

DIGITAL NEWS REPORT IRELAND 2020

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Niamh Kirk, Kirsty Park, Dave Robbins,
Eileen Culloty, Edward Casey, Jane Suiter



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BROADCASTING
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CONTENTS

BAI Foreword	04
DCU FuJo Forward	06
Methodology	07
Authorship and Research Acknowledgements	08
Executive Summary	09
Section 1: Irish News Consumers	13
Section 2: Sources and Devices	23
Section 3: Attitudes, Trust and Payments	33
Section 4: Brands, Discovery and Social Media	49
Section 5: Generation Z:18-24s as News Consumers	65
Essay: COVID-19's disastrous effects on media worldwide by Colleen Murrell	74
Essay: Podcasting comes into its own by David Robbins	76
Essay: Irish attitudes to information are broadly positive by Eileen Culloty	78
Essay: Generation Z – A new generation and a new challenge for digital journalism by Niamh Kirk.....	80
Essay: The importance of local news by Fiona Stack.....	82

BAI FOREWORD

The Ireland in which we are launching the 2020 Digital News Report is unrecognisable from the one that we were living in when the data was collected a few short months ago. At that point, airports, bars and restaurants were still packed with people who had probably never heard the phrase “social distancing”. Despite the upheaval caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the information contained in this year’s report is as informative and thought provoking as ever because one of the key values of this research is that it tracks the evolution of the news consumption ecosystem in Ireland and across the globe.

One of the recurring themes for public health officials during the pandemic has been the importance of accessing reliable information from trusted sources. False information about the virus, its origins, how it is spread, and available treatments have caused alarm and cost lives. Thankfully, as shown by this report and others¹ published recently, citizens in Ireland have access to, and rely on, credible information provided by established news sources. This is reflected in the consistent positioning of recognised outlets in the brand lists in terms of popularity and trust scores. However, as illustrated in the BAI’s work on countering disinformation² there is no room for complacency. Attacks on 5G infrastructure have shown the power, prevalence and coordinated nature of such activity nationally and internationally

The 2020 report and the COVID-19 crisis have also highlighted that we cannot be complacent regarding the sustainability of our news provision ecosystem. The fragility of the funding model that underpins the provision of indigenous news in Ireland has been a recurring theme in the Digital News Report since it was first published in 2015. Traditional revenue sources have been eroded and sustainable new ones have yet to emerge. The 2020 report again shows modest growth in the numbers willing to pay for news online despite innovation in payment models. At 12 per cent the number of people paying for news in Ireland has not increased since last year’s report. While there is some evidence that online subscriptions have increased during the COVID-19 restrictions it is not clear if these will be sustained and any additional revenue from this source will not replace lost advertising.

In addition, research published by Core Media before the crisis hit revealed that Google and Facebook accounted for over 40 per cent (€425m) of the Irish advertising market in 2019. This represented 80 per cent of all online advertising spend.³ This growth has been at the expense of traditional media players especially the print sector. These same traditional media players have been most severely impacted by the collapse in advertising revenue due to the pandemic and ironically have also been central to the provision of reliable news and public health information. This dynamic is illustrated in the contribution from Fiona Stack General Manager of Radio Kerry which is included in this Report.

1 https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2020-05/20-028458-jnlr_omnipoll_2020_final_21-04-20.pdf

2 The BAI has been playing a leadership role in Ireland and at a European level in monitoring the implementation of the Code of Practice on Disinformation over the past 12 months, For more information see <https://www.bai.ie/en/new-report-highlights-inconsistencies-across-digital-platforms-in-tackling-disinformation>

3 <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/media-and-marketing/google-facebook-to-build-on-whopping-share-of-irish-ad-market-1.4191494>

The BAI has responded to the funding crisis by providing €3.25m in targeted support to the commercial and community radio sectors and by releasing over €7m to the audiovisual sector in the recent Sound and Vision funding round. The BAI is actively engaged in discussions nationally and at a European level about the provision of further supports for the sector, in accordance with its statutory remit. We are also participating in wider conversations about provisions to the broader media sector particularly those that are critical in maintaining a plurality of media in Ireland. As we work our way through this crisis and into recovery, the social cohesion that has been evident over the past two months will be tested. Informed debate about the options available and taken will be critical to sustaining that cohesion. This will require a sustainably resourced media sector. The BAI is committed to playing its part in this regard.

Michael O'Keeffe
BAI Chief Executive
June 2020

DCU FUJO FOREWORD

Welcome to the sixth annual Irish Digital News Report, which has been designed to capture the changing ecology of news in Ireland. As part of the largest on-going comparative study of digital news consumption in the world, the international Digital News Report is an important indicator of shifting global trends.

This has been a challenging year for Irish journalism even before the COVID-19 crisis. Substantial falls in advertising revenues have hit the sector hard even though the crisis generated a noted up-tick in traditional media consumption. The latter has resulted in some successes with Independent.ie's new paywall, for example, well ahead of projections and The Irish Times adding significant digital and delivery subscriptions. The Irish data was collected pre-crisis and time will tell if current consumption patterns will translate into long-term trends.

This report puts the Irish data in an international context and provides important new insights into key issues including people's willingness to pay for news (broadly stable), the influence of private messaging applications, and declining trust in social media.

To examine the role of news in the wider information ecosystem, the report focuses on the demand for quality news, on global innovations to support the industry, and on the role of the media in combating disinformation. Overall, the attitudes of Irish consumers are broadly positive, but there are clear gaps in understanding regarding the likely sources of false information. Few respondents express concern about receiving false information from search engines or YouTube even though both are key sources of disinformation.

With a view to the future, this year we included a specific section on Generation Z and the trends and attitudes that characterise these consumers. Unsurprisingly, Generation Z is highly active on social media and in particular on YouTube and TikTok where they can engage with news in novel ways and participate in content creation with peers.

We trust and hope this will be an invaluable resource for academics, media owners, journalists, and those developing policy. Our team at Dublin City University's FuJo Institute is hugely grateful to our sponsor the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) and our academic partners at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University as well as the international pollsters YouGov and their Irish partners Research Now.

Through the annual Digital News Report and associated research projects, the DCU FuJo Institute is establishing a critical knowledge base for the Irish media industry. For more information about this work, visit: www.fujomedia.eu

Dr Jane Suiter

Director, DCU FuJo Institute
June 2020

METHODOLOGY

This international study has been commissioned to understand how news is currently being consumed globally with a particular focus on digital news consumption and devices used to access the news. To provide an international comparison, core questions were asked of a nationally representative audience in 40 countries. This is a study for the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University. It is made possible with the support of the following organisations: Hans Bredow Institute, Navarra University, Roskilde University, University of Canberra, Dublin City University, University of Laval, University of Tampere, University of Bergen.

The research on Ireland is designed to understand Irish news consumers' use and value of news across a number of factors. Results here are reflective of broad consumption trends in Ireland and are not equated to the data collected by news organisations regarding their individual digital readerships.

- A comprehensive online questionnaire was designed with input from all stakeholders to capture all aspects of online news consumption.
- The research was conducted online in January/February 2020.
- To reflect the total population, the data was weighted to targets set on age, gender, region, newspaper readership, and social grade. The sample is reflective of the population with access to the internet. In Ireland, this is some 94 per cent of the population.
- As this survey deals with news consumption, respondents were screened out if they had not accessed news in the last month. This category averaged around three per cent.
- It is important to note that online samples tend to under-represent the consumption habits of people who are not online (this typically includes those who are older, less affluent, have limited formal education, or live in more rural communities). In this sense, the survey is best understood as being representative of the online population who use news at least once a month.
- It is also important to note that online surveys rely on recall which is often imperfect or subject to bias. We have tried to mitigate these risks through careful questionnaire design and testing. Nevertheless, surveys can be good way of capturing fragmented media consumption across platforms (e.g. social media, messaging, apps, and websites) and tracking activities and changes over time.
- Figures in graphs are rounded up and down; additionally 'don't know' answers and categories with very low response rates have not been reported in the figures.
- The Digital News Report International conducted surveys in January/February 2020 and later repeated some questions in six countries (UK, US, Germany, Spain, South Korea, and Argentina) in April 2020 to understand the COVID-19 pandemic. The international comparisons in this report are derived from the surveys fielded in January/February in order to compare like with like.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Niamh Kirk is a researcher at DCU's Institute for Future Media and Journalism (FuJo) where she works on projects relating to journalism, social media, information politics and transnationalism. She is a post-doctoral researcher in UCD examining post conflict European societies and a lecturer in Dublin City University's School of Communications.

Kirsty Park is a post-doctoral researcher at DCU's Institute for Future Media and Journalism (FuJo) where she is part of the research team examining the Irish Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality. She works on projects relating to Irish politics and social media and lectures in Communications.

Dave Robbins is an assistant professor in the School of Communications at DCU. He is the co-founder of DCU's MSc in Climate Change: Policy, Media & Society. A former journalist and editor, he teaches on the university's journalism programmes.

Eileen Culloty is a post-doctoral researcher at DCU's Institute for Future Media and Journalism (FuJo) where she leads research on countering disinformation as part of the H2020 project 'Provenance'. Specifically, she is investigating how to use information supports to challenge false beliefs and dissuade people from sharing disinformation.

Jane Suiter is director of the DCU Institute for Future Media and Journalism (FuJo). She is coordinator of a Marie Curie European Training Network on 'Harnessing Digital and Data Technologies for Journalism'. A former journalist, Jane was previously Economics Editor at The Irish Times.

We are also very grateful to the following for their contributions and assistance: **Rasmus Kleis Nielsen**, Director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism; **Richard Fletcher**, Research Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism; **Nic Newman**, Research Associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism; and **Deborah Molloy Bergin** and **Ciarán Kissane**, Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year our report comes in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the impacts of which are still unfolding. The crisis has confirmed both the economic precariousness of news media and the absolute necessity for high quality journalism that can inform the people and help combat rampant disinformation.

In this new world, journalists no longer control access to information and governments and other actors are increasingly communicating directly with audiences via social media. Nonetheless, the nightly COVID-19 briefings mean that journalists get to ask the questions, even if they do not always receive answers, and in this way they are a vital champion of democratic transparency and accountability and a buttress against misleading claims, false information and conspiracy theories.

The research underpinning this report was collected in advance of the lockdown and so presents a snapshot of where we were before the crisis hit. There is a collection of essays at the back of the report where our experts interpret the data and the impact of the pandemic on local journalism, on combating disinformation, and on podcasting. A wider perspective is available in the international report for which additional research was conducted in six countries (UK, US, Germany, Spain, South Korea, and Argentina) in early April. These responses confirm industry data, which show increased consumption of traditional sources of news, especially television, but also some online news sources.

The key message is that journalism matters and is in demand again, overall some 66 per cent of people believe that it is either very or extremely important for the proper functioning of society. Subscriptions for The Irish Times and Irish Independent appear to confirm this. Nonetheless, income is still declining as advertisers suffer from declining revenue and as hard copy sales drop. The response of the Australian government and policy makers in terms of charging platforms for the use of content are interesting in this regard as Coleen Murrell points out in her essay.

The increase in digital subscriptions points to the need for publishers to engage with their audiences digitally to ever greater degrees. We have looked here at the importance of email newsletters and podcasts, both of which are growing both in terms of supply and of demand. Climate change will also be a major issue even after the impact of coronavirus subsides so we have also delved into how audiences feel about media coverage of the issue.

Our report this year thus comes at a time of great change for all of us and for the news industry in particular. This executive summary highlights some of the key points, it is followed by Section One which profiles Irish news consumers; Section Two on Sources and Devices; Section Three on Attitudes, Trust and Payments; Section Four on Brands, Topics, Discovery and Social Media; and Section Five with a special focus on Generation Z.

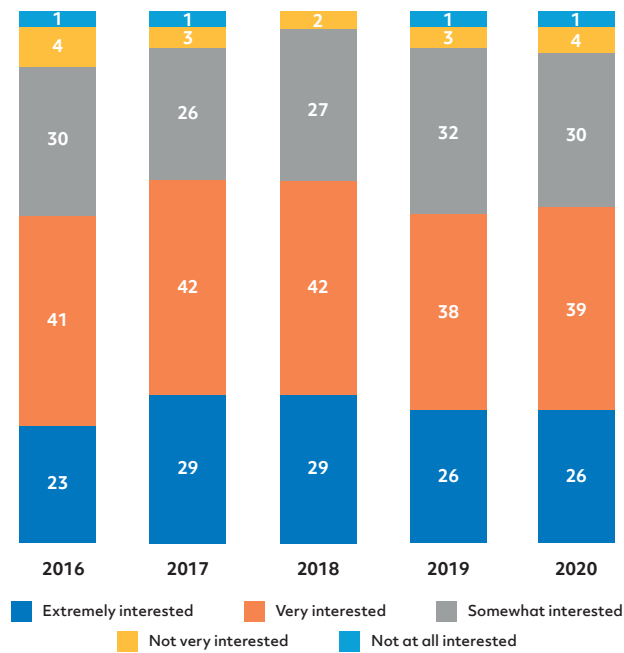
Here is a summary of some of the most important findings from our 2020 research.

- Both radio and newspapers have remained steady over the past five years, with a consistent place in the daily news habits of Irish consumers. About half of all Irish news sources are digital. Compared with the US and the EU overall, Irish consumers prefer radio to TV news.
- Among digital news consumers in Ireland, the fall in casual users and increase in daily briefers over the past few years indicates a shift towards a more engaged consumer base.
- Paying for news has not increased over the past year remaining at 12 per cent. Many Irish news organisations have introduced paywalls and with the loss of advertising revenue, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, subscriptions are increasingly important for news organisations. However there has been a five per cent increase in payment by donation.
- At the same time, the use of online and social media is increasing, particularly among younger age cohorts. Social media is increasingly the main source of news for 18-24s, growing from 43 per cent in 2019 to 46 per cent in 2020. Among 25-44s, digital news media is the main source, while TV is the main source for over 55s. However, it is not yet clear to what extent this is a cohort effect and whether younger age groups will migrate to other sources as they age. There is a relatively high rate of smartphone use for news, which has risen by 20 percentage points over five years and with more pronounced growth in Ireland than elsewhere.
- This affinity for audio and indeed smartphones translates to podcasts; some 40 per cent of respondents listen to podcasts, which are most popular with the under 45s.
- Overall trust in the news media remains quite high in Ireland. Internationally, Irish news consumers are among the more trusting of news media. In 2020, 48 per cent of people agreed they could trust most news most of the time. Around three quarters of all respondents trust major brands such as RTÉ, The Irish Times and the Irish Independent.
- However, the move to digital is also causing some concern with only 18 per cent professing a trust in news found on social media. When it comes to the sources of misinformation people are exposed to online, Irish people are most concerned about Facebook. More generally, 62 per cent of Irish people said they were concerned about what was real and fake on the internet.
- Further, most people think that inaccurate political adverts should be blocked by digital media companies. Some 65 per cent of people in Ireland and the UK and 59 per cent in the EU think digital media companies should take responsibility for the accuracy of the political ads they profit from. Most Irish people do not think politicians should be allowed to advertise on social media and 65 per cent think that if a politician makes a misleading statement in an advert it should be taken down by the social media companies.

SECTION ONE

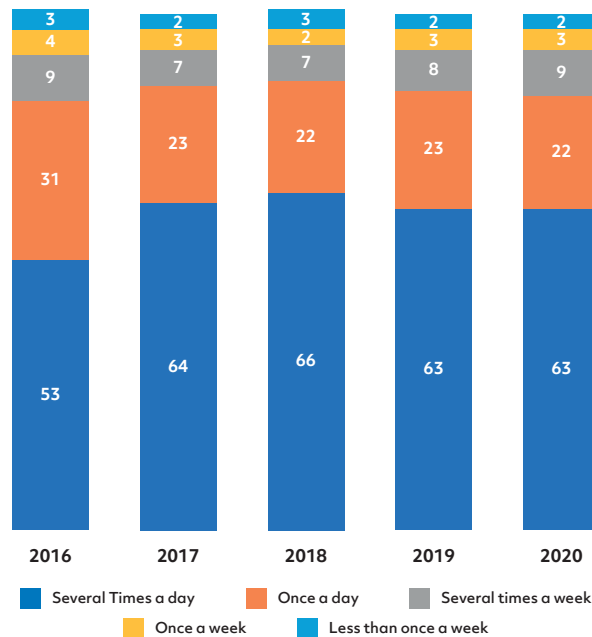
IRISH NEWS CONSUMERS

This section profiles Irish news consumers. News consumers are categorised according to their interest and engagement with news and technology as well as their political leaning and interests.

FIG 1: INTEREST IN NEWS

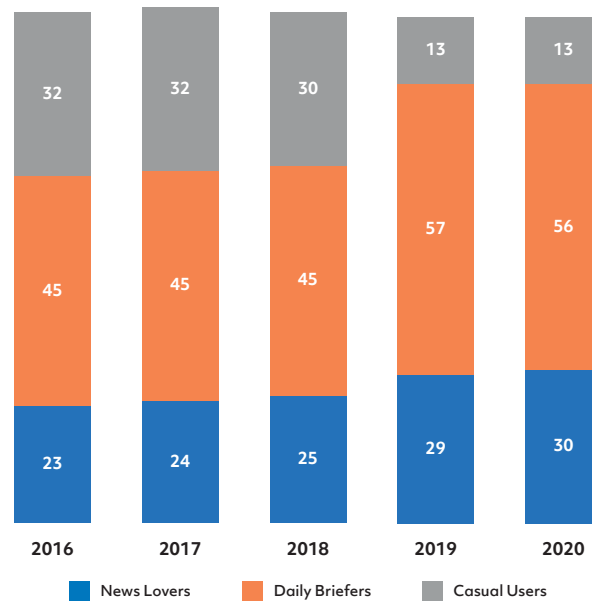
Q. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news?

For the last five years, Irish consumers' interest in news has remained at consistently high levels. Just under 70 per cent declare themselves either extremely or very interested in news. This is similar to the numbers for the EU and North America and above the levels reported in the UK. Those aged 18-24 show the least interest in news content and these levels rise for each successive age group, with 55-64 year olds showing the highest levels of interest. There are more Irish people who are extremely interested in news (26 per cent) compared to the UK (14 per cent) and the EU average (20 per cent).

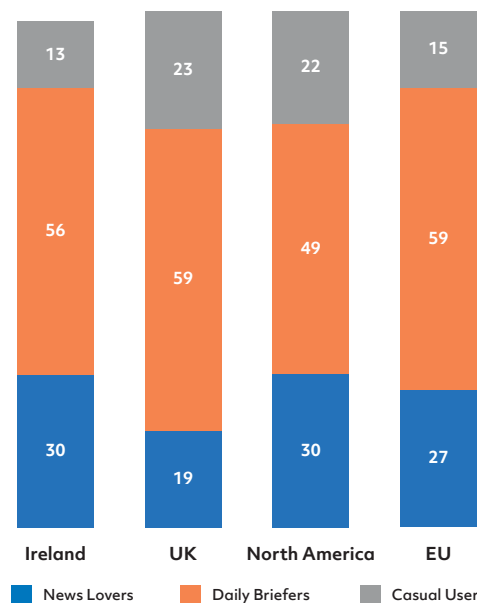
FIG 2: FREQUENCY OF ACCESS NEWS

Q. Typically, how often do you access news? By news we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online).

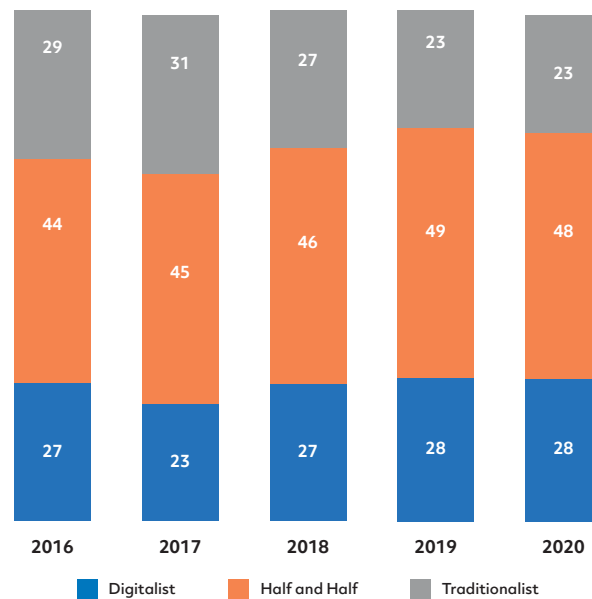
Irish news consumers continue to access news at similar levels to 2018 and 2019, indicating that the growth in those accessing news more frequently may be levelling off. The majority at 63 per cent continue to check the news several times a day and, 85 per cent of all news consumers access the news at least one a day. This is similar to the EU average and slightly higher than the average in North America and the UK. Over the past five years the frequency of access has increased with 63 per cent checking several times a day in 2020 compared to 53 per cent in 2016. However, it is likely that these numbers may be under pressure post COVID-19 given the possibility of people limiting/reducing their news access for mental health reasons particularly given WHO and HSE guidelines to “stay informed but set limits for news and social media”.

FIG 3: CONCEPTUAL GROUPS

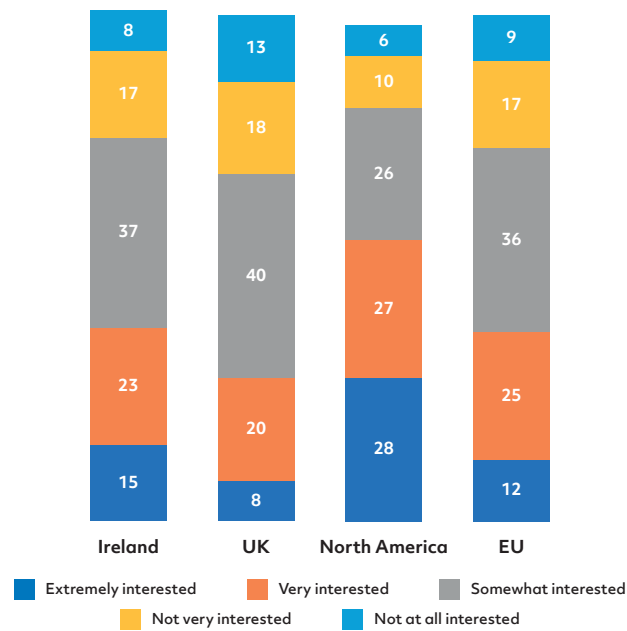
We divide news consumers into three conceptual groups based on their interest in and frequency of accessing news. News Lovers are those who indicate that they are extremely interested in news and access news content more than five times per day. Daily Briefers access news less than five times a day, but are very or extremely interested in news content. Casual Users access news once a day or less and are somewhat interested in news. In 2019 we saw a drop in Casual Users and an increase in Daily Briefers, and those levels have remained consistent in 2020, indicating that this may be a more permanent shift towards more engaged news consumers.

FIG 4: CONCEPTUAL GROUPS INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

The number of NEWS LOVERS in Ireland, at 30 per cent, is equal to the US and a little higher than the EU average of 27 per cent. However, there are more NEWS LOVERS in Ireland than in the UK (19 per cent) where Brexit fatigue is thought to contribute to the reduction in interest and engagement.

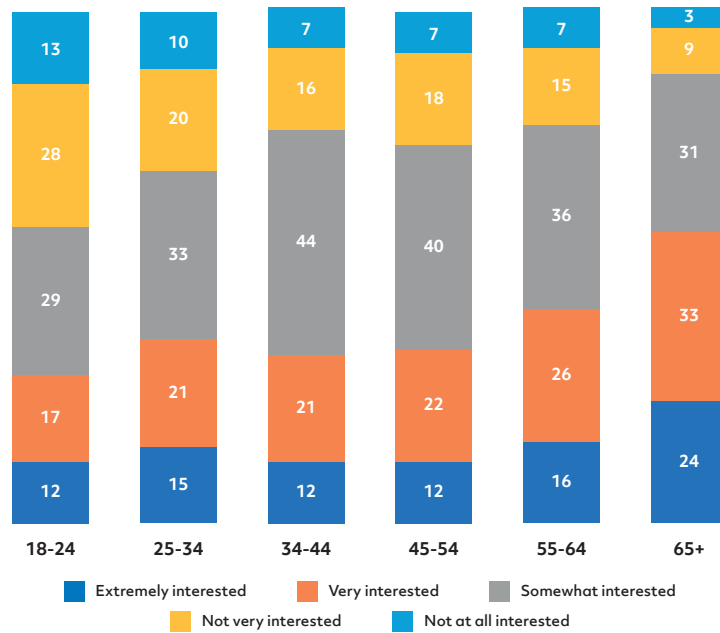
FIG 5: CONCEPTUAL GROUPS

Another conceptual category for understanding news consumers is whether they are traditionalists, who consume news mostly through traditional means such as newspapers, radio and TV, or digitalists, who consume news mostly from digital sources such as smartphones, tablets and computers. The levels for 2020 are similar to last year, with most news consumers, at 48 per cent, accessing their news from both traditional and digital sources. As may be expected, younger news consumers are most likely to consume news digitally, while older consumers are the most likely to be traditionalists at 40 per cent. Overall, the number of digitalists remain steady over the years, while those using both are rising slowly. The number relying on traditional sources has fallen by six percentage points, from 29 per cent in 2016 to 23 per cent in 2020. Those on higher incomes engage more with digital news while those on lower incomes engage more with traditional media.

FIG 6: INTEREST IN POLITICS INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON 2020

Q. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics?

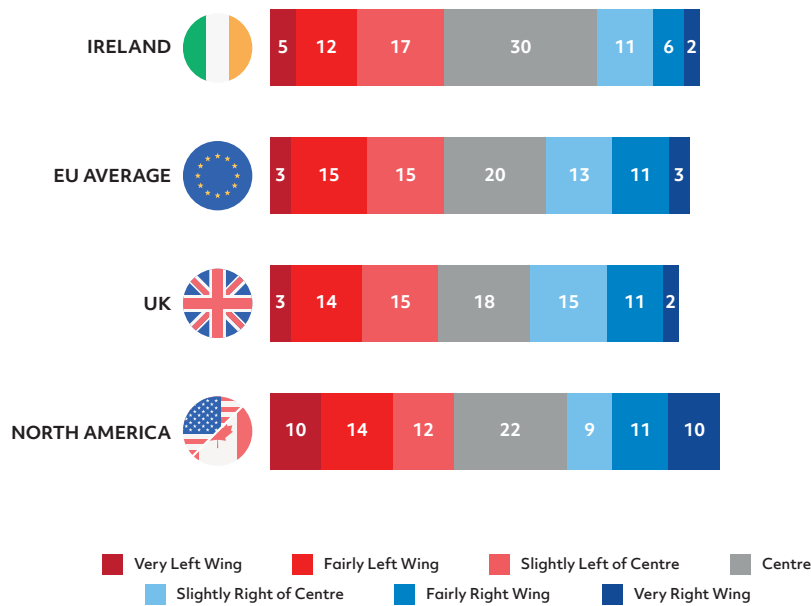
Interest in politics remains broadly static in Ireland over the past five years. This is somewhat unusual given this year's survey was taken in January during the campaign for the 2020 general election in Ireland. Nonetheless, the level of political interest in Ireland remains high with 38 per cent of respondents saying they are very or extremely interested in politics, while only eight per cent say they are not interested at all. This is a higher level of interest than the UK and the EU, but much lower than North America. In 2019 the International Digital News Report identified a substantial degree of fatigue around Brexit among UK consumers while the political climate throughout the EU was somewhat less tumultuous than in North America, particularly in the US. Additionally, Canada held a federal election in October 2019 which may have increased Canadians' level of interest in political issues.

FIG 7: INTEREST IN POLITICS BY AGE

Q. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics?

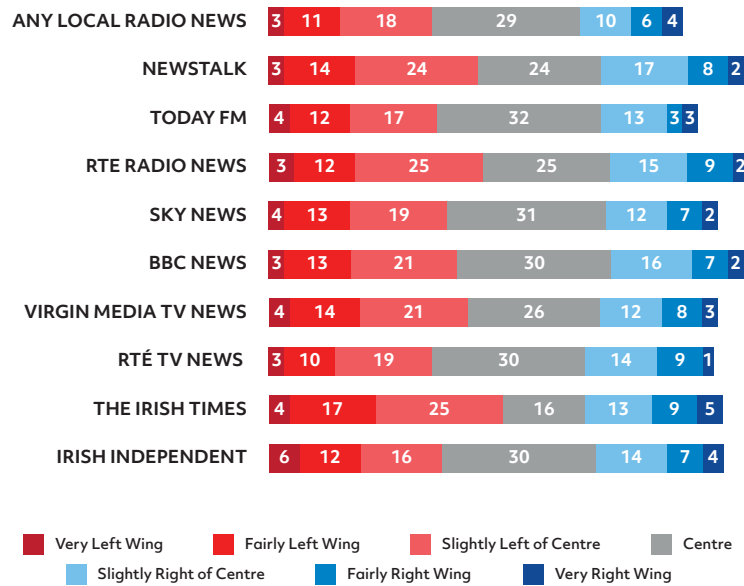
Older age groups are substantially more interested in politics than younger age groups. Some 57 per cent of over 65s are very or extremely interested while 29 per cent of 18-25s and 36 per cent of 25- 34s say they are very or extremely interested in politics. By contrast only 11 per cent of over 65s say they are not interested compared to 41 per cent of 18-24s and 30 per cent of 25-34s.

FIG 8: POLITICAL LEANING INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS 2020

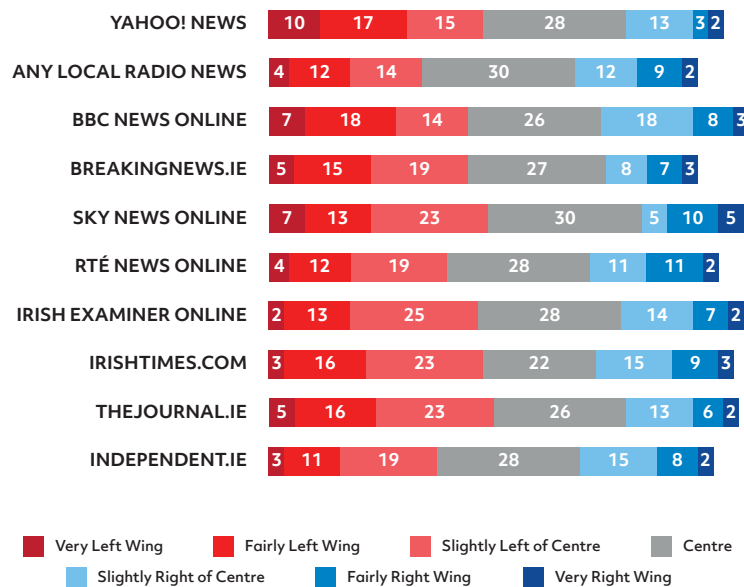


Q. Some people talk about 'left', 'right' and 'centre' to describe parties and politicians. (Generally, socialist parties would be considered 'left wing' whilst conservative parties would be considered 'right wing'). With this in mind, where would you place yourself on the following scale?

The polarisation of US politics, especially the drift to the right, is not happening in Ireland. If we take centre, plus centre left and centre right, the "centrism" of Irish politics is more apparent. By this measure, 58 per cent of Irish people place themselves somewhere in the centre ground of politics, compared to 48 per cent in the UK and EU, and 43 per cent in North America.

FIG 9: POLITICAL LEANING OF TRADITIONAL NEWS BRANDS

Almost all Irish news brands attract the large centrist audience. At the margins, the right-leaning audience is more disposed towards traditional news brands while the digital brands attract a stronger left-leaning audience.

FIG 10: POLITICAL LEANING OF MAIN DIGITAL NEWS BRANDS

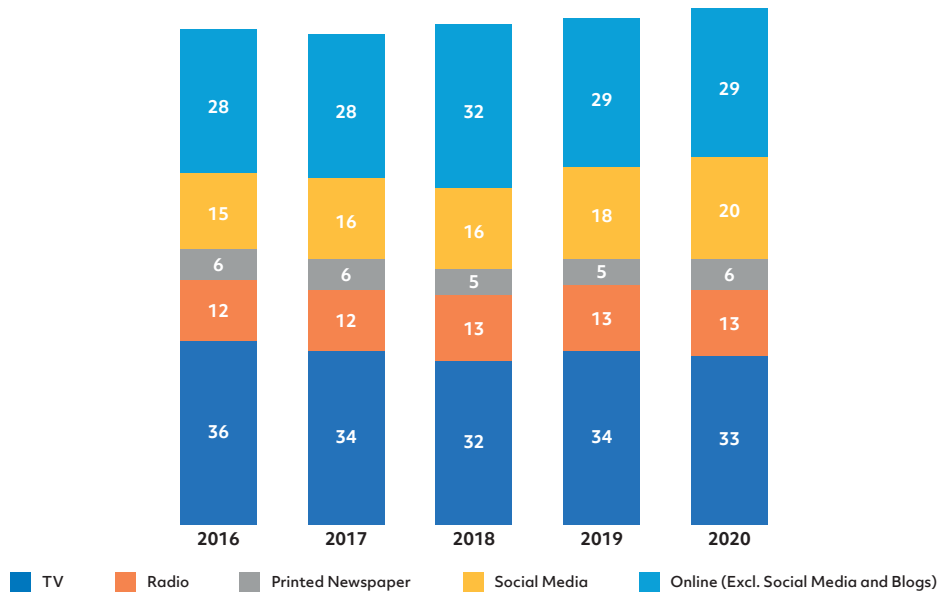
The Irish Times newspaper and website attracts a larger left leaning audience than most other brands, although TheJournal.ie, Sky news online and Newstalk radio also have a large portion of left-leaning consumers.

SECTION TWO

SOURCES AND DEVICES

This section details the main sources and devices used by Irish news consumers as well as the types of news they prefer.

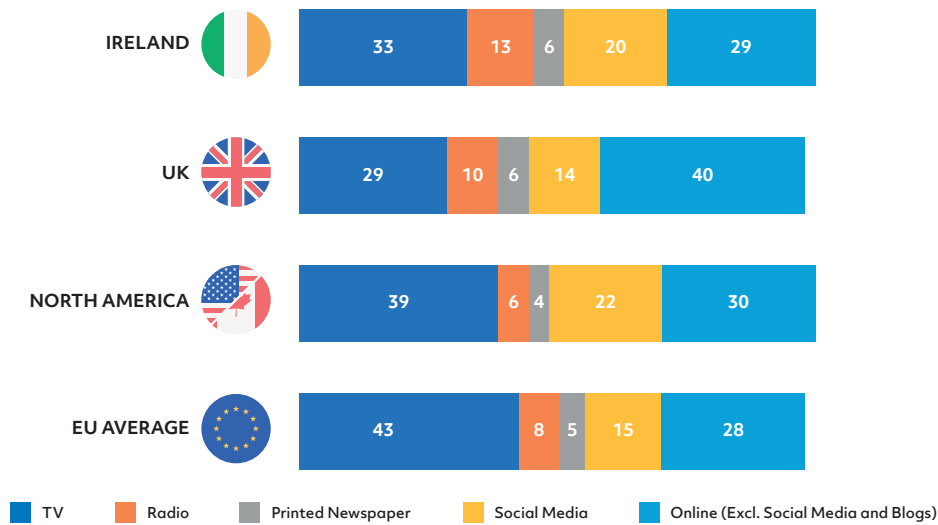
FIG 11: MAIN SOURCES OF NEWS



Q. You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your main source of news?

Each year we ask respondents about their main sources of news. Over the past five years there has been a slow decline in the use of TV as a main source of news, falling three percentage points since 2016, and some growth for digital and social media, with social media rising five percentage points since 2016. Both radio and newspapers have remained steadfast with very little variation over the past five years. News consumers habits are associated with how consumers live their everyday lives at home and at work. It seems that radio and newspapers have a consistent place in the daily news habits of Irish consumers, whether it be a Sunday newspaper read or tuning in to morning radio. This highlights the importance of continued investment in these sources by news media and the continued role of traditional news sources in Irish society.

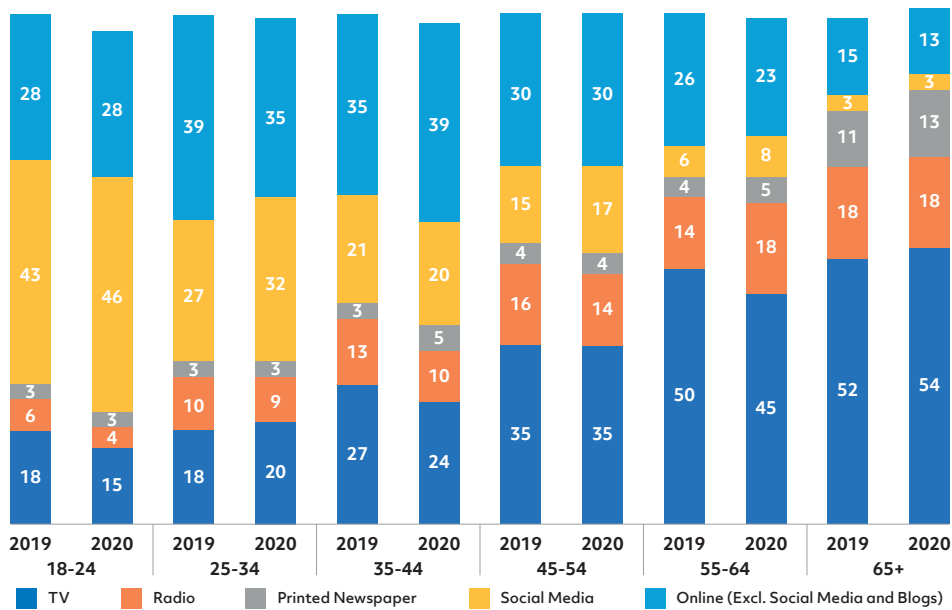
**FIG 12: MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS
INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS 2020**



Q. You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your main source of news?

Ireland's news sources are about half digital and half traditional. Ireland appears to have a healthy radio market (13 per cent) with a higher portion of radio as a main source than the UK, North America and the EU. Ireland relies substantially less on TV as a main source (33 per cent) compared to North America (39 per cent) and the EU (43 per cent). However, it must be recognised that Ireland's media market is substantially smaller and less diverse in terms of original Irish content.

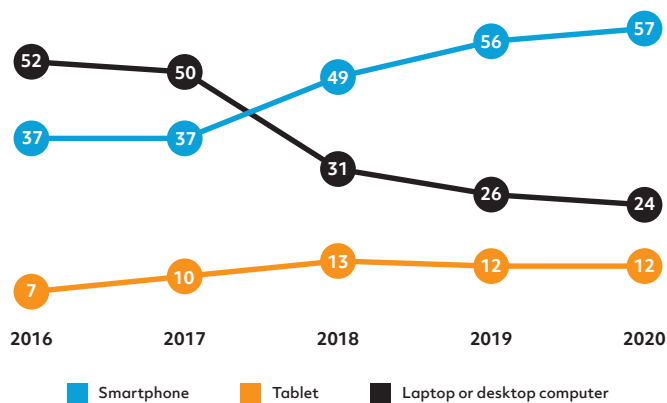
FIG 13: MAIN SOURCES OF NEWS BY AGE GROUP



Q. You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your main source of news?

When we break down the main sources of news by age we see a large degree of variation among different age groups. Social media is increasingly the main source of news for 18-24s, growing from 43 per cent in 2019 to 46 per cent in 2020. Among 25-44s, digital news media is the main source, while TV is the main source for over 55s. However, it is not yet clear the extent to which younger news users change their habits as they get older and whether they will carry on using social media as a main source.

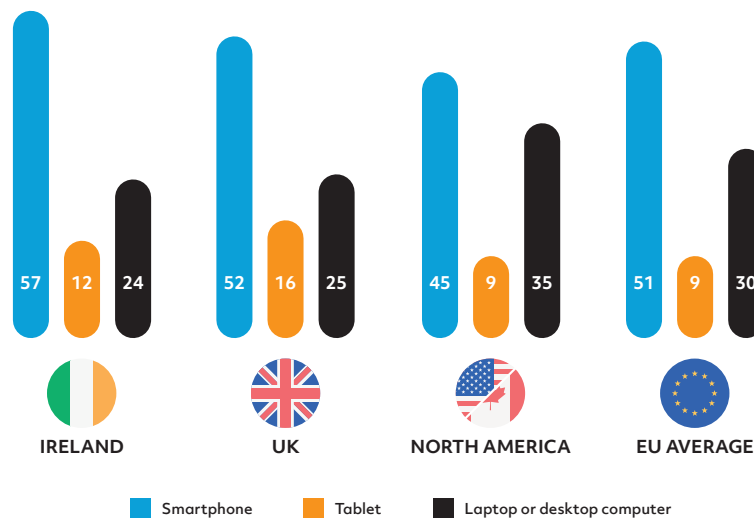
FIG 14: MAIN DEVICES USED FOR NEWS



Q. You've said you use the following devices to access news in the last week, which is your main way of accessing online news?

There have been substantial changes in the main devices used to access news over the past five years. Smartphones have seen a sharp increase from 37 per cent in 2016 to 57 per cent in 2020. There have been great improvements in terms of access to smartphones in Ireland, with cheaper high-performance devices increasingly available, enhanced data packages from mobile phone providers and news media advancing platform sensitive displays for their news pages and content. The mobile convenience of the smartphone is likely to influence this with users able to check on news on the move, rather than stopping to sit at a PC or laptop. The use of PCs and laptops as main source has declined starkly, falling 28 per cent over five years.

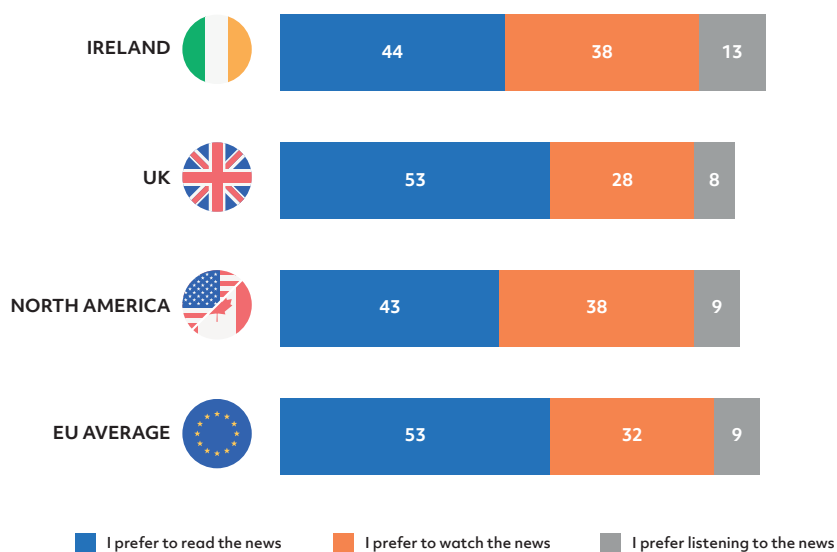
**FIG 15: MAIN DEVICE FOR NEWS
INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON 2020**



Q. Which, if any, of the following devices have you used to access news in the last week.

Internationally, Ireland has high levels of smartphone use for news, five per cent more than the UK, 12 per cent more than North America and six per cent more than the EU. Correspondingly, Ireland has the lowest use of a laptop or PC as a main source of news at 24 per cent although the UK level is similar at 25 per cent.

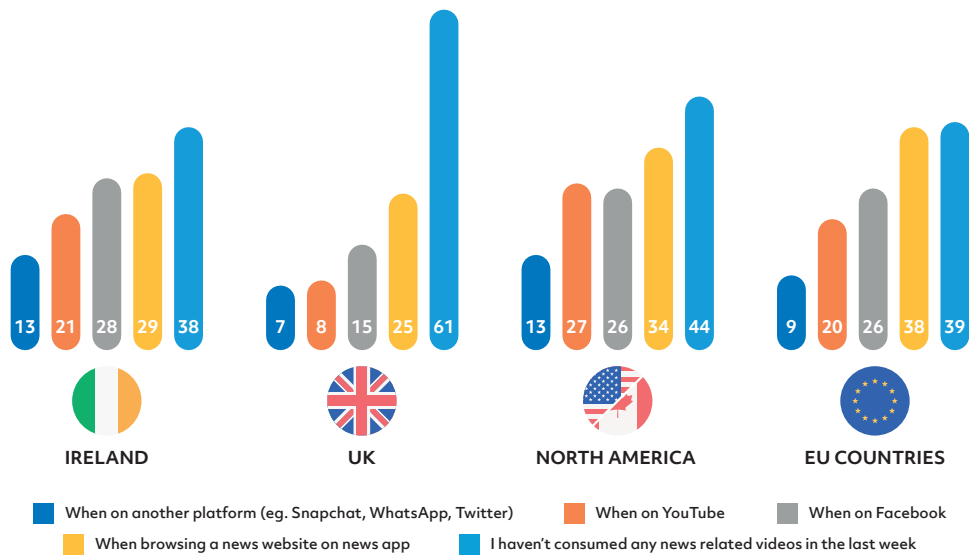
FIG 16: NEWS CONSUMPTION PREFERENCES INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS 2020



Q. In thinking about your online habits around news and current affairs , which of the following statements applies best to you? Please select one.

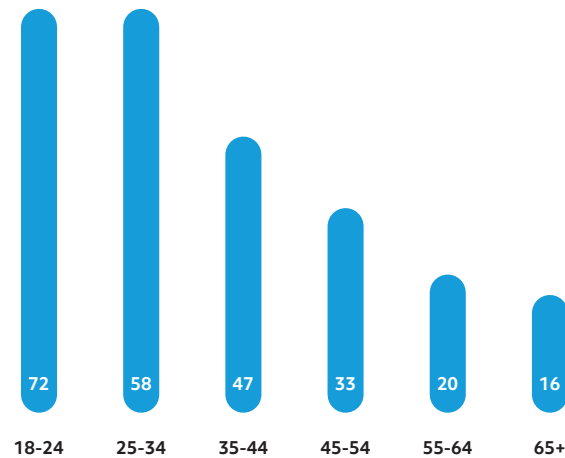
Looking to news formats, most Irish people, at 44 per cent, prefer to read the news, which is the preferred format internationally. There are notable differences between preferences regarding watching news with ten per cent more people in both Ireland and North America (38 per cent) preferring to watch than in the UK (28 per cent). TV is a main source of news for 33 per cent of Irish people and video news is also consumed online.

**FIG 17: I CONSUMED A NEWS RELATED VIDEO
INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS 2020**



Q. In the past week, when did you consume a news related video? Please select all that apply.

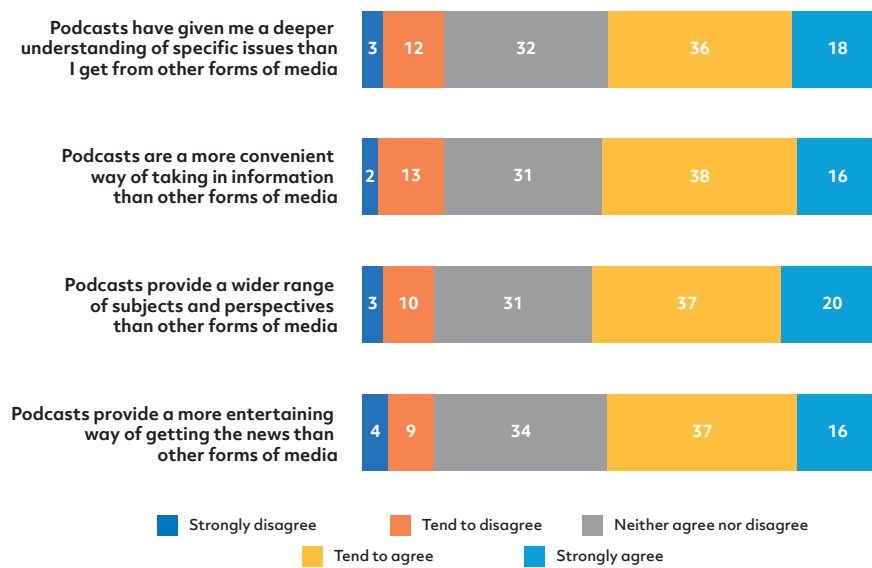
Some 62 per cent of Irish people watch videos news clips online, with news websites (29 per cent), Facebook (28 per cent) and YouTube (21 per cent) acting as the most popular sources for news videos.

FIG 18: AGE GROUPS LISTENING TO PODCASTS**Q. Have you listened to a podcast in the past week?**

Irish respondents have a high preference for listening to news compared with others internationally (12 per cent). This Irish preference for audio formats is also seen in the growth of listening to podcasts, which has grown three percentage points to 40 per cent since last year. Under 45s are the biggest demographic listening to podcasts, particularly 18-24s, 72 per cent of whom said they had listened to a podcast in the past week. Podcasts are linked to the use of smartphones, with providers such as Spotify among the most popular apps downloaded in Ireland.¹

FIG 19: TYPES OF PODCASTS LISTENED TO IN THE PAST MONTH**Q. Which of the following types of podcast have you listened to in the last month? Please select all that apply.**

¹ <https://www.similarweb.com/apps/top/google/store-rank/ie/all/top-free>

FIG 20: REASONS FOR LISTENING TO PODCASTS

Q. You say you use podcasts, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Those who listened to a podcast last month 796.

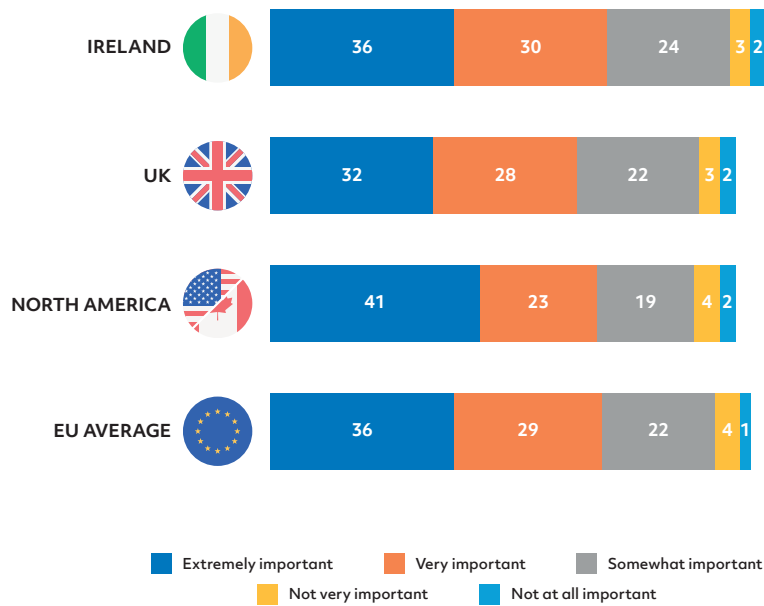
It seems podcasts allow users to explore and focus on their individual interests that may not be catered for by mainstream media, which are more focused on capturing a broader audience. Most podcast listeners listen in to better understand specialist subjects of interest to them (14 per cent), while 13 per cent use them to delve deeper into politics and lifestyle. Mainstream news media in Ireland is expanding the range of podcasts in 2020 with more documentary styles and original content as opposed to repurposed radio shows and audio from TV. RTÉ recently launched the Nobody Zone, a podcast series about an Irish serial killer in London and TheJournal.ie recently produced a similar investigative podcast about the Stardust Fires.



SECTION THREE

ATTITUDES, TRUST AND PAYMENTS

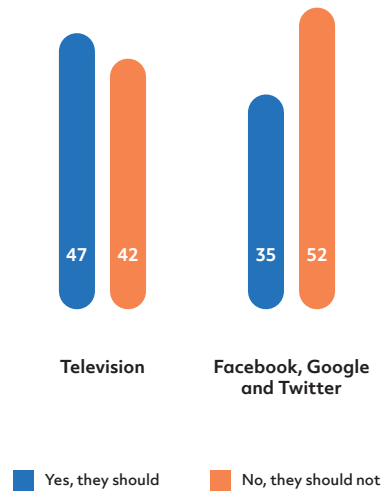
This section outlines attitudes to news among Irish news consumers. It details their attitudes towards trust, disinformation, and paying for news.

FIG 21: IMPORTANCE OF INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM

Q. How important, if at all, do you think independent journalism is for the proper functioning of society?

Irish news consumers attitudes to news media were explored in this year's survey. Participants were asked about the role of independent journalism in society and more than 66 per cent of people believe that it is either very or extremely important for the proper functioning of society. Irish news consumers are similar to those in the UK and throughout the EU in this regard. In North America there is a stronger enthusiasm for independent journalism with 41 per cent responding that it is extremely important, compared with 36 per cent in Ireland and in the EU, and 32 per cent in the UK.

FIG 22: SHOULD POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL PARTIES BE ABLE TO ADVERTISE ON THE FOLLOWING?



Q. Should politicians and political parties be able to advertise on the following?

Over the past year there have been growing calls for regulation of political advertising on digital media. While political advertising on TV and radio is banned in Ireland, there are no laws to prevent advertising online or in on-demand media such as the RTÉ Player or Virgin Media Player and no requirements for transparency from political parties¹. There is a proposal to regulate, a report Transparency of Online Political Advertising² is being drafted and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland is calling for consistency in the rules around political advertising across media³.

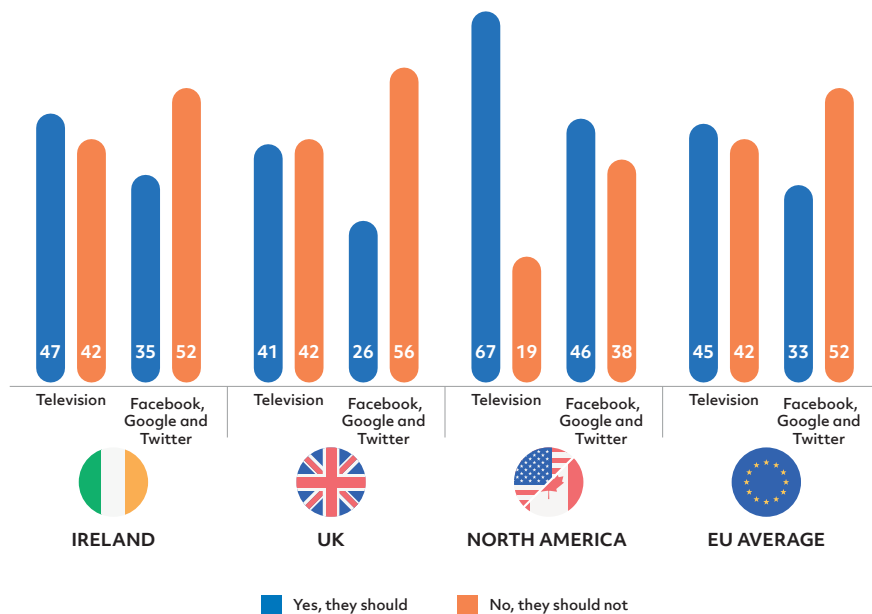
Regarding political messaging, Irish news consumers are divided on whether politicians should be allowed to advertise on TV, fewer than half, 47 per cent, think they should compared to 42 per cent who disagree. Irish consumers are much more definite about advertising on digital media such as Facebook, Google and Twitter with 52 per cent disapproving compared to 35 per cent approving.

1 ElectCheck <https://fujomedia.eu/electcheck-2019-published/>

2 https://merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/News/Proposal_to_Regulate_Transparency_of_Online_Political_Advertising.html

3 <https://assets.gov.ie/3708/041218154557-e51e8c3713014c959e15bfba34f1e17a.pdf>

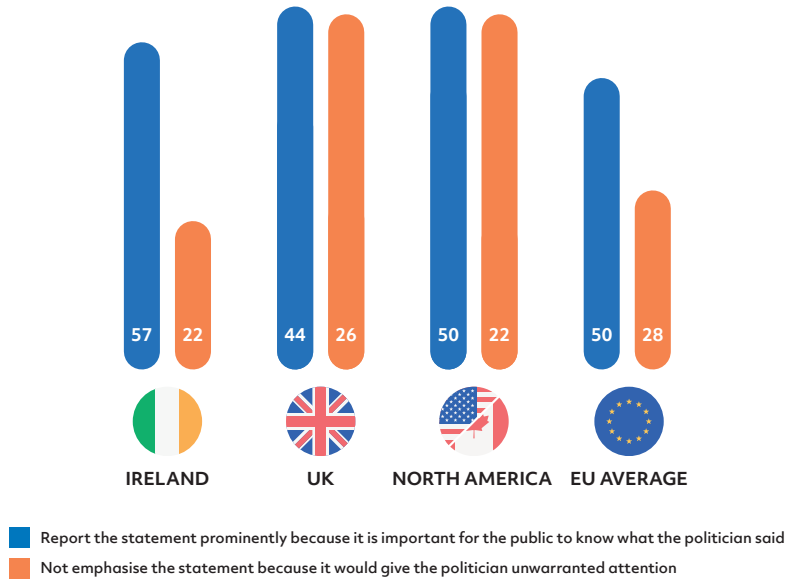
FIG 23: SHOULD POLITICIANS AND POLITICAL PARTIES BE ABLE TO ADVERTISE ON THE FOLLOWING?



Q. Should politicians and political parties be able to advertise on the following?

The Cambridge Analytica scandal clearly had an impact on public attitudes to online advertising in the UK with a substantial portion of people, 56 per cent, disapproving of political adverts on digital media. Most regions we compared Ireland with do not think politicians should be allowed to advertise on digital media, with the exception of North America where 46 per cent think they should compared with 38 per cent who think they should not. Attitudes to political advertising on TV is somewhat more favourable, particularly in North America where political advertising on TV is a norm, and 67 per cent of people in North America think it should be allowed. Although political advertising on TV is banned in Ireland, some 47 per cent of people think it should be allowed.

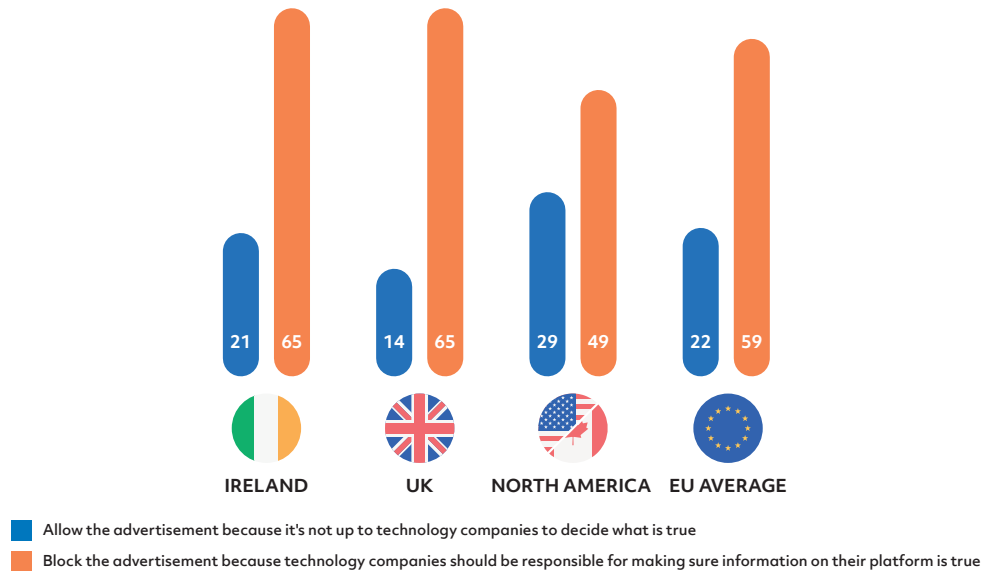
FIG 24: IF A POLITICIAN MAKES A STATEMENT THAT COULD BE FALSE, WHICH COMES CLOSER TO YOUR VIEW ABOUT WHAT THE NEWS MEDIA SHOULD DO?



Q. Thinking about how the news media covers politics, if a politician makes a statement that could be false, which comes closer to your view about what the news media should do?

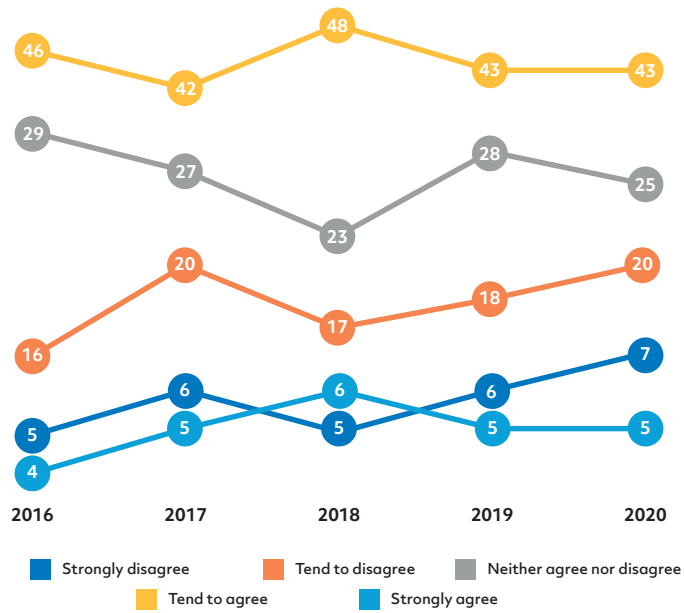
In terms of journalism's response to political statements that are incorrect or misleading, 57 per cent of Irish people think that the media should still report on the statements because it is important to know what politicians have said. There was not much support for the idea of news media choosing to suppress political commentary even if it is incorrect, with only 22 per cent think that the news media should not emphasise the statement to avoid politicians getting unwarranted attention. However, about a fifth of people, 21 per cent, were not sure what should be done.

FIG 25: IF A POLITICIAN OR POLITICAL PARTY TAKES OUT AN ADVERTISEMENT THAT COULD BE INACCURATE, WHICH COMES CLOSER TO YOUR VIEW ABOUT TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES SHOULD DO?



Q. Thinking about the responsibility of technology companies like Facebook, Google or Twitter, if a politician or political party takes out an advertisement that could be inaccurate, which comes closer to your view about what technology companies should do?

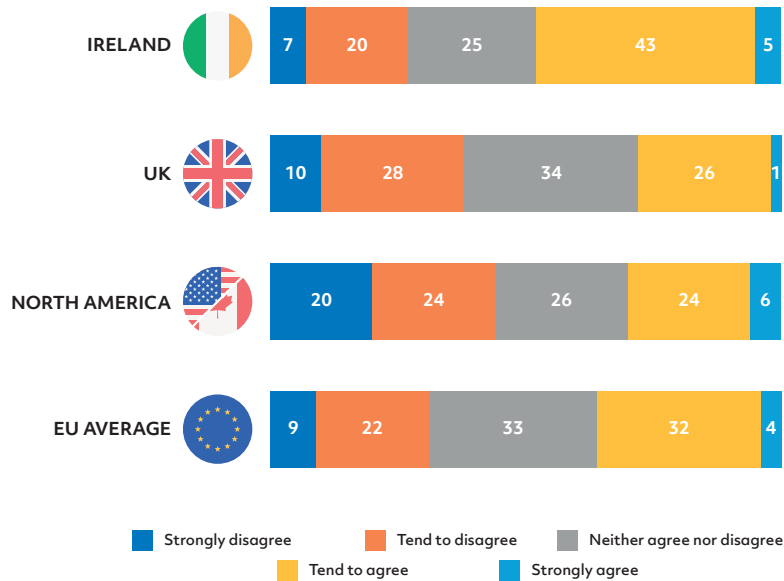
Most people think that inaccurate political adverts should be blocked by digital media companies. Some 65 per cent of people in Ireland and the UK and 59 per cent in the EU think digital media should take responsibility for the accuracy of political ads they profit from. Fewer people in North America, 49 per cent, agree with this statement. Most people internationally do not think digital media companies should allow false statements to be published in political adverts on their platforms.

FIG 26: TRUST MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME

Q. I think you can trust most news most of the time.

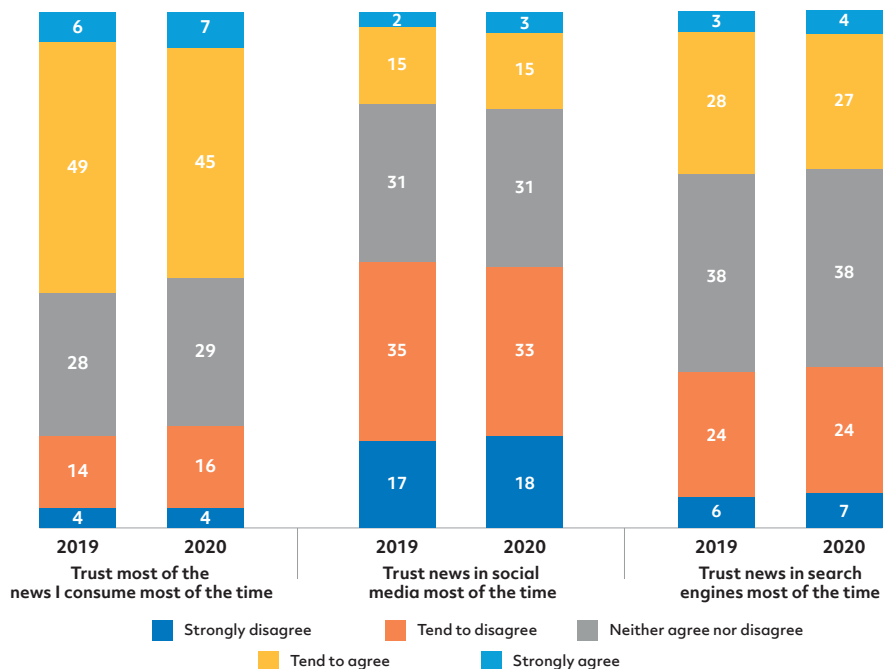
Trust in the news media remains quite high in Ireland and has not changed much over the past five years. In 2020, 48 per cent of people agreed they could trust most news most of the time. Internationally, Ireland is among the more trusting of news media. More people distrust their news media in the UK (38 per cent) and North America (44 per cent), compared to Ireland (27 per cent) or the EU (31 per cent).

FIG 27: YOU CAN TRUST MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS 2020



Q. I think you can trust most news most of the time.

FIG 28: TRUST IN NEWS VIA DIFFERENT SOURCES 2019 AND 2020



Q. I think I can trust most of the news I consume most of the time.

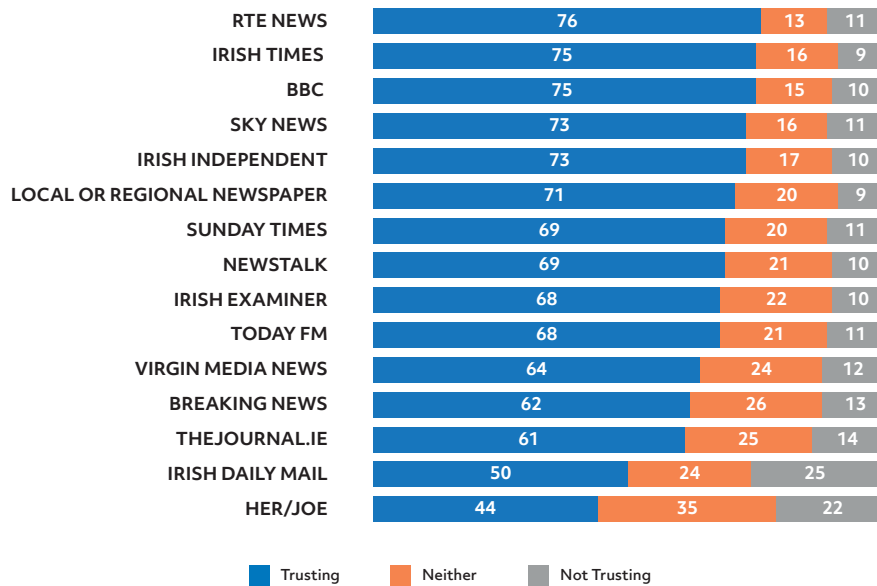
Q. I think I can trust news in social media most of the time.

Q. I think I can trust news in search engines most of the time.

Unsurprisingly, more people trust the sources of news they choose to use with 52 per cent in Ireland reporting that they trust most of the news they consume most of the time. Irish people are more trusting of news via search engines (31 per cent) than over social media (18 per cent).

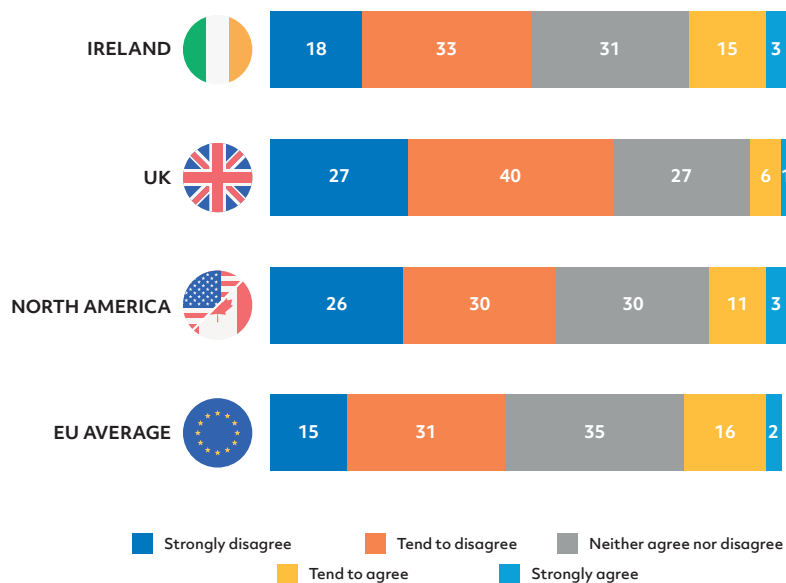
Just over half of people, 51 per cent, say they do not trust news via social media most of the time. This highlights challenges for news publishers distributing on social platforms as the medium can detract from the quality of the journalism.

FIG 29: TRUST IN NEWS BRANDS



Trust in news in general is fairly high in Ireland. However, trust is highest among legacy news brands which have had decades to build up reputations and specialist areas of coverage.

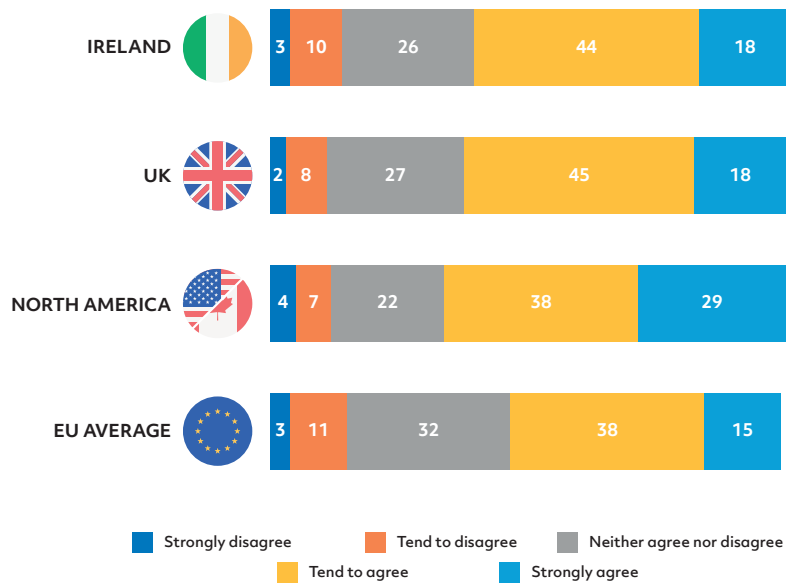
FIG 30: TRUST NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Q. I think I can trust news in social media most of the time.

Again, the potential impact of the Cambridge Analytica scandal can be seen in the international comparisons, with substantially more people in the UK, 67 per cent, not trusting news via social media compared with 56 per cent in North America and 46 per cent in the EU.

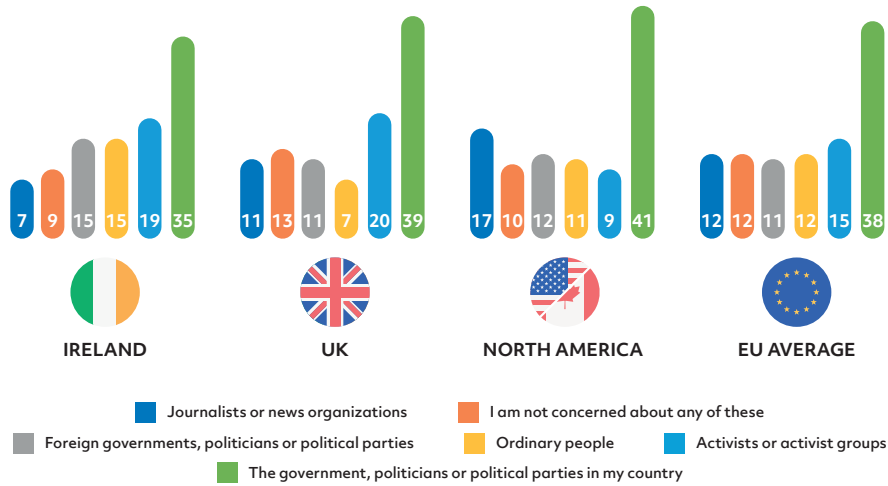
FIG 31: I AM CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT IS REAL AND FAKE ON THE INTERNET INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS 2020



Q. "Thinking about online news, I am concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet."

More broadly, 62 per cent of Irish people said they were concerned about what was real and fake on the internet and the sentiment is similar in the UK and Europe. While 67 per cent of people in North America are concerned about misinformation online, 29 per cent are very concerned, substantially more than the UK and Ireland at 18 per cent.

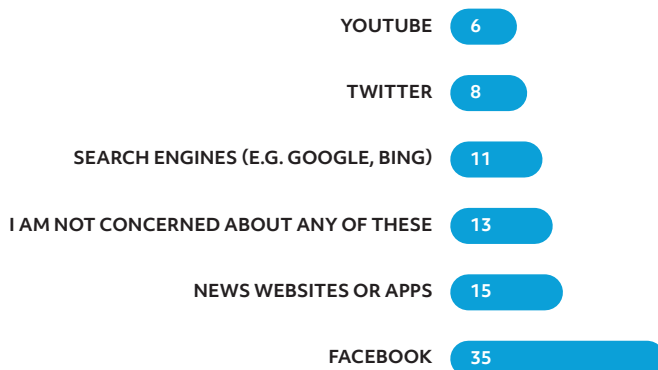
FIG 32: FALSE OR MISLEADING INFORMATION



Q. "Thinking about online news, I am concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet."

Internationally, people are far more concerned with misleading information coming from governments rather than from journalism. Irish people are the least concerned with misinformation in news media (seven per cent) than elsewhere and are more concerned with misinformation from other sources. After governments, Irish people are particularly concerned with misinformation from activists and activist groups (19 per cent), similar to the UK (20 per cent) and the EU (15 per cent). However, North America appears to be more trusting of their activists than elsewhere with only nine per cent stating this was a concern for them.

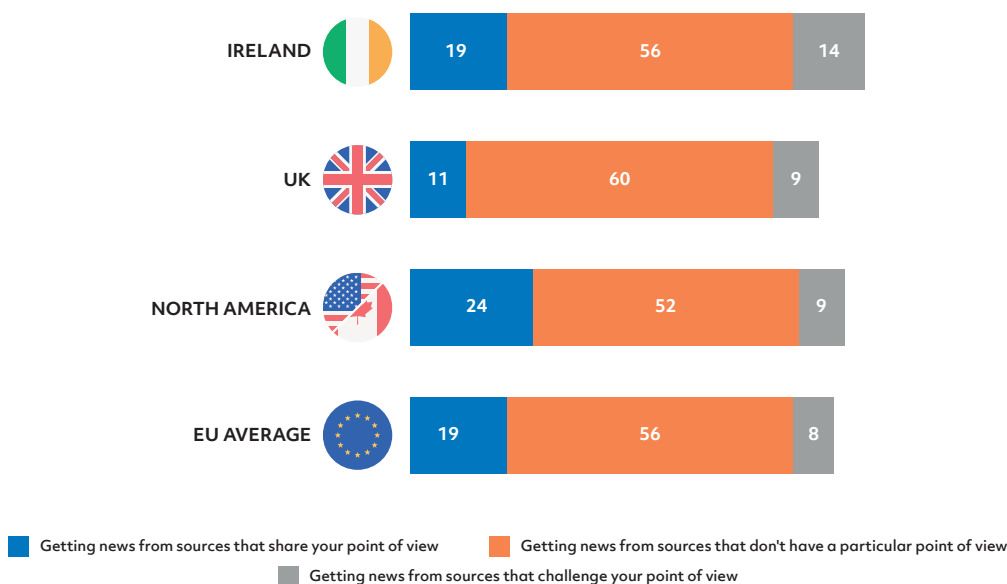
FIG 33: CONCERN ABOUT MISINFORMATION FROM ONLINE MEDIA



Q. Which of the following, if any, are you most concerned about online? Please select one. False or misleading information from.

When it comes to misinformation people are exposed to online, Irish people are most concerned about Facebook (35 per cent), although it must also be recognised that Facebook has the highest market share of social networks in Ireland, which would affect the response rate. Notably fewer people are concerned with misinformation on YouTube (six per cent) than other platforms. While there has been some public attention on misinformation on YouTube and questions over how the algorithm works to direct users to other content, our research indicates that most people use YouTube for recreational and entertainment (62 per cent) more so than for news (22 per cent) and therefore most people may not come across false or misleading news resulting in a lower level of concern.

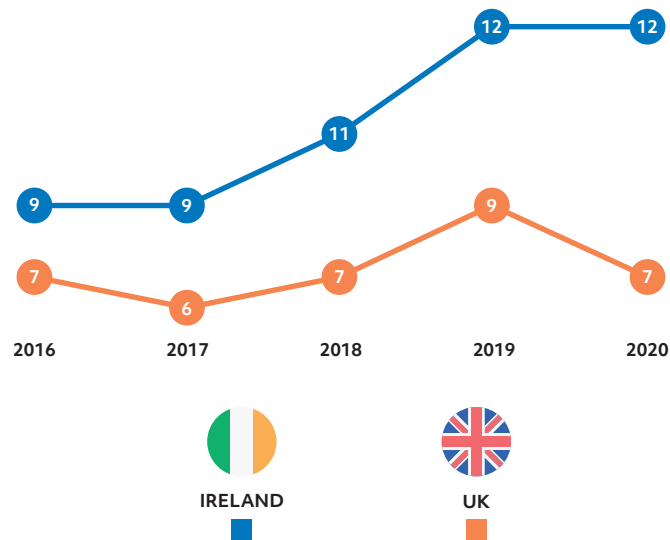
FIG 34: NEWS SOURCE PREFERENCES INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS 2020



Q. Thinking about the different kinds of news available to you, do you prefer.

Most people in most regions show a preference for objective, balanced news, with some slight differences in the preference for news that shares people's point of views. Some 14 per cent of Irish people like to get insight from other perspectives and prefer news that challenges their point of view, compared with nine per cent in the UK and North America and eight per cent in the EU.

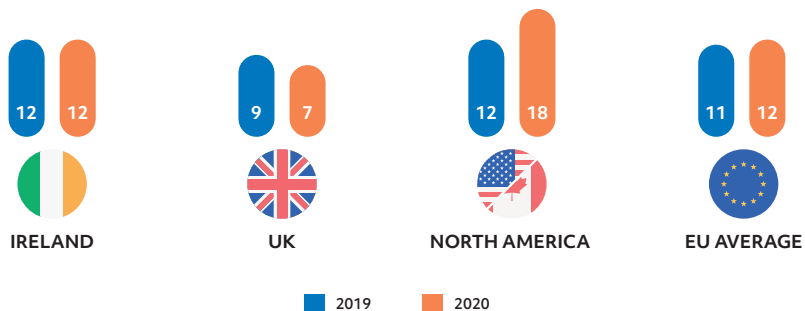
FIG 35: PAYING FOR NEWS



Q. Have you paid for online news content, or accessed a paid for online news service in the last year? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition).

Paying for online news has not increased over the past year and has risen by only three per cent over the past five years. In general, subscription and donation models are increasing in Ireland which is not yet reflected in rates of people paying for news this year. This year INM's new owners implemented a new subscriber model with some content free to access and some 'premium' content only available to subscribers. Early in the COVID-19 crisis news media print sales declined rapidly cutting off an important funding source in terms of both sales and advertising revenue. Online only brands also suffered as the economy was put on hold and many journalists were let go. TheJournal.ie dropped one of its titles, Fora, and launched a reader's appeal for donations. This highlights the fragility of the news media revenue system, the precarity of reliance on digital advertisers and the importance of reader support to maintain a healthy national news media market.

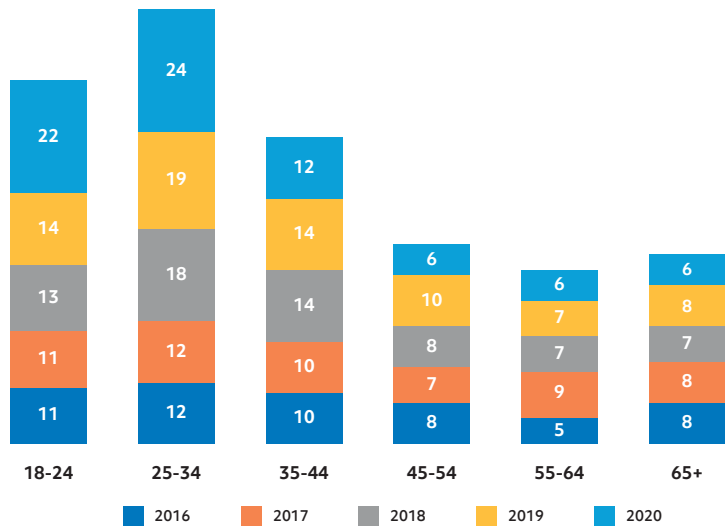
FIG 36: PAYING FOR ONLINE NEWS INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS 2020



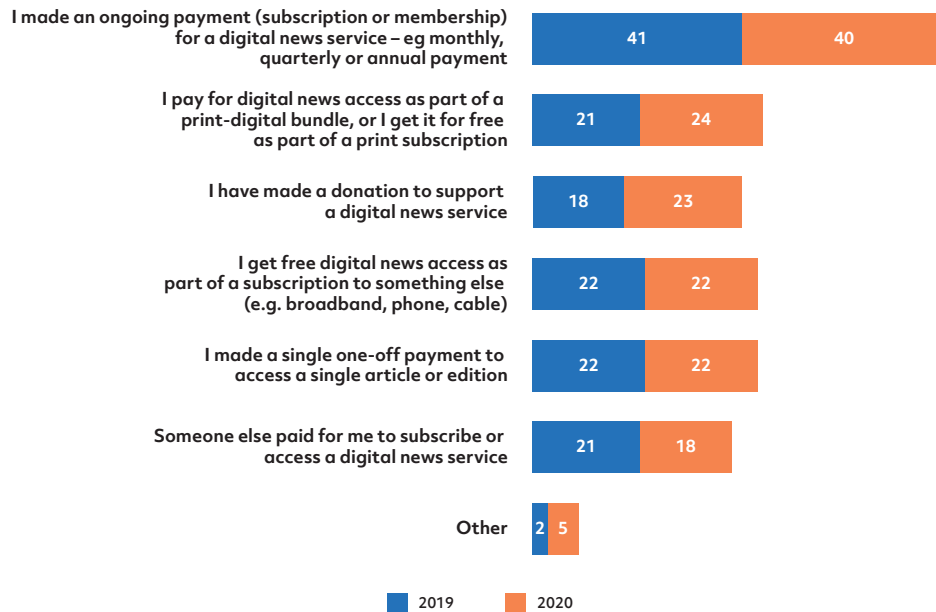
Q. Have you paid for online news content, or accessed a paid for online news service in the last year? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition).

However, payment for online news in Ireland is in line with the rest of the EU at 12 per cent, but fewer people in UK pay for online news (seven per cent) while more pay in North America (18 per cent).

FIG 37: AGE GROUPS WHO PAID FOR ONLINE NEWS BY YEAR



One sign of promise is that younger people are increasingly paying for news online with the highest rate of growth among those 18 - 34.

FIG 38: METHODS OF PAYING FOR ONLINE NEWS

Q. You said you have accessed paid for online news content in the last year. Which, if any, of the following ways have you used to pay for online news content in the last year? Please select all that apply. Base: those who have paid for online news this is how the paid. 241

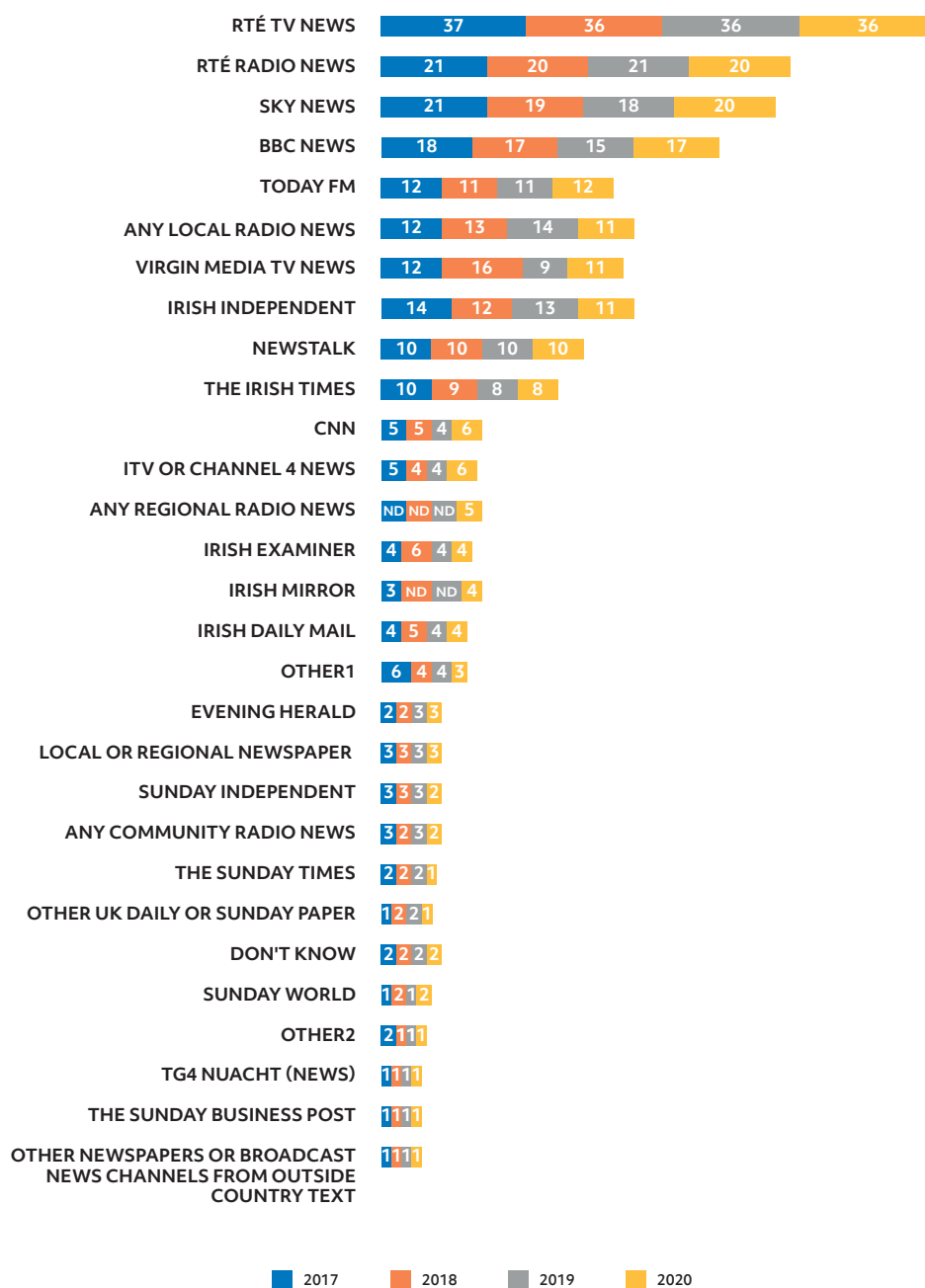
Taking out an online subscription to a news title is the most common way to pay for news at 40 per cent. It seems that the introduction of donation models such as Noteworthy, has affected those paying for online news with more people making a donation to a digital news service in 2020 (23 per cent) than in 2019 (18 per cent), an increase of five percentage points.

SECTION FOUR

BRANDS, DISCOVERY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

This section outlines the main sources and brands used by Irish news consumers. It provides a breakdown of consumption patterns across traditional and digital brands, selected types of news, how Irish consumers find news online, and on social media.

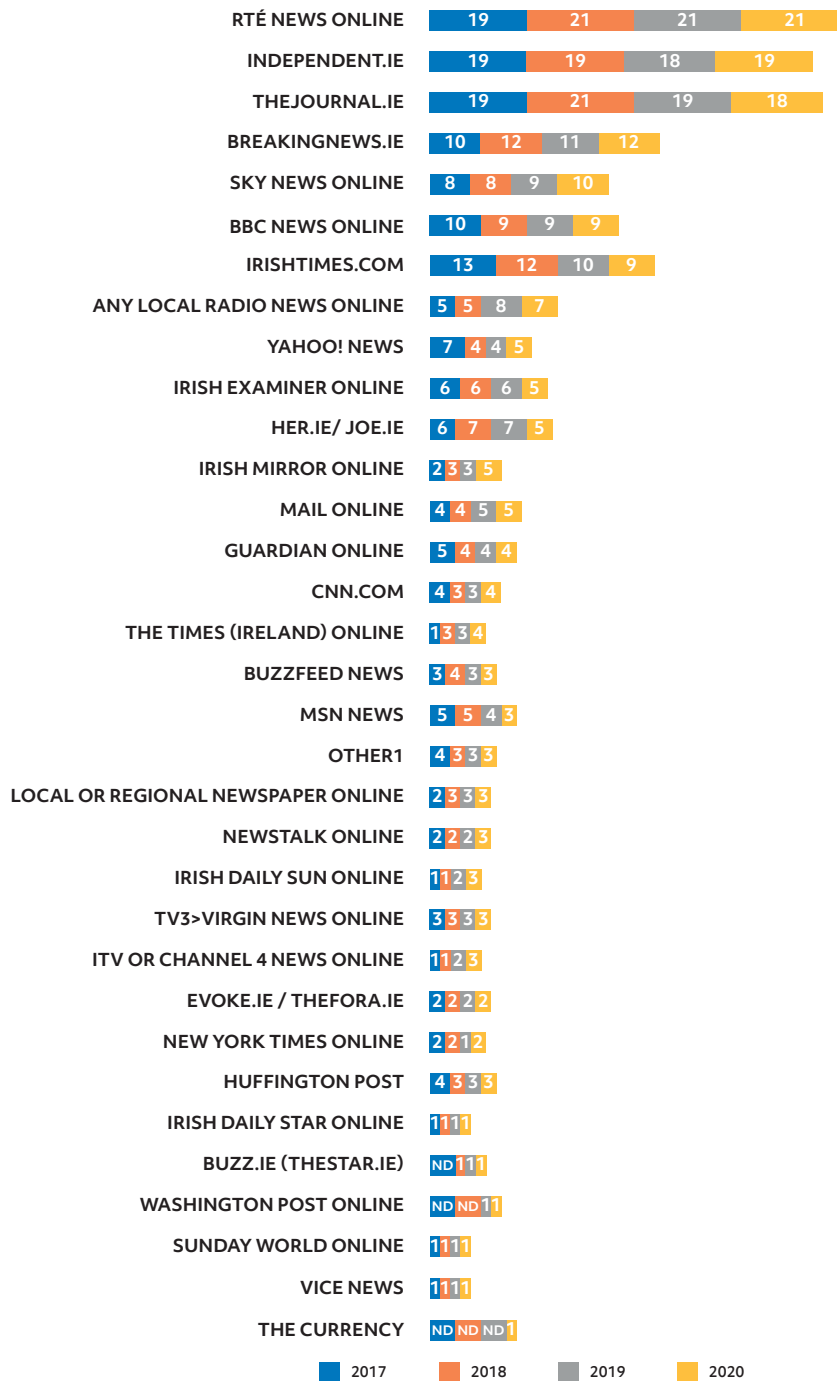
FIG 39: MAIN TRADITIONAL BRAND USED



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news offline in the last week. Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

Irish news consumers have not changed their habits much in terms of their preference for either traditional or digital news brands. There has been little change in the main traditional news brands used over the past four years, with most of the year on year changes within the margin of error. Ireland's public service broadcaster, RTÉ is the top news brand for traditional media, with RTÉ TV (36 per cent) and radio (20 per cent).

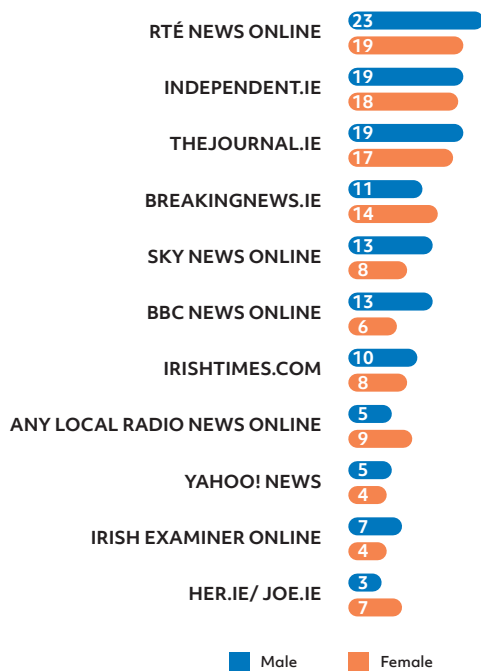
FIG 40: MAIN DIGITAL BRAND USED



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news online in the last week. Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

In terms of digital media, RTÉ online (21 per cent) is in top spot just ahead of TheJournal.ie. However, irishtimes.com has fallen by four percentage points over the past four years, perhaps impacted by the presence of a paywall, as barriers to access could provoke readers towards free news as a main source.

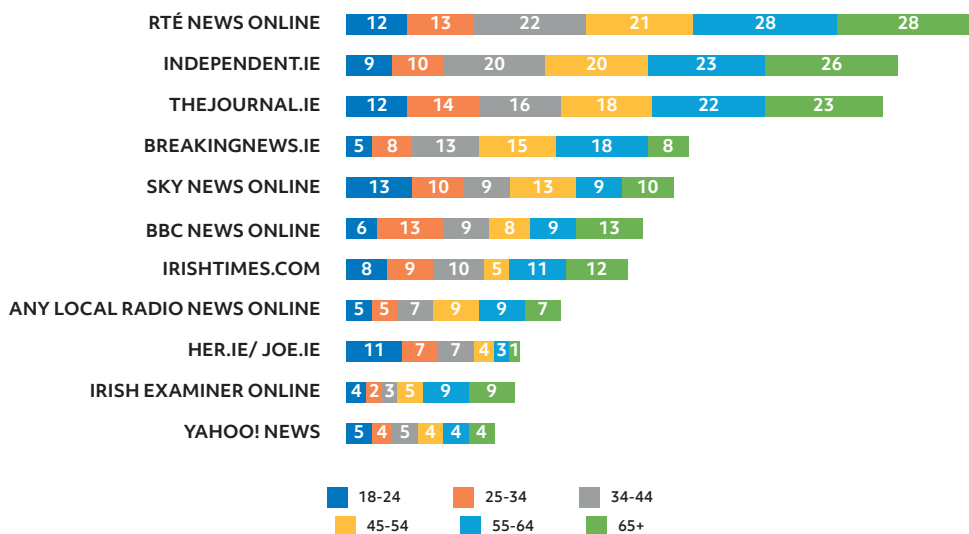
FIG 41: BRAND USE BY GENDER 2020



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news online in the last week. Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

This year we examined differences in brand use among gender and age groups. The breakdown shows relatively little variation across the top news titles. Most notable is the level of engagement in the number of men using UK sources of news such as the BBC and Sky News online compared with women. Female respondents were also more inclined to listen to local radio news.

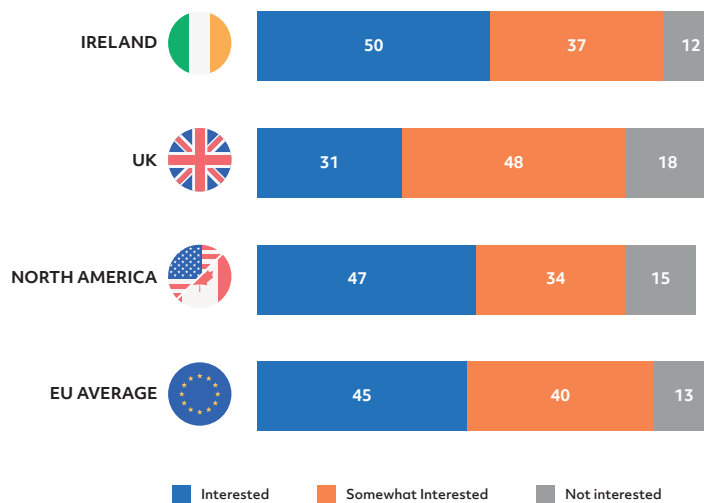
FIG 42: BRAND USE BY AGE GROUP



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news online in the last week. Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

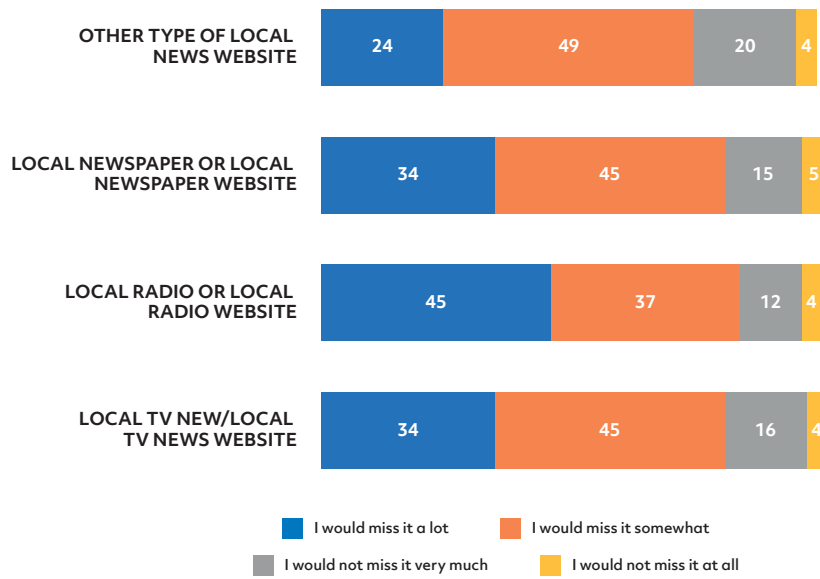
Traditional news brands attract higher portions of older news consumers, with older people skewing towards RTÉ, Independent, BBC and The Irish Times, while digital native brands such as TheJournal.ie, Her.ie and Joe.ie are largely used by younger people. Niche news saw some uplift in Ireland over the past year. Noteworthy, a crowd-sourced investigative journalism project led by Journal Media, launched in Ireland. Additionally, The Currency launched under a subscription model with a focus on business, finance, economics, and public policy, gaining a 1 per cent share in the market.

FIG 43: INTEREST IN LOCAL NEWS INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

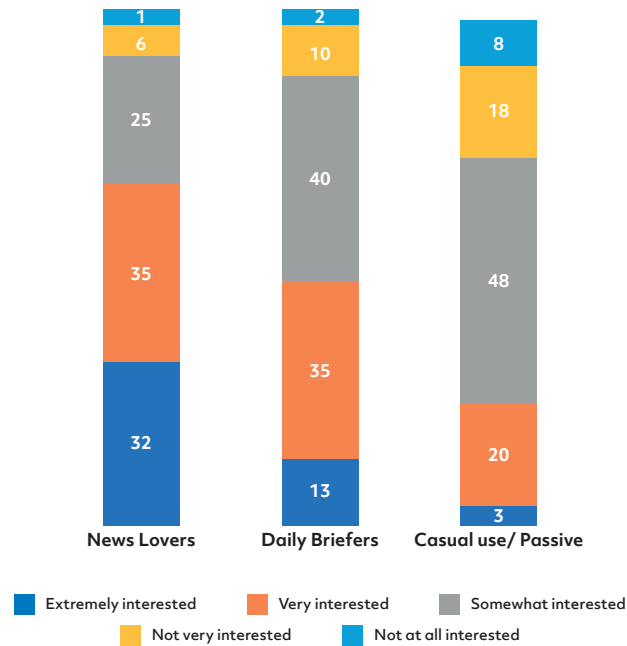


Q. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in local news?

It has been a difficult year for the local news sector in Ireland. Like national media, revenue and resources have been under pressure from competition from digital advertisers and new hyperlocal websites. The ongoing relationships between local business and local newspapers is a mutually beneficial cornerstone of the industry. Early on in the COVID-19 crisis many businesses closed and an important revenue stream for local newspapers was shut off. In March, Iconic Newspaper group laid off local workers across ten of its titles. But perhaps Irish news users' dedication to local news offers a glimmer of hope for recovery. Irish news consumers seem to have a stronger relationship with local news than elsewhere with 50 per cent of people saying they are interested in local news compared with 31 per cent in the UK, 45 per cent in Europe, and 47 per cent in North America, although it should be noted that there is a large variation between the size and character of local news markets in these regions. Local newspapers are the most used source at 46 per cent with radio second at 37 per cent. Social media is making an impact on local news markets in Ireland too with more than a quarter of respondents saying they are part of a local social media group or page at 26 per cent.

FIG 44: HOW MUCH WOULD YOU MISS THE FOLLOWING IF IT WENT OUT OF BUSINESS?

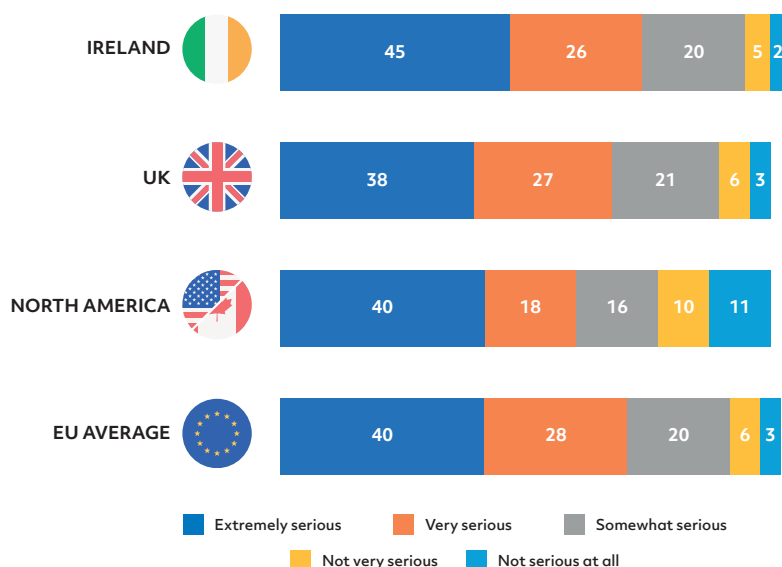
Q. How much would you miss the below news source if it went out of business?

FIG 45: NEWS LOVERS' INTEREST IN LOCAL NEWS

Q. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in local news?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, NEWS LOVERS are far more interested in local news than others with 92 per cent saying they are interested in some way. However, even among passive news consumers, interest in local news is high with 71 per cent saying they were interested, although only three per cent say they are extremely interested. While older age groups claim the most interest in local news, 70 per cent of 18-24s also expressed an interest in local news. This high level of engagement indicates that Irish news consumers like to see news and engage with the current affairs in their local area.

**FIG 46: HOW SERIOUS A PROBLEM IS CLIMATE CHANGE
INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS 2020**



Q. How serious a problem, if at all, do you think climate change is?

The increased prominence of climate change on the political and media agendas is reflected in the high levels of concern about the issue in Ireland. The Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change, the establishment of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action, and the increased levels of support for the Green Party in the 2020 general election have all served to increase the visibility of the issue for the public.

The experience of the public during restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic may see concern about environmental issues continue. The lockdown has meant decreases in air, water, and noise pollution. There has been a significant increase in cycling and the use of local green spaces, and local authorities have given more road space to active travel such as walking and cycling. Direct experience by the public of these environmental improvements could see greater engagement on issues such as climate change in the future.

Only five per cent of participants believe climate change is not very serious, and only two per cent dismiss it as not serious at all. This points to a low level of climate scepticism or denial in Ireland, especially compared to North America where 21 per cent of respondents are unconcerned by the climate crisis. This aligns with other research which has found that climate deniers are not represented to any great extent in the media in Ireland or in European media generally, whereas they are much more prominent in US media coverage.

FIG 47: WHICH DO YOU PAY MOST ATTENTION TO REGARDING CLIMATE CHANGE?



Q. When it comes to climate change, which of the following sources of news, if any, do you pay most attention to? Please select one.

Irish consumers pay the most attention to climate change on TV (34 per cent) followed by mainstream digital media (15 per cent). Irish participants showed a desire for specialist expert knowledge on the issue with nine per cent using specialised outlets for their climate change news.

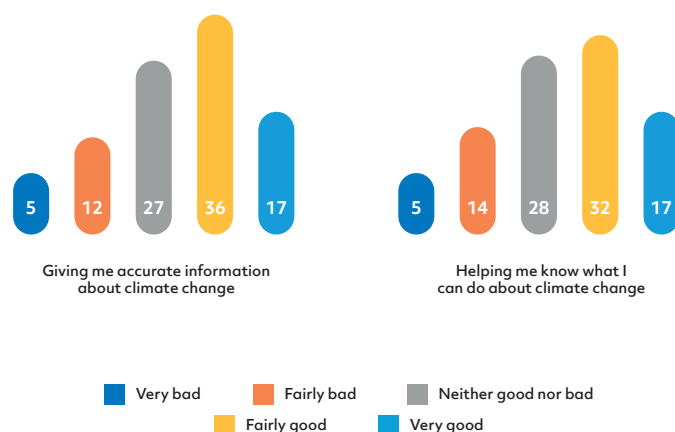
The relatively high reliance on TV for news on climate change is interesting as television outlets cover the topic less frequently than other media platforms. Climate coverage on RTÉ has been found to be “low, sporadic, and infrequent”, although the public broadcaster did organise a week of themed programming and content across all its platforms in November 2019.

Previous research has shown that people are reluctant to speak with peers about climate change; that appears to be changing in Ireland, with eight per cent paying attention to their colleagues and friends on the issue.

The relatively heavy reliance on specialist media outlets is also encouraging for environmental news outlets such as greennews.ie.

The public is very reliant on the media for information about scientific topics such as climate change. This is born out by our report, which shows that over 80 per cent of respondents pay attention to some form of media for their information on climate change. Climate change is often seen as an “unobtrusive” topic - relatively few people have direct experience of it (although that is changing), and therefore rely on media reports.

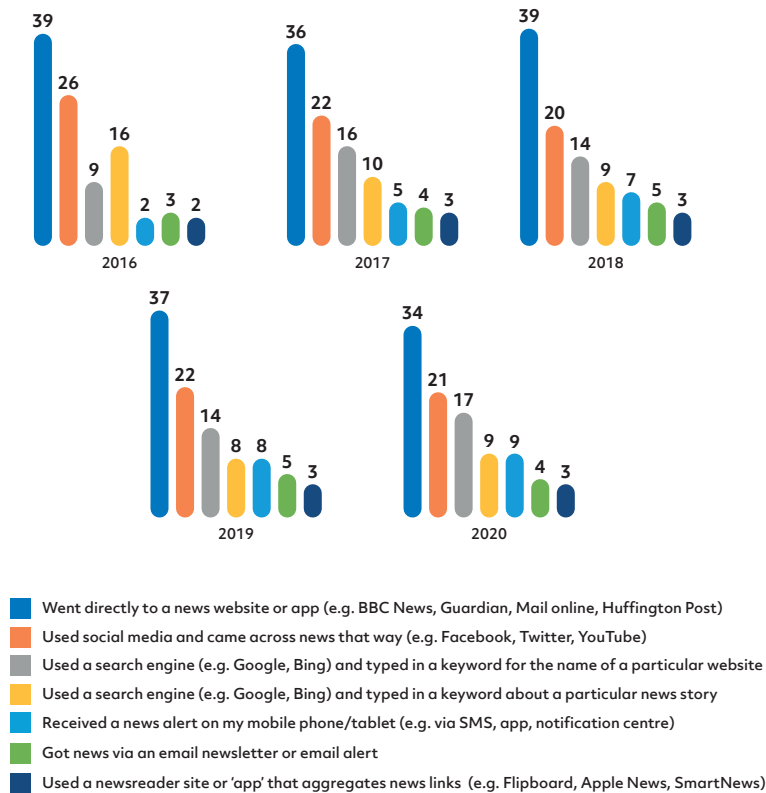
FIG 48: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU THINK THE NEWS MEDIA DOES A GOOD OR BAD THE FOLLOWING?



Q. To what extent do you think the news media does a good or bad job at the following?

Irish news consumers think that the news media is slightly better at providing accurate information about climate change (53 per cent) than providing solutions to address it (49 per cent).

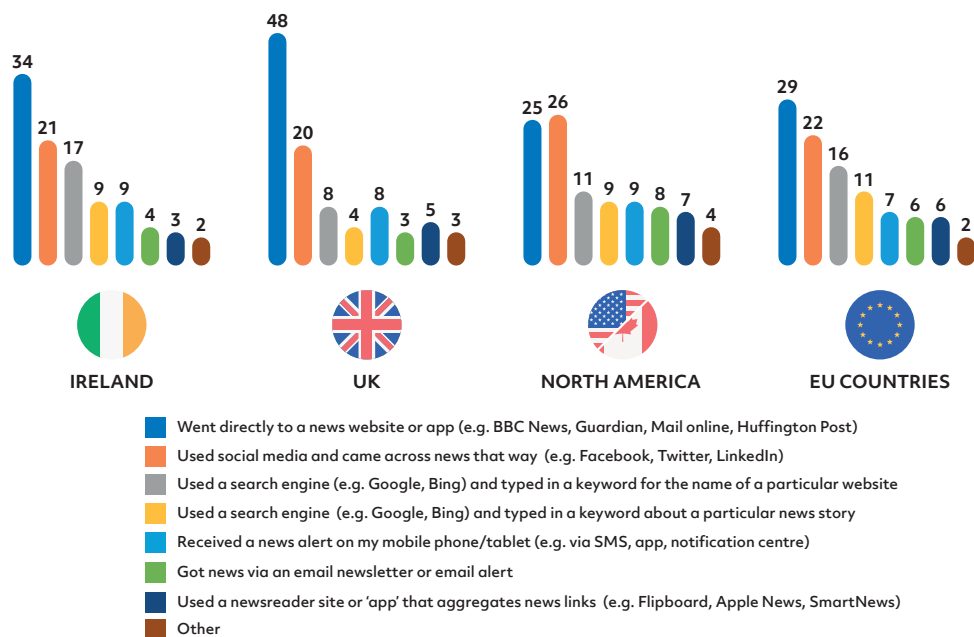
The Irish media appear to be doing a good job on providing accurate information about climate change, with 53 per cent of respondents believing the media do a fairly good or very good job in their reporting on the issue. That falls to 49 per cent when it comes to telling people what they can do to combat climate change. Traditionally, the media have focused on the politics of climate change rather than particular adaptation or mitigation measures. There seems to be a committed cohort (17 per cent of respondents in both cases) who believe the media are performing very well on providing accurate information and informing the public of measures they can take themselves. There is a similar section of the public (17-19 per cent) dissatisfied with the accuracy and usefulness of media coverage of climate.

FIG 49: MAIN WAYS PEOPLE FOUND NEWS ONLINE LAST WEEK

Q. Which of these was the main way in which you came across news in the last week?

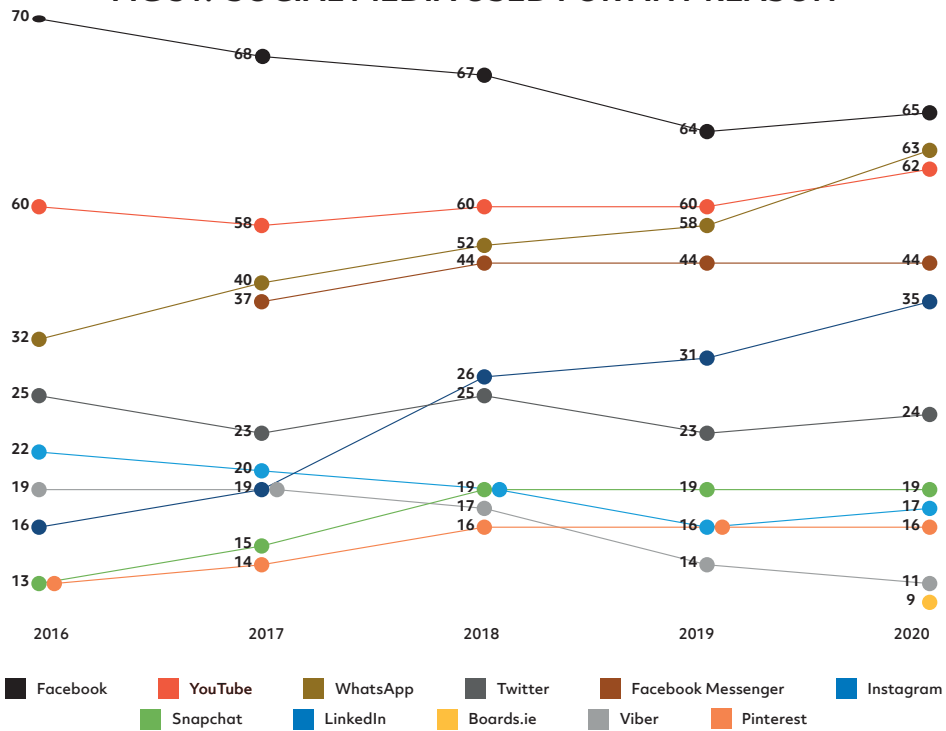
There has been a slight but gradual decline in users going directly to a news website over the past five years, from 39 per cent in 2016 to 34 per cent in 2020. This is likely shaped by the decline in the use of the laptop as a main device. Additionally, finding news via social media has seen a similar decline, although we must recognise the algorithmic changes on large platforms such as Facebook in 2018 that demoted news from pages and prioritises content shared by friends. On the other hand, there has been a small but steady rise in push notifications as a main source which is inherently linked to the rapid rise in the smartphone as the main device for news consumption.

**FIG 50: MAIN WAY PEOPLE FOUND NEWS ONLINE
INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS**



Q. Which of these was the main way in which you came across news in the last week?

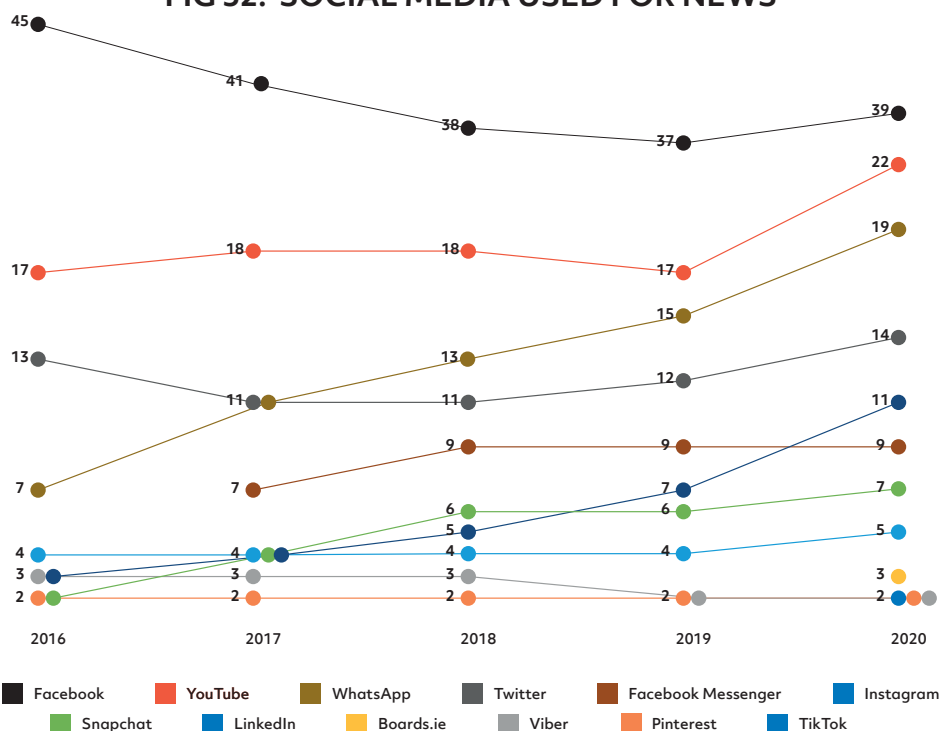
FIG 51: SOCIAL MEDIA USED FOR ANY REASON



Q. Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose in the last week? Please select all that apply.

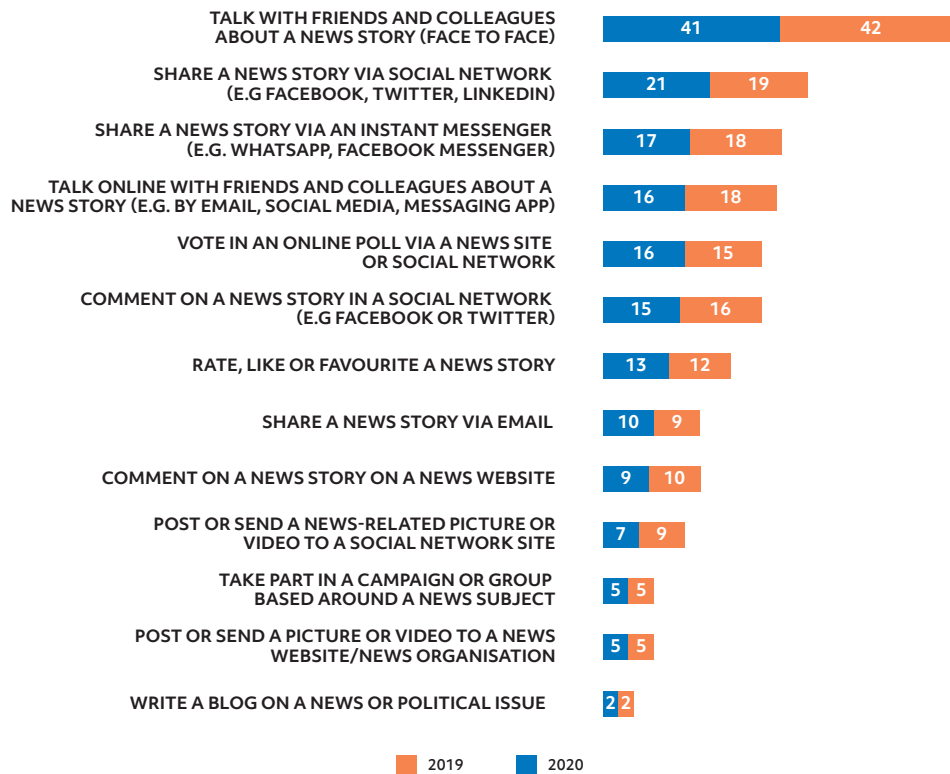
Irish news consumers are using Facebook less and the use of Facebook fell by five percentage points over the past five years. On the other hand, the use of WhatsApp has soared by 30 percentage points since 2016. Similarly, Instagram has seen a steep increase over five years. All, of course, are owned by the same group.

FIG 52: SOCIAL MEDIA USED FOR NEWS



Q. Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? Please select all that apply.

In terms of news Facebook also dominates and is used most for news by Irish consumers; however, it has fallen six percentage points in five years. This is unsurprising given the changes in people's news feeds and the increased distrust towards news found through social media. YouTube has seen a steady increase in use for news, and this may be shaped by changes in the media market with broadcast news media increasingly putting content on YouTube and new features such as live feeds of important news broadcasts. Both WhatsApp and Instagram are also increasing as main sources of news, again possibly shaped by increases in the market where short snippets of video are published by news brands. Overall, some 53 per cent of Irish people get news on social media via Facebook owned companies.

FIG 53: PARTICIPATION WITH NEWS

Q. During an average week in which, if any, of the following ways do you share or participate in news coverage? Please select all that apply.

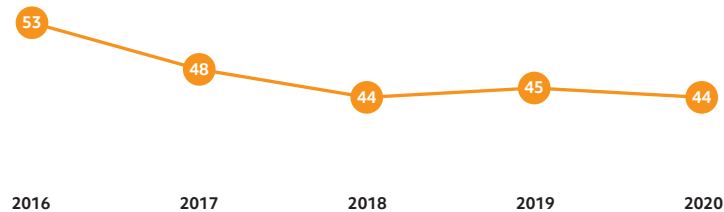
With the increase in concern about what is real and fake on the internet, it is no surprise to see three per cent fewer Irish consumers likely to share news on social media in 2020 compared to last year. Talking face to face with people is still the most common way people participate, share, and comment on news.

SECTION FIVE

GENERATION Z: 18-24s AS NEWS CONSUMERS

This section details the use and attitudes to news among Ireland's 18-24s. It details their sources, devices, brands and types of news they use as well as their trust, concerns and attitudes to news media.

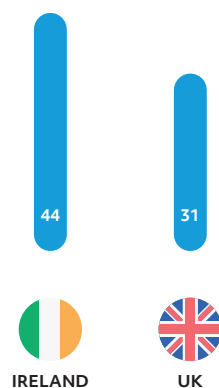
FIG 54: VERY INTERESTED 18-24 BY YEAR



Q. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news?

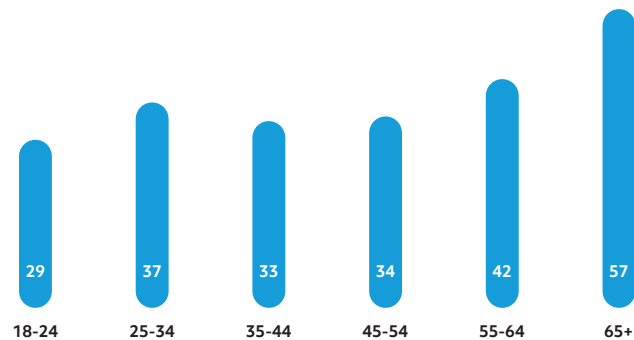
This year we took a focused look at news media use among Generation Z, those born in the mid 90s to the early 00s. This cohort have been targeted for recruitment by media organisations as they will be the news consumers of the future. They are also the age-group whose attention is most sought-after across multiple social media and news platforms. They have grown up in an exclusively digital world where high-speed wireless internet access was prevalent and advanced smartphones were available from an early age. Worryingly for news brands their interest in news has declined over the past five years, falling by 11 percentage points for those very or extremely interested in news. Although in 2020, the number of Irish Generation Z who are very interested is much higher than the same demographic in the UK.

FIG 55: VERY INTERESTED IN NEWS 18-24 UK AND IRELAND 2020



Q. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news?

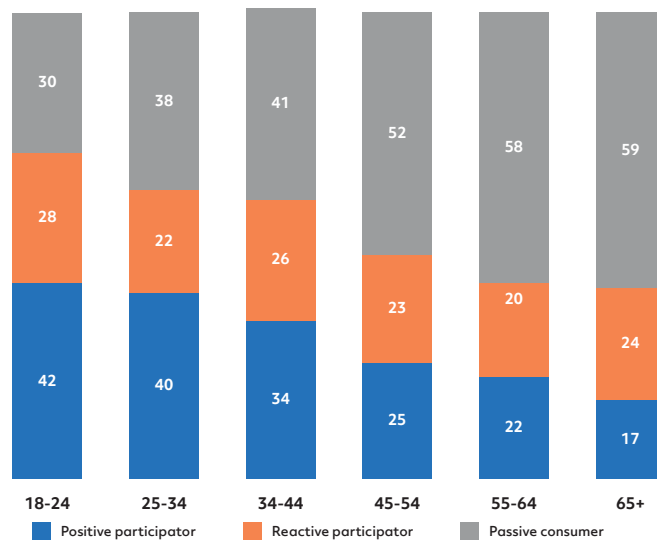
FIG 56: VERY INTERESTED IN POLITICS BY AGE GROUP 2020



Q. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics?

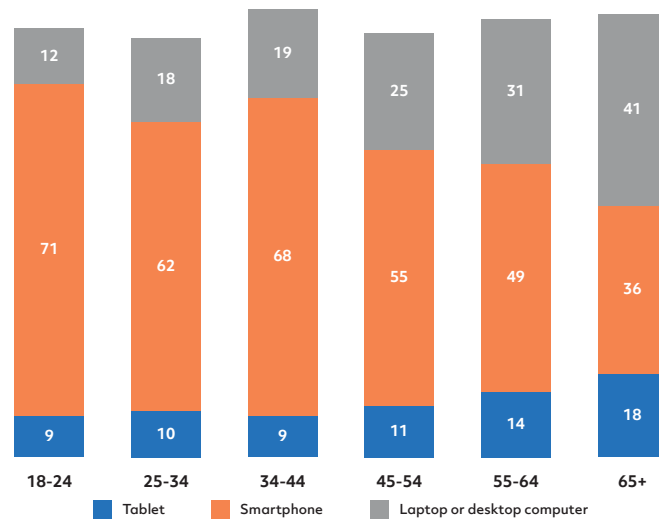
While Ireland's Generation Z is among the least interested in politics overall, almost a third of this generation, 29 per cent, say they are very or extremely interested in politics. Most Irish Generation Z are centrist, however more Irish 18-24s lean left than other age groups, substantially more than lean right.

FIG 57: PARTICIPATION AGE GROUPS 2020



Notably, despite being among the least interested demographic, 18-24s are among the most positive participators in Ireland, liking, sharing and commenting on news more than any other age group. Indeed some 42 per cent of Irish Gen Z participate actively compared with just 14 per cent in the UK.

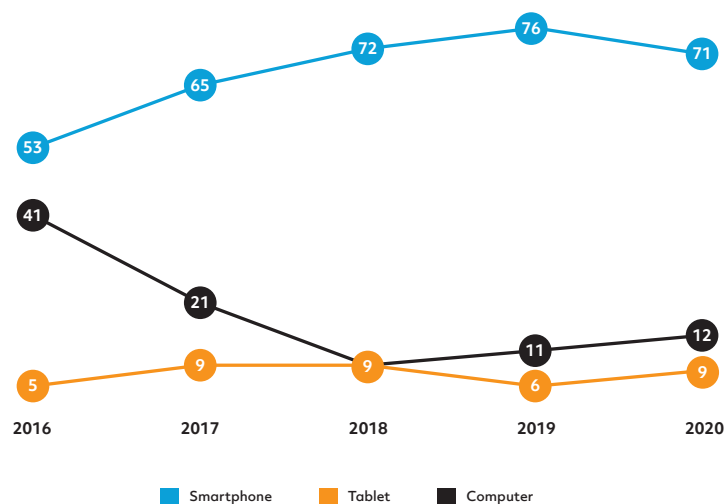
FIG 58: MAIN DEVICE FOR NEWS BY AGE GROUP 2020



Q. You've said you use the following devices to access news in the last week, which is your main way of accessing online news?

Generation Z use their smartphones as the main device and at a greater rate compared with other age groups. Over the past five years, their use of smartphones has grown substantially, rising by 23 percentage points, while the use of PCs and laptops have fallen by 29 percentage points. This is not surprising as research from Ireland suggests that many young people do not have easy or affordable access to personal laptops or home PCs¹. Smartphones are more affordable and have increasingly sophisticated functionalities, becoming a one-stop-shop for various types of media engagement.

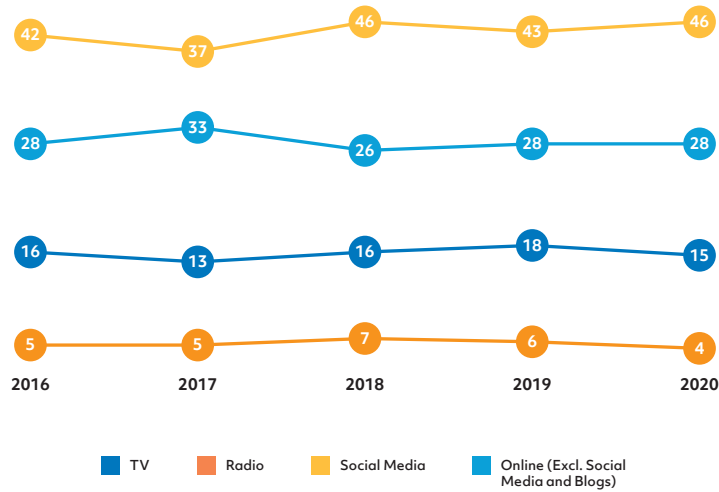
FIG 59: 18-24 MAIN DEVICE FOR NEWS BY YEAR



Q. You've said you use the following devices to access news in the last week, which is your main way of accessing online news?

¹ <https://www.bai.ie/en/bai-funded-research-study-sheds-light-on-irish-consumption-of-video-content/>

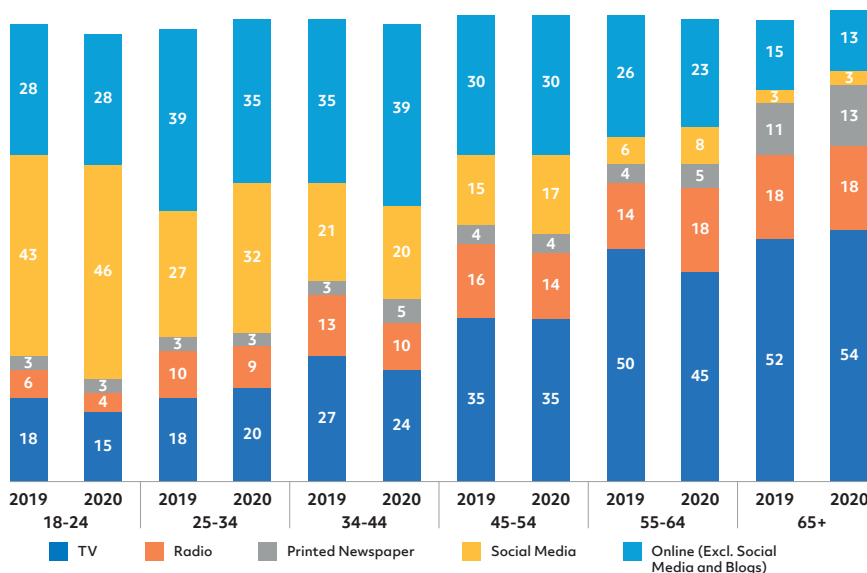
FIG 60: 18-24 MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS BY YEAR



Q. You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your main source of news?

Younger people are also increasingly using social media as their main source, growing by three percentage points in five years. And while there are fluctuations across the use of all main sources, none have seen a substantial decline among 18-24s over the past five years.

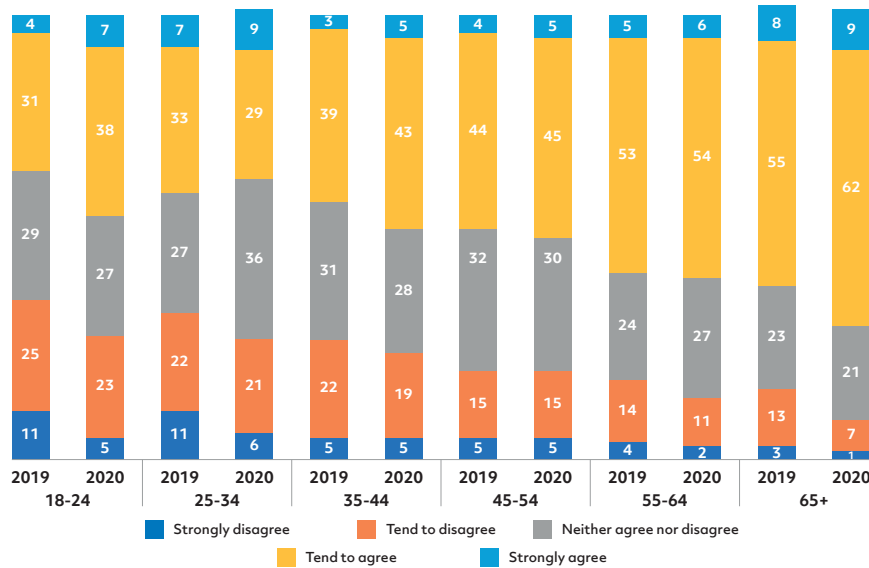
FIG 61: MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS BY AGE GROUP



Q. You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your main source of news?

There is a large disparity between the main sources of news among 18-24s compared with other age groups. Irish Generation Z is substantially more digitised than those over 55. However, this does not mean that these patterns will persist throughout their lives and as this generation age, they may engage more with traditional sources.

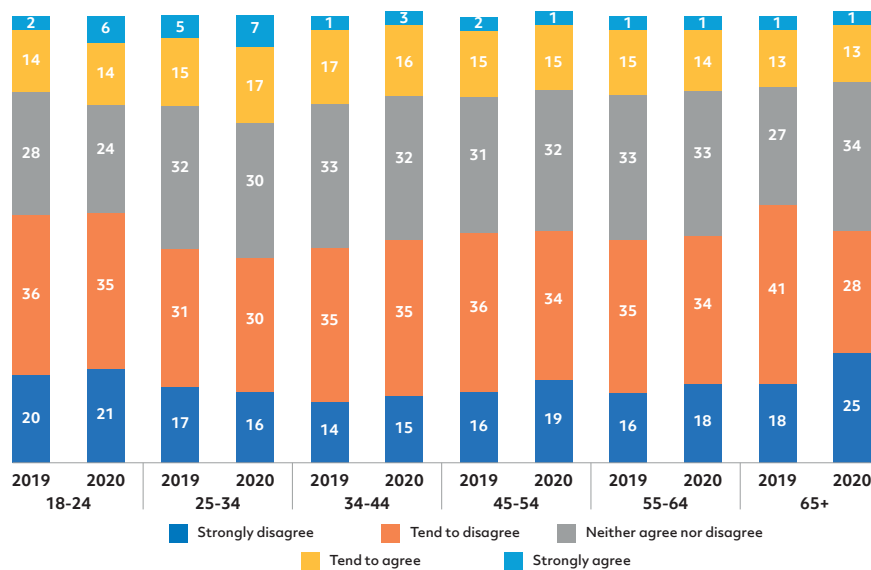
FIG 62: TRUST MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME AMONG AGE GROUPS 2019 AND 2020



Q. I think you can trust most news most of the time.

Generation Z in Ireland is the least trusting of news media in general, although their level of trust has grown in the past year. The higher level of social media use for news among 18-24s, one of the least trusted sources in general, does not completely explain this. Responses from participants show that 18-24s in Ireland are not much more distrustful for news via social media than other age groups.

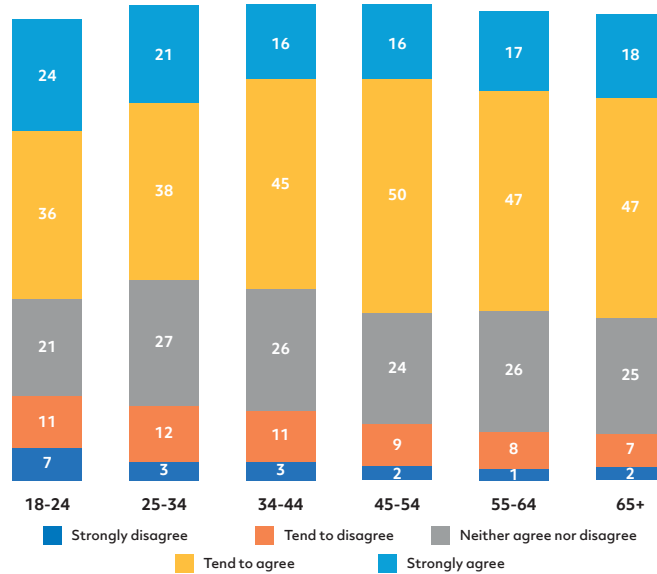
FIG 63: TRUST IN NEWS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG AGE GROUPS 2019 AND 2020



Q. I think I can trust news in social media most of the time.

There is a disparity in Generation Z between their use of social media for news which is high, and their trust in social media as a news source which is low, but much the same as other age groups. This suggests 18-24s consume news on smartphones because it is scrollable and easy to interact with (like, share, and comment), but do not take it too seriously.

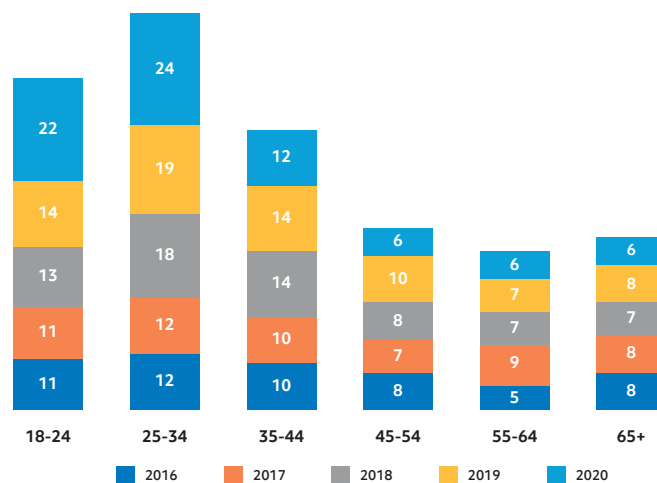
FIG 64: I AM CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT IS REAL AND WHAT IS FAKE ON THE INTERNET



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. Thinking about online news, I am concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet.

Perhaps because some of the appeal of news engagement for Generation Z is as much about scrolling and shareability, they are the age group least concerned about what is real and fake on the internet in general.

FIG 65: AGE GROUPS WHO PAID FOR NEWS BY YEAR



Q. Have you paid for online news content, or accessed a paid for online news service in the last year? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition).

As noted in section three, younger people are more inclined to pay for news than older age groups. Indeed, Generation Z more so than other generation have grown up with the need to pay for access to quality content as a norm, either for music on Spotify or iTunes, or video via Netflix and Amazon Prime or for news via online subscriptions or donations. In contrast, older age groups are perhaps more accustomed to free content and may be more reluctant to pay for what they once got for free.

FIG 66: 18-24 MAIN TRADITIONAL NEWS BRANDS 2020



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news offline in the last week. Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

The main traditional news brands used by Irish Generation Z are not that dissimilar to the main traditional brands used in general. RTE TV News is the most popular among 18-24s and the top ten traditional news brands used by Generation Z are much the same as the top ten used on average, with the exception of the Irish Mirror which is the eighth most popular among younger news readers.

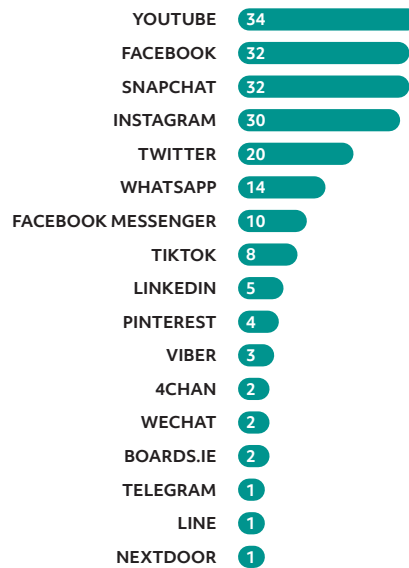
FIG 67: 18-24 MAIN DIGITAL NEWS BRANDS 2020



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news online in the last week. Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

Buzzfeed News is the most popular main digital brand among Irish 18-24's possibly tapping into the types of news stories that are most familiar to this age group including pop culture and niche beats such as covering social media influencers that is often not a feature of traditional mainstream brands. However, among the top ten main brands used by this demographic, there are a range of mainstream traditional sources such as Sky News and TheJournal.ie and RTE Online.

FIG 68: 18-24 SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND USE FOR NEWS 2020



Q. Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? Please select all that apply.

YouTube is the most popular social media brand used in general and as a main source of news for Irish 18-24s. While a number of international news organisations such as Sky News, Fox, and CNN have dedicated YouTube channels and sometimes broadcast important events live on the platform, YouTube is in many ways neglected by Irish News organisations who tend to focus heavily on distribution on Facebook and Twitter. On YouTube there have been concerns about the quality of news and topical content from independent providers. YouTube recently reintroduced a feature in the US market to show if content has been fact-checked but this is yet to be rolled out in Europe. Similarly, TikTok is under utilized by Irish news organisations. Some UK and US based news organisations have begun to package and distribute news in novel ways on this emerging platform. TikTok's features require a lot of creativity and innovation in storytelling demanding a mix of video, audio, text and novel presentation to gain attention. Irish news organisations are engaging more with Instagram as a distribution channel, with most of the mainstream news organisations such as RTÉ One, Newstalk, The Irish Times, and TheJournal.ie with official 'blue tick' Instagram pages, and using other features of the platform such as Instagram stories.

COVID-19's disastrous effects on media worldwide

by Colleen Murrell

The coronavirus pandemic has rocked our world and never has the role of public interest media been so important in communicating trustworthy information, questioning power and analysing evidence of policies, right or wrong. But just as COVID-19 shows us how crucial journalists are for uncovering the true stories – such as PPE availability, ICU access, or the standards of care in our care homes - the virus has also dealt another sharp blow to the media industry. The lockdown has led to a further collapse in advertising revenue, which mostly still enables journalism to exist. And although there has been an increase in people visiting trusted news sites, many web platforms are not set up to monetize this change as they have neither paywalls nor membership schemes.

According to a report² by the the International Federation of Journalists in Brussels, COVID-19 has led to two thirds of staff and freelance journalists suffering “pay cuts, lost revenue, job losses, cancelled commissions or worsening working conditions.” The IFJ general secretary, Anthony Bellanger, said, “Journalism is a public good and it deserves public support and an end to political obstruction and interference.” In many countries, including here in Ireland, journalists are deemed to be ‘key workers’ during the coronavirus lockdown period. And yet everywhere jobs are being lost.

I arrived recently in Ireland after living in Australia for 20 years, and over there dozens of media outlets have ceased printing and broadcasting in 2020, and job losses are mounting. The government, which has never shown much interest in bailing out the media from the public purse, has suddenly had an epiphany. In April it introduced a number of measures to help the industry, saying, “the government recognises that public interest journalism is essential to informing local communities, particularly in relation to national and global events such as COVID-19³.” It announced 30 million euros for a Public Interest News Gathering (PING) program⁴ – to support high quality news “delivered by commercial television, newspaper, and radio businesses in regional Australia.” Other measures include bringing forward the release of 3 million euros from the government’s Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund, a 12-month waiver on spectrum payments⁵ for broadcasters plus a suspension of 55 per cent local content requirements.

But each new week brings forth further bad news. In June 2020 the ABC, the national broadcaster, announced it expects to cut 250 staff across news and other divisions to meet its annual budget shortfall, and despite bushfire coverage and COVID-19 adding an extra 1.8 million euros to costs⁶. It remains to be seen if the government will extend its generosity to the ABC, with which it has had many disagreements over recent years.

On the other hand, the pandemic has galvanised the government into taking on the social media giants that for years have not paid the media fairly for their work. In April it announced that a new mandatory code⁷ would be imposed on Google and Facebook, forcing them to pay news companies for use of their content. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) decided that voluntary negotiations with the tech companies were going nowhere fast

2 <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/exposed-the-crisis-facing-journalism-in-the-face-of-covid-19.html>

3 <https://www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/television/relief-australian-media-during-covid-19>

4 <https://www.bulletpoint.com.au/public-interest-news-gathering-program-ping/>

5 <https://www.abc.org/monetise/australian-government-unveils-54m-relief-fund-for-broadcasters/5735.article>

6 https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/jun/09/abc-seeks-voluntary-redundancies-to-make-up-41m-budget-shortfall?CMP=share_btn_tw

7 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-20/facebook-and-google-to-face-mandatory-code-of-conduct/12163300>

and so the treasurer Josh Frydenberg said, “It’s only fair that those that generate content get paid for it.” Many countries, in particular France and Spain, will now be watching to see if chasing these companies through competition law - rather than copyright law - gets traction.

And it is not only the government that has stepped in to help journalism. There are also philanthropic organisations. In April, Australia’s ‘Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism and Ideas’ (JNI) announced a number of COVID-19-related initiatives⁸. To date it has given out 20 grants to support companies that employ freelance reporters. Among the recipients was Australia’s network of 450 community radio stations, providing important local health information to listeners, and the Fact Check service (run by the national broadcaster ABC and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) to help its efforts to tackle misinformation about the pandemic. Philanthropy is also in evidence in a current plan to rescue the national news agency, the Australian Associated Press (AAP). This time the bid⁹ is led by Peter Tonagh, chair of Quantum.

In the UK, in response to news media facing “potentially catastrophic declines in income” the Reuters Institute (RISJ) in Oxford announced it would chair an ‘Independent News Emergency Relief Coordination’ group (INERC¹⁰) to initiate help for journalists during the crisis. The RISJ said journalists were “key to both publicising and scrutinising how governments and other powerful institutions respond to the crisis.” INERC’s founding members include BBC Media Action, and WAN-IFRA, plus Google and Facebook. It is understood to be a “temporary initiative” to last six months. The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has launched a “news recovery plan¹¹,” with both short and long-term proposals. These include a windfall tax of 6 per cent on tech giants, and tax credits and interest free loans “for frontline reporters covering the COVID-19 crisis and recovery.”

So will Ireland create any such initiatives? Would it, for example, pursue Facebook or Google for payment for news content? Recent behaviour suggests not, given that Dublin is the European headquarters for many digital companies that are afforded very comfortable tax provisions. But allowing the tech platforms to cannibalise the digital content of Irish news media may also have a dire effect on jobs in the local news industry. While Google does give money to news research projects (including the Digital News Report 2020) many are now calling for a more fair and direct distribution of profits from the platforms that make money from news content. If we want trustworthy news to see us through this current crisis, then we need to sustain it.

8 <https://jninstitute.org/partnerships/support-for-freelancers-and-casual-contributors-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-01042020-150826>

9 <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/aap-newswire-set-to-be-saved-from-closure-with-sale-in-final-stages>

10 <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/independent-news-emergency-relief-coordination>

11 <https://www.nuj.org.uk/news/nuj-launches-news-recovery-plan/>

Podcasting comes into its own

by David Robbins

There is a public perception that podcasting – both producing and listening to them – is one of the signature media changes brought about by restrictions introduced to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus. In the popular imagination, starting a podcast from home during lockdown is on a par with sourdough bread-making as a cliched response to confinement. This perception was captured succinctly in a tweet by Derry Girls actor Nicola Coughlan: “I know this time of self isolation is hard and scary for people, but no matter how bad you are feeling – please, please don’t consider starting your own podcast”. The tweet went viral, receiving over 100,000 likes and almost 20,000 re-tweets.

There is some basis for the perception that podcasting is the medium the public have turned to during the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of podcasts available on Apple Podcasts has passed one million, with 30 million individual episodes available. Listeners are hungry for content, according to hosting and analytics company Acast, and the pandemic has changed listening habits, content selection and device use.

Global download figures are rising, with weekend downloads showing a 4.8 per cent increase on pre-COVID-19 figures. Previously, listenership peaked during commuting times; now, it is more constant throughout the day. Home-based digital assistant devices such as Alexa, and domestic streaming (Chromecast) and speaker systems (Sonos) have seen significant increases in popularity for podcast listening (source: Acast).

The pandemic has also changed the type of content we are listening to, with comedy in greater demand as a contrast to the grim coronavirus news bulletins. Downloads of comedy podcasts in Europe for the end of March were up by 21 per cent on the previous week, while entertainment (up 6.8 per cent) and culture (up 8.1 per cent) were also gaining in popularity. However, there is a large section of the listening public who want to know more about medical topics in general, and the pandemic in particular: health (up 7.5 per cent) and science/medicine (up 14.5 per cent) podcasts are more popular too.

True crime podcasts seem immune to changes in taste or listening habits. According to Chartable’s data for the top 100 podcasts downloaded globally for the week April 27-May 3, 2020, Crime Junkie from Audiochuck is the world’s most downloaded podcast. Dateline, the NBC true crime platform, has several titles in the top 100, including The Thing About Pam, a Serial-style series about the 2011 murder of Betsy Faria in Missouri, which has been moving up the charts.

News is also a popular topic area. Research by the Reuters Institute from December, 2019 show that news podcasts are a growing category around the world. In the US, they account for 6 per cent of all podcasts listed with Apple, but 21 per cent of the most popular episodes come from news podcasts. The success of The Daily from the New York Times has persuaded many news organisations that there is a demand for news-based content, whether it be micro-bulletins (one to five minutes), news round-ups (six to 15 minutes) or deep dives (20 minutes and above).

It can be difficult to get a full and accurate picture of the podcast market, as there are multiple analytics companies offering slightly differing data from the various podcast platforms, such as Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify and Google Podcasts. For instance, Podtrac, a podcast analytics and advertising agency, noted that the pandemic caused a 4 per cent fall in US downloads at the beginning of March, but also pointed out that total downloads for 2020 were up 25 per cent on the previous year. Ad Results Media, another US analytics and advertising company, said their data showed a flatlining of downloads during the pandemic, but that, given the losses suffered by other media, “flat is the new up” (source: Nieman Labs report, April 14, 2020).

In Ireland, our research shows that podcasts were becoming more popular before the pandemic arrived. Some 40 per cent of respondents say they listen to podcasts, up from 37 per cent last year. This increase is especially marked in the 18-24 age group, with 72 per cent listening to podcasts in 2020, compared to 59 per cent in 2019. The popularity of podcasts declines with age: only 16 per cent of those in the over-65 age-group listen to them. The high levels of engagement with podcasts among the 18-24 age group may be a result of their familiarity with podcast apps and subscription models.

A preference for the audio experience is quite marked in Ireland: 13 per cent of Irish people prefer to listen to the news, as opposed to watching or reading it. That is significantly more than audiences in the US and Canada (9 per cent), the UK (8 per cent), and the EU (9 per cent). The content preferences of Irish podcast listeners are quite evenly spread across genres, with niche subjects, news and politics, lifestyle, sport, and contemporary society each attracting about 11-13 per cent of the audience. The reasons for choosing podcasts are also evenly distributed: between 52 per cent and 57 per cent of podcast listeners like the convenience of the medium, its capacity to delve more deeply into topics, its ability to include non-mainstream voices, and its capacity to entertain.

Irish-produced content is popular among Irish listeners, according to the podcast chart for Ireland compiled by Chartable. The Irish History Podcast (Finn Dwyer), The Stand with Eamon Dunphy, the David McWilliams Podcast, The 2 Johnnies Podcast, the Blindboy Podcast and The Laughs of Your Life with Doireann Garrigy all feature in the top ten (source: Chartable Apple Podcasts downloads for week ending Sat May 9, 2020).

Ireland is also a podcast production hotspot, with studios and networks including Headstuff Podcast Network, Tall Tales, The Warren, Castaway Media, and Collaborative Studios all active in podcast production. Irish media organisations are investing heavily in original podcast series, and content produced by the Irish Times and the Independent group perform well in the Irish charts. Ireland’s reputation as a hub for creative podcasting content was further enhanced in June 2020 with the award of a New York Radio Festival award to ‘Stardust’, a six-part investigation into the Stardust nightclub tragedy, produced by TheJournal.ie.

Podcasting was a bright spot on the Irish media landscape before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, and life under lockdown has helped the medium come into its own. Podcasts may not have replaced the radio as the soundtrack to domestic life yet, but the growth of the sector seems assured.

Irish attitudes to information are broadly positive

by Eileen Culloty

The COVID-19 crisis has amplified the problems inherent to the digital information environment.

The ‘infodemic’ described by the World Health Organisation (WHO) concerns the overabundance and co-existence of accurate and inaccurate claims. Faced with an onslaught of news, rumours, hoaxes and opinions, many people are confused about who to trust and what to believe. In this context, it is reassuring to find that Irish attitudes to information are broadly positive. Although the survey was undertaken before the crisis hit Ireland, it indicates that Irish audiences are generally trusting of journalistic sources and aware of likely disinformation sources.

Audiences are arguably the most important component of the disinformation process because disinformation only becomes a problem when it finds people willing to believe and share it. Unsurprisingly, helping audiences develop skills to evaluate information and providing fact-checks to correct false claims are central to disinformation countermeasures. Last year, the Be Media Smart campaign¹² was developed by Media Literacy Ireland, a voluntary network which is facilitated by the BAI. The campaign is running again in response to COVID-19. Similarly, FuJo collaborated with Age Action to create resources¹³ that help older people avoid false information about the virus while TheJournal.ie¹⁴ is debunking a myriad of false claims and rumours – many of which circulate on Facebook and WhatsApp groups.

The ability to source reliable information and assess potential bias are cornerstones of media literacy. Two thirds of respondents recognise that independent journalism plays a central role in the proper functioning of a democratic society, and there is a preference, or at least a self-reported preference, for news sources that do not have a particular point of view. In addition, the majority are concerned about online disinformation.

Regarding likely sources of false or misleading information, one third are concerned about false information from governments and almost one fifth are concerned about false information from activists. This indicates an awareness that governments and activists may have a specific agenda that colours their communication. Interestingly, 15 per cent are concerned about receiving disinformation from ordinary people; this is higher than the EU average (12 per cent) and the UK (7 per cent). While there has been a great deal of attention placed on the ‘bad actors’ who create disinformation, it is ordinary people who, unwittingly or not, magnify false claims. Research suggests that ordinary people have a range of motivations for sharing disinformation, but often there is no bad intention. In fact, many people think they are being helpful by alerting others to alarming stories. This has been a big factor in the circulation of rumours and hoaxes surrounding COVID-19.

The online source most people are concerned about is Facebook. As Facebook is still the most popular online platform, this is unsurprising. However, YouTube is arguably as central to the disinformation ecosystem as Facebook. A recent study from researchers at the University of Ottawa analysed the top YouTube results for the terms ‘coronavirus’ and ‘COVID-19’ and found that more than a quarter of the most-viewed videos contained misleading information. In addition, YouTube poses greater difficulties for fact-checkers as false claims are often embedded in lengthy videos.

12 <https://www.bemediasmart.ie/>

13 <https://fujomedia.eu/fujo-develops-age-action-resource-on-covid-19-disinformation/>

14 <https://www.thejournal.ie/debunked/news/>

In terms of trust in news, Irish audiences are more trusting of news obtained via search engines (31 per cent) than social media (19 per cent). This probably reflects the attention placed on social media as a source of dubious information. However, search engines are also problematical. The way search engines select and prioritise information is not neutral, as each search engine uses its own criteria to construct hierarchies of knowledge. For example, a recent COVID-19 study¹⁵ found that Google Search and DuckDuckGo returned completely different results for the same search queries. In addition, autocomplete suggestions have been manipulated by bad actors; in particular, by the far-right. In 2016, an investigation by the Observer¹⁶ found that Google's search algorithm and its autocomplete function prioritise websites that, for example, declare climate change is a hoax, being gay is a sin, and the Sandy Hook mass shooting never happened. These problems have largely fallen under the public radar.

For years, the major social platforms have been criticised for failing to counteract harmful content. In response to COVID-19, the platforms have acted swiftly. In March, they issued a joint statement¹⁷ affirming their commitment to "elevating authoritative content" while combating fraud and misinformation. This may seem surprising given their previous reluctance to address harmful content. Earlier this year, Facebook refused¹⁸ to either fact-check or remove political ads with false claims. By the end of March, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube all banned videos featuring Brazil's President, Jair Bolsonaro, advocating unproven treatments for COVID-19.

As COVID-19 presents an unprecedented global emergency, the actions the platforms are taking need to be understood in that context. Content removals have increased and, most visibly, official sources of information are prioritised. However, it is relatively uncontroversial to intervene in a global health crisis; the platform's practical and political arguments against policing content are likely to remain when this crisis is over. In their defence, the old problems of monitoring content and detecting disinformation have not gone away.

This means that developing public understanding of the problem remains crucial. Moreover, it is not enough to simply foster concern about online information, audiences need the media and information skills to understand how information is structured online and to evaluate reliability for themselves.

15 <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/how-search-engines-disseminate-information-about-covid-19-and-why-they-should-do-better/>

16 <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/16/google-autocomplete-rightwing-bias-algorithm-political-propaganda>

17 <https://techcrunch.com/2020/03/16/facebook-reddit-google-linkedin-microsoft-twitter-and-youtube-issue-joint-statement-on-misinformation/>

18 <https://apnews.com/90e5e81f501346f8779cb2f8b8880d9c>

Generation Z – A new generation and a new challenge for digital journalism

by Niamh Kirk

Mainstream journalism faces a challenge in reaching their new digitally savvy Generation Z audiences. Generation Z, those born around the turn of the century, are unlike any generation preceding it. They are digitally immersed across multiple multimedia platforms, creative content producers from a young age and largely all from one device, increasingly smart smartphones. Focusing on generations allows us to look at how demographics behave at different stages of the life cycles and the defining features of age cohorts.¹⁹ Communications technologies shape how generations engage with media and interact with each other and society in general. Journalism faces a challenge in adapting to the media habits of this fragmented, multimedia producing generation.

Content

This year's survey shows a decline in interest among 18-24's and a similar decline in other age groups. Higher interest in some years may reflect the evolution in the wider news environment, 2016 to 2018 the mainstream news was filled with cross demographic social issues such as the referendums on marriage equality and the 8th amendment. Other critical issues such as climate change are high on the Gen Z agenda. Three quarters of 18-24s say they take climate change very seriously, 51 per cent of young people said that they felt it was extremely serious, 24 per cent said very serious. Most of Irish Generation Z get their climate change news from online news sites (24 per cent) and 16 per cent from traditional TV, and 16 per cent get it from alternative online sources such as blogs and social media, nine per cent from specialised climate change news outlets. 44 per cent think the news media do a good job on accurate reporting, and 38 per cent think it does a good job of explaining what can be done about it. News media may need to up their expertise to capture an audience that want more depth and guidance than day-to-day headline stories can deliver. In terms of brands, Irish Gen Z's favoured online news outlet, BuzzFeed News, closed its UK and Australian newsrooms but keeping staff for global coverage amid the COVID-19 crisis²⁰. BuzzFeed News UK reported on a range of topics and specialised in covering the economics and culture of social media, politics and social impacts in the UK and at times Ireland. Where will Irish 18-24's go for this type of journalism and will Irish brands react to capture this potential market?

Platforms, devices and discovery

Smartphones are used by 71 per cent of Gen Z as their main device for accessing news and this has increased by 18 percentage points over five years. This is in part shaped by affordability of phones and life stage²¹. Nonetheless, smartphones host the increasing volume of apps and platforms that are used as the main source of news. As devices storage capacity, speed and versatility grow so do the innovations in their uses. Smartphone's social media apps are often adopted and popularised by Generation Z and then feed up to older generations. The #over30 trend on TikTok is a prime example of this. The social media ecosystem has its own forms of news reports and investigations from consumer affairs such as critical reviews of influencers' make-up products to political satire on Snapchat and TikTok.

In many ways, Gen Z news is already being produced and distributed by younger audiences across these platforms. Often news organisations are competing against industry and academic experts, politicians and popular commentators who identify characteristics of variability long

19 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>

20 <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/may/13/buzzfeed-pulls-plug-on-uk-and-australian-news-operations>

21 <https://www.bai.ie/en/bai-funded-research-study-sheds-light-on-irish-consumption-of-video-content/>

before mainstream newsrooms have joined the club. In this regard, newsrooms can end up trying to cut through the noise in an already crowded marketplace. A more proactive, earlier adoption approach that builds an audience from those that join could yield better results. This calls for more experimentation by newsrooms to capture younger audiences even in a situation where resources are limited and increasingly dwindling. Some news titles like the *Washington Post* are adopting early and taking novel approaches to news content production, delivering it in the 'style' of the platforms whether such as joining in trends.²² News organisations can broaden their beats to deliver news that is of interest to younger readers and in formats that are engaging. A diversification of the role of social media teams now a feature in national newsrooms could help. But it is also important to be wary of heralding major behavioural changes. Most Irish 18-24's in our survey said their preference was still to read the news (41 per cent) while 37 per cent said they prefer to watch.

The question of how to get critical information to young people was addressed during the COVID-19 crisis when platforms worked to highlight and direct users to the highest quality resources such as national health providers and the World Health Organisation. YouTube added a banner with links to authoritative information on all videos posted for example. Twitter announced it would introduce a fact-check style label on COVID-19 content²³.

Trust

Trust is another challenge in our findings. Generation Z are among the least trusting of news in general and news on social media in particular. But they are also among the least concerned about misleading information online, which may point to a certain degree of confidence and savvy. Studies have shown that younger people are less likely to share misinformation than older age groups.²⁴ But engendering trust in Generation Z may not be the same as it might be for generations that grew up with legacy media. For mainstream news media to gain trust requires building relationships based on what is expected from media providers already being used. Two critical components of this are derived from cultures of practice on social media, engagement and openness.

Engagement with audiences online is a challenge in Ireland. Defamation Laws regarding content moderation prevent news titles from engaging in the conversations happening on their own social media pages. As a result news titles cannot converse directly with their own readers online. Transparency and openness are other potential trust builders. While it is important that news media be authoritative they must also recognise their fallibility. The traditional, formal, authoritative approach may not be relatable for younger audiences.

Gen Z's media use is not just about content creation production. Creativity and participation with digital media and trends are part of everyday social life and communication. Their interest in news is high even if the most salient topics are not the same as other age groups. Irish journalism many need to incorporate some new approaches to deliver the content in the formats, style and tone to better engage younger audiences.

22 <https://www.tiktok.com/@washingtonpost?lang=en>

23 https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/product/2020/updating-our-approach-to-misleading-information.html

24 <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/5/1/eaau4586#F1>

The importance of local news

by Fiona Stack

The next chapter

On February 20th this year, local and national radio stations from across Ireland met at the Radio Days Ireland Conference. Special presentations were made to multiple local radio stations to mark their 30 years of broadcasting.

Among the topics discussed at the conference was “The Future of News in a Changing Media Environment.” While there are many challenges facing the industry - particularly in relation to revenue and competition from social media giants - it was clear to me that there was also a tangible momentum, great ideas and a new willingness to work together to overcome shared threats.

Just a few short weeks later and COVID-19 had changed everything for society, and for all media organisations. Plans to mark 30 years turned to worries about surviving the next 30 days, because of the instant drop off in revenue.

With no cover charge or licence fee, and being dependent on advertising as the sole source of income, local radio and in particular, its local news services, faced an immediate threat.

Ironically, it was also a time when there was never a greater need for information that was trustworthy, accurate, relevant and up to date. Local newsrooms became a touchpoint for those with concerns and questions. We took it as a compliment that there was an expectation we would have the answers, and be able to provide the reassurance people needed.

Why is local news important?

As this survey shows, 87 per cent of those questioned in Ireland expressed an interest in local news. The UK figure was 79 per cent, with 85 per cent for the EU in general and 81 per cent for the US.

Of those who described themselves as news lovers, 92 per cent expressed an interest in local news. Even among passive news consumers, interest in local news is high, with 71 per cent saying they were interested. Over 80 per cent said they would miss their local radio, or local radio website, if it went out of business.

The protection of local news is not just about journalism, it is about democracy. How many thousands of stories would go untold, not making the cut for national media because of its many competing demands? How many voices might never be heard?

Local radio provides an easily accessible forum for people to challenge and probe, to hold national and local bodies to account, to ask questions, to get answers.

Ireland has always had a proud tradition in journalism, both national and local. Journalists in local newsrooms live the same lives as their listeners or readers. This closeness to our audience means all the pillars of good journalism are an inherent part of what we do each day – we are reliable and informative, we fact check, we are answerable and accessible, and we are relevant. If you announce a local industry has cut 50 jobs, but it is really 52, someone will stop you in the supermarket to correct you.

Newsrooms have played a more vital role since the outbreak of COVID-19, constantly disseminating advice and information, encouraging collective responsibility and hopefully, leading the discussion on rebuilding.

The currency of trust

An IPSOS MRBI poll carried out since the outbreak of COVID-19 showed that nine out of ten of those polled had listened to radio in the previous week. Radio scored a trust rating of 7.9 out of 10, compared to 2.9 for Facebook and 3.4 for Twitter.

Some 48 per cent of those surveyed said they listened to radio for news and information, 11 per cent for debates and discussion, and interestingly 9 per cent because it keeps them company and makes them feel less alone.

A fairer commercial playing field is now vital. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has already referenced tech companies like Google, Facebook and Twitter benefitting from content produced by others saying "They are sort of free riders on costs incurred by other people." There have been calls for a levy on their profits to be used to protect traditional journalism, or there is the Australian suggestion which would require them to pay media outlets for news content displayed on their services.

Hopefully, trust is a currency more and more brands will want to associate with. What is at stake is broader than revenue alone. It is about valuing the truth, and how society and individuals learn and share information responsibly.

Story tellers must be given as many platforms as possible, stories must be encouraged and generated, not just copied and pasted. People must be allowed to think and express, not just be told what others think. I love what I do, it has given me a front-row seat on an evolving Ireland, and Radio Kerry has been the keeper of the story of a people and a place. From an early age young people must be given a sense that their home place has value, and a future.

I hope journalism students will always have the opportunity to be curious and to create - not just curate.

Working together

COVID-19 brings unprecedented challenges for local news, with several local media organisations in Ireland and the UK already announcing their closure. But through adversity and necessity it could also herald a new era of journalism and discovery, with traditional media and social media giants leveraging each other's strengths and experience, to co-exist and even support each other, with vision and financial security for both.

Social media companies have technologies, audience insights and resources local media can only dream of, but could learn from. Local media organisations have credibility, and the ability to create unique content from instant and reliable sources in their communities, hugely loyal audiences and the trust that will be increasingly expected of, and demanded of, social media giants.

*IPSOS MRBI omnipoll April 30th 2020

