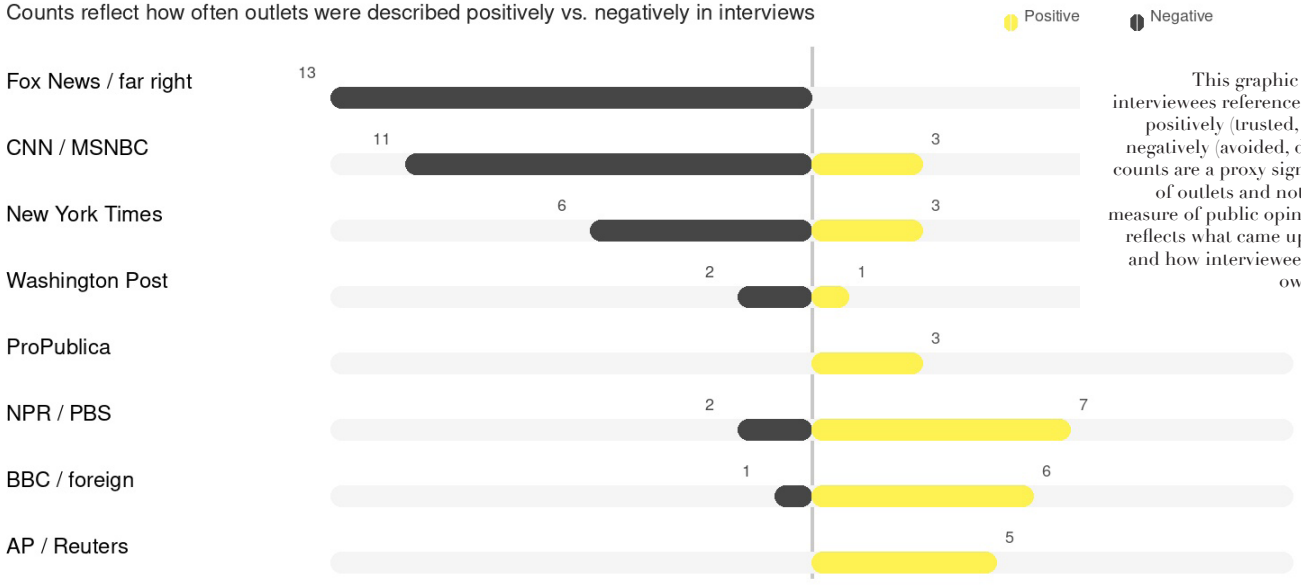
Shift 4: Emotional exhaustion becomes part of the trust equation

Interviewees consistently described emotional fatigue as inseparable from trust. When consuming news felt like an endurance test, trust declined not because facts were rejected, but because the emotional price was too high. People described anxiety, anger, dread, spiraling, numbness, and "spiritual fatigue" as the felt outcome

PROXY MENTIONS

Mentions as a proxy for trust

Counts reflect how often outlets were described positively vs. negatively in interviews



This graphic tallies how often interviewees referenced specific outlets positively (trusted, relied on) versus negatively (avoided, distrusted). These counts are a proxy signal, not a ranking of outlets and not a representative measure of public opinion. A "mention" reflects what came up in conversation and how interviewees described their own media choices.

of a news environment that repeatedly centers threat and hostility.

One interviewee described making a conscious decision to disengage in order to "decouple" from large-scale atrocities and protect their well-being. Another described the physical escalation of stress and the need to get "more aggressive" about limiting intake because it can spiral into hours of searching and rumination. Another described avoidance as mood regulation: "I think if I'm having a difficult day, I won't turn on the news, because… the impact it can potentially have on my mood. For some, exhaustion was connected to format. Interviewees critiqued cable-style coverage as a "news media soap opera" and described pulling away because the framing makes them wonder, "what's the point of all this anymore?" That is not a rejection of information. It is a judgment that the delivery system is emotionally destabilizing.

Shift 5: Representation and topic selection become accuracy and values signals

Interviewees also described misrepresentation as a credibility problem, not merely an inclusion problem. They critiqued coverage that treats LGBTQ+ communities as a monolith, returns repeatedly to the same symbolic flashpoints, and depicts LGBTQ+ life mainly through rights conflict or tragedy. One interviewee argued that outlets erase diversity by implying the community is mostly white, which signals shallow understanding rather than expertise. Another emphasized the absence of intersectional presence and perspective, noting the lack of disabled and Black representation as a barrier to "an honest depiction of the world around them. Another critiqued monolith framing that reduces trans people to caricatures, oscillating between "monsters" and "helpless little things" instead of whole human beings.

Topic selection also served as a values signal. Interviewees described disengaging when they felt targeted by coverage, when stories amplified moral panic, or when repeated hostile narratives made it feel like the newsroom was inviting debate about their right to exist. Some described "noping out" when they encountered bigotry aimed at their identity. Others expressed anger at recurring cycles that position LGBTQ+ people as social threats, which made certain outlets feel unsafe even to sample.

Over time, these representations and topic patterns reshape trust by changing what people assume will happen when they click. If the expected payoff is conflict, distortion, or dehumanization, avoidance becomes the rational option. These shifts help explain why avoidance is not simply "less news." For many interviewees, avoidance became a form of credibility sorting: narrowing to sources they experience as more fact-forward, more restrained, and less invested in outrage cycles. The next section describes how interviewees talked about specific outlets, platforms, and individual journalists, and how those source-level judgments shape where trust concentrates and where it collapses.

CONDITIONS FOR RE-ENGAGEMENT

Even in a section defined by avoidance, many LGBTQ+ interviewees still described wanting journalism to work. They did not talk about "winning them back" through branding, audience messaging, or more frequent publishing. They talked about whether engagement feels survivable, whether stories are useful, whether journalists can show their work, and whether newsrooms will own harm when harm happens. A few interviewees were blunt about not seeing a pathway to re-engagement in the current climate. Most, however, described specific conditions that would make reading, watching, or listening feel worth the cost again.

The six conditions below reflect what interviewees described as most likely to reopen the door.

Condition 1: Chosen care

For many interviewees, care is the first threshold because engagement is experienced as a bodily and emotional event, not just an information choice. Interviewees described monitoring their mood and stress levels in real time and stepping back when coverage pushes them past what they can handle. One interviewee described taking a mental health break when "the world

is on fire," and even while wanting to know "which parts are more on fire," the volume still "gets to be too much." Another described skipping the news on difficult days because of "the impact it can potentially have on my mood." These are not abstract feelings. They are the practical conditions that determine whether someone can even stay with a story.

Care also shows up in the specific ways interviewees described managing exposure. One interviewee deleted a news app entirely because they "cannot keep seeing this," explaining that they used to click and read deeply, but now they avoid opening stories because "most of the time it's awful." Another described dissociating when encountering hate speech aimed at their identity and immediately "Nope"ing out. In this framing, care is not about protecting people from hard truths. It is about reducing preventable harm caused by editorial habits: headline provocation, endless conflict loops, routine legitimization of dehumanizing claims, or predictable exposure to cruelty without added clarity.

Care also intersects with safety. One interviewee described actively avoiding the news until staying informed became a matter of personal safety, adding that they would love to go back to avoidance, but it is "not feasible in this country at this time for trans people." That line matters because it reframes engagement as a burden. The condition interviewees are naming is not "make me want to read." It is "stop making reading feel like self-harm." When care is present, engagement becomes less of a risk calculation and more of a manageable civic practice.

Condition 2: Chosen clarity

Interviewees repeatedly described wanting journalism that helps them get oriented rather than spun up. They are not only reacting to negativity. They are reacting to confusion and overload, especially when stories touch policy, healthcare, schools, courts, and daily life. For some, unclear reporting is not just frustrating. It increases stress because it forces them to do interpretive labor while also managing fear.

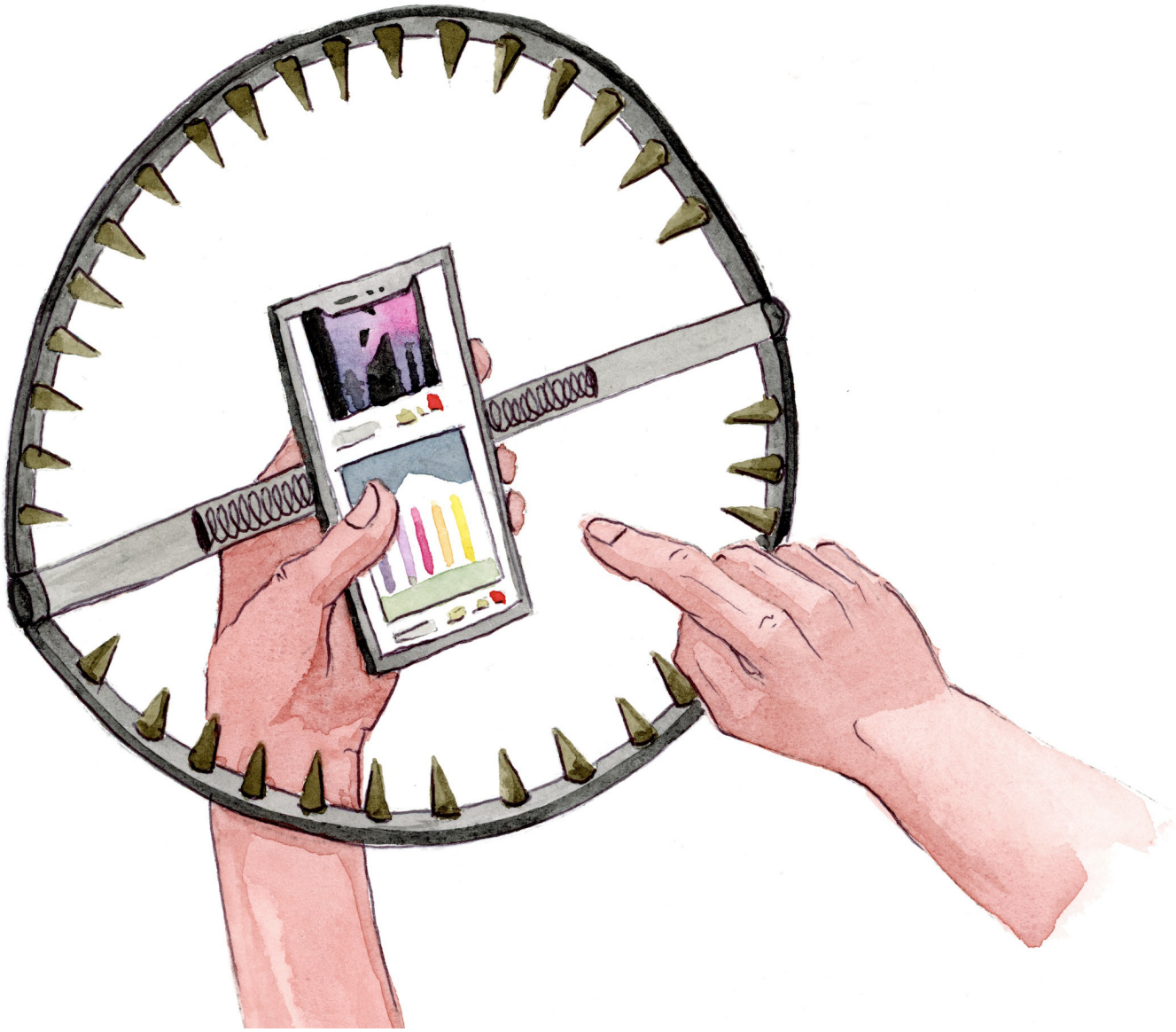
Clarity, in these accounts, means reporting that makes consequences legible. Interviewees described wanting deeper explanations of what bills actually do, who is pushing them, how enforcement works, and what changes they bring to people's lives on the ground. One interviewee described being more likely to engage when an outlet goes beyond the headline and offers a breakdown of what a bill means and who is fighting for it, rather than announcing it in a clickbait way that triggers anxiety without explanation. Another described wanting facts, not opinions, and framed it bluntly: "I don't care about your opinions. I want the facts on the matter." That is a request for story structure, not ideology.

Clarity also includes restraint and coherence. Interviewees described wanting fewer stories that feel like "discussion" or debate formats, where it becomes hard to tell what fact is and what is performance. For LGBTQ+ interviewees, that confusion carries higher stakes because the topic is not theoretical. It is identity, rights, and safety. Clarity becomes a condition for re-engagement because it reduces cognitive load. It signals that the newsroom is doing the work that audiences cannot do alone: translating institutions, defining terms, mapping timelines, and naming what matters without hype.

Condition 3: Chosen receipts

A strong re-engagement condition was "show your work." Interviewees described being more willing to engage when they can see how a story was built and where claims come from. In an environment they described as full of spin, manipulation, and emotion-driven propaganda, receipts operate as a credibility shortcut.

One interviewee said they would trust outlets more if stories included direct links to primary sources, such as Supreme Court decisions, transcripts, or vote tabulations. Another described the idea of including a limitations section, similar to a research paper, as "brilliant," because it clarifies what data can and cannot show, where evidence is thin, and what remains unknown. This is a direct response to how interviewees described modern information conditions: they feel pulled be-



tween competing narratives, sensational headlines, and outlets they suspect are optimizing for outrage.

Receipts also intersect with rage-bait fatigue. One interviewee described avoiding content that feels like "emotion-driven propaganda" designed to "addict you" based on how much it can "rile up your emotions." Another described the sense that coverage can prey on people's paranoia to make money. In this environment, transparency about sources and evidence is not an academic preference. It is a survival tool. It lets interviewees decide whether a story is worth the emotional cost of reading.

This condition can also be small and practical. Receipts can include links, documents, methodology notes, clear sourcing language, and explanations of why a newsroom is confident in a claim. Interviewees described re-engagement becoming more likely when the reporting helps them stop guessing.

Condition 4: Chosen repair

Interviewees described trust repair as a visible process, not a quiet internal correction. They described becoming more open to re-engagement when a newsroom demonstrates accountability in public, especially when prior coverage caused harm or validated harmful narratives.

One interviewee said trust requires a public statement recognizing what the organization did wrong and the harm it caused, followed by a public plan to improve. The condition here is not "never make mistakes." It is "do not hide the mistake, do not minimize it, and do not move on as if nothing happened." In a climate where interviewees feel the consequences of coverage

personally, silent updates read as avoidance rather than professionalism.

Repair also shows up in how interviewees talk about the news as an industry. Some interviewees described distrust tied to ownership, monopoly power, and corporate influence, and they linked that distrust to a sense that news is motivated by money first. One interviewee framed the system as "capitalistically motivated," arguing that profit pressure erodes the boundary between truth and power. Another pointed out that accurate, life-relevant coverage often targets people least able to pay, raising the tension between sustainable journalism and equitable access. One interviewee said they would consume more local news if it were not behind a paywall, even while acknowledging the dilemma of paying journalists.

Those comments matter here because they show what "repair" means in practice. It includes corrections and editor's notes, but it also includes credibility practices that address structural skepticism: being clear about funding and ownership, being explicit about constraints, and showing that accuracy and community service outrank engagement incentives.

Condition 5: Chosen truth

For many interviewees, truth is about accuracy and moral clarity when the subject is human rights and safety. Interviewees repeatedly described "neutrality" and "both sides" framing as a form of failure when it treats their legitimacy as up for negotiation.

One interviewee asked directly: "If you are not going to call fascism what it is… if you are not going to call discrimination what it is, why should I trust you if you can't call a spade a spade?" Another argued that "integrity demands a choice" when the question is whether trans people have human rights. In these accounts, the issue is not that journalists should become activists. It is that some journalistic conventions, especially debate formats and false balance, can launder harm into legitimacy. Interviewees described feeling that certain coverage treats cruelty as a reasonable viewpoint and teaches audiences that dehumanizing claims belong inside civic conversation.

This condition also explains why some interviewees monitor the news for safety, even when they would rather avoid it. When coverage refuses to name harm clearly, interviewees lose trust in journalism's ability to function as a warning system and public accountability. If the reporting cannot tell the truth plainly, it cannot be used to navigate reality.

Chosen truth is also about refusing to normalize what should not be normal. Interviewees described disengaging when coverage makes extreme rhetoric feel ordinary, or when headlines cycle outrage without consequence. For re-engagement, they described a need for journalism that clearly distinguishes among evidence and propaganda, truth and performance, and legitimate disagreement and dehumanization.

Condition 6: Chosen joy

Interviewees repeatedly described the need for coverage that does not define LGBTQ+ life only through threat, controversy, and tragedy. This is not a request to look away from harm. It is a request for journalism to stop presenting queer life as synonymous with crisis.

One interviewee said they want more coverage of "queer joy," noting that they often retreat to entertainment media to find those feelings. Another said they want stories about how the community is thriving, with community leaders, role models, and "the good stuff," not only political problems. Interviewees also described wanting coverage that includes practical resources and "action points," such as where to find help, how to volunteer, and what steps exist beyond fear. This connects joy to utility. It is easier to stay engaged when the story leaves you with something to do or something to hold onto.

One interviewee described engaging with LGBTQ coverage because it gives them "information in my tool belt" they can use in day-to-day life, especially in conversations shaped by misleading headlines. That quote matters because it reframes the goal of coverage. It is not just to inform abstractly. It is to equip people to live, respond, and stay grounded.

Joy, in this framing, is not fluff; it is narrative accuracy. When journalism only appears at moments of backlash, it teaches audiences that LGBTQ+ existence is a problem to be managed. Interviewees described re-engagement as becoming more likely when coverage also reflects resilience, ordinary life, achievement, and community strength.

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The opportunities in this section point to a shared conclusion: trust grows where journalism demonstrates integrity, provides meaningful support, and reflects the lived realities of the people it serves. LGBTQ+ audiences are not asking newsrooms to abandon rigor or neutrality. They are asking newsrooms to match rigor with humanity, to balance objectivity with moral clarity, and to create coverage that informs without depleting.

These opportunities are not burdens; LGBTQ+ individuals see them as pathways forward, with the news serving as a public service to their community. Recommendations for implementing these conditions will be discussed in the newsroom recommendations section of this white paper.

chosen proximity: non-lgbtq individuals on enountering LGBTQ+ coverage

To clarify the broader climate LGBTQ+ audiences navigate, it is helpful to examine the perspectives of interviewees who do not identify as LGBTQ+. These interviews do not represent LGBTQ+ lived experience. They do, however, offer a wider-angle view of how LGBTQ+ topics are treated in public-facing news, how coverage is interpreted outside the community, and what kinds of cues shape audience judgments about credibility, conflict, and inclusion.

Across the non-LGBTQ interviews, several patterns show up repeatedly: perceptions of sensational or scandal-driven coverage, perceptions of missing context or "blackouts" of everyday reality, and the presence of moral opposition that frames LGBTQ+ visibility as illegitimate. These interviews also surface broader conditions that shape how LGBTQ+ coverage is encountered, including algorithmic fragmentation, "monolith" framing, proximity to LGBTQ+ loved ones, and polarized reactions to inclusion cues such as pronoun use.

WHAT GETS TAKEN UP (WHAT THEY NOTICE IN COVERAGE)

What follows focuses on what non-LGBTQ interviewees described noticing in LGBTQ+ coverage itself. They document recurring perceptions of what is emphasized, what is missing, and the story structures that shape how LGBTQ+ topics are understood outside the community.

The climate of sensationalism and "scandal"

Supportive and neutral non-LGBTQ interviewees often described LGBTQ+ coverage as something that arrives through "scandal" framing rather than through steady, civic-oriented reporting. In their descriptions, LGBTQ+ topics do not feel like a normal beat that audiences can expect ongoing, contextual coverage of. Instead, they appear as sudden spikes tied to spectacle, tragedy, or controversy, then fade until the next flashpoint. One interviewee described LGBTQ+ news as coming through big moments and framed it as "scandals," describing the coverage as "very second news" rather than sustained public-service reporting (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). The language here is telling: "scandal" suggests not only heightened attention but also a posture of exposure and judgment, positioning the story for reaction rather than understanding.

Several supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees also described this sensational cycle as being reinforced by adversarial story structure. One supportive interviewee expressed frustration with what they experienced as constant "he said, she said" fighting across outlets and questioned what the point of modern coverage is when it feels like a perpetual conflict cycle rather than a search for clarity (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). In these accounts, the issue is not that journalism covers disagreement. It is that conflict that becomes the organizing principle of the story. When LGBTQ+ topics are routinely framed through a "fight" structure, readers may come

to expect outrage, not information, and to read the coverage as another round of cultural warfare instead of as reporting that helps them understand institutions, policy, and lived reality.

Supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees also pointed to what they perceived as disproportionate editorial focus on controversy-driven storylines. One interviewee noted recurring fixation on "drag queen" stories and trans-related conflict, while arguing that larger, more consequential institutional harms can receive less emphasis in comparison (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). This critique is not a claim that LGBTQ+ coverage should be minimized. It is a critique of proportionality and framing: when a narrow set of LGBTQ+ flashpoints repeatedly dominates attention, it can give audiences the impression that LGBTQ+ issues exist primarily as controversy. It can also narrow the range of "acceptable" story types, where coverage is most visible when it is dramatic, polarizing, or easily weaponized.

Some supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees described this dynamic as being intensified by engagement-driven incentives. Their concern was that LGBTQ+ coverage becomes an attention magnet precisely because it reliably generates clicks, anger, and argument, making it easy for stories to be selected and packaged in ways that heighten conflict. In their accounts, this creates a climate where LGBTQ+ topics are exploited for engagement rather than handled with the steadiness and context that audiences expect from civic reporting. That does not mean every newsroom makes these choices, or that sensational framing is inevitable. It does mean that some readers perceive recurring cues that signal "this story is built for reaction," including scandal framing, headline provocation, and debate-style sourcing.

These observations do not demonstrate intent on the part of newsrooms, and they should not be read as causal claims about why coverage takes the forms it does. They do document how some non-LGBTQ readers interpret the patterns they see, particularly when high-conflict storylines appear to dominate what is considered newsworthy. For a newsroom audience, the value of this evidence is diagnostic: it points to the specific framing signals and story structures that lead some readers to experience LGBTQ+ coverage as episodic, conflict-driven, and designed for heat rather than light.

Beyond how LGBTQ+ stories surface, interviewees also described what they struggle to find once they start looking: sustained context and everyday reality.

Perceptions of "blackouts" and missing context

A second recurring theme across supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees is the sense that LGBTQ+ coverage often lacks basic context and fails to depict "normalcy." Several interviewees described a pattern where stories flare up around a small set of familiar flashpoints, while the day-to-day realities that shape people's lives receive far less attention. One supportive non-LGBTQ interviewee described outlets "glanc[ing] over" LGBTQ+ communities and focusing on recurring controversies such as "a club" or "Walmart bathrooms," while missing the "meat and potatoes" of legislation, concrete resources, and the practical realities that determine what is changing and who is affected (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). In this framing, LGBTQ+ existence is mainly visible through conflict. The routine civic layer, including how policy is written, enforced, funded, and experienced locally, remains harder to find.

Importantly, these "blackout" perceptions were not necessarily described as intentional suppression. They were described as a pattern of editorial visibility: what reliably makes it into headlines and what reliably does not. Supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees described wanting coverage that helps them understand the underlying mechanics of issues. When stories are framed primarily through viral moments or culture-war symbols, interviewees described being left without the information they need to interpret consequences, communicate accurately with others, or understand the timeline of what is happening. The complaint is not simply that there are not enough stories. It is the stories that often feel disconnected from the institutional and policy reality that is driving the stakes.

Supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees also described what they perceived as an expertise gap that contrib-

utes to incomplete or inaccurate framing. One interviewee argued that reporting can feel unfair because it is produced by people who "don't have any idea what it's like to be LGBTQ" (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). Another supportive interviewee critiqued coverage as "ill-informed, particularly when it comes to trans issues," and described frustration with reporting that fails to include "anything that's scientifically accurate" (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). These comments are not proof of widespread journalistic ignorance, and they should not be read as claims about the competence of all reporters or all outlets. They are evidence of how some readers, even those outside the LGBTQ+ community, evaluate coverage quality when it appears to rely on familiar controversy frames without demonstrating subject-matter grounding.

Several interviewees also linked this expertise issue to sourcing and story structure. When coverage emphasizes "debate" or reaction without anchoring claims in vetted expertise, interviewees described feeling that important information is being replaced by performative conflict. That concern shows up in how some supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees talk about missing policy specificity. One interviewee described wanting coverage that engages the language of bills, medical or scientific information, and institutional accountability rather than treating the story primarily as opinion and reaction (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). Another supportive interviewee emphasized newsroom accountability for the questions journalists ask and what they accept at face value, particularly when sources evade direct scrutiny (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). In their accounts, the problem is not disagreement. It is that key claims often go insufficiently tested, leaving audiences with loud positions and limited clarity.

These accounts point to a reader-facing perception that important details are frequently missing or underdeveloped, even when the stakes are high. Supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees described wanting journalism that does more of the work on behalf of the audience: defining terms, distinguishing policy language from political messaging, clarifying which claims are supported by evidence, and explaining how decisions will play out in schools, healthcare settings, courts, and everyday life. It is evidence of how some non-LGBTQ readers interpret what they see when LGBTQ+ coverage feels episodic, controversy-driven, and thin on the contextual and institutional detail that would help people understand what is actually happening.

That gap in context is connected to a second framing concern: coverage can feel narrow, as if a diverse set of communities is routinely represented through a small set of familiar storylines.

> "it's gone from frustration to a lot of anger... it's scaring her [my daughter], it's giving her anxiety
>
> ***NON-LGBTQ+ MEMBER, SUPPORTING***

"Monolith" framing versus lived complexity

Supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees also described what they perceived as a "monolith" problem: coverage that treats diverse communities, identities, and lived experiences as if a small number of recurring storylines could represent them. Several interviewees noted that LGBTQ+ coverage often gravitates toward tragedy, scandal, or rights conflict and rarely depicts ordinary life, everyday success, or the mundane realities that make people legible as full citizens rather than as symbols in a cultural fight (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). In these accounts, LGBTQ+ people appear most often at moments of crisis or controversy, which can implicitly teach audiences that LGBTQ+ life is defined primarily by conflict.

Supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees were also attentive to which LGBTQ+ identities receive visibility and which remain peripheral. One interviewee criticized the tendency to focus primarily on "the L and the G," arguing that coverage often privileges white-centered narratives and, in doing so, erases bisexual, trans, BIPOC, and other lived realities that do not fit the most familiar templates (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, support-

ive). Another supportive interviewee described the sense that the "same" LGBTQ+ stories cycle repeatedly, while other identities and experiences appear only intermittently or as footnotes. In this framing, the issue is not simply underrepresentation. It is that repetitive selection and framing can create a public shorthand for "what LGBTQ+ issues are," narrowing the community into a few socially legible categories.

For these interviewees, there was a misalignment between what became headline news and what they understood to be community priorities. One interviewee noted that while the media fixates on recurring flashpoints like bathrooms, LGBTQ+ people often want the same core civic goods as anyone else, such as safe neighborhoods and strong education (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). That observation is not a claim about what all LGBTQ+ people want. It is evidence of how some outside observers interpret the mismatch between everyday community concerns and the limited set of topics that dominate coverage. In their telling, the news's repeated focus on a handful of controversies can crowd out other forms of public service reporting, including local policy coverage, institutional accountability, community achievement, and stories that portray LGBTQ+ lives as multidimensional rather than exceptional.

Again, these observations do not prove newsroom intent or universal practice. They do provide evidence of a recurring perception among supportive non-LGBTQ readers: that coverage often narrows a diverse community into a small number of hyper-visible controversies, and that these narrowing shapes what "LGBTQ+ news" comes to mean in the public imagination. When that shorthand becomes dominant, it can influence how audiences approach future coverage, what they expect to see, and whether they assume LGBTQ+ topics will appear as civic reporting or as conflict-driven spectacle.

WHAT SHAPES HOW IT LANDS (ENVIRONMENT AROUND COVERAGE)

There is now a need to step back from individual story frames to describe the broader conditions non-LGBTQ interviewees said shape how LGBTQ+ coverage is encountered. These describe the environment readers say they experience: fragmented information streams, polarized interpretations, and emotional spillover tied to proximity, care, and conflict.

Algorithmic fragmentation and the loss of shared facts

Supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees also described the broader information landscape as fractured and politically warped, shaped by platforms and incentives that amplify conflict. In their accounts, the challenge is not simply that audiences disagree, but that people are no longer encountering the same baseline set of facts or interpretive frames. One interviewee described the "status of news today" as increasingly polarized and "warped," with little middle ground available and few places that feel designed for shared understanding (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). Another supportive interviewee expressed frustration that two anchors can tell the "same story" with "totally different" accounts, leaving people unsure what to believe and what counts as credible evidence (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). In this framing, confusion becomes a normal condition of news consumption rather than an occasional problem to resolve.

Several supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees also described feeling that conflict is not an accidental byproduct of the system, but a reliable feature of how attention is produced and sustained. One interviewee described a media environment that "thrives on drama," "preys on people's paranoia," and uses controversial headlines as "bait" rather than offering context for informed citizenship (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). Their language suggests a perception that the business and distribution logic of news and social platforms rewards agitation and certainty over explanation and humility. For some readers, the result is fatigue and retreat. For others, it is hypervigilance, in which headlines are read as threats, and every story becomes another test of whether the newsroom is "on a side."

This shows how supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees make sense of the current ecosystem: as one in which audiences encounter inconsistent narratives, interpre-

tive frames are delivered through polarized channels, and attention incentives shape what rises to visibility. Several interviewees described this as an environment in which it is difficult to maintain a stable understanding of events, as the story itself changes depending on where it is encountered. In that context, LGBTQ+ topics can appear especially vulnerable to distortion, not because distortion is inevitable, but because these topics are already treated as culturally contested and emotionally charged. When conflict is the default frame, and facts feel unstable, LGBTQ+ stories can be pulled toward symbolic politics, moral panic, or simplified "sides," making it harder for audiences to encounter coverage as public information rather than as another round of cultural warfare.

In a fragmented environment, disagreement does not always look like debate. Some interviewees described encountering outright rejection of LGBTQ+ visibility as a legitimate topic for news.

Hostility and moral objections in the news environment

Non-LGBTQ interviews also included a small subset of explicitly opposed viewpoints. These interviews matter for a newsroom audience because they show that LGBTQ+ coverage is often consumed in a climate where some readers do not treat LGBTQ+ topics as routine civic information. Instead, they approach these stories as questions of moral legitimacy and cultural permission: whether LGBTQ+ lives should be visible in news at all, whether LGBTQ+ rights should be treated as ordinary policy concerns, and whether journalists should even name LGBTQ+ people and identities in straightforward ways.

In the opposed interviews, that position was stated directly. One opposed non-LGBTQ interviewee argued that news outlets should avoid LGBTQ+ topics entirely, effectively calling for erasure from coverage (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, opposed). Another opposed interviewee framed LGBTQ+ topics as moral wrongdoing and rejected the idea that news is "the place" for such issues, objecting to coverage because it "promot[es]" what they view as sin (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, opposed). A neutral, non-LGBTQ interviewee refused LGBTQ+ labels and described identity within a fixed male/female framework, presenting LGBTQ+ identity as a "choice" rather than as an identity category shaped by lived experience, culture, and social recognition (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, neutral). Taken together, these accounts do not speak for non-LGBTQ audiences broadly. They do provide evidence that some readers enter LGBTQ+ coverage with a prior stance that limits what they will accept as legitimate journalism.

I do not reproduce hostile language from these interviews verbatim. The point is not to amplify it. The point is to document a condition that LGBTQ+ interviewees already navigate: the presence of moral absolutism and "othering" narratives within the same news ecosystem through which they try to stay informed. For newsroom practice, these interviews help clarify why "balance" and "debate" structures can feel risky to LGBTQ+ audiences even when a journalist intends to be fair. When a portion of the audience is not approaching LGBTQ+ stories as information but as a referendum on legitimacy, routine reporting choices can be interpreted as taking sides simply by acknowledging LGBTQ+ lives as real, present, and newsworthy.

These interviews also help explain why some LGBTQ+ interviewees describe bracing for harm before they click. The anticipation is not only about whether an individual story will be inaccurate. It is about whether the coverage will invite or platform rejection narratives, normalize hostility as a reasonable "counterpoint," or frame LGBTQ+ rights as endlessly negotiable. In that environment, disengagement can look less like a lack of interest and more like a strategic decision about exposure: whether the story will offer clarity and context, or reopen the same legitimacy fight that already saturates the broader news system.

That legitimacy frame helps clarify why small newsroom cues can carry outsized interpretive weight. Pronoun use is one concrete example interviewees returned to when describing how quickly trust can form or collapse.

Inclusion cues and polarized reactions to pronouns

Non-LGBTQ interviewees offered a clear example of how a single newsroom practice can be interpreted in sharply different ways: journalists listing pronouns in bylines, bios, email signatures, or introductions. Across these interviews, pronouns did not function as a neutral formatting choice. They served as signals that readers interpreted as meaningful, often before they engaged with the substance of the reporting.

> "pronouns are seen as a positive perception... i think it's good to know how they identify... especially if they go by they or them."
>
> ***NON-LGBTQ+ MEMBER, SUPPORTING***

For some supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees, pronouns served as a positive cue associated with clarity, respect, and basic professionalism. One supportive interviewee framed pronouns as helpful because "it's good to know how they identify," especially when someone uses "they/them" (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). Another supportive non-LGBTQ interviewee described pronouns as a signal that a journalist likely values diversity, equity, and inclusion and may approach identity with care (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). In these accounts, pronouns were not described as political messaging. They were described as a cue that a newsroom is aware of the social world it covers and attentive to getting people's identities right. For supportive non-LGBTQ readers, that cue can operate as an early indicator of credibility, particularly in coverage where accuracy about identity and terminology is already a point of concern.

By contrast, opposed non-LGBTQ interviewees described pronoun cues as a reason to disengage entirely. One dismissed the practice with contempt (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, opposed). Another described seeing pronouns as a trigger for disconnecting, framing the practice as incomprehensible and alienating (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, opposed). In these accounts, pronouns were treated as ideological markers rather than clarification tools. The reaction was not merely disagreement; it was rejection, in which the presence of pronouns served as a shortcut to deciding that the source was not worth attention.

These reactions do not indicate how most audiences respond, and they should not be used to make claims about prevalence. They do, however, document a sharp interpretive divide in how the same inclusion cue can be read in the same information environment. For supportive readers, pronouns operate as a competence cue: a small signal that a journalist is paying attention to identity and likely to get names, terms, and lived realities right. For opposed readers, pronouns operate as an ideological cue that triggers distrust before the reporting is even encountered. The difference is not the pronouns themselves, but the interpretive frame readers bring to LGBTQ+ topics.

This divide helps explain why small newsroom practices can carry disproportionate weight in contested coverage. In many communities, audiences have learned to treat identity markers as political markers. That can create real tension for journalists, including trans journalists working in rural or polarized settings, where a basic accuracy practice can be misread as "bias." It isn't that newsrooms should remove pronouns to satisfy skeptical readers. It is that inclusion cues are already part of the climate around LGBTQ+ topics, and they shape who leans in, who leans out, and how quickly audiences make credibility judgments before engaging with a story's substance.

Finally, some non-LGBTQ interviewees described their relationship to LGBTQ+ coverage in terms of proximity and care. For them, disengagement was less about the topic itself and more about managing the emotional spillover that coverage can create for loved ones. For newsrooms, the practical value of noticing this split is anticipatory: it clarifies why the same credibility signal can build trust for some readers while functioning as an off-ramp for others.

Proximity, caregiving, and the burden of protection

For some supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees, disengagement was described less as a personal preference and more as a caregiving practice shaped by proximity to LGBTQ+ loved ones. One interviewee described blocking entire networks to protect a family member with health vulnerabilities from the "consistent hearing of negative things" (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). In that account, avoidance is framed as environmental management: limiting exposure to coverage that feels predictably negative, repetitive, or threatening to reduce stress and prevent emotional spirals.

Other supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees described a similar protective posture even when they did not use the language of caregiving directly. They talked about anger, anxiety, and an "overdeveloped danger sense" on behalf of their children or friends, and described stepping back from coverage when it felt like a steady stream of risk cues rather than usable information (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). Their comments suggest that for some readers, LGBTQ+ coverage is processed through the lens of "What does this mean for someone I love?" rather than through a detached public-affairs frame. That proximity can make certain headlines feel less like political news and more like personal threat, especially when stories center on conflict, punishment, or legitimacy debates.

Several supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees also connected this protective stance to skepticism about symbolic inclusion. They voiced cynicism toward performative gestures such as corporate pride branding, describing them as PR-driven rather than grounded in consistent practice, integrity, or material support (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). In their view, visible signals of support can coexist with coverage choices or institutional decisions that still leave LGBTQ+ people vulnerable. This tension contributes to fatigue, particularly when the public-facing message of inclusion feels disconnected from the tone, framing, or priorities of everyday reporting.

The neutral and opposed non-LGBTQ interviewees reflected different reasons for avoidance. In particular, those who are opposed saw LGBTQ+ content as being a reason to "turn off," "find bias," or be "morally opposed" to it. They preferred not to see LGBTQ+ individuals and stories at all in the news; instead, they felt that the news should, to paraphrase one interviewee, t*alk about individuals, why do you need to say if they are gay or trans.* While the lack of labels was a sentiment shared by the neutral non-LGBTQ interviewees, the sentiment differed. Those opposed to LGBTQ+ content saw relation to LGBTQ+ identity as an imposition on their personal well-being and beliefs; those neutral felt that adding labels about one's sexuality felt unnecessary to tell a story, but didn't express disdain in their discussion of it.

> "actually talk to the community, like, actually talk to the people that are there. don't, just report."
>
> ***NON-LGBTQ+ MEMBER, SUPPORTING***

These accounts do not equate non-LGBTQ experiences with LGBTQ+ lived experience. They do, however, provide evidence that proximity shapes how some people interpret coverage and how they manage exposure to recurring negative storylines. They also add texture to what "avoidance" can look like outside the LGBTQ+ community: not only disengagement from disinterest, but disengagement as a form of protection, boundary-setting, and care when coverage is experienced as destabilizing for the people readers feel responsible for.

WHAT NON-LGBTQ PERSPECTIVES HELP CLARIFY

The non-LGBTQ interviews help clarify the wider news environment LGBTQ+ audiences are navigating by showing two things at once: what some outside readers say they repeatedly notice in LGBTQ+ coverage, and what they describe as the broader conditions shaping how that coverage lands. Supportive and neutral non-LGBTQ interviewees frequently described LGBTQ+ topics as arriving through flashpoints that feel engineered

for attention, including "scandals," tragedy-driven coverage, and recurring culture-war storylines (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). Several also described frustration with conflict-first reporting that reads as "he said, she said" and leaves them feeling that coverage is more focused on fighting than on helping audiences understand what is true and what is at stake (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). In these accounts, LGBTQ+ issues are positioned as unusually vulnerable to sensational framing, not because they are inherently scandalous, but because they are repeatedly treated as controversial.

Those same interviewees also described what feels missing when they try to follow LGBTQ+ news with care and clarity. Supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees repeatedly pointed to perceived "blackouts" of everyday reality and policy-specific context, where LGBTQ+ lives become headlines when conflict erupts, but the "meat and potatoes" of legislation, institutional change, and practical resources remain harder to find (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). They also described concerns about subject-matter grounding, arguing that coverage can feel unfair or inaccurate when journalists lack lived context or fail to include scientifically grounded information, particularly in reporting about trans people (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). Others described "monolith" framing, in which a diverse community is reduced to a small set of familiar storylines, with limited attention to racial, gender, and identity diversity and an overfocus on a few hyper-visible controversies (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). These observations do not establish why coverage takes these forms. They document what some readers say they look for, what they say they do not see, and how they interpret patterns in story selection and framing.

But these interpretive judgments are made inside a wider information environment that many interviewees described as fragmented and polarized. Supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees described an ecosystem where people encounter inconsistent narratives, where the same event can be framed in sharply different ways depending on the source, and where conflict incentives shape what rises to visibility (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). Within that environment, some interviewees also described encountering outright rejection of LGBTQ+ visibility as legitimate news. A small number expressed moral condemnation or argued for avoidance and erasure, positioning LGBTQ+ topics as inappropriate for news coverage at all (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, opposed). A neutral non-LGBTQ interviewee described identity through a fixed male/female framework and framed LGBTQ+ identity as a "choice" (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, neutral).

Non-LGBTQ interviewees also illustrate how small newsroom cues can carry outsized interpretive weight in this climate. Supportive non-LGBTQ interviewees described pronouns in bylines or introductions as a sign of respect and awareness, a cue that a journalist might approach identity with care (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, supportive). Opposed non-LGBTQ interviewees described the same cue as alienating and as a reason to disengage entirely (Non-LGBTQ interviewee, opposed). These contrasting reactions do not establish how most audiences respond. They provide evidence that inclusion practices are interpreted through stance, and that the same journalistic choice can build trust for some readers while functioning as an immediate off-ramp for others.

These perspectives add texture to the story without substituting for LGBTQ+ lived experience. They map the external pressures around LGBTQ+ coverage as interviewees described them: perceptions of sensational spikes and missing context; concerns about expertise and narrow framing; awareness of algorithmic fragmentation and contradictory narratives; proximity-driven emotional spillover tied to loved ones; and the continued presence of moral opposition. That broader climate forms part of the environment LGBTQ+ interviewees are responding to when they describe bracing for harm, scanning rather than reading, and stepping back when coverage feels unsafe or exhausting.

showing up with care: recommendations for newsrooms

The findings in this report point to clear, actionable steps news organizations can take to rebuild trust, reduce avoidance, and strengthen engagement with LGBTQ+ audiences. Collaborators consistently expressed a desire for journalism that is transparent, useful, honest, and attentive to lived experience. The recommendations below translate those expectations into newsroom practices that align with Trusting News's mission to help journalists actively earn trust through listening, humility, and transparency.

Each recommendation is grounded in recurring patterns across the 50 interviews and directly reflects how collaborators described their disengagement, skepticism, and pathways back to trust.

REBUILD TRUST THROUGH TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Collaborators expressed deep skepticism about the intentions and integrity of news organizations. They share that their trust increases only when newsrooms make their processes visible and acknowledge mistakes openly.

Recommendations

- Make corrections visible and explanatory. Silent updates were widely interpreted as evasive. Collaborators preferred explicit correction notes that clarified what was wrong and how it was fixed, such as an editor's note that acknowledges "what you got wrong and what you updated" (Non-LGBTQ, supportive).
- Disclose funding and conflicts of interest. Readers wanted to know "who they take money from" so they could make informed judgments about a newsroom's independence (Non-LGBTQ, supportive; Non-LGBTQ, supportive).
- Explain reporting decisions. When covering sensitive topics, collaborators wanted brief explanations of why specific sources were chosen, how data were verified, and what limitations shaped the reporting. They compared this to a research paper's documentation of constraints (LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Use precise language when discussing human rights. Avoid euphemism or hedging when describing discriminatory actions or attempts to restrict civil liberties. Collaborators repeatedly argued that failure to "call a spade a spade" eroded integrity (LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Add transparency elements, such as "How We Reported This" boxes, newsletter chatter, and social media short-form videos for high-stakes coverage. These can document sourcing, fact-checking, and the newsroom's reasoning. This practice directly addresses concerns about bias, misrepresentation, and selective framing.

These shifts reflect a desire for journalism that acknowledges difficulty without amplifying distress and treats the audience as partners in problem-solving, not spectators to crisis.

PRIORITIZE SUBSTANTIVE, CONTEXTUAL, AND SOLUTION-ORIENTED REPORTING

Collaborators share that their distrust rises sharply when they feel misrepresented, stereotyped, or flattened into a monolith. They want journalism that reflects the full diversity of LGBTQ+ communities and is informed by people with direct experience.

Recommendations

- Provide context by default: define terminology, supply a brief history, and translate policy into consequences. Confusion and mistrust were highest when stories relied on shorthand or assumed insider knowledge. In practice, this means using plain-language definitions at first reference, accurately reflecting sources' self-described language, and explaining what a bill or policy change does and who it affects, rather than treating language disputes as the story.
- Center material realities, not just cultural controversies. Collaborators wanted coverage of housing, employment, safety, medical access, and legislation. They were frustrated when newsrooms focused on issues like bathroom debates while overlooking immediate survival concerns (LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Offer actionable, solutions-oriented resources. Engagement was stronger when stories included information about community services, legal rights, or ways to participate in civic life. Collaborators felt hopeless when the news only outlined problems without tangible next steps (LGBTQ+ Interviewee; LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Balance challenging content with reporting on resilience and community success. Collaborators valued "positive encounters" and wanted newsrooms to highlight moments of progress or joy (LGBTQ+ Interviewee; Non-LGBTQ, supportive).
- Avoid vague or hyperbolic language. Audiences consistently rejected "fear mongering" frames that inflated threat or emotion without clarity (LGBTQ+ Interviewee; LGBTQ+ Interviewee).

These shifts reflect a desire for journalism that acknowledges difficulty without amplifying distress and treats the audience as partners in problem-solving, not spectators to crisis.

STRENGTHEN REPRESENTATION, LIVED EXPERIENCE, AND AUTHENTICITY IN REPORTING

Collaborators share that their distrust rises sharply when they feel misrepresented, stereotyped, or flattened into a monolith. They want journalism that reflects the full diversity of LGBTQ+ communities and is informed by people with direct experience.

Recommendations

- Assign reporters with relevant expertise or lived experience when appropriate. Collaborators believed that those "living it" were better able to capture nuance and avoid common inaccuracies. This also includes hiring queer journalists and fostering a culture safe enough for people to speak up about their lived experiences and be local in their identities. (Non-LGBTQ, supportive; LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Broaden sourcing beyond familiar spokespeople. Collaborators emphasized the need for intersectional voices, including disabled, BIPOC, rural, immigrant, youth, and elder LGBTQ+ community members (LGBTQ+ Interviewee; LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Avoid framing the community as uniform. Collaborators resisted being treated as "a monolith," noting that it erases the

diversity of needs and perspectives (LGBTQ+ Interviewee).

- Support staff in publicly sharing their pronouns or identity markers if they choose to. These signals were often interpreted as indicators of safety and inclusion (LGBTQ+ Interviewee; LGBTQ+ Interviewee; Non-LGBTQ, supportive).
- Provide training on sensitive terminology and common pitfalls. Collaborators reported recurring frustration with inaccurate or sensationalist descriptions of LGBTQ+ identities and issues.

Authenticity consistently was tied to trust. Collaborators responded positively when they felt seen, not simplified.

REDUCE EMOTIONAL HARM AND SUPPORT AUDIENCE WELL-BEING

Avoidance was often a rational response to emotional overload, fatigue, and harm. Collaborators didn't tune out because they lacked interest; they stepped away to protect themselves.

Recommendations

- Adopt trauma-informed framing for emotionally heavy stories. Collaborators described feeling overwhelmed by constant exposure to "horrific stuff" that was "not good for my mental health" (LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Avoid repetitive cycles of negative stories that offer no new information or context. Repetition intensified exhaustion and contributed directly to disengagement.
- Use content notes or summaries to help readers manage exposure. This allows the audience to decide how and when to engage, especially when coverage involves violence, threats to rights, or hate incidents.
- Pair conflict-centered stories with reporting on solutions or support systems. Without a path forward, coverage left collaborators feeling helpless and caused a drop-off (LGBTQ+ Interviewee; LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Review headline style guides to reduce unnecessary alarms. Sensational or misleading headlines created immediate distrust and frustration (LGBTQ+ Interviewee; LGBTQ+ Interviewee).

This recommendation set speaks directly to collaborators who said they disengaged because the news made it harder to keep their "mental state stable" (LGBTQ+ Interviewee).

ENGAGE LGBTQ+ AUDIENCES THROUGH ACCESSIBLE, COMMUNITY-FOCUSED PRACTICES

orators wanted journalism that aligns with how they consume information and participate in civic life. Accessibility and proximity were crucial.

Recommendations

- Streamline digital formats. Collaborators asked for concise explainers, mobile-friendly summaries, and formats that do not rely on traditional print structures (Non-LGBTQ, supportive).
- Host community listening sessions or moderated discussions. These settings allowed audiences to ask questions directly and provided newsrooms with insight into emerging issues (LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Partner with LGBTQ+ organizations to source, distribute, and provide context. Trusted community groups often serve as filters or validators of information (Non-LGBTQ, supportive; LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Demonstrate commitment beyond a single news cycle. Collaborators felt more trust when journalists followed a story past the "two-week mark" (Non-LGBTQ, supportive).

- Engage audiences on platforms they already use. Collaborators often relied on social media or peer networks for timely information; journalists and newsrooms need to make themselves more useful to their communities.

These practices position the newsroom as a community resource rather than a distant narrator.

REAFFIRM JOURNALISTIC COURAGE AND MORAL CLARITY

Collaborators lost trust when journalists avoided naming harm, sidestepped context to appear neutral, or treated existential threats as partisan debates.

Recommendations

- Name harmful actions or ideologies clearly. Collaborators repeatedly said trust collapses when journalists refuse to identify discrimination, authoritarian behavior, or organized hate (LGBTQ+ Interviewee; Non-LGBTQ, supportive).
- Avoid false equivalence in human rights coverage. Treating debates over rights or existence as balanced "sides" was interpreted as a failure of integrity (LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Interrogate claims aggressively, especially in political or legislative reporting. Collaborators wanted journalists to "push back" rather than repeat statements (Non-LGBTQ, supportive).
- Protect editorial independence from political pressure or corporate influence. Collaborators lost trust when they believed owners exerted influence, as in the Washington Post example (Non-LGBTQ, supportive).
- Develop internal guidance on when neutrality undermines truth-telling. Many argued that refusing to take a stance on clear harm is itself a moral and political choice.

This reflects a newsroom's commitment to independence and the core tenets of its ethical code; it also affirms its commitment to the communities it serves.

BUILD TRUST THROUGH SMALL, VISIBLE SIGNALS OF INCLUSION

Collaborators described minor acts of respect as having an outsized impact on their trust. Collaborators repeatedly described subtle gestures that helped them feel seen.

Recommendations

- Allow pronouns in bylines, staff bios, or email signatures when staff choose to use them. These cues were read as indicators of safety and respect (LGBTQ+ Interviewee; Non-LGBTQ, supportive).
- Ensure accurate naming and pronoun use in all coverage. Promptly correcting misgendering was essential for credibility.
- Highlight community successes and celebrations. Positive coverage balanced the weight of harmful news and signaled care for the community's well-being (LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Use visuals that reflect intersectional identities. Audiences noticed and rejected narrow or tokenistic portrayals (LGBTQ+ Interviewee; LGBTQ+ Interviewee).
- Publish or update newsroom values statements. When a newsroom clearly communicates its commitments, audiences can better interpret decisions and coverage choices.

These practices meet audiences where they are and communicate that LGBTQ+ lives are worth care, accuracy, and presence.

keeping the door open: paths forward

The LGBTQ+ news consumers in this study did not disengage because they were indifferent to current events or uninterested in civic life. They stepped back because the news environment, as they encountered it, demanded too much emotional labor, offered too little clarity or utility, and often failed to meet a basic standard of integrity on issues that shape their safety and survival. For many, avoidance was not apathy. It was self-preservation. Trust was not withdrawn lightly. It eroded through repeated encounters with reporting that felt sensationalized, incomplete, or inattentive to the realities of LGBTQ+ life.

These interviews also show that avoidance is not the end of the story. Many interviewees described returning to journalism or staying connected in more limited ways when they felt respected, accurately represented, informed without being flooded, and supported by information they could actually use. They stayed engaged when they recognized transparency, accountability, and moral clarity in a newsroom's work. Audiences stick around when journalism behaves like a public service.

THREE COMMITMENTS EMERGED AS THE CLEAREST THROUGHLINE FOR NEWSROOM PRACTICE.

First, journalists need to treat emotional and cognitive burden as a real access issue, not a personal weakness. Interviewees were explicit that overwhelming negativity, sensational framing, and repetitive crisis coverage can undermine their capacity to stay informed. Responsible reporting does not mean softening brutal truths. It means delivering them with context, care, and a respect for the limits of human attention and well-being.

Second, newsrooms need to make transparency and accountability visible. Interviewees consistently rewarded organizations that corrected openly, explained decisions, and clarified what they knew and what they could not yet verify. They wanted to understand why certain stories were elevated, how sources were chosen, who funds the institution, and what values guide the coverage. When those elements remained invisible, distrust filled the gaps.

Third, journalism has to reflect the communities it hopes to serve, not only in who is quoted, but in whose knowledge counts as expertise and what kinds of stories are treated as newsworthy. Interviewees asked for coverage that recognizes the diversity and everyday reality of LGBTQ+ life, not just its most politicized flashpoints. They placed trust in reporters who demonstrated lived context, deep listening, and sustained investment. They also wanted stories beyond crisis: stories that show thriving, community competence, and the ordinary dignity of daily life.

SEEKING JOY

This is also where traditional norms need a harder look. Interviewees were clear that "neutrality" can read as moral evasion when coverage treats human rights, safety, and legitimacy as topics of debate rather than as lived conditions with real consequences. Moral clarity does not require partisan framing. It requires accuracy about harm, an honest description of power, and a refusal to launder dehumanization as just another side.

The path forward is practical. It starts with humility and listening, shows up through daily decisions about framing, sourcing, context, and follow-through, and becomes durable when newsrooms build consistent relationships with communities that have clear expectations of what trustworthy journalism looks like.

Interviewees offered both critique and hope. They named what pushed them away with precision, and they were just as clear about what could bring them back. Their insights point toward a future where journalism rebuilds trust by changing its practices, not by asking audiences to absorb more harm in the name of staying informed.