

---

## **Covid-19 news and information: consumption and attitudes**

Results by ethnicity (combined waves one to four of Ofcom's online survey)

---

[Covid-19 news and information: consumption and attitudes](#) – Welsh translation

**Publication date:** 5 May 2020

## Overview

As a response to the Covid-19 outbreak, Ofcom has commissioned an ongoing weekly online survey of c.2,000 respondents, to monitor how people are getting news and information about the crisis. This research is designed to support a range of stakeholders with their activities during this time. Fieldwork takes place each weekend, asking people about their habits and attitudes of the previous seven days.

This report examines differences in consumption and attitudes by ethnicity. In order to ensure robust sample sizes this report **combines** results from waves one to four of our research (fieldwork between 27 March to 19 April 2020), which corresponds to week one to four of the UK 'lockdown'.

It should be noted that as it is an online panel methodology, the survey findings are representative of the views and habits of the 87% of the UK population that are online<sup>1</sup>.

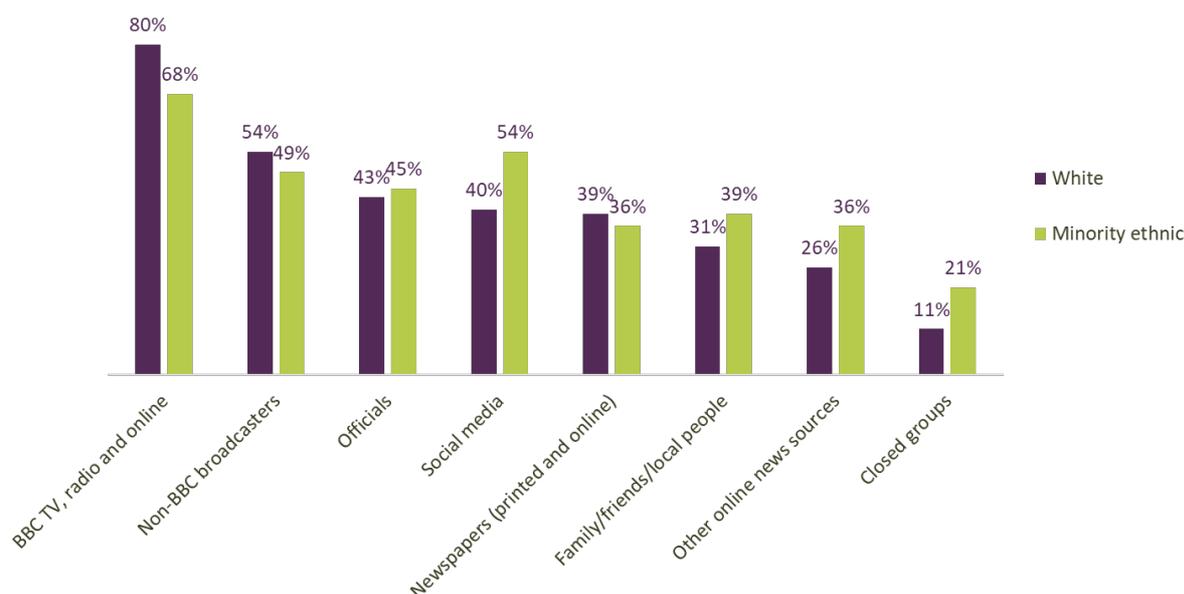
### Consumption of news and information about Covid-19

- In the first four weeks of the 'lockdown', almost all the UK online population accessed news and information about Covid-19 at least once a day, with no difference between white (97%) and minority ethnic (96%) respondents.
- However, there is a difference in the frequency of accessing news and information. Respondents from a minority ethnic background (24%) were more likely to be getting news 20 or more times a day than white respondents (16%). This is being driven by Asian respondents (28%).
- BBC services are still the most-used source. However, white adults (80%) used BBC services more than respondents from minority ethnic groups (68%). Social media is more popular among minority ethnic groups (54%) than adults from a white ethnic group (40%); in particular, WhatsApp (27% vs 7%). Minority ethnic groups are also more likely to have used family, friends and local people (39% vs 31%), other online news services (36% vs 26%) and closed groups (21% vs 11%).

---

<sup>1</sup> Ofcom, [Online Nation](#) 2019

Figure 1: Sources used for news/information about Covid-19



Source: Ofcom Covid-19 news survey, March-April 2020. Q3a. Which, if any of the following sources have you used to get information/news about the Coronavirus outbreak in the last week?

Base: All respondents who are getting information/news about the Coronavirus outbreak Weeks 1-4: White adults (7746), Minority ethnic groups (727)

Note: 'Other online news sources' combines three aggregated types of source: websites/apps of online news organisations like BuzzFeed, Huffington Post and Vice; websites or apps that bring together news from different news providers; and non-mainstream news sources such as Russia Today, Breitbart and The Skwawkbox

- Differences by ethnicity can also be seen in the consideration of the most important sources for news/information about Covid-19. Across the first four weeks of 'lockdown', BBC services were nominated as the most important source for 52% of white adults, but this was only for a third of adults from a minority ethnic background (35%). Official sources (such as WHO, NHS, Govt, etc) were considered the most important source by one fifth (18%) minority ethnic groups (compared to 14% for white adults), followed by social media and other online news sources (both 7% vs 4%).
- In general, people say they are using media organisations (across TV, press, radio and online) more than they were before the outbreak of the virus, however this is more noticeable for respondents from minority ethnic groups. Sixty five percent claimed to be using UK-wide organisations (a lot or a little) more than before compared to 57% of white adults. This also applies to local media organisations (46% vs 32%) and media organisations from other countries (44% vs 23%).
- There are differences by ethnicity in the way information about Covid-19 is being shared. More white adults (77%) than minority ethnic groups (71%) are doing so in person or by phone. However, minority ethnic groups (39%) are sharing written communications in closed groups, such as WhatsApp, Teams, Zoom etc, more than adults from a white ethnic group (26%). A

quarter of adults from a minority ethnic group (26%) are also sharing by video compared to one in five (19%) white adults.

## Misinformation related to Covid-19

- During the first four weeks of the 'lockdown', adults from minority ethnic groups (52%) were more likely to have come across false or misleading information than white adults (46%). This was driven by Asian respondents (55%).
- Among those who saw misinformation in weeks one to four of the 'lockdown', two thirds (64%) of white adults say that they are seeing it at least once a day, compared to 69% for adults from a minority ethnic background.
- The most common piece of misinformation (from a selected list) in weeks three and four of the lockdown, among both white (51%) and ethnic minorities (51%) was *'theories linking the origins or causes of Covid-19 to 5G technology'*<sup>2</sup>. For weeks one to four of the lockdown, a higher proportion of adults from a minority ethnic group than white adults have come across most of the other types of false or misleading information, such as; *"drinking water more frequently"* (32% vs 28%), *"gargling salt water"* (29% vs 18%), *"eating warm food/drink and avoiding cold food/drink"* (27% vs 17%), *"increasing use of natural remedies such as colloidal silver, essential oils, etc"* (26% vs 19%) and *"drinking more lemon juice"* (24% vs 12%)<sup>3</sup>.
- Over half (57%) of white adults who came across misinformation did nothing about it compared to 40% of adults from a minority ethnic group. Also, half of those who identified themselves from a mixed ethnic background did nothing compared to a third of Asian respondents.
- Adults from a minority ethnic group were more likely to have checked whether the information was misleading with family and friends (24% compared to 11% of white adults) and used a fact checking site (21% compared to 13% of white adults).

## Official advice about Covid-19

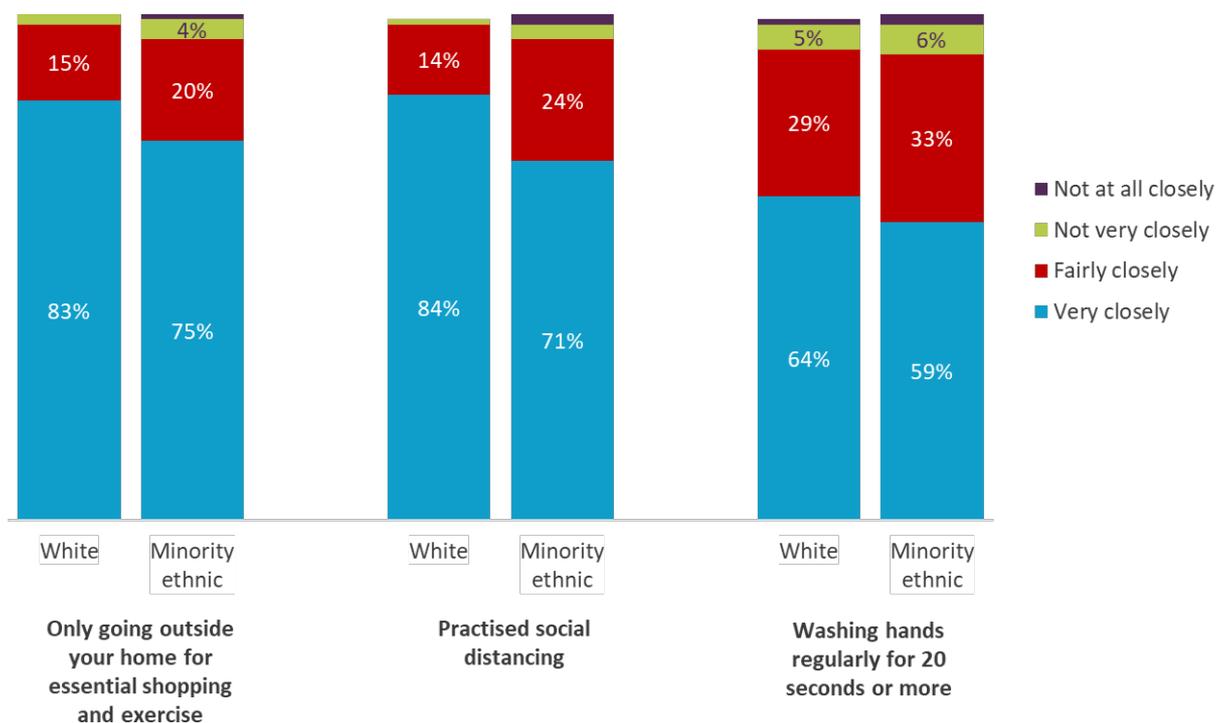
- As illustrated in Figure 3, there are no differences by ethnicity in the proportion of respondents saying they are (either very or fairly) closely following the official advice of practising social distancing (minority ethnic groups 95% vs. white adults 98%), only going outside for essential things (minority ethnic groups 95% vs. white adults 98%), and washing hands regularly (minority ethnic groups 92% vs. white adults 93%). However, respondents from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to say they are only *'fairly closely'* following official advice on practicing social distancing (24% vs.14% for white respondents).

---

<sup>2</sup> This statement was not included in wave one and two of the online survey

<sup>3</sup> These statements were included in all four waves of the online survey

Figure 3: Extent to which people are closely following official advice



Source: Ofcom Covid-19 news survey, March-April 2020. Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding. Q13. In the last week, how closely would you say you are following official advice on the following aspects of Coronavirus? Base: All respondents Weeks 1-4: White adults (7796), Minority ethnic groups (731)

## Attitudes towards Covid-19 and media coverage

- Official sources are the most trusted source for information on Covid-19 for both white adults (93%) and minority ethnic groups (86%). Around nine in ten of those using the official sources trust the NHS (white adults 95% vs. minority ethnic groups 87%) and local health services (white adults 88% vs. minority ethnic groups 87%), whilst around eight in ten trust the government as an information source on Covid-19 (white adults 85% vs. minority ethnic groups 77%).
- Traditional broadcasters are also highly trusted among both white and minority ethnic group respondents. Around three quarters (79%) of adults from a white ethnic group trust BBC services (compared to 74% for minority ethnic groups), whilst a similar figure (80%) of white adults also trust non-BBC broadcasters (compared to 73% for minority ethnic groups). Social media (white adults 20% vs. minority ethnic groups 29%) and closed groups (white adults 27% vs. minority ethnic groups 26%) are the least trusted media for information on Covid-19.
- A higher proportion of adults from a minority ethnic background (47%) say they are *'finding it hard to know what's true and what's false about Covid-19'* compared to white adults (35%). This appears to be driven by Asian respondents, over half (52%) of whom agree with this statement. Furthermore, minority ethnic groups are also more likely to agree they are *'confused about what they should be doing in response to Covid-19'* (25% vs 15% for white adults), *'the mainstream media is exaggerating the seriousness of Covid-19'* (28% vs. 17%) and *'I am trying to avoid news about Covid-19'* (31% vs. 26%).