

Attitudes towards the impartiality of television news

Summary of findings

July 2014

Opinion on the impartiality of TV news sources

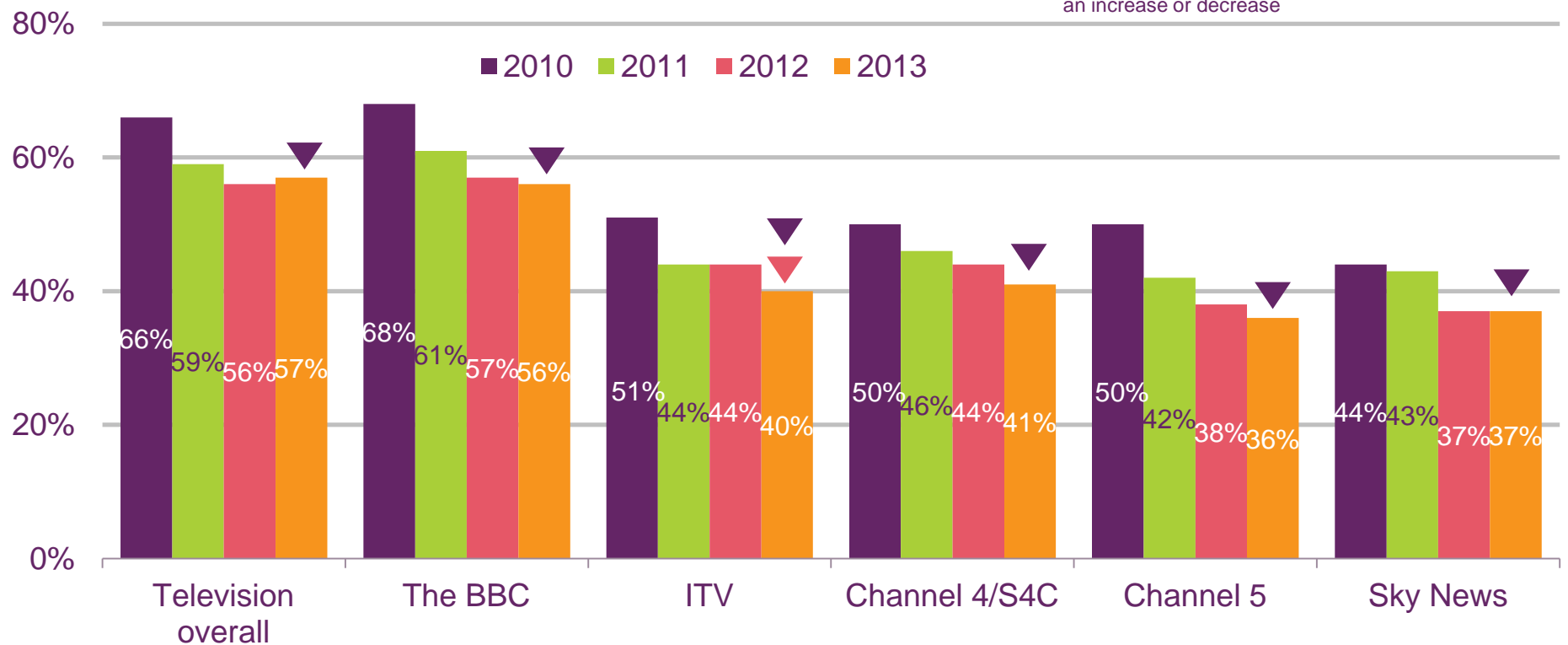
According to results from Ofcom's Media Tracker, the perception of impartiality in television news among UK adults has declined since 2010, with the rate of decline greatest between 2010 and 2011. In total, perception of the impartiality of 'television overall' has dropped by nine percentage points since 2010, a decline that is also evident across individual figures for each of the public service broadcasters (PSBs) and Sky News.

The following slides set out the results from Ofcom's Media Tracker, together with data from other Ofcom research on attitudes towards news.

Perception of impartiality in television news has decreased significantly since 2010 and is not restricted to any individual broadcaster

% saying impartial (= a score of 1 or 2 out of 5)

Indicates a significant change between 2010 and 2013
 Indicates a significant change yoy between 2012 and 2013
 The direction of the arrow indicates whether the change is an increase or decrease



Source: Ofcom Media Tracker 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013.

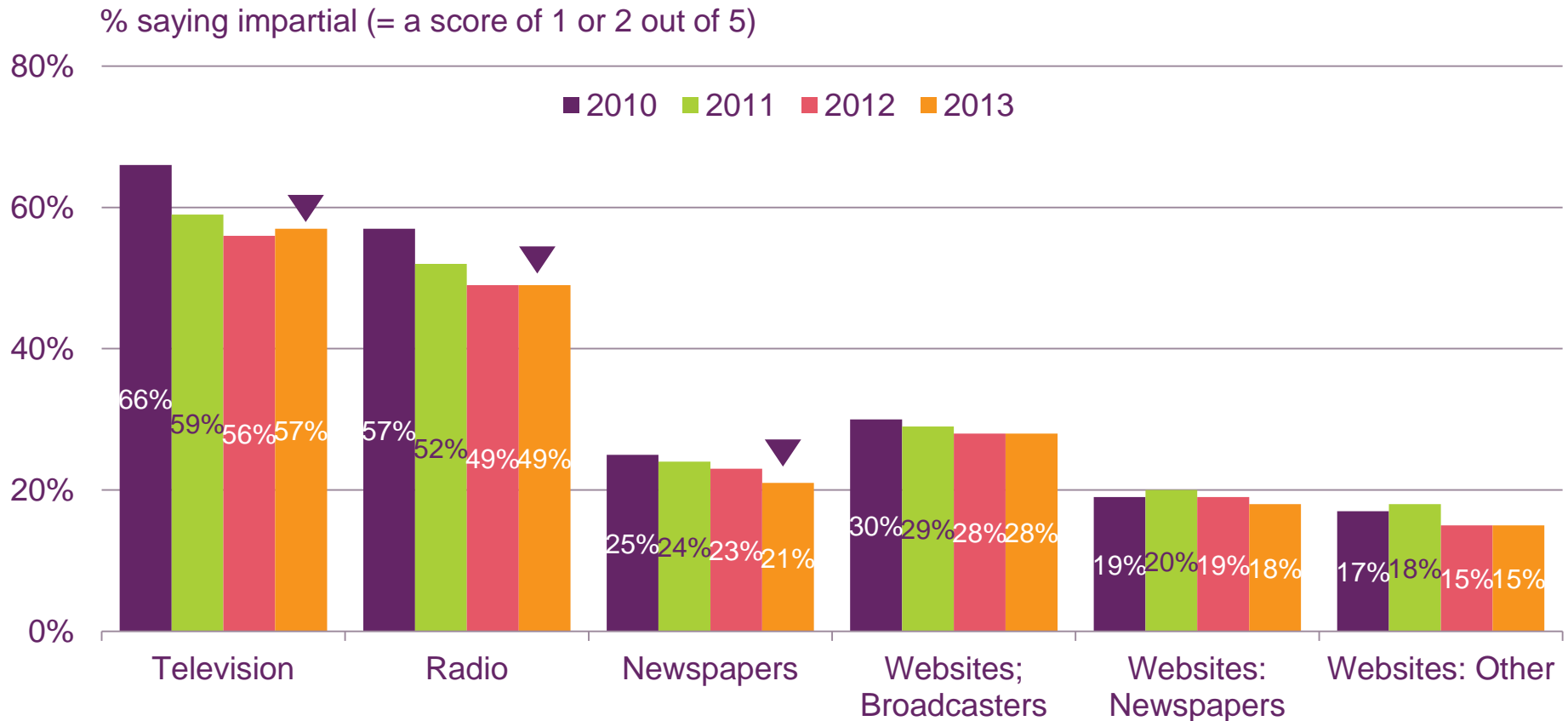
Base: Base: All respondents 2013 (1,893), 2012 (1,854), 2011 (1,754), 2010 (2141). The BBC = BBC One, BBC Two, BBC News.

Q - Using a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very impartial and 5 is very biased, how impartial do you think each of the following news sources is?

Perception of impartiality in radio news and newspapers has also decreased significantly since 2010



▼ Indicates a significant change between 2010 and 2013
▼ Indicates a significant change yoy between 2012 and 2013
 The direction of the arrow indicates whether the change is an increase or decrease



Source: Ofcom Media Tracker 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013.

Base: Base: All respondents 2013 (1,893), 2012 (1,854), 2011 (1,754), 2010 (2141).

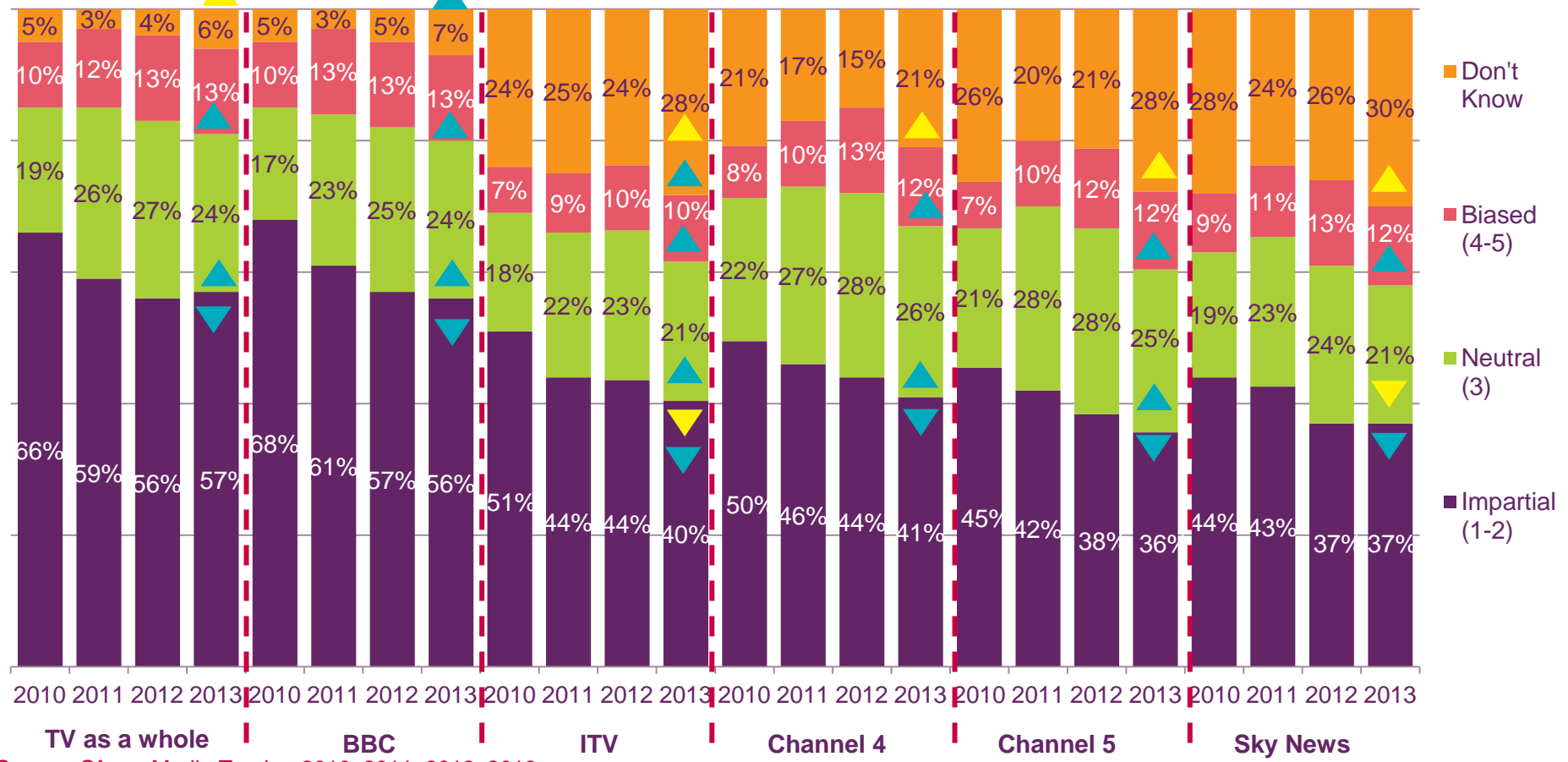
Q - Using a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very impartial and 5 is very biased, how impartial do you think each of the following news sources is?

The proportion of adults opting to answer 'neutral' has increased significantly since 2010



▼ Indicates a significant change between 2010 and 2013
▲ Indicates a significant change yoy between 2012 and 2013
 The direction of the arrow indicates whether the change is an increase or decrease

% of respondents who rated news impartiality on a scale of 1 – 5 (all adults)



Source: Ofcom Media Tracker 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013.

Base: Base: All respondents 2013 (1,893), 2012 (1,854), 2011 (1,754), 2010 (2141). The BBC = BBC One, BBC Two, BBC News.

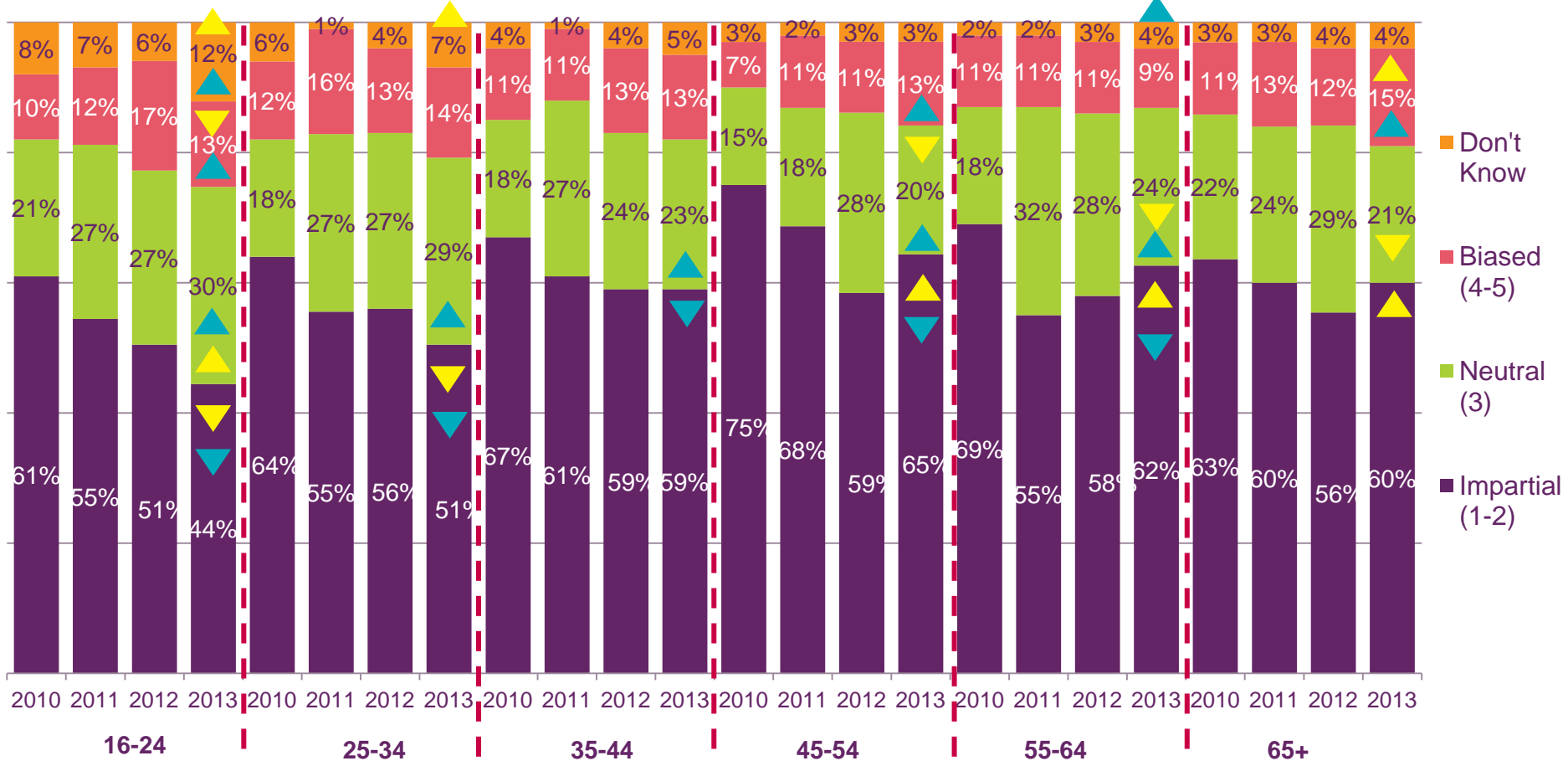
Q - Using a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very impartial and 5 is very biased, how impartial do you think each of the following news sources is?

Each age group has seen a decline in perception of impartiality



▼ Indicates a significant change between 2010 and 2013
▼ Indicates a significant change yoy between 2012 and 2013
 The direction of the arrow indicates whether the change is an increase or decrease

% of respondents who rated news impartiality on a scale of 1 – 5 (all adults)



Source: Ofcom Media Tracker 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013.

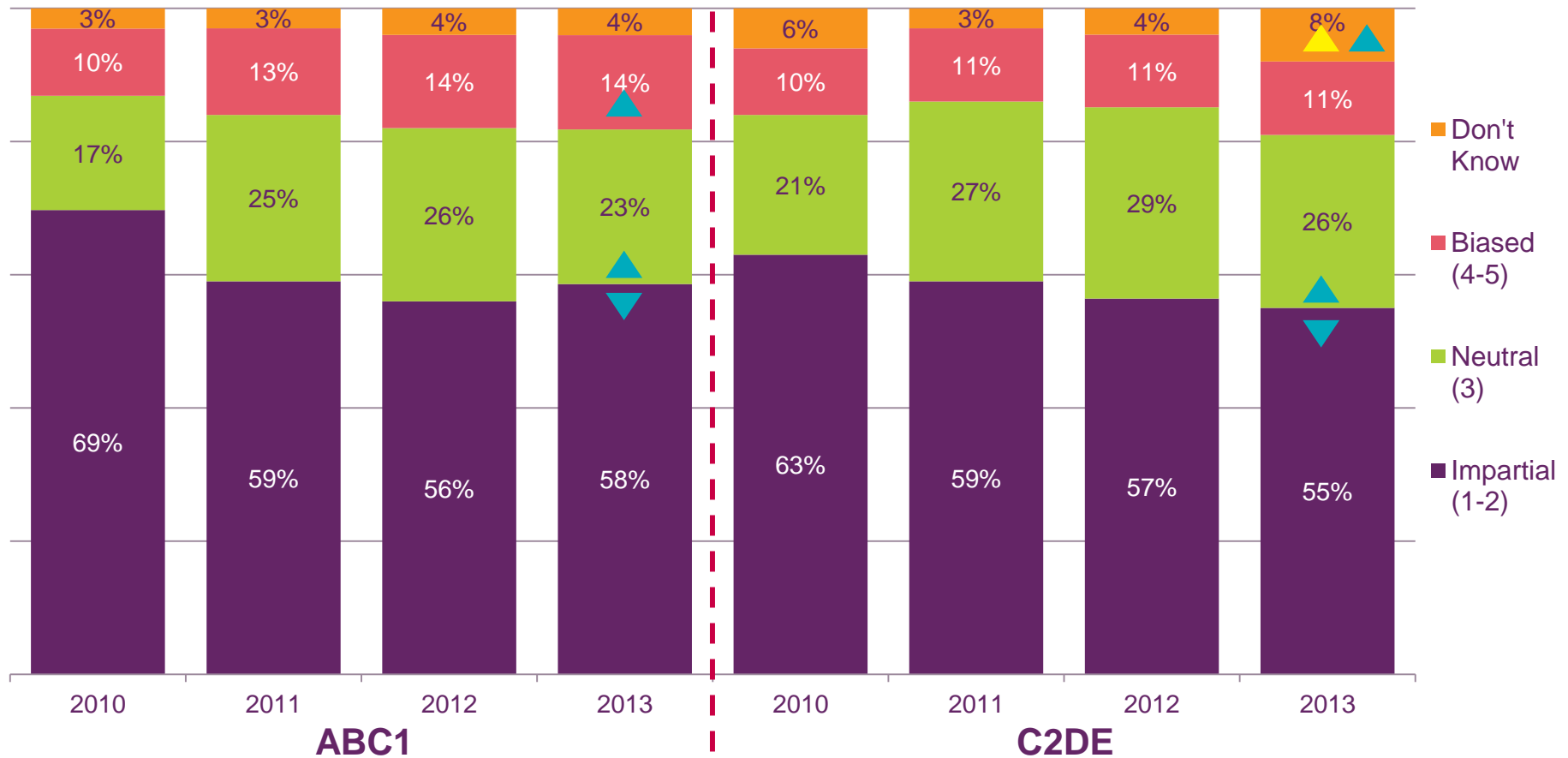
Base: Base: All respondents 2013 (1,893), 2012 (1,854), 2011 (1,754), 2010 (2141). The BBC = BBC One, BBC Two, BBC News.

Q - Using a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very impartial and 5 is very biased, how impartial do you think each of the following news sources is?

Each socio-economic group has seen a decline in perception of impartiality

Indicates a significant change between 2010 and 2013
 Indicates a significant change yoy between 2012 and 2013
 The direction of the arrow indicates whether the change is an increase or decrease

% of respondents who rated news impartiality on a scale of 1 – 5 (all adults)



Source: Ofcom Media Tracker 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013.

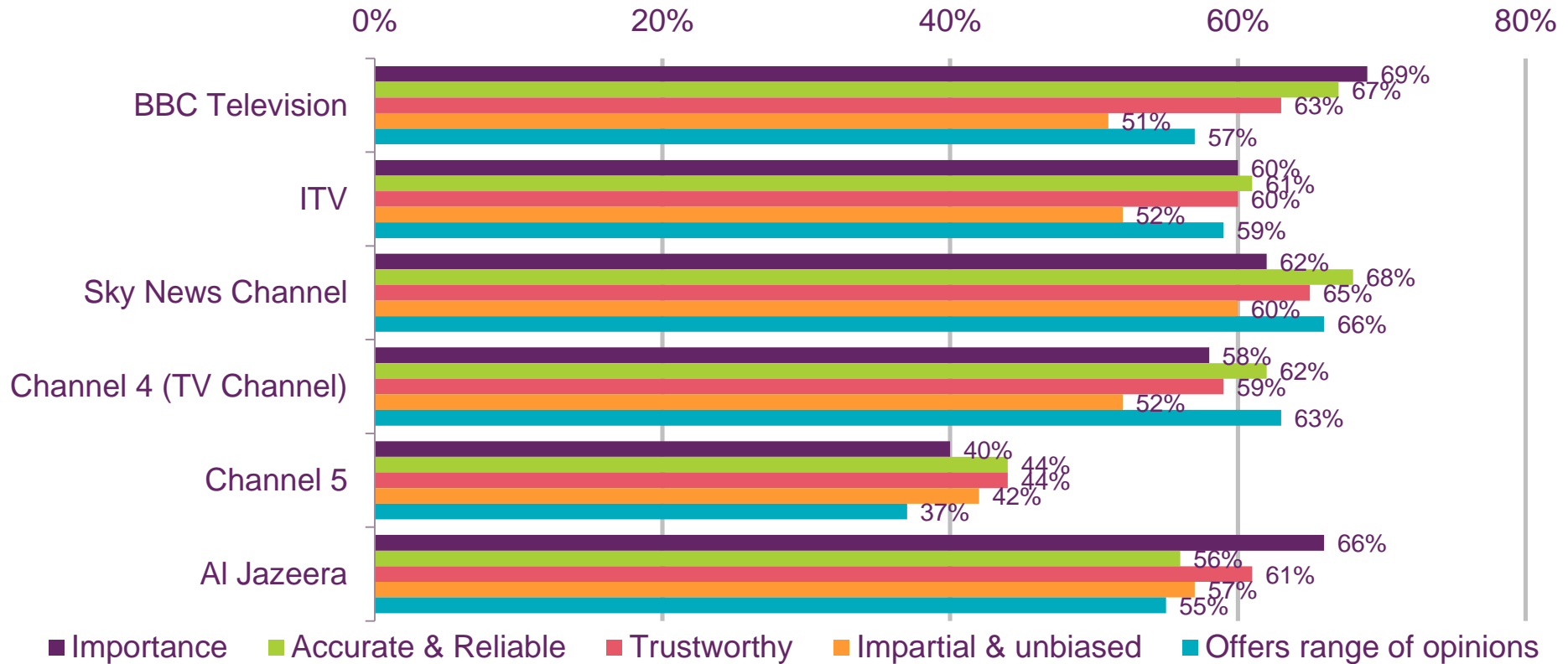
Base: All respondents: 2141 (2010), 1755 (2011), 1854 (2012), 1893 (2013).

Q - Using a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is very impartial and 5 is very biased, how impartial do you think each of the following news sources is?

'Impartial and unbiased' receive lower ratings when considered against other attributes for TV news sources

Attributes for television news sources among those who use each source

Proportion of users who rated the source highly (7-10) (%)



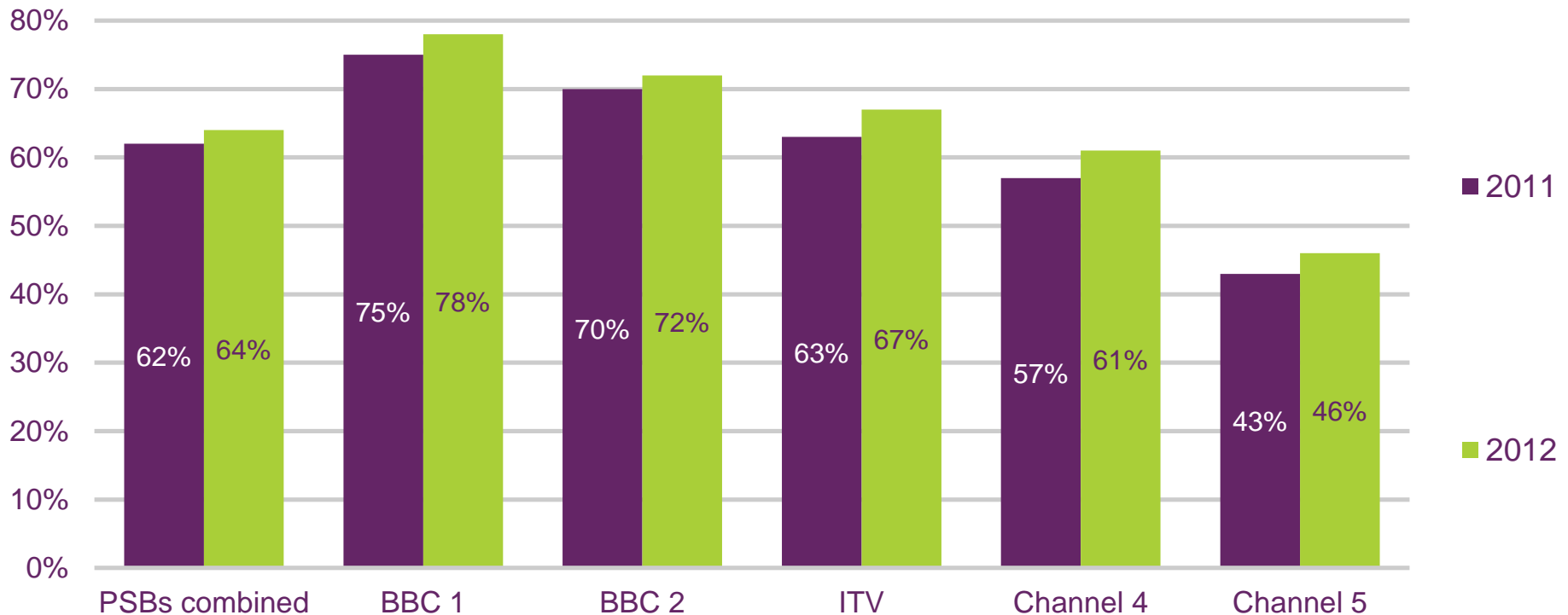
Source: Ofcom News Report 2013.

Base: Those who use platform to access the news 'nowadays' on each type (varies) – Only includes bases over 50. Note: News sources are ordered by consumption levels.

Despite a decline in perception of impartiality, Ofcom research shows that ratings for the delivery of trustworthy news programmes have increased year on year

“Its news programmes are trustworthy”

% rating (7/8/9/10) all regular viewers who watch each channel



Source: Ofcom PSB Tracker 2011, 2012.

Base: Self-reported regular viewers of BBC 1 (1604 in 2011; 1678 in 2012), BBC 2 (642 in 2011; 692 in 2012), ITV (1049 in 2011; 1117 in 2012), Channel 4 (605 in 2011; 639 in 2012), Channel 5 (344 in 2011; 284 in 2012).

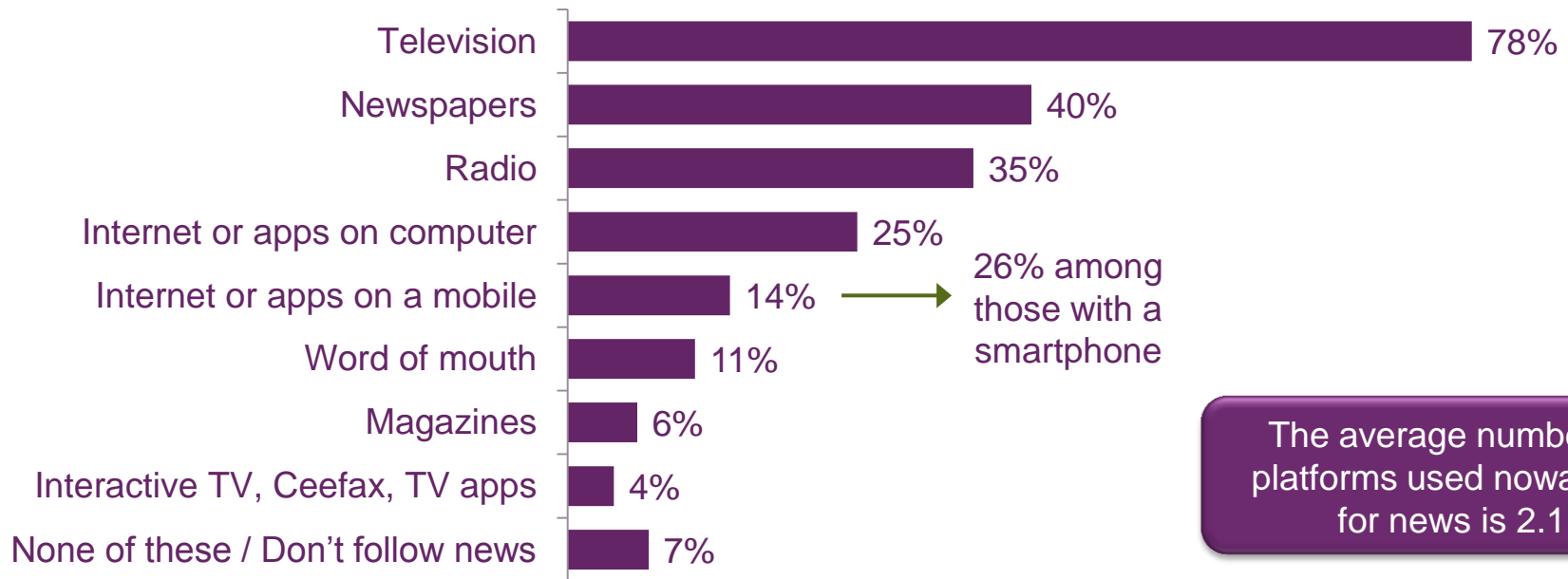
Q15B: Rating on the statement: “its news programmes are trustworthy”.

TV is the most-used platform for news...



Changes in perception of impartiality take place within the context of shifts in news consumption by platform. Ofcom's *News Report* research shows that television is by far the most-used platform for news consumption, with 78% of all adults using it for this purpose, followed by newspapers (40%) and radio (35%). A quarter (26%) of those with smartphones use the internet or apps on their mobile phone for news.

Platform used for news 'nowadays'



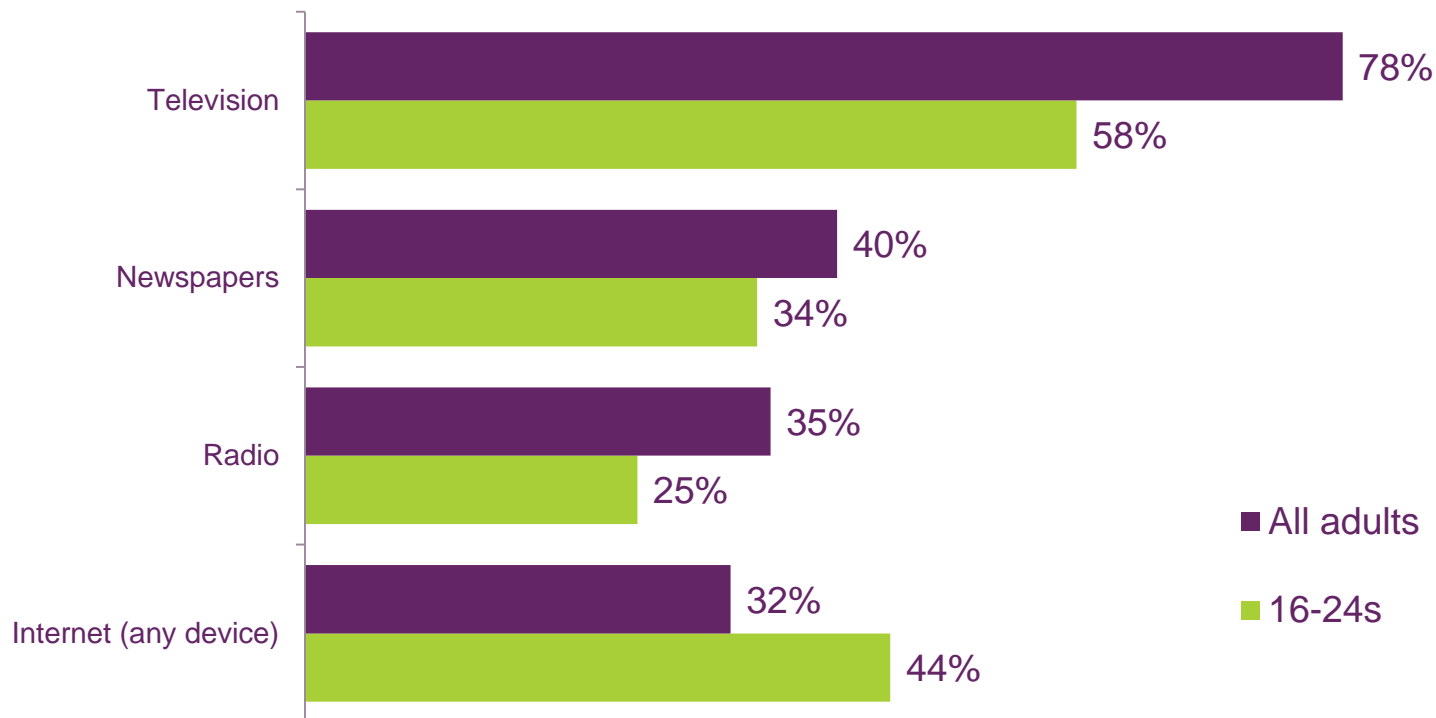
The average number of platforms used nowadays for news is 2.1

Source: *Ofcom News Report 2013*.

Base: All adults 16+ (2862).

Q3a) Which of the following do you use for news nowadays?

...but younger people are more likely to use the internet for news



Source: *Ofcom News Report 2013*.

Base: All adults 16+ (2862).

Q3a) Which of the following do you use for news nowadays?

Summary of findings

Ofcom's Media Tracker research shows that perception of impartiality in television news, among all adults, has declined significantly since 2010. Although the rate of decline was greatest between 2010 and 2011, it has continued and is present across TV as a whole, as well as among each of the five broadcasters that respondents were asked about.

There does not appear to be one particular age or socio-economic group that is driving the decline. Although the largest decline can be seen among 16-24s, the decrease is apparent across all age groups.

The declining perception of impartiality is not targeted at, or restricted to, any individual broadcaster. The decrease is apparent across all five of the broadcasters that respondents were asked about.

Summary of findings

The rate of increase in the perception of bias among UK adults does not equate to the rate of decrease in impartiality. Although ratings of bias have significantly increased since 2010 for TV as a whole and across each of the broadcasters asked about individually, bias ratings remain small in proportion to impartial and neutral ratings. The rate of increase in bias is less than both the increase for neutrality and the rate of decrease for impartiality.

The proportion of all adults opting to answer 'neutral' when asked about their perceptions of news impartiality has increased significantly since 2010. Although there has been a decline in neutrality ratings among older age groups (45-54s, 55-64s and over-65s) year on year since 2012, overall neutrality ratings have increased since 2010. This increase in respondents rating sources as neutral has been concurrent with the decrease in respondents rating news sources as impartial.

Ofcom's *News Report* research (2013) shows that impartiality and bias are rated lower by adults when considered against other attributes of TV news sources. When respondents are asked to rate the attributes of TV broadcasters' news output, they award the highest ratings to *importance* and *accuracy and reliability*. There is no apparent trend between ratings awarded by users for trust, accuracy and reliability and for impartiality. This may reflect the different ways in which viewers perceive these attributes; for example, although a source may not be seen to be particularly impartial, the viewer may perceive it to be trustworthy: they can rely on that the source to deliver news from a particular point of view or to provide an opinion.

Summary of findings

According to Ofcom's PSB Tracker research, adults still trust television news. Ratings for the delivery of trustworthy news programmes by each PSB channel, captured by the PSB Tracker research, have increased year on year. Although this does not reflect the decline in impartiality seen in the Media Tracker research, it may demonstrate that adults' concept of trust is focused around trusting a given news source to deliver a particular opinion to them, regardless of whether they consider that opinion to be impartial or biased.

The decline in perception of impartiality, found across all TV broadcasters and among all age groups, in Ofcom's Media Tracker research raises questions as to what has driven this shift in opinion, particularly since 2010. A potential cause of the decline could be that the emergence of online news is changing traditional habits of news consumption. Slides 10 and 11 highlight that the internet is increasingly becoming a major platform for news consumption. The internet provides a wider range of opinion than television can deliver, and as a result perceptions of TV news may be affected. The internet allows news and opinion to be distributed and consumed immediately, and internet-connected mobile devices allow consumption of news 'on-the-go', so the way news is presented on television may seem 'outdated' to online news consumers.

Other potential factors include: adults becoming more media-literate and more aware of alternative news sources available to them; individuals' perceptions of impartiality and bias changing in relation to news and opinion on other platforms; the content of broadcaster news programmes changing over time; or events such as the Leveson Inquiry influencing people's views of the media as a whole.