
Covid-19 news and information: consumption and attitudes

Results from week 33 (November 2020)

Overview

This fieldwork took place from 6-8 November, asking people about their habits and attitudes in the previous seven days. This was the week during which England entered a second lockdown (on 5 November), and the week before the firebreak lockdown in Wales was due to end (on 9 November).

The results are mainly compared with week one of our survey (27-29 March) which coincided with week one of the UK 'lockdown'. The results are also compared with the data from week 29 (9-11 October), which was the last time we ran this survey.¹

Key findings

Consumption of news and information about Covid-19

- Nine in ten people (90%) accessed news about Covid-19 at least once a day in the last week. This was an increase from 88% in week 29, but below the high at the start of the lockdown (99% in week one). Over 65s were more likely than any other age group to access news about Covid-19 at least once a day (95%) and 16-24s were least likely (85%). One in twenty people (6%) accessed news about the pandemic at least twenty times a day, the same proportion as week 29 but again below week one (24%).
- Three in ten respondents (31%) said they are '*trying to avoid news about the coronavirus*' (30% in week 29 and 22% in week one). Those aged 25-34 were most likely to say they are avoiding news about the coronavirus (46%). Female respondents were more likely to say they are avoiding news on the topic (34%) than male respondents (27%).
- Among adult internet users, traditional media sources (broadcasters, newspapers, radio) remained the most-used source of news and information about Covid-19 (85% in week 33, 84% in week 29 and 93% in week one). However, 16-24 year olds, people from DE social grades and people from Scotland were less likely than the UK average to use these sources (70%, 80% and 74% respectively). Traditional media was seen as the most important source of news and information by 63% of respondents (64% in week 29 and 71% in week one). Over 65s were more likely to see traditional media as the most important news source (76%) while 16-24s were least likely (39%).
- The proportion of people who used social media as a source of information about the pandemic in the last week was 36% (34% in week 29, 49% in week one). Some groups were less likely than the UK average to use social media, including men (33%); respondents over the age of 45 (25%) and people in England (34%). Meanwhile, 16-24s were the most likely to use social media as a news source (55%) and 14% of these respondents saw it as their most important source of news, compared to just 1% of over 65s who thought the same. The use of closed messenger groups as a source of

¹ We carried out our Covid-19 news and information research each week from week one of the lockdown until week fourteen (in June). Since then, we have carried out this research on a monthly basis.

information about the pandemic decreased to 7% in week 33 (from 9% in week 29 and 15% in week one).

- There was a decrease in sharing news or information about Covid-19 via social media posts (11% reported sharing posts in week 33 vs. 13% in week 29 and 25% in week one). The proportion of people sharing information by writing in closed messenger groups was 18% (16% in week 29 and 34% in week one). Around a quarter of people (23%) said they have not shared any information or news about Covid-19, either online or by word of mouth in the last week, compared to 26% in week 29 and 11% in week one.
- In week 20, respondents were asked for the first time whether they agreed with the statement '*I feel confident that I understand the statistics and data used to provide the number of Coronavirus cases and deaths*' (52% agreed). In week 33, the same proportion of respondents (52%) agreed with the statement and 23% disagreed. This was similar to the results in week 29 (where 52% agreed and 22% disagreed). As in week 29, male respondents were more likely (58%) than female respondents (46%) to agree with the statement.

Misinformation related to Covid-19

- In week 33, a third (33%) of respondents said they came across information or news about Coronavirus in the last week that they thought was false or misleading (32% in week 29 and 46% in week one). 16-24s were the most likely to come across false or misleading information (42%) compared with 28% of over 65-year-olds. Over a third (37%) of male respondents came across false or misleading information compared to 29% of female respondents. Just 5% of those who saw misleading information in week 33 said they forwarded or shared it (compared to 7% in week one).
- We asked respondents if they had come across a select list of claims that could be considered as false or misleading.² In week 33 we asked for the first time if respondents had come across three new claims: that '*the flu alone is killing more people than Coronavirus*'; that '*Coronavirus statistics are being combined to make Coronavirus look more harmful than it is*' and that '*the Coronavirus test which shows if you currently have the virus does not work and 93% of tests produce a false positive*'.
- The most common claim respondents had seen was that '*the flu alone is killing more people than Coronavirus*' (33% of respondents said they came across this claim). The next most common claims, both seen by 31% of respondents, were '*face masks/coverings offer no protection or are harmful*' and '*the number of deaths linked to Coronavirus is much lower in reality than is being reported*'.
- Of the other new claims included in our week 33 survey, 23% of people had seen the claim that '*Coronavirus statistics are being combined to make Coronavirus look more harmful than it is*' and

² In week 33, the wording of this question changed. In previous weeks (week one to week 29) we asked respondents '*Have you come across any of these false or misleading information about aspects of the Coronavirus in the last week?*' and gave a list of pre-selected claims to choose from, such as '*Claims about potential dangers of a Coronavirus vaccination*'. From week 33 onwards, we are asking respondents '*Have you come across any of these claims which some people are making about aspects of the Coronavirus and that could be considered as false or misleading in the last week?*' and are including a revised list of pre-selected claims they may have seen, such as '*There are potential dangers associated with the Coronavirus vaccination*'.

16% of people had seen the claim that *'the Coronavirus test which shows if you currently have the virus does not work and 93% of tests produce a false positive'*.

- Three in ten respondents (29%) saw the claim that *'the number of cases linked to Coronavirus is much lower in reality than is being reported'* (18% in week 29). Two in ten respondents (19%) came across claims linking Coronavirus and 5G technology (13% in week 29). This is a decline from the 50% of respondents who saw similar claims during week three in April when we first asked about this.
- Three in ten respondents (28%) said that seeing claims that could be considered as false or misleading had made them think twice about the issue (26% in week 29). Those aged 16-24 were most likely to say that false or misleading information had made them think twice (38%) compared to 20% of over 55s.
- In week 33, 82% of respondents who use social media said they had come across information about the coronavirus from official sources in the form of banners, pop-ups and upfront notices either each time (14%), most times (30%) or sometimes (38%) when they went onto social media.
- Half of respondents that use social media (51%) said that they had come across *'news/info that have warnings/notices from the platform attached, saying that the info may be untrustworthy/untrue'* either each time (6%), most times (15%) or sometimes (30%) when they went on social media. Of those that came across these warnings/notices about content, over half (53%) reported clicking through to view the content being flagged in this way.
- Most respondents agreed that *'untrue stories about the coronavirus should not be posted or shared on social media'* (81%) with only 7% disagreeing. Respondents over 65 were more likely than any other age group to agree with this statement (at 87%). One in five (20%) of respondents agreed that *'people and organisations have a right to say what they want on social media about the coronavirus, even if it might not be true'*. One in five (19%) of respondents also agreed that *'it's OK for untrue stories about Coronavirus to be posted and shared on social media, as long as they are flagged as potentially untrustworthy/untrue by the social media platform'*.

Attitudes and behaviour related to Covid-19

- In week 33, one in four respondents (24%) agreed with the statement *'I am confused about what I should be doing in response to the coronavirus'*. This was a decline from week 29 (where 30% agreed) but an increase from week one (where 17% agreed). Three in ten 16-24s (33%) agreed with the statement compared to 22% of over 65s.
- Four in ten (40%) said they *'find it hard to know what is true and what is false about the coronavirus'*, a similar proportion to week 29 (38%) and week one (40%). More female respondents (45%) said they find it hard to know what's true or false compared to male respondents (36%), and 16-24s were the most likely age group to agree with the statement (45%). Respondents in AB households (35%) were less likely than other socio-economic households to agree with this statement.

- The NHS remained one of the most trusted sources for information on Covid-19. In week 33, 90% of those who said they use the NHS for information said they trust it, a decrease from 95% in week 29 and week one. A clear majority of respondents using official sources continued to trust the information provided by official scientists (80% in week 33 and 29, 90% in week one); local health services (86% in week 33, 83% in week 29 and 92% in week one) and the WHO (89% in week 33, 92% in week 29 and 94% in week one). Three quarters (76%) of respondents trusted information provided by the UK Government, down from nine in ten (91%) in week one.
- One in four respondents (26%) said they think *'the mainstream media is exaggerating the seriousness of the coronavirus'*, which is similar to week 29 (27%) and compares to 17% in week one. Male respondents (29%) were more likely to agree with this statement than female respondents (23%). One in four people aged 16-24 (36%) agreed with the statement compared to one in five 55-64s (18%).
- Six in ten respondents (63%) continued to think that *'this crisis is showing some positive sides of society (e.g. more local/community spirit, support for the NHS)'* (compared to 61% who agreed in week 29 and 86% in week one).
- In week 20, respondents were asked for the first time whether they would *'agree to be vaccinated against the Coronavirus if there was a vaccine approved by the NHS available tomorrow'*. In week 33, six in ten respondents (62%) agreed with the statement, the same proportion as week 29, and 20% disagreed (18% in week 29). Over 65s were more likely than any other age group to agree with this statement (74%).
- In previous weeks of this survey, we asked parents if they agreed with the statement that *'on balance, I am comfortable that my child/children is/are back at school'* and in week 29, over half (55%) of parents agreed. In week 33, we asked parents if they agreed with a slightly different statement: *'on balance, I am happy that my child/children is/are still able to go to school'*. The majority (63%) of parents agreed with this, although parents between 45-54 (55%) were less likely to agree.
- Almost all respondents said they are closely following official guidance practising social distancing (94% in week 33, 98% in week one) and wearing a face mask/ covering where relevant (95% in week 33). Most respondents said they are closely following the official advice around regular handwashing, 88% of respondents agreed with this in week 33 compared to almost all respondents (96%) in week one. In week 33, we also asked respondents how closely they were following the official advice to *'stay at home as much as possible'* and 91% of respondents said they were following this closely.
- Finally, respondents reported *'maintaining social distancing'* (59%) and *'washing hands regularly and thoroughly'* (57%) as the two most important pieces of official advice (combining 1st, 2nd and 3rd rankings). Half of respondents (54%) felt that *'wearing a face mask/covering'* was important, which is a decrease from week 29 (60%) but it is still almost three times more than in week 14 (21%) following the announcement that face coverings should be worn when travelling on public transport

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or going into shops. The same proportion of respondents (54%) felt that the advice to '*stay at home as much as possible*' was important.