

Exploring attitudes towards online news

**The role of online
intermediaries in news
consumption**

Qualitative Research Report

November 2022



Contents

1	Introduction	4
1.1	Background	4
1.2	Methodology	4
1.3	How to read this report	7
1.4	Glossary of key terms	7
2	Experiences of online news	8
2.1	Accessing news online	8
2.2	Content of online news	12
2.3	Attitudes towards the reliability of online news	15
3	Critical assessment of news	17
3.1	Approaches to assessing online news	17
4	Attitudes to the personalisation of news online	20
4.1	Awareness of personalisation	20
4.2	Personalisation on online intermediaries	22
5	Media plurality in an online world	25
5.1	Spontaneous awareness of media plurality rules	25
5.2	Media plurality and online news	26
6	Reflections	29
7	Appendices	32
7.1	Sample breakdown	32
7.2	Discussion guide: Workshop 1	33
7.3	Discussion guide: Workshop 2	40
7.4	Online diary 1: Task list	50
7.5	Online diary 2: Task list	51
7.6	Stimulus materials: Workshop 1	53
7.7	Simulus materials: Workshop 2	56

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The news market in the UK has changed rapidly, with a significant increase in the amount of news available online. Within this evolving context, Ofcom launched a programme of work to understand what impact changes in the market might mean for media plurality. Currently, Ofcom has statutory duties to secure and maintain a sufficient plurality of providers of different TV and radio services. These rules do not cover online intermediaries. [Ofcom has identified](#) three features not currently captured under the existing regulatory framework that may present a risk to media plurality:

- Online intermediaries and their algorithms control the prominence they give to different news sources and stories.
- The basis on which online intermediaries serve news via their algorithms is not sufficiently transparent.
- Consumers do not always critically engage with the accuracy and partiality of online news.

As part of this work, Ofcom commissioned Ipsos UK to conduct qualitative research to help them understand people's experiences, attitudes, and expectations around online news consumption. The research explored how well people understand the role of online intermediaries in determining the sources and types of news stories they see, how people critically assess online news stories, and whether exposure to a wide range of sources and viewpoints matters to them.

1.2 Methodology

The research used a longitudinal design which combined online diaries with reconvened online deliberative workshops across four stages. This design enabled the complexity of how online intermediaries work and low levels of understanding around personalisation and media plurality rules to be fully considered, deliberated and reflected upon. Participants were given information about online intermediaries, personalisation (including the use of algorithms and choice architecture), and media plurality to help take them on a journey from spontaneous views to informed citizens. Figure 1 provides an outline of the reconvened deliberative approach that was used for the research, and the aims of each stage of the process.

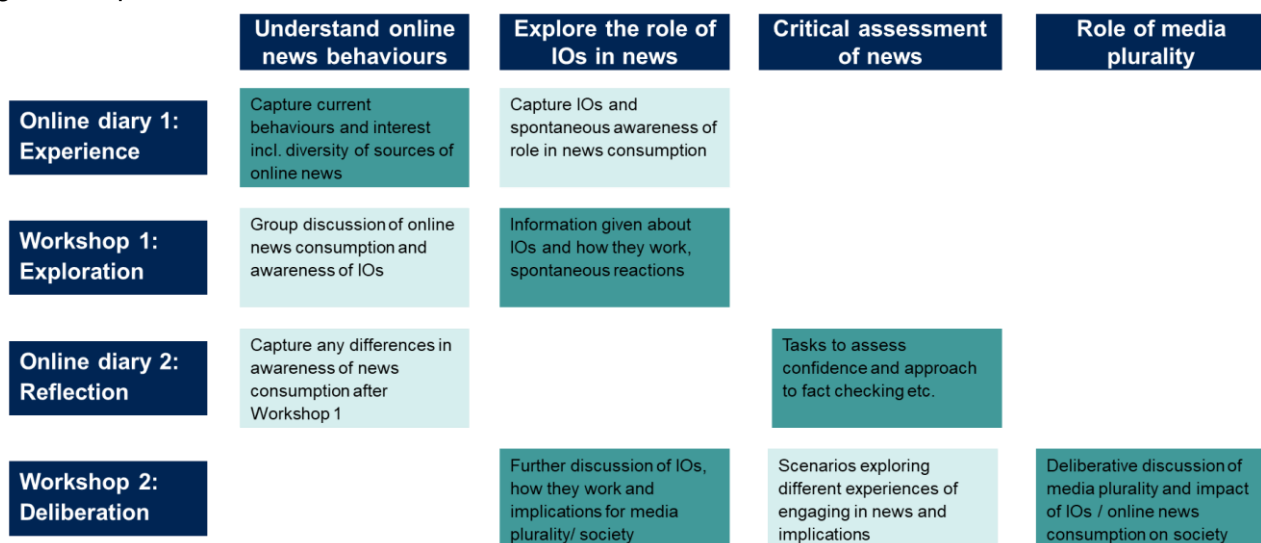


Figure 1: Summary diagram of the research aims across each stage of the project

A total of 75 online news users took part in the research. Following an initial pilot group with six people, the remaining participants were split geographically into four cohorts completing each stage of the research together. Fieldwork was conducted between 27th June and 30th July 2022. Figure 3 below shows some of the main news stories shared by participants in their online diaries during this period.

Group	Location	Reported online news engagement	Age
Cohort 1 (19)	Scotland, North East England and Yorkshire & the Humber	High (6) Medium/High (5) Medium/Low (4) Low (4)	18-24 (6) 25-34 (4) 35-54 (5) 55+ (4)
Cohort 2 (16)	Wales, West Midlands, and South West England	High (6) Medium (4) Low (6)	18-24 (4) 25-34 (3) 35-54 (5) 55+ (4)
Cohort 3 (15)	London, East of England, and South East England	High (4) Medium (5) Low (6)	18-24 (2) 25-34 (5) 35-54 (4) 55+ (4)
Cohort 4 (19)	Northern Ireland, North West England, East Midlands	High (7) Medium (7) Low (5)	18-24 (4) 25-34 (5) 35-54 (5) 55+ (4)

Figure 2: Sample breakdown

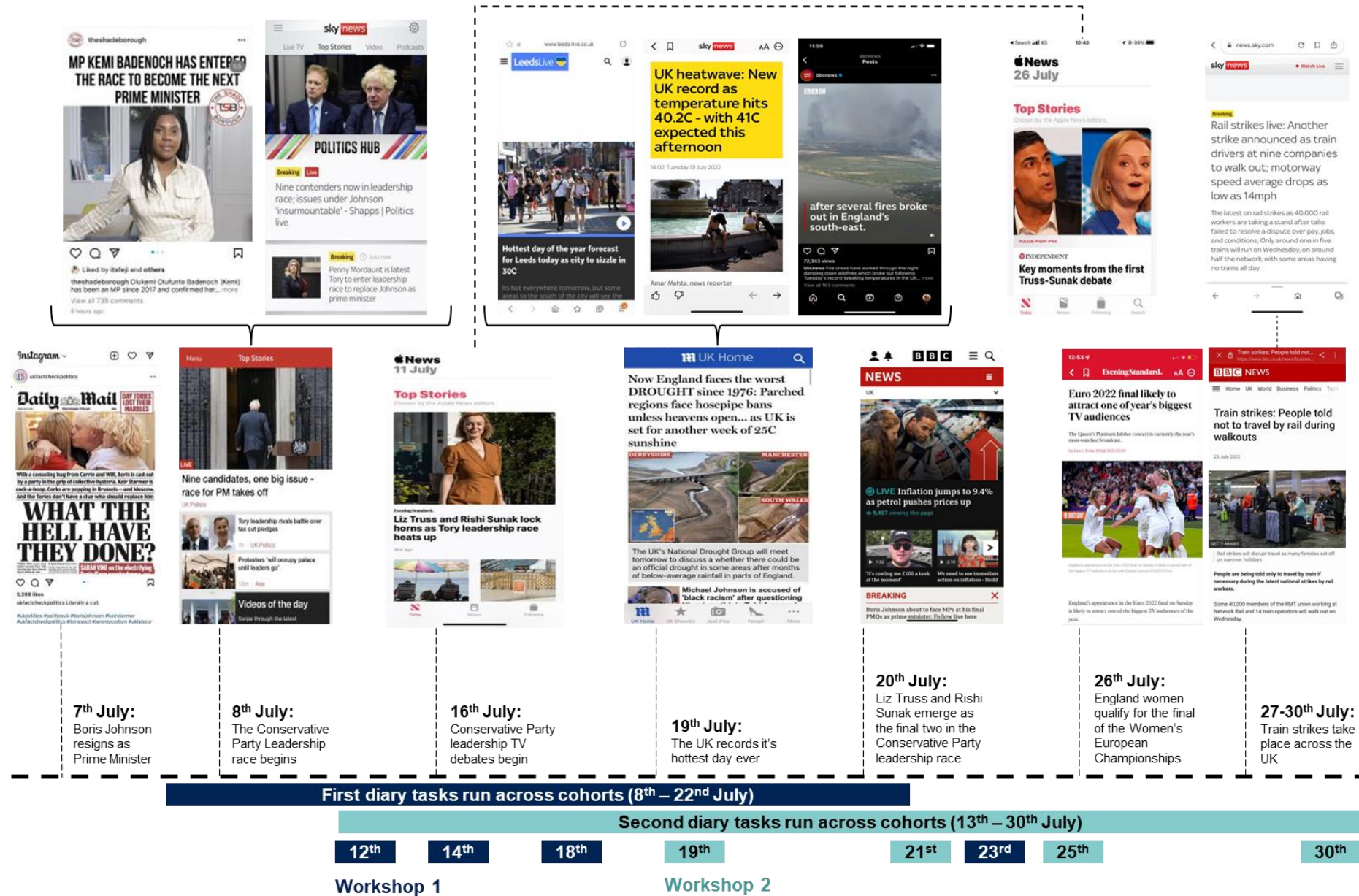


Figure 3: Timeline of news stories shared by participants during fieldwork

1.3 How to read this report

This report provides an overview of the key themes from across the research. We refer to ‘participants’ throughout and provide evidence through verbatim comments, which have not been attributed to protect anonymity. Instead, they are identified by region, their self-reported levels of engagement with online news (low, medium, high) and whether the comment was made in the online diary. Quotes from the online diaries also have information about participants’ gender and age. At the end of each chapter, we have developed a pen portrait of three example participants: Jason, Sue and Dave. These are designed to illustrate alternative participant views and how attitudes changed during the research.

Participants were recruited based on their self-reported online news consumption. Therefore, the findings in this report are not representative of the general public as a whole, which includes non-online news users, and those that are not aware of their online news consumption.

Any views on specific brands or news organisations that are shared in this report are the views of participants and not of Ipsos or Ofcom.

1.4 Glossary of key terms

Algorithm: a process or set of rules to be followed in calculations or other problem-solving operations, especially by a computer.

Choice architecture: the design of different ways in which choices can be presented to users, and the impact of that presentation on decision-making.

Critical engagement: how news users interact with the news, including their ability to judge the veracity of news.

Indeemo: an online platform where participants in the research uploaded media diaries, reflecting on their online news consumption.

Media plurality: this is [defined by Ofcom](#) as: i) ensuring that there is diversity in the viewpoints that are available and consumed, across and within media enterprises; and ii) preventing any one media owner, or voice, having too much influence over public opinion and the political agenda. Media plurality ensures that individual media organisations cannot have too much influence over public opinion or control the news agenda.

News aggregator: a type of online intermediary, such as Apple News and Google News, that creates a ‘digital newspaper’ by aggregating news articles from many publishers into one location.

Online intermediaries (OIs): services which operate between a publisher of a news article and the reader that have an influence over the news seen. There are three types of online intermediaries covered by this research: search engines, news aggregators and social media.

Search engines: websites or apps which help people find news online e.g. Google, Bing and Yahoo.

Social media: websites or apps where news is posted, shared and discussed online among networks of users e.g. Facebook or Twitter.

2 Experiences of online news

This chapter describes how participants accessed news online, including their use of search engines, news aggregators and social media, and the role of news in their daily routine. It sets out what participants valued about online news, including the diversity of stories and sources available.

2.1 Accessing news online

Online news formed part of participants' daily routines, ranging from more active to passive consumption.

Participants described personal routines for accessing the news each day, with specific times they were more likely to do so. For example, news frequently formed part of participants' morning routines by watching breakfast television, listening to the radio or scrolling websites or social media on the way to work. Similarly, participants often caught up on the news in the evening, as a way of finding out about stories they may have missed during the day. These routines helped participants to stay up to date, often forming part of their daily habits.

"And this is something I do sort of first thing in the morning before I get out of bed, and then I check again, sort of early evening around this time, just the headlines and then later on when I go to bed. I'll kind of go over it again another time. The other thing I would check then after I've looked in the Mail would be the BBC News app." (Northern Ireland, Female, 25-34 years-old, High online news engagement, online diary)

"I do access news from all sorts of different platforms, I would say on most days, the first thing I do in the morning is access the BBC News Homepage. This may be through habit and a lot of the time it is just to check on the morning headlines. But the BBC News Homepage is a constant in my daily news habits." (Yorkshire & the Humber, Male, 35-44 years-old, Medium online news engagement, online diary)

Discussions highlighted more active news engagement, with participants looking for information through online sources, as well as more passive engagement where they were scrolling social media or received notifications, alerting them to news stories online.

"I wouldn't specifically go to [social media to] look for news, but if I did see something I would probably look deeper into it." (Wales/West Midlands/South West England, High online news engagement)

"I got a notification from Apple News for this article and clicked to investigate. I don't click on most of these notifications but will click on the odd one to skim read what's happening." (East of England, Female, 25-34 years-old, Medium online news engagement, online diary)

During workshop discussions, participants expressed some surprise as they reflected on how much news they were passively consuming both offline, for example by having the radio on in the background or during their commutes, and online, while using their phones or laptops for work or leisure purposes.

"I was surprised by how much of the news I do consume throughout the day. TV on in the background, radio on when working from home all day. Having a break with work. Having a look... I consume more than I thought I actually did." (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, High online news engagement)

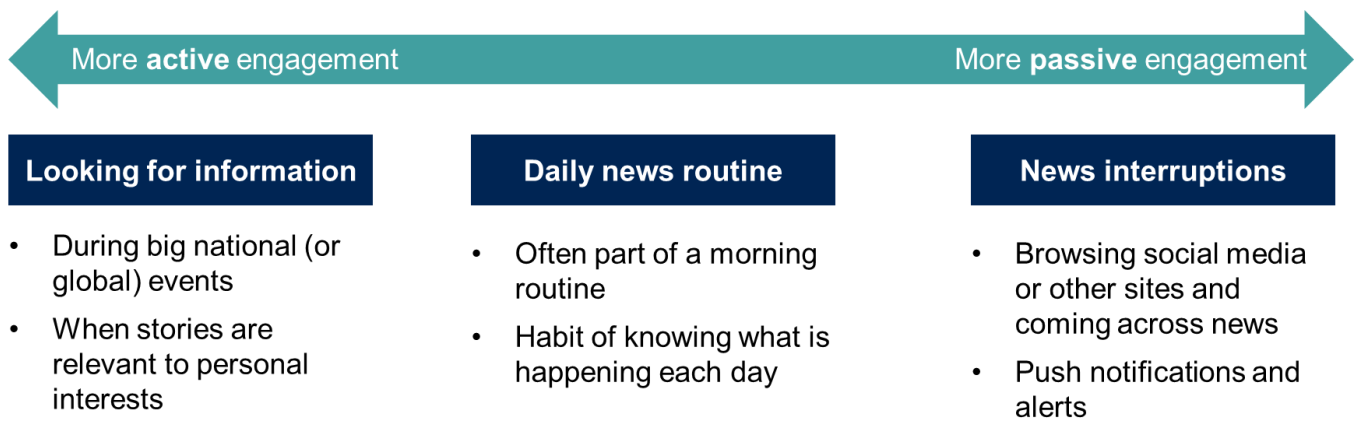


Figure 2: Summary of online news consumption behaviours

Online news was seen as more up-to-date and covering a wider range of stories compared to offline sources.

Large national or global events were highlighted as moments when online news sources were relied on more by participants. At these times, both older and younger participants wanted to find out what was happening quickly, regardless of levels of engagement with online news. Participants often went straight to online news websites or social media for breaking news. Online platforms were regarded as more up-to-date than offline sources, meaning many participants felt they could access live information that may take longer to appear elsewhere.

“[Online news] is so readily available, at the click of a button you can get more information about something.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Low online news engagement)

“[I value online news because of] how quickly they get stories live...One of the problems with print is you’re not going to read about it until the next day, so online is the king there.” (Wales/West Midlands/South West England, High online news engagement)

This also applied to stories participants were personally interested in but that might not receive as much, or any, coverage on offline sources. They argued there was a greater breadth of stories and perspectives online, enabling them to find out the detail of what they were interested in. This could include international stories, local news or more specialised content which catered to participants’ interests.

“For me, my local area Manchester is quite a big area. I do frequently Google Manchester news. I like to know what’s going on. Who’s been arrested. Who’s causing trouble in my area. I’m just one of those people and I like to share the information. I do Google that a lot.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Medium online news engagement)

“Online gives you so much more. For example, on Facebook, BBC Africa came up and I’ve never seen that before. Whereas those stories are not so much in newspapers.” (Wales/West Midlands/South West England, Low online news engagement)

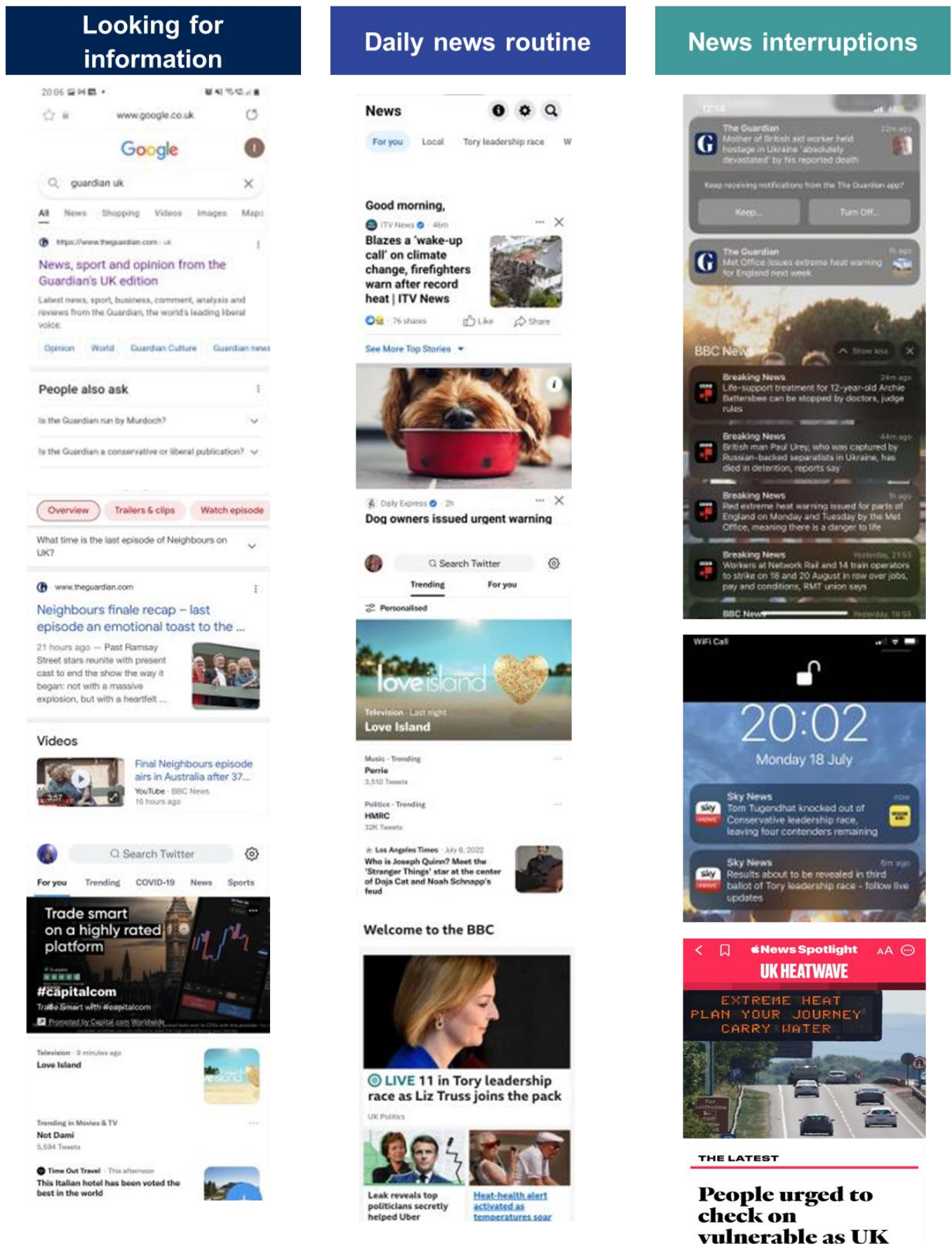


Figure 3: Screenshots of news stories shared by participants.

The speed and ease of access to online news was valued.

Online news was often seen as the most convenient way to access information quickly. Participants highlighted that they would feel less up-to-date if they had to rely solely on offline sources and appreciated that they could choose when and where to access stories online.

“I think you wouldn’t be as up-to-date if you weren’t reading online news as well.” (London/East of England/South East England, Medium online news engagement)

“[Online news] is so readily available, at the click of a button you can get more information about something.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Low online news engagement)

Receiving news alerts or notifications from online news sources and news aggregators was seen as a useful way of accessing the news without much effort. Participants emphasised the value of finding breaking news in this way. Although it was also recognised that they would likely ignore the notification unless it was about a story that interested them.

“I got a notification from Apple News for this article and clicked to investigate. I don’t click on most of these notifications but will click on the odd one to skim read what’s happening.” (Female, 25-34 years-old, Medium online news engagement)

Participants often used, and moved between, online intermediaries to access stories on news websites.

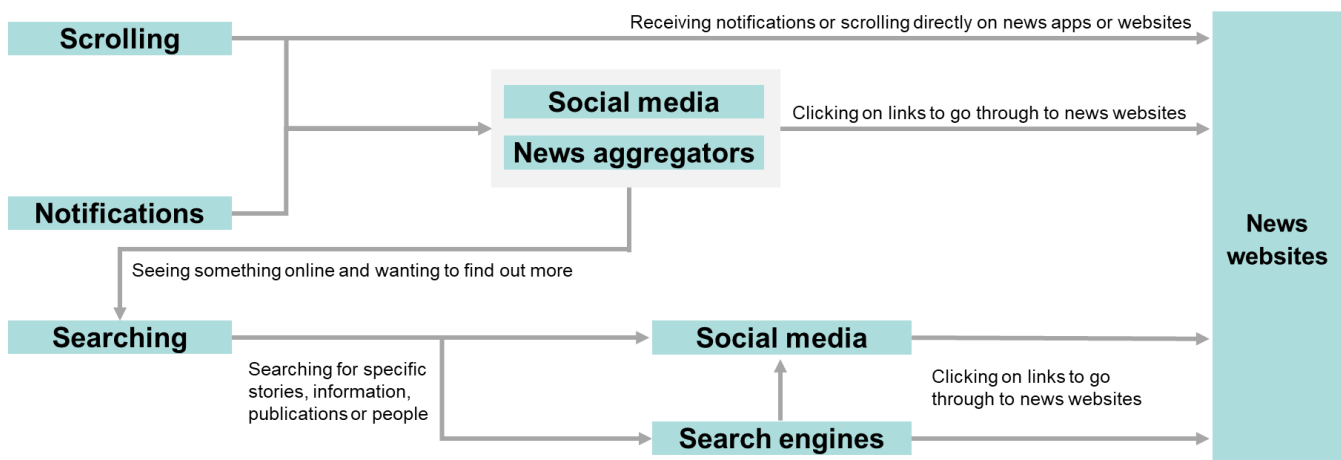


Figure 4: Summary of how participants use online intermediaries to access news

Participants widely used search engines, social media, and news aggregators to access news online. These platforms were key elements of their online news habits and were spontaneously mentioned by participants when they were asked about how they interact with the news.

“I’m a scroller. I use Google News, Wales Online, the Mail Online, South Wales Evening Post which is a local paper. But I just tend to scroll through until I find something I’m interested in.” (Wales/West Midlands/South West England, High online news engagement)

In general, participants tended to see online intermediaries as a route to news stories, moving between platforms before reaching their final news destination. For example, they described using search engines to find out more about stories they had seen elsewhere or looking on social media to understand reactions to a story. Similarly, news aggregators were seen as useful compilations of news. Participants

reflected that they could scroll through stories from multiple sources, taking in the main headlines, before deciding which to click and read in more depth.

“I’ll get a notification on Apple News first, so I find it out from there and then go to other places. I tend to go to BBC just because it’s normally got what you’re looking for, and personally I think it’s the most reliable. I don’t think it’s completely non-biased.” (London/East of England/South East England, Medium online news engagement)

“News aggregators definitely normally break the breaking news to me first, but I don’t tend to click on that, so it’ll come up on my phone and then I’ll go to BBC or a search engine and look through what people are saying about it.” (London/East of England/South East England, Medium online news engagement)

Participants often came across news on social media incidentally.

Participants discussed how they often interacted with the news while scrolling through social media. This included seeing articles from news publishers they actively followed, as well as content shared by other users, or stories and adverts suggested for them. Younger participants especially emphasised their use of social media as their main news source. They valued coming across news on social media, where they tended to be scrolling for leisure. This was seen as a low effort way of keeping up with the news, with younger participants in particular emphasising the convenience of coming across stories which related to their interests. They also valued the comments and interactions around news they saw on social media, which allowed them to see different opinions relating to a story.

“Facebook is a prominent source, a lot of things come up. I don’t follow news pages because I don’t like it to clog up my feed, but it does find a way to get onto my feed. It’s [suggested], probably because I click onto them, and it’s also other people sharing them.” (Scotland/North East England/Yorkshire & the Humber, Low/ Medium online news engagement)

2.2 Content of online news

Constant access to online news content could be overwhelming for some.

Although participants appreciated the easy access of online news, and valued notifications and alerts, they argued this made it harder to get away from. Some participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the sheer number of ‘negative’ news stories that they were exposed to, for example about politics, the economy, and foreign conflicts. A number of participants particularly highlighted becoming overwhelmed by the news during the Covid-19 pandemic. Having constant access to and consuming news about case numbers, deaths and restrictions became distressing for these participants, even where they had initially felt it was important to be kept informed about the pandemic. This led some participants to stop accessing news or adapt their routines to make it more manageable.

“I used to be obsessed with the news. It was making me negative, I was getting depressed. It was always bad news. Last year with Covid, I had to delete a lot of apps.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, High/Medium online news engagement)

Participants often contrasted this with a lack of ‘good’ news or lighter stories, that might provide balance. There was a perception that both online and offline news platforms devoted resources to the same type of stories, making it harder to access alternative perspectives or good news. It was felt this could have a negative impact on individuals’ mental health.

“It can be quite damaging for mental health. You can follow quite a lot of negative stories and it can be hard to get out of the loop.” (Wales/West Midlands/South West England, Medium online news engagement)

Tailored content online was valued by participants, although it could make news harder to get away from.

In general, participants wanted to see topics they cared about without having to scroll through or engage with other stories that did not align with their interests. In some cases, this reflected their frustrations with offline sources, such as TV, where they had no choice over the topics discussed.

“I think it's good that it knows what you're interested in. There are other sources of news. TV, that's not taking into account your personal algorithms and what you're searching for.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Medium online news engagement)

However, personalised content could intensify feelings of being overwhelmed by the news through targeted stories related to topics someone had looked at previously. Some participants discussed how they continued to receive prompts to read more stories on certain subjects they were interested in, such as race relations or women's rights. However, due to the upsetting aspects of the stories, these participants reflected that they had started to feel overwhelmed, and that their mental health was being impacted by the sheer number of articles they received alerts for.

“The things I'm most into are also things that make me anxious like climate change or politics. I want the option to pick it up. Whereas if you just are constantly given things that would be different. You were getting everything on Brexit, then Trump, then the pandemic, and it was just so much negativity. I generally click into news at certain times, like the commute. I don't want it all the time.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Medium online news engagement)

Online news was seen as having the potential to provide greater diversity in sources and perspectives than offline news, including access to 'citizen journalism'.

The diversity of news was seen as one of the main benefits of accessing stories online. Participants widely emphasised their ability to find news and information on almost any topic, as well as being able to search for alternative perspectives from around the world. Participants of all ages described how they could often find user-generated content online which provided more authentic perspectives on a story, especially where it related to local or more specialist topics. This was particularly appreciated by younger participants who often valued the user-generated content available on social media.

“I quite enjoy Twitter and the comments section where you do hear people's honest and open views. Often, they are strong views, and a lot of people tend to engage with them because they find them more provocative, which is interesting because it is people's perspective. . . I find it a bit more honest, so I go to get those kind of things.” (Scotland/North East England/Yorkshire & the Humber, Medium/ High online news engagement)

However, there was some frustration that much online news tended to cover the same stories without much depth.

Participants reflected that although online news offered a wider range of sources and stories, they argued that well-established media providers often focused on similar topics and perspectives, and they sometimes found it difficult to properly understand the issues being reported. They acknowledged that they could find multiple sources reporting on a story but were unable to easily find reporting that covered the detail or nuance of the topic. This reflected their perceptions that news tended to cover the same

types of content without going into much depth. Participants expressed concern that this could lead to the sharing of incorrect or unclear information widely online, for example through sharing on social media.

“One of the problems nowadays is you can be online and get across a wider breadth of stories but not really have the proper knowledge of the story. You think you understand the story and you might share it with someone but you’re actually misrepresenting it. I think you have to hunt out the details nowadays.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, High online news engagement)

Despite the diversity of news available online, participants often gravitated towards news from trusted sources and news brands.

Although participants recognised the wide range of news sources online, they tended to report getting news from sources they already saw as trustworthy. In particular, older participants discussed how they would use a regular set of sources they trusted when choosing where to access their news. These were chosen for their reliability, quality and brand, with the BBC and Sky News often cited as being among participants’ favoured platforms. These organisations were frequently described by participants of all ages as less-biased, with a belief that content was more likely to be verified if it was also being broadcast on TV. This was in contrast to other sources such as newspaper brands that were seen as more likely to have a political leaning.

“It’s normally like the general public reputation. BBC and Sky News have a good reputation, so I trust them, and they’re generally the first to break a story. The Sun, Daily Mail and Mail Online, you can tell they’re faker in the way they’re written, with the opinion they’re trying to convince you to have.” (London/East of England/South East England, Medium online news engagement)

In a small number of cases, participants from a range of ages distrusted more traditional media brands, which they felt reproduced the same stories. They expressed how they either felt all media was untrustworthy, or that specific mainstream sources had lost integrity. This resulted in greater scepticism about the news, including online news, with these participants actively looking for wider sources. This included international and local press, as well as user-generated content they could find more easily online.

“I don’t trust the news at all...I go right back to the sources. I don’t trust the news. When I hear the news, I think, ‘What is the agenda behind that?’ and then I sort of go looking.” (Wales/West Midlands/South West England, Medium online news engagement)

Levels of trust in online intermediaries also influenced participants’ news consumption.

In general, participants emphasised the brand of the news publisher influencing their choices, rather than the brand of the online intermediary used to access news. In this way, they would actively choose which news sites to go to based on the news brand, even if they were given multiple options on a search engine or news aggregator.

“So I simply did a Google search to see what came up and found this article from The Guardian which I trust as a reliable source of news so clicked on the article link.” (Northern Ireland, Female, 55-64, High online news engagement, online diary)

In some cases, participants also described trust in online intermediaries themselves. For example, there was a perception that news aggregators were more likely to be trustworthy due to the potential

reputational risk to Apple or Google for displaying false information. This was reinforced by the fact that news aggregators linked participants to articles by established sources they already trusted. For example, participants noted that their Apple newsfeeds were often dominated by one or two sources, such as BBC or Sky News, which they would have accessed anyway. In these cases, participants felt that the news aggregator played a useful role in bringing different articles together based on the topics they were interested in, but did not pose concerns about fake news or misleading information.

"I think Apple has a reputation to uphold so if they are providing this service, you'd expect them to do the research and be selective in what they are presenting." (Scotland/North East England/Yorkshire & the Humber, Low/ Medium online news engagement)

Passive news consumption was more likely to result in participants consuming sources they did not trust.

A number of participants reflected on their behaviours after keeping a media diary. They described how the task had illustrated the amount of news they were consuming from brands they did not trust as a result of content shown on online intermediaries such as social media sites or news aggregators.

"I found [keeping the diary] interesting because I mindlessly read the news but it made me think about 'why do I look at it?' One of the sites I look at is the Daily Mail and I don't like the Daily Mail. I look at it every single day. They're very fast at updating things but then I'll back up and go to BBC News. It made me a lot more conscious about what I am doing." (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, High online news engagement)

2.3 Attitudes towards the reliability of online news

There were some concerns about the quality and reliability of news content online.

Although participants consistently valued the speed, range, and diversity of online news, they recognised this could have an impact on the reliability or accuracy of online content. In particular, participants that were more trusting of mainstream media sources often felt news on social media was less trustworthy than stories found via news aggregators or search engines. This reflected the increased speed and range of voices seen on social media, with user-generated content playing a greater role on social media platforms. This meant these participants felt users needed to be more careful with consuming news on these sites, especially as false information could spread quickly online.

"I think there's almost too much, but it's also quite good because there are lots of different opinions out there, so you can dig and form your own opinions. But things like Twitter you can get a lot of fake news, and Tik Tok there's always random things on there that are just not true. So I think you have to be more careful nowadays, because it's very easy for something that's not real to spread quite quickly." (London/East of England/South East England, Medium online news engagement)

In contrast, those less trusting of traditional media sources argued that social media sites provided access to more authentic voices. They felt this helped them understand what was happening on the ground, avoiding the selection or interpretation of media organisations. They mentioned citizen journalists and the importance of individuals sharing live footage and commentary of events which may not be covered elsewhere.

"I think the news has got better because of social media, people can record it if they're there [at that place]. I grew up in Northern Ireland and the news would say certain towns are rioting, and you'd be like, 'I'm sitting in the town.'" (London/East of England/South East England, High online news engagement)

There tended to be little distinction between different types of content on social media platforms, with participants arguing that stories from journalists, news brands and individuals could be defined as news. Although many participants suggested they would treat user-generated content differently to news brands they recognised, they still saw this type of content as news.

Pen portraits

Jason (18-24, Medium online news engagement) always uses social media, including Twitter and Facebook, to access the news. He likes that it is personalised to him, and he sees content from people he follows including his friends, journalists and commentators. He values seeing different perspectives and responses to stories as they develop throughout the day, often going on trending or 'for you' sections to see what is going on. He scrolls through Twitter when he has a spare moment, as well as clicking on notifications that pop-up on his phone which can sometimes be distracting.

Sue (55-64, High online news engagement) relies on well-established online news sources such as BBC News and Sky News. This is part of her daily routine, scrolling the BBC News app with her morning coffee. She trusts the news on these sites, finding stories non-biased and reliable.

"The first page I look at for news in the morning when I wake is the BBC online news headlines."

Dave (45-54 years old, Low online news engagement) resists using well-established media sources as he thinks they are too closely associated with politicians and powerful elites. Instead, he likes to find alternative sources of news online, spending time searching for different perspectives from the UK and around the world. He likes to know what is happening and decide whether a story is important or not on his own, without topics being selected for him – whether by TV and radio bulletins or online intermediaries.

3 Critical assessment of news

This chapter sets out participants' views on the reliability of online news and how they assess whether stories are accurate or not.

3.1 Approaches to assessing online news

Participants emphasised the importance of access to facts and information.

Participants noted that they, and others, relied on both online and offline media to inform them about current events and issues such as politics. They felt given this reliance, media organisations had some responsibility to the public including, at a minimum, a duty to check and verify information they published and ensuring news is accurate. However, there was also a recognition that individuals are responsible for seeking a range of views to inform their own opinions.

“Good journalism is knowing both sides of the story so the reader can make up their minds about how they think about it. We’re fed how we’re supposed to think about things, but good reporting is factual not biased, and people have their own view on the facts.” (London/East of England/South East England, Low online news engagement)

Participants felt confident in their own abilities to identify fake news, but less so in others.

Participants generally felt they could identify misinformation and knew what markers to look for. This included not going on websites or links that they were unfamiliar with, as well as looking at the wording of web addresses and spelling mistakes. Younger participants shared that they had covered how to identify misinformation at school, feeling equipped and aware of what to look out for. However, some participants also recognised they that they did not always look for these signs given the time it takes to interrogate a source, often using the brand as a marker of reliability instead.

“It’s so easy to overlook these things. This quiz¹ really made me think about what I was looking at, spellings I would usually overlook due to quick reading and definitely things I would never look at.” (North West England, Male, 18-24, Low online news engagement, online diary)

Despite their own confidence, participants had concerns about the abilities of others to spot fake news or misinformation. In particular, older participants felt that younger people could be more susceptible to reading a story and taking it at face value. In contrast, younger participants argued that older groups might be less confident online and more likely to trust what they see.

“The younger generation [can be more susceptible to fake news]...because of how out there it is on social media. Without being awful, people don’t grow up with enough to get their own views. They’ll read stuff and go on that without any digging.” (Scotland/North East England/Yorkshire & the Humber, Low/ Medium online news engagement)

¹ As part of the online diary tasks, participants were asked to complete a quiz on the BBC Bitesize website where they needed to spot the signs of fake news: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zwfm8hv>

"I think the older generation. My mum, for example, she'd be susceptible to these random sites and click into that, which would add to the algorithm that would bring more of these sites, and she'd go down a path that would lead her more to this viewpoint. Whereas I can check these facts, look at who's posted it, and I do generally trust them, and go from there." (Scotland/North East England/Yorkshire & the Humber, Low/ Medium online news engagement)

Participants described 'checking' stories by looking for information on different sites.

Cross-referencing stories from multiple traditional sources was seen as one of the main ways to verify information online. Participants discussed how they looked for the same story on different websites, often relying on the BBC to decide whether content was likely to be accurate. Although the BBC was often seen as slower to cover a story and more limited in the types of news it covered, it was widely regarded as trustworthy and gave participants confidence that information was true.

"I'll check three sites to look at and read, but I am biased towards the BBC. I think they tell an honest account of what's happening in the UK." (Yorkshire & the Humber, Male, 55+, Low online news engagement, online diary)

"BBC and CNN are good filters. They'll fact check things and will even acknowledge things that haven't been fact checked yet. Those providers, I think, give you that security." (London/East of England/South East England, High online news engagement)

However, there were questions about the extent to which participants did cross-reference stories in practice, with a recognition this was not always part of their usual habits. Participants emphasised how they were more likely to check a story if the content did not seem believable, or if they were looking at a source they did not trust, rather than this process forming part of their news routine.

"Despite grammar errors and a lack of facts, it was hard to see signs of it being real or fake. I think this is because the information was straight forward so easy to believe." (West Midlands, Female, 18-24, Medium online news engagement, online diary)

There was limited awareness of fact-checking tools and websites, with few participants using these platforms to check news online. Those who were aware, questioned the reliability of these tools with concerns about how fact-checking was verified.

"I don't think you can trust the Facebook fact-checker. I fact check the Facebook fact-checker. We are living in weird times at the moment." (Wales/West Midlands/South West, Medium online news engagement)

"I checked Google News, and at the bottom there's a fact check section, and for a lot of them it says 'False' or 'Misleading', but it'll be good to find out on the actual post." (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Medium online news engagement, Workshop 2)

"How do you fact check the fact-checker?" (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Medium online news engagement)

Pen portraits

Jason recognises that some of the content he sees on social media is lower quality than other news sources. However, he trusts his ability to judge stories arguing that you often need to take what you see with a pinch of salt.

“I use Twitter quite a lot and you can use the “for you” section to find tweets and headlines that are tailored towards you. They are from various sites/journalists and I can see why I saw each story as I’d previously been looking at similar stuff on my phone beforehand so I think this is definitely very personalised towards me. However, I would assess the quality of most news stories on Twitter to be poor quality.”

Sue tends to avoid stories with sensationalist headlines as she thinks they might be ‘fake news’. However, sometimes she clicks on them if they seem especially entertaining.

Dave does not trust news he finds on more established websites. He actively looks for other sources, even if they don’t have brands he recognises or include spelling mistakes in titles and stories.

4 Attitudes to the personalisation of news online

This chapter describes participants' spontaneous awareness of personalisation and their understanding of how this applies to online intermediaries and the news they consume online. It highlights some of the factors participants used to identify personalisation and how attitudes differed towards search engines, news aggregators and social media.

4.1 Awareness of personalisation

In the main, participants were generally familiar with the concept of personalisation but surprised about the potential extent of this on online intermediaries.

Overall, participants widely recognised a degree of personalisation on different platforms. Despite this, they were often surprised by the potential extent of personalisation on online intermediaries, and how this could work in practice. While there was a mix across groups, participants with lower internet use were more likely to express surprise once the concept had been introduced.

"I thought [the information on personalisation] was interesting as you never see someone else's phone, realistically. So, you just think they see the same thing." (Wales/West Midlands/South West England, Low online news engagement)

Advertising was often top of mind when participants reflected on personalised content. They described how they were used to receiving tailored adverts based on their previous searches and purchases. This showed some knowledge that websites were tracking activity, with a recognition that cookies were involved in this process. There was widespread familiarity with accepting or rejecting cookies when accessing online websites, although participants were often not clear about how this worked in practice. Awareness varied across ages and levels of engagement in online news, with those reporting they frequently consume news online not necessarily more aware of personalisation than other groups.

"You don't understand it, when you do look through it, what it means. I don't even know what cookies are. Someone who's not up-to-date with technology, I don't know what cookies are. I don't know if they're good or bad. For quickness, I accept cookies and I agree, and I shouldn't really." (London/East of England/South East England, High online news engagement)

Participants differed in whether they felt in control of what news they saw online.

Those who felt more in control argued they could choose what to click on and had the power to actively shape what a platform showed them, without always recognising the role of algorithms in tailoring what they saw. For example, participants mentioned following different users on social media, asking sites to show them more or less of specific types of content, or tailoring search terms to their needs. They emphasised how individuals could select what they read or watched, with online news providing greater options to find content they were interested in.

"Social media is personalised, and I choose that, like the accounts I follow and the things I choose to read into on there." (Wales/West Midlands/South West England, Medium online news engagement)

Despite feeling able to select news they wanted to see online, there was also a recognition that participants frequently saw content that did not interest them on online intermediaries. They felt there could be multiple reasons for this, including if they had once clicked on a link by mistake or if someone else had used their device. Participants also questioned whether what they saw online was a result of financial arrangements between a publisher and an online intermediary, resulting in specific articles being put at the top of search results or newsfeeds. This gave them a sense of feeling out of control and unable to tailor platforms to the types of news they wanted to see.

Understanding of personalisation did not necessarily correspond with whether participants felt in control of how their personal information was used.

There was often limited awareness of the role of algorithms in tailoring news, with those who understood this often feeling less in control of the content they see.

“You don’t have much control really. Algorithms give you stories your phone thinks you should have. You do pick the stories, but then you don’t pick what comes up. Like you’ve clicked on something random before and you ask why it’s on your phone the next day. I think people have less control than they think they do, but it’s made out like they do have the control.” (Wales/West Midlands/South West England, Medium online news engagement)

Those who were more familiar with personalisation did not always feel in control of the data they shared online or feel able to tailor news in the way they wanted to. For example, they described how they could be prevented from accessing certain sites if they did not share personal information or argued that it was not possible for individuals to tailor news content as they could not know how algorithms were working or what data was being used. In this way, their understanding of personalisation led them to feel less in control, given the lack of transparency over how sites tailor content to individual users.

“It goes back to the talk on control, no matter what you pick, there’s likely to be a pattern each time and that’s going to start showing up more, so what you’re exposed to is very curated.” (London/East of England/South East England, Medium online news engagement)

On the other hand, participants with low levels of awareness could feel greater control by feeling able to make decisions about what personal information they wanted to share. In some cases, participants actively decided to reject cookies because they did not understand what information they were sharing or how it could be used. They recognised that they would be comfortable with their information being used to tailor content so that they received news which reflected their interests, but because they were unsure of the purposes, they decided to restrict this.

“I think I was aware of, and it’s probably been something that I’ve always been a bit unsettled about. The whole cookies tracking all that sort of stuff, what am I actually accepting? . . . It’s actually led to me making conscious choices now that whenever I get the pop-up, I ask the app not to track or accept cookies, I’ll go into more details and accept only essential, turn off the others. I’m actively doing that. I’m also like a bit misinformed on it as well, because I’m only doing that out of my own conscience. I don’t actually know to what extent they are tracking me, and if it is just simply for interest and stuff, I’m alright with that.” (Scotland/North East England/Yorkshire & the Humber, Low/ Medium online news engagement)

“I think it is coming from things I have clicked on in the past because I do remember, there is a story about Emily Maitlis about her stalker waiting to be charged. I remember clicking on that story months ago and also there was one about the rail strikes which I was interested in as well. There is obviously some.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, High online news engagement)

4.2 Personalisation on online intermediaries

Participants were more familiar with personalisation on social media than on news aggregators and search engines.

The extent to which personalisation was familiar often depended on the online intermediary being discussed. For example, participants were aware that social media was already personalised by who participants chose to 'follow' or 'be friends with'. They had experience of actively making decisions for content to be personalised to them, making it easier to appreciate the tailored nature of these platforms. There was also familiarity with 'for you' sections on social media sites, or clearly labelled 'suggested posts' on social media feeds, as well as wider public debate about the use of algorithms and targeting on these platforms. Participants were able to recognise some personalisation on news aggregators, through the 'for you' function. However, this was less clear than with social media platforms.

"Accounts that I follow would be MPs I like and trust so when I get those news sites it's already set up to what I want to see." (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Low online news engagement)

"The local news it has selected for me [on Google News], but the 'For You' page I don't know what's there for me. I thought it knew too much, but now I don't think it does know too much about me." (Scotland/North East England/Yorkshire & the Humber, Low online news engagement)

In contrast, participants were much less familiar with the potential for personalisation on search engines. Search engines were seen as platforms where participants could go to find factual information or tools for conducting further research. In this way, they were seen as a tool for accessing news and information, rather than a source of news on their own. Participants sometimes struggled to see how content could be personalised to them on a search engine, expressing surprise that individuals could see different results for the same search. This remained the case, even after participants had been told about personalisation and shown an example of how two people searching for the same thing on different devices could receive differing search results. Although there was familiarity with search terms being suggested or auto-filled, participants did not always associate this with a form of personalisation.

"If you search for the same thing, on the same search engine, you must have very similar results, surely?" (London/East of England/South East England, Low online news engagement)

In some cases, participants tested this concept in practice during their time taking part in the research. They expressed surprise when they discovered that they could see different search results to those they lived with, even though they were using the same search terms. This led to some raising concerns about the content they were seeing being limited without their knowledge.

"Even though they're opposite [results], the search is exactly the same. I've tried this with my partner actually, and we had the same thing. We put the same words in our search engine, and we got different things." (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, High online news engagement)

Participants used a range of factors to assess whether they felt news was likely to be personalised.

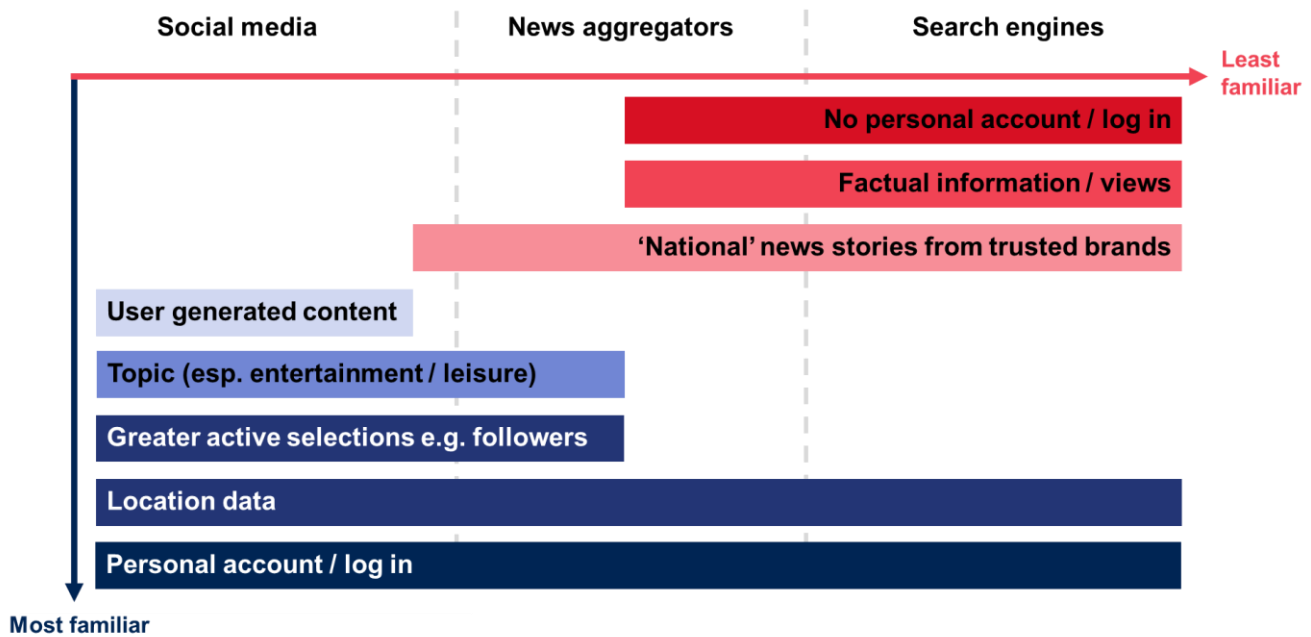


Figure 5: Summary of the main factors influencing awareness of personalisation across online intermediaries

Participants described several factors that influenced their views towards personalisation, reflecting overall perceptions that social media was more likely to be tailored compared with news aggregators or search engines. They were more familiar with personalisation on sites where they had an individual account or log-in, and where they actively selected stories they were interested in or accounts to follow. Similarly, there was greater awareness of location data being used to share local stories or weather information with participants, personalisation based on topics they were interested in or related to user-generated content.

"I use Twitter every night to track the news on Love Island Live. So I am not surprised this is at the top of my searches." (Northern Ireland, Female, 18-24-years-old, High online news engagement, online diary)

"This was the first article I saw when I opened my Google app, I think this is tailored to me due to it being my local and childhood club (Celtic) so I tend to keep up to date with the team news." (Scotland, Female, 18-24-years-old, Medium online news engagement, online diary)

"This story was suggested to me by Google News on the 'for you' page. As I follow a lot of football stories, I believe this story was tailored towards me as a result. The source, Sky Sports, is a fairly major source of sports news so its prominence is probably why it was shown to me, and is also why I tend to value the reporting on Sky Sports." (Scotland, Male, 18-24, Medium online news engagement, online diary)

In contrast, there was less awareness of national news stories, factual information or stories from well-established brands being personalised, as participants assumed these would be relevant to people across the country. There was also less familiarity with the potential for viewpoints or publications with political leanings to be aligned with an individual's views on online intermediaries. Although participants did express concerns about echo chambers, particularly on social media, this tended to be linked to discussions about user-generated content rather than seeing articles on search engines or news aggregators that aligned to someone's viewpoint.

“I couldn’t see anything actually targeting me.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Medium online news engagement)

“I found it hard to find personalised articles. If you go to Instagram and explore it’s not things for you. I only just got Apple News so that is not personalised, I’ve not got Twitter. I looked at BBC but I don’t think that is personalised. I think it’s surprising, how difficult it is to get personalised [content].” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Low online news engagement)

Pen portraits

Jason knows what he sees on social media is tailored to him and likes the benefits of this. He only wants to see stories which relate to his interests and is not concerned about sharing his personal data if it means he gets access to this.

Although **Sue** knows some stories are tailored to her as she sees lots of news from her local area, she does not really understand how personalisation works. She is unsure how the stories she sees link to her, but she likes seeing articles that relate to the topics she is interested in.

Dave worries about his privacy online and takes steps to prevent his data being shared for example avoiding Google and using alternative search engines instead. He never creates personal accounts to access news online and always rejects cookies.

“I am fully aware of the dangers of giving away my data. Therefore, I practice what I preach and minimise my digital footprint as much as possible.”

5 Media plurality in an online world

This chapter sets out participants' spontaneous awareness and attitudes towards the principles of media plurality in both online and offline news. It describes how participants felt media plurality could be affected by personalisation and the potential influence online news could have on individuals and wider society.

5.1 Spontaneous awareness of media plurality rules

What is media plurality?

Ofcom has statutory duties to secure and maintain a sufficient plurality of providers of different TV and radio services as set out in the Communications Act 2003. Media plurality rules are in place to ensure that individual media organisations cannot have too much influence over public opinion or control the news agenda. For example, a newspaper owner with 20% or more market share for print newspapers has limits on their ability to control the TV news market as well. The Government can also ask Ofcom to examine a merger between news sources if it is concerned about it. Media plurality rules currently only apply to traditional sources of news such as television, radio and print. Online intermediaries are not currently covered.

Participants were widely unfamiliar with media plurality and current rules, although they acknowledged its importance.

In general, participants had not heard of the term 'media plurality' before taking part in this research. On further discussion, participants understood that media plurality meant that no single idea, or set of views, could dominate the media landscape. There was broad consensus that this concept is important for both online and offline media given the potential influence of news organisations and the need to have access to facts, a balance of opinions, and different perspectives.

"I hadn't really heard of it [media plurality]. People should have access to a wide range of viewpoints though." (London/East of England/South East England, Low online news engagement)

"I'd never heard of it in my life. It's something I'm going to look into more. It's a new word for me. It's not something I hear very often." (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Medium online news engagement)

There was support for the principle that media outlets should be owned by a range of organisations and individuals.

Participants understood the concern that if one organisation or individual owned multiple news outlets, they could have influence over public opinion. As such, there was support for media plurality rules preventing this on broadcast and print media.

However, some also questioned whether a diversity of media company owners would affect the diversity of news stories available to them online. They were sceptical that different media company owners would want to influence consumers in different ways, suggesting they would likely have similar priorities and experiences given their levels of personal wealth. In this way, they expected most media company owners to prioritise showing the same news stories and perspectives, limiting the diversity of available content.

“Regardless of who owns [the news media], it isn’t really going to matter because they’re all part of the same one percent that’s out of touch with most people.” (London/East of England/South East England, Medium online news engagement)

There was a recognition that the news could have an influence on individual views.

Participants reflected on times where they felt they could have been influenced by news they had read. For example, there were mentions of Brexit, national elections, attitudes towards vaccines and the Scottish referendum as examples where participants themselves or people they knew had potentially been influenced by the news.

“I might have been [influenced about] Brexit. I voted to remain even though the country is suffering, but I bet my feed at the time was all about remaining, which would have been totally different to a Leaver.” (Wales/West Midlands/South West England, Medium online news engagement)

“I’d like to think [my voting intentions aren’t influenced] but subconsciously, perhaps. I wouldn’t 100% say no because you’re online that much.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Medium online news engagement)

5.2 Media plurality and online news

Even though participants felt there was greater diversity of sources and perspectives online, they recognised how their opinions could be shaped and informed by the content they are exposed to.

Participants recognised that both offline and online news was curated by editors, who ultimately chose what stories to report on. For some, this was more obvious offline where it was clear that a TV or radio news bulletin would be limited in scope. However, participants also recognised how editors curate online news websites, as well as the role of algorithms in tailoring news stories to individuals on online intermediaries.

“You go looking for news but you do not decide what news stories are put there. I don’t decide what the BBC puts on their website. The editorial team decides the news. Generally, for just opening up a news site you’re at the mercy of the editors as to what they feel are the main stories.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, High online news engagement)

Participants felt that personalised content on online intermediaries in particular was convenient and exposed them to information they may not otherwise see. However, they expressed concerns about the impact that personalised newsfeeds could have by limiting what they are exposed to. They worried that this could influence their individual opinions and increase the potential for echo-chambers, including the risk that specific views could be reinforced without access to alternative perspectives. There were also concerns that personalisation could prevent them from seeing stories they could be interested in because they had not looked at similar types of content before.

“I suppose it’s narrowing what you’re being exposed to because of the algorithm. Just because I’m not politically minded doesn’t mean I don’t want to know what’s going on.” (Scotland/North East England/Yorkshire & the Humber, Low online news engagement)

Participants recognised that online personalisation could also influence societal outcomes.

On deliberation of the issues, there was an appreciation that personalised news could have an impact on broader society by leading to increased polarisation or the sharing of false or misleading information. Participants worried this could divide society, with people only having access to content that agreed with

their perspective. For example, personalised news could reinforce opinions leading to choices such as voting in a particular way, consuming certain products, or taking part in public activities, such as protests. They felt this could have negative consequences by making it harder for individuals to see alternative perspectives or understand the reasons why someone might have a different opinion.

“People become quite ingrained in their views. When you read news from a slightly more skewed or biased or different background, that almost reinforces the views you develop and reinforces the views you’re having about an ongoing story. That does draw you away from a different perspective. I don’t tend to read different sources other than for this task. I think it does ingrain you more in your own ways.” (Scotland/North East England/Yorkshire & the Humber, Medium/ High online news engagement)

Although participants recognised that offline news could reinforce people’s opinions, with individuals often choosing to access news from the same sources, there was greater concern with online news. This reflected the passive nature of online news consumption and the role of personalisation that users may not be aware of. For example, some participants worried individuals may not realise they are only seeing a narrow range of perspectives or topics online, whereas they would be more aware that they were consuming a specific perspective when they buy a physical newspaper. This was also coupled with concerns about the quality of some online news content, particularly in relation to social media.

“It makes things very divisive. Back in the day people would buy a couple of newspapers, you could get a different side of the story. I think there was more of an open dialogue between people with different views.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Low online news engagement)

“There are big chunks of people who aren’t like us and believe just what they’re seeing.” (London/East of England/South East England, Medium online news engagement)

However, in some cases, participants argued that online and offline news had the potential to divide society in a similar way. They felt that individuals were responsible for accessing a range of sources wherever they got their news and pointed to the political leanings of some papers.

Participants were particularly concerned about the influence of social media, compared to other online intermediaries.

Participants emphasised how social media tends to show users content which reinforces their views, reflecting how users often choose who to follow or are given suggestions based on their previous interactions. This reflected the increased familiarity of the potential for personalisation on social media platforms compared to search engines or news aggregators, where participants found it more difficult to recognise how news content could be personalised to them. In response, participants raised further concerns about the potential influence social media organisations could have in shaping particular agendas, especially when related to political or financial themes.

“It could be [influencing us] on a subconscious level because the people doing these social media feeds have put in a lot of money into manipulating people’s minds.” (Wales/West Midlands/South West England, Medium online news engagement)

To mitigate these concerns, there was a demand for being able to see a wide range of perspectives. Participants wanted to be exposed to different attitudes to ensure they were getting a rounded view of issues. This was seen as particularly important when considering political issues, including during elections. They felt this could mitigate some of the risks of personalised online news.

“You need a wide range [of news] and it’s important to have different viewpoints as you can go around believing you’re right with everything but sometimes you need to hear a different point of view to realise something else.” (London/East of England/South East England, Low online news engagement)

There was surprise that media plurality rules did not apply to online news.

While participants had not previously considered the rules in detail, when introduced to them, they had concerns there were no checks for online news. They emphasised how much of their news content comes from online sources and were therefore concerned that the rules for broadcast and print media did not apply. This led to participants questioning the reliability of online news in some cases. However, they also recognised the rules might be harder to enforce and were sceptical that this could be done effectively given the global nature of platforms and the extent of user-generated content.

“I didn’t realise that those rules didn’t apply to online media, that’s quite worrying. For example, you can have a Rupert Murdoch figure who one day owns Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, whatever. They could do a lot of damage in the political sphere. That is a bit of a concern. It goes to show that the internet is a wild west still.” (London/East of England/South East England, Medium online news engagement)

“I didn’t know it, but it surprises me that it is on TV, newspapers et cetera, but not online. Everything I get is online and it is not subjected to those rules. I’m surprised there is one rule for one, and not for the other. It’s probably why there has been a bit of a free for all the last few years.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, Low online news engagement)

Participants assumed articles published online by established newspapers would not be edited for their websites and therefore would remain within the existing rules. This meant participants were less concerned about online intermediaries that brought articles together from the websites of newspaper publishers, such as news aggregators. They also referenced the reputational risk to large publishers of sharing false or misleading content.

“I don’t think it matters for intermediaries, because it’s coming from the big papers that are covered, and then they’re putting it together.” (Scotland/North East England/Yorkshire & the Humber, Low/ Medium online news engagement)

Pen portraits

Jason often sees arguments on Twitter. He thinks people tend to see stories which align with their views, and this could risk greater polarisation in society. Although he likes the convenience of seeing stories that he is interested in and often finds he agrees with what he sees online, he believes individuals are responsible for making sure they seek out alternative perspectives.

Sue had not heard of media plurality before the session. However, she agreed with the principles and was surprised that the rules did not apply to online news. This made her more concerned about the news she reads online and not sure whether she could trust it to the same extent she did before. She supported more regulation to ensure media plurality online.

Dave believes there is little diversity in the mainstream media whether online or offline. He does not think current media plurality rules work effectively as news publishers are owned by similar types of people. He thinks there is greater diversity online, where he can search out alternative perspectives. As such, he does not think media plurality rules should be extended to online news and questions how this would be possible in practice.

6 Reflections

This chapter summarises the key findings from the research including how participants' attitudes changed during the study. It describes participants' expectations for the future including whether individuals or platforms should be most responsible for individuals consuming a range of news.

Overall, participants widely felt they would continue to use online intermediaries to access news, even though views towards personalisation varied.

Although they had concerns about the potential impact of personalisation through online intermediaries on themselves as individuals and wider society, participants argued the convenience and variety of online news meant they felt it still held significant benefits, and they would continue to use it. This reflected the role of online news and intermediaries in their daily routine, and the habitual nature of much online news consumption described by participants.

“The benefits probably don't outweigh the negatives, but I still want it [personalisation] for some reason.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, High online news engagement)

In particular, participants emphasised the convenience and speed of online news, the ease of access to stories that aligned with their interests, and the range of sources and perspectives online. While they had concerns about reliability, particularly related to user-generated content or less familiar news brands, and they worried about the influence of online intermediaries, they felt it brought benefits to them and society overall. In particular, the ease of access to information and the ability to learn about stories not being covered elsewhere were seen as bringing specific societal benefits.

In some cases, participants recognised how their views had changed during the research.

Those who were surprised by the extent of personalisation often became more concerned about how their personal information was being used or what they were seeing online. While those who had some awareness of personalisation remained sceptical about how platforms used their data, they were also often resigned to this, as it enabled them to access the news.

In some cases, participants suggested they would change their behaviours around data sharing. For example, they mentioned taking more care when accepting cookies or reading terms and conditions. They felt that the better-informed people were about these issues, the more they could take control over their experiences online.

“I'd say as long as you're aware that what you're seeing is personalised and you know you can look at different perspectives and topics then I think the benefits [of using online intermediaries] do outweigh the negatives. I'd say the younger generation are probably more aware. I don't think my parents would be aware to the extent you're monitored when you're online.” (Wales/West Midlands/South West England, Medium online news engagement)

Although understanding more about personalisation and media plurality did not result in participants always changing how they consumed news online as individuals, there was support for greater regulation to ensure that audiences accessed a range of viewpoints or to increase transparency for users.

“It’s a double-edged sword. I wouldn’t want Ofcom to stop them from operating, but there needs to be some more regulation or oversight.” (London/East of England/South East England, Medium online news engagement)

Perceptions of control shaped attitudes towards future options.

Views often differed depending on the extent to which participants felt individuals had control over online intermediaries or their access to a range of news sources online. This influenced whether they felt platforms or individuals should be most responsible for people consuming a range of media sources.

Those who felt greater control placed an emphasis on individuals taking time to research a range of viewpoints or consume news from different sources to cross-check information. These participants felt this was easier to do online compared to more traditional forms of news, reflecting the diversity of sources available and the capabilities of platforms such as search engines to find a range of news providers.

“When we search online, we have access to more information compared to our parents’ day for instance, who just brought newsprint. We have the opportunity, if we use it intelligently, to access a lot of different stories and angles. Should we choose to sift out what the truth is and be able to dismiss sensationalism if we want to. We didn’t have that before.” (Northern Ireland/North West England/East Midlands, High online news engagement)

However, those who felt they lacked control over what they saw online wanted support from platforms to help individuals see diverse news sources. Greater action from platforms was particularly valued by participants who used fewer online sources of news. However, more frequent online news users also recognised the potential benefits of this to wider society, even if they felt they personally sought out a variety of sources already.

“It’s up to the people who are publishing it to give us variety.” (Scotland/North East England/Yorkshire & the Humber, Low online news engagement)

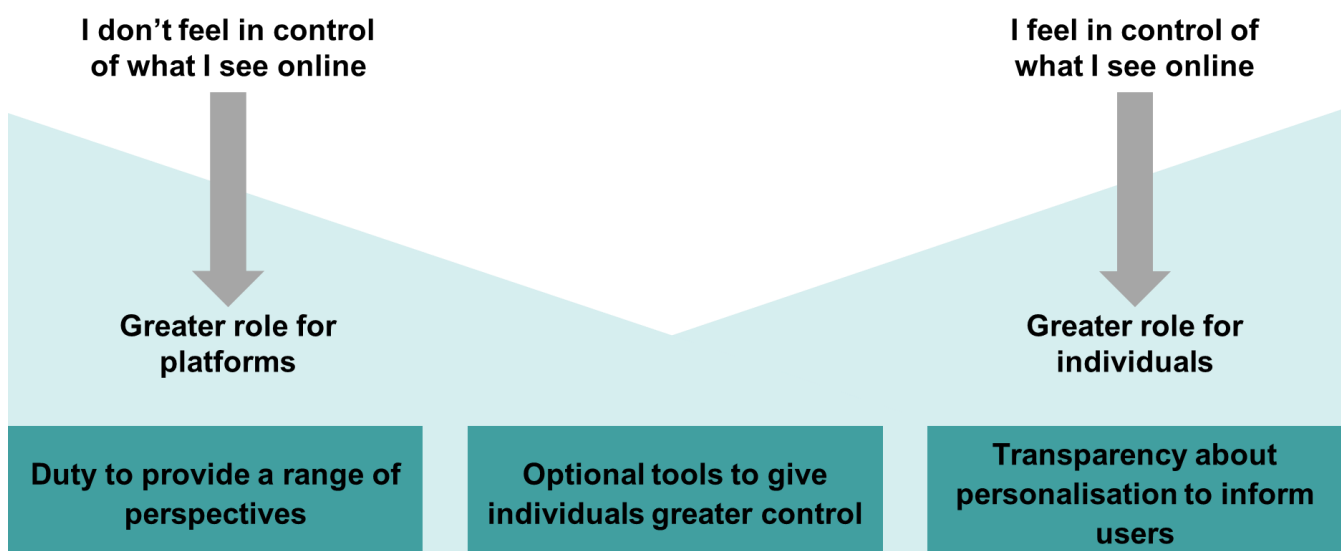


Figure 6: Summary of how perceptions of control influenced views

There was widespread support for tools or regulation to ensure a range of sources are available to users.

In general, participants welcomed tools that could help them access a diverse range of news sources and perspectives. They suggested this could make it easier for users to see alternative views and avoid a situation where personalisation meant they only saw news which reinforced their opinions. This reflected concerns about stories and information participants felt they were not seeing as a result of incorrect personalisation or tailoring that was too narrowly fixed to their interests. It also recognised the potential impact of this on dividing society, if people only see content that aligns with their existing perspectives.

“They [platforms] have a responsibility to do that. Ideally, I’d be given half of what I’m interested in. With the climate change thing, I’d like to see some arguments for and against.” (London/East of England/South East England, Medium online news engagement)

Participants largely wanted users to have more control over these tools, for example being able to switch between their own tailored feeds and a more general or diverse feed. In some cases, participants emphasised a duty for platforms to provide a range of perspectives, reflecting the extent to which they believed individuals would seek out or engage with a diverse range of sources on their own.

“I think it [responsibility] lies with the companies. Lots of readers are naive and won’t scrutinise as much as they should.” (Scotland/North East England/Yorkshire & the Humber, High online news engagement)

Some participants emphasised the need for greater transparency.

Reflecting their own experiences of learning about personalisation during the research, some participants argued there was a need for greater transparency around how online news is tailored to individuals. They felt this could help users understand the reasons they were being shown stories on online intermediaries and increase awareness about personalisation online. This was seen as important for individuals to help them to recognise they may only be seeing certain perspectives and therefore encourage them to seek out alternative views. This also reflected participants’ surprise about the lack of regulation covering online news, leading them to be more sceptical about the accuracy of online news stories than before the research.

“There aren’t as many regulations as I thought there were. I thought I was reading more trustworthy news than I actually am.” (London/East of England/South East England, Medium online news engagement)

Pen portraits

Jason believes the benefits of online intermediaries outweighs the risks and finds it hard to imagine not using social media for news as it has become such a key part of his routine. However, he does worry about other people in society, including his parents, who he often has to explain social media to.

Sue is generally undecided on whether the benefits of online intermediaries outweigh the risks. She would like to know more about how her data is used before coming to a decision.

Dave thinks the risks of online intermediaries outweigh the benefits and worries that most people in society are unaware of how their data is being used to influence their views.

7 Appendices

7.1 Sample breakdown

We set minimum quotas on several key characteristics including gender, age, socio-demographic group, ethnicity, and household type to ensure a broad range of attitudes and backgrounds were reflected in the workshops.

Achieved participant sample

Focus Group	Locations	Gender	Age	Socio-economic group	Ethnicity
Pilot group 6 x participants	England	3 x M 3 x F	1 x 18-24 2 x 25-34 1 x 34-54 2 x 55+	3 x ABC1 3 x C2DEs	3 x from minority ethnic groups
Cohort 1: 4 x mini-groups 19 x participants	Scotland North East England Yorkshire & the Humber	9 x M 10 x F	6 x 18-24 4 x 25-34 5 x 35-54 4 x 55+	11 x ABC1 8 x C2DEs	4 x from minority ethnic groups
Cohort 2: 3 x mini-groups 16 x participants	Wales West Midlands South West England	8 x M 8 x F	4 x 18-24 3 x 25-34 5 x 35-54 4 x 55+	8 x ABC1 8 x C2DEs	3 x from minority ethnic groups
Cohort 3: 3 x mini-groups 15 x participants	London East of England South East England	7 x M 8 x F	2 x 18-24 5 x 25-34 4 x 35-54 4 x 55+	8 x ABC1 7 x C2DEs	4 x from minority ethnic groups
Cohort 4 3 x mini-groups 19 x participants	Northern Ireland North West England East Midlands	9 x M 10 x F	4 x 18-24 5 x 25-34 5 x 35-54 4 x 55+	9 x ABC1 10 x C2DEs	4 x from minority ethnic groups

7.2 Discussion guide: Workshop 1

Timings	Discussion
	Introduction and set up
15 mins	<p>Participants join the group 10-15 minutes in advance of the start time/check tech is working.</p> <p>LEAD FACILITATOR TO MAKE MODERATORS CO-CHAIRS AND SET UP ABILITY FOR SCREEN SHARING. TECH SUPPORT TO LET PARTICIPANTS INTO THE GROUP AND SHARE ALLOCATING PEOPLE TO BREAKOUT GROUPS.</p>
10 mins	<p>Lead moderator to introduce self, notetakers, and any observers.</p> <p>Explain the role of Ipsos - we are independent research agency, aiming to help you share your views, ensuring we hear from everyone. Ipsos is working with Ofcom, the communications regulator, on a research study which aims to explore consumption of online news.</p> <p>The session will last about 1.5 hours.</p> <p>Please feel free to take breaks or step away from the discussion as required – you can just switch off your microphone and camera. You can re-join or end your participation completely without giving a reason. If possible, please ensure you are somewhere quiet where you can be on your own and won't be interrupted.</p> <p>Confidentiality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain that the groups will be audio/video (delete as appropriate) recorded through OBS system, this will be securely held and deleted at the end of the research. If appropriate: Remind participants that Ofcom will view the video recording following the discussion, to help us ensure that the materials used in the research are effective and appropriate. Ask participants to change their name on Zoom to their <u>first/preferred name only</u>. Explain that we will start the recording after we have done introductions. Explain that while your personal information, e.g. name, email etc. will not be shared with Ofcom, they will have access to the video recording. This recording will only be available to the Ofcom team working on this research study and will not leave Ipsos servers. The recording is for information purposes only, as

	<p>Ofcom are interested in what you have to say about this subject. The recording will be securely deleted after the research project has ended.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written report - may use quotes but no detailed attribution. <p>Housekeeping/ground rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some of the topics we will be discussing might be sensitive, political or controversial, meaning people might have different views - it is fine to hold different views, all opinions are valid and there are no right or wrong answers. It is important, though to disagree with ideas and not individuals and respect each other as we talk about these topics. Please try not to talk over each other, though we know this can be challenging on Zoom - this will help make sure the notetakers can clearly record what is being said. Please keep your videos on throughout the group. We have found that being able to see each other helps the flow of the conversation and feels a bit more natural than talking to blank screens. If your Wi-Fi stops working/you disconnect from the call, please try your best to re-join. If the moderator's Wi-Fi breaks/they are disconnected, they will try and re-join. The note-taker will be in contact with the moderator and keep participants updated. Please continue the conversation until the moderator re-enters the session. There will be a lot to cover so we may need to move people on. This is not personal, but only to ensure we fit everything in. Reiterate that they are free to leave at any time. <p>PARTICIPANTS ARE PUT INTO MINI-GROUPS</p> <p><i>Mini-group moderator:</i></p> <p>Any questions before we begin?</p>
25 minutes	<p>Introductions and reflections on the pre-task</p> <p><i>Aim: Explore participants' news behaviours including where they go to find news online and offline, their interest in news and the type/ range of news they are consuming.</i></p>

<p>10 mins</p>	<p><i>Moderator explains the purpose and format of the workshop and what it will cover in broad terms, setting parameters for the discussion.</i></p> <p><u>Participant introductions</u></p> <p>Participants to say their name, where they're from and a piece of news they read/heard/listened to that day.</p> <p><i>Moderator to tell participants recording will start now. Capture recording has begun on tape and consent for group to be recorded/happy to take part.</i></p> <p>Where do you normally go to find out the news?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe: TV, radio, online, local/ national newspapers, other places? • How, if at all, does this differ? E.g. by type of news, time / day, current events? • What is the balance between the online and offline sources of news you use each week? • Are you actively searching for certain types of news? How do you go about doing this? <p>How did you find keeping a news media diary? Was anything surprising?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [If not covered above] Where do you usually go to find news online? • Probe: recommendations from family/friends/other people online, searching for a specific story, recommendations from an app, certain websites, websites or apps that bring together news from different providers (e.g. Apple News, Google News, Feedly), social media, alerts or notifications <p>How do you decide where to go for news / what do you look for in deciding where to go? PROBE ON:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality, trust, accuracy, entertainment, authority, source, brand, relationship with the brand, etc. <p>What do you think about the range of news available in the UK today?</p>
<p>5 mins</p>	

<p>10 mins</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important do you think it is to have access to a range of sources (e.g. news providers) when accessing the news? • What about the importance of having a range of voices (e.g. perspectives/slants - one provider may showcase a range of voices for example)? • Do you think you have access to more sources of news online or offline? What about different voices? <p>To what extent do you pay attention to the source of the news you read, watch or listen to? What about the author or editor?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [If focused on offline sources] do you take the same approach when reading or watching news online? • Do you actively search for certain news sources or journalists online? <p>What do you value most in the news sources that you use online?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe: convenience, diversity, accuracy, trustworthiness, relevance, timeliness. • Are there any online news sources you would never use? Why is this the case? <p>Do you tend to trust the news you read online? Why/ why not?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this differ by where you go for news? In what ways? • Probe: Search (e.g. Google) vs social media (Facebook) vs news aggregator (Apple news)? <p>Does this differ at all on different apps or sites?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What about on: social media, search engines, news aggregators?
-----------------------	---

	<p>What control, if any, do you feel you have over the news you see online?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes you say that? • How do you think the news you see is selected?
15 mins	<p>Initial discussion on OIs</p> <p><i>Aim: to introduce the concept of online intermediaries in news consumption, gauge levels of awareness and capture spontaneous views.</i></p>
15 mins	<p><i>Moderator uses slides to show descriptions of different OIs including search engines, aggregators and social media.</i></p> <p>How familiar are these types of platforms to you? Do you use them to access news?</p> <p>For each type of platform, probe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any positives to accessing news in this way? • Any downsides? <p>How do you think the news stories provided on these platforms are selected?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What makes you think that?
30 mins	<p>Introduction to how OIs work</p> <p><i>Aim: to introduce some of the more challenging concepts related to OIs including algorithms and choice architecture, providing the information consistently to the full workshop. Capture spontaneous views towards these concepts and any questions.</i></p>
10 mins	PARTICIPANTS BROUGHT BACK INTO PLENARY

<p>10 mins</p>	<p>Lead moderator:</p> <p>Does anyone want to share any initial reflections from their group?</p> <p>LEAD MODERATOR TO PLAY VIDEO – <u>MAKE SURE YOU HAVE TICKED BOX FOR SHARING AUDIO BEFORE YOU SHARE.</u></p> <p><i>Moderator to play video of Ofcom staff/expert presenting key information related to how OIs present news, including how algorithms and choice architecture works. This also includes a description of how content is personalised to individuals based on their digital footprint and the factors that may influence which types of content are shown including types of sources, content, recency, brand, user engagement, etc.</i></p> <p>PARTICIPANTS PUT INTO MINI-GROUPS</p> <p><i>Moderator runs through the key concepts as needed and respond to any initial questions participants may have.</i></p> <p>How familiar were those concepts? Any questions/ areas that are unclear?</p> <p>TASK: We'd now like to test this out in practice. If you open your internet browser and search for 'news'. What comes up?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe on how similar/ different the articles are – does everyone see the same thing? What do you think the reasons for this might be? • I've put a link in the chat function for Google News: https://news.google.co.uk/. We'd like you to click onto this and see what stories come up. Probe on how similar/ different the articles are – does everyone see the same thing? What do you think the reasons for this might be? • What kind of things come up as top stories / picks for you? NOTE TO MODERATORS: THERE SHOULD BE A SECTION ON THE RIGHT HANDSIDE OF THE SITE IF PARTICIPANTS ARE LOGGED IN THAT SAYS 'PICKS FOR YOU' • How personalised do you think the stories are to you? What information do you think is being used?
<p>10 mins</p>	<p>How does this make you feel about the role of social media, search engines and news aggregators in influencing the news you read, watch or listen to?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any benefits or downsides? <p><u>Individually, go through each OI in turn and probe:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential positives e.g. greater choice/ exposure to a wider range of sources, seeing content that matches interests AND • Potential negatives e.g. limiting news sources/types of news, reduced choice or control • Did you have any concerns about this before this workshop? What about now? <p>Do you think the news you see, read or hear about through online intermediaries aligns with your views and beliefs? Why/why not?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important is it to you that the news you see/hear about aligns with your view? • How important do you think this is to society as a whole? <p>Overall do you think the positives outweigh the negatives?</p> <p>Do you have any questions you would like answered ahead of the next session?</p>
10 mins	Thank you and close
	<p>PARTICIPANTS BROUGHT BACK TO PLENARY</p> <p><i>Lead moderator:</i></p> <p>Can someone from each group feedback about the discussion?</p> <p>We'd now like to have a final exercise, where we'd like you to vote on your views towards online intermediaries. Overall, to what extent do you think the positives outweigh the negatives of online intermediaries in news consumption [where 1 is not at all – the negatives are too great and 10 is absolutely – the positives are worth it]?</p> <p><i>Moderator thanks the group and explains the next steps including the online diary tasks and the date/time of the next workshop. Do get in touch if you have any questions going forward.</i></p>

7.3 Discussion guide: Workshop 2

Timings	Discussion
	Introduction and set up
15 mins	<p>Participants join the group 10-15 minutes in advance of the start time/check tech is working.</p> <p>LEAD FACILITATOR TO MAKE MODERATORS CO-CHAIRS AND SET UP ABILITY FOR SCREEN SHARING. TECH SUPPORT TO LET PARTICIPANTS INTO THE GROUP AND START ALLOCATING PEOPLE TO BREAKOUT GROUPS.</p>
5 mins	<p>Lead moderator to introduce self, notetakers, and any observers.</p> <p>Explain the role of Ipsos - we are independent research agency, aiming to help you share your views, ensuring we hear from everyone. Ipsos is working with Ofcom, the communications regulator, on a research study which aims to explore consumption of online news.</p> <p>The session will last about 2 hours.</p> <p>Please feel free to take breaks or step away from the discussion as required – you can just switch off your microphone and camera. You can re-join or end your participation completely without giving a reason. If possible, please ensure you are somewhere quiet where you can be on your own and won't be interrupted.</p> <p>Confidentiality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain that the group will be video recorded through OBS system, this will be securely held and deleted at the end of the research. Remind participants that this is a pilot discussion to help design our materials for the research project. <u>Ofcom will view the video recording</u> following the discussion, to help us ensure that the materials used in the research are effective and appropriate. Ask participants to change their name on Zoom to their <u>first/preferred name only</u>. Explain that we will start the recording after we have done introductions. Explain that while your personal information, e.g. name, email etc. will not be shared with Ofcom, they will have access to the video recording for the pilot. This recording will only be

	<p>available to the Ofcom team working on this research study and will not leave Ipsos servers. The recording is for learning purposes only, to inform the future focus groups for this research. The recording will be securely deleted after the research project has ended.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written report - may use quotes but no detailed attribution <p>Housekeeping/ground rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the topics we will be discussing might be sensitive, political or controversial, meaning people might have different views - it is fine to hold different views, all opinions are valid and there are no right or wrong answers. It is important, though to disagree with ideas and not individuals and respect each other as we talk about these topics. • Please try not to talk over each other, though we know this can be challenging on Zoom - this will help make sure the notetakers can clearly record what is being said. • Please keep your videos on throughout the group. We have found that being able to see each other helps the flow of the conversation and feels a bit more natural than talking to blank screens. • If your Wi-Fi stops working/you disconnect from the call, please try your best to re-join. If the moderator's Wi-Fi breaks/they are disconnected, they will try and re-join. The note-taker will be in contact with the moderator and keep participants updated. Please continue the conversation until the moderator re-enters the session. • There will be a lot to cover so we may need to move people on. This is not personal, but only to ensure we fit everything in. • Reiterate that they are free to leave at any time. <p>PARTICIPANTS ARE PUT INTO MINI-GROUPS</p> <p><i>Mini-group moderator:</i></p> <p>Any questions before we begin?</p>
15 minutes	<p>Introductions and reflection on media diaries</p> <p><i>Aim: Reminder of the research and recap of the previous workshop, capture any changes in participants' reported online news behaviours since the last workshop.</i></p>

Moderator explains the purpose and format of the workshop and what it will cover in broad terms, setting parameters for the discussion.

Discussion to review Indeemo diary tasks

How did you find keeping the diary?

- Was anything surprising?
- Did you notice any differences compared to keeping the diary before the first workshop?

How did you find the quizzes/games you were asked to complete?

- How well did you do? Did this surprise you?
- What did you learn?
- Did you see/learn anything unexpected?

How do you normally judge whether to trust a news source?

- What kind of signs do you look for that might suggest something is false or misleading?
- How confident do you feel in spotting 'fake news'?

What about the 'find the personalisation' task? If needed, the task that asked you to find posts that you think were personalised to you.

- How did you find this task?
- Was it easier/more difficult than you expected? What makes you say that?
- Why do you think you were shown stories from those sources (e.g. Guardian vs Daily Mail)?
- Did doing the task change the way you feel about news stories you see online (e.g. why you were seeing them, the control you have over what you see)?

	<p>How did you find the ‘news search’ task? If needed, the task where you had to find three news sources and decide whether you trusted them or not.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you go about assessing the news stories (e.g. deciding how much you trusted them)? • What factors influenced your level of trust? • Did anything surprise you during this task?
15 mins	<p>Diversity of news</p> <p><i>Aim: to provide participants with an understanding of media plurality to enable them to discuss the potential implications of OIs.</i></p>
	<p>What do you think about the range of news sources and viewpoints available online?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this make you feel? • Probe: well-informed, overwhelmed by the extent of information, lacking reliable information/ unclear where to go <p>How easy or difficult is it to find a range of news sources online?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you normally go about doing this? • What about finding different voices? <p>How, if at all, do your experiences differ depending on which platform you are on?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media? • News aggregators? • Search engines?

	<p>Do you think the news you see, read or hear about through online intermediaries aligns with your views and beliefs? Why/why not?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important is it to you that the news you see/hear about aligns with your views? • What impact might this have on society as a whole? <p>How important is it to have access to a wide range of news sources and viewpoints? To you as an individual? To society overall? Why?</p> <p>To what extent do you feel like you gain knowledge or information through the media?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How important is this to you? To society overall? <p>Are there times when you have looked to the media for information about a specific topic?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For what reasons? • Did you find the kind of information you were looking for? Why/ why not? <p>PARTICIPANTS BROUGHT BACK INTO PLENARY</p> <p><i>Lead moderator:</i></p> <p>Does anyone want to share any initial reflections from their group?</p>
5 mins	<p>Introduction to ‘media plurality’</p> <p><i>Lead moderator to introduce the idea of having a diversity of sources of news and a diversity of voices within the news landscape using slide deck.</i></p> <p><i>Recap of how online intermediaries work, including the role of algorithms. Moderator to introduce Jane and John - highlighting that they/the scenarios are hypothetical.</i></p>

10 mins	Reflections on the presentation
	<p>PARTICIPANTS PUT INTO MINI-GROUPS</p> <p><i>In mini-groups, moderator to capture initial thoughts on the presentation.</i></p> <p>What did you think of the presentation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How familiar was the concept of media plurality? • Was anything surprising or new? • Was anything unclear? PROBE: personalisation/ differences between John and Jane <p>What do you see as the role of media organisations in informing citizens?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think news organisations lead to people being more or less informed? • Does this differ depending on whether people are reading online or offline news? In what ways? <p>Does the way we consume news help to bring people together, or drive people with different views further apart?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this differ depending on whether people are reading online or offline news? In what ways? • Is this something that concerns you? <p>PARTICIPANTS REMAIN IN MINI-GROUPS FOR THE BREAK. MODERATORS ASK PARTICIPANTS TO SWITCH OFF THEIR CAMERAS AND MICROPHONES AND COME BACK IN 10 MINUTES.</p>
10 mins	BREAK (MODERATORS TO BREAK WHEN APPROPRIATE FOR THEIR GROUP)
40 mins	Scenarios discussion
20 mins	<p>PARTICIPANTS RETURN FROM THEIR BREAK, STILL IN MINI-GROUPS</p> <p>EXAMPLES TO BE ROTATED ACROSS MINI-GROUPS – CHECK WITH LEAD MODERATOR FOR WHICH EXAMPLE TO START WITH.</p> <p><i>Moderator to read out: “We’re now going to look at the experiences of Jane and John and explore how they might be influenced by the news they see online. As mentioned earlier, this scenario is <u>hypothetical</u>. As we’ve heard, Jane and John live in the same town but have different interests and backgrounds.</i></p> <p>Jane and John have heard that there is a national climate change protest which is receiving lots of coverage in the news. They both search online to find out more. [MODERATOR TO SHOW HYPOTHETICAL SEARCH ENGINE RESULTS]</p> <p>What do you think about the differences between what Jane and John see on the same search engine?</p>

- **PROBE: types of news sources, perspectives in the headlines**
- How could this affect Jane and John?

Does this feel like something that could happen in real-life? Can you imagine two people seeing different search results in this way?

Could this affect some groups more than others?

- PROBE: older / younger people, people more / less engaged in the news, other groups?

In what ways might they be informed or influenced by the news they see?

- How much control do they have over this?
- How easy or difficult might it be to judge what information is reliable?

How could this affect what Jane and John each think of the protests? In what ways?

- Do you think they would have enough information to take a fully informed view on the situation?

How could this affect what Jane and John think of each other? Do you think they are more or less likely to understand each other's perspectives?

- Do you think consuming news in this way could help to bring people together or drive people apart?
- What could be the impact of this on individuals? On society?

How important do you think it is that citizens have access to a range of news in situations such as these (e.g. national protests)? For what reasons?

Moderator to read out: A few weeks later, in the run up to a local election, both Jane and John are paying close attention to the local news. They both browse social media during the day to find out what is happening.” [MODERATOR TO SHOW HYPOTHETICAL SOCIAL MEDIA FEEDS]

<p>20 mins</p>	<p>What do you think about the differences between what Jane and John see on the same app?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PROBE: types of stories e.g. about new housing developments, closure of local music venues, road closures etc. • PROBE: types of news sources e.g. ‘breaking news’, individuals sharing stories, local press etc. • How could this affect Jane and John? <p>Does this feel like something that could happen in real-life? Can you imagine two people seeing different social media feeds in this way?</p> <p>To what extent do you think Jane and John will see a wide range of viewpoints?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this matter? Why/why not? <p>In what ways might they be informed or influenced by the news they see?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much control do they have over this? • How easy or difficult might it be to judge what information is reliable? <p>How, if at all, could social media’s ability to select what Jane and John see, affect their voting intentions in a local election?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think they would have enough information to make a fully informed decision? <p>Thinking about your experiences using social media, news aggregators or search engines, do you consider your voting intentions to be impacted by the news shown to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent do you feel well-informed or overloaded as a result of the news you see online? <p>Could the way these intermediaries are able to select certain news for people to see affect some groups more than others?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PROBE: older / younger people, people more / less engaged in the news, other groups? <p>How important do you think it is that citizens have access to a range of news in the run up to an election? For what reasons?</p>
-----------------------	--

15 mins	Final reflections
	<p>Overall, how do you feel about social media, search engines and news aggregators being able to select the news you see?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does it matter that two people don't see the same content on these sites? • Does this matter to you personally? To society overall? To different groups? • How does this differ between different platforms or websites? Are you more concerned about some more than others? PROBE: social media, search engines, news aggregators <p>What impact could this have on opinions across society?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think people could be more or less informed? • Do you think it could bring people together or drive people apart? <p>Would you like more control over what news these platforms show you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you <u>take more control</u> over what news is shown to you if you could? <p>To what extent do you think these platforms should ensure people are exposed to a range of news sources and viewpoints?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impact would this have on you? On society overall? On different groups? • To what extent do you think they should be more transparent about how they serve you news? <p>How important, if at all, do you think it is that these platforms are owned by a range of people/companies?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would it concern you if only a small number of people/companies owned these platforms? In what ways? For what reasons? <p>Overall, do you think the benefits of online intermediaries outweigh the downsides?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are any groups more or less likely to be impacted positively/ negatively?
5 mins	Thank you and close
	<p>PARTICIPANTS BROUGHT BACK TO PLENARY</p> <p><i>Lead moderator:</i></p> <p>Would someone from each group like to feedback on the discussion?</p> <p>We'd now like to have a final exercise, where we'd like you to vote on your views towards online intermediaries. Overall, to what extent do you think the positives outweigh the negatives of online intermediaries in news consumption [where 1 is not at all – the negatives are too great and 10 is absolutely – the positives are worth it]?</p> <p><i>Moderator thanks the group, mentions the final voluntary vox pop task on the app – tell us what you think of the session this evening. Moderator explains that they will receive their thank-you payment via the recruiter. Do get in touch if you have any questions going forward.</i></p>

7.4 Online diary 1: Task list

Task Title	TASK 1: Media Diary
Task Description	<p>Welcome to your first task!</p> <p>The purpose of this task is to help us to get to know more about how you come across the news you see and hear.</p> <p>We'd like you to take screenshots of all the places online you have read, watched or listened to news today, as well as the sites you used to get there. For example, we'd like you to tell us about how you found an article or take a screenshot of the websites or apps you used to find the story. This could be on any device you use to find news online, such as a mobile phone or computer. We'd love to hear about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What news sources you have read, watched or listened to? • How you found and decided on each news source? • What app or platform you use most frequently for news online? <p>All details can be important here, so please share all of your experiences.</p>
Required Responses	<i>At least 2 photos (screenshots)</i>

Task Title	TASK 2. "Find the news"
Task Description	<p>Welcome to your second task.</p> <p>The purpose of this task is to find a recent national news story. We want you to show us where you would normally go to find out about your breaking news online. Again, this could be via a mobile phone, tablet or computer.</p> <p>Take a screenshot of all the apps and websites you use to find the story and tell us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What story you found, and where did you find it? • How would you decide whether to trust the story or not?
Required Responses	1 video and at least 2 photos (screenshots) of story

Task Title	TASK 3: Post of the day
Task Description	<p>Welcome to your third and final task.</p> <p>The purpose of this task is to understand what news stories online stand out to you. This can be for either positive or negative reasons.</p> <p>Please choose one post or news article which stood out to you today and take a screenshot of this story. Then tell us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why you chose this story? • How you found the story? E.g. did you use any apps or websites to find it? • What you found interesting or compelling? • Who else you think this kind of story might appeal to?

	Again, no detail is too big or too small here, so please share all of your views on this story.
Required Responses	1 video and 1 photo (screenshot)

7.5 Online diary 2: Task list

Task Title	TASK 1: Media Diary
Task Description	<p>Welcome to your first task!</p> <p>The purpose of this task is to help us to get to know more about the news you see and hear.</p> <p>We'd like you to take screenshots of all the places online you have read, watched or listened to news today, as well as the sites you used to get there. For example, we'd like you to tell us about how you found an article or take a screenshot of the websites or apps you used to find the story. This could be on any device you use to find news online, such as a mobile phone or computer. We'd love to hear about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What news sources you have read, watched or listened to? • How you found and decided on each news source? • Why do you use this particular app or website? <p>All details can be important here, so please share all of your experiences.</p>
Required Responses	At least 2 photos (screenshots)

Task Title	TASK 2. Take a quiz
Task Description	<p>We'd like you to complete two quizzes to learn more about how online news is personalised or whether you can spot 'fake news'.</p> <p>Firstly, please complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply Magic Sauce shows what your digital footprint reveals about you. You'll need to connect to a social media account (Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn) and the website will generate predictions about your age, gender and personality. <p>Then complete one of the following quizzes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bad news game lets you act as a fake news writer, trying to get as many followers as possible. • This fake news quiz asks you to select the signs of fake news – how many can you get right? <p>For this task, click on a link to a quiz, try it out and tell us about the results. For each quiz you complete, we'd like you to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a screenshot of the results. • Tell us about how well you think you did. • Was anything surprising or expected?

Required Responses	1 video and a photo (screenshot) with caption

Task Title	TASK 3: Find the personalisation
Task Description	<p>For this task, we'd like you to spend some time browsing social media or news sites that bring together stories from different places like Apple News, Google News or Feedly. It doesn't matter if you don't have a social media account, you can browse sites like Twitter without one. E.g. by searching for 'Twitter trends'.</p> <p>The purpose of this task is to try and find examples of posts you think have been personalised to you. We'd like you to take screenshot of any news stories you think have been tailored to you and tell us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What stories did you find and from where? • Why do you think these stories were tailored towards you? • Why do you think you saw stories from this source? • How would you assess the quality of a news story on one of these sites? <p>Again no detail is too big or too small here, so please share all of your experiences and views on this story.</p>
Required Responses	1 video and at least 2 photos (screenshots)

Task Title	TASK 4: News search
Task Description	<p>Welcome to the final task!</p> <p>The purpose of this task is to understand how you assess news stories and decide what information to trust online.</p> <p>Please choose three news stories from different sources, and take a screenshot of each. We'd like you to tell us:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why these stories stood out for you today? • What you think about the quality of the story? • How you go about deciding whether to trust the information or not?
Required Responses	1 video and 3 photos (screenshots)

7.6 Stimulus materials: Workshop 1

How we access news has changed...



Four in ten now use the radio for news (40%) and less than a third use print newspapers (24%).

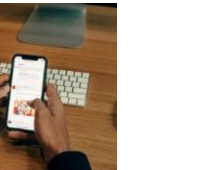


The internet (66%) is the second most-used platform for news (after TV), with many adults using social media (46%) and/or other websites/apps (37%).

© Ipsos | workshop 1 | July 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only |



There are now lots of places for accessing news online



© Ipsos | workshop 1 | July 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only |

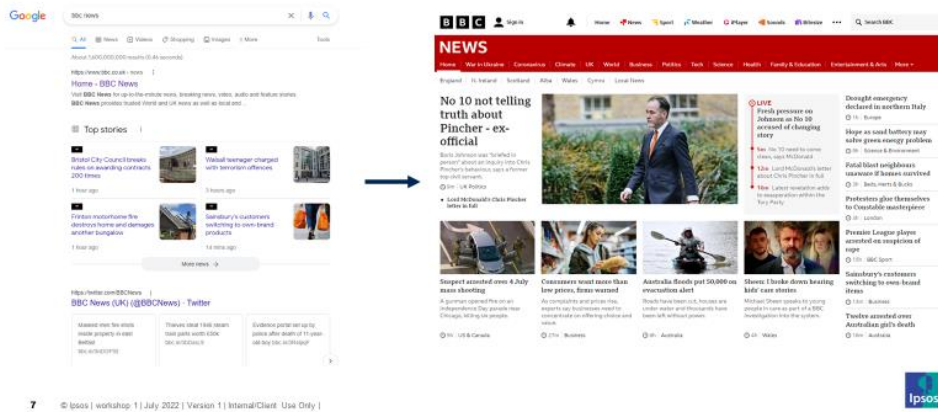


This includes going straight to a website



© Ipsos | workshop 1 | July 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only |

Or going through another app or site to reach the news



Today we want to focus on
online intermediaries...

Online intermediaries are apps or websites that sit between a news publisher and a news consumer



News publishers

Online intermediaries

News consumers

By online intermediaries we mean...



Social media



News aggregators



Search engines

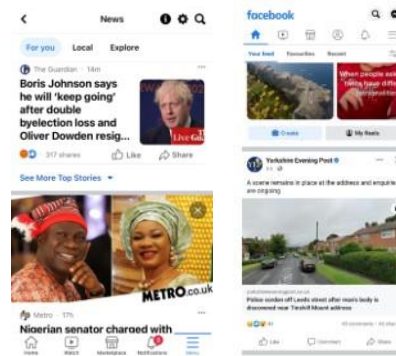
10 © Ipsos | workshop 1 | July 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only |



Consuming news through social media...



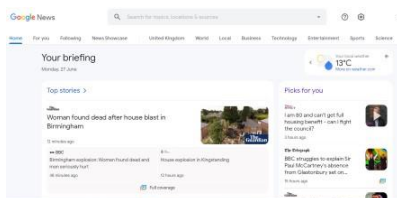
Facebook



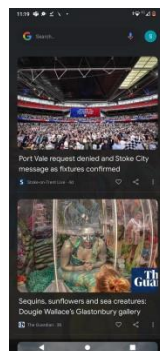
11 © Ipsos | workshop 1 | July 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only |



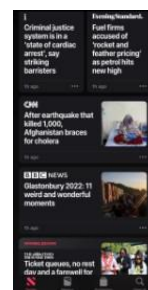
Consuming news through news aggregators...



Google news



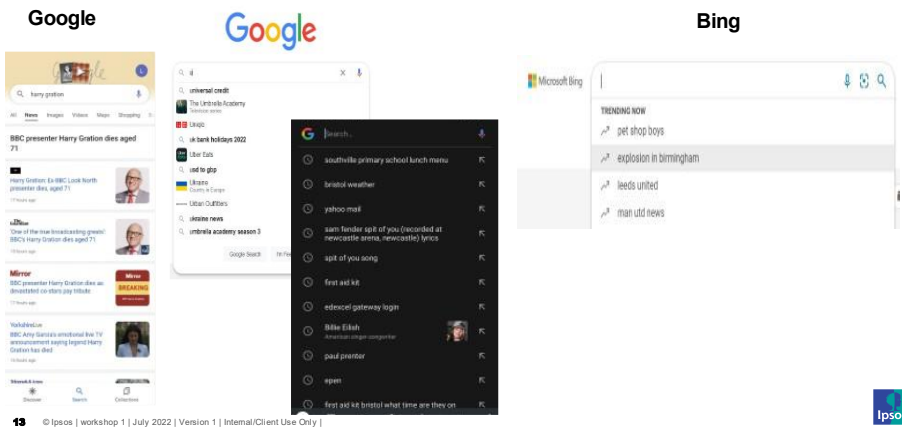
Apple news



12 © Ipsos | workshop 1 | July 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only |



Consuming news through search engines...



7.7 Simulus materials: Workshop 2

It is important that people across the UK have access to a wide range of news sources and viewpoints...

Different sources



A range of different media organisations with viewpoints from different sides of the political spectrum



....so that the UK can be a well-functioning democratic society with informed citizens. This is known as Media Plurality.

© Ipsos | Ofcom MP workshop 2 slides | June 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only



Rules are in place to ensure that individual media organisations cannot have too much influence over public opinion or control the news agenda.

For example, a newspaper owner with 20% or more market share for print newspapers has limits on their ability to control the TV news market as well. The Government can also ask Ofcom to examine a merger between news sources if it is concerned about it.

© Ipsos | 21-0979781 | May 2022 | V1 | Client Use Only



We've been discussing online intermediaries



Social media



News aggregators



Search engines

3 © Ipsos | Ofcom MP workshop 2 slides | June 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only



These platforms bring together news from different places using algorithms to personalise what you see



4 © Ipsos | Ofcom MP workshop 2 slides | June 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only

Media plurality rules currently only apply to traditional sources of news e.g. television, radio and print.

Online intermediaries are **not currently covered**.

5 © Ipsos | 21-0979761 | May 2022 | V1 | Client Use Only



Hypothetical scenario: Jane and John

NB: The following examples of news recommendations are simply illustrative - they do not necessarily demonstrate what particular online intermediaries currently do

© Ipsos | Ofcom MP workshop 2 slides | June 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only



Introducing Jane and John



Jane is 24 years old.
She's interested in sport,
is worried about climate
change and is looking to
buy a house.



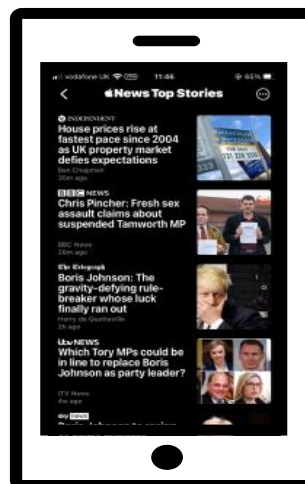
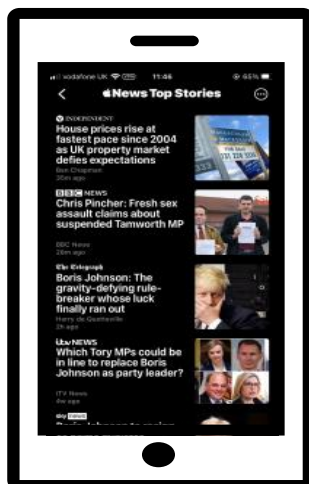
John is 55 years old.
He's interested in politics,
likes following the music
scene and is currently
looking for work.

© Ipsos | Ofcom MP workshop 2 slides | June 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only



Week 1: Jane and John's top stories

HYPOTHETICAL

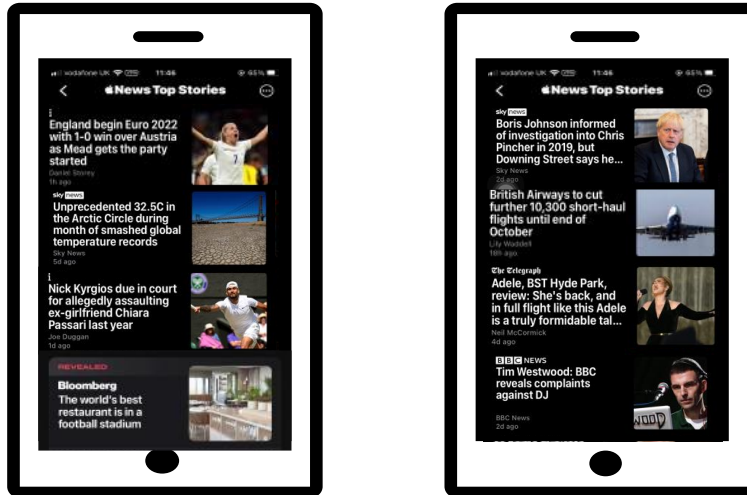


© Ipsos | Ofcom MP workshop 2 slides | June 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only



Month 1: Jane and John's top stories

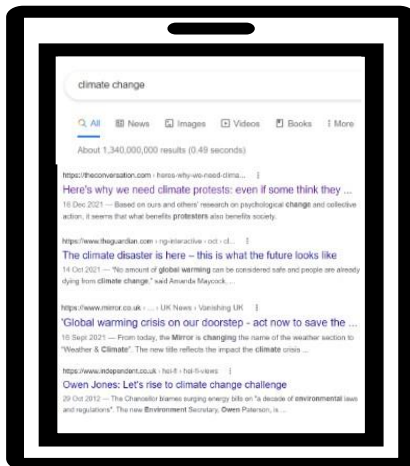
HYPOTHETICAL



© Ipsos | Ofcom MP workshop 2 slides | June 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only



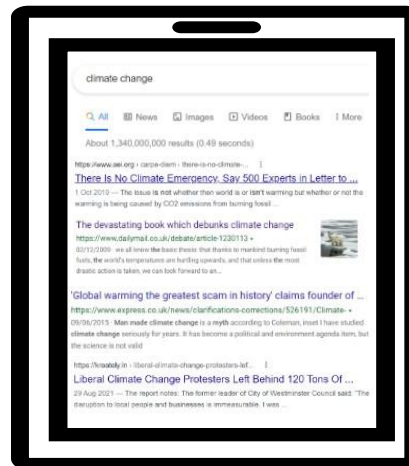
Jane's search engine results



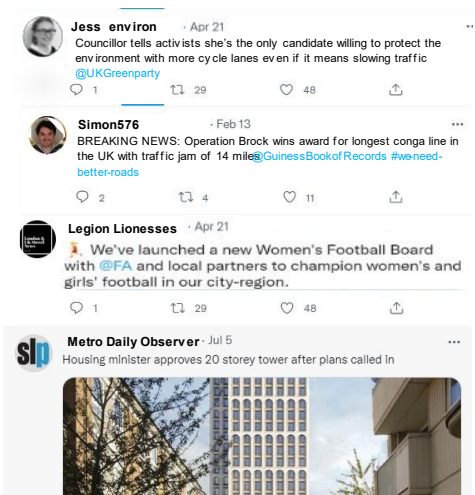
© Ipsos | Ofcom MP workshop 2 slides | June 2022 | Version 1 | Internal/Client Use Only

John's search engine results

HYPOTHETICAL

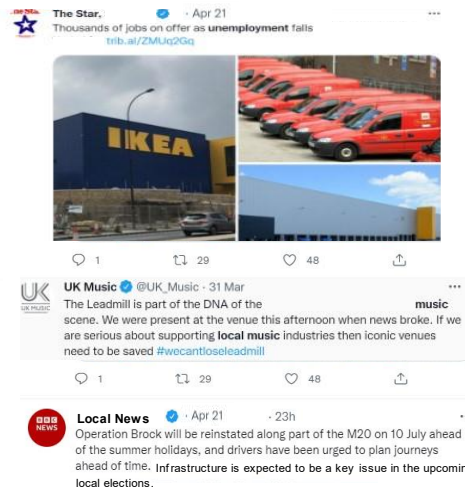


Jane's Social Media Feed



John's Social Media Feed

HYPOTHETICAL



Our standards and accreditations

Ipsos' standards and accreditations provide our clients with the peace of mind that they can always depend on us to deliver reliable, sustainable findings. Our focus on quality and continuous improvement means we have embedded a "right first time" approach throughout our organisation.



ISO 20252

This is the international market research specific standard that supersedes BS 7911/MRQSA and incorporates IQCS (Interviewer Quality Control Scheme). It covers the five stages of a Market Research project. Ipsos was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.



Market Research Society (MRS) Company Partnership

By being an MRS Company Partner, Ipsos endorses and supports the core MRS brand values of professionalism, research excellence and business effectiveness, and commits to comply with the MRS Code of Conduct throughout the organisation. We were the first company to sign up to the requirements and self-regulation of the MRS Code. More than 350 companies have followed our lead.



ISO 9001

This is the international general company standard with a focus on continual improvement through quality management systems. In 1994, we became one of the early adopters of the ISO 9001 business standard.



ISO 27001

This is the international standard for information security, designed to ensure the selection of adequate and proportionate security controls. Ipsos was the first research company in the UK to be awarded this in August 2008.



The UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018

Ipsos is required to comply with the UK GDPR and the UK DPA. It covers the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy.



HMG Cyber Essentials

This is a government-backed scheme and a key deliverable of the UK's National Cyber Security Programme. Ipsos was assessment-validated for Cyber Essentials certification in 2016. Cyber Essentials defines a set of controls which, when properly implemented, provide organisations with basic protection from the most prevalent forms of threat coming from the internet.



Fair Data

Ipsos is signed up as a "Fair Data" company, agreeing to adhere to 10 core principles. The principles support and complement other standards such as ISOs, and the requirements of Data Protection legislation.

For more information

3 Thomas More Square
London
E1W 1YW

t: +44 (0)20 3059 5000

www.ipsos.com/en-uk
<http://twitter.com/IpsosUK>

About Ipsos Public Affairs

Ipsos Public Affairs works closely with national governments, local public services and the not-for-profit sector. Its c.200 research staff focus on public service and policy issues. Each has expertise in a particular part of the public sector, ensuring we have a detailed understanding of specific sectors and policy challenges. Combined with our methods and communications expertise, this helps ensure that our research makes a difference for decision makers and communities.

