

Trust in news providers



Overview

- The news is thought to play an important role in a functioning democracy and in supporting civic engagement. However, public confidence in the UK press dropped in the 1980s and remains low in comparison to other countries. Trust may also be related to misinformation and the use of artificial intelligence.
- There are many different types of news provided by broadcast and print services and increasingly via online sources. In 2024, 70% of adults in the UK consumed news via the TV and 71% online. In the UK, Ofcom regulates broadcast news, while voluntary regulation applies to the press. Some sources of news, such as self-publishing journalists, are not regulated.
- The concept of trust in news can be complex, making it hard to measure. Research by Ofcom indicates that TV and radio news is the most trusted.
- Causal data on what drives trust in news is lacking. However, low levels of trust may be linked to social media use, a lack of diversity and representation in the media, and wider political events.
- Efforts to increase trust include accreditation schemes and improving the news literacy of audiences. Some contributors have suggested areas to consider in supporting trust in news, including potential gaps in the regulatory framework, the consistency of journalism standards, and how current funding models and funding pressures for news provision might affect trust.

Background

The United Nations (UN) states that people's trust in the media is essential to "social and economic progress, allowing people to cooperate with and express solidarity for one another" (see [Social impacts of lower trust in news providers](#)).¹

The UN highlights the potentially positive impact social media and increased connectivity has on public trust (see [Factors associated with trust in news](#)).¹

However, research for UNESCO in 2023 found a high prevalence of false or misleading information on social media (see [PN 719](#)),² which may reduce public trust in news providers.^{3,4}

International surveys suggest that the UK has relatively low, and declining, levels of trust in news.⁵⁻⁷ For example, the World Values Survey found that:

- confidence in the UK press dropped steeply in the 1980s and has remained at one of the lowest levels of trust internationally^{a 8}
- of 64 countries surveyed between 2017 and 2022, only Egypt reported less confidence in the press (8% said they had confidence) than the UK (13%)⁸

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)^b has a priority outcome to "create a broadcasting and media system fit for the 21st century".^{9,10} Ofcom, the UK statutory regulator, has a priority outcome to support "media we trust and value".¹¹

Since 2020, five parliamentary inquiries have scrutinised aspects of trust in news providers.^c Most recently, in January 2024, the House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee launched an inquiry into the [Future of news: impartiality, trust and technology](#).¹²

Definitions and types of news

Though there are many ways to define 'news', there is no statutory definition.^d Some public and legal debate has focused on what makes content 'newsworthy'^{13,14} in terms of factors such as public interest criteria.^{e 15}

^a Based on 3,056 people in the UK aged 18+, surveyed 1 March-9 September 2022.⁸

^b Governance of culture, media and sport is devolved with the exception of broadcasting and digital communications, which are reserved.

^c The House of Lords Communications and Digital Committee held inquiries into the [future of journalism](#) (2020) and into [digital regulation](#) (2021). The House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee held inquiries into the [future of public service broadcasting](#) (2021) and [local journalism](#) (2022).

^d The [Communications Act 2003, s. 319\(8\)](#) classifies news under the provisions of the Act as follows: "news" means news in whatever form it is included in a service'.¹³ It does not define or provide examples of the forms news takes or the service by which it is delivered.

^e Public interest journalism is not universally defined. Media practitioners and academics suggest it refers to the pursuit of information that the public has a right to know.¹⁶

There are many different types of news and an increasing number of online news sources (Table 1).^{16,17} This complicates what is considered as a 'broadcaster' or 'news provider'.¹⁸ This POSTnote refers to organisations and individuals that convey news to the public collectively as 'news providers'.

In line with the evidence base and terminology used by academics and industry,^{19–22} this POSTnote uses a broad dictionary definition of news: a report in the media of recent events or occurrences, brought or coming to the reader or viewer as new information.²³

Table 1: Types and examples of news and news providers

The following list of categories of news is not exhaustive.

By source - how it is delivered to the consumer

Broadcast Includes news output by **television (TV) and radio** services. Public service broadcasters (PSBs)^f such as the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 have requirements to provide news.²⁶ There are also wholly commercial outlets such as Sky News.

Print Includes brands of **printed newspapers**, magazines and periodicals, such as Metro Newspaper, Daily Mail, The Telegraph, The Guardian, The Sun and Byline Times. Also referred to as 'the press', which can be news physically printed as text on paper or a digital version.

Online Some news media, such as BBC News or The Times, have become online **digital news brands** with website and app content.²⁷

Includes **social media platforms and aggregators**, also known as 'online intermediaries',³ such as Facebook and Google. These do not generate content but instead use algorithms to provide news from multiple sources to users.³

May include content created by **self-publishing journalists** such as YouTubers, bloggers, or journo-influencers.⁹

By topic For example, breaking, sports, lifestyle, politics, specialist.

By location For example, local, regional, national, international.

By format For example, bulletins, programmes, comment, letters, articles, short films, interviews, documentaries, magazines.

Source: adapted from Geyser (2017), Leinonen (2022) and information published by Ofcom and Reuters Institute for Journalism.^{3,25,27–29}

^f PSBs are the BBC; those providing Channel 3 services, which includes ITV and STV;²⁴ Channel 4; Channel 5; and S4C. While all BBC television channels are PSB channels, only the main channels of other PSBs have this status.²⁵

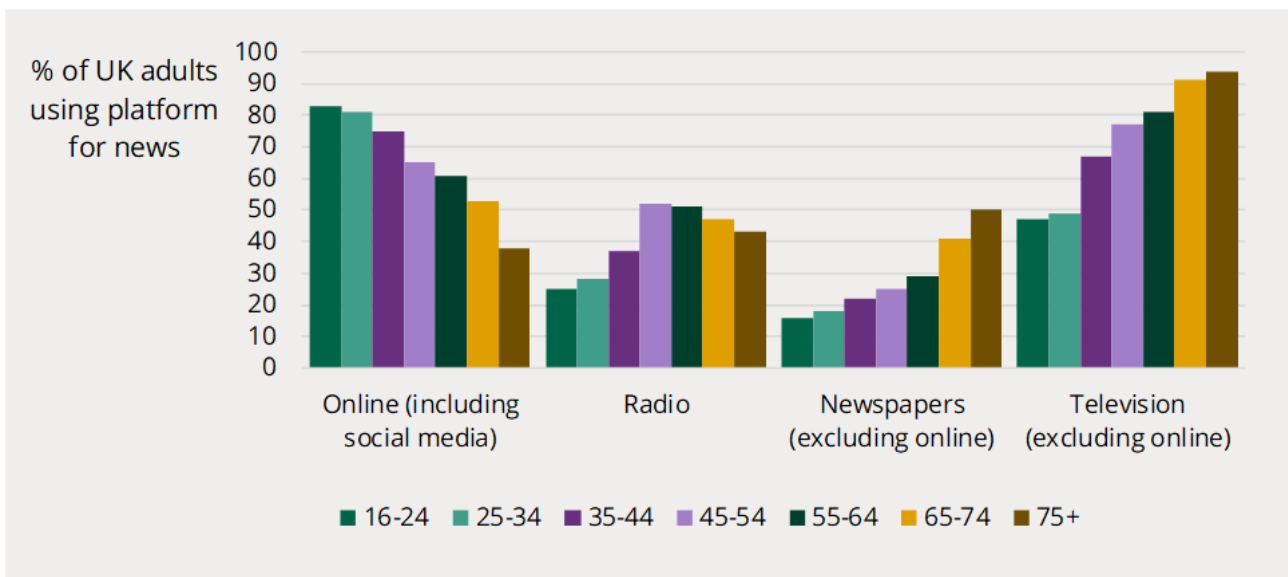
⁹ A 'journo-influencer' is a someone who adopts an influencer style of reporting.^{28,29} An 'influencer' is someone who uses their authority, knowledge, or relationship with their audience to affect the decisions of others.²⁵

In 2024, Ofcom reported that 96% of UK adults consume news across different sources including:^{h 30-32}

- 70% via television (TV)ⁱ
- 71% online
- 40% via the radio
- 34% via newspapers^j

Younger adults were the most likely to access news online, while older adults were more likely to use traditional sources such as TV and printed newspapers (Figure 1).³⁰

Figure 1: News consumption by source and age



Source: News consumption in the UK: 2023, Research findings, Ofcom (2023)³⁰

What is trust in news?

The concept of trust can be complex and there is debate on how to define it:³³⁻³⁶

- Some industry bodies and academics note that trust has many dimensions: it can depend on perceived qualities such as honesty, accuracy, and reliability.^{k 12,37-42}

^h Based on Ofcom’s News Consumption Survey, which has been carried out annually since 2013. 2024 wave based on over 5,400 people aged 16+, interviewed face-to-face or online, in November-December 2023 and February-March 2024.

ⁱ This includes viewing news via video-on-demand (VoD), which comprised 4% of the total in 2024.³²

^j This includes reading newspapers both via print and the website/app.³²

^k Other qualities include: competence, empathy, objectivity, impartiality, familiarity, risk, clarity, courage, fairness, respect, transparency, authenticity, credibility and confidence.^{12,38-43}

In the context of news, the ability of an individual to assess the reliability of news, and sources of news, will be important.^{43–45}

- Concepts of trust may depend on the context or situation.^{33,46} For example, trusting someone to look after your child is different from trusting a ladder to hold your weight.^{33,46}
- The UN and OECD define trust as “a person’s belief that another person or institution will act consistently with their expectations of positive behaviour”.^{1,47}

This POSTnote focuses on trust as a reliance on news providers to deliver information that consumers can trust and value. Its focus is on trust, rather than trustworthiness. Stakeholders note the difference between these concepts:^{18–20,33,36}

- trust refers to subjective beliefs held about an individual/organisation
- trustworthiness refers to actual qualities of that individual/organisation

While the two are connected, they are independent: for example, people may trust a news provider, regardless of whether or not it is seen as trustworthy.^{18,20}

Measuring trust in news

The complex nature of trust makes it difficult to measure.^{1,33,48} Trust in news providers is most often quantified through self-report surveys^{49,50} using a variety of question types.¹

These surveys provide a snapshot estimate⁴⁹ and, when repeated, can indicate general trends.²² Some stakeholders note the risk that survey methods over-simplify the concept of trust and present it without context.^{38,49,51}

Regulation of news

Industry bodies note how important regulation is in ensuring journalistic standards and how this links to trust in news providers.^{21,22,18,45,52,53}

The Leveson Inquiry,^{m 14} which reported in 2012, and the 2019 Cairncross Review,^{n 54} made several recommendations about media regulation, which aimed to improve the news media’s relationship with the public.^{55,56}

¹ Examples of questions include: “how much do you trust the news media on a scale of ‘not at all’ to ‘completely’”,⁵² and “do you trust journalists to tell the truth, or not?”.⁵³

^m The government-commissioned Leveson Inquiry examined concerns about the conduct of the press. It made 92 recommendations, including 47 on future regulatory models. These covered: establishing an independent self-regulatory regime; encouraging industry membership; and desired features of any self-regulatory body/approach, for example, the nature of its powers and sanctions.¹⁴

ⁿ The government-commissioned Cairncross Review examined the sustainability of journalism and the future of the press. It made nine recommendations including: creating a News Quality Obligation, with

Under current legislation (Table 2), industry groups, the communications regulator Ofcom, and other government bodies have responsibilities for regulating some types of news providers (Table 3).^{56,57}

Different types of news are regulated differently (Table 3). Ofcom is the statutory regulator for broadcast news in the UK.⁵⁸ The Media Act 2024 will extend Ofcom's content regulation duties to some video on-demand services (Table 2).

Voluntary regulatory arrangements apply to print media, through an external regulator or an internal standards board.⁵⁶ As of 2024, there are two external regulators, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) and Impress. Impress is an approved regulator, which was designed to be 'Leveson-compliant'.^{56,59-61}

Some types of news, for example, from self-publishing journalists and individuals not employed by news media organisations, podcasts, and some online audio services, are not subject to any regulation.⁶²

There are periodic examinations of the performance of different regulatory frameworks:

- Two reviews commissioned by IPSO found that voluntary regulation of the press by IPSO was working effectively in the interests of consumers.^{22,63,64}
- A number of Press Recognition Panel (PRP)^p reports have raised concerns about IPSO's regulatory regime.^{65,66} For example, one report estimated that IPSO had investigated around 4%, and upheld less than 1%, of the complaints it had received.^{q 67}
- As part of its regular reviews, in 2022, the PRP confirmed that Impress continued to satisfy the Royal Charter's requirement for recognition as an approved regulator.⁶⁸
- The 2024 BBC Mid-Term Review by DCMS examined the regulatory framework. The government recommended changes to Ofcom's responsibilities, including the extension of the regulators remit to include full enforcement powers over BBC online material, and new functions to review BBC complaints decisions.⁶⁹

regulation of online platforms to improve users' news experience; and the co-development of a media literacy strategy led by government with Ofcom, the news industry and other bodies.⁵⁴

^o A 2013 Royal Charter on press regulation incorporated key recommendations from the Leveson report, allowing for the establishment of one or more independent self-regulatory bodies for the press. Any such body would be recognised and overseen by the Press Recognition Panel (see footnote p), which launched in 2014. In 2016, Impress was recognised by the Panel as an 'approved' regulator.⁵⁸

^p An independent body set up by Royal Charter to oversee regulation of the press and other news publishers.

^q The PRP noted that this calculation excluded "third party complaints and clearly out of scope complaints".

Table 2: Legislation relevant to news providers as of August 2024

Communications Act 2003	<p>Requires Ofcom to put in place a code (Ofcom’s Broadcasting Code) setting standards for the content of TV and radio services.⁷⁰</p> <p>Alongside other aims,^r the Code seeks to ensure that licensed broadcasters report news with due accuracy and present it with due impartiality.^{71,72} Its rules include that politicians must not act as news presenters, interviewers, or presenters in any news programme unless, exceptionally, it is editorially justified.⁷²</p>
Data Protection Act 2018	<p>In 2023, the Information Commissioner’s Office published a code of practice for media organisations and journalists to support compliance with the Act and to help build public trust in news providers by ensuring that reporters use personal information lawfully.⁷³</p>
Online Safety Act 2023 ⁷⁴	<p>Places new duties on social media companies and search services in relation to user safety, including to reduce the risks that their services are used for illegal activity, and to take down illegal content. Illegal offences include malicious activity conducted by foreign powers, for example state-sponsored disinformation campaigns (see PN 719).</p> <p>Makes Ofcom the independent regulator of online safety, with new powers to enforce providers’ compliance with the Act.</p>
Media Act 2024 ^s ⁷⁵	<p>Gives Ofcom powers to enforce a code of practice for video-on-demand (VoD) services, like Netflix and Amazon Prime, updates the regulatory framework for commercial radio, and makes provisions to ensure that public service content is prominent (available and easy to find) online.⁷⁶</p>
Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024	<p>Provides for the regulation of competition in digital markets, including news communications.⁷⁷ A representative for the print industry suggested that the Act will provide economic sustainability for the media sector through better definition of the financial relationship between platforms and publishers.⁷⁸</p>

^r The Broadcasting Code contains ten sections covering: Protecting the under-eighteens; Harm and offence; Crime, disorder, hatred and abuse; Religion; Due impartiality and due accuracy; Elections and referendums; Fairness; Privacy; Commercial references on TV; and Commercial communications on radio.

^s The Media Act repeals Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013. Although never enacted, this could have required news publishers to pay the costs of any court judgement if they were not a member of an approved regulator (see footnote o). Section 40 had arisen from the Leveson Inquiry, and was intended to provide financial incentives to newspaper publishers to join an approved regulator.⁵⁷

Table 3: Regulatory arrangements by type of news provider

<p>Broadcast (TV and radio) news providers</p>	<p>Statutory regulation by Ofcom. Its role includes:⁵⁸</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> licensing broadcast news providers enforcing content standards as set out in the Broadcasting Code investigating complaints about providers <p>PSBs are subject to additional reporting requirements.⁵⁸ The Secretary of State for DCMS also regularly meets with the Director General of the BBC and with Ofcom.⁷⁹</p> <p>Ofcom’s regulation of the BBC also includes a non-enforcement role with respect to the BBC’s online written news.[†]</p>
<p>Print media, including organisations that publish editorial content in print or online</p>	<p>Voluntary regulation by an internal standards board or an externally recognised membership-based organisation.⁵⁶</p> <p>There are two external regulators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) regulates over 1,500 print and 1,100 online UK news titles which IPSO estimates as around 95% of the market.^{63,80,81} Examples include The Daily Telegraph (Telegraph Media Group Ltd), The Times and The Sun (News UK), The Express (Reach plc), and the Daily Mail (Associated Newspapers Ltd) Impress regulates 210 news titles,⁸² including The Conversation UK, Liverpool Reporter, and The Ecologist. <p>Members follow journalistic codes, set up complaints handling processes and submit annual statements to the regulator.^{83,84}</p> <p>The Guardian, Independent and Financial Times are not members of either regulatory organisation, choosing instead to set up an internal standards board.^{85,86}</p>

[†] Under the BBC’s Framework Agreement, Ofcom must “consider and give an opinion, including such recommendations as they consider appropriate, on whether the BBC has observed the relevant editorial guidelines on the content of online material in the UK Public Services”.⁷⁴

Trends in levels of trust in news

Newspapers and other print news

Overall consumption of print news has declined as audiences have moved to online news sources.^{27,30,31,87} For example, the 2024 Digital News Report,^u published by the Reuters Institute,^v found that the proportion of UK adults accessing print news declined from 59% to 14% between 2013 and 2024.³⁵

There is mixed evidence on whether trust in print news in the UK has increased, decreased or remained stable (Table 4).^{22,49}

Table 4: Examples of UK trends in trust in newspaper journalists and print news

Source	Measure(s)	Time period	Trend direction and finding
Ipsos	Trust journalists "to tell the truth"	1983-2017	↑ Increase from 19% in 1983, and 10% in 1993, to 27% in 2017
YouGov	Trust journalists on "upmarket" or "mid-market" newspapers to tell the truth "a great deal" or "a fair amount"	2003-2016	↓ Decline on both measures between March 2003 and October 2016: for "upmarket" newspapers from 65% to 36%; for "mid-market" newspapers from 36% to 16%
Euro-barometer	Trust "the written press" or not	2011-2016	↔ Remained stable at around 20%
Charity Commission	Trust newspapers vs other sectors (for example, doctors, MPs)	2008-2023	↔ Remained stable with a mean score out of 10 of 3.9 in 2008 and 4.0 in 2023

Source: compiled from surveys for Ipsos,⁸⁹ YouGov,⁹⁰ Eurobarometer,⁴⁹ and the Charity Commission.⁹¹

Some academics suggest that news consumption patterns may not correlate with levels of trust in news providers.^{20,92} For example, people tend to report lower levels of trust in tabloids even though sales are similar to broadsheets.^{w 35,87,93}

^u 2024 Digital News Report based on online survey responses from around 95,000 people in 47 countries, during January-February 2024; the UK sample size was 2,107. The Digital News Report has been published annually since 2012.

^v The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism – or 'Reuters Institute' – is a research centre based within the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford.⁸⁸

^w Data published by Publishers Audience Measurement Company/Ipsos Iris for 2020-22 shows that "quality" newspaper brands and "popular" news brands both reached 67% of the general population, whilst "mid-market" newspapers reached 58%.⁹⁵

A 2020 DCMS study into dynamics of the UK press sector suggested that public trust in local press is higher than for national press.^{22,55,94} One academic suggested local press could be seen as more relevant for local audiences and more neutral politically.²⁰

Broadcast news

Survey evidence suggests declines in the reach of TV and radio news in the UK.^{30,31} For example, according to the Reuters Institute, the proportion of UK adults getting news from the TV declined from 79% in 2013 to 50% in 2024.^{x 35}

Broadcast news is consistently reported as among the most trusted, including from PSBs.^{27,30,35,95} Ofcom research for 2024 found higher trust ratings among consumers of TV news (68% rated this type highly for trust) and radio news (68%), followed by newspapers (66%) and social media (43%).^{y 31}

An academic article in the *British Journalism Review* in 2021 highlighted that news organisations subject to impartiality rules gain greater trust from news consumers.⁹⁶

Online news

In 2024, Ofcom research found that 71% of UK adults consumed online news (up from 64% in 2018).^{30,31} Ofcom analysis for 2022 suggested that 64% of online adults used online intermediaries to access news and information regularly.^{z 3,97}

As noted above, news sourced from social media was rated lowest for trust compared to all other sources.^{aa 30}

Some industry bodies suggest that a lack of transparency around online intermediaries' news sources makes understanding the impact these platforms have on news consumption difficult.^{18,45} In addition, podcasts are becoming increasingly popular³⁵ and more research is required to understand their role in news provision.⁹⁸

In 2024, the Reuters Institute found that 46% of UK respondents actively avoided the news (up from 24% in 2017), while 38% felt "worn out" by the amount of news.^{35,99} It noted the increase in smartphone use and notifications from apps^{bb} as a potential contributor to people feeling that "the news has become hard to escape".³⁵

^x Ofcom research suggests that, between 2018 and 2024, TV channels generally saw falls in their news audience, with the exception of GB News, which launched in 2021 and accounted for around 8% of people watching TV news by 2024.^{32,33,97}

^y For each type of news, percentages are the proportion of regular viewers (at least weekly) for that type of news who rated it highly for trust (between 7-10 on a 10-point scale).

^z Meta – the company which owns Facebook and Instagram – was the third largest source of news in the UK after the BBC and ITV.¹⁰⁰

^{aa} Young social media users (aged 12-15) who are high consumers of online news, reported lower trust levels in online news compared to traditional sources.³²

^{bb} Ofcom research suggested that in 2023 UK adults were online for an average of 3 hours 41 minutes a day, mostly on smartphones.¹⁰³

Factors associated with trust in news

Increased use of social media

Academics and industry bodies note that increased social media use has changed how people consume news.^{97,100,101} There is debate as to whether this has made news use:

- more diverse, through increasing the number of news sources,^{97,102,103} and the algorithmic selection offered by search engines and social media platforms^{18,19,21,45,104}
- less diverse, due to the potential for platforms to, for example, narrow the range of topics and viewpoints, or prioritise certain outlets^{36,105}

Research studies suggest that:

- those who most often get their news from social media tend to be more polarised and less trusting of democratic institutions than those who get their news from broadcast and print sources³
- the more social media is used as a news source, the lower the trust^{4,35}

Although causal evidence is lacking, academics and industry bodies highlight ways in which increased social media use may affect trust in news providers, including:

- Reducing the intermediary role of news providers. For example, content creators and politicians have a direct link to the public via social media,²¹ especially through news videos on online platforms.^{cc 35}
- Increasing risks of polarising news audiences. For example, online 'echo chambers'^{dd} of like-minded individuals may avoid dissenting opinions, potentially creating distrust of news.^{104,106}
- The risk that customisation of news may fragment and dilute trusted sources. For example, platforms may push certain topics to increase audience engagement^{97,107,108} potentially increasing the risk of amplifying harmful content.¹⁰⁵

Ofcom is currently monitoring the impact of online platforms on the financial sustainability of the news distribution sector (see [Funding for news](#)).¹⁰²

^{cc} A 2024 worldwide study by the Reuters Institute found the main source of news videos was via online platforms (72%) rather than direct from publisher websites (22%).³⁶

^{dd} Echo chambers are online spaces, sometimes associated with conspiratorial networks, comprising of a small minority of self-selecting and partisan individuals.^{4,108,110,111}

Differences between social groups

Some surveys suggest variations in trust between different social groups.^{ee 109} For example:

- The 2022 World Values Survey found that confidence in the press in the UK varied by age. For example, 25% of Pre-War generation respondents had confidence in the press, compared to 15% of Gen X and 5% of Gen Z respondents.^{ff 8}
- Internal research by the BBC found variations in levels of trust in the broadcaster by age, education, political view, and geographic area.¹⁷

The 2024 Digital News Report found that worldwide, young people, people with lower levels of formal education, and those in low income households tend to trust the news less. For example, 37% of people aged under 35 said they trusted most news most of the time, compared with 42% of people aged 35 and over.³⁵

Diversity and representation

News providers recognise that representation of different groups is important for trust.^{16,37,53,110} Some studies note a lack of diversity in the UK news media,¹¹¹ which could reduce trust among under-represented communities.^{21,36,112,113}

This is particularly highlighted in relation to local journalism and staff recruitment.^{15,21,45,114–116} For example, in a survey of 403 female journalists, 75% have experienced a threat to their safety,¹¹⁷ which industry representatives say is impacting staff retention and press freedom.¹¹⁸

Research by Ofcom suggests that audiences from lower income households or working class backgrounds feel underrepresented by the BBC,¹⁶ although there is no published data on how this links to trust in BBC news provision.¹⁷

Political events and trust in politics

Trust in the news can vary for groups with differing political opinions.^{20,119} For the UK, the Digital News Report studies suggest that trust is slightly higher on the right of the political spectrum.^{20,120} Its 2020 report found that 36% of 'right-leaning' people trust the news most of the time compared to 15% of 'left-leaning', although this gap had widened following the 2019 election.^{99 120,121}

^{ee} As noted in Figure 1, different groups may access news in different ways.

^{ff} Pre-war generation can refer to people born before 1946 (roughly, aged 80 and over, as of 2024). Gen/ X can refer to those born between 1966 and 1980 (roughly, aged between 45-60). Gen Z can refer to people born in or after the mid-1990s (roughly, aged up to 30).¹¹⁶

⁹⁹ For example, the 2015 report found similar levels of trust for 'right' and 'left-leaning' people, at 48% and 46% respectively.¹²⁰

Although causal evidence is not available,^{20,122} some stakeholders note the potential correlation between declines in trust in news and significant political events such as the referendums on Scottish independence and Brexit.^{19,92,34,17}

Stakeholders note the close links? between trust in news and trust in politics.^{15,20,21,35,36,123,124} The World Values Survey found that confidence in political parties in Britain remained low over the last two decades: in 2022, 13% said they had confidence in political parties, down from 17% in 2005; over the same period, trust in the press remained stable, between 13-15%.⁸

Perceptions of impartiality

The UK Communications Act 2003 requires news providers licensed by Ofcom to abide by rules on “due impartiality contained in the Ofcom code” (see Table 2).¹²⁵

There is no consensus on whether perceptions of impartiality directly impact trust in news providers.^{20,21,96,122} Some industry bodies note that questioning a provider’s impartiality may heighten perceptions of bias.^{21,45} Ofcom research on the BBC suggested that, in addition to actual news content, audience perceptions of the BBC’s impartiality were driven by contextual factors.^{hh 126}

Academic research suggests that people tend to believe what confirms their existing beliefs and be more sceptical of counterviews, which can lead to selection bias when choosing news sources (see News literate audiences).¹²⁷ Ofcom research on smaller news channels, such as Al Jazeera and GB News, suggests that regular viewers of those channels rate them highly for trust. However, trust ratings for such channels are lower than average, when based on all TV news viewers.⁹⁵

Funding for news

Commercial news brands (see Table 1) are funded through circulation, display and classified advertising, and subscriptions fees.^{57,128,129} News on BBC and S4C is funded through the licence fee; news on other PSBs is funded through their commercial activities.^{57,128–130}

News offered online directly or via intermediaries provided at no cost to the consumer may generate revenue through digital advertising.^{128,129} The Competition & Markets Authority found that around £14 billion was spent on digital advertising in the UK in 2019, with 80% on Google and Facebook.¹³¹

There are funding pressures on some news providers, linked to the increase in online sources.^{128,132–134} For example:

- demand for, and revenue associated with, printed newspapers has fallen sharply since the late 2000s^{128,132}
- the licence fee was frozen for two years in 2022 and 2023, which reduced BBC and S4C income in real terms¹³⁵

^{hh} Contextual factors included, for example, an individual’s relationship with the BBC brand; how much a story resonated with a person’s identity; and the broader cultural climate.

Some academics suggest potential risks of the current funding model, and funding pressures, for news provision on levels of trust in news, including:

- the ability of the current business model to provide independent, diverse and representative news media¹¹³
- whether a reliance on advertising revenue incentivises providers to prioritise popular content over in-depth, investigative reporting¹⁹
- the potential impact of profitability on journalists' capacity to provide high-quality reporting^{34,92,131}

Social impacts of lower trust in news providers

Academics agree that the news can change the way people think and behave.^{136–141} However, there is a lack of data to show the extent to which trust in news providers influences behavioural change.^{19,20,49}

Use of AI and fake news

The spreading of false information or “fake news” is not a new phenomenon, with documented examples since the 19th century ([PN708](#)).^{142–144} More recently, the use of generative AIⁱⁱ to produce fake news content on social media, such as reports in 2023 of Pope Francis wearing designer clothing, has been linked to the erosion of public trust in news providers (see [PN708](#), [PN719](#) and [PB57](#)).¹¹⁰

The media charity, Voice of the Listener & Viewer, suggests that news output containing disinformation or misinformation may negatively impact trust in news providers.^{jj}⁶² Low trust can create further opportunities for the spread of disinformation and misinformation.^{19,98}

Of 293 media executives surveyed by the Reuters Institute, 70% think that generative AI will lower the public's trust in the news.¹⁰⁶

Role of news providers in the democratic process

Stakeholders note the importance of news to the functioning of democracy^{21,37,110,113,145,146} and civic engagement.^{147–149} There is some evidence of a causal link between levels of news consumption and political participation, for

ⁱⁱ The Alan Turing Institute defines generative AI as an “artificial intelligence system that generates text, images, audio, video or other media in response to user prompts”.¹⁵²

^{jj} Disinformation is the deliberate creation and spread of false and/or misleading content. Misinformation is the inadvertent spread of such content (see [PN719](#)).¹⁵³

example, a DCMS study in 2020 showed that introducing a daily local newspaper increased voter turnout by 1.27 percentage points.⁵⁵

Research in 2022 by the Public Interest News Foundation^{kk} found that in areas where local media engaged in face-to-face activities, trust in news publications about democratic processes increased.^{112,150}

A number of contributors highlight the role journalists have in holding those in positions of power to account.^{151,152} Although it is difficult to identify empirical evidence for the UK, some stakeholders and studies note that reduced public trust in news providers may contribute to institutional corruption due to the lack of accountability.^{18,19,153,154}

Stakeholders note that trust in news providers can be intentionally undermined by those who seek to disrupt society¹⁵⁵ by increasing cynicism around the role of news providers, and other democratic institutions, in society.^{20,110,114,155,156}

Public information campaigns

It is difficult to identify causation between trust levels in news providers and impacts on public information campaigns.¹⁵⁷ However, the 2021 Digital News Report found that news providers play a significant role in enabling audiences to understand public health emergencies.¹⁵⁸

During the covid-19 pandemic, government press conferences featured heavily on PSB and most commercial news bulletins, with less airtime given to “anti-vaxxers”.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, TV news consumption was high¹⁵⁹ with PSBs achieving their highest audience share in six years.⁵³

Studies in the UK found that those who obtained news primarily from social media were less willing to be vaccinated^{160,161} or to vaccinate their children (see POST rapid response on [covid-19 vaccine misinformation](#)).¹⁶²

Current approaches to increasing trust and trustworthiness in news

News provision involves many stakeholders, including audiences, journalists, publishers, platforms, advertisers, policymakers and regulators. Each group has goals, behaviours and incentives that affect how news is presented and understood.¹⁰²

Academics have suggested that the audience should not be the sole focus of a lack of trust in news media^{34,92} and that news providers also have a responsibility to provide trustworthy information.^{36,92}

^{kk} The Public Interest News Foundation is a UK charity which aims to support public interest news.¹⁵⁹

The current evidence base for interventions to improve trust is limited mainly to laboratory based studies.^{ll 34,92} Their effectiveness in real-life situations remains unclear.^{18,20}

Guidelines and accreditation schemes

Some organisations offer guidelines and accreditation schemes (Box 1), aimed at promoting high-quality journalism and reducing the spread of disinformation (PN719). These initiatives encourage media platforms to prioritise trustworthy sources and inform consumers of the primary source of the news.

As of 2024, in the UK, each type of news provider may be bound by a different set of journalism standards (see Table 3). This contrasts with European Union member states, where the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) 2024 seeks to harmonise media regulation across the EU.^{mm 163}

Box 1: Standards, kitemarks and badges

The Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI) uses shared standardsⁿⁿ based on 130 criteria relating to transparency in the media and professionalism in editorial processes.¹⁶⁵ Used by Microsoft's Bing News^{oo} and Newsback.^{pp 21}

NewsGuard assesses the trustworthiness of news sites using nine indicators based on industry best practices. Sites are awarded a 'nutrition rating' via a plug-in available on Microsoft internet browsers.^{qq 45}

The Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA) is an open standards body that helps audiences understand the origin of content and any changes made since its release.^{rr 37} Used by the BBC.³⁷

^{ll} Studies are mostly based on experiments outside the UK where participants are shown different versions of news stories, with or without additional information on how the story was made.²²

^{mm} The EMFA encourages news outlets to adopt certified standards, such as the Journalism Trust Initiative.^{23,178–180}

ⁿⁿ By August 2023, 100 media outlets in 33 countries, including Ireland, France, the US and Canada, had completed a self-evaluation with the JTI benchmarks.¹⁶⁴ As of 2024, there are no UK-based news providers using this initiative.²¹

^{oo} Microsoft Bing News aggregates news content from world, national and local sources.¹⁶⁶

^{pp} Newsback provides technology to media organisations to trace the origin of print, radio, television and online news to help identify when content has potentially been manipulated.¹⁶⁷

^{qq} In 2020, NewsGuard estimated that its ratings covered around 95% of online engagement across the UK, US, Germany, France and Italy.¹⁶⁸ In 2023, NewsGuard noted that the Department of Culture, Media and Sport had made use of its ratings to analyse public conversations.¹⁶⁹

^{rr} C2PA develops technical standards for certifying the source and history (or provenance) of media content.¹⁷⁰

Transparency in news production

Audiences may be more likely to trust news providers if they can see how news reports are made,^{60,100,101} for example, through visible branding and accessibility to original sources.^{22,39,62,172,173}

A 2023 survey by Newsworks, a publishing marketing body found 74% of participants look to the most popular news brands to verify stories seen on social media.³⁹

Publishers claim that impersonation of news brands by aggregator or AI-produced news sites damages their relationship with their audience and undermines trust.²² However, the impact of making the original sources or brand clearer has not been studied.¹⁷

Some news organisations are using transparency techniques, including fact-checking initiatives.¹⁷⁴⁻¹⁷⁶ For example, the BBC launched 'BBC Verify' in April 2023 to demonstrate the editorial tools and techniques used by its journalists.^{17,177}

News literate audiences

News consumers are exposed to reports of events that divide opinion; this requires scepticism and critical thinking skills to assess potentially unreliable sources (PN 719).^{17,20,114,122}

News literacy involves the public knowing how to access, assess, and evaluate news content and provision.^{46,178,179} Examples include:

- distinguishing eyewitness journalism from opinion pieces^{22,114}
- knowing how to spot false or misleading information (PN 719)
- understanding the role of the regulator^{45,92}

Some stakeholders agree there is a lack of public knowledge about regulatory frameworks for news (see Table 3)^{34,45} and how news is produced.¹⁰³ Others note the difficulty of measuring levels of news literacy, and the impact of news literacy training.^{19,179}

One research study suggests that increasing news literacy has the potential to rebuild public trust in the news sector¹⁸⁰ but it is not understood how news literacy links to trust in news providers.⁹²

Reuters Institute research in 2018 found only small increases in levels of trust in news as news literacy increased, possibly because news literacy may also increase scepticism.¹⁷⁹

Editorial strategies and trust

Reuters Institute reports note that solutions-based journalism^{ss} could help build trust in news providers and (re)engage news consumers^{27,106,182} by giving people a sense of hope or personal agency.¹¹⁹

Around 44% of 300 media executives surveyed by the Reuters Institute (2024) are considering this editorial strategy to address news avoidance and fatigue.¹⁰⁶

Future policy considerations

As news increasingly moves online, stakeholders highlighted areas for further consideration in the debate around supporting trust in news providers:

- potential gaps and limitations in the regulatory framework, for example, podcasted news (see [Regulation of news](#)).^{19,62,98,110,171}
- implementation of the recommendations from the Leveson Inquiry, which has been the subject of contentious debate,⁵⁶ and the Cairncross Review^{36,103}
- consistency in journalistic standards across news sources^{110,171} and in implementation of statutory regulation^{tt 18}
- whether current funding models incentivise initiatives that could promote greater trust, such as local coverage and news literacy programmes^{19,20,45,92,122}
- how news literacy and news avoidance affect news consumption^{18,19,45,92}

Industry bodies and academics note the challenge of striking the right balance between regulation and consideration of freedoms of speech, of expression, and of the press.^{36,58,102,183,184}

^{ss} 'Solutions-based' or 'constructive' journalism aims to move beyond news as "what's gone wrong". It involves reporting about responses to problems; providing insight on what can be learned; providing evidence; and setting out limitations, to place the news in context.¹⁸¹

^{tt} For example, in March 2024, Ofcom ruled that GB News had breached impartiality rules on five occasions when an MP had presented news programmes.¹⁹³ It did not impose sanctions at that time, instead putting the channel on notice that repeated breaches may result in future sanctions. Some industry experts suggested this approach may negatively affect public trust in broadcast news.¹⁹⁴

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Contributors

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Members of the POST Board*

Ofcom*

Jo Allan and colleagues, Newsworks*

Professor Steven Barnett, Westminster University

Dr Jennifer Birks, Nottingham University*

Sophie Chalk, Voice of the Listener and Viewer*

Dr Precious Chatterje-Doodly, The Open University*

John Davidson, Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO)

Professor Natalie Fenton, Goldsmith's Leverhulme Media Research Centre*

Chloé Fiodiere, Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Dr Richard Fletcher, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford*

Professor Marie Gillespie, The Open University

Jonathan Heawood, Public Interest News Foundation*

Balihar Khalsa, ITN News*

Lexie Kirkconnell-Kawana, Impress*

Helen Moor, BBC News

Fiona O'Brien, Reporters Without Borders (RSF)*

Dr Jonathan Tallant, Nottingham University*

Emma Theedom, BBC News

Peter Wright, DMG Media

*denotes people and organisations who acted as external reviewers of the briefing

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