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Launch of the Information Disorder Research in Sri Lanka and a Forum on Building Digital Resilience

Tuesday, 01 July 2025 • North Gate Hotel, Jaffna

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Launch of the Information Disorder Research in Sri Lanka and a Forum on Building Digital Resilience

Opening Address

PROF. SIVAKOLUNDU SRISATKUNARAJAH

Vice Chancellor, University of Jaffna

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Address by Chief Guest

HON. NAGALINGAM VETHANAYAHAN

Governor Northern Province

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Dissecting the Information Disorder

Human Factors and the Path to Solutions

IDRC · CRDI
International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international
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What is the information disorder and why should we understand it?

Speaker

HELANI GALPAYA

CEO, LIRNEasia

LIRNEasia: a pro-poor, pro-market Asia Pacific think tank; focus on infrastructure policy and regulation

Our Mission:

"Catalyzing policy change through research to improve people's lives in the emerging Asia Pacific by facilitating their use of hard and soft infrastructures through the use of knowledge, information and technology"

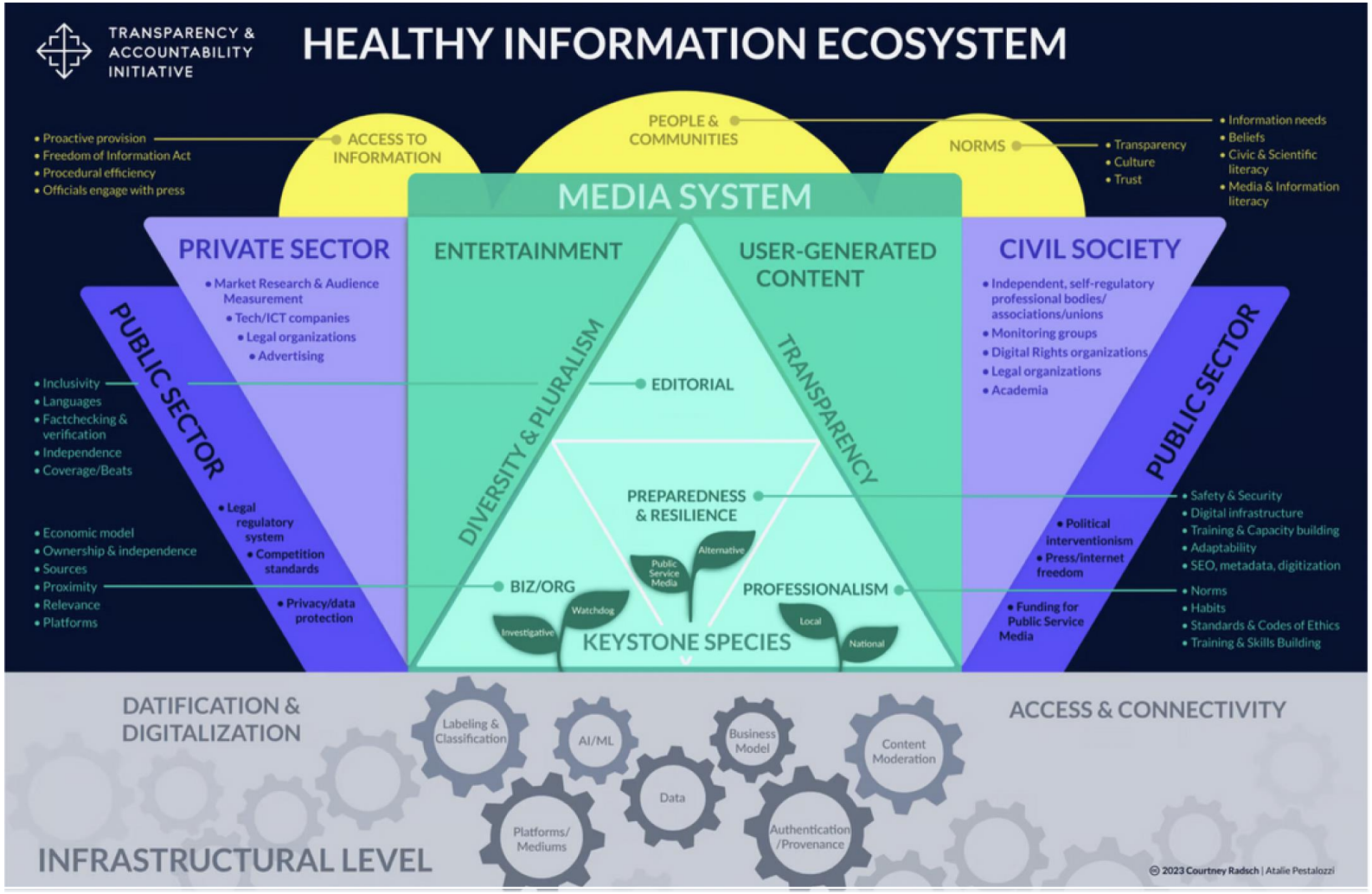
What is the information disorder and why should we understand it?

1

Context setting

Why we should care about the information disorder

An information ecosystem created by complex interaction of humans, technology, economics, politics and power



- ”Healthy information ecosystem: a well functioning and diverse system where , information created, shared and used responsibly
- But ecosystem of actors with different motivations, incentives and capacity
- Ability to influence (and be influenced by) this ecosystem directly an indirectly
- Influence can be intended/unintended, beneficial/harmful
- “Unhealthy” information ecosystems can lead to mistrust in media, mistrust among people, reduction in human rights, deterioration of democratic governance, physical harm

Source: Radsch (2023). Note others have provided models for how to think of influence in media/information chain - Eg. Shannon & Weaver (1949)

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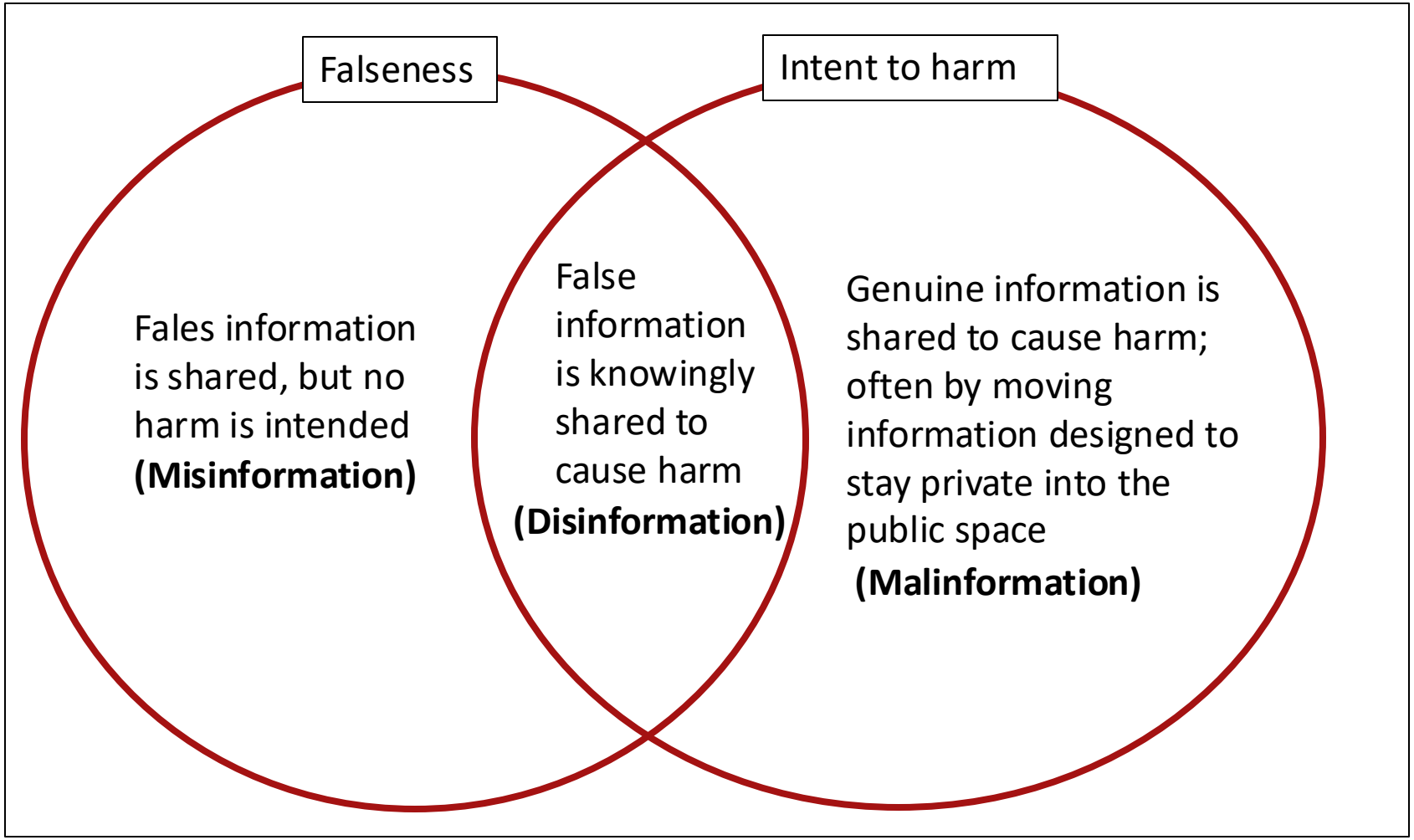
Information Disorder = all encompassing term for misinformation, disinformation, mal-information, hate speech



- Intent is often hard to detect
- In this presentation we might use the term ”misinformation” (because it’s the term most people use it)
- But we mean broadly all parts of the information disorder – misinformation, disinformation and malinformation
  - We do not differentiate by intent

Source: Wardle and Derakshan (2017); Wasserman et al (2020)

Thriving on a factors that form several interlinked self reinforcing cycle(s)

- The **more users on the medium/platform → the more users want join** (increased potential connections/network effects)
- **More users there are → more advertisers** value the platform (increased potential to reach more eyeballs/mindshare)
- **More users + more advertisers → More revenue + more data** to analyze for the platform
  - Driving investments in even more complex algorithms to optimize eye balls and income
- (Most) advertisers with low standards on where they advertise → **advertising money flows any content with people/eyeballs/attention**
  - Beyond minimum standards such as avoiding pornography sites
  - Few check for "fact checked" content adjacency
- **Power and politics** that understand all these incentives - use for own means (good or bad)
- New **laws and policies** intended to control the information disorder
  - But only the largest platforms able to comply with new rules re: fact checking
- Markets and **business models driving media concentration**
  - Increasing bias? Smaller outlets needing even more sensational content to user attention
- Systematic factors: difficulty in finding facts to verify against, lack of language resources to use AI in fact checking
- **Human attention as ultimate limited resource**
  - the "market" everyone wants to get a share of
  - Information overload
  - Human preference for sensational content? ("bad news spreads faster & wider"), differentiated literacy levels, psychological factors

Many responses/solutions implemented by different actors. Probably need a combination of all these for a workable solution

Type of response	What it looks like	Comment/challenges
Law & regulation related	- Fake news laws (e.g. POFMA in Singapore; NetzDG in Germany; OSA in Sri Lanka) - Competition regulation, defamation & other existing laws	- Problematic outcomes for free speech - Jurisdictional issue
Content production & distribution related	- Production of high quality content (by journalists or non-traditional content creators) - Labelling of content - as AI generated, as unverified - Content take down (by platform) - Algorithmic de-prioritization (by platform) - Demonetizing, advertising related responses - Codes of conduct/self regulation, community guidelines	- Done by platforms, media houses who have ability to do at scale - Need support of RTI related laws, open data - Platforms rely on trusted flaggers , algorithms and various detection mechanism - Effectiveness unknown (to us) due to platform lack of transparency
Independent fact checking	- Most common documented solution globally - Fact checks distributed to users via websites, text message groups, newspapers, TV etc.	- Funding and data for fact checking? - Inability to do at scale without algorithms - Most "pick" a topic/sector, not always based on virality or harm - Low reach of the fact check (vs original post)
Normative & educational responses	- Digital literacy, media literacy - User targeted fact checking	- Many variations - Impacts unknown for the most part - Sustainable model?

Sources: LIRNEasia, adopted and expanded based on Bontcheva & Posetti (2020) categories; See Vosoughi, Roy, Aral, 2018 on virality of different types of content

This study aims to bridge some gaps in our knowledge related to the role of humans in the information disorder

- Understand how demographic, social, and contextual factors shape belief in misinformation
  - through a nationally representative survey where we "test" people's ability to identify truthfulness of information
- Assess the effectiveness and scalability of some solutions
  - specifically, digital literacy programs and fact-checking initiatives
  - through an experimental study
- Our goal: identify ways to strengthen responses to counter information disorder.

Are we idiots?

Insights from the study on human factors that influence the information disorder

Speaker

SACHINI RANASINGHE

Researcher, LIRNEasia

Are we idiots?

Insights from the study on human factors that influence the information disorder

2

How we studied (parts) of a complex problem

Research design and methods

We understand the nature of the problem, but not enough of these human factors in the majority world

Majority of available research studies are from WEIRD countries

Some research exists for countries like India and Pakistan but unclear of applicability beyond borders

Often, research is focused on a single dimension, or discuss one area (e.g., misinformation focused on elections or on health).

Need to research (on the problem and solutions) situated in the region/country

In reality, these dimensions are interlinked

Sources: Badrinath (2021), Isalm (2021), Mistree (2021), Roozenbeek et al. (2023), Guess et al. (2020), Ali & Qazi (2021)

What we did: mixed methods, sequentially implemented

	Sample and sample composition	Locations	Method/details
1) Informative Qualitatives to design national survey	83 purposively selected respondents; aged 18 –65 Social media users and non-users	Western province	10 Focus group discussions (FGDs) 25 In-depth interviews (IDIs) Desk research on viral narratives
2) Nationally representative survey	2610 = 1797 Sinhala news consumers + 813 Tamil news consumers Aged 18+ with the ability to read	150 Grama Niladari (GN) divisions covering Sri Lanka	Systematic random sampling; 95% confidence interval; +/-3.3% margin of error for Sinhala news consumers and +/-4.9% margin of error for Tamil news consumers .
3) Experimental study	A sample of 1529 Sinhala and Tamil news consumers aged 18 to 65	7 Districts in Western, Southern, Eastern & Northern provinces	Sample selected using quota based purposive sampling
4) Explanatory Qualitative	A sample of 31 experimental study participants aged 18 to 65	Covering Western and Nothern provinces	5 Focus group discussions (FGDs) 11 In-depth interviews (IDIs)

1
2
3
4

“Testing" someone’s ability to identify misinformation: using cue cards that contained information that is not too different to what they might see across media

- Three topics were chosen (in case the type of information made a difference)
  - News related to the economy ("Economic" news, hence forth)
  - News related to ethno-religious context of Sri Lanka ("Ethno-religious" news)
  - News related to Climate Change and Environment ("Climate" news)
- These categories aren't totally independent of each other
  - And often have a political dimension
- Each card contained information that was True, Mostly True, Mostly False, False
- The content was designed broadly based on popular (mis)information narratives already observed circulating in the country
  - We worked with Watchdog (Appendix Ltd.), who designed the cue cards
- The cards were piloted in the field and refined prior to use in the national survey

We also found out that virality is influenced by language information is consumed in + geography

- We found virality is influenced by language & geography
  - Issues gaining traction in Northern and Eastern provinces (mostly in Tamil) was different from those in the South/Central provinces (mostly in Sinhala)
  - E.g. a pesticide use in rice farming is more likely to go viral in Sinhala-language media if it originates from the Central Province, where the population is mostly Sinhala
- **Therefore we needed (slightly) different content in the cue cards, based on language**
- In national survey, we asked respondents about the language they “prefer to read cue cards in"
  - 82.8% said in Sinhala; 16.9% said Tamil; 0.3% said English
- We showed them cue cards in their language of choice
  - They may have answered the rest of the survey questions in another language
- Essentially this "split" our sample for the national survey and experiment study into “Sinhala News Consumers” vs “Tamil News Consumers”
- **Today we are showing you the results for the Tamil News Consumers only**
  - **They may of course consume in English, but they chose Tamil cue cards during our survey**
  - 10 chose to see English cue cards but excluded from analysis
  - Sinhala cue card readers data separately anlayzed and released at event in Colombo later this week

Each respondent shown 40 cards (in randomised order), asked if the content was true, mostly true, mostly false or false. A score assigned based on answer. Total individual score range could be 20-120

Cue card composition

Content related to..	Classification of content			
	True	Mostly-true	Mostly-false	False
Climate	3 cards	3 cards	3 cards	3 cards
Economic	4 cards	4 cards	4 cards	4 cards
Ethno-religious	3 cards	3 cards	3 cards	3 cards

Scoring of answers by respondents

		Correct classification			
		True	Mostly True	Mostly False	False
Respondent classification	True	3	2	1	0
	Mostly True	2	3	2	1
	Mostly False	1	2	3	2
	False	0	1	2	3

The lowest possible score for a respondent is 20 & the highest is 120

An example of a Tamil language cue card

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We asked people about their information habits

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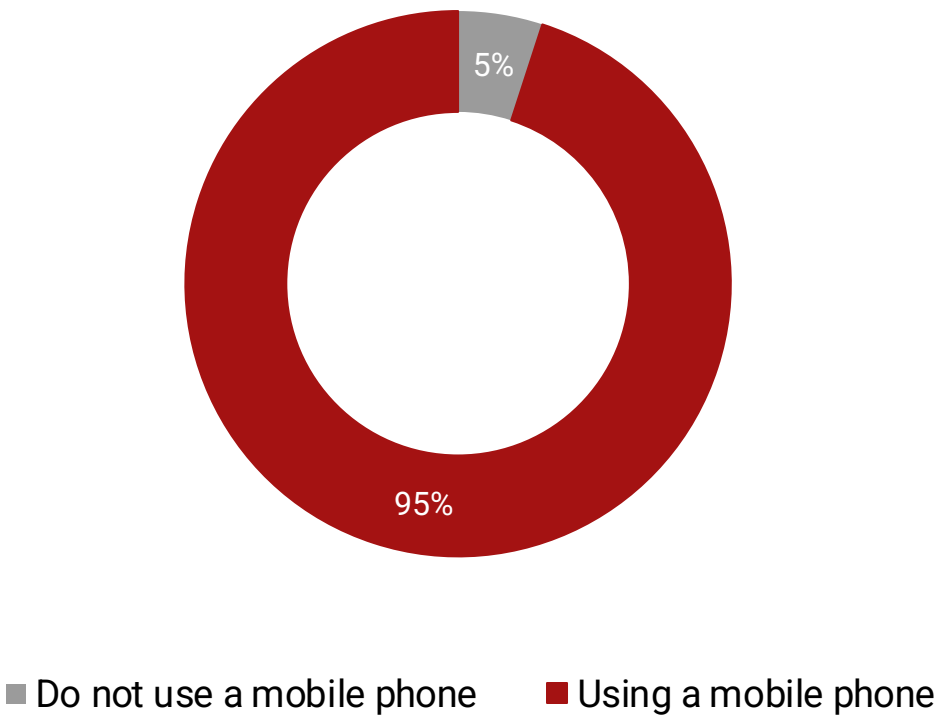
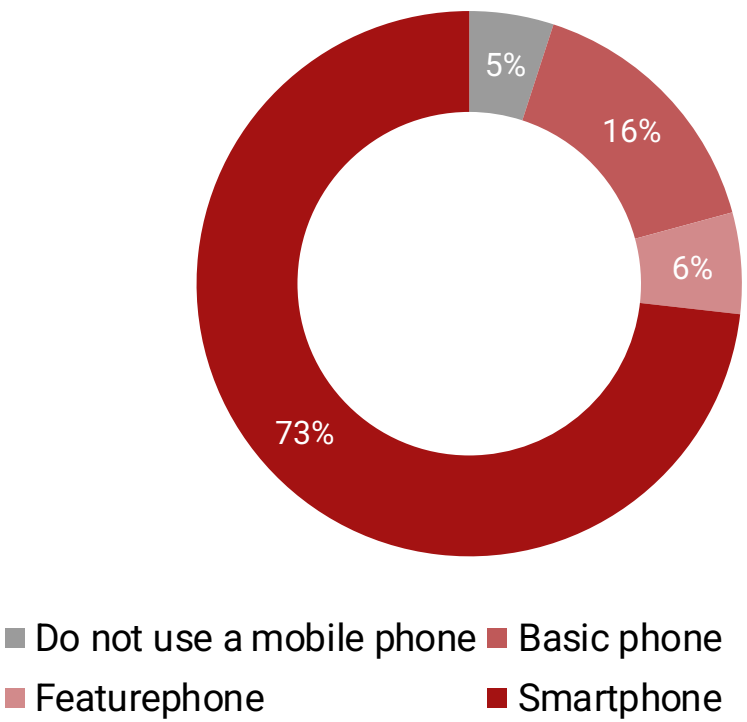
Mobile phones give instant ability to share, view, verify. 95% use mobile phones; 73% use smart phones

Mobile phone use
(% of Tamil news consumers)



Mobile phone use
(% of Tamil news consumers)



Q: What type of mobile phone do you use?,
Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=813)

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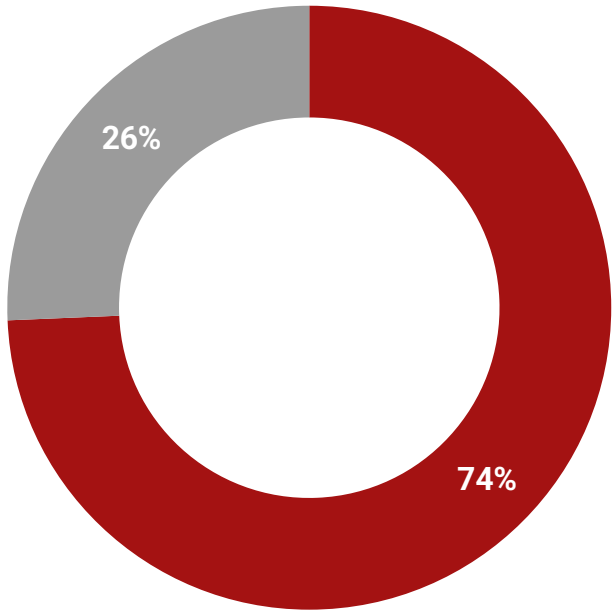
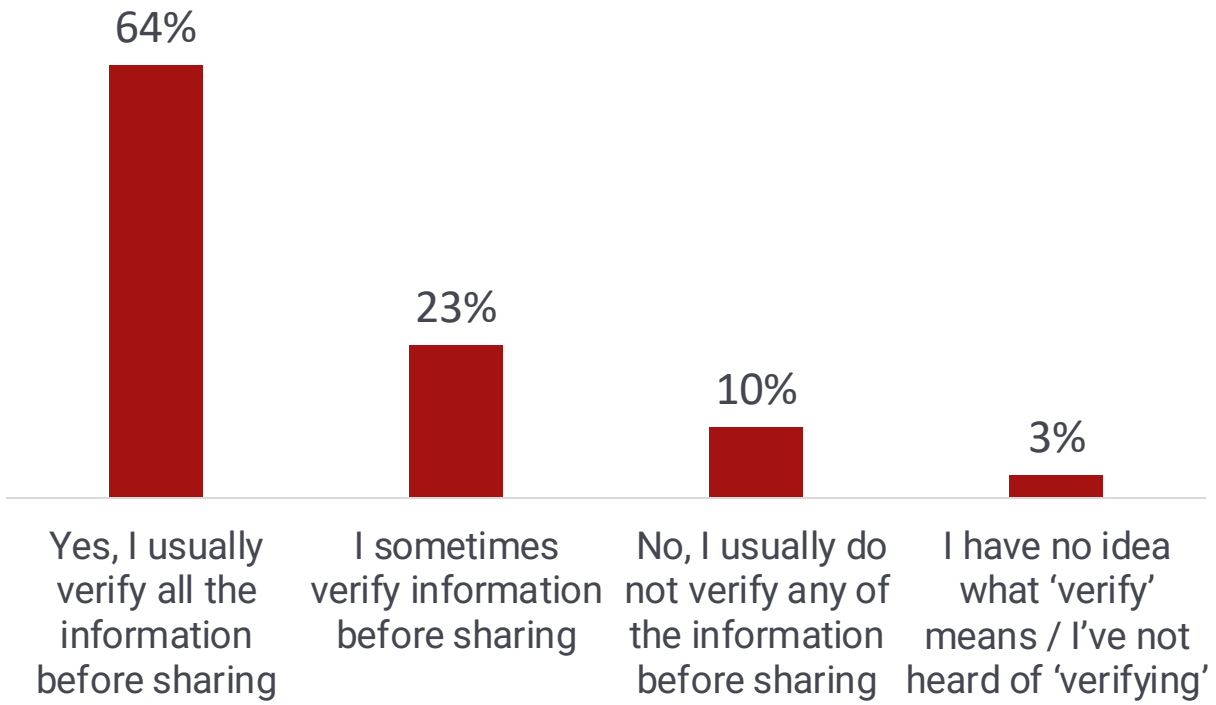
News sharing is high. Many claim they verify before sharing content (surprised?)

News sharing with others
(% of Tamil news consumers)



Shares news Does not share news

News verification before sharing
(% of Tamil news consumers that share news)



Q: You mentioned that you usually received information that is similar to what we showed to you earlier. Do you share it with other people?, Do you usually verify the information before sharing with others?
Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=813), Tamil consumers that share news (n=601)

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Most claimed to be aware of receiving false news in the past; nearly half verified by asking family/friends or checking offline information sources

Awareness of receiving false information (% of Tamil news consumers)

Method of identifying information to be false (% of Tamil news consumers that have received false news in the past)

Q: Apart from the cards that we showed you, have you ever received any information that you knew or know now to be partially or completely false?, How do you know that the information you received was partially false or false?, (Multiple response)
Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=813), All Tamil news consumers that have received false information in the past (n= 492)

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Searching for original/verified/multiple source(s) and reading comments in posts were used

"I check whether the post was made by a verified page. If I doubt it, **I go to the official page** or search for proof." – Umadevi*, 23 years, SEC C, Kalutara

"There are people who create fake pages during elections… so I always check first [if it it's a fake page]". – Nimal*, 34 years, SEC C, Gampaha

"People **debate in the comments**. I compare opinions and judge from there" – Ishara*, 20 years, SEC D, Colombo

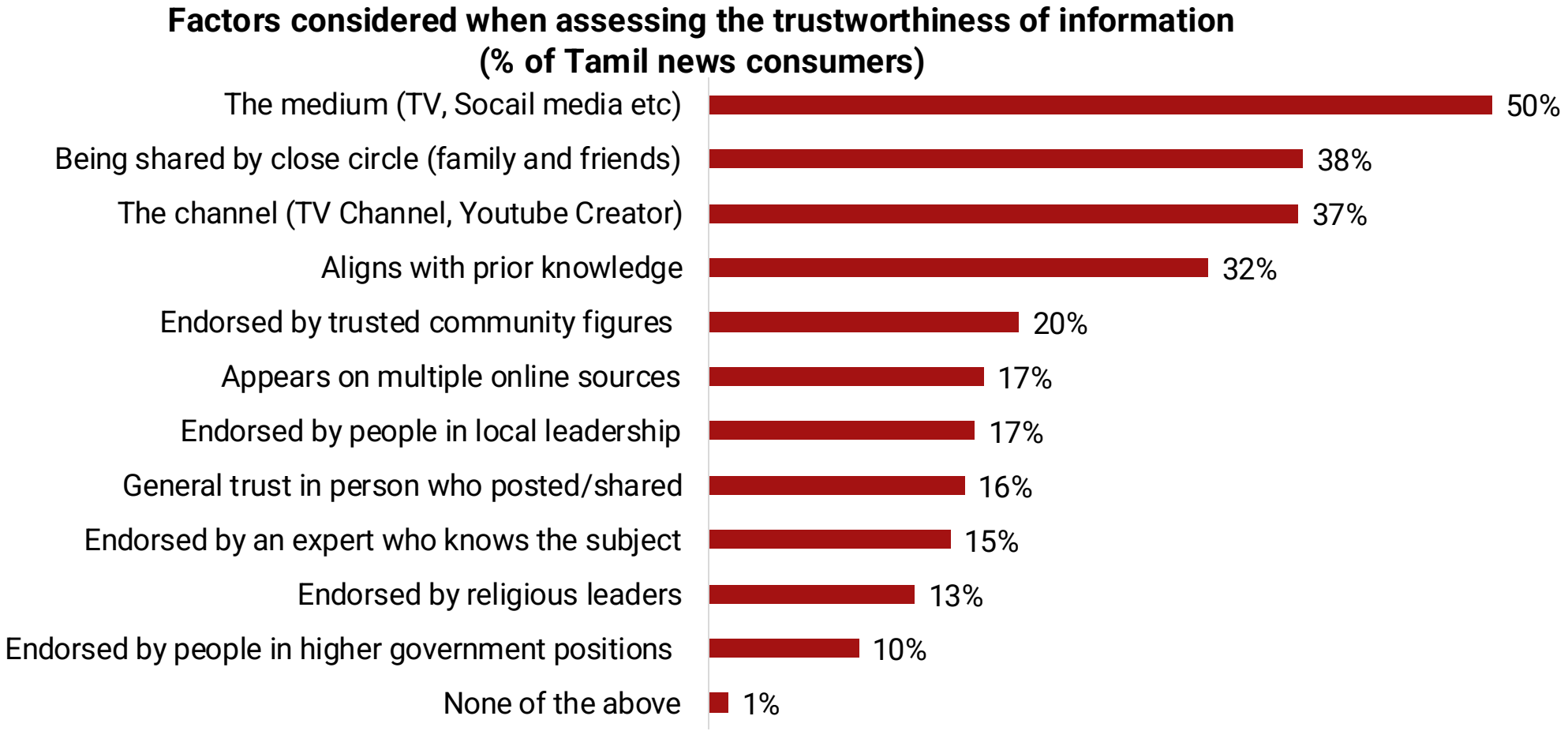
"You can't always believe what's posted, but **comments help** figure out what's real"- Nimesha*, 43 years, SEC D, Colombo

"If I see something new, I **search on Google** to find out more. If I see the same news on Helakuru, Facebook, and somewhere else, then I know it's true " – Sathees*, 29 years, SEC C, Kalutara

"Some news items are edited, they don't show the proper news, but **the full story** could be found on YouTube." – Dasun*, 20 years, SEC C, Gampaha

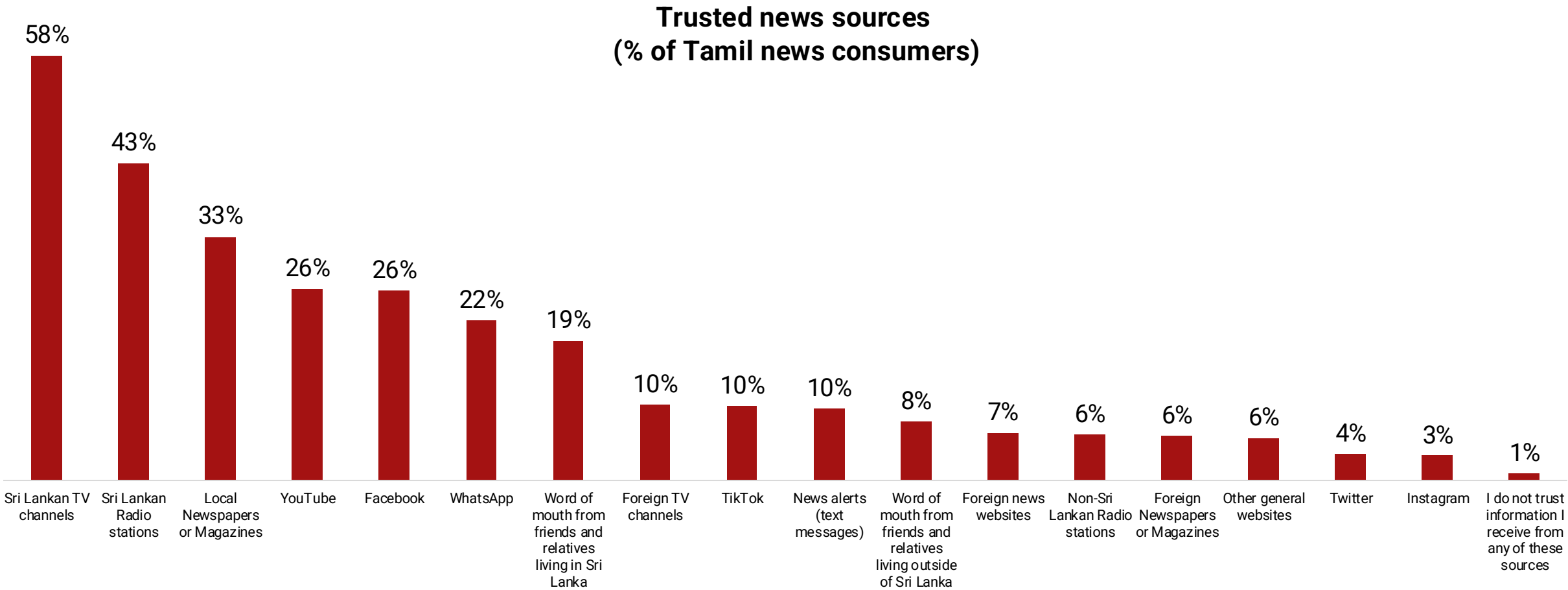
*name changed

Trust and acceptance of information influenced by type of media, sender/originator and prior knowledge



Q: What are the factors that you consider when deciding to trust or accept information as accurate or reliable?, (Multiple response)
Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=813)

Trust in news social media (Youtube, facebook) less compared to legacy media (TV, radio, newspapers)



Q: Others like you to whom we spoke to mentioned that they receive information from different sources such as TV, radio, newspapers, WhatsApp, YouTube etc. They also mentioned that they trust the information they receive from some sources but were less likely to trust some sources. I have a list of sources from which one can receive information. Can you please tell me if you receive the same piece of information from these sources, which sources are you likely to trust? (Multiple response)
Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=813)

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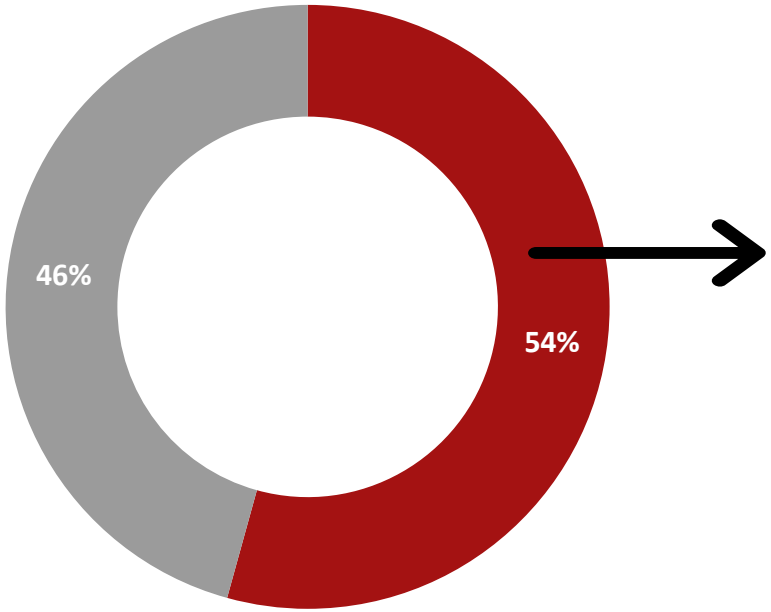
Majority say they have knowingly shared false information in the past, more than half did so to debunk it

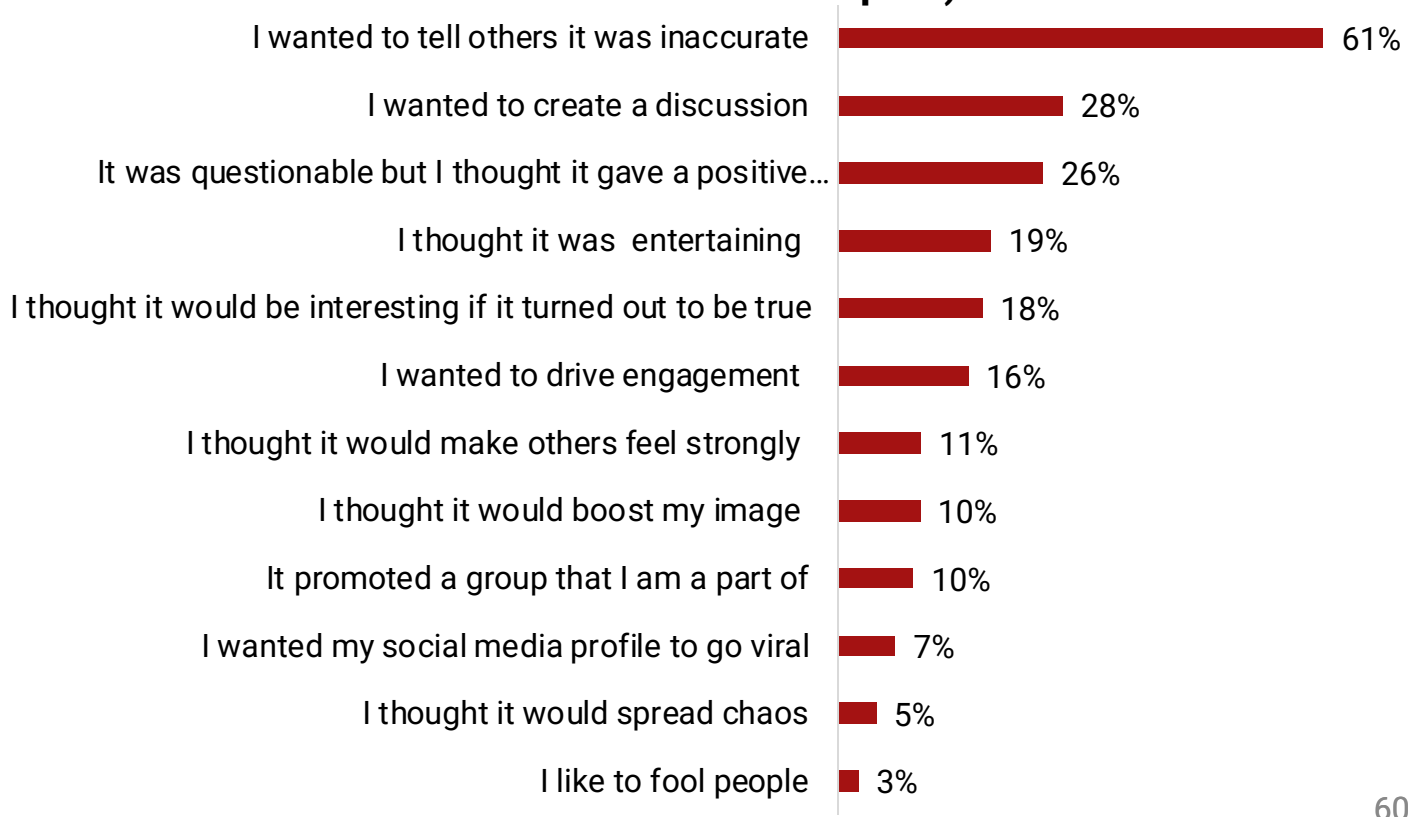
Sharing false information
(% of Tamil news consumers that share information with others and have knowingly received false information in the past)



Knowingly shared false information in the past

Have not knowingly shared false information in the past

Reasons for sharing false information
(% of Tamil news consumers that knowingly shared false information in the past)



Q: Have you ever shared news and information, that you knew/assumed at the time (before you shared) was false or partially false? What were the reasons behind you sharing news and information that you knew/assumed at the time was false or partially false? , (Multiple response)
Base: Tamil news consumers that share information with others and have knowingly received false information in the past (n=423), All Tamil news consumers that knowingly shared false news in the past (n=207)

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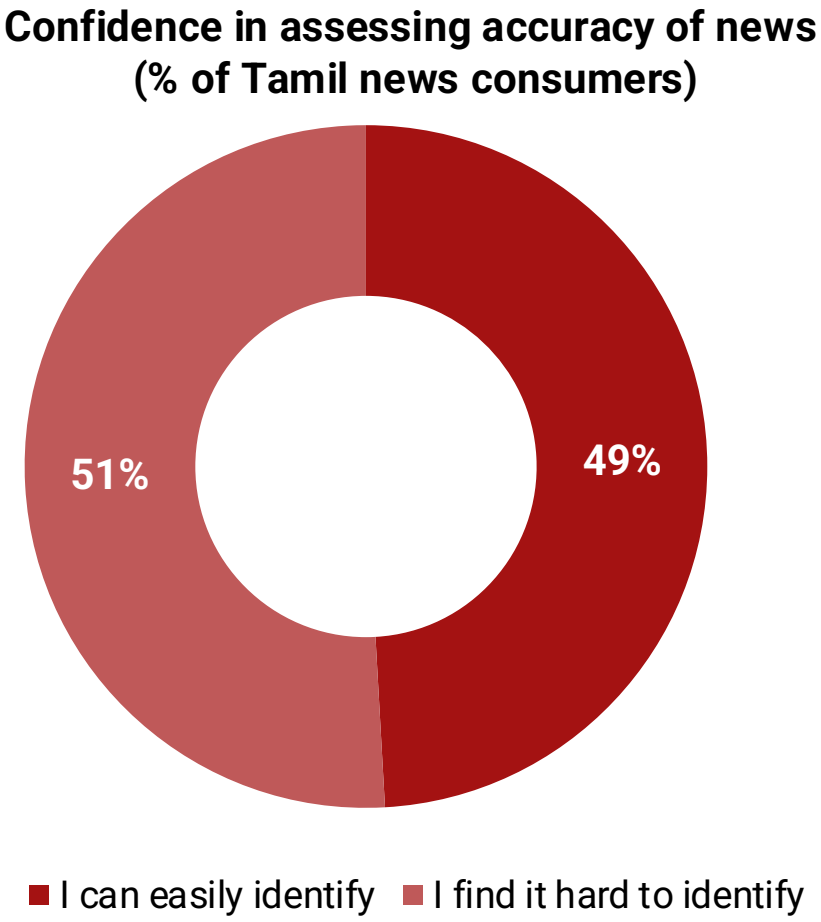
More than half say they are not confident of their ability to tell true and false news apart



Q: how do you feel about your own ability to identify whether the information is true or not true?
Base: All Sinhala news consumers (n=813)

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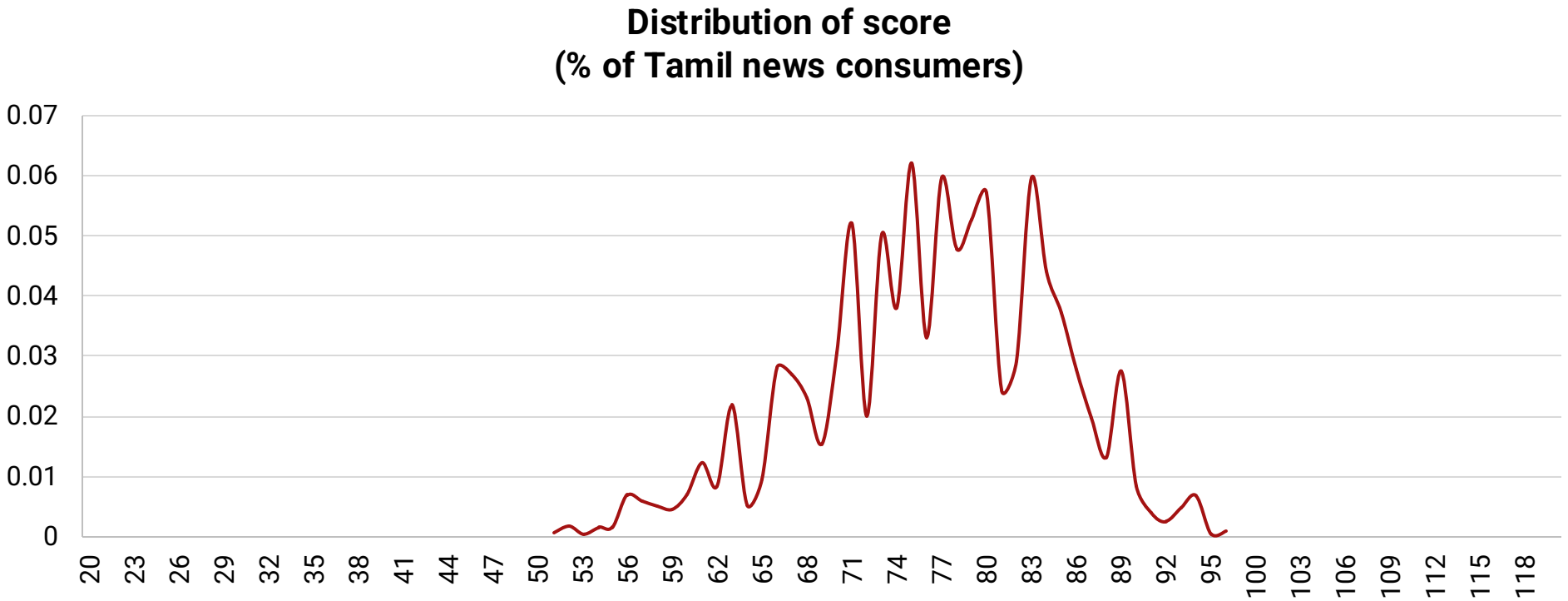
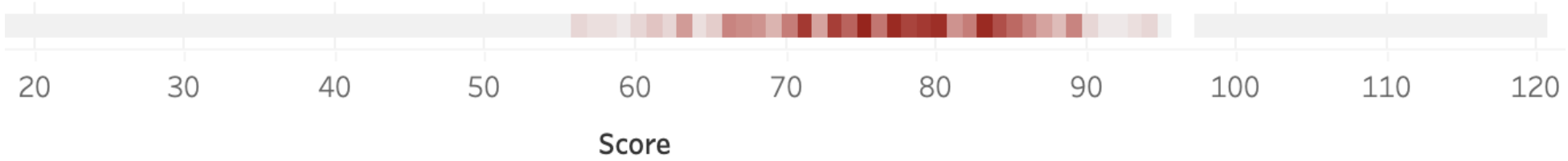
Can Tamil news readers identify misinformation (irrespective of their claimed abilities)?

Results tested using 40 cue cards

The scores are between 51 to 99



The lowest possible score for a respondent is 20 & the highest is 120



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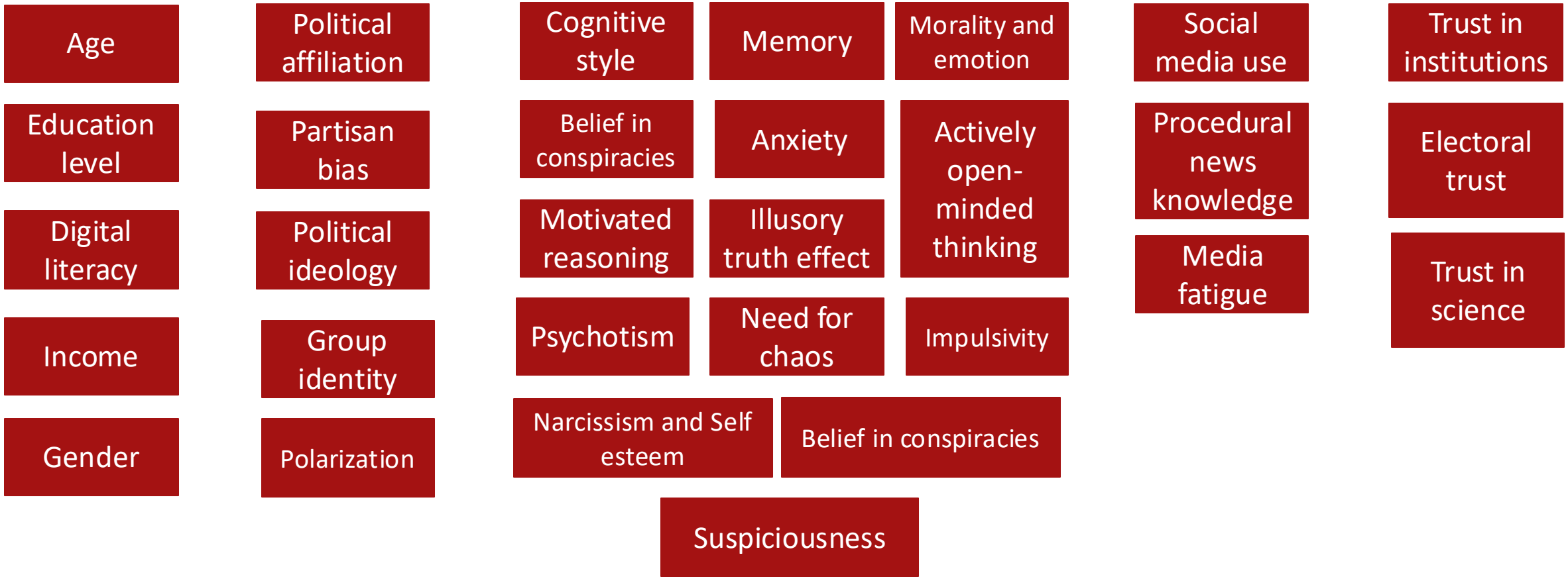
What human characteristics are influencing the ability to identify misinformation

Many demographic, behavioural, contextual factors are known to or thought to influence a person's ability to identify misinformation



Sources: Van Bavel et al (2021), Cichoka et al. (2015), Martell et al. (2020), Peterson et al (2023), Weeks (2015), Festinger et al. (1956), Kunda (1990), Schulz, Wirth, & Müller (2018), Pennycook & Rand (2019), Poon et al. (2020), Melki (2021), Mirhoseini et al.(2023), Sanders (2023), Roozenbeek and Lindon (2024), Guess et al (2019) , Baptista et al (2021), Aslett et al (2020), Schulz et al (2018)

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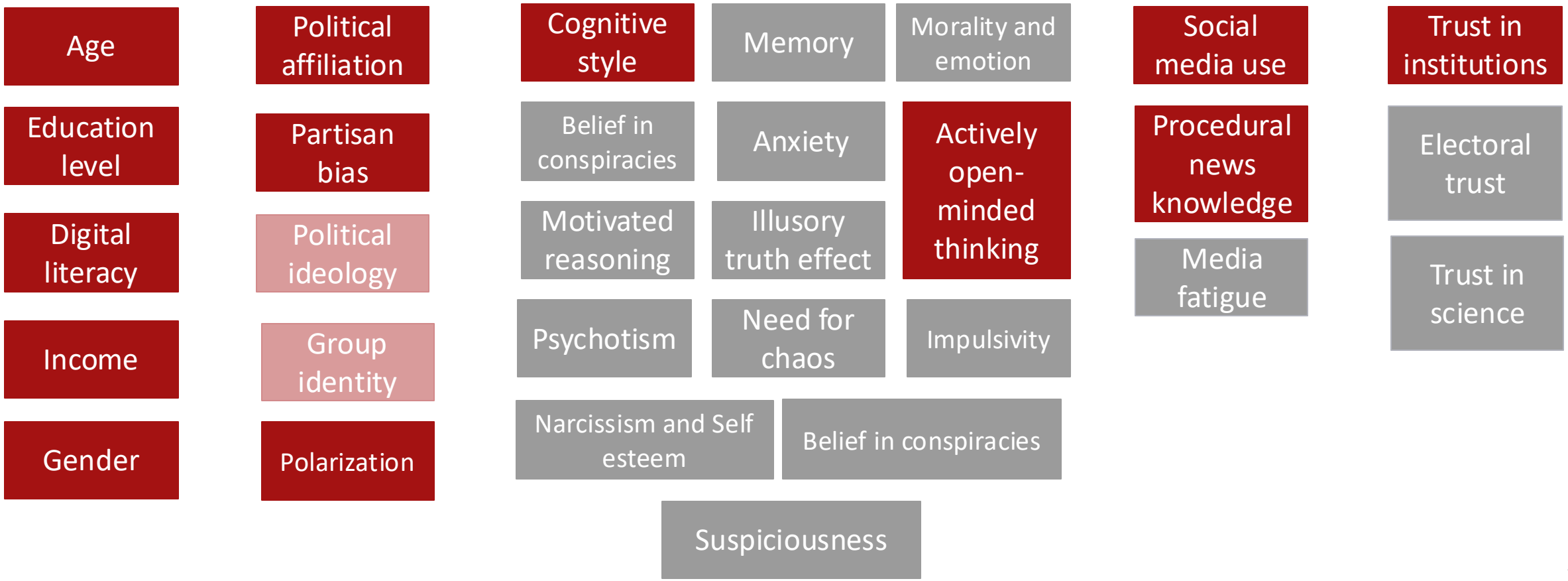
But capturing all these at scale are difficult for various reasons

- Testing some of these factors (e.g. memory and emotion) in a survey setting is very difficult
  - Complex questions to administer (a whole module, often)
  - Long time to answer
  - Not suited for a face-to-face survey setting
  - Not cost-effective to do at scale

Many demographic, behavioural, contextual factors are known to or thought to influence a person's ability to identify misinformation



Sources: Van Bavel et al (2021), Cichoka et al. (2015), Martell et al. (2020), Peterson et al (2023), Weeks (2015), Festinger et al. (1956), Kunda (1990), Schulz, Wirth, & Müller (2018), Pennycook & Rand (2019), Poon et al. (2020), Melki (2021), Mirhoseini et al.(2023), Sanders (2023), Roozenbeek and Lindon (2024), Guess et al (2019) , Baptista et al (2021), Aslett et al (2020), Schulz et al (2018)

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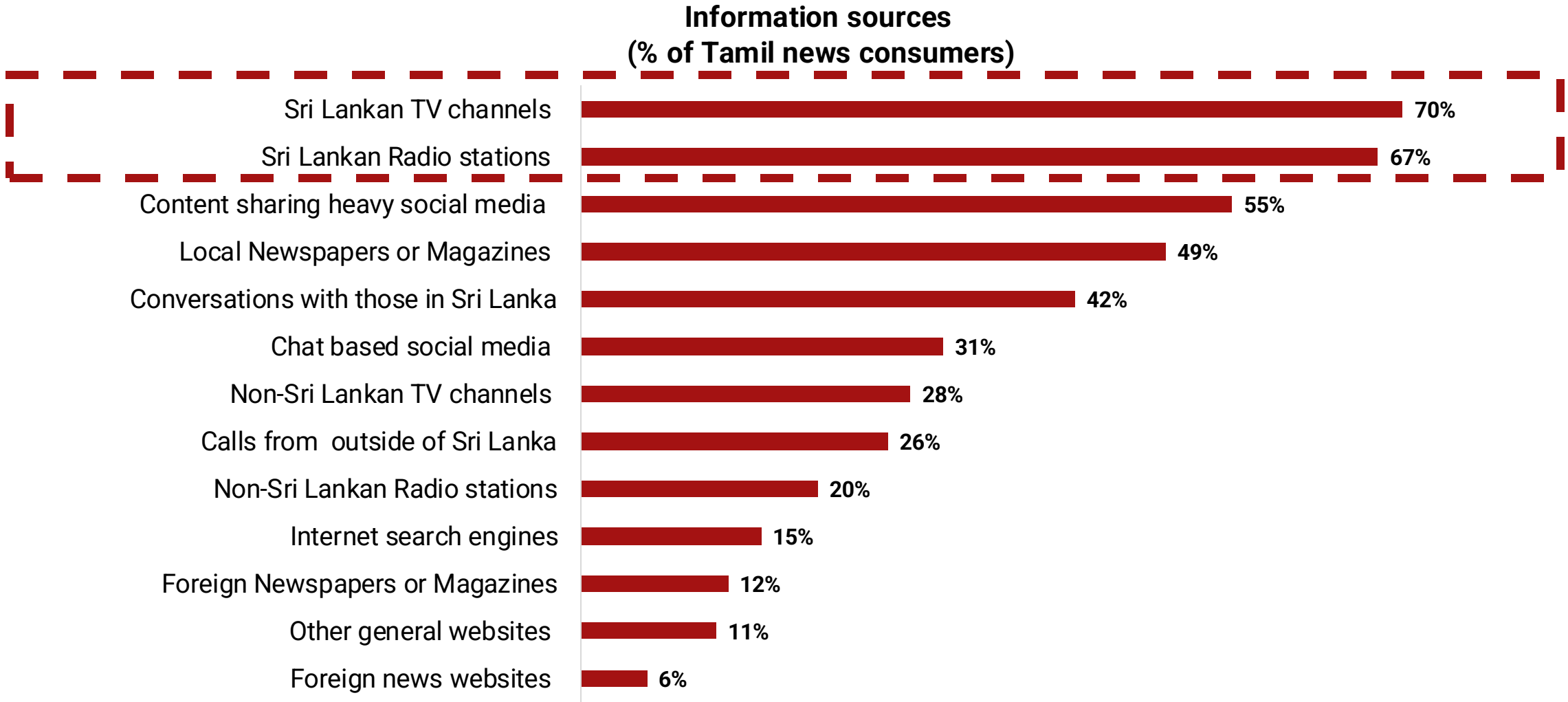
Information sources can shape exposure to misinformation

- Some studies finds that exposure to some types of misinformation is mostly through social networks as opposed to “mainstream news” sources.
  - An analysis of a sample of COVID-19 related misinformation verified by the International Fact-Checking Network and Google Fact Checking Tools found that the majority of it appeared on social-media platforms (88%), whereas it appeared much less on other sources: 9% on TV and 8% in the press.
  - May not apply to SL
- Social media inundates consumers with an “information overload” that also contributes to the problem – consumers cannot verify everything

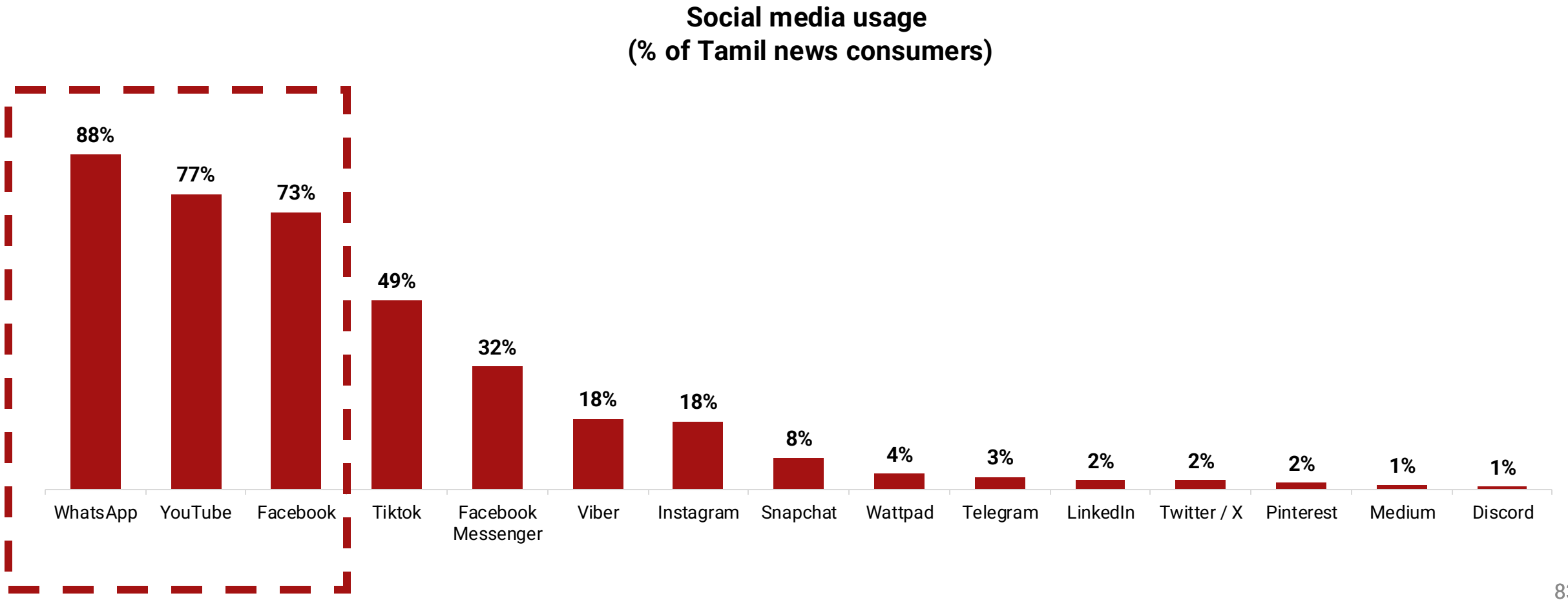
Source: Beauvais (2024), Brennen et al. (2020), Bermes (2021)

Local TV and radio networks most common channels to get news and information



Q: In the cards that we showed you previously, there were different types of information. From which sources do you get the types of information that we showed you?
(Multiple response)
Base: All Sinhala news consumers (n=813)

Among social media users, Whatsapp, Youtube and Facebook are widely used



Q: Do you use social media?, Which social media platforms do you use?, (Multiple response)
Base: Tamil news consumers who are social media users (n=609)

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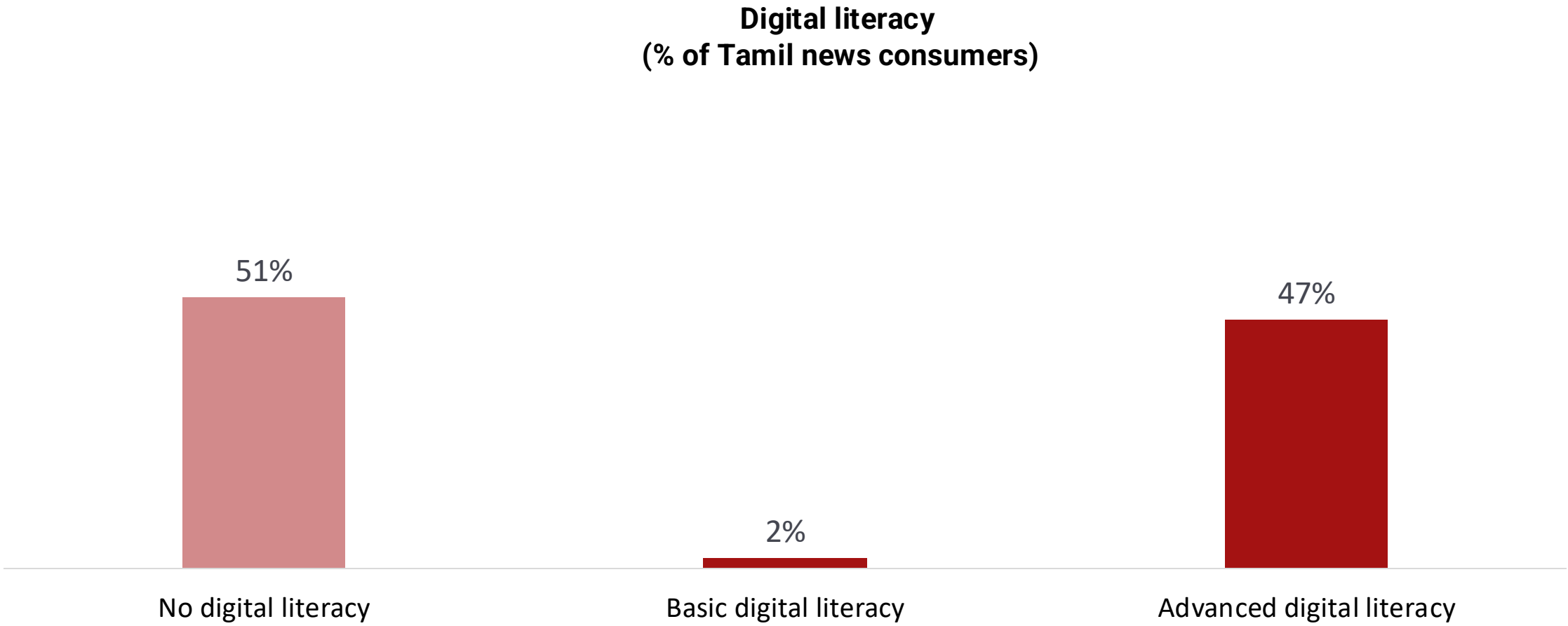
Understanding how news media works and digital literacy seems to have an impact on the information disorder

- Digital literacy and procedural news knowledge has been linked to better accuracy in distinguishing true from false news.
  - Several studies found a positive association between digital literacy and the ability to discern true vs. false information.
  - A 2019 study found that greater procedural news knowledge (e.g., how news is produced) was positively related to identifying false information
- Findings are not uniform across studies.
  - Some argue that digital literacy not very impactful; information literacy plays a bigger role.
- Digital literacy can also be a solution
  - There are some researchers that propose boosting digital literacy as a strategy to counter the information disorder.

Source: Sirlin et al (2021), Jones-Jang et al. (2019) , Roozenbeek & Lindon (2024), Amazeen & Bucy (2019)

The population is split between those who have no digital literacy vs those who have high levels of digital literacy



Q: [DCS recommended question] Have you used an internet-connected device (e.g., computer, tablet, smartphone) within the past six months to do any of the following? To search for data and information, To evaluate data and information, To store data and information in a retrievable manner, To share or receive data or information,
Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=813)

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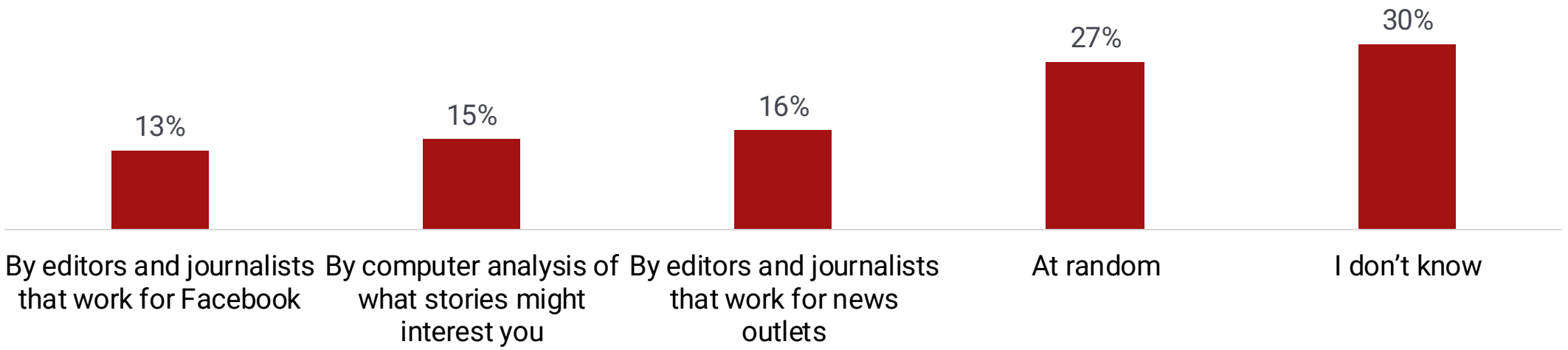
Knowledge on the media business models is low

Knowledge about social media algorithmic targeting
(% of Tamil news consumers)



Q1: How are most of the individual decisions about what news stories to show people on Facebook made?

Base: All Tamil news consumers (n= 813)

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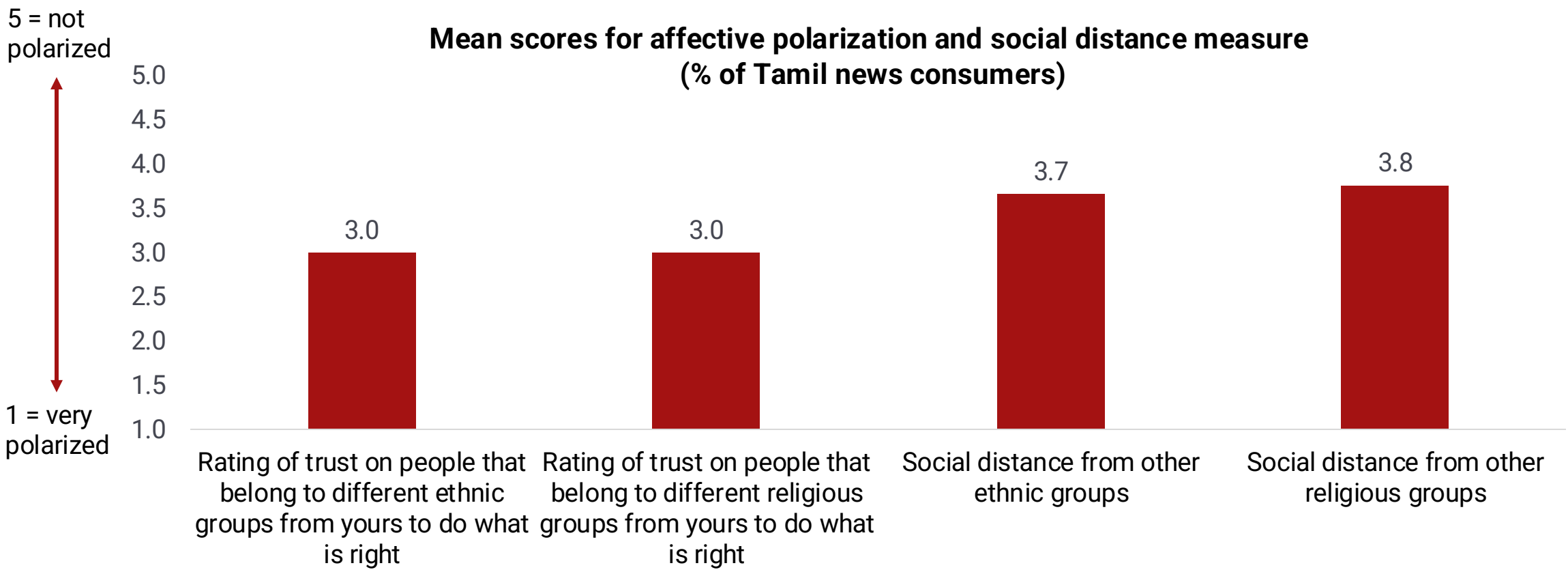
Polarization may fuel identity driven misinformation

- Polarization is the divergence of attitudes and beliefs towards ideological extremes. It amplifies the impact of identity on misinformation belief and sharing.
- In some countries (e.g. USA) political ideology (e.g liberal vs conservative) is a cause of polarization
- In SL, this can be seen more along ethnic and religious lines than ideological lines, e.g, “Sinhala Bauddha” more relevant
- We measure this phenomenon using two questions:
  1. General feelings of prejudice → Rate the extent to which they trust the parties to do what is right
  2. Discrimination → Social-distance measure: gauging how comfortable people are with scenarios (e.g., being a neighbor, marrying, buying goods, receiving medical care) from members of a group (e.g. religious, ethnic) other than one's own

Source: Van Bavel et al. (2021), Druckman and Levendusky (2019), Sri Lanka Barometer (2023)

Religious and ethnic polarization levels are moderate to low



Q: I am going to read out a few statements. As I read out each statement, please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement – rate 1 to strongly disagree and 5 to agree strongly.
Q: Social distance is a measure that takes a composite of 4 questions. As I read out each statement, please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement - Living in a neighbourhood where half of your neighbourhood are from a different group, having a close relative marry a person from a different group, buying products sold by a merchant from a different group, being treated by a doctor/nurse from a different group
Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=813)

Seemingly lower social distance in professional settings, but higher discomfort with interethnic personal relationships

Q: Social distance is a measure that takes a composite of 4 questions. As I read out each statement, please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement - Living in a neighbourhood where half of your neighbourhood are from a different ethnic group, having a close relative marry a person from a different group, buying products sold by a merchant from a different group, being treated by a doctor/nurse from a different group

Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=813); Note: 4 questions were selected from the 7 questions used in Sri Lanka Barometer (2023)

Seemingly lower social distance in professional settings, but higher discomfort with interreligious personal relationships

Q: Social distance is a measure that takes a composite of 4 questions. As I read out each statement, please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement - Living in a neighbourhood where half of your neighbourhood are from a different religious group, having a close relative marry a person from a different group, buying products sold by a merchant from a different group, being treated by a doctor/nurse from a different group

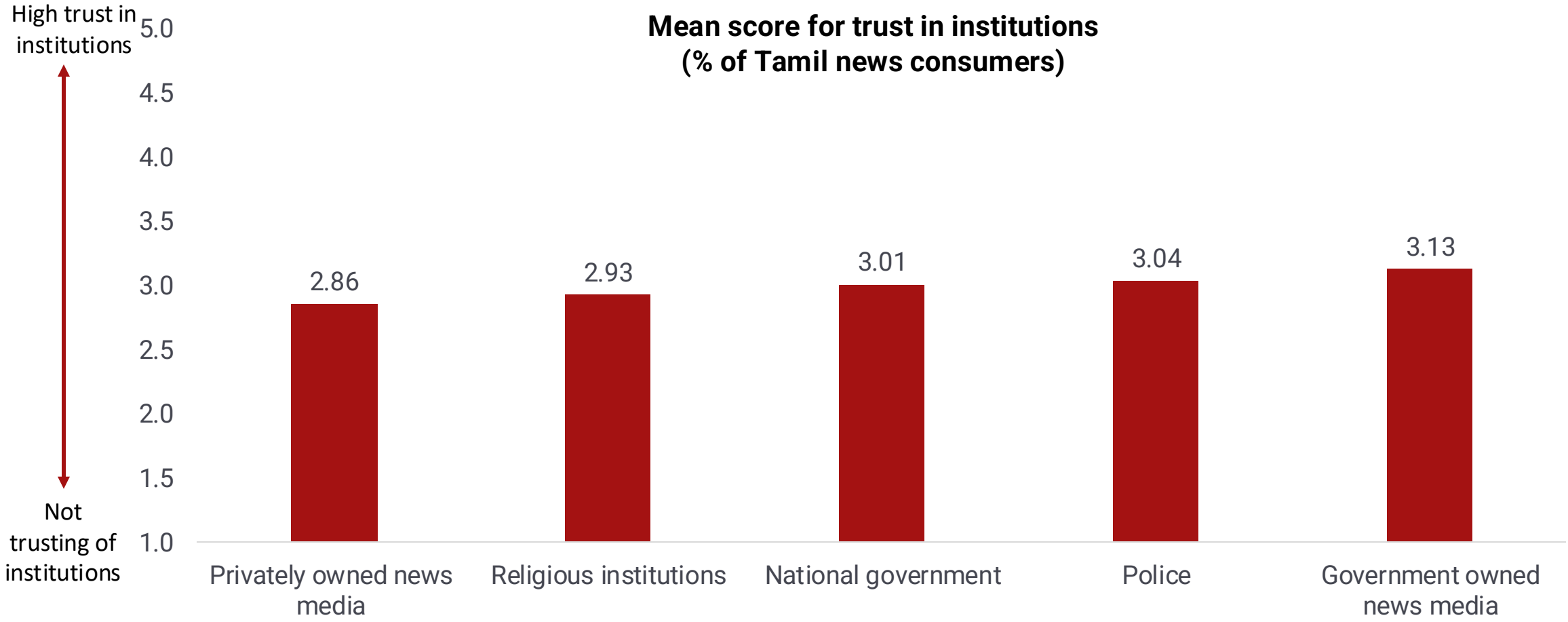
Base: All Sinhala news consumers (n=813); Note: 4 questions were selected from the 7 questions used in Sri Lanka Barometer (2023)

Trust in institutions may shape misinformation belief

- Trust in institutions plays a role. Trust in institutions is undermined by misinformation but trust also may be a shield against misinformation.
  - Several studies show that people with higher trust in institutions (and information from institutions, e.g., national government) are less likely to believe false news. There is evidence that a negative relationship exists between belief in COVID-19 related misinformation and trust in institutions.
- We have measured the extent to which people trust key societal institutions with a rating of the extent to which people trust institutions using a 5-point Likert scale: national government, police, public news media, private news media, and religious institutions

Source: Melki (2021), Boulianne and Humprecht (2023) , Varazzani et al (2025)

Moderate trust in all institutions among Tamil news consumers



Q: Now I'm going to read out a few types of institutions. As I read out each, please tell me how much confidence do you have in each institution to act in the best interests of the public? 1 for not at all, to 5 for trusting fully.
Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=813)

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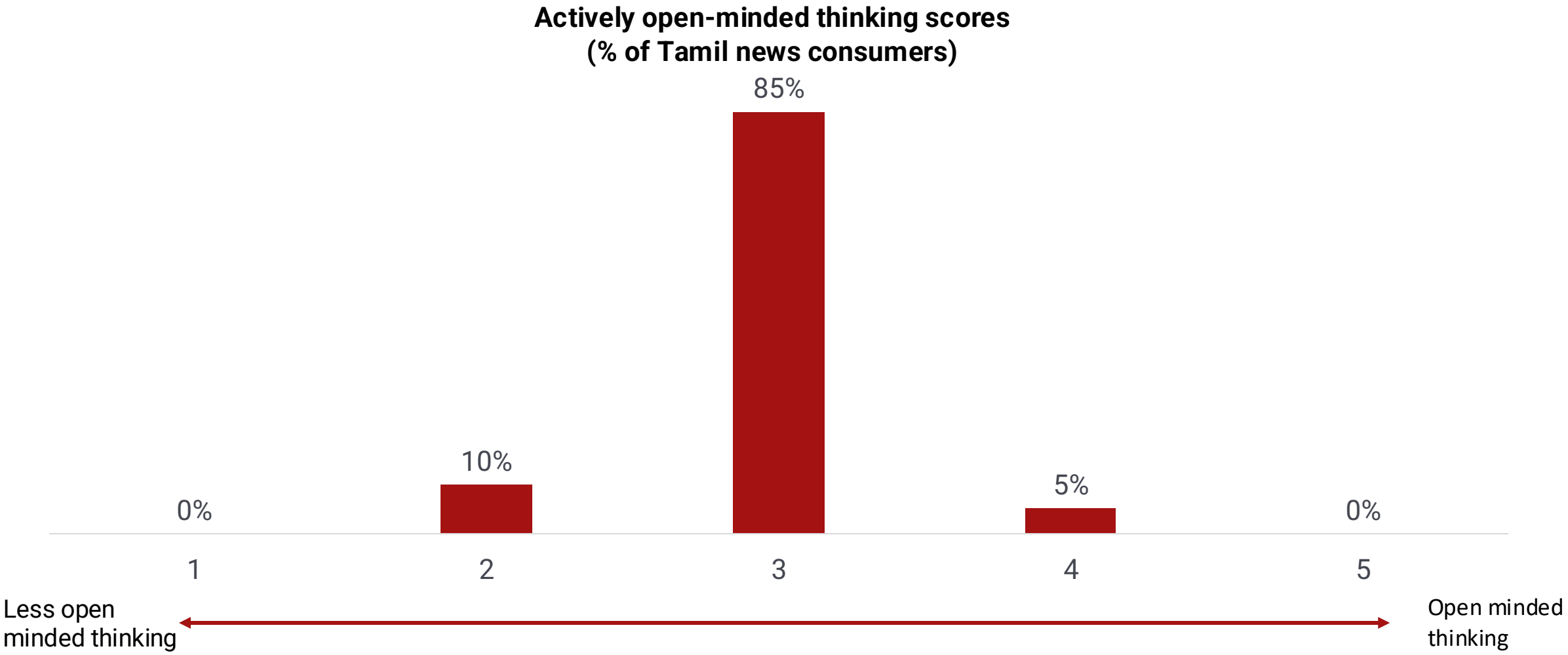
Actively open-minded thinking may help seek evidence, even ones contradictory to beliefs

- Actively Open-Minded Thinking (AOT) is the tendency to seek evidence and consider alternative viewpoints when forming or revising beliefs.
- Studies show that, the more actively open-minded people claimed to be, the less susceptible they were to believing misinformation
- We measured AOT using an 8-items on a 5-point Likert scale.
  - The final AOT score is calculated as the average of all responses.
  - Higher scores = more open thinking.

Source: Roozenbeek and Lindon (2024), Saltor et al. (2023), Stanovich & West (1997), Bronstein et al. (2019), Pennycook et al. (2020).

Majority are moderate - neither open nor closed minded



Q: Using an 8 question AOT scale.
Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=813)

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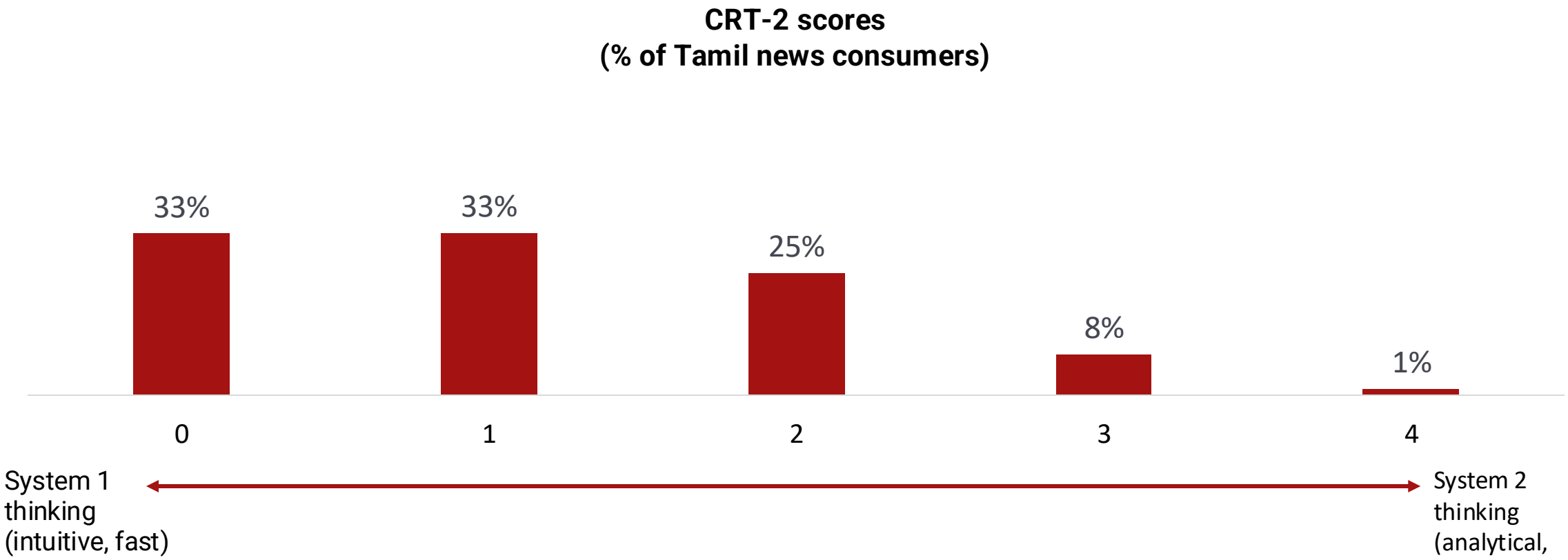
How a person arrives at conclusions is important: fast & intuitive vs slow &analytical decision makers evaluate information differently

- Cognitive style influences how people evaluate information. Research shows that individuals with higher cognitive reflection are better at distinguishing true from false news.
- The Cognitive Reflection Test (CRT) is commonly used in misinformation studies.
  - For example, U.S.-based research finds that higher CRT scores correlate with improved news accuracy judgments.
- CRT is a multiple-question measure designed to measure an individual's tendency to override an initial, intuitive (but incorrect) answer in favor of more reflective, analytical reasoning.
  - We used the 4-question CRT-2 in our study because its questions are less reliant on specific math skills, making it more accessible across different education levels and helping us avoid floor effects in our analysis.
  - Higher scores in the test means that more questions answered correctly, indicating more system 2 thinking

Source: Van Bavel et al. (2021), Pennycook and Rand (2019), Thomson and Oppenheimer (2023), Kahneman (2011)

System 1 thinking is prevalent



Q: If you're running a race and you pass the person in second place, what place are you in?, A farmer had 15 cows and all but 8 died. How many are left?, Nipuni's father has three daughters. The first two are named Olu and Nelum. What is the third daughter's name?, How many cubic feet of dirt are there in a hole that is 3' deep x 3' wide x 3' long?,
Base: All Tamil news consumers (n= 813)

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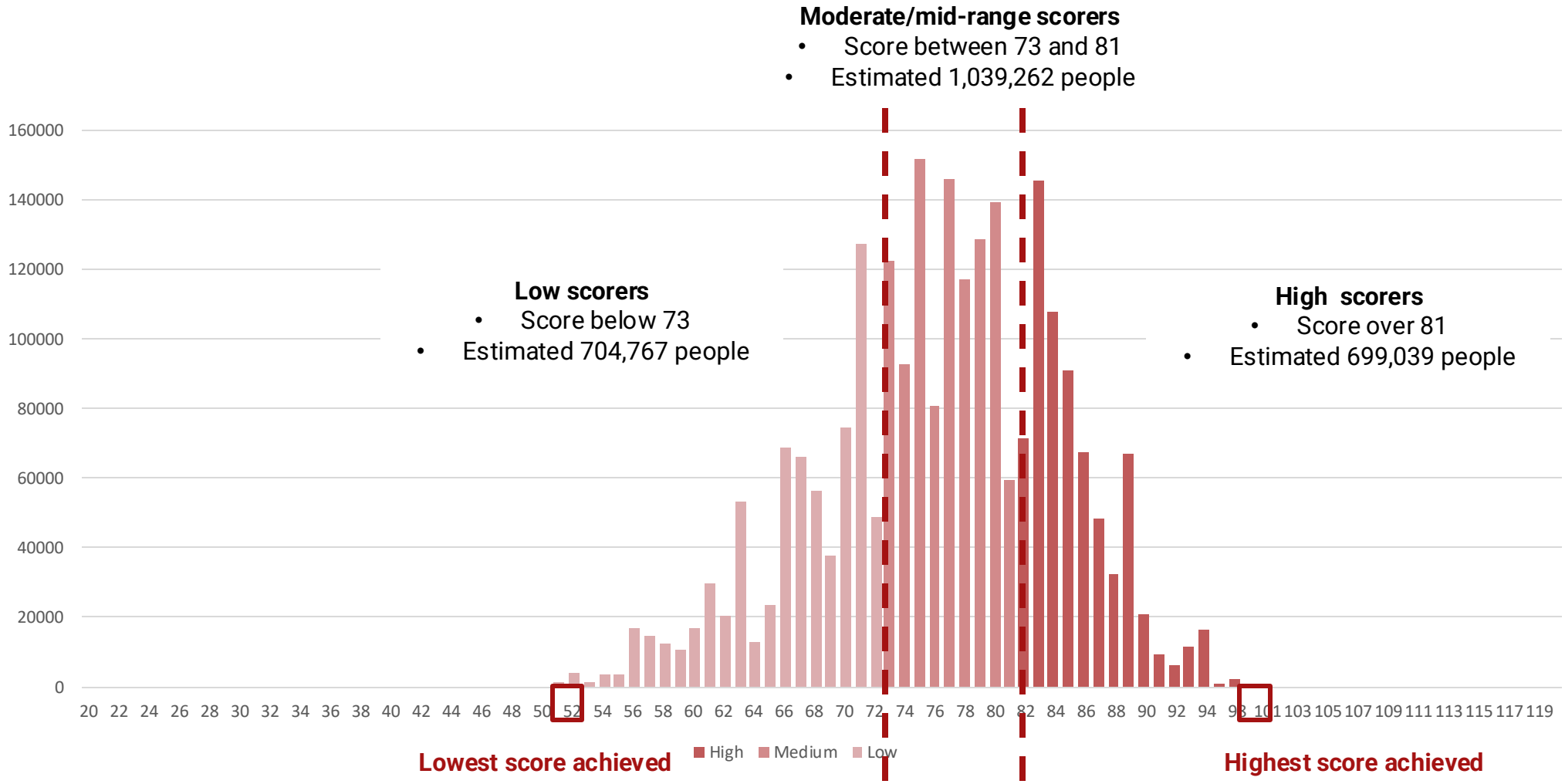
6

Relationship between ability (to classify misinformation) and human characteristics

Based on the score; three ability groups were identified & the majority is in the medium ability group



*using two-step cluster method on the scores

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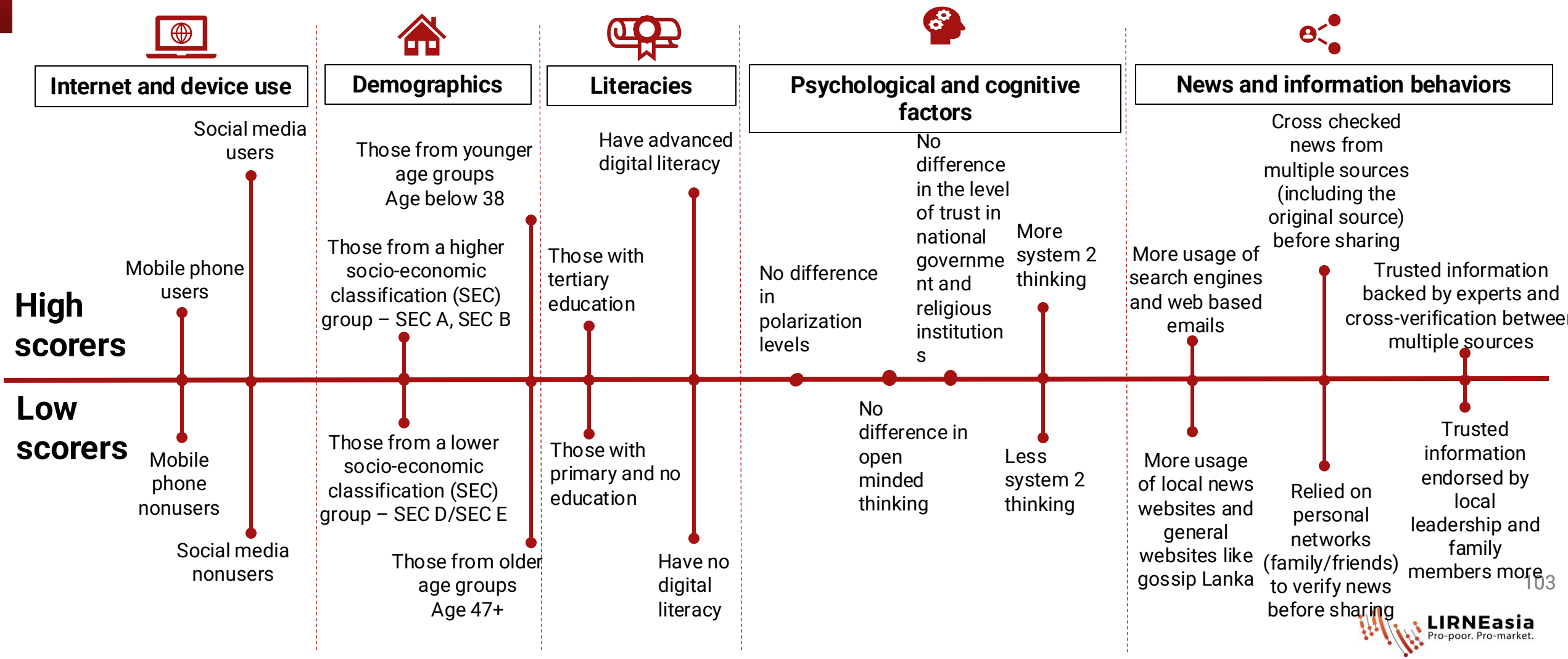
High vs low scorers had different demographic, psychological, and behavioral characteristics



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Are there solutions?

Comparison of the effectiveness of different counter measures

Speaker

PASDEVAN NADARAJAH

Researcher, LIRNEasia

Are there solutions?

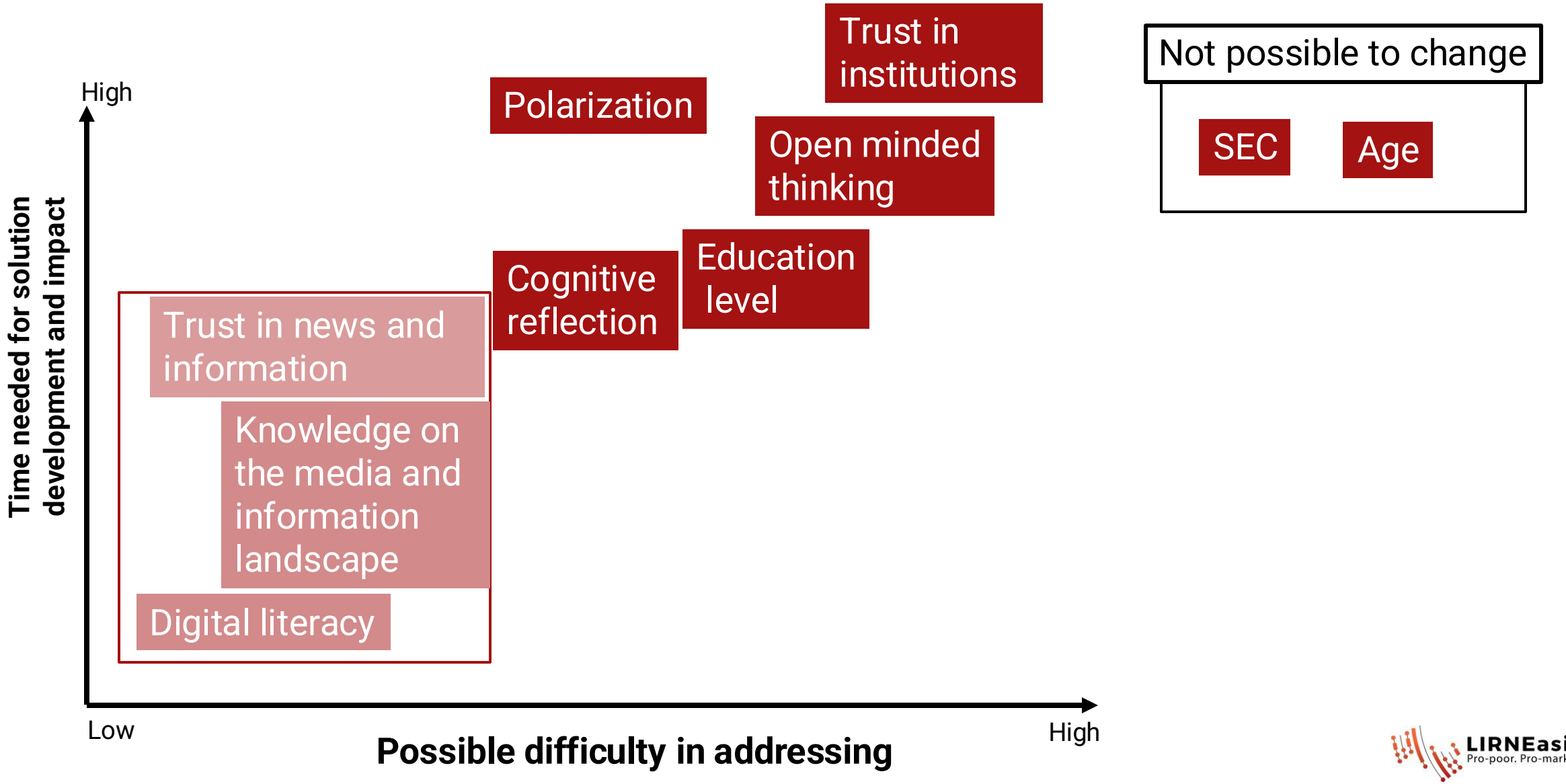
Comparison of the effectiveness of different counter measures

7

Can we improve people's ability?

Setting up an experimenting to test 'solutions'

We've identified gaps, some easier to bridge than others



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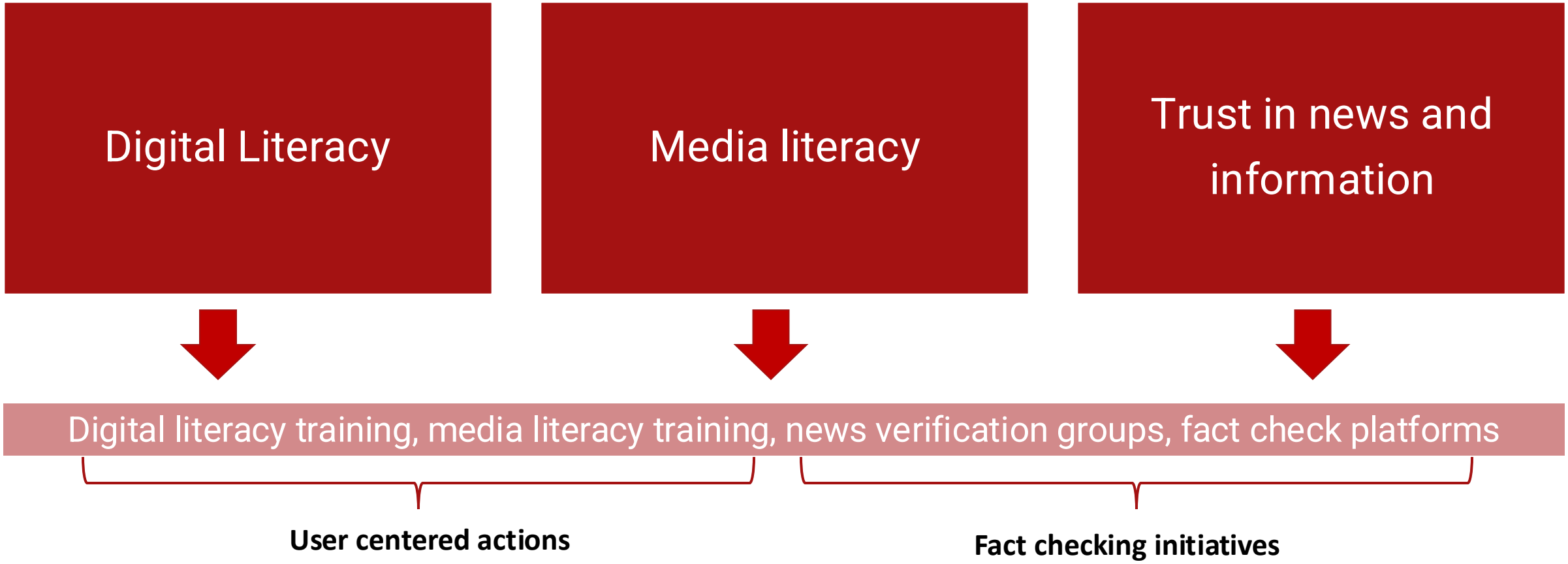
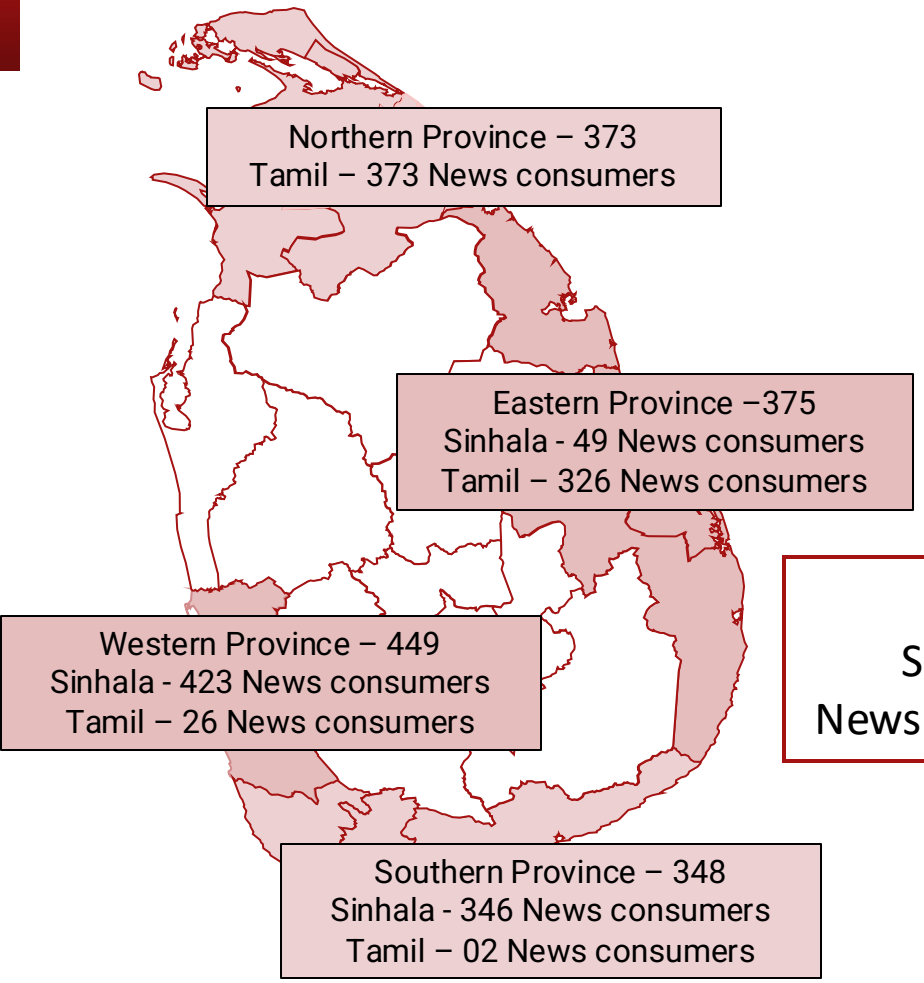
There are solutions that *can* address the challenges. Various organizations doing so



Experiment: 1529 people purposively selected, from 4 provinces and informed by national survey insights ….



1529
News Consumers

802
Sinhala
News consumes

727
Tamil
News consumes

Quota based purposive sampling

Insights from the Nationally representative study

Identified parameters for categorizing levels of misinformation detection abilities

Parameters:
1. Age
2. Education
3. Socio-economic status (SEC)
4. Gender

Selected participants purposively for the quota

Fieldwork time period: 01 -Dec-2024 to 10-Jan-2025

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Respondent journey of the experimental study

Baseline Evaluation
At the test center

Immediate Post Intervention Evaluation
At the test center

14 Days Post Intervention Evaluation
At the respondent's home

Randomly assigned to and exposed to one of five interventions
At the test center

Qualitative feedback from selected respondents
3-4 months after the intervention; using FGDs and IDIs.

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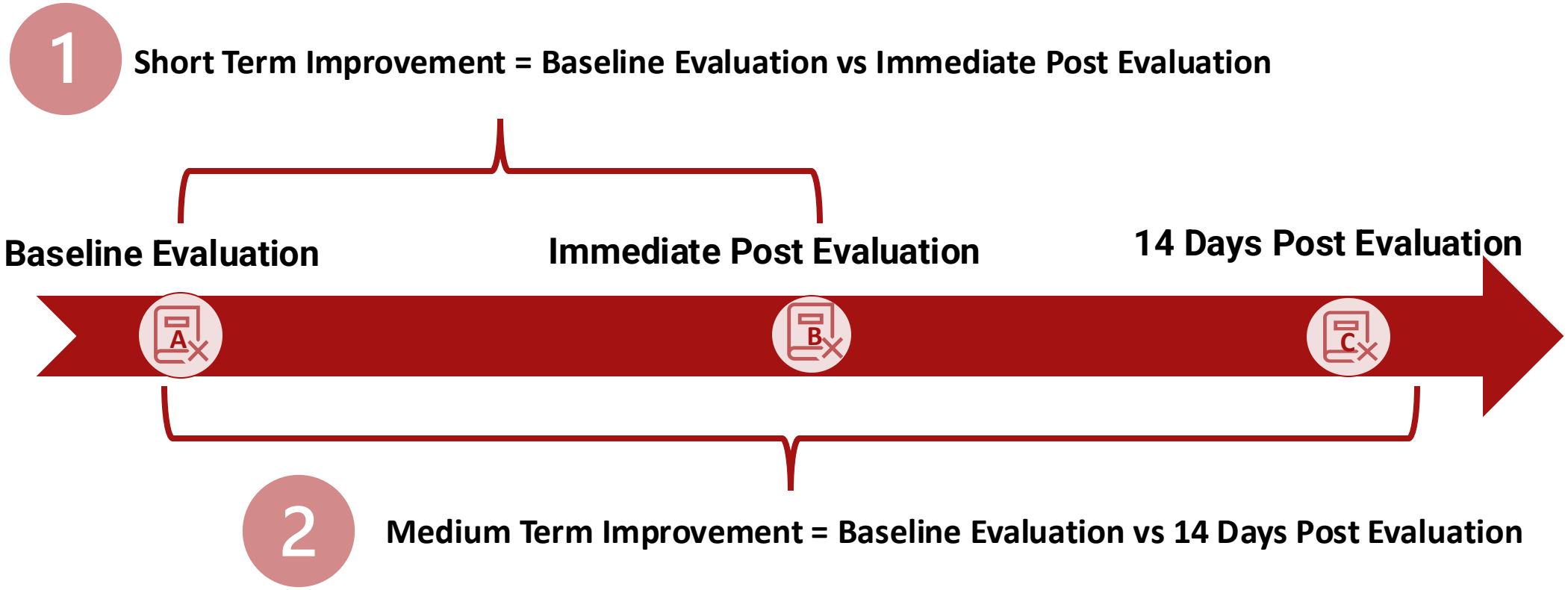
Ability to classify information was calculated in two instances



At each stage, evaluation of ability done with 40 cue cards containing different types of information, covering 3 topics, scored similar to national survey

Cue card composition

Information topic	Classification of content			
	True	Mostly-true	Mostly-false	False
Climate	3 cards	3 cards	3 cards	3 cards
Economic	4 cards	4 cards	4 cards	4 cards
Ethno-religious	3 cards	3 cards	3 cards	3 cards

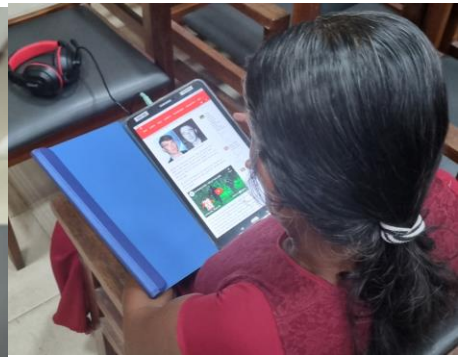
40 x 3

Cards were shown to each respondent (different cards to what was shown in national survey)

Five types of interventions (an untreated control group) were tested







IN-PERSON TRAINING

- Focused on identifying misinformation, incorporating practical examples.
- The In-person training conducted by Sarvodaya Fusion
- Duration: 45 Minutes.
- Sample Size: 110

VIDEO

- Using real-world examples to help viewers recognize and critically assess misleading content.
- The video developed by Verite Research
- Duration: 15 Minutes
- Sample Size : 125

GAME

- Choice-based narrative with multiple characters; teach tools to tackle misinformation.
- The E-game developed by Marga Institute
- Duration: 15 Minutes
- Sample Size : 124

WHATSAPP GROUP

- Engage with the WhatsApp group and read the fact-checked articles and messages.
- The group was handled by the Sri Lanka Press Institute.
- Duration: 10 – 15 Minutes
- Sample Size: 128

WEBSITE

- Given a tab with a link to an online website which does fact-checking on articles.
- The website was handled by Factcrescendo
- Duration: 15–20 Minutes
- Sample Size: 126

Control Group (114) were used as an experimental requirement & given a newspaper article to read within 15 minutes.

7.1

Did these interventions improve anything?

Results of the experimental research

Three statistical tests were tested for improvement

- **Statistical significance** gives an indication of whether our results are due to chance or reflects a real effect of our intervention.
  - Significant at 0.05 means there is less than a 5% probability (0.05) that the result happened by chance, assuming there is actually no effect (i.e., the null hypothesis is true) → we use * to show this
  - Significant at 0.00 means there is strong evidence that the null hypothesis (that there was no change due to interventions) is false. → we use ** to show this
- **Effect size** gives an indication of the magnitude of the difference between groups. So, imagine that two interventions have caused improvement of ability, and one has done that more than the other. The effect size will tell you by how much more.
  - Small effect size means the differences are between 0.2 to 0.49 → we have not reported this
  - Medium effect size means the differences are between 0.5 to 0.79 → we use + to show this
  - High effect size means the differences are over 0.8 → we use ++ to show this
- **Power analysis** gives an indication if our sample size was enough to support the result that there was a change in ability due to our intervention
  - we use # to show >80% power value.

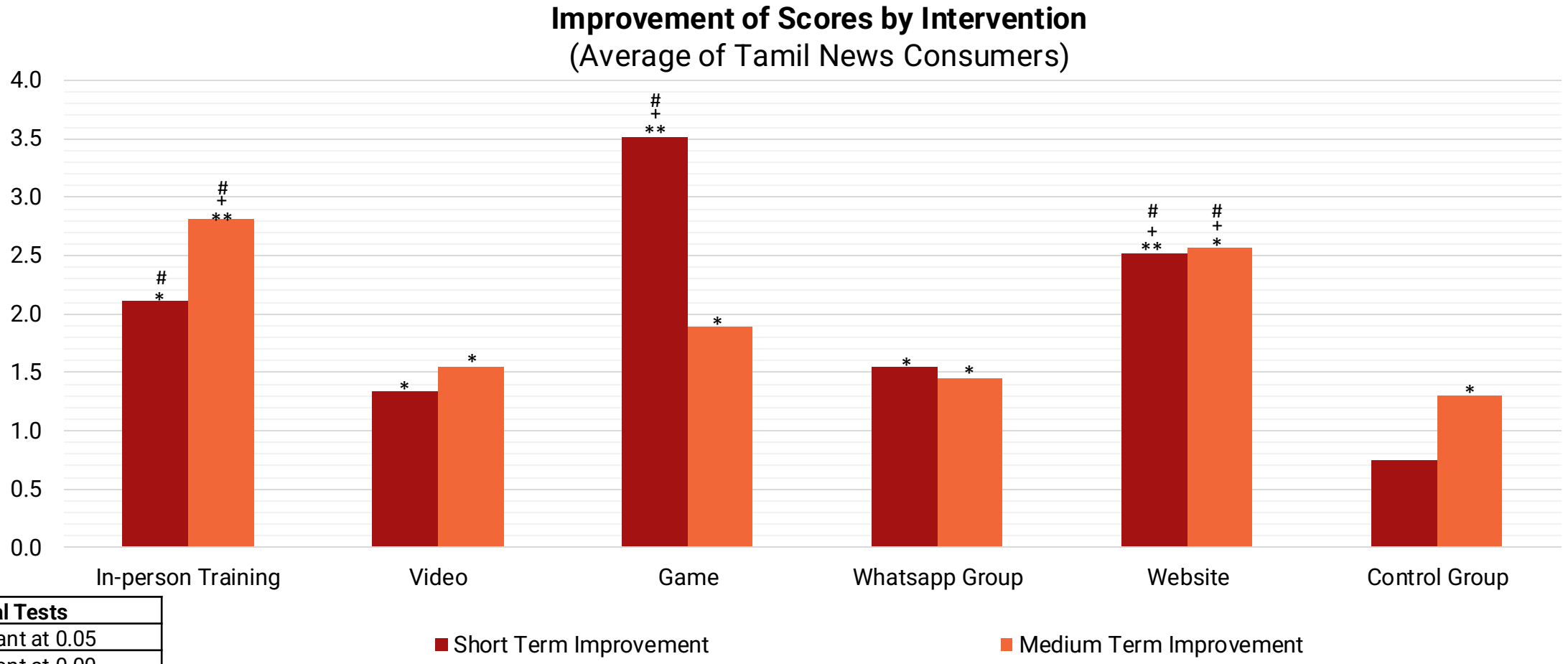
Meaning of the statistical test symbols

Significant at 0.05 means *
Strong Significant Level at 0.00

Medium Effect Size
High Effect Size

Acceptable Power <80 %

All interventions significantly improved ability, and the game intervention was the most effective.



Statistical Tests	
*	Significant at 0.05
**	Significant at 0.00
+	Medium Effect Size
++	High Effect Size
#	Acceptable Power

Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=727)

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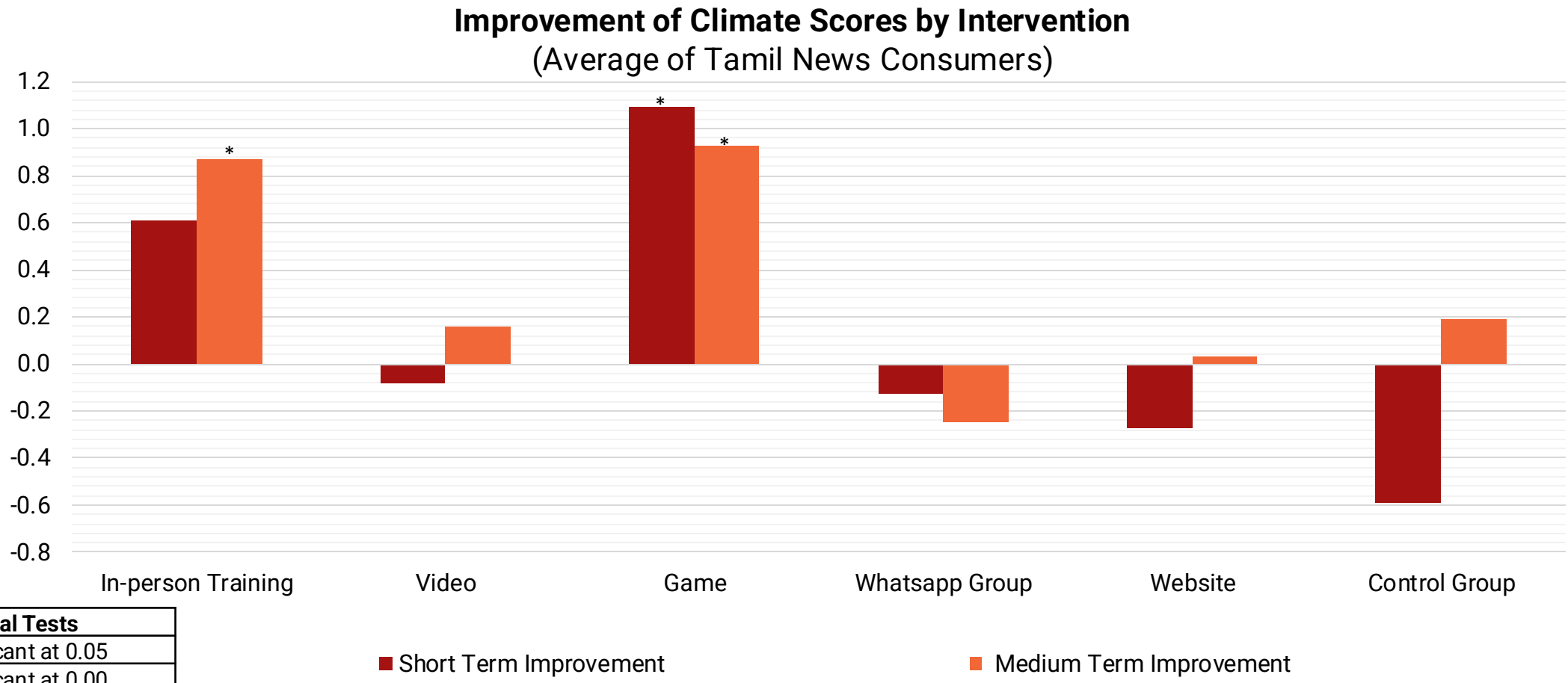
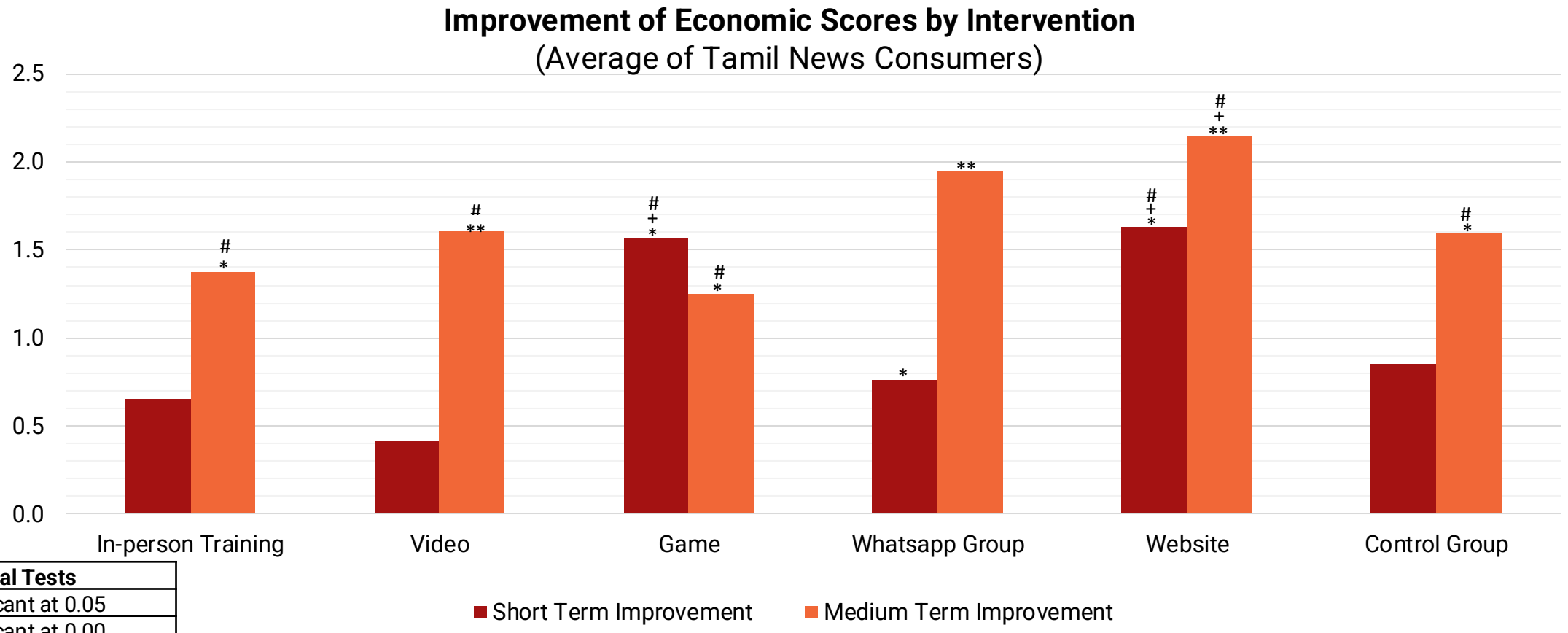
Game has been the most effective to improve ability, followed by in-person training



Statistical Tests	
*	Significant at 0.05
**	Significant at 0.00
+	Medium Effect Size
++	High Effect Size
#	Acceptable Power

Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=727)

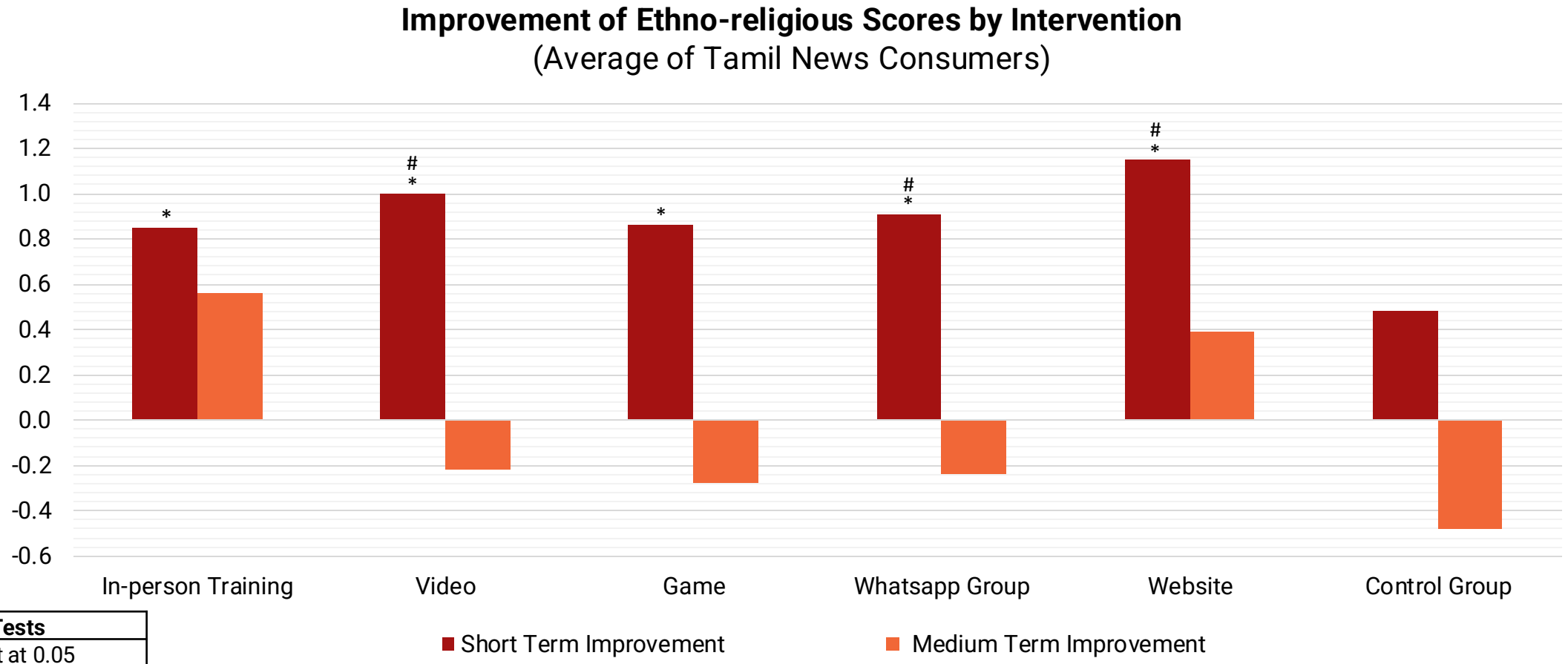
All interventions significantly improved respondents' ability, with the website intervention proving the most effective method.



Statistical Tests	
*	Significant at 0.05
**	Significant at 0.00
+	Medium Effect Size
++	High Effect Size
#	Acceptable Power

Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=727)

All interventions significantly improved respondents' ability in the short term.



Statistical Tests	
*	Significant at 0.05
**	Significant at 0.00
+	Medium Effect Size
++	High Effect Size
#	Acceptable Power

Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=727)

The most effective interventions can be identified according to each type of information assessed

Intervention	All Information Themes	Information Themes		
		Climate Information	Economic Information	Ethno-religious Information
In-person Training	Yes*|+	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*
Video	Yes*		Yes*|+	Yes*
Game	Yes*|+	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*
WhatsApp Group	Yes*		Yes**	Yes*
Website	Yes**|+		Yes**|+	Yes*

Statistical Tests	
*	Significant at 0.05
**	Significant at 0.00
+	Medium Effect Size
++	High Effect Size

Improvement	
	No Improvement
	Short Term Improvement
	Medium Term Improvement
	Both

Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=727)

The game intervention improved the ability to classify all information themes across some demographics.

Intervention	Demographics				
	Location	Gender	Age	Education Levels	SEC
In-person Training					
Video					
Game	Rural*	Male* & Female*	18 – 30 Years*|+	Secondary Educated*|+	D*|+
WhatsApp Group	Urban*		46 – 65 Years*|+		
Website			18 – 30 Years*|+		

(The analysis is based on individual parameters, not combined parameters)

Statistical Tests	
*	Significant at 0.05
**	Significant at 0.00
+	Medium Effect Size
++	High Effect Size

Improvement	
	No Improvement
	Short Term Improvement
	Medium Term Improvement
	Both

Base: All Tamil news consumers (n=727)

7.2

Feedback and thoughts from participants

Follow up interviews with experimental study participants

- Follow-up qualitative interviews were conducted within 3-4 months after the Experimental Study.
- Data collection methods: Focus Group Discussions and In-Depth Interviews.
- Sample: High and Low performers from all the interventions of the experimental study were selected.
- Objectives:
  - To obtain feedback on the intervention participated in.
  - To understand the perceived impact of the intervention.
- Languages: Sinhala and Tamil.
- Locations: Colombo and Jaffna.

Key Findings

- Participants frequently encountered misinformation (eg: propaganda, scams, AI-edited content)
- Some used digital tools (reverse image search, fact-checking)
- Participants advised others on avoiding misinformation – absent in the control group.
- Trust in social media declined across all intervention groups
- Interventions were engaging and led to more critical, cautious behaviour

"Earlier [before the intervention], I used to belive whatever was shared on social media without questioning it. Now, I cross-check with verified online sources, consult family members, and verify the information myself before deciding whether it's true"– (Intervention: WhatsApp Group/Jaffna/Male/Tamil/SEC-D/38 years)

"I once received a scam call claiming to be from 'Dialog Mega Wasana,' telling me I had won a prize but needed to pay LKR 50,000 in taxes first. I paid the amount, only to realize late that it was a scam. After this incident, I started advising my friends to be cautious and to stay alert to such scams and misinformation" (Intervention: WhatsApp Group/ Jaffna/ Male/ Tamil/ SEC-c- /40 years).

Recommendations by the participants to improve interventions

- Tailor sessions by audience type (e.g., seniors, youth).
- Use WhatsApp and apps for reminders and fact-checking tips.
- Incorporate practical examples and games.
- Offer more frequent follow-ups for sustained impact.

"Please conduct such a program again with examples. Because there were people who could not understand by reading, so if you do it again, please explain with examples, real incidents, especially about this money fraud problem" (Intervention: In-person training/Jaffna/Male/Tamil/SEC-D/40 years).

"Tailor the design of programs and sessions to reflect the diverse backgrounds of students, youth, and other participants". (Intervention: Game/Jaffna/Female/Tamil/SEC-D/25 years)

8

Implications

What do we do with these results?

- We selected these interventions because many people see them as solutions, and they are implemented in many countries
- Some interventions showed no statistical improvement in the ability to classify across information themes among some demographic groups.
  - Could have been factors we didn't account/control
  - Could have been that these interventions don't work
- Ideally (if we have money and, budget), we would test combinations of solutions
  - Specially interventions that included platform-implemented interventions (like labelling, de-prioritisation, etc., ALONG with the ones we tested)

We thank our research partners

Survey partner: SRL

Partner in cue card creation: Appendix (Pvt Ltd)

Partners for the experimental study:

VERITÉ RESEARCH

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Sri Lanka Press Institute

fusion
Sarvodaya ICT4D Movement

FACT Crescendo

Marga Institute

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Information Ecosystems: Tamil Language Narratives, Problems and Solutions

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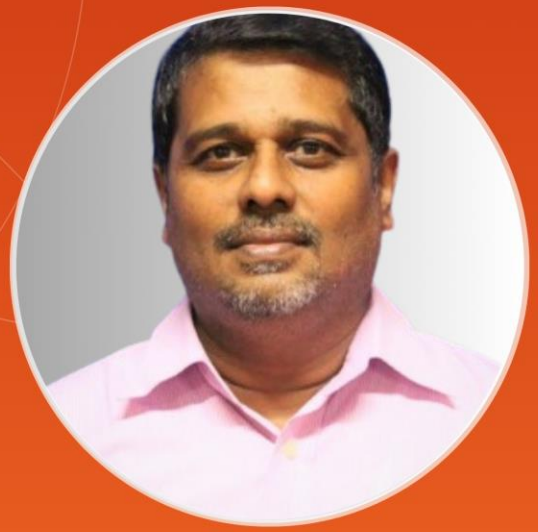

Closing Remarks

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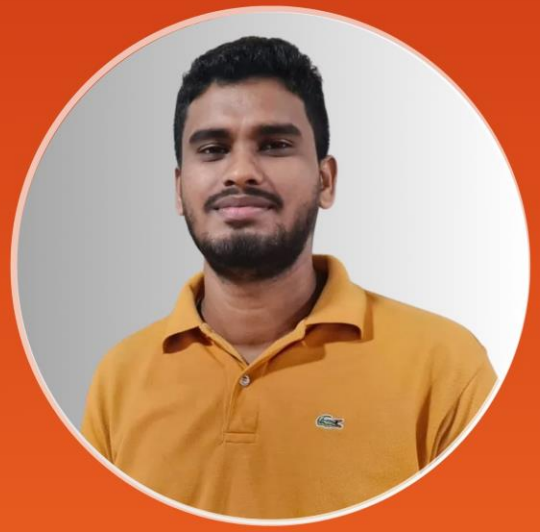

Closing Remarks

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