
News Consumption in the UK: 2019

Overview of research findings

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1. Key findings from the report

This report provides an overview of the findings from Ofcom's 2018/19 research into news consumption across television, radio, print, social media, other internet sources and magazines. It is published as part of our range of market research reports examining the consumption of content, and attitudes towards that content, across different platforms.

The aim of the report is to inform understanding of news consumption across the UK and within each UK nation. This includes sources and platforms used, the perceived importance of different outlets for news, attitudes towards individual news sources, international and local news use. The report also provides an understanding of news consumption among 12-15s.

The primary source is Ofcom's News Consumption Survey. The report also contains information from a range of industry currencies including:

- BARB for television viewing
- TouchPoints for newspaper readership
- ABC for newspaper circulation
- Comscore for online news consumption

More information about the industry currencies used in the report can be found in the annex.

What we have found – in brief

While TV remains the most-used platform for news nowadays by UK adults, usage has decreased since last year (75% vs. 79% in 2018). At the same time, use of social media for news use has gone up (49% vs. 44%). Use of TV for news is much more likely among the 65+ age group (94%), while the internet is the most-used platform for news consumption among 16-24s and those from a minority ethnic background.

Fewer UK adults use BBC TV channels for news compared to last year, while more are using social media platforms. As was the case in 2018, BBC One is the most-used news source among all adults (58%), followed by ITV (40%) and Facebook (35%). However, several BBC TV news sources (BBC One, BBC News Channel and BBC Two) have all seen a decrease in use for news compared to 2018. Use of several social media platforms for news have increased since last year (Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and Snapchat).

There is evidence that UK adults are consuming news more actively via social media. For example, those who access news shared by news organisations, trending news or news stories from friends and family or other people they follow via Facebook or Twitter are more likely to make comments on the new posts they see compared to the previous year.

When rated by their users on measures such as quality, accuracy, trustworthiness and impartiality, magazines continue to perform better than other news platforms, followed by TV. As was the case in 2018, ratings tend to be lower for the majority of the attributes among users of social media sites.

TV is the most common platform for accessing international and local news, despite a decrease in use compared to 2018. Users of TV for international and local news tend to be highly satisfied with the quality of this type of news output that the platform provides. In the Nations, BBC One remains the most-used source for news in England, Wales and Scotland; while both UTV and BBC are top in Northern Ireland.

Six in ten 12-15-year olds are interested in news. These children primarily engage with news to understand what's going on around them and to learn about new things. Being 'too boring' is the key reason for lack of interest in news.

TV is still the most-used platform for news consumption among 12-15-year olds and BBC One/BBC Two are still the most-used news sources, despite a drop in usage (40% vs. 45% in 2018). As was the case last year, Family, Radio and TV are considered to be the most truthful news sources, while social media and friends are the least truthful.

2. Overall summary of findings

Overall summary - Adults

TV remains the most-used platform among UK adults for news nowadays (75%), despite an overall decrease in use since last year (79%). At the same time, use of social media has gone up, with nearly half (49%) of all adults saying they use it for news (vs. 44% last year).

While TV is the most-used platform for news overall, there are some exceptions; for example, young people aged 16-24 are more likely to use the internet for news nowadays than TV (83% vs. 51%), while the same is true for those from a minority ethnic background (82% vs. 65%). By contrast, older people aged 65+ are more likely to stick to the more traditional platforms for news, including TV, radio and print newspapers, with TV use among this age group being almost universal (94%). ABC1s remain more likely than C2DEs to use the internet, radio and print newspapers¹. While TV news use has gone down since last year, more people are using social media for news consumption. Young people aged 16-24 in particular are much more likely to use social media for news than their older 65+ counterparts (76% vs. 16%).

The decrease in TV news consumption since 2018 is reflected in the decrease in use of several BBC TV news sources. While BBC One remains the most-used news source among all adults overall (58%), its use has gone down since last year (62%).

Use of the BBC News Channel and BBC Two have also decreased since last year. At the same time, corresponding with the increase in use of social media, usage of several online sources for news have increased (including Google search engine, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram). When looking across all platforms, UK adults say they use an average of 6.7 individual news sources. TV remains central to people's news consumption with seven TV sources appearing in the top 20 most-used source list, more than any other platform (four social media sites, four newspaper titles (print or digital format), three radio stations and two websites/apps also appear in the top 20 most-used source list. When these sources are grouped into wholesale categories, the BBC has the highest audience reach (declining from 81% in 2018 to 78% in 2019), followed by ITN (51%), Sky (27%) and DMGT (25%).

However, BBC One maintains its status as the most important news source, although this measure has also decreased since 2018; from 27% of all adults in 2018 to 24% in 2019.

Around a quarter of adults said that out of all the news sources they use, BBC One is their most important, this was followed by ITV (11%), Facebook (8%) and the BBC website/app (6%). Importance of BBC One is heightened among those aged 65+ (40%), while for 16-24s, Facebook is their most important news source (17%). At a platform level, measures such as quality, accuracy, trustworthiness and impartiality tend to be the strongest among readers of magazines and weakest among users of social media. For example, 37% of users of social media for news said they thought it

¹ ABC1 and C2DE denote social grade, which is a classification system based on occupation. ABC1 refers to managerial, supervisory, administrative and professional workers while C2DE refers to manual workers, state pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers and those that are unemployed with state benefits.

was impartial, compared to 78% among users of magazines, 62% for TV, 61% for radio and 58% for print newspapers.

Social media is increasingly being used for news nowadays (increased from 44% of all adults in 2018 to 49% in 2019), and is used more than any other type of internet news source (remaining steady at 38%).

Of those using social media for news nowadays, three-quarters claim to use Facebook, with around one third using Twitter and three in ten using WhatsApp and Instagram. Compared to 12 months ago, more adults claim to be using WhatsApp for news (from 22% to 30%), Instagram (from 21% to 28%) and Snapchat (from 14% to 17%), while Reddit has also gone up slightly (from 4% to 6%), but Facebook has remained steady at 73%. When social media users were asked how they find out about news when they are online, 41% said they mostly get news from social media posts. In addition, an increasing proportion of social media users are actively consuming news across a range of different news posts, being more likely to do things such as make comments, share or retweet content. However, some still struggle to remember the original source of the news stories posted on social media.

The proportion who use social media for news, and the specific types of social media sites, vary by demographic group.

16-24s and people from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to use most of the social media sites for news than those aged 65+ and white people. For example, among social media news users, half of 16-24s said they used Instagram for news, compared to just 8% of those aged 65+, while 48% of those from minority ethnic background use WhatsApp, compared to just a quarter of white people. Men are more likely to use Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Reddit and Viber than women, while women are more likely to use Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat than men.

TV is still the most popular platform for accessing international and local news, despite a decline in popularity. And people are generally highly satisfied with the quality of local and international news TV channels provide.

TV is the most popular platform for accessing international news (declining from 62% to 58%), followed by radio (23%), printed newspapers (23%) and social media (increasing from 18% to 22%). More than four in five users of TV, radio and printed newspapers for international news said they are satisfied with the quality of this type of news provided by the platforms, however only two-thirds of the social media users are satisfied. TV is also the most popular platform for accessing local news. Two in five of all adults say they watch regional/local broadcasts on BBC TV (declining from 48% for 42%) and one-third watch ITV. More than four in five of these viewers are satisfied with the quality of news that these channels provide. There has been an increase in use of websites/apps of local or regional newspapers, social media and word of mouth for local news.

In the Nations, BBC One remains the most-used news source in England, Wales and Scotland, with UTV and BBC One being equally used in Northern Ireland.

Facebook is the third most popular source across all Nations. Similarly, BBC One is the single most important news source in Wales, England and Scotland, whereas UTV is the most important source

in Northern Ireland. Scottish respondents are most likely to say they're very interested in news about their Nation (58% vs. 47% in Wales, 43% in Northern Ireland and 31% in England). And in terms of individual sources used to access news specifically about their Nation, BBC One is most common in England and Wales, while in Scotland it is STV and in Northern Ireland, UTV.

As was the case in 2018, six in ten adults think it is important for 'society overall' that broadcasters provide current affairs programming, more than those who say it is important to them personally (52%).

Around seven in ten adults also think it is important that current affairs programmes are impartial, provide high quality commentary and interpretation of events/issues, helps them to understand what is going on in the world today and provides a good depth of analysis. However, fewer adults watch/listen to current affairs programmes compared to 2018, with TV declining in popularity (from 66% to 62%). BBC One and BBC Radio 4 are the most-used TV and radio sources for current affairs.

Overall summary – 12-15-year olds

Six in ten 12-15-year olds claim to be either 'very' or 'quite' interested in news.

These children primarily engage with news to understand what's going on around them and to learn about new things. Among the four in ten who are not interested in the news, the main reason is it's 'too boring' (41%). A further one in five said it was not relevant for people their age (19%) and one in six said it was too upsetting (15%).

However, when we asked how often they read, watch or listen to or follow news, three quarters of 12-15s said they do so at least once a week.

Only 8% said they never accessed news. Recognising that news is not always accessed on purpose, we asked children how often they inadvertently came across news (e.g. because others are watching, listening to or talking about it) and eight in ten said this happened at least once a week, while only six in ten said they actively look for news at least once a week.

TV remains the most-used platform for news consumption and BBC One remains the most-used source, although similar to adults, usage has decreased since last year.

12-15-year olds are particularly interested in music and celebrity news, but when asked which types of news content they are *most* interested in sports/sports personalities (18%) and music news/singers/musicians (17%) come out top. TV remains the platform used most often for news (29%), followed by social media (21%) and talking to family (15%). Social media is used most often for celebrity, music and fashion news, while TV was used most often for all other types of news content. BBC One/Two remain the most-used and most important news source across all platforms, despite a drop in usage (decreasing from 45% in 2018 to 40% in 2019), followed by Facebook (32%), YouTube (30%) and then ITV (29%). 12-15-year olds are most likely to first find out about TV and radio sources from parent(s) and find out about social media sources from friends.

Family, radio and TV are perceived to be the most truthful news sources, while news from social media is the least truthful. More children are thinking about whether a news story they see on social media is accurate or not than compared to last year.

As was the case in 2018, eight in ten 12-15s said the news they heard from family was either 'always' or 'mostly' accurate, compared to 77% for radio and 70 % for TV. Only one in three (35%) think news stories on social media are reported truthfully and four in ten (39%) said the same about news they hear from friends. Just over two in five 12-15s who use social media for news claim they always/often think about whether the stories they see there are accurate (increasing from 36% in 2018 to 44% in 2019), however, half said it is difficult to tell whether news on social media is accurate or not. Nine in ten 12-15s say they have heard about 'fake news' (increasing from 78% to 87%), eight in ten say they're aware of its meaning (also increasing from 74% to 83%) and half claim they have seen a 'fake news' story (increasing from 43% to 50%). The most common action they would take if they saw a fake news story is to tell parents or another family member.

A1. Industry currencies

- a) BARB (Broadcasters' Audience Research Board) is the official industry currency for TV consumption. It uses a continuous panel of approximately 5,300 UK homes and tracks television viewing among all people aged 4+ in these homes using meters attached to every working television set in the home.
- b) TouchPoints is an annual survey commissioned by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA). With a sample of c.6,000 adults 15+ across Great Britain, it uses a seven-day diary to capture media consumption and other daily activities every half hour. In addition, it also uses a self-completion questionnaire which includes attitudinal statements and other behavioural questions.
- c) ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulation) publishes verified newspaper circulation figures, based on sales information provided by publishers.
- d) Comscore is an organisation that provides online audience measurement. It is endorsed by UKOM, the body that sets and governs the UK standard for the online industry. Comscore uses a hybrid measurement approach to online audience measurement which consists of both panel and census data.

A2. Methodology

During 2017/18, Ofcom decided to move the News Consumption tracker from a 100% face-to-face omnibus approach to include online interviews. This methodology was repeated during 2018/19. Face-to-face respondents were approached to participate by door-to-door interviewers; they then completed the survey using a tablet (CAPI). Online respondents, recruited from an online panel, were invited to complete the same survey separately via email.

In total, 2,156 face-to-face and 2,535 online interviews were carried out during 2018/19. Nations were over-represented during fieldwork to produce robust sample sizes for analysis. The interviews were conducted over two waves (November & December and March) in order to achieve a robust and representative view of UK adults. The combined 2018/2019 data has been reported as '2019' within this report, whilst the 2017/2018 data has been reported as '2018'.

The survey data has been weighted to correct for the over-representation of the Nations, with weights applied to age, gender and SEG within Nation to match known population profiles. A final weight step was taken to calibrate between the face-to-face and online methodologies.

It is possible to make direct comparisons between the 2018 and 2019 data, as the methodology and question wording is consistent. However, due to the changes made to the survey in 2017/18, it is not possible to make direct comparisons to data collected before 2018.

Findings by different demographic groups are shown on the slides, where possible. Statistically significant differences are shown at a 95% confidence level.

The survey has approximately 150 codes for different potential sources for news, as well as the option to allow respondents to nominate their own sources which yields a further 800 or so, including regional sources. This gives us a bottom-up measure of what people consider they use for news (about their Nation, the UK, and internationally) and will not necessarily include every possible outlet. The survey therefore provides a granular range of news sources. These individual news sources are then aggregated into various groups or "nets" relating to their owner or publisher.

This is a recall-based survey. As such, it is likely to provide somewhat different results to other types of measurement. In particular, it may underestimate some online news consumption activity. It is likely to be harder for respondents to recall ad-hoc online news consumption compared to, say, the purchase of a newspaper or the watching of an evening television bulletin. On the other hand, respondents show through such surveys which news sources resonate with them.

The methodology used for the news consumption research amongst 12-15 year olds is unchanged since the 2018 report. In total, 500 interviews from November & December 2018 have been combined with 500 interviews from March 2019. Quotas were set on age, gender, SEG and nation to ensure the sample was representative of the UK. Each wave of fieldwork was undertaken in three stages:

- Stage 1: We targeted parents of 12-15 year olds, using an online panel.
- Stage 2: Parents were screened to ensure they had a 12-15 year old.
- Stage 3: The parent asked their (qualifying) child to complete the rest of the questionnaire.