

# Local news and media in the UK

Qualitative consumer research report  
July 2024



community  
research

*Bringing the voices of communities into the heart of organisations*



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# 1. Executive summary

## 1.1 Research approach

- In early 2024, Community Research conducted research with the public on behalf of Ofcom to explore use of and attitudes towards local media. This consisted of a three-week 100-person online forum, followed by online focus groups with around half the forum participants. The research also included six face-to-face group discussions, which included some digitally-disadvantaged or excluded<sup>1</sup> participants.

## 1.2 Defining local media

- When it came to identifying what made news and information feel truly local, there was general agreement that a thorough understanding of the local context to ensure an accurate portrayal of the area was the most important factor overall.
- The geographic size of the area that people perceived as 'local' depended on the media source and type of news and information sought.
- Most people were confident that they could get relevant news and information about where they lived through the range of media sources available to them, and that their local area was represented and fairly portrayed. Nations/regions TV and radio were felt to be less relevant to an immediate local area but people still saw value in the broader offer.
- It was only after some consideration that a minority identified that there may be some gaps in the provision of local news and information. These perceived gaps in provision were thought to be 'mid-local' i.e. city/town/village/rural area (as opposed to a more specific local neighbourhood or wider county/region level) and were sometimes connected to investigative journalism.

## 1.3 Usage and value of local media

- People tended to use multiple sources of media for local news and information, with social media the most common platform. Facebook was by far the most commonly used.
- The local content that people valued most was weather, news and current affairs (local politics, crime, and updates on planning decisions and proposed developments impacting their area) and traffic and travel.
- Consumption habits varied across the sample, but TV and newspapers tended to be more actively consumed compared to radio, which was consumed more passively. Those consuming local news via social media were initially active in the curation of their feeds (i.e. following specific pages for which they were interested in seeing new content) and then scrolling through other suggestions made by the social media site in a more passive way (i.e. only clicking if it piqued their interest).

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<sup>1</sup> Individuals who have no or limited use of digital sources due to age/income/confidence.

- Ultimately, local media was valued not only for its content but, on consideration, for the role it played in building a sense of community cohesion – bringing people together and enabling them to become more involved in their communities.

#### 1.4 Drivers for using different local media sources and perceptions of trust

- Online was the most popular platform for local media due to its convenience, 'live' nature and ability to focus on people's more immediate local area. Online sources were also appreciated for potentially offering more entertainment, interaction, and opportunities for personalisation.
- More traditional platforms such as TV, radio and print newspapers were sought for a broader picture and for their perceived accuracy. Beyond this, TV was also chosen for providing a relaxing, collective viewing experience; while radio was liked for its convenience.
- All participants used multiple different sources of local media; their choice of source in different situations was dependant on context, their habits and which source was seen as most appropriate to their particular information need at the time.
- Audiences were most likely to trust traditional media platforms (TV, radio, newspapers) to provide accurate reporting; however, views were more nuanced than this suggests:
  - BBC online news was also highly trusted, in part because of wider trust in the BBC but also because of the perception that it did not contain sensationalist stories.
  - In some instances, people trusted social media more than other platforms, if they were familiar with the person commenting or were confident that misinformation would be called-out.
- Overall, people were largely prepared to sacrifice accuracy for having instant access to up-to-date information in certain situations, and the majority were furthermore confident in their own abilities to filter and judge the veracity of online sources.

#### 1.5 Views of changes to local media landscape and its impact

- People recognised that they were more likely to access their local news via online sources and less likely to read printed newspapers (and potentially watch regional TV bulletins) than they may have done in the past. Some people had also noticed that there had been some consolidation with local newspapers and radio stations which they felt could impact ability to deliver of local news.
- The perceived benefits of online news sources and social media, especially relevance and the fact that they are so up-to-date, were very top-of-mind to participants. While they identified some potential downsides of these sources in terms of trust and accuracy, they thought these benefits outweighed the risks.
- On balance, by using a range of sources, including on social media as well as on more traditional platforms, most people believed that they had access to news

and information that was important to their local area and that they were happy with the quality and quantity of that news. Most were either unconcerned about the decline of traditional media or acknowledged that it might lead to some issues but felt that it was inevitable given societal changes.

- The main concerns about the decline in traditional media related to the potential risk of missing important news stories, primarily due to:
  - their own consumption habits meaning that they typically only saw a narrower range of stories that appeared in their social media feeds;
  - some stories no longer being reported on; or,
  - potential geographic gaps in coverage.

Some pointed to the potential impact on local democracy if those in power were not being held to account as a result. In addition, a minority were very worried about the impact this decline could have on social cohesion. However, even those who expressed a desire to see more investigative local journalism had little appetite to pay for it.

- Very few had previously been aware of the BBC's plans to reduce funding for local radio in England and invest in online services, but upon learning about the plans, most were either actively positive or neutral. For those who were positive, it seemed like a sensible direction of travel – that it made sense for the BBC to spend less on a platform where there were declining audiences, and more on a platform that was growing. Some also hoped that the increased investment in local investigative journalism may plug the identified gaps in this area. However, there was also some concern about radio listeners losing out and whether the changes would make a tangible difference at all.



## 2. Background and approach

### 2.1 Background

Local media plays an important role in the lives of audiences and citizens across the UK. Ofcom research shows that half of adults say that knowing what is going on in their local area is a reason they follow news<sup>2</sup> and 92% of adults use local news or information.<sup>3</sup> Local media provides audiences with news and information about what is happening in their local areas, helps build social cohesion and engagement among communities and supports local democracy. However, as more people have turned online for local news and information, local media providers, including the BBC, are having to adapt their local offerings beyond traditional broadcast and print.

Ofcom has a duty to further the interests of citizens and consumers, as well as maintain sufficient plurality of providers of different TV and radio services, and to secure the availability of a wide range of high-quality broadcast services. Ofcom is also obliged to promote the fulfilment of the purposes of public service broadcasting, in addition to duties relating to local TV, commercial local radio and community radio services. It is within this context that Ofcom is looking at the provision, role and value of local media in the UK, and commissioned research to build on its current understanding of what audiences need and value from local services.

### 2.2 Research objectives

Community Research was commissioned to conduct a large qualitative study that aimed to explore audience motivations, understand the decision-making process behind the selection of local media providers, and gain greater insight into areas including social value and what makes something 'feel' local.

Specifically, there were five core areas the research aimed to cover:

- **Attitudes and perceptions** – to understand audience expectations of local media and how well these are being met, as well as the impact of changes to the sectors.
- **Trust** – to understand what makes providers trustworthy, how perceptions differ between providers and how trust impacts audience expectations.
- **Representation and portrayal** – to understand what makes something 'feel' local and how important it is to audiences that content is sourced and broadcast from the local area, as well as the extent to which audiences believe they are represented and authentically portrayed.
- **Local news preferences and substitution between providers** – to understand how people discover and consume local news, why they use the routes

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<sup>2</sup> [Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2023](#); 50% of respondents identified 'to know what's going on in my local area' as a reason they followed news.

<sup>3</sup> [Ofcom Local Media Survey 2023](#)

they use, and reasons for preferences between the BBC and commercial online sources and the extent to which they are substitutes.

- **Social cohesion and local engagement** – to understand how local media contributes to a feeling of community and belonging and to what extent it leads to increased engagement with local community.

## 2.3 Approach

In order to meet the objectives, a multi-stage research approach was designed, consisting of:

- An online forum with 100 local media users, which included:
  - One-week diary task to record seven days of local media consumption.
  - Two-week forum including polling, discussions and individual tasks, exploring attitudes and behaviours in relation to local media.
- Online focus groups with 48 reconvened forum participants:
  - Eight 90-minute groups conducted after the online forum to explore specific research areas including community cohesion, local democracy and the BBC's changes to its local radio programming and online output.
- Face-to-face focus groups with 33 participants:
  - Six two-hour groups each with four to six participants which covered similar content to the online forum (albeit in a condensed fashion).
  - These participants did not take part in the online forum but completed a paper-based diary task to record their local media consumption.

Fieldwork took place during February and March 2024.

## Sample

The 100 online forum participants were recruited to ensure a demographic and geographic mix. Minimum quotas were set to ensure a good spread of age, gender, socio-economic group and location across the UK. The sample specification was also designed to ensure the inclusion of sufficient numbers of parents, people with disabilities or long-term health conditions and people from minority ethnic groups. Quotas were also put in place to ensure a broad range of behaviours in relation to local media consumption (and to ensure that the qualitative sample loosely reflected the incidence of these behaviours in [Ofcom's Local Media survey](#) as a whole).

The participants of the six face-to-face groups were similarly recruited to ensure a mix of demographic characteristics and local media consumption behaviours. The sample included a small number of people who were digitally disadvantaged or excluded. The group conducted in Wales was with Welsh language speakers and conducted in Welsh.

For the online and offline fieldwork, anyone not consuming any local media regularly (at least monthly) was excluded as were those working in the media sector.

A full sample breakdown is provided [in the appendices](#).

## 2.4 A note on the research report

As this is a qualitative study, this research cannot – and does not set out to be – representative of the wider population. Instead, what we aimed to do was sample participants purposively in order to highlight a diverse range of views and circumstances. When analysing the data, we were not seeking to establish prevalence – as with a quantitative survey – but rather to understand what underpinned people’s experiences. The online forum did include some polling to quickly ascertain the spread of people’s experiences and views. These findings have been used to inform the tables and charts that are presented in this report.

It is worth noting that, in contrast to quantitative research (which provides a broad understanding of the population at large), qualitative research provides depth and granularity to gain insight into people’s lives, thinking, and motivations. This can be used as evidence to develop hypotheses and inferences about where local media fits in people’s lives. In the report, we aim to distinguish between what participants said and did, and any inferences that we – as researchers – draw from the evidence.

Throughout the report, quotes have been included to illustrate particular viewpoints. It is important to remember that the views expressed do not always represent the views of all who participated.

Finally, we recognise that the news and information provided by nations/regions TV and radio programming stretches beyond news bulletins. However, for the purpose of this research, participants were asked to focus on nations/regions news bulletins when considering local news and information.



### 3. Defining local media

This section sets out what people regard as being local in the context of local media.

#### Section summary

- The geographic size of the area that people perceive as 'local' varies according to media source and type of news and information sought.
- Most felt they could get relevant news and information about where they lived through the range of media sources available to them, and that their local area was represented and fairly portrayed. Nations/regions TV and BBC and local commercial radio were felt to be less relevant to their immediate local area but it was recognised that their broader offer was still valuable.
- Gaps in provision were not top of mind for most people and were only identified by a minority of participants. These perceived gaps related to a decline in investigative journalism or geographic gaps at the 'mid-local' level i.e. city/town/village/rural area (as opposed to a more specific local neighbourhood or wider county/region level). See [Section 6](#) for more detail.

#### 3.1 What is 'local'?

The size of the area people considered to be local expanded and contracted depending on the nature of news and information being sought, whether people lived in an urban or rural area, and the extent to which people commuted for work and leisure. People in rural areas typically alluded to a more expansive geographic area as being local.

*Living in Cornwall means that local can be anything in the county, whereas city dwellers could define local as being a very small area in comparison. As I travel around the county anything within a 50 mile radius of my home could impact on my life. Therefore I take an interest in media coverage within the county.*

Woman, 55-64, South West, England

*I believe that local can actually be split into two subject areas. The first is very local, in my case being the village I live in, and second the city and county area. Occasionally, I suppose, I would consider that local could include a third area which would be the East Midlands, depending on the news story.*

Man, 65+, East Midlands, England

The views of those living in the devolved nations differed slightly from those in England when it came to their views of what was 'local' to them. Those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland valued the news that covered their whole nation (most commonly political updates) in addition to news and information that was more specific to a particular geographical area. Although there was some debate, most agreed that this whole nation content could also be considered 'local' content. This is an additional tier

of 'local-ness' that was not evident amongst participants in England, who did not consider news about England or sometimes even their television region to be 'local'.

*Local means different things to me depending upon the subject. If it is something like weather, car boot sales or other community news, local means within a perhaps a 10-mile radius and I tend to get that information from the local (town) newspaper or Facebook/Nextdoor social media. Then there are the local area items – for this I would consider it to be Tayside, so Perth, Dundee, Northeast Fife and Highland (up to perhaps Pitlochry)... so perhaps a 20-mile radius. This would be things like weather, travel, council news. Then there is another level of local – BIG news such as national politics and environmental issues. For this level, I would consider local to be Scotland-wide.*

Woman, 45-54, Scotland

### Expectations of 'local' by media source

People were further asked how wide an area they expected different types of media to cover. As seen in [Ofcom's Local Media survey](#), nations/regions TV was seen to cover the widest area (most commonly their nation/region or county), followed by nations/regions radio (most commonly their county), followed by local newspapers (which were most likely to be seen as covering their nearest town or city). Social media forums and messaging apps were seen to cover the smallest geographical area (usually their nearest town/city, or their street/neighbourhood/village). Accordingly, people selected different local media sources for different types of content – they would use TV/radio for 'bigger' political or current affairs stories, and local newspapers or social media for community news. This is summarised in Figure 1.

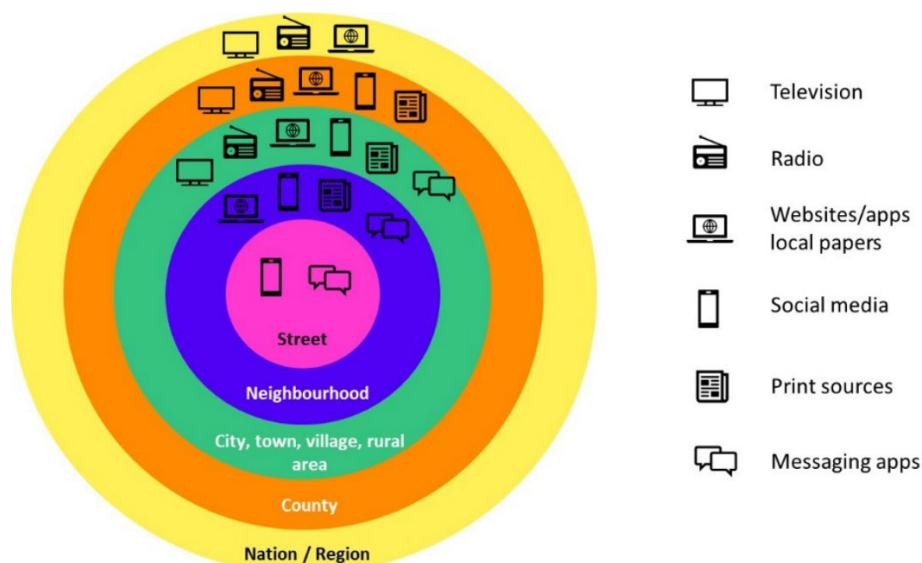


Figure 1: Geography of different media sources

The perceived relevance of a media source was directly linked to the size of the geographic area covered, with social media/messaging apps and local newspapers

most likely to be considered extremely relevant to people's immediate areas (and TV and radio less so).

*Social media feels very local, as there are groups dedicated to the town you live in and people in the community post in it too, giving a big local feel.*

Man, 35-44, East Midlands, England.

Those living in less urban areas or in 'in-between' spots (for example on a county border or between two television regions) tended to feel that their areas were less likely to be covered on TV or radio. In one of the face-to-face groups conducted, people living in the same town were viewing content from different television regions, and neither region felt particularly relevant to them. Equally, big cities were seen to dominate the local news with less coverage of things happening in towns and villages. However, the vast majority – even the digitally disadvantaged or excluded – felt that they were able to get enough local news and information from somewhere.

*I would like to see at least one news story from my local area whether it's good or bad. If the news is about just Manchester or Preston then I start to lose interest.*

Man, 35-44, North West, England

## What other factors make something feel local?

Beyond the size of the geographical area covered (with the smallest geographical area naturally feeling most local), there was a mix of views when it came to identifying what contributed to making news and information feel truly local, but different factors ranged in importance as illustrated in Figure 2.

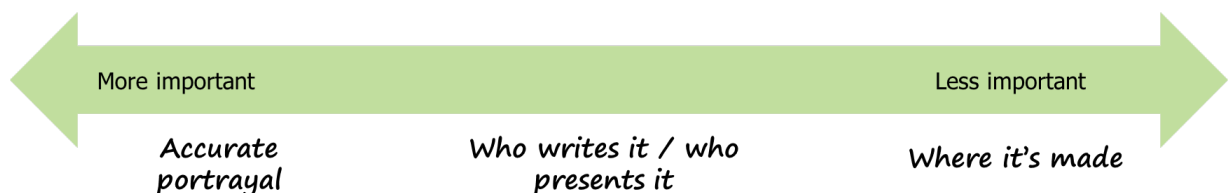


Figure 2: Factors important to making content feel local

The majority agreed that the most important factor was accurately portraying an area – that errors weren't made because of a lack of detailed local knowledge and understanding. For example, it was important that local place names were correctly pronounced, and that journalists were able to identify and understand the local context sufficiently. Some thought that a good journalist with the right training could research and deliver accurate news for any area, while others thought that this was not sufficient.

*Local news presenters can and do at times add to the story by expressing their own feelings (hopes and concerns) about certain stories. Conversely, news items that seem to miss key points or get some facts wrong highlight that those*

*reporting the story are not from the local area, as a local would have been more aware of the facts.*

Man, 45-54, North East, England

*As long as it is presented/written accurately from a knowledgeable source. I think it's about the small nods to the area, such as favourite brands we consume, sayings/expressions we usually say in the area and local people/companies which are situated/famous in the area too. These touches make you feel like it's coming from a local's perspective and so more familiar and endearing.*

Man, 35-44, East Midlands, England

In Northern Ireland, people cautioned that having a good knowledge of the local context was particularly important, and felt that journalists needed this to do a good job and ask the right questions. Without this local understanding of the complex political context, significant references made in passing could be missed.

*There's a programme on [BBC] Radio Ulster in the morning and they give news and they do interviews and there's [a presenter who is not from the local area] and they actually interview people and they haven't got the knowledge, in my opinion, to ask the questions. The questions that they are asking, actually, they're not relevant to the topic and it's because they haven't got the background for here.*

Face-to-face group, Belfast, Northern Ireland

Relatedly, many felt that the person writing or presenting a local news story should live in the local area (some thought they should have been raised and brought up locally; others felt it did not matter as long as they had sufficient knowledge of an area through their lived experience).

A presenter's accent mattered to some people to help cement a feeling of 'local-ness'. Welsh-speaking participants and a small number of participants in Scotland highlighted the importance of language and were intentionally consuming nations/regions BBC in Welsh/Gaelic – these stories did not necessarily cover their own local areas, but the use of language added to that feeling of 'local-ness'. Also, they commented that these stories might be framed differently from the English versions produced by the BBC, or completely different stories might be included, bringing a more local perspective on the issues of the day.

*My husband likes comparing how stories are covered on BBC Wales and BBC Cymru, and he reckons on BBC Wales, stories are often not covered or given a different slant.*

Face-to-face group, Llandeilo, Wales

*Because Radio nan Gàidheal's BBC, so there's usually a fair amount of similar stories but there's definitely more of a Highlands and Islands emphasis.*

Face to face group, Falkirk, Scotland

Where a programme or newspaper was made was important to a substantial minority, who felt it was important to keep jobs in the local area. However, this mattered less to others, who weren't necessarily aware of where a newspaper is based and were only concerned that the content itself was relevant and accurately portrayed their area. Some suggested that ownership could also impact on how local stories were selected and whether they were the most relevant to the local community.

*I believe the person should live close by or within the local area or county at least. There is nothing more cringey than a news presenter or radio presenter getting the pronunciation wrong on townlands or names of villages etc. I don't believe where it is printed has as much of an effect though.*

Man, 25-34, Northern Ireland

Overall, people had mixed views about the extent to which their local area was represented and fairly and accurately portrayed in local media. However, on balance most people were confident that they could get sufficient local news and information through the range of media sources available to them.

## 4. Usage and value of local media

This section sets out how people were using local media, in terms of both the sources they used, and the kinds of information they consumed. It also highlights the value of local media.

### Section summary

- Multiple sources of local news and information were consumed. Sources on social media were the most commonly used.
- Local weather, local news and current affairs and traffic and travel were the types of content most highly valued.
- On the whole, TV and newspapers tended to be more actively consumed compared to radio, which was consumed more passively. Those consuming local news via social media were initially active, following specific pages, but then scrolled through other suggestions made by the social media site in a more passive way.
- Local media was valued not only for its content but, on consideration, for the role it played in building a sense of community cohesion enabling involvement and participation.

### 4.1 People use multiple sources of local media<sup>4</sup>

Most people tended to use multiple sources of media for local news and information. According to participants' diaries, social media was the most common platform for local media stories over the course of the week's exercise.

Facebook was by far the most commonly used social media site, with relatively fewer mentions of X (formerly Twitter), Reddit, Nextdoor and Instagram. On Facebook, users were following a range of community groups and online newspapers, with 'Spotted' groups<sup>5</sup> also referenced fairly frequently. Although it was mentioned less, Facebook was still used by younger users. X (formerly Twitter) was commonly used for breaking news, although recent changes to the platform had led some to use it less than they had previously.

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<sup>4</sup> Please note that participants to the research were recruited to quota in order to ensure a good representation of media consumption. As such, these findings should not be seen to be indicative of wider population behaviours, but be used to provide context for the following research insights.

<sup>5</sup> Spotted groups are moderated local community groups on Facebook which allow posts giving local information and also commentary on local issues.



*Facebook is where I get local information. I follow the local paper and local area pages. This way I see content that's super local as often things don't go on the main news outlets. I live in the Highlands and so this is the best area to source local information from people in the local area.*

Woman, 25-34, Scotland

After social media, the sources that were most mentioned in media diaries, in order of frequency, were online versions of the local newspaper, BBC nations/regions radio, BBC nations/regions TV bulletins and BBC online news.

People were also aware that a greater use of streaming services meant that they were less reliant on scheduled TV – and possibly watching fewer nations/regions news bulletins as a result. As they became used to seeing the content they wanted 'on-demand', the idea of sitting down at a particular time to watch nations/regions news, although still important for some, was less appealing for others. Equally, when accessing the news, people typically wanted it to be 'up-to-date' or 'live' which meant that catch-up services, or weekly newspapers, were not appropriate. They were more likely to use specific apps for weather and traffic and travel, so were less reliant on traditional media platforms.

Observations from the media diaries suggested some differences by demographic, with older participants more likely to watch nations/regions TV news bulletins and less likely to use social media forums than younger participants. Participants in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales were more likely to consume BBC nations/regions radio and TV than those in England.

Printed versions of local newspapers were less frequently mentioned. This was attributed to a number of factors including the limited number of places where newspapers could be picked up and perceived high cost of paid-for local printed newspapers; the perceived lack of newsworthy content in free local newspapers; but also, the perceived benefits of online alternatives.

*I used to read more of our Chronicle newspaper but that seems now totally obsolete – I like to know about the news 'live', so people commenting every 10 minutes about how the traffic on a certain road is, or on Cheshire Live or Manchester Evening News which gives live updates as soon as it receives them. I suppose I like to really 'follow' the news rather than read a one-off article or conclusion article. That's what has changed as it's now far more accessible.*

Woman, 25-34, North West, England

## 4.2 Local media sources provide a range of valued content

The local content that people were most likely to feel was important was weather, news and current affairs, traffic and travel, and information about local events (see Figure 3).

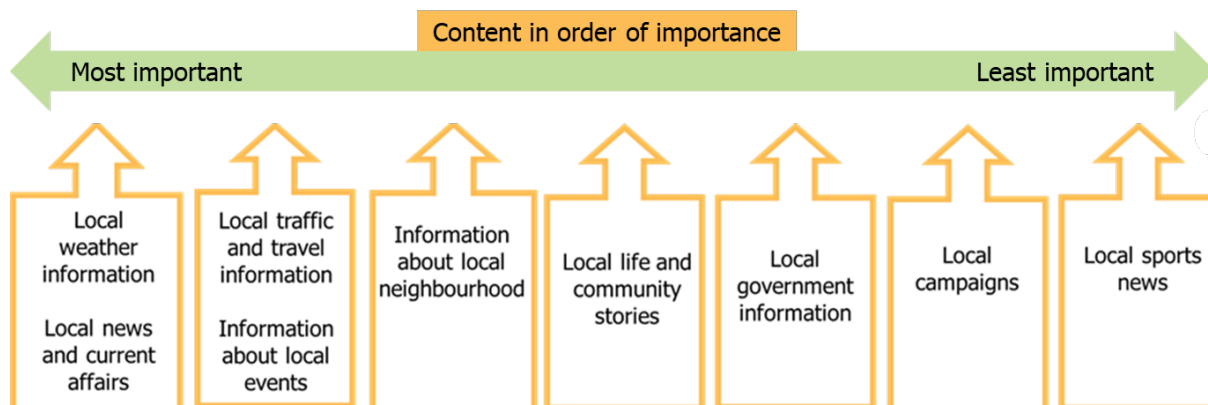


Figure 3: Prompted responses (showing the order of perceived importance by participants on the forum)

Weather and traffic and travel information were felt to be particularly important as this type of content helped determine daily behaviours (for example, routes to work or what to wear).

*I value the traffic and weather news the most because it has a direct effect on my day-to-day activities and helps me plan my day and the activities I do during that day.*

Man, 65+, North West, England

Local news and current affairs were also highly valued by people and spontaneous responses suggested that within this there were specific areas of interest for some. In order of frequency:

- **Local crime:** Throughout the discussions, news about local crime featured highly. The information was considered important because it could help people understand what the local issues were, and if and how they were being addressed. For some, news about crime also highlighted which areas of a town or city to avoid in order to stay safe. Several people suggested that following the activities in the local courts was also relatively easy for journalists to do and they perceived it to be a relatively cost-effective way to produce stories for the local paper. Although some people thought that information about local crime was important, there was broad concern that crime might be sensationalised and used as 'clickbait'.
- **Local politics:** This includes local issues relating to council decisions and how national issues may play out at a local or regional/national level, for example within healthcare, education or the environment. In Northern Ireland, it was also suggested that it could be interesting to get a national (i.e. Northern Irish) perspective on international news and current affairs. Political news was valued because it gave people a sense of what was happening locally and also helped them to get a sense of how other people felt about the issues.

*I like to hear a general mix of what's going on and I'm always especially interested to hear about education/healthcare. I like to have a breakdown of how*

*UK or Scotland-wide policy changes transfer to my local area and what it might mean for me and my family.*

Woman, 45-54, Scotland

*I like to see stories about local events and also discussion of local problems and the response of local authorities. I also like to see reports on how local services are being delivered and how efficient these services are to address identified issues.*

Man, 65+, Wales

- **Local planning information:** Some participants were interested in finding out about planning applications and decisions but also news about planned housing developments or infrastructure projects impacting the local area.

Another key area of interest to people was information about the local neighbourhood and, more specifically, people mentioned news and information about local amenities such as amended opening hours of shops/other facilities; new parking restrictions; business start-ups/closures. This type of information was welcomed because, as well as providing an update on what was happening locally, it enabled people to make/adjust plans as necessary.

*I like to hear about decent small businesses I can support. I also like to hear about anything criminal and dangerous as there are always good and bad parts of London and I like to avoid problems.*

Woman, 35-44, London, England

Local campaigns (such as fundraising campaigns for local charities and community-led campaigns to fix potholes) were not rated as particularly important at an individual level compared to other types of content, but for some, low awareness of local campaigns was a cause for concern. People gave examples of when they had heard about a campaign relatively late and would have got more involved sooner if they had known.

Local sport was probably one of the most polarising types of local content. Those who valued it, valued it highly, while others said they did not care, or only cared about national sport. Local sports fans thought that making results available via local media was important for publicising the existence of local clubs to raise awareness and build interest.

*I would miss local sports coverage. My main interest is running. This doesn't really get covered in the national media and local events certainly won't be covered.*

Man, 55-64, North East, England

The importance that people placed on the different types of content provided by local media was further evidenced by analysis of participants' diaries which indicated that

weather, local news and current affairs, and traffic and travel were also the most commonly consumed content over the course of the week that the diary was kept, as indicated in Figure 4.

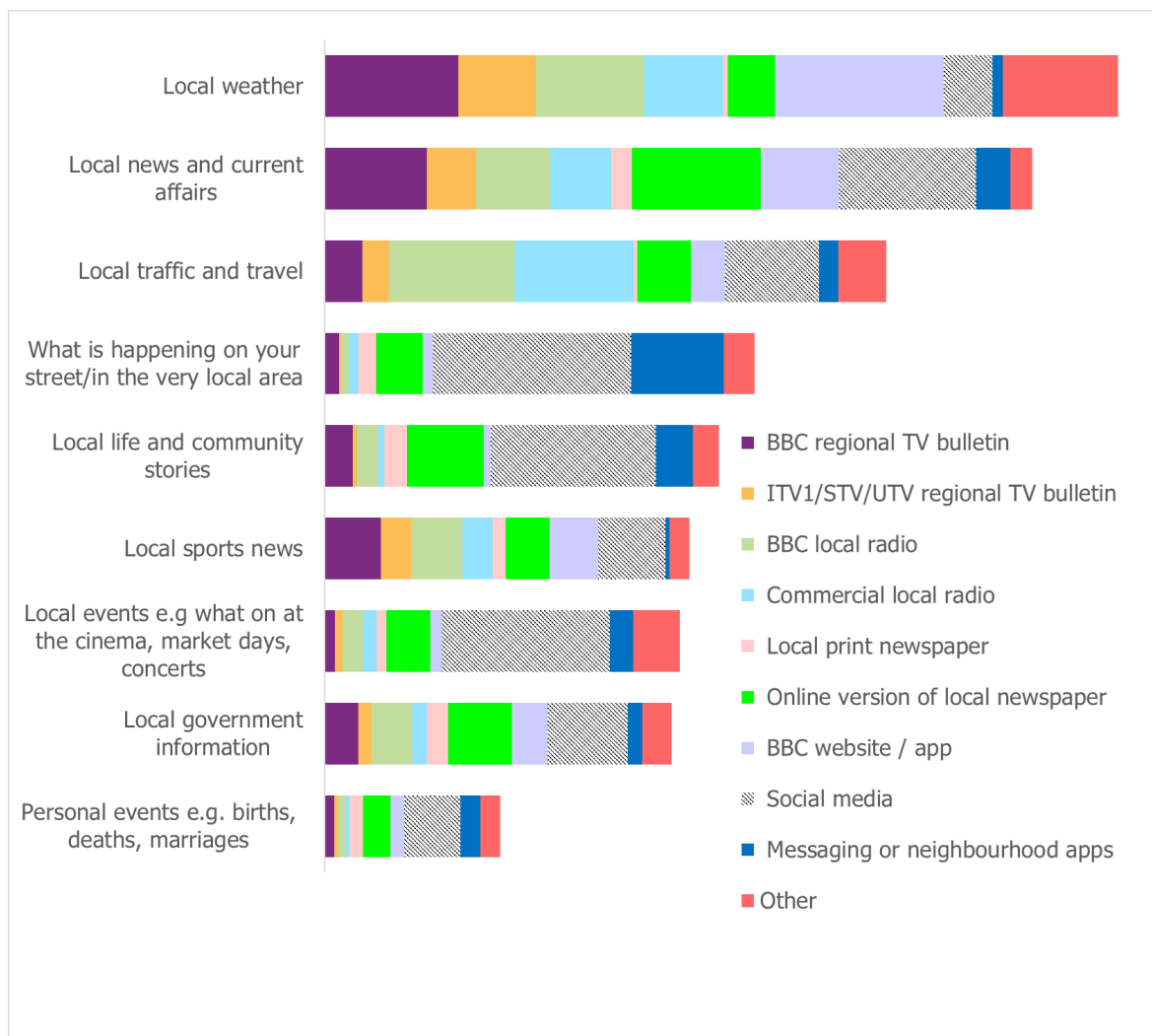


Figure 4: Proportion of mentions when participants asked to log all local media stories consumed over the course of a week

Figure 4 also shows the high usage of online sources and social media across the different types of local media content, with messaging or neighbourhood apps of limited use beyond finding out what is happening on the street/the very local area. Specific mentions of using Nextdoor related to finding out about local events, road closures and updates on planned developments in the area. Nextdoor was dismissed by some as it was thought to be dominated by lost pets and complaints about low-level nuisance behaviours.

Across different types of content, people also indicated that they turned to a range of 'other' sources. For example, the Met Office app was popular for local weather, transport providers' websites were used for travel information and leaflets, posters and word of mouth were sources of information for local events.

[Section 5](#) explores in more detail the drivers for using different sources.

### 4.3 A mix of consumption habits and routines were apparent

Analysis of media diaries showed that people typically consumed a number of media sources in a variety of different ways, but all (bar those digitally-disadvantaged or excluded) used online local media in some form.

- Many (around two fifths) consumed online sources and had established routines in relation to how they watched nations/regions TV bulletins and/or listened nations/regions radio.
  - For example, sitting down to watch the breakfast or evening news, having the radio on as company during the day, listening to the nations/regions radio while driving in order to receive traffic updates.
  - Typically, those who regularly watched nations/regions TV tended to be older (aged over 50).
- A similar proportion frequently used online sources but only consumed nations/regions TV and/or nations/regions radio news (or less often, a print newspaper) on an ad hoc basis.
  - Any established routines tended to be in relation to when they checked online sources i.e. first thing in the morning.
- The remaining participants relied solely on online sources and social media for their local news.
  - Typically these tended to be aged under 50.

### Exploring active vs. passive consumption of local media

The research also sought to understand the extent to which people were actively or passively using local media. Nations/regions TV news bulletins and printed newspapers seemed to be more actively consumed, with people reporting making a conscious decision to catch up on the local news by purchasing or picking up a local paper or making sure they switched on the TV. In contrast, nations/regions radio news bulletins could be consumed more passively by some people, as it was part of their routine (for example listening in the car) or because the main driver for listening was for music.

For those accessing local news and information through Facebook, their volume of consumption depended on what appeared on their feed: if there happened to be an interesting story, they might follow a link to the newspaper website to read more, or they might view the discussion within Facebook. However, if less local content of interest appeared they would spend time looking at other posts instead. Many were part of local Facebook groups where people would post local updates or link to relevant articles, thus curating local news and information. Others followed local newspapers but commented that this could result in seeing regional stories that might be less relevant.

People described how they purposively chose what they followed initially but then become much more passive in their consumption. Most active searches related to information which directly affected them i.e., local events, weather, traffic or crime.

They did search more widely however, if something piqued their interest or if they wanted to corroborate information by checking several sources.

*I don't usually search for info unless there is a particular subject in the news that I want more info on. Then I might Google it. Otherwise, I would follow links on the original posts which would usually be from sites that I follow on Facebook or BBC news headlines that have popped up when I start up the computer.*

Woman, 65+, West Midlands, England

#### 4.4 Exploring the role of local media in informing behaviours and opinions

Local media, on any platform, informed people's behaviours and opinions. In terms of behaviours, it provided information which helped people plan their day – for example, what to wear based on the weather forecast or which routes to take based on traffic updates – and also informed future behaviours such as plans for the weekend.

In terms of opinions, local media helped inform people about local issues that interested them, such as changes to NHS services, planned developments in their neighbourhoods or local petitions and campaigns. Some highlighted that having a plethora of local media sources available also empowered people to further investigate and share opinions on news and information that was important to them.

*I think that you become more empowered. People are more empowered themselves with their mobile phones now. We're all our own investigators now.*

Woman, 45-54, North East, England

That said, some were also concerned that this could lead to people believing information that is based on conjecture rather than fact.

#### 4.5 Exploring the value of local media in relation to community cohesion

Although it was not always top of mind, people recognised and valued local media's impact on community. It was seen to help instil a sense of cohesion in a number of ways:

- **Creating a sense of connection:** Some suggested that local media makes up for the loss of face-to-face interactions that they felt was occurring in society generally. They attributed the lack of face-to-face interactions to fewer people having the time to chat to their neighbours and spend time in their communities, as they navigated busy lives. As such, they saw local media playing a role by ensuring people could keep abreast of what was happening in the local area. This, in turn, could provide a conversation (virtual or in-person) with family, friends, neighbours and strangers.

*I think it helps people to feel that they belong to the area if they know what is going on. It helps if they can then offer comment or talk to their neighbours about it. My dad lives in our village, but isn't on social media. I get him the local magazine/newsletter which is produced every two months, and he reads that to give him an idea of what is going on locally. It helps him to be able to talk to his*



*other carers about what is happening. If he didn't have that I think he would feel rather lost.*

Woman, 45-54, South West, England

*I would say it's extremely important due to how wide ranging my community is with different people, religions and cultures which all need to have a voice that needs to be heard but also they need to be kept in the loop about what is happening around them.*

Man, 18-24, West Midlands, England

A few people also valued the availability of local information online which enabled them to stay in touch with local news in other parts of the country. This was especially important for people who had moved away from the area where they had grown up, as it helped them to stay in touch with what was happening and, in some instances, pass on news and information to older relatives who may not be able to access this online information.

Some who had recent experience of moving into an area also felt that local media could help people integrate into their communities, and they shared examples of how they themselves had found events and social activities to attend via local media (in particular posts on social media) that had enabled them to quickly settle in and find others with similar interests.

*Living in Devon is a strange place, they used to look at people moving to the area as "incomers" and were never totally accepted years ago, but now things have changed and I feel that local media has played a part in this as the local media does allow everyone to know what is happening in and around our area, and the residents that are new to this can and do get involved in the local attractions and the local clubs and things like bingo and quiz nights so that they can integrate into the local area easily.*

Woman, 45-54, South West, England

Some also suggested that local media could help people find new connections as they experience life events, for example having a baby and finding mother and baby groups.

*I think access to local news and information has a massive impact on people's sense of belonging to a community. It makes us feel as one and allows us to support one another.*

Woman, 25-34, London, England

- **Encouraging people to get involved:** It was widely believed that local media could encourage people to get involved and come together and to take part in things, for example, campaigning for change or attending local events.

*I think it has a large impact as local information such as community events is what brings people together, so it is really important for all locals to be able to access that type of information.*

Woman, 18-24, Scotland

*We have a residents' Facebook page that neighbours write in almost daily. I read a lot about what's going on in Nextdoor and Belfast Live. I found it made it easier to become part of the community and getting to know my neighbours easier. I was able to attend events, meet politicians, participate in things because of local media.*

Woman, 55-64, Northern Ireland

- **Instilling a sense of pride:** Some mentioned that local media has an important role to play in instilling pride in a local community by promoting positive stories and helping to combat negative perceptions of an area. This was particularly the case for a handful of people who felt that the area in which they lived was negatively portrayed regionally/nationally.

*It can also give you the good news for an area. Achievements by individuals, schools or businesses in a local area, which can bring a community together.*

Woman, 55-64, South East, England

*[Local media is] incredibly [important], as the area is often demonised, misrepresented and exaggerated in national news.*

Woman, 18-24, North West, England

- **Helping people feel safer:** Some identified local media's role in highlighting crimes as important for helping people feel safer, making them aware of crime hotspots and the actions being taken to combat local crime. However, others felt that overly focussing on crime could cause unnecessary fear.
- **Boosting local economy:** Some thought that local media could bring economic benefits that could give a 'boost' to the area (and the community). They felt that local media could help to stimulate a local economy by promoting local businesses and events that bring people into the area (to spend money). In addition, a minority thought that having a local newspaper or radio station situated in their town would result in jobs for local people.

## 5. Drivers for using different local media sources and perceptions of trust

This section sets out people's reasons for choosing different media sources for local news and information, and which are considered more or less trustworthy.

### Section summary

- Online sources of local media were used extensively on account of their convenience, 'live' nature and their scope to provide information on people's immediate area.
- Offline sources were used to give a broader picture and for their perceived accuracy. TV also provides a relaxing, collective viewing experience; while radio was liked for its convenience.
- Choices were contingent upon context, habits and which source was seen as most appropriate to the particular information need at that moment in time.
- Audiences were most likely to trust traditional media platforms (TV, radio, newspapers) to provide accurate reporting; however, BBC online news was also highly trusted and there were some circumstances where social media was more trusted than other platforms.
- People were prepared to make certain trade-offs and to sacrifice accuracy for access to instant information at times, and were generally confident in their ability to identify false information or fake news.

### 5.1 There are multiple drivers for using online local media sources

Online sources encompass websites, apps (including messaging apps) and social media. The main reasons people chose to use online sources are expanded on below:

- **Convenience:** Most chose to use online sources because of their convenience (e.g. the stories were just 'there' on their phones whenever they wanted them) and they weren't always around for the nations/regions TV and radio news bulletins. Additionally, they could read online sources multiple times and have time to take in information, which was of value to some.
- **Instant access:** Online information was believed to be more up-to-date, providing people with the latest and most recent updates on stories.

*You get the information much faster/instantaneously. It's also easier to click share to then pass on the information to other people. I like getting to see what other people comment on it, to get additional information or alternate opinions.*

Woman, 18-24, Scotland

- **Localised:** In contrast to traditional media sources, online sources were felt to be targeted to a more confined local area and therefore able to provide more

relevant detail. Online stories were also perceived as providing wider context including comments from people living in the local community or friends.

- **Participatory:** For some, the rolling nature of headlines satisfied an appetite for local news as a source of 'entertainment'. Online sources were also perceived to be different to other media as they enabled more interaction. This was both in terms of them being able to interact in the comments section – both with other residents and/or with decision makers in their areas – but also because they could easily share articles and clips with others.

*Since I was dragged, protesting, into the modern age I have not really looked back. News is in my hand, at my speed, when I want or need it, be it local, regional or national and I can share it at the click of a button too, if I think my nearest and dearest will find it relevant.*

Woman, 55-64, South East, England

- **Personalised:** Some said they liked using online sources as they had control over what they saw, because they could curate their own feeds and only click on stories of interest. However, people were not necessarily aware of how much local media they were consuming online, suggesting some of their online consumption was passive rather than active, and therefore driven more by algorithms than by their personal decisions.

Messaging apps, especially WhatsApp, were used for alerting a limited number of neighbours, family members, or common interest groups to specific community level news and information. They were essentially a means of bringing together a more trusted group.

*We never used to have a WhatsApp group or Facebook group page but now we do which is great because we have people in the community constantly updating us with what's going on, even if it's not the biggest news.*

Woman, 25-34, London, England

While many valued online sources highly (and to a lesser degree messaging apps), the more digitally-disadvantaged or excluded participants did not necessarily feel that they were missing out. They felt they had their own ways of finding out what was happening locally, mainly by talking to friends and family, listening to nations/regions radio, watching the nations/regions TV news, or by reading the local newspaper. The digitally-disadvantaged or excluded participants in this research seemed to have strong social networks. However, they suggested that those without such networks to keep them informed may have a different view.

### Exploring specific drivers for BBC online sources

Given the range of different types of commercial news online, there was felt to be a real contrast between BBC online and other online sources. People appreciated that the BBC provided content free from paywalls and advertising, which generally made for a more pleasant user experience. The BBC was also highlighted as having fewer

'sensationalist' stories, and people were confident that the information provided would be more likely to be fact checked than some other online sources. However, it was considered to cover a wider geographical area than some of the other online sources used, such as online versions of the local newspapers, and therefore information was generally perceived as less relevant from a local perspective.

A handful of individuals also mentioned the following points when comparing BBC online services to other commercial services:

- The BBC News app being more user friendly than the ITV equivalent.
- The lack of a comments section on most BBC online stories (some liked this about the BBC; others enjoyed seeing the interaction).

## 5.2 Drivers for using traditional local media sources vary by format

Broadly speaking, people who consumed media sources on traditional platforms felt that they offered a broader view or a different dimension to a news story that they might not have considered otherwise. Some people also placed greater trust in the accuracy of news and information from traditional media sources (particularly the BBC) which is explored in more detail in [Section 5.3](#). Beyond this, drivers for consuming traditional media sources highlighted some differences between television, radio and print newspapers.

### Television provides a collective experience in addition to valued content

Watching nations/regions TV news bulletins was often perceived as a relaxing, collective experience, and for some it was this experience as much as the content that was appreciated. Some participants described watching the news during downtime, for example, as part of a well-established evening routine that marked the end of a busy day. For others it was a less of a relaxation activity but more associated with an element of nostalgia, because of having done it during their childhood. Consumption of TV news was typically more of a social activity than radio or online news.

Amongst those who watched nations/regions TV news, a mix of behaviours were apparent: some actively sought out the news and ensured that they were watching at a specific time; others described only watching it if it happened to be on or because they occasionally chose to join other family members habitually watching it.

Nations/regions TV news bulletins were also somewhat appreciated for containing an element of 'good news'. Although good news stories were not always relevant to their specific local area, audiences appreciated seeing their wider communities celebrated.

People also liked being able to see what was happening on screen, for example, familiar presenters, the faces of people being interviewed, or even the visual of the weather maps or a local high street. These engaging visual elements were perceived to be missing from online coverage which would often only include still images.

*I do regularly watch BBC Newsline NI at 6:30 pm. [If it wasn't on,] I would feel that I was missing out on a collective news watching. I would also feel that I was missing out on the political commentary and discussion.*

Woman, 35-44, Northern Ireland

*TV enables you to see as well as listen to what is going on. It presents both sides of an issue. Look North has an entertaining presenter. I find the weather reports good and would miss those.*

Woman, 65+, East Midlands, England

## Exploring specific drivers for BBC and ITV/STV/UTV nations/regions TV news bulletins

BBC nations/regions TV news bulletins were felt to provide a more serious slant on news stories than ITV/STV/UTV equivalents, which were seen as being more light-hearted and a less in-depth at times. In Northern Ireland some perceived the BBC regions/nations news bulletins to be of higher quality than the alternatives.

*I do prefer to watch ITV because I feel like the presenters come across a lot more relatable by having more of a relaxed vibe even with some jokes and laughter.*

Woman, 18-24, West Midlands, England

*They [BBC] also tend to have more professional and well-informed speakers that come and discuss the topics, I think ITV news do have professional speakers but it's much more light-hearted in my opinion.*

Man, 25-34, London, England

*I feel BBC news covers more content of what goes on whereas I feel UTV news would do the basics within it.*

Man, 18-24, Northern Ireland

Beyond this, audiences saw little difference between BBC and ITV/STV/UTV nations/regions news bulletins in terms of content, with the exception of several participants in Scotland who mentioned that STV news bulletins felt more local than the BBC equivalent. In the group discussion in Falkirk, participants spoke of STV not covering the Scottish Borders and therefore news was more focussed on their area. In the online forum, several comments further alluded to news as being more specific to a region of Scotland.

*I watch STV over the BBC Scotland bulletins as it feels more authentically local.*

Woman, 45-54, Scotland

## Traffic and travel updates are a key reason for listening to local radio

Listeners to BBC nations/regions radio and commercial local radio stations had different drivers for choosing the stations they listened to. While local news and



current affairs content was often the main reason for people choosing to listen to BBC nations/regions radio, commercial local radio audiences were more likely to choose to listen primarily for the music. In both cases, traffic and travel updates were also important and people mainly listened while driving as it provided a convenient way of keeping up to date.

<i>BBC nations/regions radio</i>	<i>Commercial local radio</i>
1  Local news and current affairs	1  Music
2  Traffic & travel	2  Traffic & travel
3  Weather	3  Local news and current affairs
4  National news and current affairs	4  Weather
5  Music	5  National news and current affairs

Figure 5: Reasons for listening to local radio ranked in order

As well as radio providing a convenient means of receiving traffic updates, many people welcomed hearing about local news more generally – and a number of listeners were prompted to look further into a news story online after hearing it on the radio.

*I listen to the radio every morning on my way to work and not being able to know what's going on in my local community would make me feel more disconnected from it. It is so easy to listen on the radio as one can get on with other tasks whilst doing so. It would make a difference to me in the way that I would have to spend more time sitting down and reading the paper or reading things online – a more conscious effort to get the information.*

Woman, 45-54, South West, England

In addition to the content of local radio, people valued:

- Specific local presenters and hearing local voices and accents.
- Some local business advertising (more so than via other media) as it could make them aware of new shops opening.
- Some specifically valued the competitions on commercial local radio.
- The companionship – some said that they tuned in mainly for the music or for the company that talk shows provide (as opposed to for the news).

*Local radio has always been at the heart of the community, the likes of Tony Snell at BBC Radio Merseyside. I have him to ask the questions I want to know the answer to when it's about local issues...*

Man, 35-44, North West, England

*With more ads you tend to hear more of what's on locally, such as local events. Cool FM's presenters I also follow on social media so [I've] seen them promoting local events activities etc. on ads and social media.*

Woman, 35-44, Northern Ireland

A small group of people in the sample listened to community radio. They valued it because it was hyper-local and was perceived to give a platform to those who otherwise might not have one. It was also felt to be fun and the presenters were considered less constrained compared to other stations.

*Bolton FM is a great local radio station which has regular local community stories and debates, music, quizzes and goes out on the road to visit and report on local issues that matter to local people.... I do get the feeling that Bolton FM really cares about its local community and wants to support and provide the best service it can to the local area.*

Man, 45-54, North West, England

*Park Radio covers a very small area close to where I live. The events they cover and discussions that take place probably wouldn't be of huge interest to a wider audience. I enjoy their fun light-hearted style.*

Woman, 45-54, East Anglia, England

Welsh speaking participants and a minority of participants in Scotland placed high value on BBC services provided in Welsh or Gaelic, even if they did not listen to them personally. For some this was more because they appreciated this provision for language preservation than just for the content.

### Exploring specific drivers for BBC nations/regions radio and local commercial radio news bulletins

Similarly to TV, BBC nations/regions radio news was felt to be more serious and have a more professional and 'official' tone than commercial local radio, which was considered more light-hearted and informal. BBC stations were also felt to cover the news in greater depth compared to commercial equivalents.

Most people believed that both BBC nations/regions radio and commercial local radio provided content that was important, relevant and accurate, although slightly more felt this about the BBC overall.

Although local news was not the key reason for listening to commercial local radio, most felt that the current frequency of news bulletins on commercial local radio was about right. The general view was that, as news could change so quickly, listeners may miss bulletins if they were less frequent (if they were not on the hour, they may be less easy to find).

The reasons given for the current frequency being about right were:

- News was not the primary reason for listening to commercial local radio (so hourly was considered sufficient).
- This is what listeners were used to.
- It was seen to represent the right balance of content.
- It would be too repetitive to have more frequent news bulletins.

## Print newspapers can be perceived as more local than other traditional sources of media

Compared to other local media sources, relatively few people consumed a local print newspaper regularly, but those who did were strongly attached to it. They welcomed:

- Reading it as an important part of a routine. For some (typically older people, or those not online) this was part of 'me time' i.e. sitting down with a cup of tea and a newspaper. Others routinely read a paper when visiting family, with several saying they read it aloud to older parents. As with TV, there was an element of nostalgia around reading a paper together.
- The fact that it could appear more local than other types of local media, (N.B. some people noted that the online versions seemed to cover a wider geographical footprint than the print versions). Being able to see family/friends represented and local 'heroes' particularly appealed, and some would buy copies in order to keep articles or photos of people they knew.
- The obituaries, which were seen as particularly important for older people, as in some communities there was an expectation that they would attend funerals of acquaintances and the obituary would be where they could find the relevant information about the service.

*We have a local newspaper and I tend to read it about once a week to catch up with very local news. I would definitely miss reading about local heroes, community events etc. which are featured. It is unlikely that the TV news is going to feature a swimming gala that my son has competed in but the newspaper would.*

Woman, 35-44, East Midlands, England

There was also some discussion about community newsletters (and Papurau Bro in Wales) where they were available – some of which were perceived to have flourished during the pandemic. In Wales, some people discussed an emotional attachment to these local Welsh language publications. However, for most other participants the benefit of community newsletters was more functional as they would include information about local events and issues of interest as well as features about interesting local characters.

### 5.3 Exploring trust in local media

People often saw a trade-off between trust/accuracy and timeliness and recognised that trustworthy, accurate information can take time to verify. On balance they saw value in having access to both instant news and information (with potentially low accuracy) and more considered, accurate content.

#### Trust in accuracy of information varies by source type

As shown in Figure 6, when it came to providing accurate news and information, people largely trusted traditional media sources (nations/regions TV bulletins,

nations/regions radio and local printed newspapers) over online newspapers or social media and messaging apps.



Figure 6: Trust in accuracy of different local media sources

People trusted nations/regions TV and radio to provide accurate news and information for a number of reasons:

- They were aware (albeit vaguely) of the presence of regulation in the sector.
- They felt that (compared to some of the online sources used) nations/regions TV and radio news had larger audiences and more resources available – and so could not afford inaccuracies in their reporting.
- Views of the BBC also influenced perceptions – for many (though not all), the BBC remained a trusted source.

Levels of trust in BBC online news were comparable with trust in radio, TV and printed newspapers. BBC online news was rated highly due to trust in the BBC more broadly and the fact that it was not thought to include 'sensationalist' stories.

People tended to trust printed versions of newspapers over their online counterparts because they were thought to have more time to fact check news and information before publishing (given many were weekly publications) and once printed, the news and information could not be amended or deleted. By contrast, they perceived online newspapers would be more likely to exaggerate and sensationalise stories because of their need for 'clicks'. They also recognised that online newspapers frequently updated news and could amend or remove any inaccuracies, and so could potentially take a more relaxed approach to fact checking.

*I trust sources more that have to adhere to standards. Second hand information from social media and messaging groups can always have a bit of "he said she said" and also be tainted towards personal views.*

Man, 35-44, Northern Ireland

Although social media forums were rated lowest in terms of accuracy, in reality, views were more nuanced. Participants mentioned that posts from people they know personally or in small Facebook communities could be trusted because they knew the individuals posting were 'in the know', and could also fairly easily establish who was sharing uninformed opinions. Some commented that local councillors and other people with relevant roles would be part of these groups and could be trusted as they are likely to have specific knowledge about the issue (although some also referenced their mistrust of individuals with specific agendas). They also felt that some of the risks could be mitigated by moderation and by the sheer number of voices – so false

information may be called out. There was some willingness to accept risk for the benefits of using social media for news and most were confident that they were able to discern which stories were accurate.

*You need a critical eye over it because otherwise people will form that criticism themselves. So like earlier, I saw that the council had posted. They were improving a park locally, it's just election bait at the moment. They're just improving parks, fixing potholes or whatever – they're not – but people in the comments will then call them out on it because nobody in the media is.*

Woman, 35-44, East Midlands, England

People also felt that there may be different agendas influencing the news and information individual media sources chose to share. For example, they questioned whether media relying on certain revenue streams would be able to always focus on the most important stories, as well as the extent of editorial control advertisers or other funders might have.

*Newspapers can be owned by people who have agendas to push. Therefore, they may be inclined to not tell all the truth if it could be detrimental to their owners/interests. Local radio is usually financed by advertising so perhaps more likely to tell the truth. Regional TV bulletins tend to be fond of certain areas more than others so perhaps wouldn't be trusted to cover everything.*

Woman, 45-54, North East, England

When asked if they trust local or national media providers more, there were mixed views. While national media were seen to be under more scrutiny and to have more resources, local media were seen to be closer to the ground and less likely to be pushing a particular agenda. Also, there was perceived to be a higher probability of meeting a local reporter in real life to hold them to account – albeit they recognised that the changing ownership of local media was changing this. Ultimately, most people agreed that all media coverage should be 'taken with a pinch of salt'.

*Because you can challenge them in the pub. If they live in London and go to the Groucho club, they will never see the 'gwerin' [local folk].*

Face-to-face group, Llandeilo, Wales

## 5.4 Using hypothetical scenarios to explore drivers

Participants were given some hypothetical scenarios (shown in Figure 7) and asked which local media source they would go to in these situations.







<p>1</p>  <p>There are rumours that your <b>local hospital is closing</b> down and there is no information on the hospital website.</p>	<p>2</p>  <p>You have noticed several <b>police helicopters</b> flying overhead and you are keen to find out what is happening.</p>	<p>3</p>  <p>There are <b>local elections</b> coming up and you want to know more about the candidates (and not just what they say about themselves).</p>
<p>4</p>  <p>There is widespread <b>flooding</b> in your local area.</p>	<p>5</p>  <p>There are <b>roadworks</b> on a road that you travel on often. You want to know why they are there and how long journeys will be disrupted for. Would this change for traffic news about delays caused by accidents that have just happened?</p>	<p>6</p>  <p>There is a <b>Christmas fayre</b> being held in a town near you. You want to find out more details about where exactly it is being held and the opening times.</p>

Figure 7: Hypothetical local news scenarios

A number of considerations influenced people's choice of local media. Generally, in an emerging situation, people were more willing to trade speed for accuracy, and if the issue was important to them, they would invest time in seeking out multiple sources to verify the information and uncover additional details. The main considerations were:

- **Urgency:** Whether they needed to know about it straight away.  
If the issue was developing/changing rapidly in real time, or if it was likely to have an immediate impact on the participant, they were more likely to turn to social media or online newspapers (or commercial local radio for traffic news), as these sources would be able to provide the latest updates.
- **Trust:** Who was likely to have the 'best' information about a situation.  
People made a value judgement in relation to who was most likely to have accurate information in different situations at the time – this may be individuals posting on Facebook community sites or more traditional media.
- **Importance:** What was at stake.  
People were more likely to consult a range of different sources if the issue was serious, complicated or if they simply had more time or a specific interest in it. For issues that were considered low stakes, they were more likely to conduct a less detailed or focussed search.

*Well, for floods, then I know that is news, I know who deals with flood news; I'll go to those sources that I've checked before. For hospital rumours of closures, that's rumours; I don't really know who to trust or what is fact, what is hearsay, so you've got to do, maybe, a little bit more research and pull in a few different resources, to try to get a bit of a jigsaw puzzle together.*

Face-to-face group, Belfast, Northern Ireland



Overall, people tended to use a range of different local media sources to meet different needs. No-one in our sample limited themselves to a single source; even those who only used online sources tended to use a variety. People felt that different types of media offered different benefits, and their choice was dependent on context, their habits, and which source was most appropriate to their particular information need.

### Deep Dive: how participants responded to each scenario

If there was a **rumour of a local hospital closing**, then most people thought that Facebook and, to a lesser extent Nextdoor, would be a key source. This is because these sources would have information from local people who might work in the hospital or have links with it, and influential people in the community would be expected to engage in the debate. The BBC website and online newspapers were also mentioned in this case study. For those who were not online, if they wanted to find out more, they thought they would rely on word of mouth and their personal contacts. For example, it could be discussed at the local pub or when meeting with family and friends.

If there were **police helicopters overhead**, some people would be ambivalent and wait to see if anything came up in the news. For those who were interested, social media was anticipated to be the primary source, including community groups on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Nextdoor and WhatsApp. Although participants were aware that it can be difficult to separate truth from speculation, they thought that social media was likely to have up-to-date information. For a 'big' story they would expect to find out more from local newspapers online or BBC nations/regions radio.

*I'd probably look it up [online] on something like the Newcastle Herald or something, because I don't think I'd be able to find it on BBC or anything; or I think it would take ages to find it.*

Face-to-face group, Newcastle, England

The case study relating to **finding out information about election candidates** did not resonate widely, with most not expecting to read up in detail about the candidates. If they did want to find out more, they thought they might check social media and specifically Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), local newspaper summaries of the candidates (online or in print) and potentially BBC online or nations/regions TV news. There was no clear consensus as to what the preferred local media source would be for this type of information.

In contrast, people had strong views on the best places to find out about **traffic delays**. Some people noted this was a topic where their behaviour had shifted substantially over recent years, with some not using 'local' sources at all and instead using AA Roadwatch, Waze and Google Maps, as these were seen to be the most reliable and up-to-date information for current traffic. However, others noted that for trips they made regularly they might not think to use these sources, so instead would rely on traffic bulletins on the radio (either BBC or commercial local radio stations). For planned roadworks, people would use a range of local sources

including online newspapers (own sites and on Facebook) and council websites, while a few would rely on local Facebook groups.

Responses to the case study about **widespread flooding** were similar to those relating to traffic delays or roadworks. In addition, if travelling after heavy rain, some would contact the person they were visiting or someone who lived close to an area that floods to check if the road was passable. Some also mentioned watching regional television to see video footage of the floods. Participants distinguished between information on travel disruption caused by flooding and the wider picture (i.e. longer-term impacts, flood mitigation measures etc.). For the latter, there were mentions of BBC regional TV, local councils and FloodLine.

*I would visit Facebook first for up-to-date info from local residents as to which roads might be closed, where there is damage and what areas to avoid. After that, I would read the BBC local news online for factual information and the wider picture. Then I would watch the evening news in order to see some film footage of this issue.*

Woman, 45-54, South West, England

Finally, to find out details about a **Christmas Fayre**, many people felt that publicising local events was far more effective than before, thanks to targeted advertising on social media and specifically Facebook. Once aware, they would follow a link or use Google to find out more information which might be on a dedicated website or in an online local newspaper. Facebook community groups and posts from the organisation were commonly mentioned, as well as local newspaper and local radio 'What's On' articles. Some commented that coverage of such events in the local media was less professional than it had been in the past, with a perception that typically events are now covered by asking the organiser to send in photographs and copy for the online newspaper to 'print', rather than sending a journalist to the event.

*I would Google the fayre and state my local area and see what information pages come up first. This isn't essential news information so I am more open to other sources.*

Man, 18-24, London, England

## 6. Views of changes to local media landscape and their impact

This section explores people's views on the rise of local online news and information and the perceived decline of traditional sources, in addition to what people see as the impact of these changes.

### Summary section

- People appreciated that their consumption habits in relation to local media have changed and they were more likely to use online sources and less likely to read printed newspapers (and potentially less likely to watch nations/regions TV bulletins) than in the past. Some people had also noticed that local newspapers and radio stations were being taken over and were becoming less local.
- Most people felt that their expectations and needs in relation to the quality, quantity and relevance of local news and information were being met. Online sources and social media offered instant access to information which was important to their local area. They were largely willing to trade off accuracy for the benefits offered.
- Only a minority were concerned about the decline in traditional media. Participants' main concerns related to the potential risk of missing important news stories for three main reasons – their own consumption habits meaning that they typically only see a narrower range of stories that appear in their social media feeds; the fact that some important news stories are no longer being reported on; or because there are geographic gaps in coverage. Some pointed to the potential impact on local democracy if those in power were not being held to account as a result. However, even those who lamented the loss of investigative journalism expressed little desire to pay for online local news and information.
- Few participants had previously been aware of the BBC's plans to reduce funding for local radio in England and invest in online services. Upon learning about the plans, most were actively positive or neutral because it seemed like a reasonable change given societal shifts.

### 6.1 People recognised that the local media landscape has changed

Although it was not top of mind, people were aware that the local media landscape had changed, with many noting that they personally had shifted away from more traditional sources. Beyond the rise of online media sources (including social media), the biggest change people had observed to the local media landscape was in relation to the local print newspaper. They highlighted that some titles were no longer in existence and others had reduced circulation. Whereas previously some papers could easily be bought in local shops and potentially even delivered, now hard copies were thought to be much more difficult to locate.

Some had also noticed that local newspapers and radio stations were being taken over and, as a result, people felt they were becoming less local. They suggested this was further hastening the decline of these services as they were becoming less relevant. Some local newspapers were seen to cover less relevant news and information than they did previously, especially if owned by large media companies. Although there was some uncertainty about who exactly did own the local newspaper, there was a feeling that newspapers, alongside some commercial local radio stations, were being swallowed up by larger organisations.

*If anything, some of the online commercial news websites have been made worse over time by too many intrusive adverts and poorly worded news articles and also misleading news articles where the click-on headline makes the story seem much more relevant than it actually is. It definitely has got worse in recent years.*

Man, 45-54, South West, England

People were of the view that local newspapers had undertaken more investigative journalism in the past and provided greater scrutiny of local issues and local decision making. There was a perception that the current versions of local newspapers (offline and online) no longer provided this insight and instead focussed on stories that are easy to produce such as writing up local events based on content sent to them.

*I used to rely heavily on local radio and newspapers whereas now I tend to use online media more. Our local radio became diluted when it became part of a bigger company, and it is no longer part of the community in the way that it once was. I like online local media as I feel it is more relevant and up-to-date.*

Woman, 55-64, South East, England

*Big organisations like Reach have taken over so many local papers, and they are filled with nothing but clickbait and poor quality excuses for journalism.*

Woman, 45-54, Scotland

More positively, some people shared examples of both online and printed community newsletters that were felt to offer valuable local content and potentially be filling a gap left by local newspapers. People also recognised that they could now access online local newspapers, social media, and sources that provide statements direct 'from the horse's mouth' including webpages for local MPs, local police forces and local councils. Furthermore, they noted that there has been an emergence of community-led places online, e.g. community Facebook sites, where local news and information would be brought into one place. While some people followed their local online newspapers, others found that Facebook was better for highlighting relevant local stories that were specific to their town/village rather than the wider footprint of the newspaper.

On balance, by using a range of sources, including social media as well as more traditional sources, most people believed that they had access to news and information that was important to their local area. Equally, they trusted the news and information they received to be accurate or they trusted their own ability to seek out the truth by

consulting a range of local media sources. However, there was a minority of people who did raise concerns about the implications of changes on local media content and provision and these are explored further in [Section 6.4](#).

## 6.2 People were largely positive towards the rise of online local media

Overall, people pointed to the benefits of online news sources and social media: relevant and up-to-date news and information about their local areas. While they identified potential downsides of these news sources in terms of trust and accuracy, they thought the benefits outweighed the risks.

*Now we have so many different platforms at our fingertips we have the power to choose what, when and how we see what is happening in our area. I think that locals in every area of the country now have a much better understanding of what is happening in their community as a result of the different sources of information available. The only downside is sometimes the information available on some platforms is not accurate as it is reported incorrectly or by people with an opinion that may be biased.*

Woman, 35-44, East Anglia, England

There was some specific discussion about how social media could both add to and detract from community cohesion. People identified the following ways it could potentially impact positively:

- It enabled hyper-local communities to develop, enabling the sharing of information between neighbours simultaneously rather than relying on word of mouth.
- It allowed for greater interaction between people who could start or respond to conversations and comments relating to different aspects of news and information.
- It could be less daunting for some people to become part of things i.e. they might not feel comfortable walking into the local pub and striking up conversation but they were happy to chat online.
- It allowed people to identify and join specific communities of interest, however niche.

However, people also noted the ways that social media could have a negative impact:

- Some sources were seen to deliberately peddle misinformation – and there were concerns that inaccurate reporting could increase tensions within a community.

*Here in Lincoln, social media can damage a community if rumours start to spread. For example, Facebook groups for the far right have been springing up significantly due to the RAF camp being repurposed as an asylum seekers centre.*

Man, 55-64, East Midlands, England

- It can exclude people without internet access (this was a negative cited by users of social media rather than non-users).
- An over focus on crime could make people feel less positive about their local area; petty crime could be magnified.
- It could allow space for a 'lynch mob' mentality and discourage disagreement.

Overall, people believed the benefits of social media for community cohesion typically outweighed the downsides, especially if local groups were well moderated. For example, tools like only allowing anonymous posting in exceptional circumstances and with the permission of an admin were perceived to reduce the negative behaviours observed online. However, people were keen to avoid moderation leading to delays in posting, recognising that one of the benefits of social media is the up-to-date nature of the content.

*Social media has had a massive effect and I think 'fake news' and mob mentality on sites like Facebook can be worse but the accessibility of information and a platform for everyone to have an opinion can also be a good thing.*

Woman, 18-24, North West, England

### 6.3 People have mixed views about the decline of traditional local media

The decline of traditional media prompted a more mixed response, with people tending to fall into one of three camps: philosophical, not at all worried, or concerned.

Those who were philosophical felt that the changes to media habits and consumption were inevitable and while some people may be digitally disadvantaged or excluded now, that would change over time. Consequently, they were willing to accept that over time, traditional media would continue to decline with online media sources filling the gaps.

*I think it would be sad to not have printed local or national media but I do think that it will be inevitable. They are impractical at times and, in an age where resources are limited and waste is to be frowned upon, we are rapidly reaching a stage where a printed newspaper is hard to justify. I'll miss them when they are gone because I doubt that they will return.*

Man, 55-64, North East, England

The group who were not at all worried felt confident that they could still find out what they needed to know – and that important/big stories would continue to emerge. This group included some people who were digitally disadvantaged or excluded as they felt that there was still sufficient radio and television coverage to keep them informed. Additionally, their local networks and people they met in social spaces, such as the pub, would pass on local news and information.

*[Have you got enough information on what's happening locally now, as a result, or do you think there's still a gap there, that needs filling?] I think social media has filled the gap perfectly.*

Face-to-face group, Coventry, England

A minority said they were concerned or worried about the changes they had seen in local media and the implications this had for the future. They tended to be older and more active in the community. They had often experienced a subject close to their heart not being covered by local media. This is explored in more detail below.

## 6.4 Exploring minority concerns about the detrimental impact of changes

A minority of participants were concerned about the potential for people to miss important news stories either because individuals were missing them because of their changed consumption habits or because important stories were simply not being reported on. While most people did not think about possible gaps, or were confident that they would always be made aware of stories that mattered, this minority pointed out that they did not know what they did not know – and so could well be unwittingly missing out on important stories.

### Missing important stories because of consumption habit changes

A minority spontaneously reflected that, because people were less likely to be exposed to a range of stories online than through traditional media, they would get a narrow view of what was happening in their local areas. They felt that most people follow a limited range of social media sites, and that this self-curated bias would be further compounded by the impact of algorithms.

They also pointed to people mindlessly scrolling through social media feeds without really taking in information.

*If we're all just going to look for what we are interested in, then we're narrowing down the information that we're taking in, aren't we? You know, surely the idea of picking up a newspaper, providing it's not massively biased, you know, one way politically or another, is that you're broadening your horizons. You're learning new stuff that you never knew before... you are learning about different segments of your community and different people that live [there] and different opinions.*

Man, 55-64, East Midlands, England

*My 19-year old's very, very involved in politics, sort of campaigning and everything; but they didn't know Bo'ness Rec was closing, because they don't read local newspapers. And they used to swim there and everything and they were outraged today, when they discovered it. But they know everything that's going to happen nationally and internationally, but they didn't know that.*

Face-to-face group, Falkirk, Scotland



*I think having completed the media diary it surprised me how much time I spent online yet didn't really know what was happening directly in my local area.*

Man, 25-34, Northern Ireland

### Missing important stories because of geographical gaps

While it was not generally highlighted as a major concern, the research did indicate a gap in provision of detailed local news at the 'mid' local level, particularly amongst those who did not live near major urban areas or lived between regions (e.g. on county borders). Their local newspapers had previously played this role, and the impact of their decline was further compounded by changes in relation to local radio (both BBC nations/region and commercial local radio) meaning that they had also become less localised. A minority believed this perceived geographical gap was, in part, connected to a decline in investigative journalism. For example, several stories emerged from participants living in small towns and parishes who explained that there was a specific geographical gap when it came to news relating to council decisions. They felt that their area had been overlooked and that some key local decisions had not been sufficiently covered or investigated by local media.

*All that sort of small local stuff that makes your town your town. You don't get that unless you know where to look.*

Woman, 25-34, North East, England

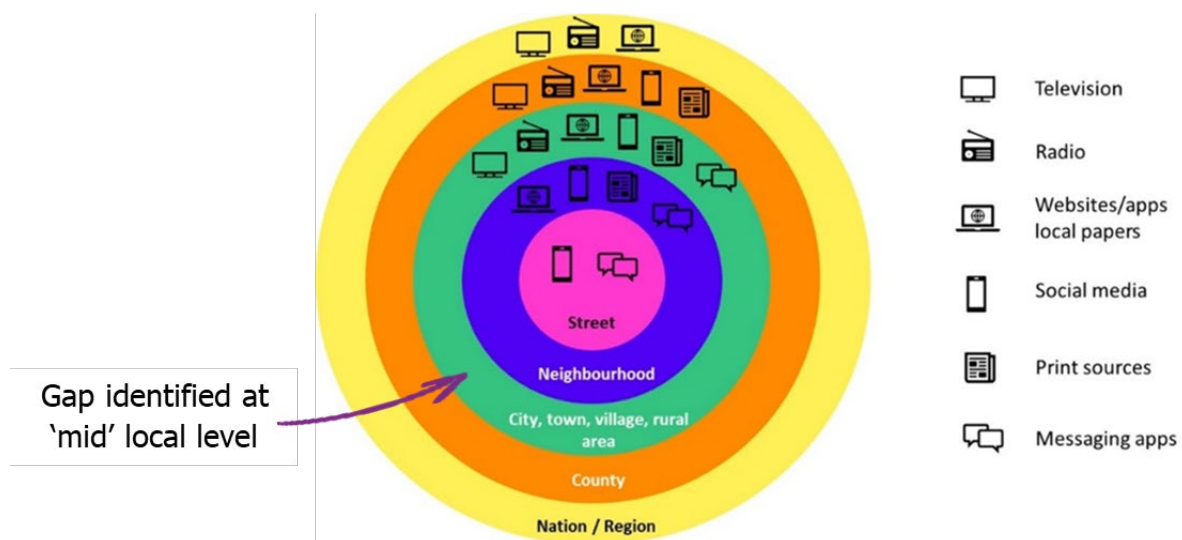


Figure 8: Geography of different media sources, highlighting gap

### Missing important stories because they are no longer being reported on

The decline of print local newspapers and the perceived prevalence of celebrity news and stories designed as 'clickbait' on online versions was an issue for some because of the implications for local investigative journalism. A minority raised concerns that reduced resources might mean that future local reporters were not being trained and also that newspapers were becoming less willing to cover more controversial stories.

*But whether or not anybody would go digging for that sort of stuff these days, you know, would journalists actually go out there and do that? I don't know. You know, because there is a dumbing down, I guess, of the local news. So I'm not sure about that.*

Man, 55-64, East Midlands, England

*There's no conflict in reporting a sponsored walk... Whereas, for instance, here, there's a brewery taking over town, who are buying up all of the pubs and it's not reported anywhere and they're going to destroy this town. And it's because, like anywhere, they're in bed with the council and blah, blah, blah, and this is the kind of stuff people are talking about, but it's never being reported.*

Face-to-Face group, Bridport, England

### An unwillingness to pay for local news and information

Whilst these people were vocal in their calls for more local news and lamented the decline of investigative reporting, there was no real appetite to pay for this content. They recognised that times have changed and that people are now so used to getting information online, that paying for this is becoming an alien concept. Most people did not feel that local newspaper content was sufficiently valuable to them to subscribe for online access, especially as they also wanted to access information from a range of newspaper sites.

*I want the story and I want it for free and I want it in a nice website or a nice app and I'm not paying for it.*

Face-to-face group, Newcastle, England

### The potential impact on local democracy

For many people there was no obvious link between local democracy and local media. Although responses to polling questions in the online forum indicated that some may have difficulty finding information about what is happening with local institutions, local government and local politicians, this was not frequently raised in discussions.

However, a small number of people (who were typically from older age groups) felt strongly that a decline in investigative journalism would be detrimental for local democracy and that local institutions were not being held to account. Specific examples given included developers being linked to planning committees and the responsibility for dealing with unsafe RAAC concrete in a local school. People in a face-to-face group in Bridport also discussed how they had been taken by surprise by local government boundary changes, whereas they felt that in the past they would have learned about them in advance through the local press. They suggested that if they had been made aware of the change there might have been a local campaign as the changes were perceived to be detrimental to their town.

*But I just think that local journalism could provide a better service to public in holding governing bodies, local councils, to account and highlighting things that*

*the public has no other way [of knowing]. We can't all be investigators, we can't all go out and find out what's going on, we can't all be aware of issues that are not affecting us but are affecting a lot of other people locally, and I think they're failing us in that regard basically.*

Man, 45-54, North East, England

*You would basically need a reporter sitting in all the council meetings to really understand what's going on. So, one of the issues is the size of councils and how remote they are from people and how opaque the decision-making processes are. And I suppose the lack of money that newspapers have got to have somebody whose job it is to report on it. There's just very, very little scrutiny of what is happening at local, political level and – unless you're talking to the politicians themselves – it's very difficult to understand what's actually going on and how the decisions are being made.*

Face-to-face group, Falkirk, Scotland

## 6.5 Largely positive reactions to BBC local services changes in England

People in the forum and face-to-face groups in England were given information about the BBC's plans to modernise its local services, outlining that reductions in radio funding were resulting in more shared programming across local radio stations, and that there would be greater investment in online news services in every local base, including investment in local current affairs by establishing 11 investigative reporting teams across England. The full stimulus provided can be found in [Section 8.2](#).

They were asked for their initial views on these changes and how they thought they might impact their consumption of local news and information. Those taking part in the follow up online groups from England were asked how and if their views had shifted, having had further time to reflect, and following discussions about the societal impacts of the changing media landscape.

Only a small minority had been aware of the changes before taking part in the research. Upon learning about the changes, most people were either actively positive about them, or neutral. A few (typically older) people were actively negative about the changes.

Those who were positive felt it seemed like a sensible direction of travel – that it made sense for the BBC to spend less in an area where there were fewer listeners, and more in an area that was growing. They thought that it was appropriate to serve audiences accordingly. They liked the idea of more investment in local online provision as they hoped that it would result in more high quality online local news which could either add to or replace what they currently consumed.

*I think it's a really positive response to how our habits are changing. Whilst I am always sympathetic to the fact that we're losing something and that local radio was lovely and charming, ...evolution is part of life, isn't it? We have to move on. I spent all day today listening to podcasts while I was working, that were all on*

*BBC Sounds. So for me, if the money is being reinvested into content that's being used online in a way that I prefer to access it, I can't criticise them for doing that.*

Face-to-face group, Bridport, England

*I think that it could be a good idea as most people look at news online or in their own time, not necessarily when it is live. It could be a good thing as more local areas may be covered and not just the big ones.*

Woman, 18-24, North East, England

In the online focus groups, participants discussed the potential for more investigative journalism to fill a gap in holding local power to account. They liked the idea of this, but some were sceptical that the BBC's investment would translate to more investigative journalism for their local area specifically. A minority were unsure about whether the BBC would be too constrained by political pressure or bias to investigate effectively.

*I think it's definitely the right direction to go in. There's no doubt that radio is taking a back step. And as you said, there's still other radio. As [participant] said, I'm not sure 11 teams is going to cut it, but a step in the right direction, and as long as it's not lip service, I think it'll be an interesting step.*

Woman, 45-54, South West, England

People who were more neutral were generally indifferent because they did not rely upon, and some did not currently use, the services being impacted.

Those who were more negative about the changes felt that they personally would be impacted (primarily because the radio programmes would be less relevant to them if they covered a wider area) and/or were worried about how others might be affected. They tended to raise concerns about older people who might lose out from a reduction in local programming on the radio, and who would not necessarily be able to benefit from the additional online provision (this was often a more generic concern as opposed to people being aware of how specific individuals they knew would be impacted). Some people were concerned about local radio presenters losing their jobs.

*I put the local radio on, BBC Radio Manchester, the other day, when I put it on, it wasn't just reporting about Greater Manchester, it was reporting about the country. So all of a sudden it had gone from just reporting from local radio to everywhere. So it just frustrated me because obviously I didn't see the point of having all the other stations when it's reporting other things outside of Greater Manchester. You want to listen to some things that are local, so it just sort of saddened me that a bit really.*

Man, 45-54, North West, England

*What about local news content access for those that don't use the internet? I can see that it has benefits for the typical news consumer, but those without internet are often the most vulnerable and isolated and they still need to be kept informed.*

Woman, 35-44, Northern Ireland

### Some uncertainty about the impact on local media consumption as a result of BBC changes

Many of the BBC changes had happened by the time the research took place and the overwhelming majority of people reported that they had not noticed them. Certainly, no-one claimed to have changed how they consumed local media as a result. People were further asked how the changes to BBC local services might impact on their consumption of local media going forward. Understandably, they found it difficult to predict their future behaviour, in part because they felt it would very much depend on how the changes manifested themselves. For instance, if the BBC delivered more stories relevant to a smaller geographical local area, they might well consume more. However, increasing the amount of investigative deep-dive journalism at a more regional level may have little impact on consumption as the perceived gap is in relation to more local stories.

*I do not anticipate any change until I see whether the changes improve my knowledge base. If it becomes more relevant I will use it more.*

Man, 65+, South West, England

*It depends on what is covered and how often. If it provides adequate information I may reduce how often I read information on South London Press or News Shopper as it would allow me to rely on one source for lots of information. I would however continue to read up more about different news pieces to avoid a bias from one source of information.*

Woman, 35-44, London, England

There was also some recognition that the changes may impact some areas more than others.

*Well I've just looked on the BBC site for my local area and most of the stories really aren't that local. It's just shocked me. I've just looked at it now and they're not relevant to my area even though I put my area in.*

Man, 55-64, North West, England

*It sounds like they are reinvesting money recuperated into my local area online, a source that I do actually use, so that's a bonus.*

Man, 18-24, East Anglia, England

Throughout the research, people reported that they did not want to pay for local news and information and were critical of paywalls. They also expressed dislike for online advertising and pop-ups as these had a negative impact on the user experience. As

such, some felt that if the BBC was able to provide sufficiently local content, with a better user experience, they might choose it over alternative online sources.

## 7. Conclusions

A multiplicity of local sources were used with the choice of source contingent upon context, habit and perceptions of appropriateness to the specific need.

Within this, the extent of use of online local media sources was apparent from participants' media diaries: the use of social media was particularly prevalent. Participants clearly expounded the benefits of online news sources and social media. Whilst they identified potential downsides of these sources in terms of trust and accuracy, the benefits, including instant access to news and information and relevance, were largely felt to outweigh the risks. Participants were generally confident in their own ability to separate fact from fake news or rumour.

Offline local media sources were still an important part of the mix and valued for their broad content and perceived accuracy. Nations/regions TV was also felt to provide a relaxing, collective viewing experience; while local radio was liked for its convenience.

Fundamentally, local media was valued because it was seen to fulfil two key functions: a) informing people's behaviours and opinions and b) connecting individuals, families and communities. The former function was more top of mind whilst the latter was a more considered view.

The sheer amount and variety of information that is available online, including social media and apps, means that day to day informational requirements to inform behaviours (such as traffic information to allow people to plan their journeys or weather forecasts to enable people to dress appropriately for the day) were very well served by utilising a range of sources, including social media and apps as well as more traditional sources.

Although there was some concern about older audiences being left behind by digital advances, most were sanguine about a continual shift to online and the people we spoke to who were digitally disadvantaged or excluded largely did not feel that they were missing out, although in some cases they were becoming more reliant on their children and families to keep them connected.

However, there was a sense from a minority that local media is not adequately providing the sort of information that is needed in order for individuals to form well-rounded opinions. Not all participants thought of local media in this way or thought that this element was important to them, but there was a vocal minority who felt that changes over time had been detrimental in this respect. These participants felt that it can be difficult to be fully informed about their local area because of a combination of changing consumption habits and a reduction in local sources. They lamented a lack of investigative journalism and the associated repercussions for local democracy and holding individuals and organisations to account.

There is also the question of whether local media effectively fulfils its valued function in relation to enhancing community cohesion. Most felt it continued to do so, albeit in



a different way since the advent of online sources. Shared viewing and listening experiences were, in some part, being replaced by the ability to share stories on social media. New interactions were being forged by younger family members relaying content of local social media posts to older relatives. Also, the perceived increased availability of online local media meant people had a greater ability to keep abreast of local news from afar – maintaining a foothold in communities they may have physically left.

New online communities have been created which has helped foster a sense of belonging to physical communities. People have been encouraged to come together whether through wider promotion of physical events and/or coalescing or taking action for a common cause. However, there were associated downsides, such as the risk to communities of misinformation being circulated.

## 8. Appendices

### 8.1 Sample breakdown

The 100 online forum participants were recruited to ensure a mix of demographic and geographic representation across the UK. Table 1 shows the final breakdown.

**Table 1: Online forum participants – demographics**

Category	Characteristics	Number of participants (out of 100)
<b>Gender</b>	Man	47
	Woman	53
<b>Age</b>	18–24	14
	25–34	17
	35–44	17
	45–54	25
	55–64	14
	65+	14
<b>Participants with children at home</b>		36
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White	82
	Minority ethnic groups	18
<b>Socio-economic group</b>	AB	23
	C1	26
	C2	28
	DE	23
<b>Nation</b>	England	79
	Northern Ireland	9
	Scotland	13
	Wales	8
<b>Location</b>	Urban	22
	Suburban	33
	Rural	45
<b>Length of time at current location</b>	Five years or less	15
	Over five years	85
<b>Disability/health condition</b>	Presence of disability/health condition	21

## Local media consumption

Quotas were put in place to ensure a broad range of media consumption behaviours, as shown in Table 2.

- All to be consuming some local media regularly (daily/weekly/monthly) i.e. none to answer rarely or never to all types of media.
- At least 60 to consume (at least) regional news bulletins, radio or print news regularly.
- Ensure a mix of BBC and commercial/community sources (for radio and TV).
- Max of 10 people to be using local media only to check weather/traffic information.

Type of media	Consumption			TOTAL
	Daily (high)	Weekly (med)	Monthly (low)	
Regional TV bulletins (BBC/ITV)	Min. 4	Min. 7	Min. 7	Min. 20
Local radio stations (BBC/other)	Min. 4	Min. 7	Min. 7	Min. 20
Local print news	Min. 2	Min. 7	Min. 8	Min. 20
Online sources	No quota	No quota	Max. 15	Max. 40

Six face-to-face groups were also conducted. Table 3 below shows the final breakdown of group participants.

**Table 3: Face-to-face group participants – demographics**

Category	Characteristic	Number of participants (out of 33)
<b>Gender</b>	Man	14
	Woman	19
<b>Age</b>	18–24	1
	25–34	2
	35–44	10
	45–54	6
	55–64	6
	65+	8
<b>Participants with children at home</b>		11
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White	29
	Minority ethnic groups	4
<b>Socio-economic group</b>	AB	6
	C1	11
	C2	7
	DE	9

Category	Characteristic	Number of participants (out of 33)
<b>Location</b>	Belfast	6
	Bridport	6
	Coventry	4
	Falkirk	6
	Llandeilo	5
	Newcastle	6
<b>Disability/health condition</b>	Presence of disability/health condition	7
<b>Digitally disadvantaged or excluded</b>	No or limited use of digital sources due to age/income/confidence	7

## 8.2 Information provided on BBC changes

- In October 2022 the BBC announced plans to modernise its local services including increasing the amount of programming shared between BBC local radio stations in England, ultimately spending less on local radio and using money saved to reinvest into online content.
- In recent months this has involved the roll out of new local radio schedules in England, including greater programme sharing by local stations in the evening and at weekends when listening tends to be lower. Inevitably, this has led to some local radio presenters losing their jobs.
- Many BBC local radio stations in England now have shows from their area only until the afternoon, when they share output regionally or nationally until about 6am the next morning.
- The money saved from changes to local radio will be used to:
  - Boost online news services in every local base to deliver an up-to-date, trusted offer across the week. Local stories will also be easier to find under changes to the BBC's online services. The BBC has also launched or is proposing to launch new dedicated local online services for Bradford, Wolverhampton, Sunderland and Peterborough
  - Create a new fund to commission original local programmes and podcasts via BBC Sounds.
  - Increase investment in local current affairs by establishing 11 investigative reporting teams across England, creating new journalism roles and delivering original stories across tv radio and online services - as well as producing over 20 TV documentary programmes each year.

## Summary of the changes to local radio programming on weekdays:

### Changes to local radio - weekdays

6am	2pm	6pm	10pm
All <b>39</b> BBC Local Radio stations will continue with their own dedicated local programming	<b>20</b> afternoon programmes across England - with a number of local stations sharing programming	Between <b>7-10</b> local programmes across England between 6pm-10pm on weekdays * There will be more shows than this on Thursdays	<b>One</b> national 'all-England' programme after 10pm

Across the week, all live **sports** programming will be kept across all local stations

**Local news** bulletin services will be protected across the day on all local stations

## Summary of the changes to local radio programming on weekends

### Proposed changes to local radio - weekends

	6am	10am	2pm	6pm	10pm
<b>Saturdays</b>	<b>13</b> local programmes in the morning	<b>18</b> local programmes in the morning	There will be <b>37</b> local programmes in the afternoon	There will be <b>20</b> local programmes in the evening	One national all England programme from 10pm
<b>Sundays</b>	<b>13</b> local programmes Sunday mornings.	<b>18</b> local programmes in the morning	There will be <b>14</b> local programmes in the afternoon	One national all England programme for the rest of the day	

Across the week, all live **sports** programming will be kept across all local stations

**Local news** bulletin services will be protected across the day on all local stations