

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

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

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

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## Overview

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

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

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

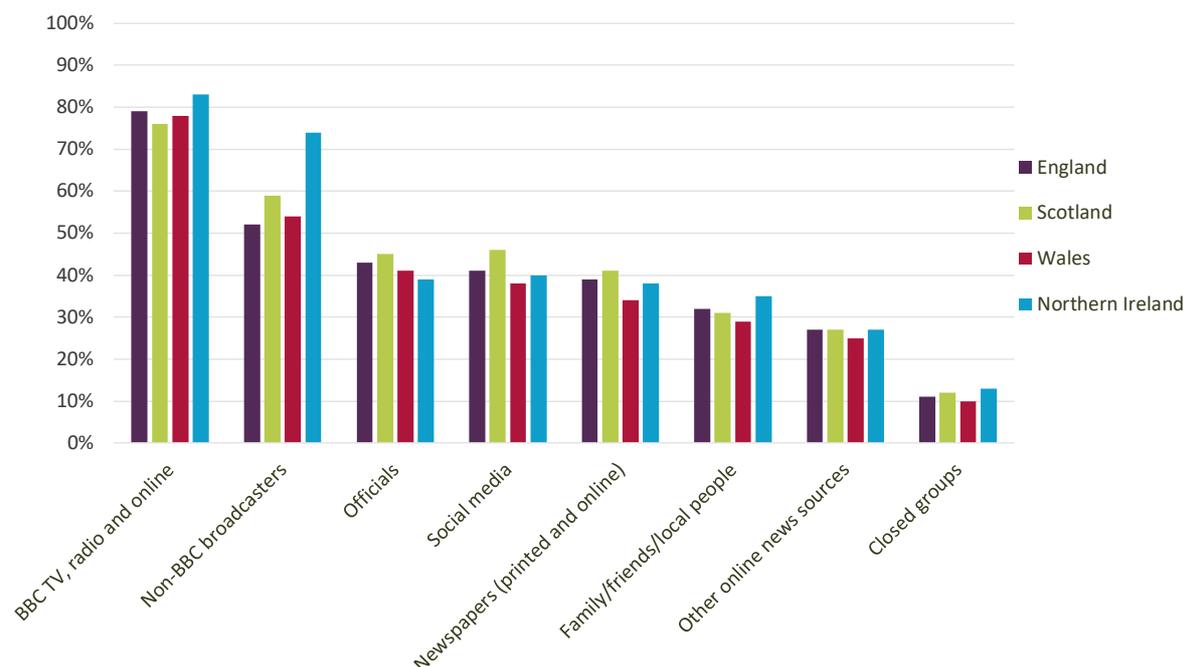
## Consumption of news and information about Covid-19

- In the first four weeks of the 'lockdown', almost all the UK online population accessed news and information about Covid-19 at least once a day, with no difference between the individual nations (England 97%, Scotland 97%, Wales 98%, Northern Ireland 98%).
- BBC services are the most-used source (see Figure 1) across all nations (England 79%, Scotland 76%, Wales 78% and Northern Ireland 83%). However, use of non-BBC broadcasters was higher in Northern Ireland (74%) and Scotland (59%) compared to England (52%) and Wales (54%). This is due to nearly four in ten (38%) of respondents in Scotland using STV as a source and over half (55%) of respondents in Northern Ireland using UTV.
- Use of social media for information about Covid-19 is higher in Scotland (46%) compared to England (41%) and Wales (38%). There is no statistical difference in social media use between Scotland (46%) and Northern Ireland (40%).

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

Figure 1: Sources used for news/information about Covid-19 (waves one to four combined)



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

Base: All respondents who are getting information/news about the Coronavirus outbreak Weeks 1-4, England (7141), Scotland (686), Wales (443) and Northern Ireland (293)

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

- Across the first four weeks of the 'lockdown', BBC TV is considered the most important source across all nations for news/information about Covid-19 (England 35%, Scotland 32%, Wales 36% and 37% Northern Ireland) followed by BBC online services (England 11%, Scotland 12%, Wales 11% and 12% Northern Ireland). One in ten (12%) of all respondents in Northern Ireland nominate UTV as their most important source, whilst 6% of all respondents in Scotland nominate STV as their most important source.
- People across the UK are sharing information about Covid-19 in broadly the same way. The vast majority are doing so mostly in person/by phone (England 76%, Scotland 77%, Wales 78% and Northern Ireland 83%), followed by writing on closed groups such as WhatsApp, Teams and Zoom (England 28%, Scotland 25%, Wales 24% and Northern Ireland 25%).

## Misinformation related to Covid-19

- During the first four weeks of 'lockdown' around half of respondents in each nation said they had come across false or misleading information (England 46%, Scotland 48%, Wales 43% and Northern Ireland 48%).
- In terms of the types of misleading or false theories people have come across (from a selected list), in the last two weeks across the UK as a whole, the most common theory was that linking

Covid-19 to 5G technology (50% having come across this in week three, and 51% in week four). Looking at the combined responses across all four weeks, *'drinking water more frequently'* was generally the most commonly heard of theory across all nations (England 28%, Scotland 27%, Wales 32% and Northern Ireland 37%), followed by *"gargling with salt water"* (England 19%, Scotland 19%, Wales 18% and Northern Ireland 26%)<sup>2</sup>.

- On seeing false or misleading information, the most common response in all nations was to do nothing about it (England 56%, Scotland 55%, Wales 54% and Northern Ireland 61%). The next most common response across all nations was to use a fact-checking website (England 14%, Scotland 14%, Wales 13% and Northern Ireland 10%).

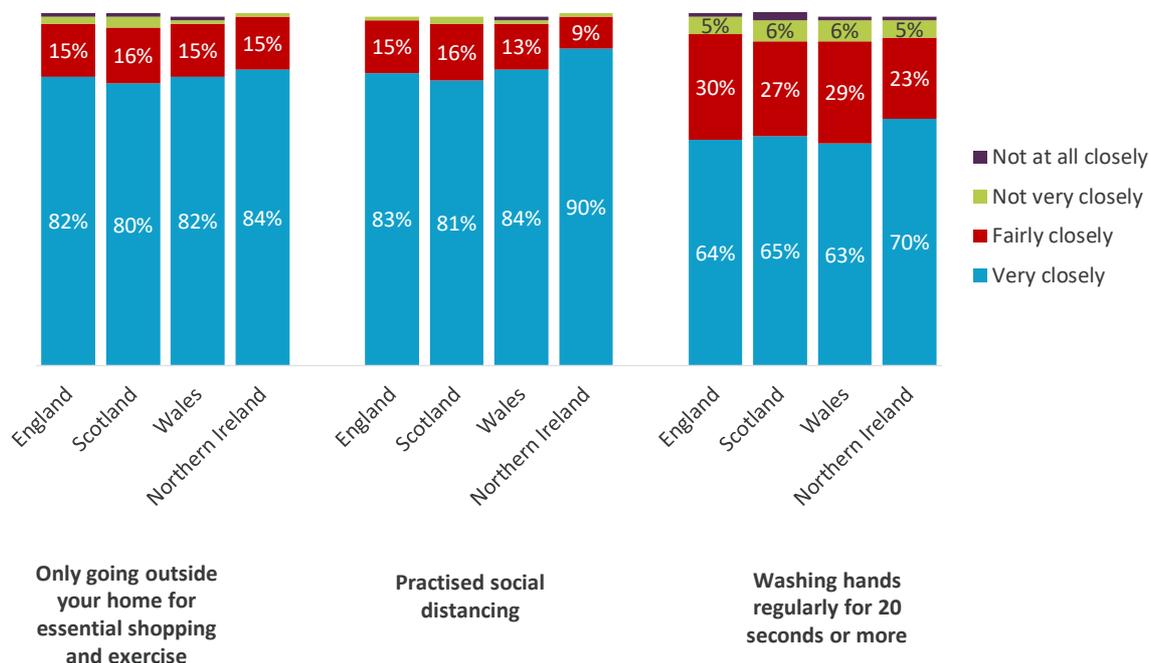
## Official advice about Covid-19

- People across the UK are broadly following government advice on Covid-19 to the same degree. Across the first four weeks of 'lockdown', virtually all respondents in each nation say they are (either very or fairly) closely following the official advice of practising social distancing (England 98%, Scotland 98%, Wales 97% and Northern Ireland 99%), only going outside for essential things (England 97%, Scotland 96%, Wales 97% and Northern Ireland 99%) and washing hands regularly (England 94%, Scotland 92%, Wales 92% and Northern Ireland 93%) (see Figure 2).

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<sup>2</sup> As the statement *'theories linking the origins or causes of Covid-19 to 5G technology'* was only introduced into the survey for weeks 3 and 4, base sizes are insufficient to analyse responses by nation.

Figure 2: Extent to which people are closely following official advice (waves one to four combined)



Source: Ofcom Covid-19 news survey, March-April 2020. Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding. Q13. In the last week, how closely would you say you are following official advice on the following aspects of Coronavirus? Base: All respondents Weeks 1-4, England (7191), Scotland (689), Wales (445) and Northern Ireland (295)

## Attitudes towards Covid-19 and media coverage

- BBC TV is one of the most trusted broadcasters for information on Covid-19 across the nations (England 78%, Scotland 76%, Wales 78% and Northern Ireland 79%). However, in Scotland, STV (81%) is the most trusted broadcaster; in Northern Ireland, it is UTV (80%) and in Wales, it is ITV Wales (80%). Social media and closed groups are the least trusted media for information on Covid-19 – Facebook is trusted by 15% of respondents in England, Scotland 14%, Wales 13% and Northern Ireland 14%, whilst Twitter is trusted by 24% of respondents in England and 28% of respondents in Scotland<sup>3</sup>.
- Respondents in Scotland (12%) were less likely to say they were ‘*confused about what they should be doing in response to Covid-19*’ compared to respondents in England (16%) and Wales (19%). They were also less likely to say that ‘*the mainstream media is exaggerating the seriousness of Covid-19*’ (14%) than respondents in England and Wales (both 19%). In addition, respondents in Northern Ireland (13%) were less likely to say this than their counterparts in England.

<sup>3</sup> Base sizes are too low to provide comparisons for Wales and Northern Ireland.