

Press release

Public say they are relying more on ‘reputable’ news brands to counter misinformation even as economic pressures mount for many publishers

Public concern about misinformation is making some people more careful about the brands they choose and the content they share online, according to the eighth annual *Digital News Report* from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. The report, which is based on a YouGov online survey conducted with 75,000 people in 38 markets, says that changing behaviour is most apparent with those that are younger and better educated, rather than older or less privileged groups.

While some consumers may be turning to more credible news sources, the report has mixed news for publishers looking for sustainable business models after decades of digital disruption. Paid online models are starting to work in some countries, but mainly for a few big publishers. Single title subscriptions, it argues, are unlikely to work for many consumers, who wish to access multiple brands in a frictionless way or do not see sufficient value in paying for news at all.

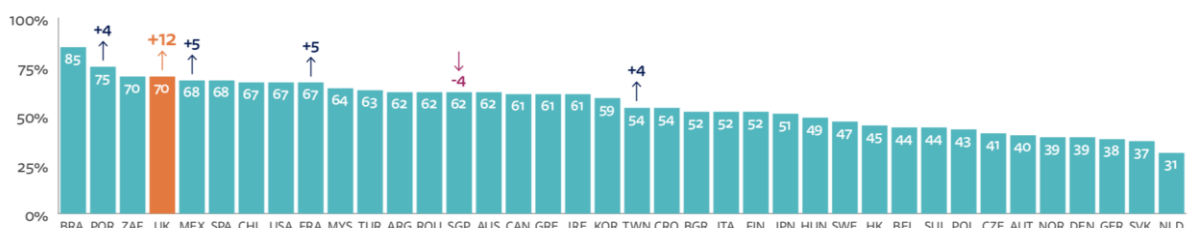
The report also highlights

- How consumers in many countries are spending less time with Facebook and more time with WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube than this time last year
- The growth of news avoidance. In the UK more than half of avoiders say the news brings down their mood while others say they feel powerless to affect events
- The continuing growth of podcasts and their popularity with younger groups

Misinformation and changing behaviour

Public concern about misinformation remains extremely high (55% average across 38 countries) and has grown significantly over the last year in some countries, despite the attempts of platforms and governments to contain it.

PROPORTION CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT IS REAL AND FAKE WHEN IT COMES TO NEWS ALL MARKETS



Q_FAKE_NEWS_1. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. – Thinking about online news, I am concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet. *Base: Total sample in each market ≈ 2000, Taiwan = 1005.*

One consequence of this concern seems to be a greater awareness and affinity with trusted news brands. Across countries over a quarter (26%) say they have started relying on more ‘reputable’

sources of news – rising to 40% in the US. A further quarter (24%) said they had stopped using sources that had a dubious reputation in the last year. (The interpretation of ‘reputable’, ‘less accurate’, ‘dubious’, and other subjective terms were left to respondents to determine.)



Qualitative research with younger news consumers in the US and UK confirmed that behaviour was shifting:

“It definitely changes my likelihood to click on a news story if I see it’s coming from a source that I’ve never heard before. If I’m already questioning it, I’ll likely go on a news source that I feel is more credible.”

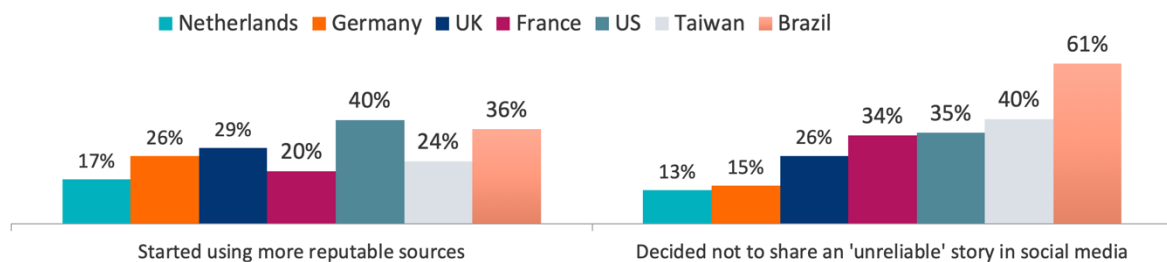
(Maggie, US depth interview)

“I think I’m much more limited in the news that I access now, because of this... I think the ones that you trust are the traditional ones that have been around for a long time, like the BBC, like The Guardian, like The Independent.”

(Chloe, UK depth interview)

Apart from the young, behaviour seems to have changed most in countries where concern about misinformation is highest. Almost two-thirds (61%) in Brazil and 40% in Taiwan said they had decided *not* to share a potentially inaccurate story in social media after recent elections that were marked by misinformation – compared with just 13% in the Netherlands, the country with the lowest level of concern in our survey.

PROPORTION THAT SAY THEY HAVE CHANGED ONLINE HABITS IN THE LAST YEAR SCORES FOR SELECTED MARKETS



Q_LIT_2019. Have you done any of the following in the last year? Base: Total sample in each market ≈ 2000, Taiwan = 1005.

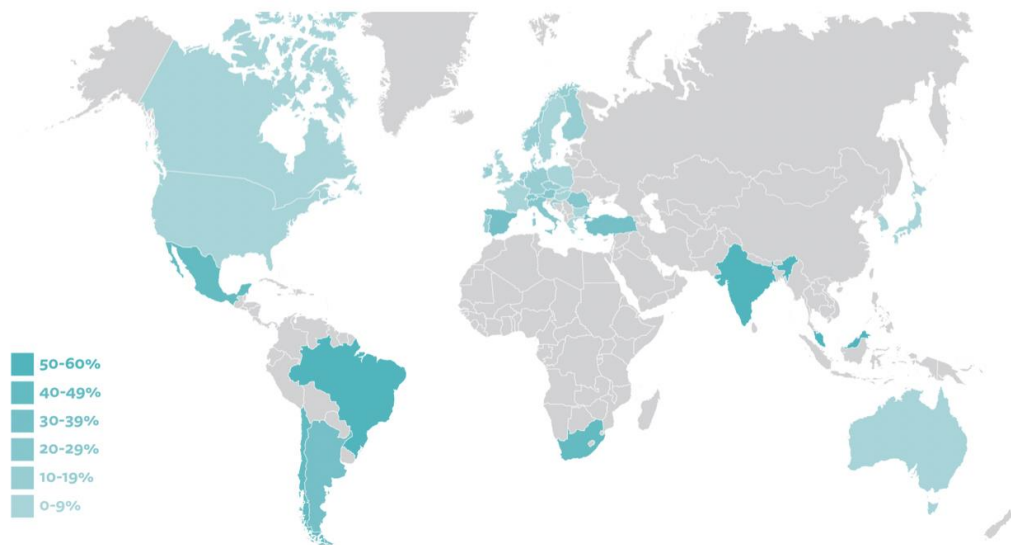
The report also reveals patterns of social media use that are significantly different in the global South. Whereas social media, especially Facebook, are dominant in many western countries, the messaging application WhatsApp has become a primary network for discussing and sharing news in Brazil (53%) Malaysia (50%), and South Africa (49%). People in these countries are also far more likely than in the West to be part of WhatsApp groups with *people they don’t know* - a trend that reflects how messaging applications can be used to easily share information at scale, potentially encouraging the spread of misinformation. Meanwhile public and private Facebook Groups discussing news and politics are also popular in Turkey (29%) and Brazil (22%) but are

much less used in Western countries such as Canada (7%) or Australia (7%). Report lead author Nic Newman:

“The move to private and group-based messaging has happened really fast. It offers more control for users but also makes it harder to spot and counter misinformation – especially in countries with lower digital literacy, a weak media or less robust institutions”

WHATSAPP AROUND THE WORLD

Usage for News across 38 countries of Digital News Report (and India*)



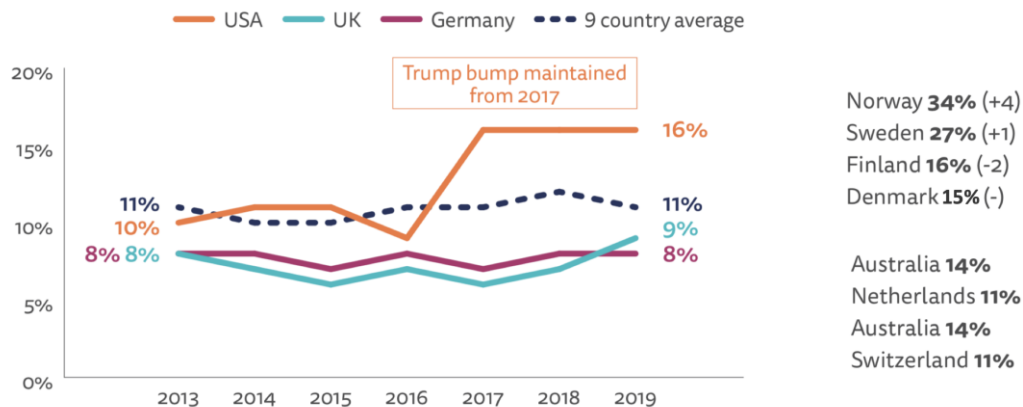
Q12B. Which, if any, of the following have you used for news in the last week? Showing WhatsApp code. Base: Total sample in each country. *India poll conducted Jan 2019 with English-speaking, online news users in India – a small (but important) subset of a larger, more diverse, and very complex Indian media market

The report also reveals how online users in many countries are spending *more time* with WhatsApp, Instagram and YouTube than this time last year. Few users are abandoning Facebook entirely, though, and it remains *by far* the most important social network for news.

The business of journalism

Despite the efforts of the news industry, we find only a small increase in the numbers paying for *any* online news – whether by subscription, membership, or donation. Growth is limited to a handful of countries mainly in the Nordic region (Norway 34%, Sweden 27%) while the number paying in the US (16%) remains stable after a big jump in 2017. Even in countries with higher levels of payment, the vast majority only have ONE online subscription – suggesting that winner-takes-all dynamics are likely to be important. One encouraging development is that most payments are now ‘ongoing’, rather than one-offs.

PROPORTION THAT PAID FOR ANY ONLINE NEWS IN LAST YEAR (2013-19) SELECTED COUNTRIES



Q7a. Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service in the last year? Base: Total 2013-19 sample in each country > 2000, Finland 2014-15 < 1500. Note: 9 country average includes US, UK, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Denmark, Japan, and Finland (from 2014 onwards).

In some countries, subscription fatigue may also be setting in, with the majority preferring to spend their limited budget on entertainment (Netflix/Spotify) rather than news. With many seeing news as a 'chore', the report suggests that publishers may struggle to substantially increase the market for high-priced 'single title' subscriptions.

Reuters Institute Director and report co-author Professor Rasmus Kleis Nielsen says:

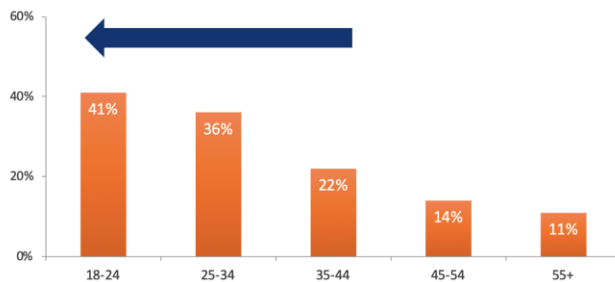
"The good news is that those publishers who produce truly distinct, valuable, and trusted journalism are increasingly being rewarded with commercial success. The bad news is that many people find that much of the journalism they come across is neither valuable, trustworthy, or worth paying for."

As more publishers launch pay models, over two-thirds (70%) of our sample in Norway and half (50%) in the United States now come across one or more barriers each week when trying to read online news. The fear is that increased friction could put people off news entirely, especially those who are already under-engaged or can't afford to pay.

Pivot to audio picks up pace

Podcasts appear to be reaching critical mass as a consequence of better content and easier distribution. Over a third of our combined sample (36%) now say they have listened to one or more podcasts in the last month, with almost one in six (15%) saying they have consumed one about news, politics, or international events.

YOUNG ARE MORE LIKELY TO LISTEN TO PODCASTS (UK)



Politiken is one of dozens of European publishers to have launched a daily news podcast

Q11F. Which of the following podcasts have you listened to in the last month? Base: Total sample in UK

In the UK, younger age groups, who spend much of their lives plugged into smartphones, are four times more likely to listen to podcasts than the over 55s – and much less likely to listen to traditional speech radio. Under 35s consume half of all podcasts despite making up around a third of the total adult population. Lead author Nic Newman:

“Our research shows that the core appeal of podcasts is the ease of use, and the ability to listen while doing something else. But for younger users, they also provide more authentic voices and the control and choice they’ve become used to.”

Audio prospects may be further boosted by the rapid adoption of voice-activated speakers such as the Amazon Echo and Google Home. Reach for *any purpose* has grown from 7% to 14% in the UK over the last year, from 9% to 12% in the United States, and from 5% to 9% in high-tech Korea. However, the proportion using smart speakers *for news* is declining as mainstream audiences come on stream. Less than four in ten access any news via their device in an average week in the US (35%) and UK (39%) and just a quarter in Germany (27%) and South Korea (25%).

Other headlines from this year’s report

- Across all countries, the average level of trust in the news in general is down 2 percentage points to 42% and less than half (49%) agree that they trust the news media *they themselves* use. Trust levels in France have fallen to just 24% (-11) in the last year as the media have come under attack over their coverage of the Yellow Vests movement. Trust in the news found via search (33%) and social media (23%) remains stable but extremely low.
- The news media are seen as doing a better job at breaking news than explaining it. Across countries, almost two-thirds feel the media are good at keeping people up to date (62%), but are less good at helping them understand the news (51%). Less than half (42%) think the media do a good job in holding rich and powerful people to account – and this figure is much lower in South Korea (21%), Hungary (20%), and Japan (17%).

- There are also significant differences *within* countries, as people with higher levels of formal education are more likely to evaluate the news media positively along every dimension than the rest of the population, suggesting that the news agenda is more geared towards the interests and needs of the more educated.
- More people say they actively avoid the news (32%) than when we last asked this question two years ago. Avoidance is up 6 percentage points overall and 11 points in the UK, driven by boredom, anger, or sadness over Brexit. People say they avoid the news because it has a negative effect on their mood (58%) or because they feel powerless to change events.
- The smartphone continues to grow in importance for news, with two-thirds (66%) now using the device to access news weekly (+4pp). Mobile news aggregators Apple News and Upday are becoming a significant force. Apple News in the United States now reaches more iPhone users each week (27%) than the Washington Post (23%).

METHODOLOGY

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Survey conducted in 38 countries; United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, Australia, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Mexico and South Africa.

Total sample size was 75749 adults with around 2000 per country. Fieldwork was undertaken at the end of January/start of February 2019.

The survey was carried out online. The data were weighted to targets set on age, gender and region, to reflect the total population. The sample is reflective of the population who have access to the internet and respondents were screened out if they had not accessed news in the last month. Note that in countries with more limited internet use, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Greece, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey, our samples tend to be based more around urban areas, which should be taken into consideration when interpreting results

Qualitative research with younger news consumers in the UK and US was carried out by Flamingo Research in February 2019. Participants had high/mid-level interest in news. Research involved tracking news consumption on mobile phones, diaries and in-depth interviews.

MORE INFORMATION ON 2019 REPORT

The research and report can also be found on a dedicated website (www.digitalnewsreport.org) from 12th June containing slidepacks, charts, and raw data tables, with a licence that encourages reuse. A description of the methodology is available with the complete questionnaire.

Sponsors of this year's report include Google, BBC News, Ofcom, Edelman UK, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), the Media Industry Research Foundation of Finland, the Fritt Ord Foundation in Norway, the Dutch Media Authority (CvdM), the Korea Press Foundation, the Open Society Foundations as well as our academic sponsors at the Hans Bredow Institute, Hamburg University, the University of Navarra, the University of Canberra and Le Centre d'études sur les médias, Université Laval in Canada and Roskilde University in Denmark. Sole responsibility for the analysis, interpretation and conclusions drawn lies with the authors and editors of the Report.

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism is dedicated to exploring the future of journalism worldwide. The Institute receives core funding from the Thomson Reuters Foundation and is based in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford. It was launched in November 2006 and developed from the Reuters Fellowship Programme, established at Oxford 36 years ago. In addition to the fellowship programme for mid-career journalists from around the world, the Institute hosts leadership development programmes and research projects focused on the future of journalism. See <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/>

Nic Newman - Lead Author and Joint Editor

Journalist and digital strategist who played a key role in shaping the BBC's internet services over more than a decade. Nic is currently a Senior Research Associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford and a consultant on digital media.

Richard Fletcher - Author

Research Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. He is a data and survey specialist primarily interested in global trends in digital news consumption.

Antonis Kalogeropoulos – Author

Research Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. His research interests include political communication, journalism, and audience research.

Rasmus Kleis Nielsen – Joint Editor

Director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and Professor of Political Communication at the University of Oxford, His work focuses on changes in the news media, political communication, and the role of digital technologies in both.

About YouGov

YouGov is an international market research agency and pioneer of market research through online methods. YouGov has a panel of 6 million people worldwide, including 1.2 million in the UK representing all ages, socio-economic groups and other demographic types.