DIGITAL NEWS REPORT IRELAND 2019

FuJo
THE INSTITUTE FOR FUTURE MEDIA & JOURNALISM

DCU Institute of Future Media and Journalism

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
REUTERS INSTITUTE for the STUDY of JOURNALISM

BAI
ÚDARÁS CRAOLACHÁIN NA hÉIREANN
BROADCASTING AUTHORITY OF IRELAND

DIGITAL NEWS REPORT IRELAND 2019

Niamh Kirk, Eileen Culloty,
Colm Kearns and Jane Suiter

DCU Institute of Future Media and Journalism

BAI
ÚDARÁS CRAOLACHÁIN NA hÉIREANN
BROADCASTING AUTHORITY OF IRELAND

CONTENTS

BAI FOREWORD

The 2019 Digital News Report underlines once again the central role digital devices and platforms are playing in the news ecosystem in Ireland and across the globe. Since 2015, the BAI has ensured that Ireland is included in this study and the value of this investment is evident in the timely insights it provides into news consumption trends nationally and facilitates comparisons with countries in Europe and beyond. For example, as outlined in Dr Jane Suiter's contribution to this Report, the research highlights the increasing use of closed messaging services such as WhatsApp in Ireland and abroad. As Dr Suiter points out, this is not unexpected and it presents new challenges for policy makers and researchers concerned about the impact of disinformation and misinformation on the democratic discourse. While the research shows that the potential harmful impact in Ireland is limited by the closed nature of groups, larger more anonymous groups have emerged in other countries. The speed of such changes presents particular challenges for those charged with ensuring that the regulatory environment remains appropriate.

In April this year the BAI submitted a comprehensive response to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on the future regulation of Harmful Content online and the implementation of the revised Audio-visual Media Services Directive. The BAI recognises the challenges presented by this new Directive which is part of a series of policy initiatives emerging from the EU Digital Agenda for Europe. These will reshape the media landscape in Ireland over the coming years. The BAI believes that ensuring Ireland maintains a plurality of voices, viewpoints, outlets and sources for news is critical in the context of the future media environment. Achieving this will require access to current and credible analysis of how the landscape is evolving and the Digital News Report makes a significant contribution here. The BAI is committed to further developing its research agenda in this and other areas.

Over the years the Digital News Report (Ireland) has explored issues around news literacy and trust and this is again a focus in 2019. Enhancing digital literacy is recognised in the BAI's current Strategy as essential to dealing with the challenges of the evolving media landscape. The BAI is playing a leadership role in terms of policy and practice in this area and the success of the Be Smart Media initiative, launched earlier this year by Media Literacy Ireland, is an example of how joint action can yield practical results.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the work of the staff in DCU, the BAI and Reuters who are involved in this research project. The BAI relies on such partnerships to deliver high quality relevant research that can inform debate and shape policy.

Michael O'Keefe
Chief Executive BAI
June 2019

DCU FUJO FOREWORD

Welcome to the fifth annual Irish Digital News Report which has been designed to capture the changing ecology of news in Ireland. At its heart, all journalism must engage with audiences and understand consumer behaviour and needs: how they react to the news, how they share it, what they value, and indeed what they would prefer to see less of. These are all valuable insights for those in the news business. As part of the largest on-going comparative study of news consumption in the world, the international Digital News Report is an important indicator of shifting global trends. This report puts the Irish data in that international context and delves deeper into specific issues. It provides important new insights into key issues including people's willingness to pay for news, the move to private messaging applications, and how the public perceive the news media. We have also looked in much more detail at the news habits of the younger generation, the digital natives whose attachment to social media makes them notably different from those that have gone before. Furthermore, we have examined the role of news in the wider information ecosystem with a focus on media literacy and disinformation.

We trust and hope this will be an invaluable resource for academics, media owners, journalists, and those developing policy. Our team at the Institute for Future Media and Journalism (FuJo) at Dublin City University 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 2019

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 37 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 2019.
- 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.

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 post-doctoral researcher in UCD examining national conflict and European integration. She recently submitted her PhD thesis on digital diaspora journalism.

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.

Colm Kearns is a research assistant at DCU's Institute for Future Media and Journalism (FuJo). He contributes to projects relating to deliberative democracy and disinformation. He recently submitted his PhD thesis on sport sponsorship and national identity and is currently writing a paper on major football clubs' use of social media to neuter fan dissent.

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: **David Levy**, 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; **Antonis Kalogeropoulos** Research Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism; and **Deborah Molloy** and **Ciarán Kissane**, Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year's report comes against the global backdrop of rising populism and polarisation as well as intensifying concerns about giant tech companies and their impact on society and, indeed, democracy. In Ireland, some of these concerns are not as pronounced as elsewhere, but there is an awareness of the difficult context created by Brexit, Trump, populist political rhetoric, and the spread of disinformation and hate speech facilitated by the tech giants.

In confronting these trends, Irish news organizations are challenged to report events without simultaneously playing a role in amplifying such negative content. Overall, it is clear that political polarisation has created a more polarised news environments with diminishing levels of trust. When combined with rising volumes of disinformation and the deliberate attempts of some to question all journalistic veracity, these conditions raise many questions about how to deliver fair and balanced reporting that underpins rather than undermines the common good. In a further challenge, news organisations must do this in a context where their business model is undermined by the sheer size of the digital giants and their ability to hoover up the vast bulk of digital advertising revenues.

Last year, Facebook announced major algorithm changes that decreased the amount of journalism appearing in its news feeds. At the same time, there is a shift towards news discussion within closed or private apps such as WhatsApp. This may, in some instances, make it harder for disinformation to spread, but it also makes it harder for researchers and regulators to track and tackle the problem. More broadly in the news media sector, there are ongoing questions about the extent to which journalism is holding the powerful to account and, separately, there are ongoing efforts to innovate and find new ways of reaching audiences. Irish news producers are taking advantage of the Irish love of audio to pivot towards podcasts. This is a promising development although the ultimate contribution of podcasts to the bottom line is still unclear.

The three sections of this report aim to cast light on these key issues with additional reflections provided in the essay comments by the authors.

In summary, some of the most important findings from our 2019 research include:

- There is only a small increase in the numbers paying for online news, which is now at 12 per cent. Nevertheless, this represents a slow and steady climb over the past four years. The under 35s are most likely to pay and that number has also been increasing slightly. However, the Irish figure is well below countries in the Nordic region where 34 per cent of Norwegians and 27 per cent of Swedes pay for news. In the coming years, it will be interesting to see whether the arrival of Mediahuis introduces any changes that impact on online payment figures in Ireland.

- Regarding online subscriptions generally, the vast majority only have one online subscription, which suggests that winner takes all dynamics are dominant in this area. Many prefer to spend their limited budget on entertainment subscriptions (Netflix/Spotify) rather than news even though some 50 per cent of our sample came across advertisements for subscriptions when trying to read online news.

- In terms of online platforms, Facebook is the most popular for accessing news in Ireland and across the EU. Interestingly, WhatsApp use is higher in Ireland than the EU average. However, the numbers are still relatively low at 15 per cent compared with non-Western countries such as Brazil (53%) Malaysia (50%), and South Africa (49%). Despite the growing popularity of closed messaging apps, few users are abandoning Facebook entirely. It remains the dominant social network and is by far the most important social network for news.

- Concern about misinformation and disinformation is growing. Some 61 per cent of Irish respondents are concerned about distinguishing what is real or fake on the internet. Although this is well below the UK (70%) and US (67%), it is much higher than in Germany (38%) and the Netherlands (31%).

- Some 48 per cent trust the news in general while 55 per cent agree that they trust the news media they themselves use. Trust in the news found via search (31%) and social media (17%) is extremely low.

- This concern about the quality of online information may be good for trusted news brands. Some 32 per cent say they have started relying on more 'reputable' sources of news while a further 22 per cent say they have stopped using sources that had a dubious reputation. This underlines the importance of publishers being careful with their reputation in terms of publishing high quality content.

- Some 59 per cent of Irish respondents believe the news media is doing a good job in helping them to understand the news. This is around the same level as UK respondents, but above the EU average (48%). Over two thirds (68%) believe the media are good at keeping people up to date and only 38 per cent believe the news media is too negative, this is lower than the EU average (39%) and the UK (46%). However, less than half (40%) think the media do a good job in holding the rich and powerful people to account, which is below both the EU average (42%) and the UK (42%).

- More people say they are actively avoiding the news (32%) than when we last asked this question two years ago. In the UK, avoidance is driven by boredom, anger, or sadness over Brexit.

- The smartphone continues to grow in importance for news with over half (56%) now using the device to access news weekly, well ahead of the EU average (50%) and the UK (49%).

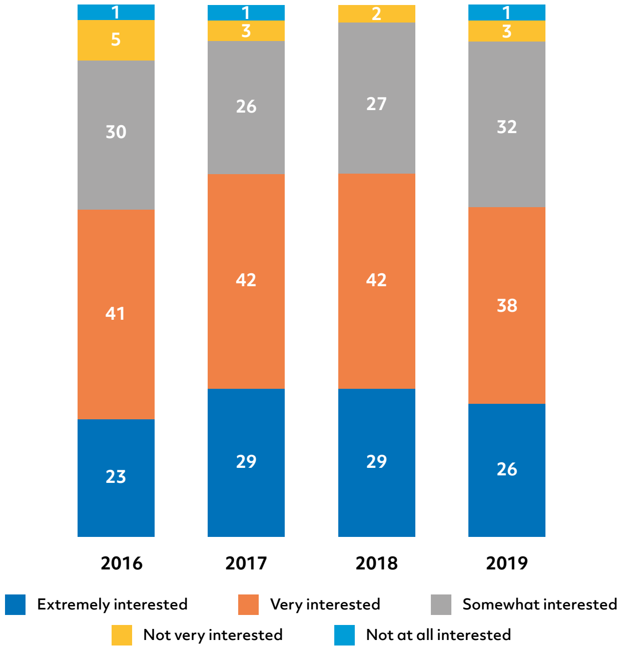
- The growth of the smartphone has also been driving the popularity of podcasts, especially among younger age groups. More than a third of our combined sample (37%) say they have consumed at least one podcast over the last month, well ahead of the UK at just 21 per cent.

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 levels of news and digital literacy.

FIG 1: INTEREST IN NEWS 2016-2019



Q. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news? 'Don't know' omitted, 0.23%.

Irish consumers' interest in news has remained consistently high over the past four years. It is in line with interest levels in the UK and the North America and well above the EU average. Over 70 per cent have declared themselves either extremely or very interested in news. There was some decline in 2019, likely due to a Brexit effect which may have put some consumer off consuming news, which also impacted interest in the UK. As expected, interest in news increases with age. Only 15 per cent of 18-24 year olds are extremely interested, just slightly less than the 17 per cent recorded last year.

FIG 2: INTEREST IN NEWS BY AGE

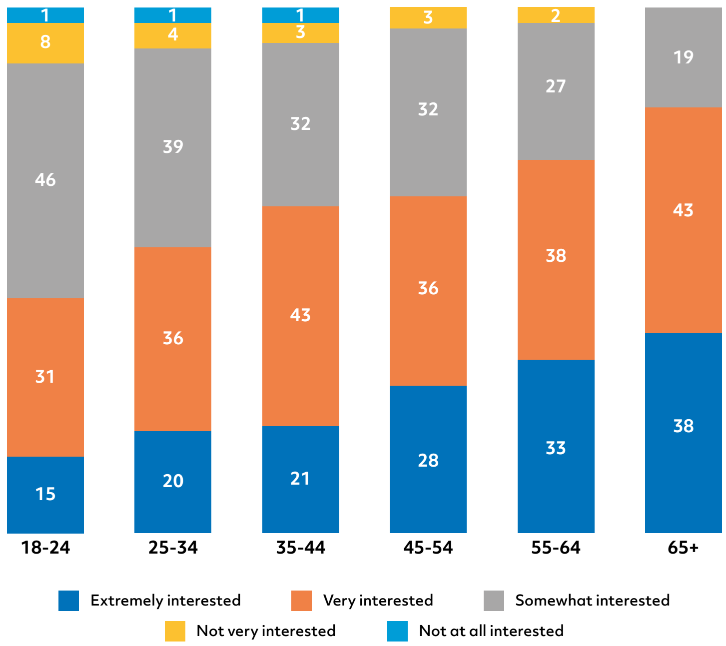


FIG 3: INTEREST IN NEWS 2019 COMPARISONS

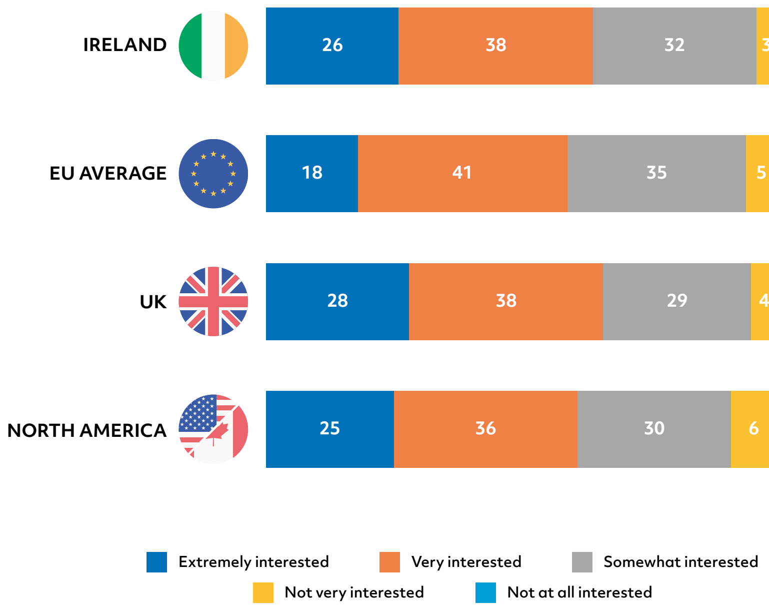
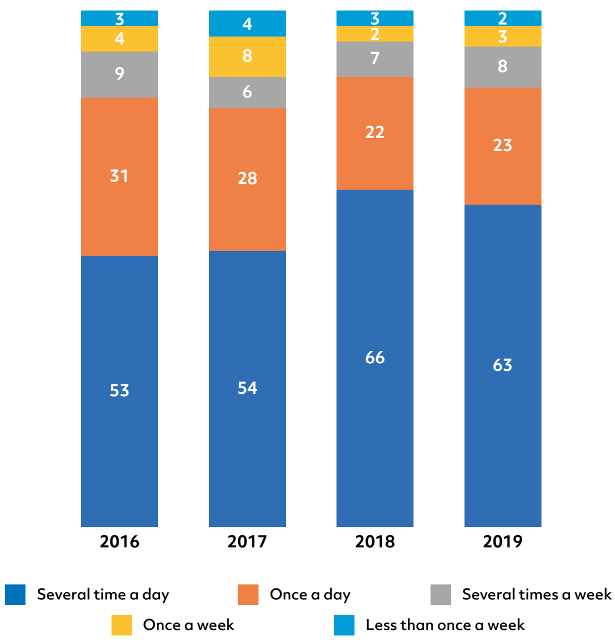


FIG 4: FREQUENCY OF ACCESSING NEWS



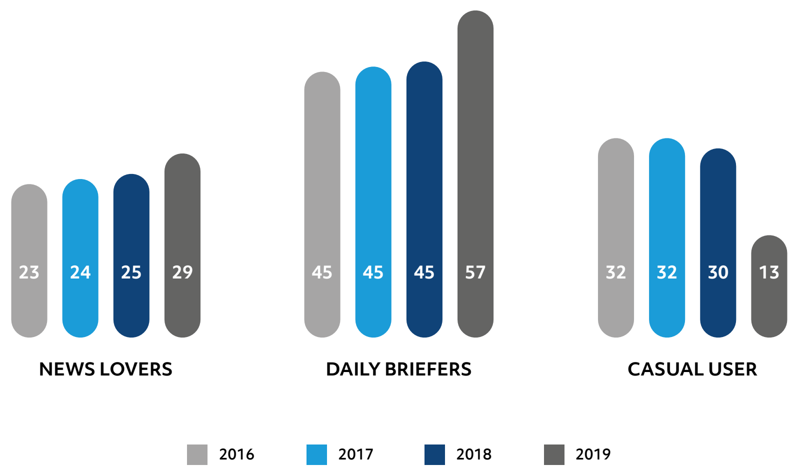
Q. Typically, how often do you access news? By news we mean national, international, regional/ local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online). 'Don't know' omitted, 1%.

Irish news consumers, in common with those elsewhere, access news several times a day and this is growing every year. In 2016, just 53 per cent accessed their news feeds several times a day and this has now grown to 63 per cent, which underlines the importance of constantly updating content on news websites and apps. Altogether some 86 per cent of news consumers access news at least once a day.

When we examine the news groups, we examine respondents through a mix of access frequency and interest in news. For example, 'news lovers' are those that say they are extremely interested in the news and access it more than five times per day. 'Daily briefers' access news at least once a day and 'casual users' less than once a day. Those categorised as "casual users" now account for only 13 per cent of the sample, down from some 30 per cent last year. Many of these appear to have become "daily users". Interestingly, this 13 per cent figure is identical for the US, the UK and the EU average. This is likely the result of the increased use of smartphones for news access, which encourages multiple pick ups per day.

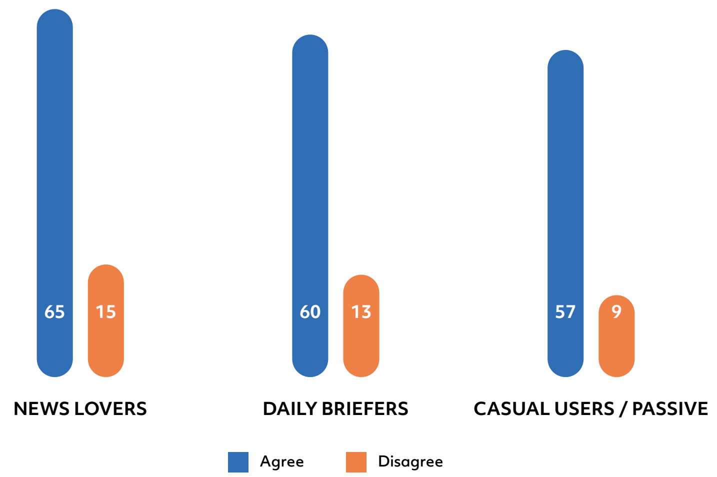
We also find that news lovers tend to trust a little more, but the effects are marginal. They also tend to be better educated and are, unsurprisingly, most likely to pay for news.

FIG 5: NEWS USER GROUPS BY YEAR



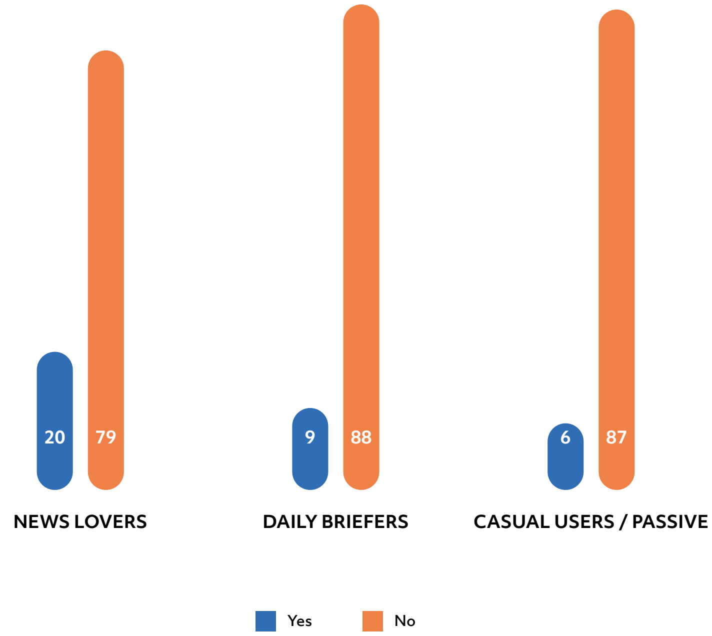
News lovers are also the most likely to be concerned about what is real and fake on the internet, which suggests that casual users may be the most vulnerable to disinformation. However, some 34 per cent are unconcerned. In addition, news lovers have by far the greatest political interest at 90 per cent compared with just 37 per cent of casual users, suggesting that political news coverage is a major driver of consumption.

FIG 6: CONCERNS ABOUT WHAT IS REAL AND FAKE ON THE INTERNET BY NEWS GROUP



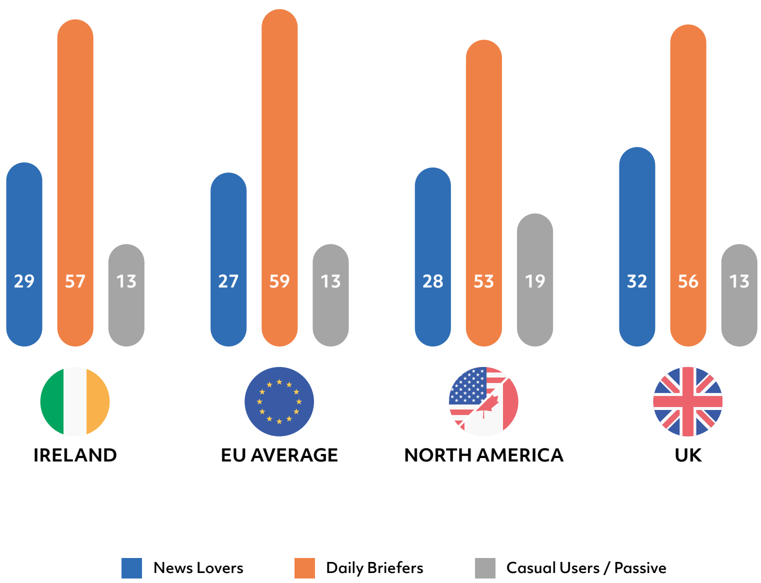
Notes: News Lovers: 20% 'neither agree nor disagree' omitted. Daily Briefers: 28% 'neither agree nor disagree' omitted. Casual users, 35% 'neither agree nor disagree' omitted.

FIG 7: PAYMENT FOR ONLINE NEWS BY NEWS CONSUMER GROUP



Notes: 'Don't know' omitted: News lovers, 1%; Daily Briefers, 3%; Casual Users, 7%.

FIG 8: NEWS CONSUMER GROUPS 2019 COMPARISONS



Additional categories identify how people consume news. Traditionalists are those who mainly consume news via newspapers, radio and TV. We can see that this behaviour is in slight decline over recent years with greater numbers of people migrating towards digital sources of news. However, it is the so-called "half and half" group which is dominant. As the name suggests, these are people who consume news both from digital and traditional sources. The number of pure digitialists is remaining flat hovering consistently below 30 per cent. Unsurprisingly, this group is dominated by younger age groups with some 41 per cent of under 24s being digital only. Older cohorts are also moving towards digital or at least the half and half model; there are five per cent fewer traditionalists among the over 65s in 2019. It also appears that wealthier people are switching towards digital. Indeed, the plurality of people with a household income of over €70,000 are digitialist. Nonetheless, most people are in middle pay brackets and consume both traditional and digital media. Education also has an impact, with those with higher levels of education (degree and higher) most likely to be digitalists at 32 per cent, compared with 19 per cent of those with lower levels of education. The picture reverses almost exactly for those who consume only traditional news media with 34 per cent of those with lower levels of education in this position and 19 per cent of those with higher levels of education.

FIG 9: CONSUMPTION TYPE BY YEAR

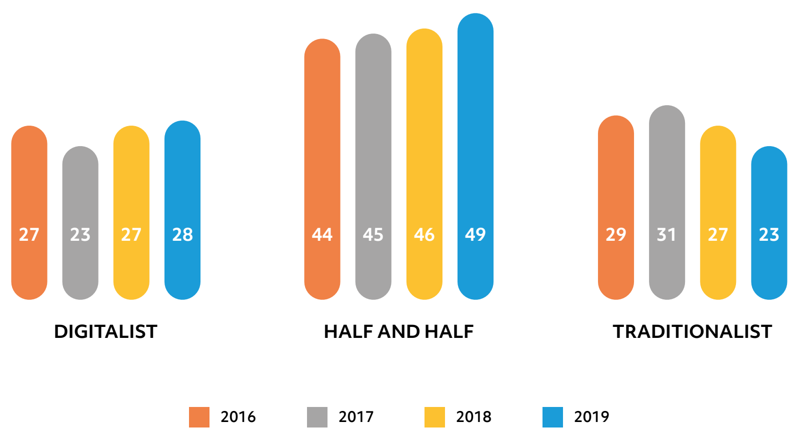


FIG 10: CONSUMPTION TYPE BY AGE GROUP

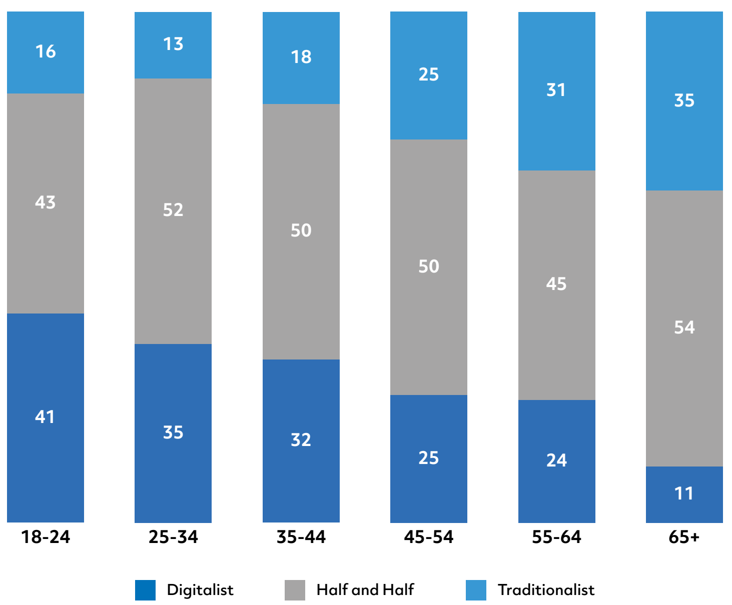
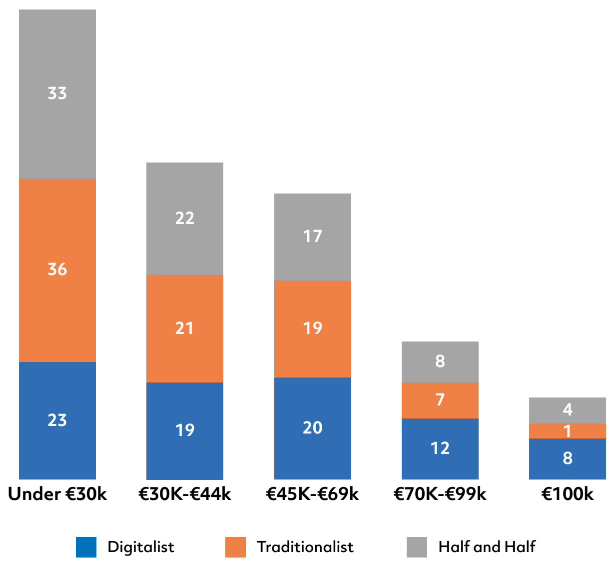


FIG 11: DIGITALISM BY INCOME



Notes: 'Don't know' and 'prefer not to say' omitted: Digitalist, 'don't know' 6%, 'prefer not to say', 12%; Traditionalist, 'don't know' 3% and 'prefer not to say', 13%; Half and Half, 'don't know', 3% and 'prefer not to say' 12%.

News participation behaviours have remained relatively static over the past three years with positive participators who frequently respond to news by writing, sharing or commenting remaining around 28 per cent of all news consumers. The passive consumers account for around 45 per cent of all news consumers, around the same levels as international comparators. It is likely that these are driven by social media algorithms, with 38 per cent of those who consume news on social being positive participators compared with 20 per cent of those listening to radio.

FIG 12: NEWS PARTICIPATION 2019 COMPARISONS

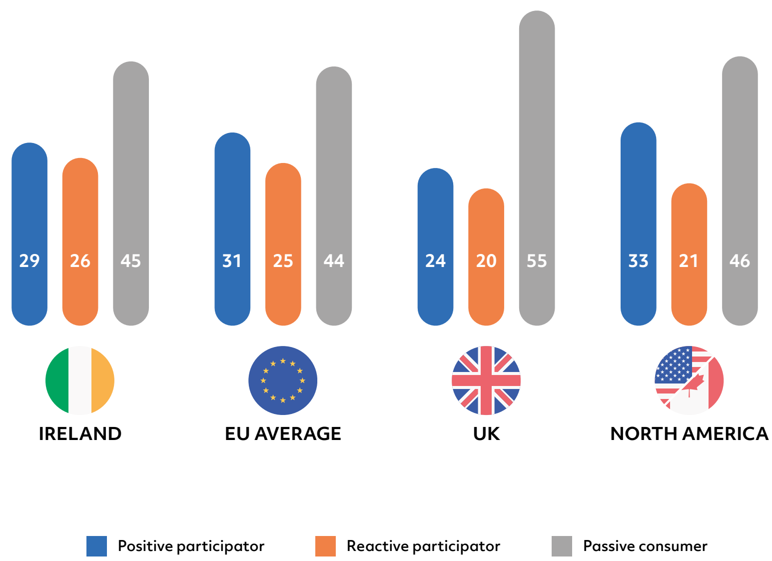


FIG 13: PARTICIPATION IN NEWS BY MAIN PLATFORM USED

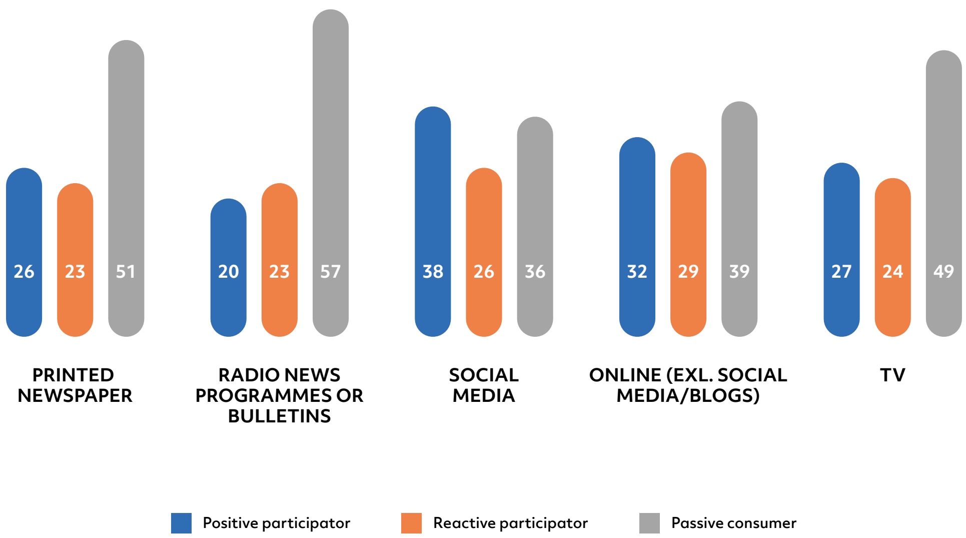
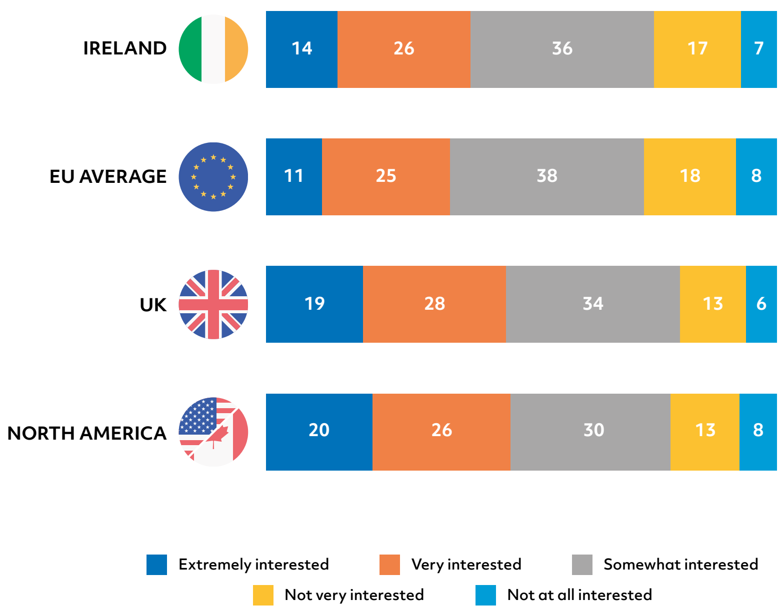


FIG 14: INTEREST IN POLITICS 2019 COMPARISONS



Q. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics? 'Don't know' omitted, 0.23%.

Interest in politics is a little lower in Ireland than in either the UK or the North America, which is perhaps a response to the attention devoted to Brexit and Trump respectively in those countries. At 14 per cent, Irish interest remains above the EU average of 11 per cent. As would be expected, interest in politics also increases with age; just 26 per cent of under 24s are very or extremely interested in politics, but interest rises to 60 per cent among the over 65s.

FIG 15: INTEREST IN POLITICS BY AGE 2019

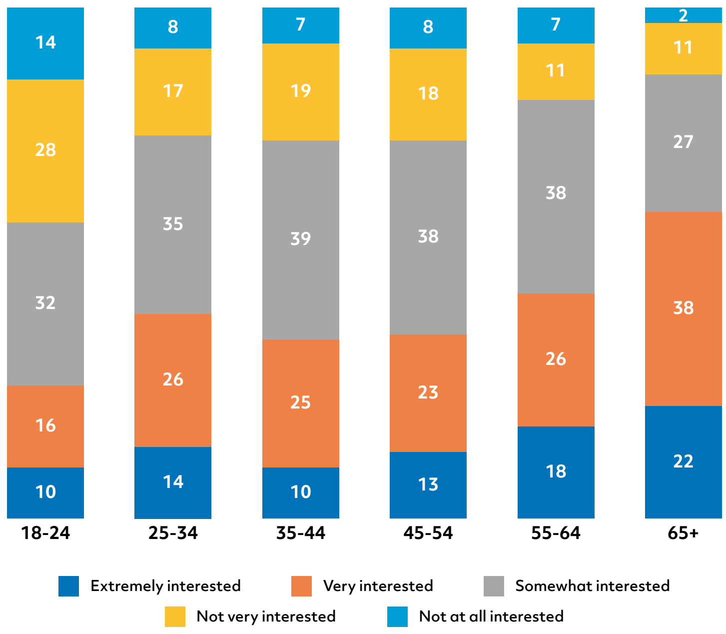


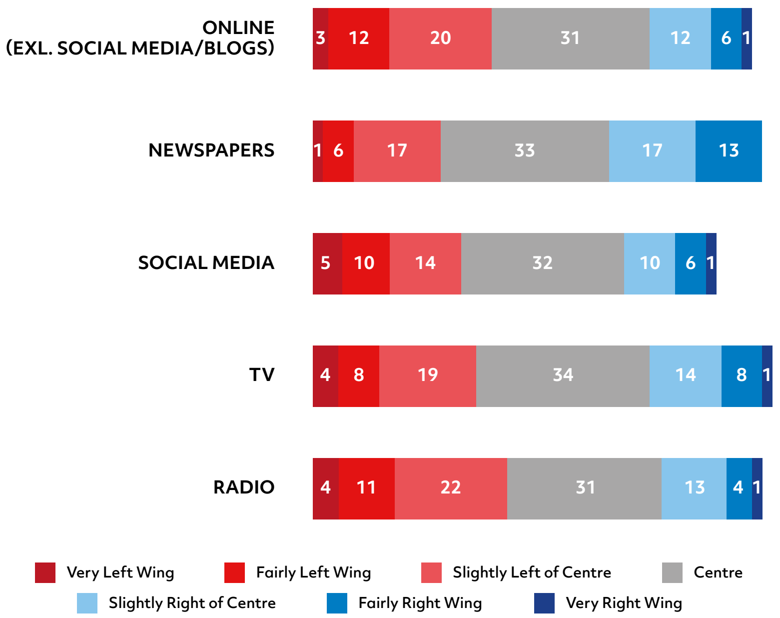
FIG 16: SELF REPORTED POLITICAL LEANING OF SURVEY

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. 'Don't know' omitted, 15% 2019; 16% 2018.

Irish news consumers appear to have fairly stable views on where they stand on a left right scale, with about 14 per cent considering themselves to be very or fairly left-wing compared with about 8 per cent positioning themselves as either very or fairly right-wing. At the same time, centrist is the modal category with 32 per cent self positioning in this space in 2019 compared with 30 per cent a year earlier.

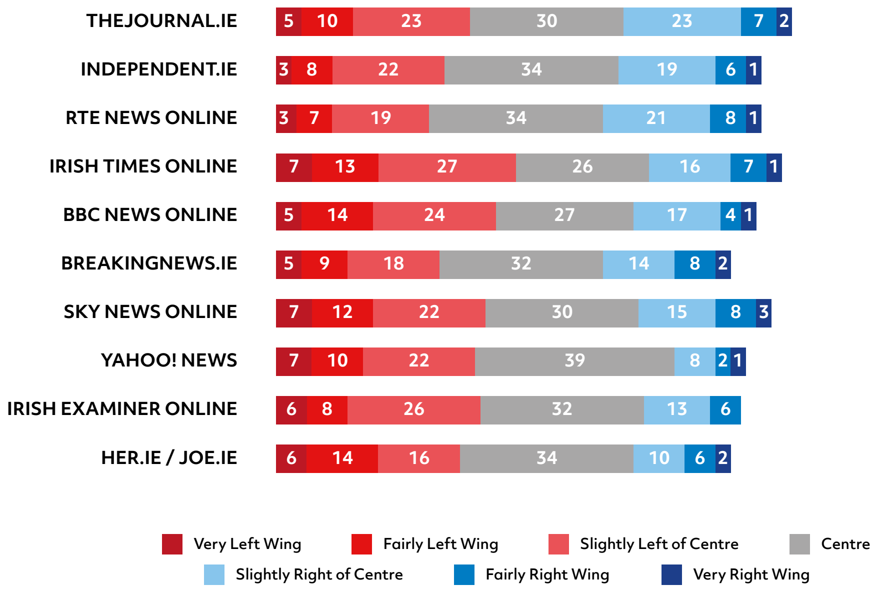
There are few differences when we examine self reported political leaning by the main source of news a person consumes. The main pattern is that those who are more right-wing are more likely to consume newspapers, while those who are more left-wing are more likely to listen to radio or consume news online. Considering individual brands, most attract a spread of audiences. *The Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent* do attract more people to the right-of-centre than some other brands, but they also attract similar, or in the case of the *The Irish Times*, larger, numbers of those who identify as very or fairly left-wing. The Irish media, it seems, is still a relatively broad church with few signs of political polarisation. This is likely to underpin the health of Irish democracy and the relative absence of extremist parties. It also underpins the argument for state support for a vibrant media system.

FIG 17: POLITICAL LEANING BY MAIN SOURCES OF NEWS



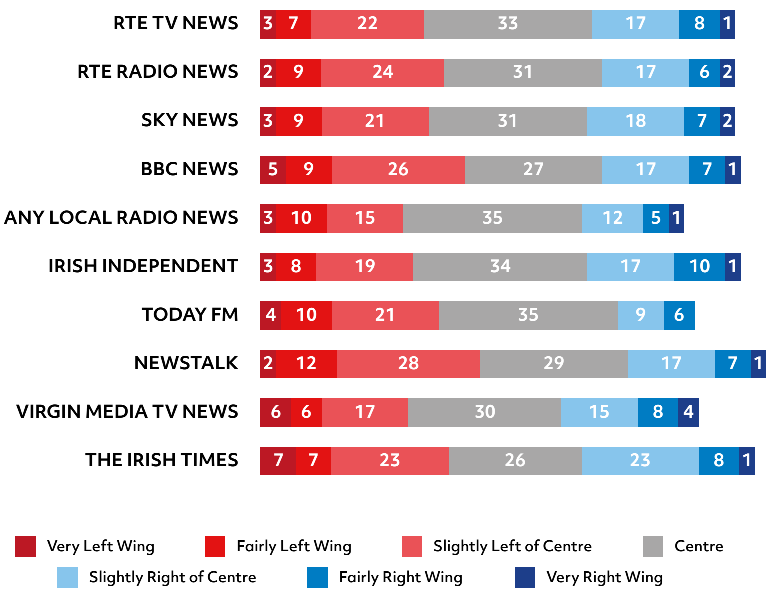
Notes: 'Don't know' omitted: Radio, 13%; TV, 27%; Newspapers, 4%; Online (exl. social media/ blogs), 27%; Social media, 29%.

FIG 18: POLITICAL LEANING OF CONSUMERS OF THE TOP 10 DIGITAL NEWS BRANDS



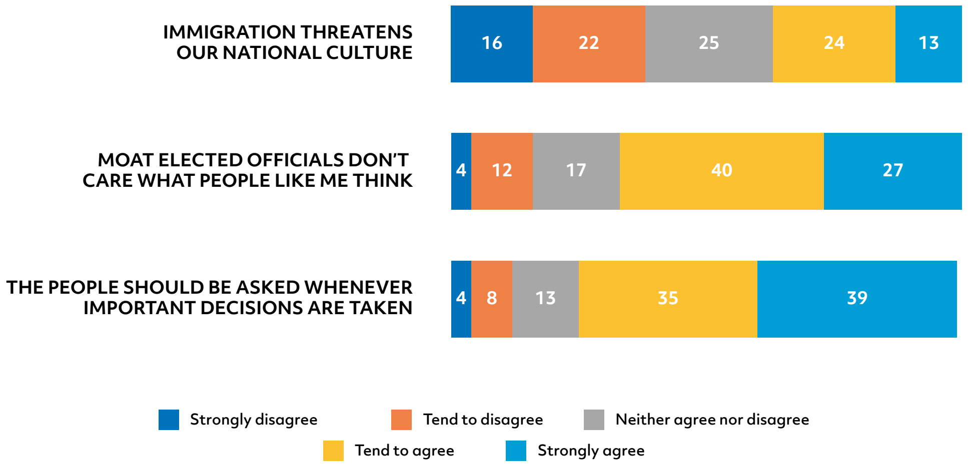
Note: 'Don't know' omitted: Thejournal.ie, 12%; independent.ie, 7%; RTE News online, 8%; Irish Times online, 4%; BBC News online, 8%; Breakingnews.ie, 12%; Sky News online,4%; Yahoo!News, 11%; Irish examiner online, 10%; Her.ie/joe.ie, 14%.

FIG 19: POLITICAL LEANING OF CONSUMERS OF THE TOP 10 TRADITIONAL NEWS BRANDS



Note: 'Don't know' omitted: RTE TV, 10%; RTE Radio, 9%; Sky News, 8%; BBC News, 9%, Local radio, 18%, Irish Independent, 8%; Today FM,15%; Newstalk, 5%; Virgin News, Irish Times, 4%.

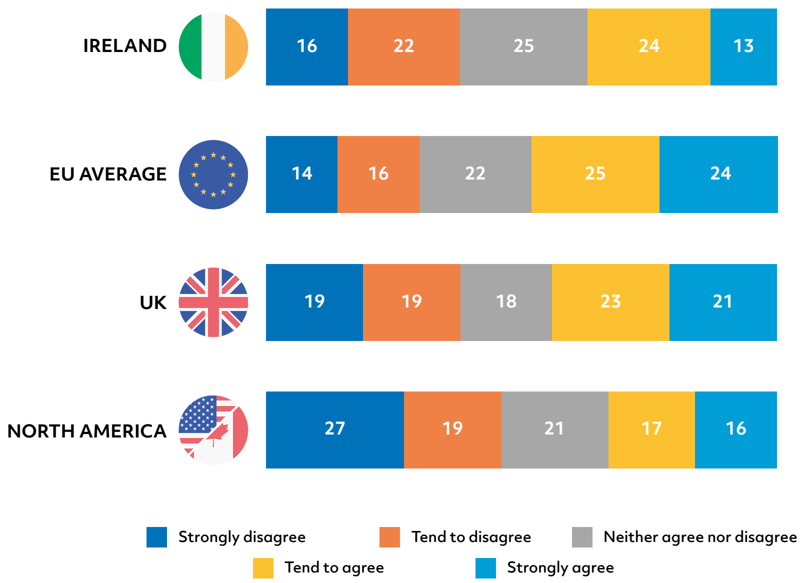
FIG 20: ATTITUDES TO MEDIA AND POLITICS



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

We asked a series of questions which are often linked to populist or nativist vote attitudes and we can see that there certainly are respondents with attitudes that correspondent to populist or nativist vote patterns in other studies. For example, some 37 per cent of our sample agree that immigration threatens our national culture; at least to some extent. An even greater number (67%) agree that most elected politicians do not care what they think; while 74 per cent believe that the people should be involved in the taking of popular decisions.

FIG 21: IMMIGRATION THREATENS OUR NATIONAL CULTURE

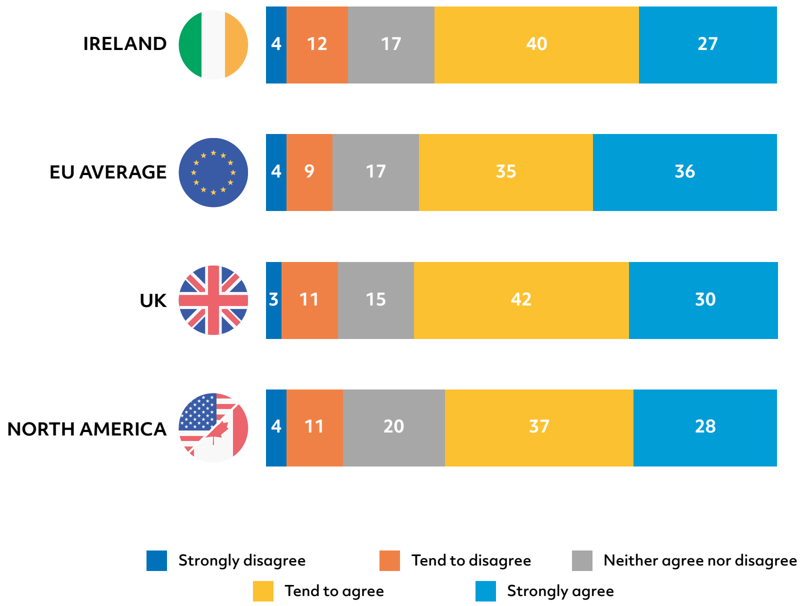


Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: Immigration threatens our national culture.

While as we can see there is some support for the kind of populist and nativist messages pushed by the far-right across Europe this is below the EU average at 24 per cent and below the UK figure at 21 per cent. Interestingly, despite the focus on the southern US border, North Americans appear to be the region least concerned with immigration.

The belief that elected officials don't care about certain sections of public opinion is running at around the EU and international average.

FIG 22: MOST ELECTED OFFICIALS DON'T CARE WHAT PEOPLE LIKE ME THINK



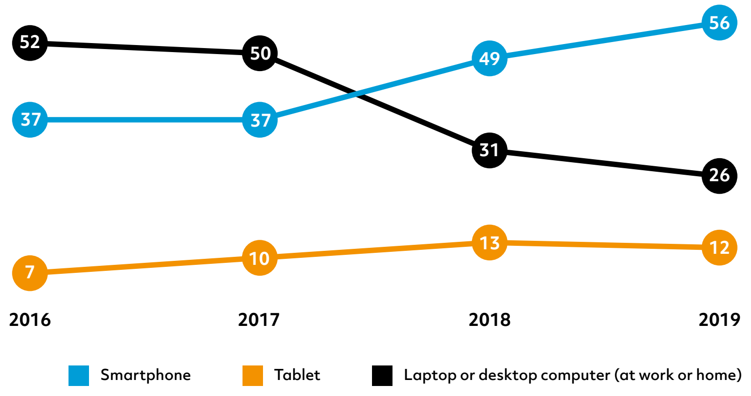
Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. - Most elected officials don't care what people like me think.

SECTION TWO

USE, ATTITUDES AND PREFERENCES

This section outlines the attitudes and preferences of Irish news consumers. It includes preferences for platforms and devices as well as attitudes towards trust, disinformation, and paying for news.

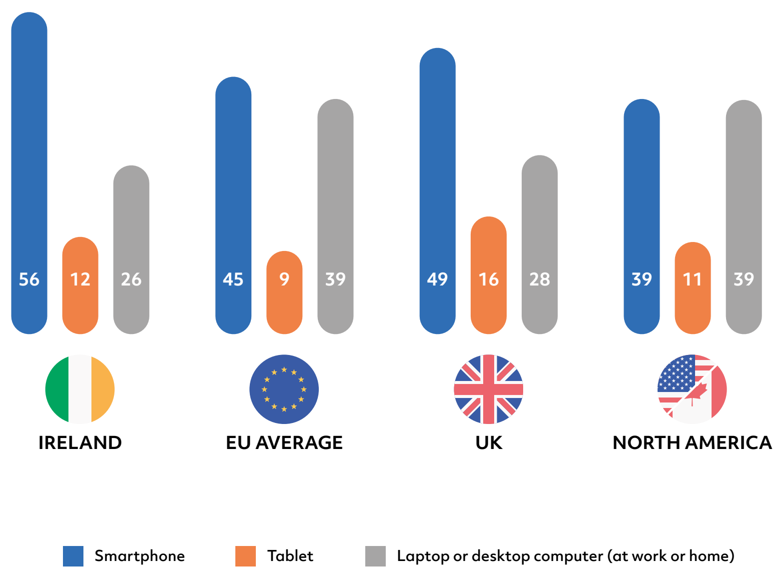
FIG 23: MAIN DEVICES USED FOR ACCESSING NEWS BY YEAR



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? Figures rounded, 'Don't know' and 'Smart TV', omitted.

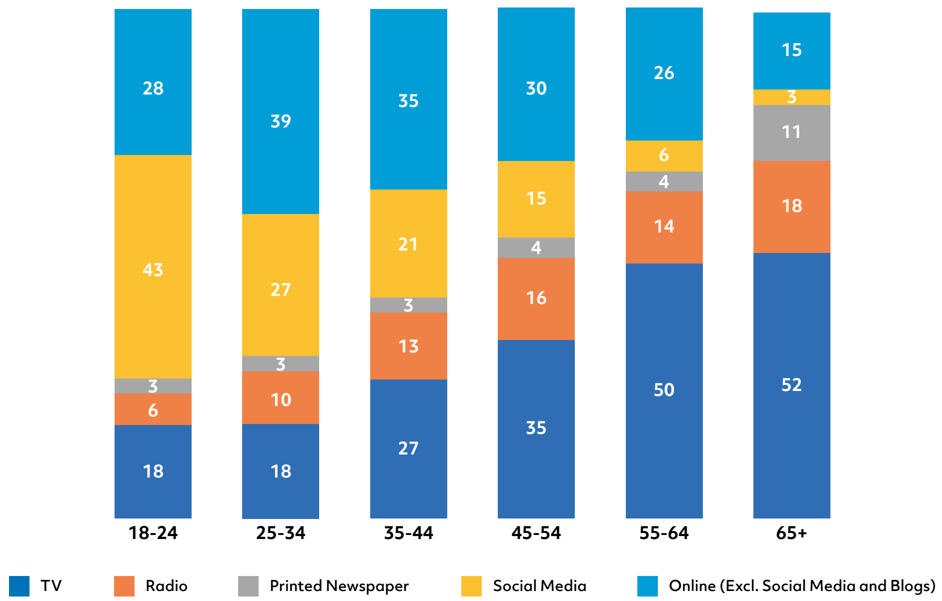
The smartphone is continuing its inexorable rise and is now the dominant way for most people to consume news at 56 per cent, far ahead of the EU, the UK and the North America. Tablets have flattened out at around 12 per cent of the market and may even be declining. But the big decline is among laptop and desktop computers. Over the past three years, the use of these devices for news consumption has diminished from 50 per cent in 2017 to just half that, or 26 per cent, in 2019.

FIG 24: MAIN DEVICE FOR ACCESSING 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? 'Smart TV' 4%, 'Watch' .18% and 'Speaker' 1% omitted.

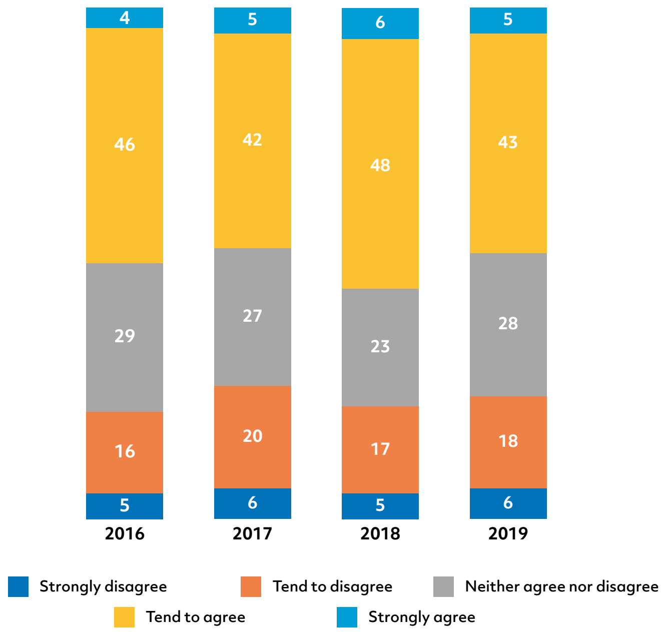
FIG 25: MAIN SOURCES FOR NEWS BY AGE 2019



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

When we examine the main source of news for respondents, we can see large differences across age cohorts. For example, some 52 per cent of over 65s largely rely on TV news but only 18 per cent of under 35s do so. Reasonably similar numbers rely on online sources; but the biggest difference is in the use of social media as a source of news. Some 43 per cent of under 24s rely on social media for news, dropping to 27 per cent in 25 to 34 year olds and to just three per cent in over 65s.

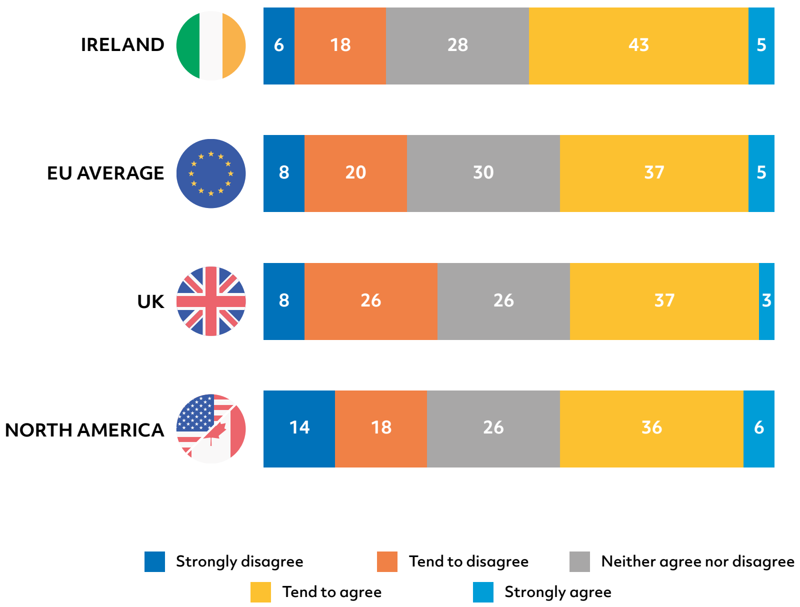
FIG 26: I CAN TRUST MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: - I think you can trust most news most of the time.

Irish news consumers continue to trust the news they consume and they trust it more than most consumers across Europe or in the UK. Consistently around five or six per cent of people strongly distrust news and around 18 per cent distrust it less viscerally. However, almost half of all news consumers tend to trust the news. There is a slight downward move this year, but it is in line with previous years and there appears to be fewer people choosing the middle ground option in 2018. In the UK 34 per cent distrusted the news, in the US 32 per cent, and in Europe, about 28 per cent. In Ireland the equivalent figure is a more positive 24 per cent, pointing again to the possibility that the less polarising news values are good news for the Irish news providers in terms of retaining the trust of news consumers.

FIG 27: I CAN TRUST MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME



Q: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I can trust most news most of the time.

Furthermore, while there are differences in trust among different age groups, likely related to the extent of consumption on social media, there are relatively high levels of trust even among younger age cohorts. However, this is something that news brands should not take for granted; particularly with regard to distinguishing their own online news from sponsored content which often has the appearance of news on social and so on.

FIG 28: TRUST MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME BY AGE 2019

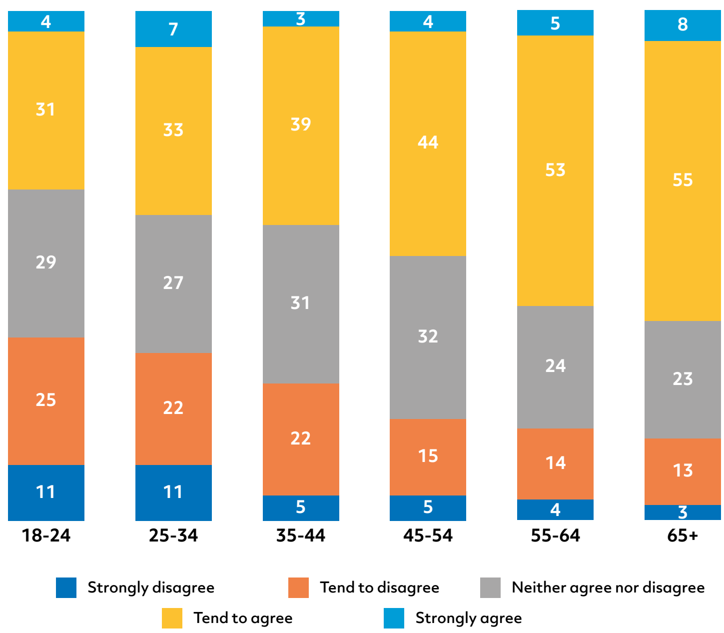
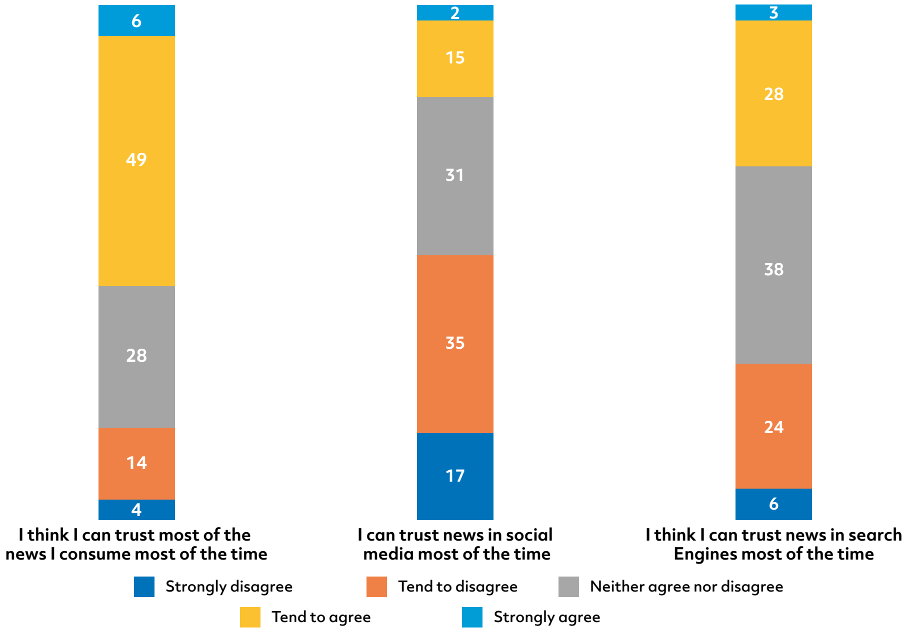


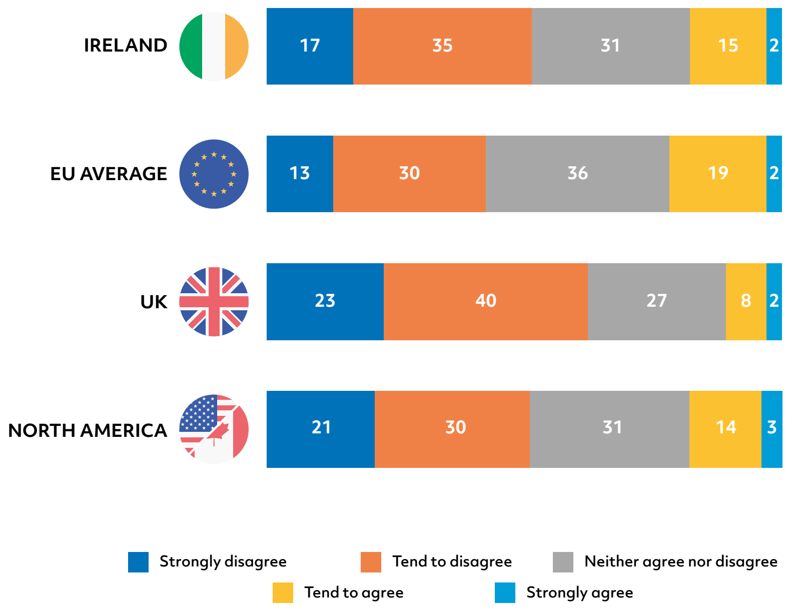
FIG 29: TRUST IN NEWS VIA DIFFERENT SOURCES 2019



Q. It is now possible to get online news in many different ways, including from search engines and social media sites. With this in mind, Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:
1. I think I can trust most of the news I consume most of the time.
2. I think I can trust most of the news I consume most of the time.
3. I think I can trust news in search engines most of the time.

There is also encouraging news in terms of the ability of Irish news consumers to discern between content they discover on various platforms and by search and so on. Unsurprisingly, most people are relatively trustful of news they themselves consume. Thus, 55 per cent of people agree that they trust their own news consumption. Conversely, only 17 per cent trust news on social, while some 31 per cent trust what they find on search. Given the prevalence of disinformation via search engines and social media, this may be sensible caution, indicating some level of news literacy. Nonetheless, Irish news consumers are, perhaps unsurprisingly given controversies over Brexit and Trump, less distrustful than their comparators in the UK and North America, but are also less trusting than those in the EU on average.

FIG 30: I THINK I CAN TRUST NEWS IN SOCIAL MEDIA MOST OF THE TIME



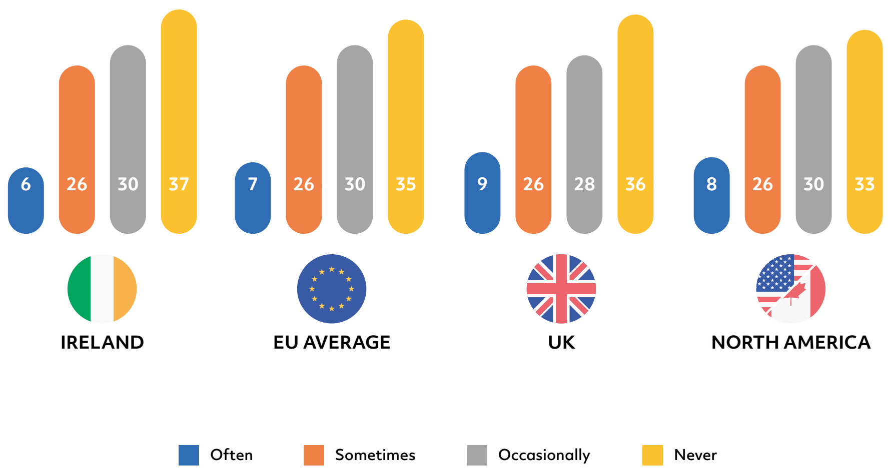
Irish trust in news on social is below the EU average, perhaps because Irish news consumers are exposed to controversy around such news in the US and the UK. Indeed we can see that trust in news on social is lowest in the UK with only 10 per cent agreeing that they can trust most such news, compared with 17 per cent in in North America and Ireland.

FIG 31: HOW OFTEN DO YOU AVOID THE NEWS?

Q. Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid news these days? 'Don't know' omitted, 1.15%.

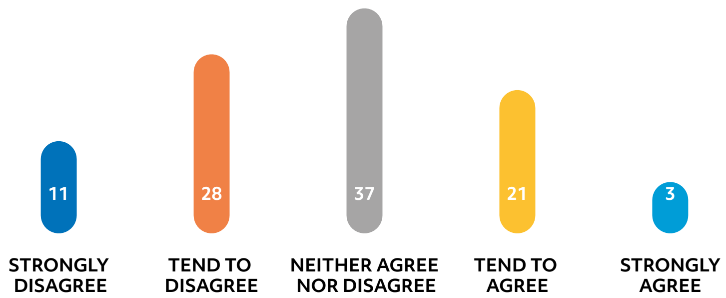
Few people avoid the news; just six per cent say they often do so. Of course, this is unsurprising given that this is a survey of news consumers. The figures are broadly in line with averages across the EU, UK and North America. These may be related to the 34 per cent who find themselves worn out by news these days, though this is lower than in comparable markets where the figure is closer to 30 per cent.

FIG 32: NEWS AVOIDANCE 2019



Q. Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid news these days? 'Don't know' omitted.

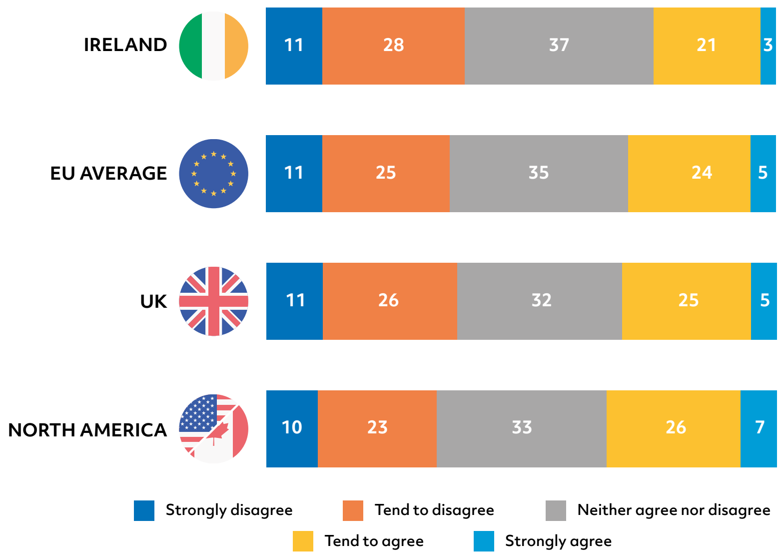
FIG 33: I AM WORN OUT BY THE AMOUNT OF NEWS THERE IS THESE DAYS



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "I am worn out by the amount of news there is these days."

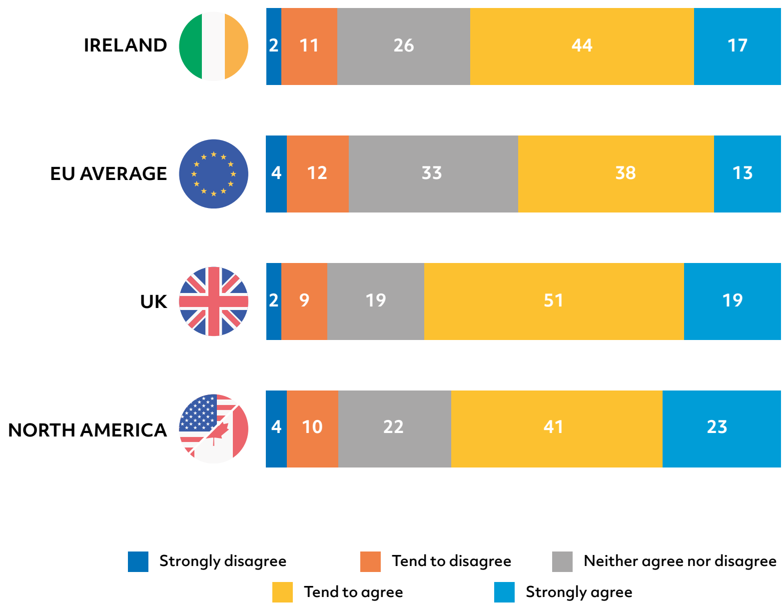
Relatedly, we asked whether the respondent was "worn out by the amount of news these days". We can see that slightly more people disagree with this statement than agree. Nonetheless some 24 per cent agree that they are worn out and this is a little below levels in the EU (29%), the UK (30%) and the North America (33%).

FIG 34: WORN OUT BY THE AMOUNT OF NEWS 2019 COMPARISONS



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. "I am worn out by the amount of news there is these days."

FIG 35: I AM CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT NEWS IS REAL AND WHAT IS FAKE ON THE INTERNET

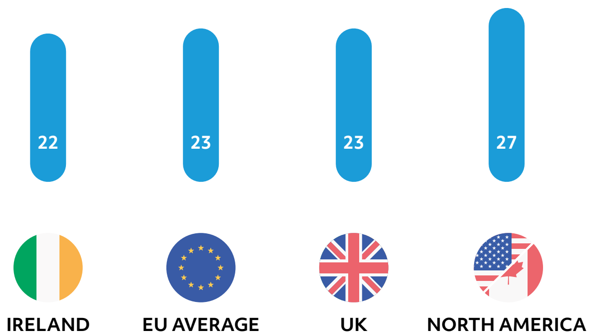


Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Thinking about online news, I am concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet."

One reason for the lack of trust is awareness of disinformation. Over 60 per cent of Irish people are at least somewhat concerned about what news is real, higher than the EU average of 51 per cent but below the 70 per cent of news consumers in the UK and 64 per cent in North America. Such concern can be a sensible attitude in a world where disinformation is rife, but creating uncertainty is a deliberate strategy of propagandists who benefit when there is confusion about what is true and what is not.

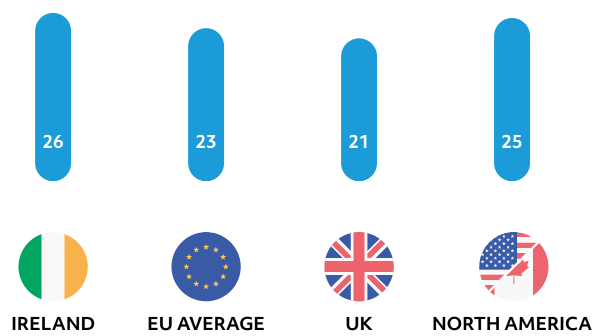
Irish people are significantly less likely than others to decide not to share a story because of concerns about accuracy and slightly less likely than others to stop using news sources due to concerns about accuracy. However, Irish people are more likely to discuss stories with people they trust.

FIG 36: I STOPPED USING CERTAIN NEWS SOURCES BECAUSE I WAS UNSURE ABOUT THE ACCURACY OF THEIR REPORTING



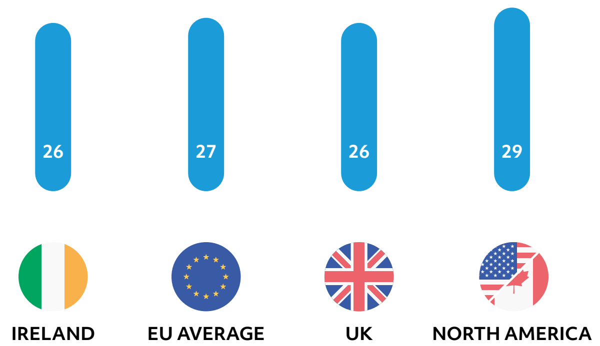
Interestingly, Irish news consumers are slightly more likely than those in other countries, and significantly more likely than those in the UK, to discuss a news story with someone they trust.

FIG 37: I DISCUSSED A NEWS STORY WITH A PERSON I TRUST BECAUSE I WAS UNSURE ABOUT ITS ACCURACY



More worryingly, Irish news audiences are a little less likely than many others to simply not share a story they are worried about. Only 26 per cent of Irish news consumers have decided not to share in these circumstances, the same level as the UK and below North America.

FIG 38: I DECIDED NOT TO SHARE A NEWS STORY BECAUSE I WAS UNSURE ABOUT ITS ACCURACY



Irish news consumers in common with those around the world are starting to move towards quality and news providers they consider to be more reputable. Some 32 per cent of Irish news consumers say they have started to do this, well ahead of the EU average (24%) and a little ahead of the UK (29%).

FIG 39: I STARTED RELYING MORE ON SOURCES OF NEWS THAT ARE CONSIDERED MORE REPUTABLE

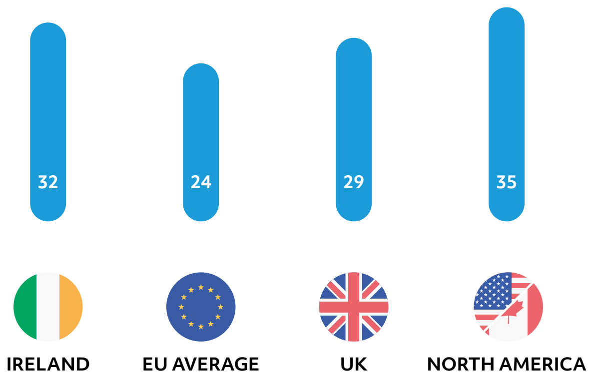
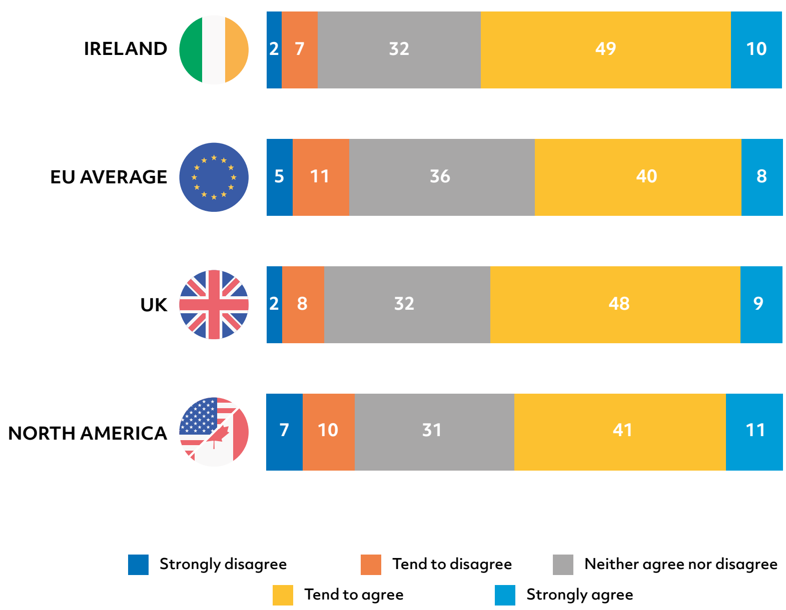


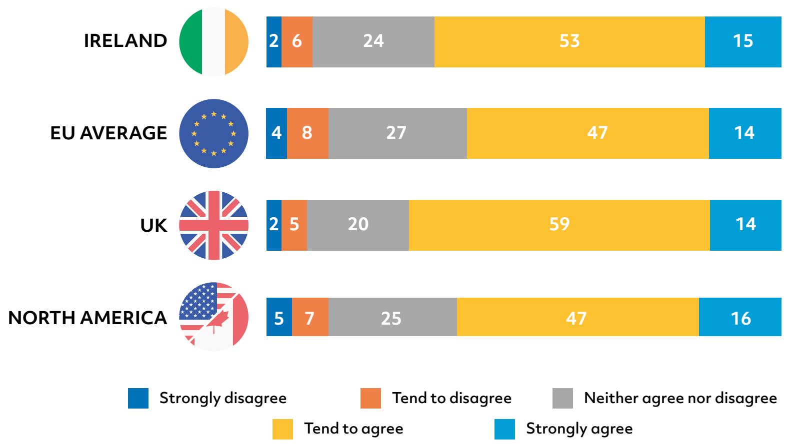
FIG 40: THE NEWS MEDIA HELPS ME UNDERSTAND THE NEWS OF THE DAY



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: The news media helps me understand the news of the day: depth.

Irish news consumers are more positive about the value of the news media than those in many other countries. Some 59 per cent agree that the news media helps them to understand the issues of the day. The EU average is just 48 per cent, while the North America average is 53 per cent.

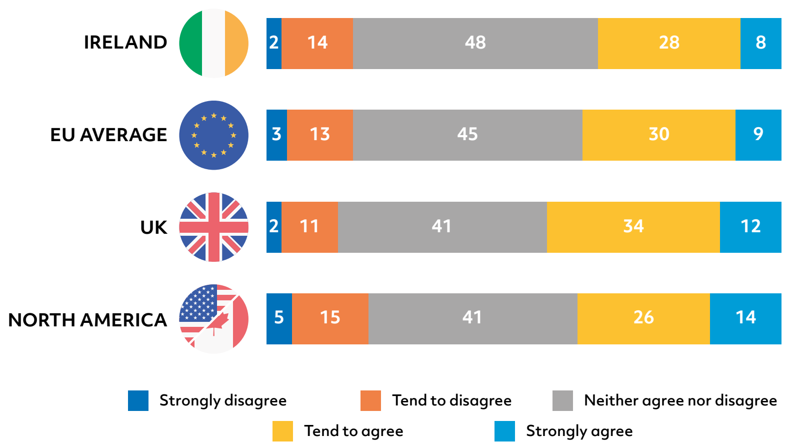
FIG 41: THE NEWS MEDIA KEEPS ME UP TO DATE WITH WHAT'S GOING ON



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: The news media keeps me up to date with what's going on: immediacy.

They are also fairly positive that the news media fulfill its most basic function of helping them to keep up to date. Dome 68 per cent agree the Irish news media fulfills this function, ahead of the EU (61%), but behind the UK (73%).

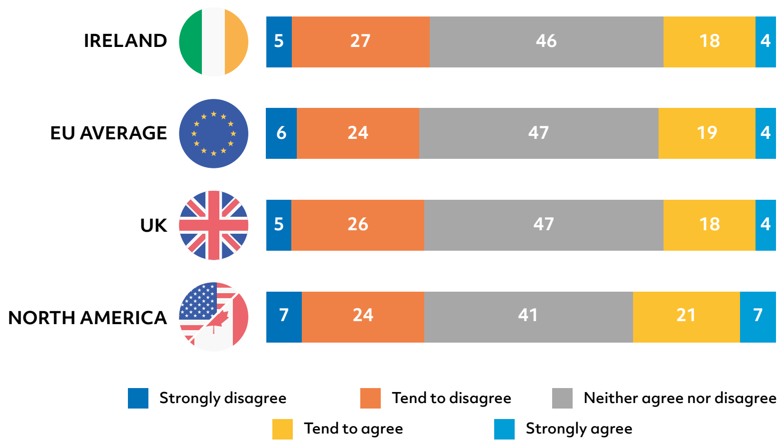
FIG 42: THE NEWS MEDIA OFTEN TAKES TOO NEGATIVE VIEWS OF EVENTS



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: The news media often takes too negative view of events: tone.

The standard tendency of news media is to prioritise the negative aspects of a story, but this is a potential turn off for many news consumers. However, a relatively low numbers of respondents across the surveyed jurisdictions feel that the media is often too negative. Just over one third, or 36 per cent, of Irish news consumers feel this way, which is broadly similar to the EU average. Notably, the numbers are far higher in the UK at 46 per cent. This may have implications for some UK titles operating in Ireland.

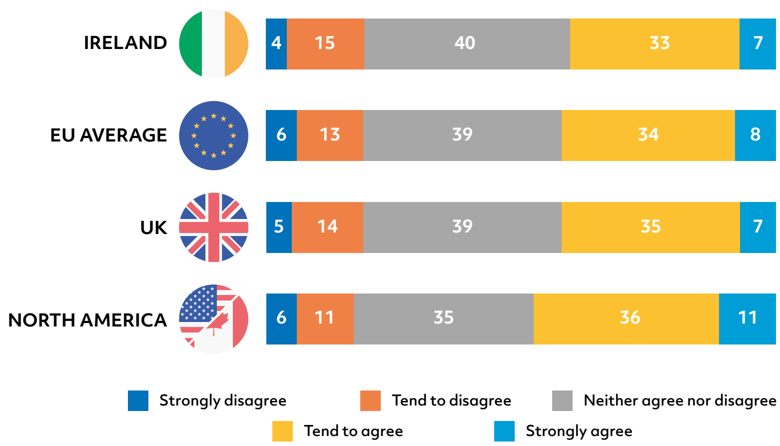
FIG 43: THE TOPICS CHOSEN BY THE NEWS MEDIA DO NOT FEEL RELEVANT TO ME



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: The topics chosen by the news media do not feel relevant to me: relevance of subjects.

One challenge which the news media must grapple with is the emergence of filter bubbles and algorithmic differentiation, which allow news consumers to focus more narrowly on topics of their own interest. Yet the challenge of general interest news media is to be relevant to a broad swathe of the news consuming public. These figures suggest they are doing doing so reasonably well, more people feel topics are relevant to them than feel the opposite. However, even larger numbers have no strong opinion on the matter. Changing that would no doubt benefit the news media. The figures are also remarkably similar across countries and jurisdictions.

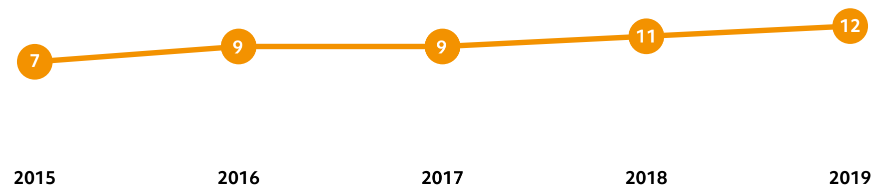
FIG 44: THE NEWS MEDIA MONITORS AND SCRUTINISES POWERFUL PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: The news media monitors and scrutinises powerful people and businesses.

One of the core normative functions of news media is its role as a Burkean fourth estate that can hold “power to account”. Here, the media appear to be doing reasonably well. Some 40 per cent of Irish news consumers agree that the media does indeed do this, although to a slightly less extent that those elsewhere. For example, in North America some 45 per cent believe that the media fulfills this role.

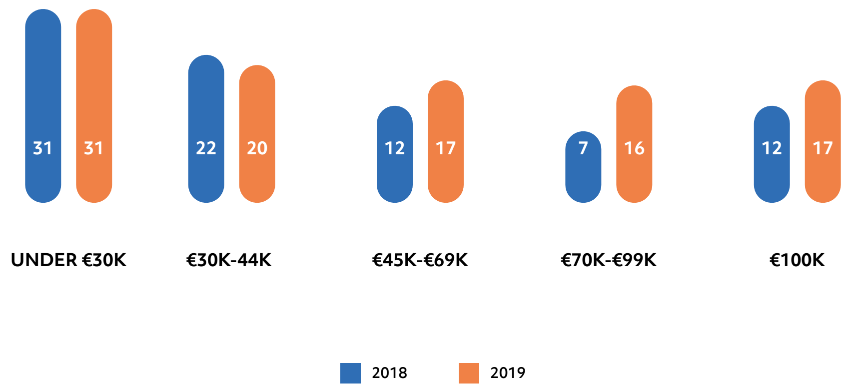
FIG 45: PAYING FOR NEWS ONLINE



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 or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition) All those who answered 'Yes'. 'No' 85% and 'Don't know' 3% omitted.

Regarding those who do pay for news, the numbers are slowly increasing each year. However, the base is very low. The Irish level of 12 per cent is almost identical to the EU average of 11 per cent and the 12 per cent recorded in North America. In the UK it is only 9 per cent despite several titles having reasonably hard subscription walls. The good news is that the rate of paying has been increasing faster among younger cohorts. Some 19 per cent of 25-34 year olds are now paying for news, compared with just 12 per cent a few years ago. Even the under 24s have a higher rate of paying than the over 45s, which may bode well for the future.

FIG 46: PAID FOR ONLINE NEWS BY INCOME



Notes: 'Don't know' 1% and 'Prefer not to answer', 7% (2019), and 'Don't know' 4% and 'Prefer not to answer' 7% (2018), omitted.

Although a relatively large number of those earning over €70,000 pay for news, paying is not just the purview of the wealthy. The largest category of those paying for news earn less than €30,000 a year and only pay for one subscription. Our respondents are also coming across advertisements for subscriptions roughly once a week.

FIG 47: PAYING FOR NEWS BY AGE 2016-2019

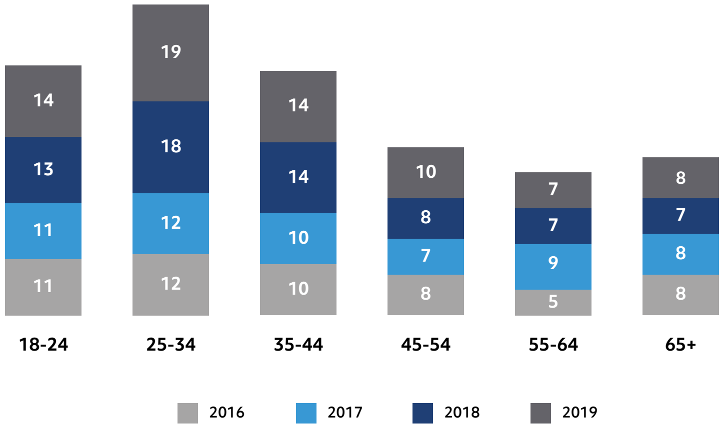


FIG 48: PERCENTAGE PAYING FOR NEWS 2019

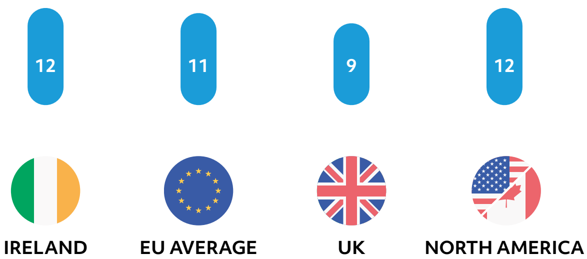
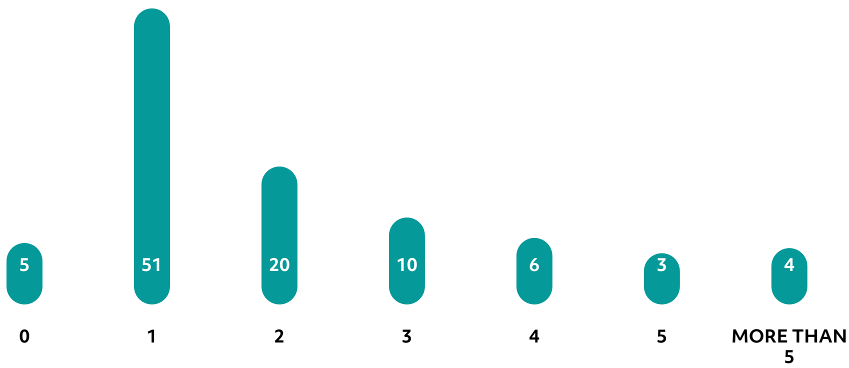


FIG 49: HOW MANY SUBSCRIPTIONS TO DIFFERENT PROVIDERS DO YOU HAVE?



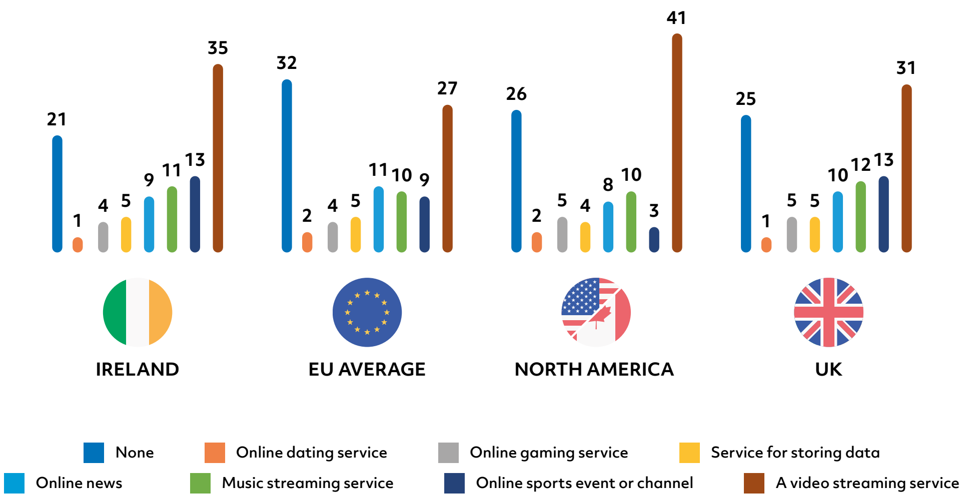
Q. You say you have paid a subscription or made an ongoing donation to a digital news service in the last year. How many different news providers do you regularly pay money to? Base: Those who have made a regular payment to a digital news service in last year. 1, 3 and 5 rounded down.

FIG 50: IF COULD HAVE ONE SUBSCRIPTION FOR THE NEXT YEAR

Q. If you could only have one for the next 12 months, which one of the following would you choose?

Video streaming is the paid service of choice for Irish news consumers. Asked if they could only subscribe to one service, the modal category was a video streaming service such as Netflix at some 35 per cent of the sample. Online sports, music and news all came in a poor second with news at just 9 per cent. This pattern held internationally; video streaming is always the most popular, although more so in Ireland than anywhere else in our comparator countries, besides North America.

FIG 51: MOST DESIRED SUBSCRIPTION FOR THE NEXT YEAR



Q. If you could only have one subscription for the next 12 months, which one of the following would you choose?

By far and away the most popular likely subscription among our news consumers is a video streaming site. After that online news, music and sports tend to bunch together in popularity with services for data storage, online gaming and online dating coming in below that again. The pattern is relatively stables across geographies.

We also looked at this question by whether or not the respondent often or occasionally seeks to avoid the news. Among those who often look to avoid the news, a paid for dating app becomes the subscription of choice.

FIG 52: DESIRED SUBSCRIPTIONS BY NEWS AVOIDANCE

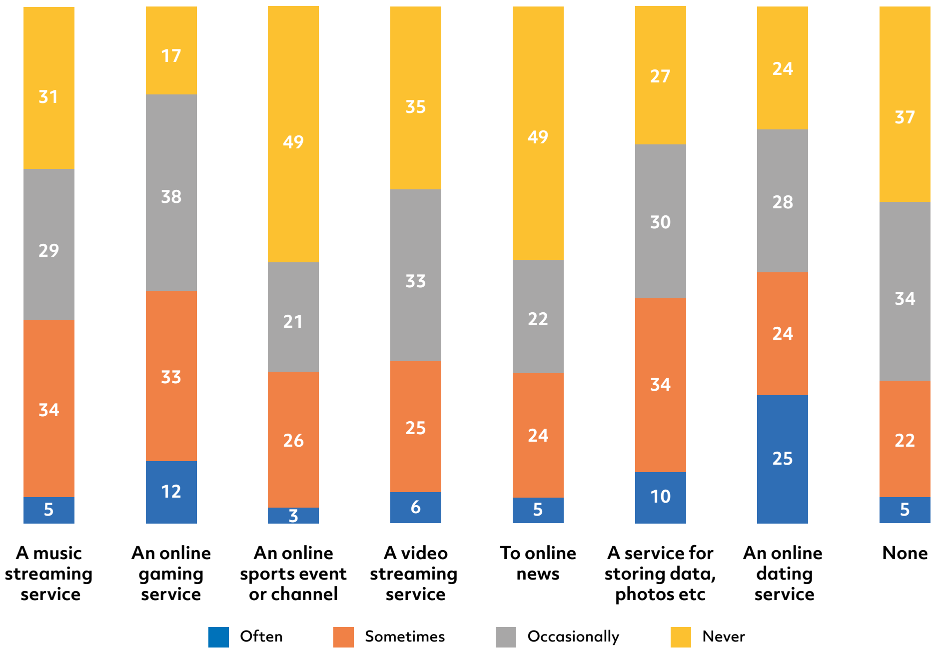
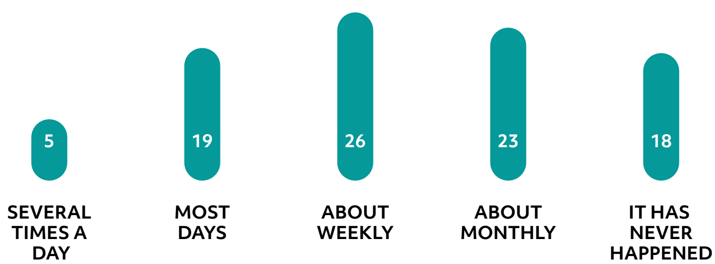
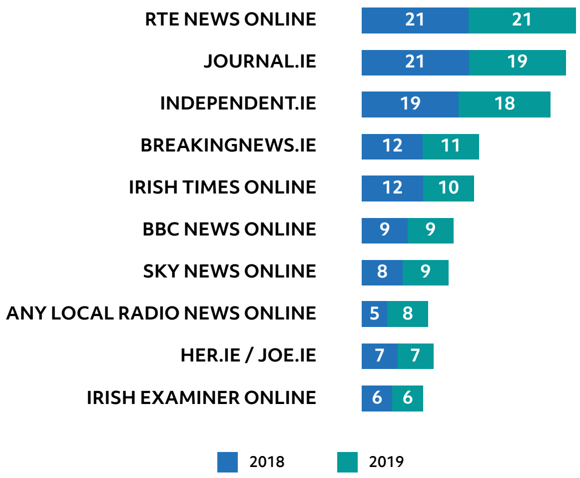


FIG 53: WHEN CLICKING A NEWS LINK ONLINE, HOW OFTEN DO YOU FIND AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR SUBSCRIPTION?



Q. How often do you click on a link, expecting to read an article, and find yourself asked to pay for a subscription instead? 'Don't know' omitted, 9%.

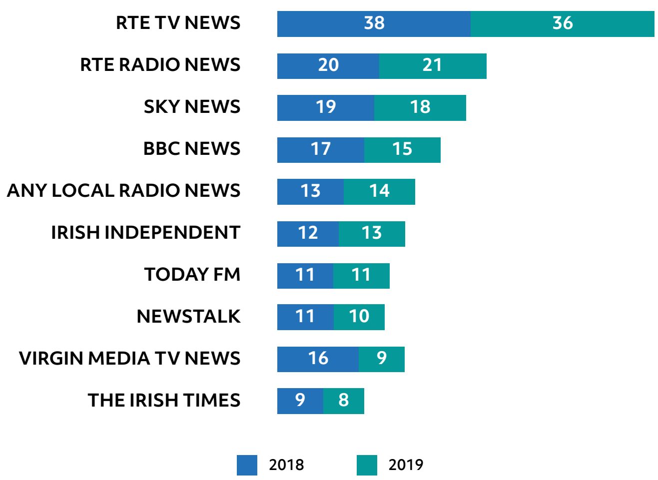
FIG 54: MAIN BRANDS USED FOR NEWS 2018 AND 2019



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 three days or more? Please select all that apply. Top ten news brands only.

There is little change in terms of the main brands used for news in 2019 and 2018; the top three remain *TheJournal.ie, RTE* and *Independent.ie*, although there are small changes within the figures. *TheJournal.ie* has dropped back two per centage points, allowing *RTE* to take the top spot. *Independent.ie* lost one per centage point and *The Irish Times* lost two per centage points. All of these changes, however, are likely to be within the margin of error.

FIG 55: MAIN TRADITIONAL SOURCES FOR NEWS



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 three days or more? Please select all that apply. Top ten news brands only.

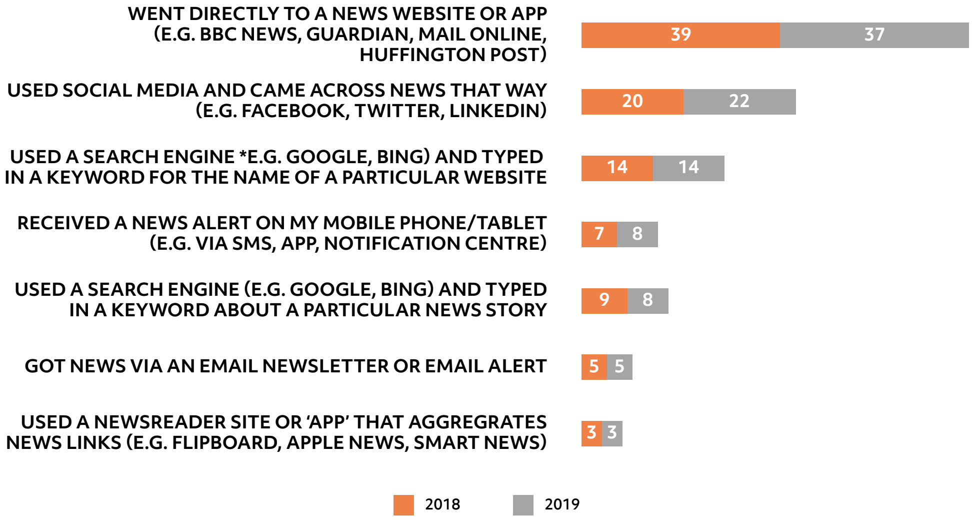
In terms of the traditional brands, *RTE TV News* remains the most popular source of news by a wide margin. Some 35 per cent of respondents say that it provides the main source of their news, compared with 21 per cent who cite *RTE Radio* as the main source of their news. UK broadcasters *Sky News* and *BBC* are also popular, coming in at third and fourth place respectively, ahead of *Today FM, Newstalk* and other indigenous broadcasters.

SECTION THREE

SOURCES, BRANDS, AND ENGAGEMENT

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 as well as digital formats for accessing news.

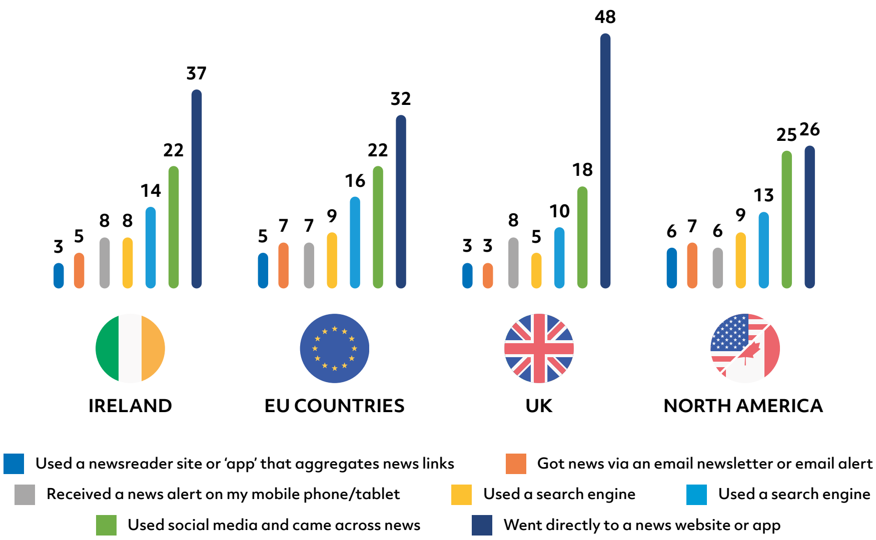
FIG 56: MAIN WAYS PEOPLE CAME ACROSS NEWS



Q. Which of these was the main way in which you came across news in the last week? 'Don't know' 0.34% and 'Other' 2% omitted.

Most of our respondents are still going directly to news websites or apps in order to get their news (37%), while 22 per cent come across their news vias social. Search comes in third at 14 per cent but newsletters, and other notifications are far less popular.

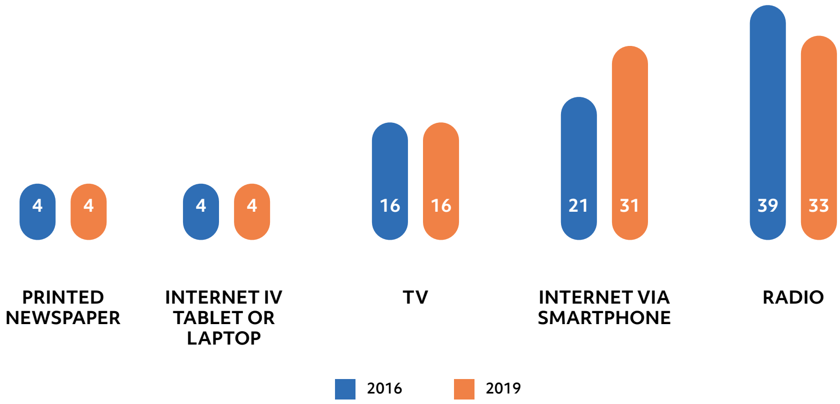
FIG 57: MAIN WAY PEOPLE CAME ACROSS NEWS ONLINE



Q. Which of these was the main way in which you came across news in the last week? 'Don't know' omitted: Ireland, 'Don't know' 0.34% and 'Other' 2%, EU, 'Don't know' 1% and 'Other' 2%, UK, 'Don't know' 1% and 'Other' 4%, North America, 'Don't know' 1% and 'Other' 6%, Australia, 'Don't know' 1% and 'Other' 4%.

In terms of how people generally come across news, it seems that going directly to a news website or app is still the dominant method. Some 37 per cent of Irish new consumers do this, below the UK but ahead of the EU and elsewhere. However, the second most popular method is to use social media. In North America and Australia these first two methods are almost equivalent in popularity. This highlights the importance of the platforms working with news publishers and others to distinguish content in some way.

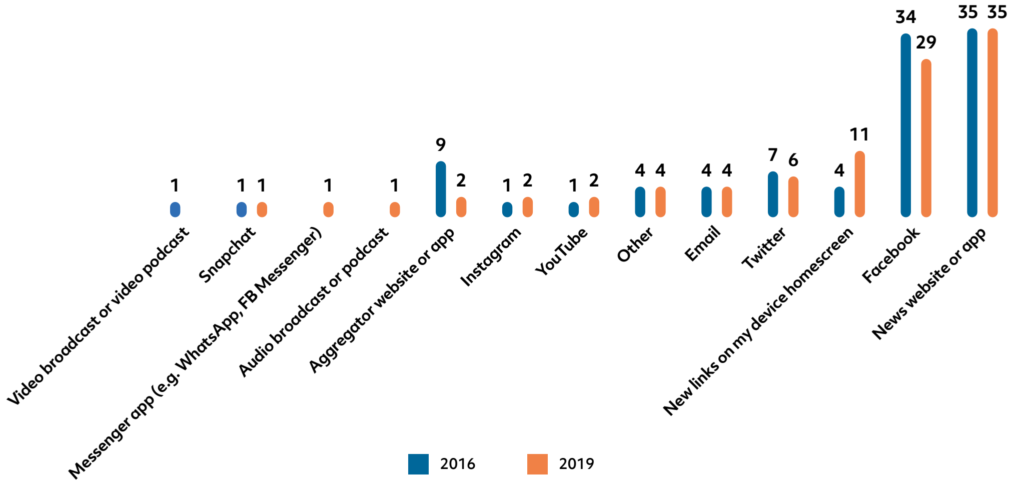
FIG 58: FIRST WAY PEOPLE COME ACROSS NEWS IN THE MORNING 2016 AND 2019



Q. What is the first way you typically come across news in the morning? 'Don't know' 1% and 'none of these' 3%, and 'Smart Speaker' 1% omitted.

We can also see the inexorable rise of the smartphone when asking where respondents first come across news in the morning. Traditionally, this has been an area dominated by radio. Hence, the importance of *Morning Ireland* and Breakfast on *Newstalk*, for example. However, even here the phone is rapidly gaining ground. Just three years ago when we last asked this question some 21 per cent used a smartphone first thing in the morning and almost double that number or 39 per cent listened to the radio. Now the numbers are almost identical. Smartphone use has grown by 10 per centage points to 31 per cent and radio has fallen six per centage points to just 33 per cent. Of course, some people may well be using an app such as TuneIn or Sonos to listen to the radio on their smartphone. Nonetheless, the trend is clear and the imperative for radio to make sure it is easily available on a smartphone.

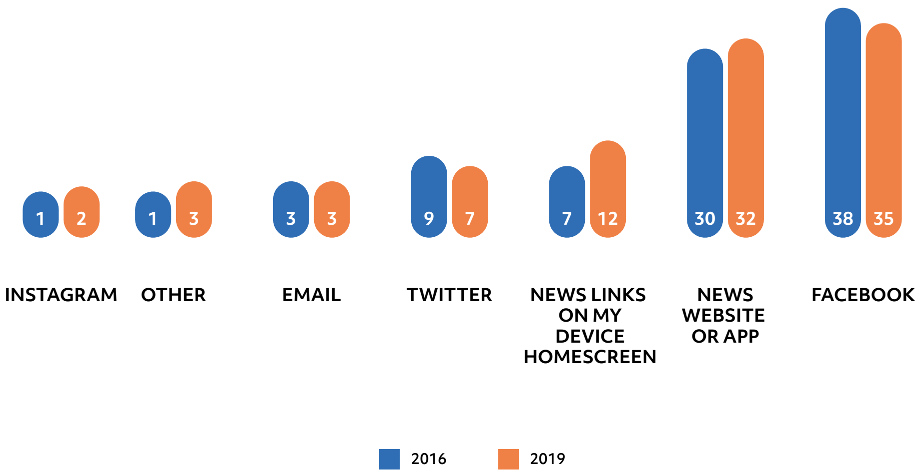
FIG 59: CONTACT WITH NEWS IN THE MORNING VIA THE INTERNET 2016 AND 2019



Q. You mentioned that your first contact with news in the morning is using the internet, in which one of the following places do you typically find your first news? Base: All who first get news in the morning via internet. 'Don't know' 1% and 'Other' 4% omitted.

First point of contact with the news is largely tied into daily routines. Consumption routines for digital news in the morning has not changed much in four years, with the first check in of the day largely news websites, emails and some social platforms remaining much the same. However, Irish users are less inclined to use Facebook as the first point of contact than they were four years ago.

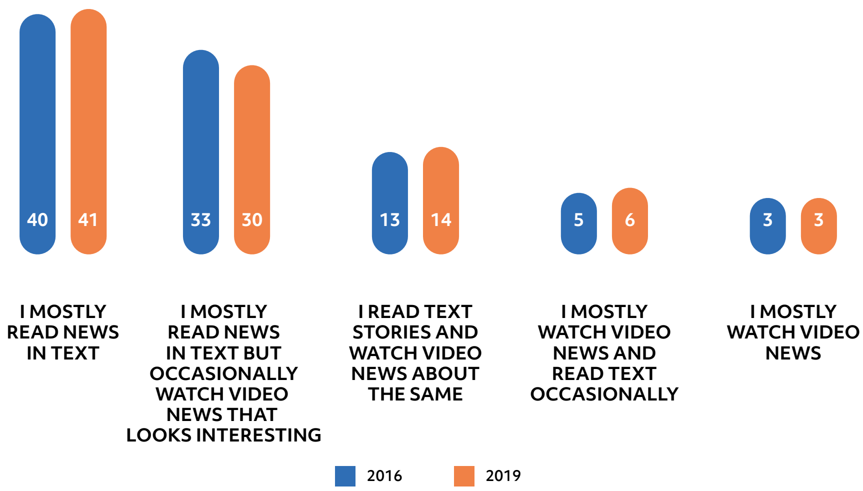
FIG 60: FIRST CONTACT WITH NEWS IN THE MORNING VIA SMARTPHONE 2016 AND 2019



Q. You mentioned that your first contact with news in the morning is using internet via smartphone, in which one of the following places do you typically find your first news? Base: All who first get news in the morning via internet. 'Don't know' omitted, 1%.

A fall in engagement with Facebook for news first thing in the morning is also reflected among people who use their smartphones. However, there has been a rise in direct engagement with news websites or apps via smartphones first thing.

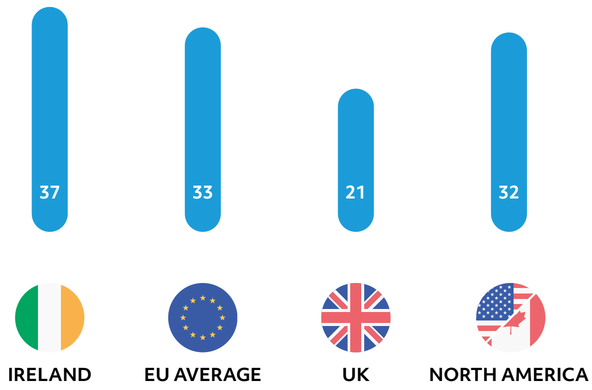
FIG 61: PREFERRED FORMAT FOR CONSUMING NEWS ONLINE



Q. In thinking about your online news habits, which of the following statements applies best to you? Please select one. 'Don't know' omitted, 7%.

Irish news consumers continue to prefer to read news in text (41%) and when we combine the numbers who prefer text but occasionally watch clips, it amounts to some 70 per cent. Only three per cent mostly watch video news, which must rub further salt in the wound of publishers who rushed to video on Facebook's exhortations a few years ago.

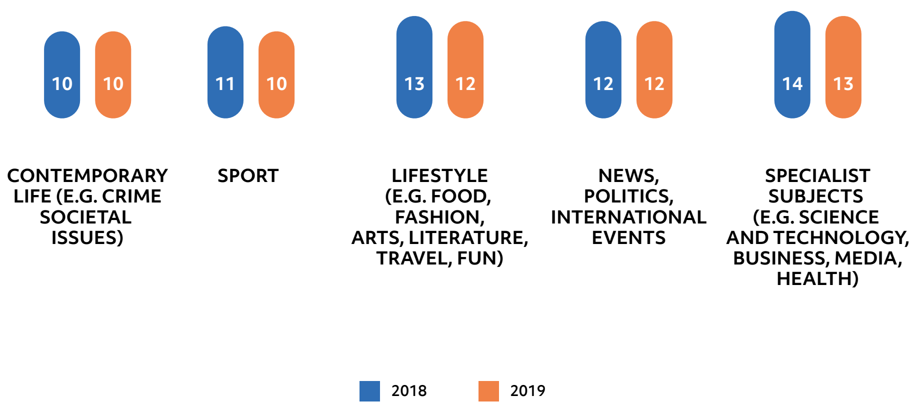
FIG 62: LISTENED TO PODCASTS



Q. A podcast is an episodic series of digital audio files, which you can download, subscribe or listen to. Which of the following types of podcast have you listened to in the last month? Please select all that apply. Answered 'yes' to at least one.

Ireland remains a nation of radio, or at least audio, lovers and this has translated to an appetite for podcasts; more Irish news consumers listen to podcasts (37%) than do those in the EU (33%) or the UK which comes in at a surprisingly low 21 per cent.

FIG 63: TYPES OF PODCASTS CONSUMED IN THE PAST MONTH



Q. A podcast is an episodic series of digital audio files, which you can download, subscribe or listen to. Which of the following types of podcast have you listened to in the last month ? Please select all that apply.

And it seems that all kinds of podcasts remain popular with an eclectic mix all winning audience share. In common with most other countries, the most popular are around specialist subjects such as politics, business or sport with news and lifestyle coming up just behind. And most people still listen at home (56%) compared with 18 per cent when exercising.

FIG 64: TYPES OF PODCASTS

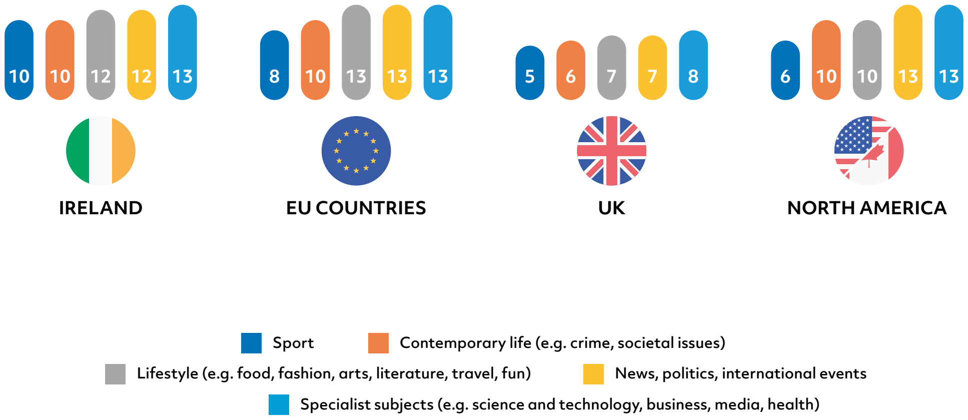
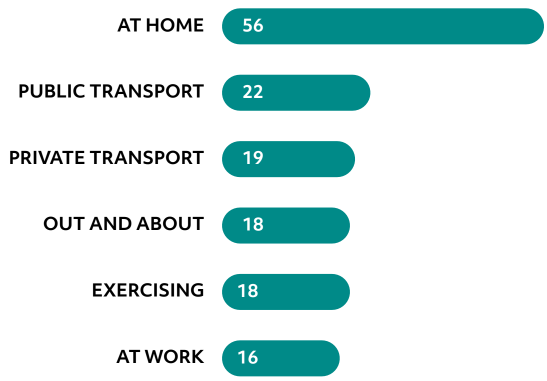


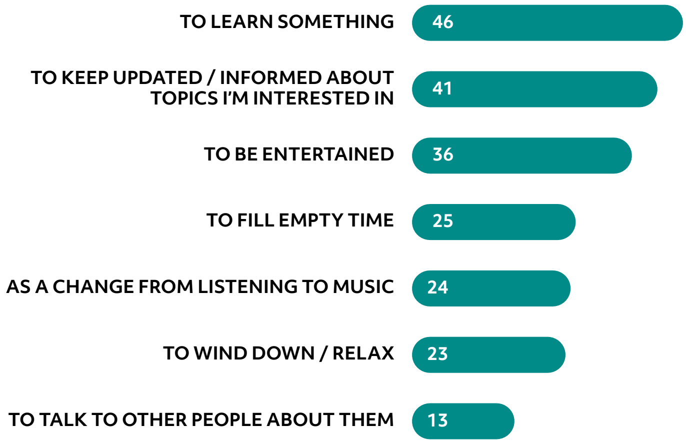
FIG 65: WHERE DO YOU LISTEN TO PODCASTS?



Q. In what circumstances do you tend to consume podcasts regularly? Please select all that apply. 'Don't know' 2% and 'Other' 2% omitted.

Listening to podcasts is another habit that is tied into daily routines, but listening at home is most common (56%). However many podcasts come via mobile apps such as iTunes and Spotify facilitating mobile consumption with many users taking the opportunity to listen-in while traveling between places - publicly, 22 per cent or privately 19 per cent or out and about (18%) and exercising (18%).

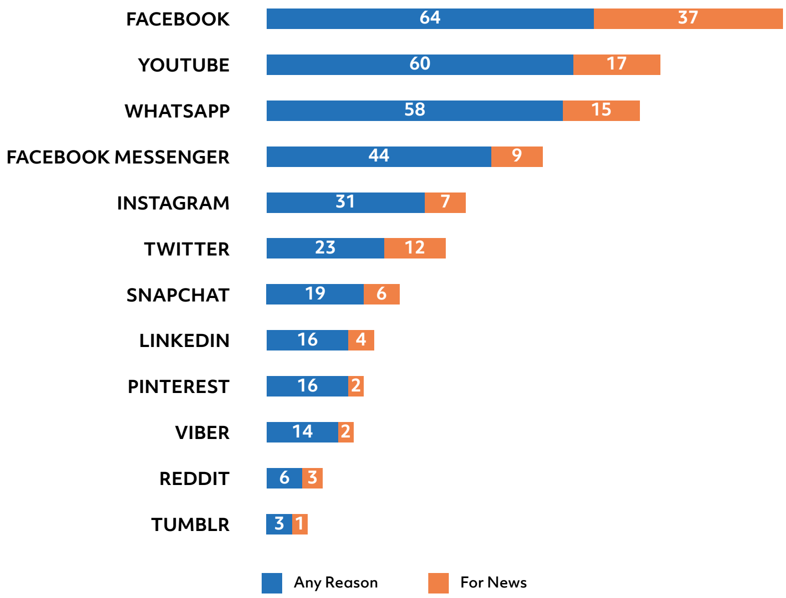
FIG 66: WHY DO YOU LISTEN TO PODCASTS?



Q. Which, if any, of the following are reasons why you listen to podcasts? Please select all that apply. 'Don't know' 1% and 'Other' 1% omitted.

Irish news media are increasingly turning their attention to podcasts with most national news titles having launched series on politics, economic or social affairs. Similarly, many TV and radio stations making the most of their broadcasts by repurposing as podcasts. And many stand alone podcasts such as The Echo Chamber and An Irish Man Abroad increasingly gaining attention. But why do Irish users tune in? Most want to learn (46%) indicating the focused and casual delivery of information is valued among users. And many listen-in to follow a topic of interest, indicating the serialisation of podcasts is also appreciated.

FIG 67: SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR ANY REASON AND FOR NEWS 2019



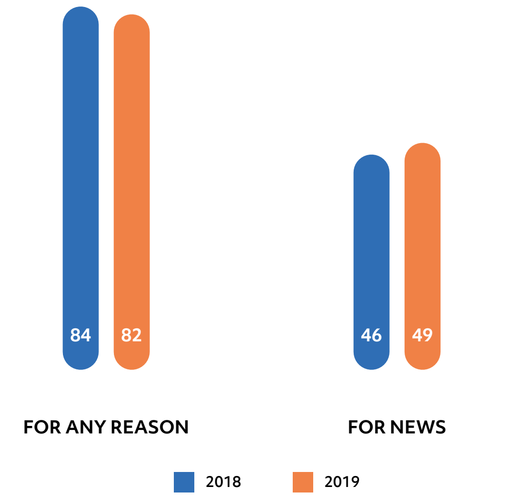
Q. Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose in the last week ? Please select all that apply.

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. Top 12 social media platforms only.

Facebook remains the most popular social media platform for news use by some distance despite controversies and changes to its algorithm. It is closely followed by YouTube which has also been mired in some controversy around the veracity and tone of many videos it hosts. The next three are all Facebook companies with WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Instagram all coming ahead of Twitter and Snapchat. As a result, Facebook Inc is the clear dominant force in news consumption on social.

Given the large numbers of people on Facebook platforms generally, but also specifically for news, there must be concern about the group's plans to integrate the backends of its platform, allowing the sharing of data.

FIG 68: FACEBOOK OWNED PLATFORMS



Indeed Facebook is the most popular method of viewing news across the EU, at an even higher rate than in Ireland. WhatsApp use is however higher in Ireland than the EU average.

FIG 69: SOCIAL MEDIA FOR NEWS 2019

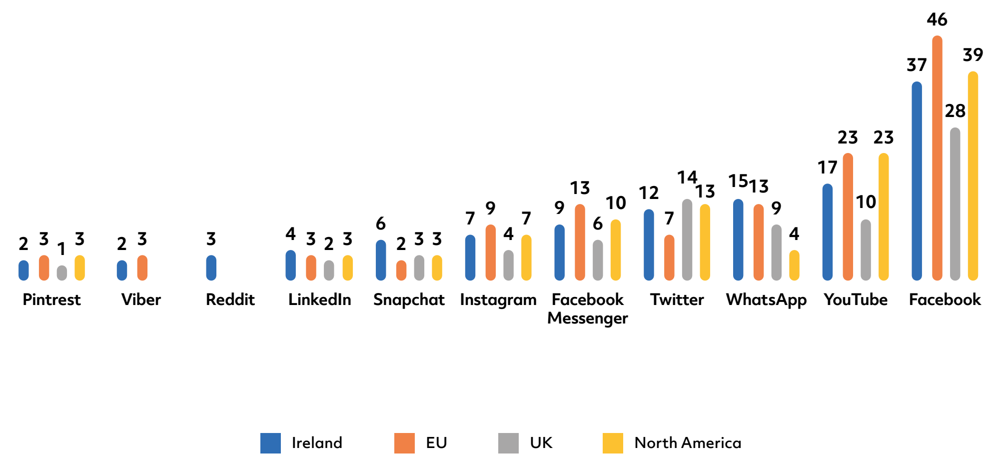
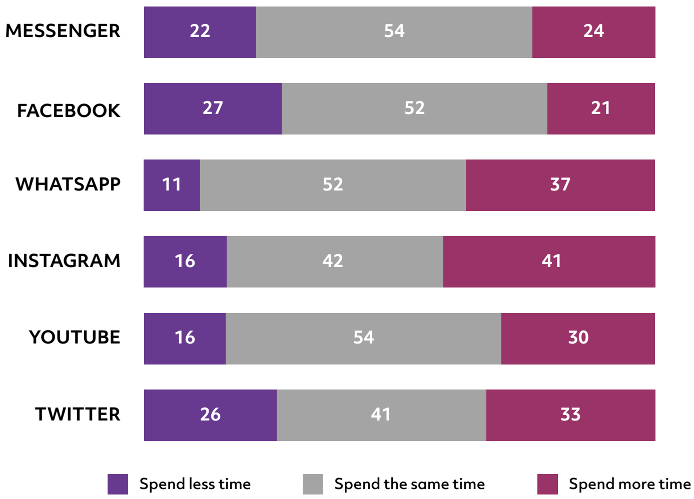


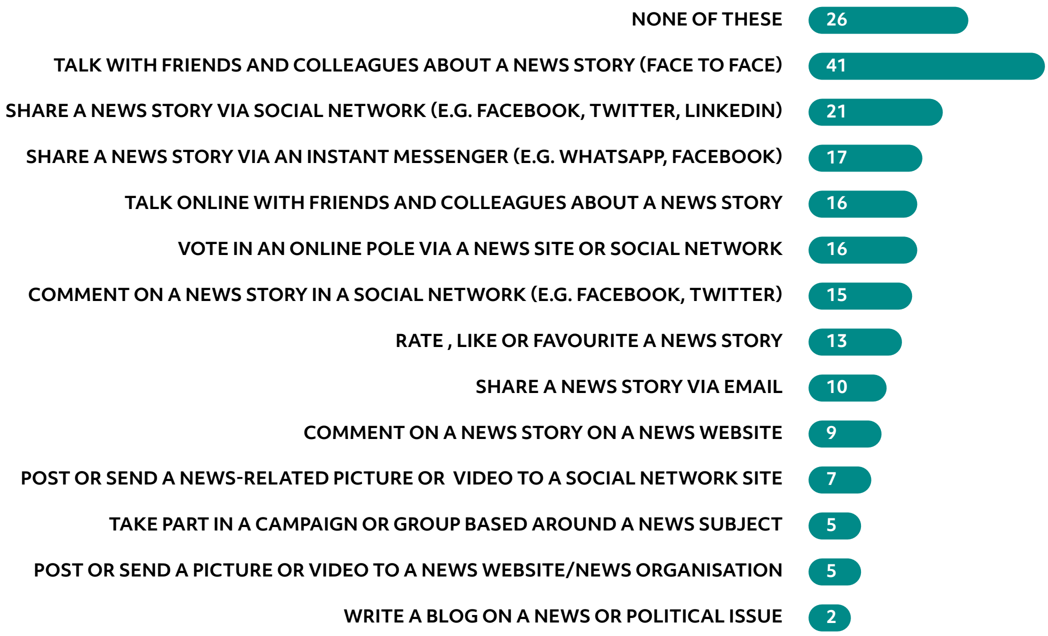
FIG 70: SPENDING TIME ON PLATFORMS FOR NEWS



Q. You say you use the following social networks for any purpose, in the last 12 months, has the amount of time you spend using them changed?

The amount of self-reported time people spend on Facebook has declined this year with 27 per cent reporting that they spend less time on the platform compared with 21 per cent who declare spending more time on it. Other Facebook platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram are taking up more of people's time. In fact, some 41 per cent report spending more time on Instagram while with just 16 per cent are spending less time on it, Similarly, 37 per cent report spending more time on WhatsApp compared with 11 per cent who report spending less time on it. Twitter and YouTube also saw upticks in the amount of time spent on their platforms.

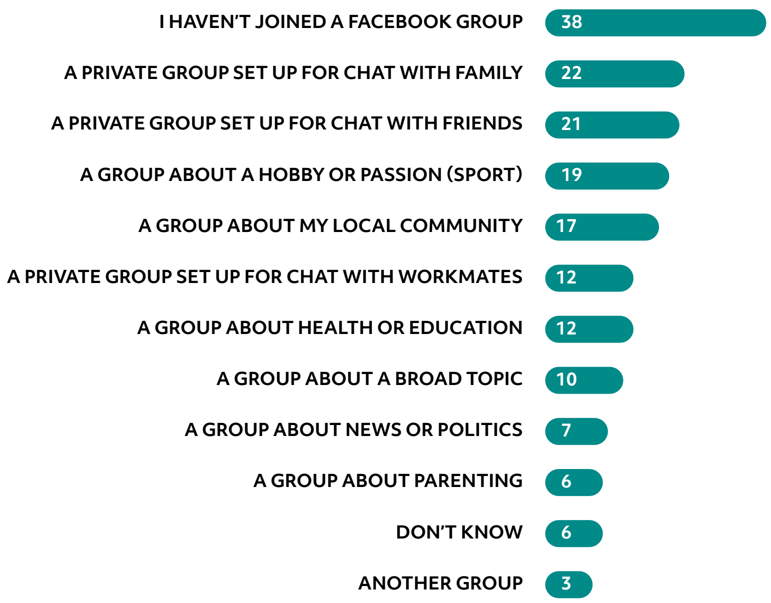
FIG 71: PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE NEWS



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.

In terms of participation, the most common method of communication is talking with friends and family about a news story, almost double the number who might share a story on a social platform, (21%) or via WhatsApp or Messenger (17%). Although not everyone discusses news, with just over a quarter of Irish news consumers not participating.

FIG 72: MEMBERSHIP OF FACEBOOK GROUPS 2019



Q. Facebook allows you to set up, join and participate in groups, where you can discuss news or related topics with likeminded people. Which, if any, of the following have you used in the past month on Facebook itself (Note: we're not talking here about messages sent via Facebook Messenger). Please select all that apply. Base: All who have used Facebook for any purpose in last week.

Similarly, most Facebook users have not joined a group (38%). And when people do they tend to be used for socialising rather than used for news or politics (7%).

This trend is reflected elsewhere with most news consumers in the EU, UK and North America not participating in Facebook groups. However among those who do, there is some notable variations between countries. For example Irish workers are among the most likely to chat in a Facebook group than elsewhere, 12 per cent in Ireland compared to 10 per cent among the EU countries, and 7 per cent in the North America and UK. Irish Facebook users are also among the most familial with 22 per cent chatting with family members, compared to 21 per cent among the EU countries, 16 per cent in the USA and 13 per cent in the UK.

FIG 73: MEMBERSHIP OF FACEBOOK GROUPS

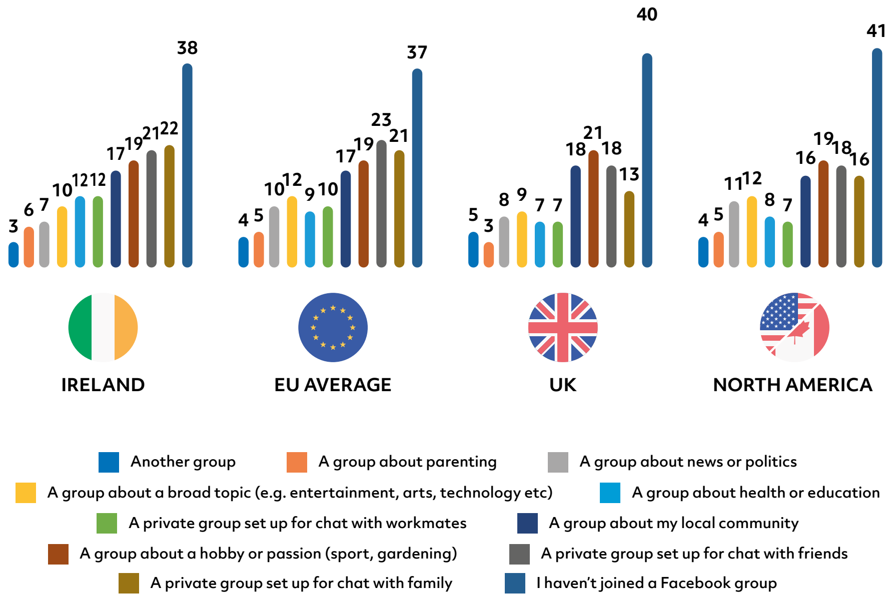
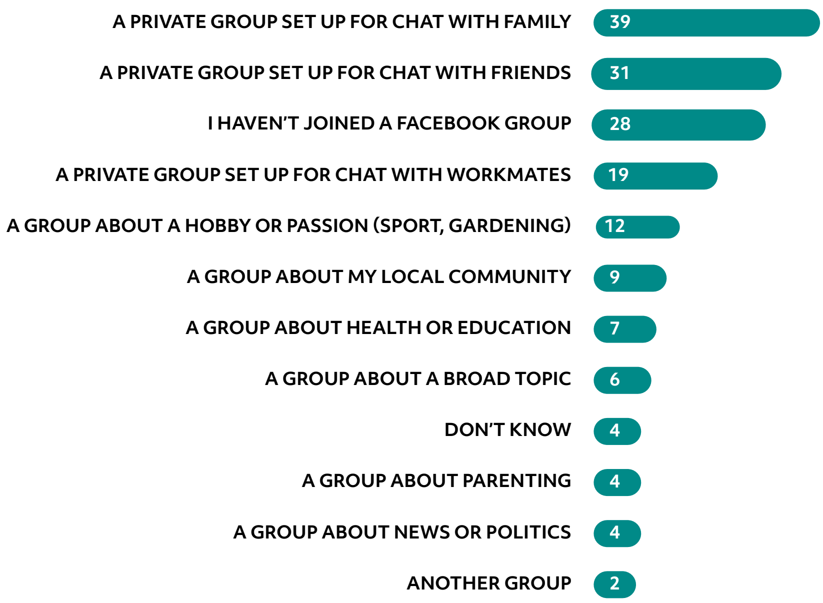


FIG 74: MEMBERSHIP OF WHATSAPP GROUPS 2019

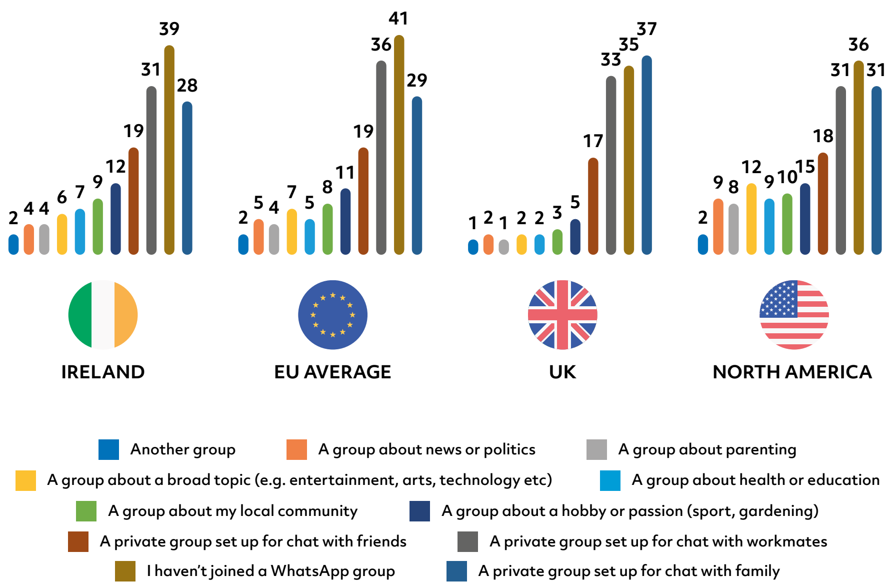


Q. Which, if any, of the following have you used in the past month on WhatsApp. Please select all that apply. Base: All who have used WhatsApp for any purpose in last week.

The growth of WhatsApp is very notable. Only 21 per cent have not joined a WhatsApp Group. The most common type of WhatsApp group is one for family (39%) closely followed by friends (31%) and workmates (19%).

WhatsApp has yet to make such significant inroads into the UK, there some 37 per cent have not joined a WhatsApp group, while in North America it is 31 per cent. However, in all jurisdictions, groups for family and friends followed by workmates are most popular.

FIG 75: MEMBERSHIP OF WHATSAPP GROUPS



COMMENT: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

by Niamh Kirk

In this year's report, we want to explore the habits and attitudes of younger news consumers. Young Irish people are heavily embedded in digital media, but what is their engagement with digital news? Among 18-24s, the main sources of news are mostly digital (71%). They are the most likely to find news via a smartphone (74%) and, unsurprisingly, they the least likely to use traditional sources such as TV (18%) or radio (6%) as a main source.

In some areas the disparity with older age groups regarding where and how young people get their news is substantial. In terms of relying on TV, they are much the same as all under 35s, both 18 per cent. However, 51 per cent of over 55s use TV as their main source and 16 per cent use radio. And smartphones are the primary device for 38 per cent of over 55s.

There has been some hope regarding younger people paying for news. It is sometimes used as a signal of potential stability in future online revenues. Some 14 per cent of younger consumers paid for news last year. However, five years ago, only five per cent of 18-24s paid for news, and ten per cent of 25-34s. That is an increase of six per cent among 18-24s and an increase of nine per cent among 25-34s. Although it must be recognised that among 18-24s, 24 per cent pay an ongoing subscription, for 37 per cent another person pays.

In line with the US, UK and the EU, older age groups are far more interested in both news and politics. Irish 18-25 year olds are among the least interested in news with 45 per cent very or extremely interested, compared to 59 per cent in the UK. And they are even less interested in politics, 26 per cent in Ireland, compared to 48 per cent in the UK and 40 per cent in the USA. Although Ireland has had an intensive political period with referendums, presidential elections and Brexit, such differences could be attributed to the more tumultuous internal political environments in both the UK and US.

The survey shows that most people in Ireland are centrist and there does not appear to be a large degree of polarisation. And this is true of younger age groups, 72 per cent of whom are centrist with 18 per cent identifying as left and 10 per cent as right. Comparing the same age groups in the UK, 25 per cent identify as left while 12 per cent identified as right and in the US it is 33 per cent left and 14 per cent right.

This age group are among the wariest digital news consumers. That is, 18-24s most likely to be concerned about fake news with 69 per cent stating they were concerned about what was real and fake on the internet. They are among the least trusting of the age groups of new via search engines (40%) and social media (56%) and least trusting of news overall (36%).

However, this can also be interpreted as a degree of savviness when it comes to questioning the quality of what they see online. 18-24s are the most likely to take some form of action regarding what they see online (89%). Among their responses are talking to friends (35%) or relying on more reputable sources (37%), but they were most likely to check multiple sources to verify information (44%).

The survey also offers some insight into young people's social values. They were the least likely to agree with the idea that immigration is a threat to national culture (27% agree) compared to an average of 38 per cent among older age groups. And they were among the most trusting of politicians being among the least likely to disagree with the idea politicians don't care what they think (50%) compared to an average of 68 per cent among older age groups.

But what do they think of news content? In terms of tone, 40 per cent of under 34s find news too negative compared to 31 per cent of over 54s. The largest generational gap is in how news media is valued for the immediacy of news, with 63 per cent of 18-24s finding it keeps them up to date compared to 76 per cent of over 55s. This can in part be explained by the higher number of younger people using social media for news. For content, under 35s are the most likely to say the news topics are not relevant, 24 per cent of 18-25s and 35 per cent of 24-35s.

We should be cautious of assuming the patterns among younger age groups will be the habits adopted for life. As our lives change, our access and need for different media can change. Higher disposable income among older age groups means better phones, more gadgets and greater resources to afford both TVs and licences. Similarly, how and why we engage with news evolves as our lives enter new phases, and we take on new responsibilities and interests. Just because fewer younger people use the TV for news or choose this brand over that, it does not necessarily mean they always will.

Younger people, much like everyone else, are getting more news than previous generations have ever have been exposed to. Recent shifts in Irish society have been in part shaped by increased engagement from younger people. It is an old cliché that young people are ignorant of news or politics. Although the engagement is lower than older generations, there is still a substantial per centage interested in it and accessing it daily, and want to see more topics that relate to their lives. Future participation depends on their adaptation of evolving technologies as well as how the news media cover and distribute topics of interest to younger generations.

References

Mitchell, A., Gottfried, J., Barthel M., and Shearer E., (2017) The Modern News Consumer News attitudes and practices in the digital era. Pew Research Center.

Chadwick, A. & EBSCOhost. (2017). The hybrid media system : politics and power. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Sattari S., Foster T., Peighambari K., Kordestani A. (2015) Preferences of Young News Consumers: A Conjoint Analysis. In: Kubacki K. (eds) Ideas in Marketing: Finding the New and Polishing the Old. Developments in Marketing Science: Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Science. Springer, Cham.

COMMENT: PAYING FOR NEWS

By Colm Kearns

Paying for News: A New Path or a Cul-de-Sac for Journalism?

2018 saw journalism continue to suffer from many of the threats which have plagued it in recent years: authoritarian measures against press freedom, a proliferation of misinformation in the wider media sphere and diminishing revenues. To a greater or lesser extent, all of these factors can be linked to the ever growing prominence of the internet as a space for political discourse and information exchange. Journalists are powerless to turn back the clock on these developments and must, instead, find new ways of surviving in an increasingly online culture.

When they initially moved online in the 1990s, many newspapers opted against charging internet users for content, hoping that increased advertising revenue would offset any decrease in sales. However, advertisers soon made use of cheaper online options and news outlets found themselves with limited options for alternative revenue streams to sustain the costs of quality journalism (Fletcher and Kleis Nielsen 2017). Any attempts to charge users for access to news content seemed to run contrary to the internet's 'culture of free,' but there are signs that this is becoming a viable option.

The Digital News Report reveals a five per cent increase in Irish people who pay for online news service over the last five years. While this increase comes from a low base, this is nonetheless encouraging given that the proportion of those whose news consumption is primarily or completely digital has remained relatively stable over the same period, which would point towards an increase in consciousness of the value of quality journalism. One of the most prominent international signs of the viability of relying on the public's willingness to pay for news came with The Guardian's announcement that the paper had recorded £800,000 operating profit for the 2018-19 financial year. Having lost £57 million just three years previously, Guardian News & Media ascribed the turnaround to their 655,000 monthly subscribers and one off contributions from more than 300,000 readers (Waterson 2019).

It would be easy to suppose that this would bode well for Irish news services given that the rate of Irish people who pay for online news content (12%) is greater than that of British people (9%), but the picture is more complicated. The Irish Times saw a 26 per cent rise in digital sales in 2018, but it was the only Irish newspaper to grow across both print and digital during this period (Slattery 2019). *The Times Ireland* has ceased publishing a print edition entirely (Crowley 2019). Irish media suffers from the difficulty of having to compete with major English language news outlets in the UK and US. *The Irish Times'* relative success in carving out a significant online subscribership could point toward a public desire for quality Irish perspectives on world events. The recent purchase of Irish News & Media (the parent company of the *Irish Independent* among other Irish newspapers) by Belgian group Mediahuis will be an interesting indicator in this regard. INM had previously backed down from plans to introduce a paywall for their online content, but Mediahuis have pursued similar strategies with some success with their other European newspapers (Brophy 2019).

Measuring current figures against those of recent years draws attention to some curious trends. Older people are, as ever, more interested in the news, but the per centage of older people (45+) willing to pay for online news has scarcely risen over the last three years, while, conversely, the per centage of 25-34 year olds has risen by seven per cent in the same period. It has been speculated that the growth in subscription services in other fields (such as music and televisual content) could contribute further towards young people's willingness to pay for news: "the 'culture of free' may begin to erode, particularly in the minds of those who have only ever experienced an internet where paying for digital media is normal" (Fletcher and Kleis Nielsen 2017). This chimes somewhat with other figures from the report which indicate similar levels of interest in online subscriptions for news, sport and music content (though the popularity of video streaming services such as Netflix outstrip all of these considerably).

A development which seems to correlate with these figures is the establishment of Kinzen, a news app established by former RTE journalist and Storyful founder, Mark Little. For a €5 monthly subscription fee, users are promised a curated news community which will liberate them "from the shallow metrics of claps, clicks and likes" (Slattery 2018). Kinzen has raised over half a million euro in funding, which indicates a degree of industry confidence in the public appetite for paying for quality digital news. Following on in this vein, former Sunday Business Post editor and deputy editor Ian Kehoe and Tom Lyons have begun hiring staff for their new venture, The Currency, a subscription based online business and economics news service. Similarly, TheJournal.ie launched Noteworthy, a project which will attempt to pursue stories based on public recommendation and secure crowd-funding for the reporting of those stories (Bohan 2019).

Another curiosity emerging from the Digital News Report's figures is that those earning under €30,000 per year represent the largest income category of those who pay for online news services. This is all the more interesting given that other results point toward wealthier people as being more likely to be 'digital only' in their news consumption. It is certainly encouraging that those earning less still count news among their priority purchases and, again, points towards a growing public consciousness of the need to actively navigate their way through an online culture characterised by misinformation. Access to quality journalism is seen by a growing number as a necessity (or perhaps an obligation) rather than a luxury.

While the Irish public are growing more receptive to paying for quality journalism, this remains a relatively slow process. Questions abound over the long term viability of online subscriptions offsetting losses in revenue caused by the decline in traditional forms of news consumption. Future generations may look back on our era as the death throes of journalism, or as a period of uneasy transition towards a functioning online media. To ensure the latter, news providers must continue to champion the idea that quality online news is a necessary expense for the discerning public. They must emphasise the qualities that elevate the veracity, relevance and thoughtfulness of their reporting over the misinformed and hastily compiled alternatives that can be accessed for free.

References

Bohan, C. (2019) 'TheJournal.ie launches Noteworthy, a new investigative journalism website,' *TheJournal.ie*. 9 April 2019. Available from https://www.thejournal.ie/thejournal-ie-noteworthy-investigative-journalism-4581536-Apr2019/

Brophy, M. (2019) 'Mediahuis must deal with INM's love/hate relationship with digital,' *The Irish Times*. 3 May 2019. Available from https://www.irishtimes.com/business/media-and-marketing/opinion-mediahuis-must-deal-with-inm-s-love-hate-relationship-with-digital-1.3879814

Crowley, S. (2019) 'The Times Ireland to cease print edition,' *RTE.ie*. 21 May 2019. Available from https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2019/0521/1050863-times-ireland/

Fletcher, R. & Kleis Nielsen, R. (2017) 'Paying for Online News,' *Digital Journalism*, 5:9. Available from https://www-tandfonline-com.dcu.idm.oclc.org/doi/pdf/10.1080/21670811.2016.1246373?needAccess=true

Slattery, L. (2018). 'Mark Little's Kinzen news app to launch in January,' *The Irish Times*. 23 October 2018. Available from https://www.irishtimes.com/business/media-and-marketing/mark-little-s-kinzen-news-app-to-launch-in-january-1.3673180

Slattery, L. (2019). ''The Irish Times' grows daily circulation 2% to 79,406,' *The Irish Times*. 21 February 2019. Available from https://www.irishtimes.com/business/media-and-marketing/the-irish-times-grows-daily-circulation-2-to-79-406-1.3801654

Waterson, J. (2019). 'Guardian breaks even helped by success of supporter strategy,' *The Guardian*. 1 May 2019. Available from https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/may/01/guardian-breaks-even-helped-by-success-of-supporter-strategy

COMMENT: CLOSED AND OPEN SHARING

By Jane Suiter, Director Institute for Future Media and Journalism

The global move to closed messaging such as WhatsApp is concerning not only for publishers but society and democracy.

One of the major international trends we see this year is that many people are spending less time with Facebook and more time with the company's other platforms WhatsApp and Instagram. The growth of WhatsApp is likely due to a deliberate strategy on the part of Facebook. The tech giant has plans to monetize private messaging by developing a payment function for WhatsApp and, as private messaging is now among the fastest growing areas of online communication, the company is pivoting towards a privacy strategy across its platforms.

The shift from open networks like Facebook to closed applications like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger is not just a trend of general interaction; they are also being used more heavily for news. This shift has potentially enormous implications.

Algorithmic and policy decisions by Facebook indicate that social networking as we know it is likely to change. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg insists that many people do not want to converse in the 'digital equivalent of the town square' but rather in private groups (Welch 2019). Across Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, the priority is now for discussion on smaller, often closed groups. According to Mr Zuckerberg, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are now likely to be the main way that users interact across the Facebook network and, in a concerning development, he is amalgamating their backends. Given the end-to-end encryption on WhatsApp, which even the tech giant itself says it cannot see behind, this means that the sharing of much news and comment in the future will be essentially closed and opaque. The detail will essentially be invisible to both regulators and researchers.

In some parts of the world these changes are already altering politics. In some countries such as Brazil, India and Myanmar, there is evidence that WhatsApp facilitates hate speech, propaganda and disinformation (Boadle 2018). There is also debate in other countries whether these groups facilitate create participation or create echo chambers that drive polarisation.

The international Digital News Report examined nine countries with different levels of social media activity – US, UK, Spain, Ireland, Turkey, Malaysia, Australia, Canada, and Brazil – and found that the majority of Facebook and WhatsApp users are members of one or more active groups. Interestingly, about half of Facebook and WhatsApp users (51% and 46% respectively) are active members of groups that mostly include people they do not know. But there are huge differences across countries. Relatively, large numbers of people use groups to interact with people they don't know in Spain (62%), Malaysia (60%), and Brazil (58%). By contrast, only a minority of users in Ireland (30%) Australia (27%) and the UK (12%) currently use WhatsApp in this way.

Countries with large groups may be more prone to disinformation, which can be shared at scale across the groups (Nemer 2018). The broad characteristics of those who use WhatsApp and Facebook groups are concerning in this context. They have lower trust in the mainstream news, are more likely to use partisan news sites, and are more likely to trust the news they get from social media. In the UK, around half of those who use either WhatsApp or Facebook groups trust news from social media (46%) in contrast to just 10 per cent of the whole sample. In Ireland, the comparable figures are 34 per cent of group members compared with 17 per cent of the whole sample. This suggests that, for the minority that use them, the news that these groups serve up is an important part of their overall news diet and is one which will be hard to shift.

Disinformation is of course most prevalent in groups that discuss politics. This is more in developing countries where relatively poor broadband means people rely more on messaging services. In India, these groups have been linked to a spate of killings and Facebook has even admitted that it may hold some responsibility for what the UN has termed ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. In Brazil and South Africa, groups have been used to spread negative campaigning and false information. These groups offer even less scrutiny than relatively open network such as Facebook. More than a million WhatsApp groups were set up in Brazil to promote candidates in the recent election. Among these was the far-right former Army Captain Jair Bolsonaro who used social groups to compensate for the relative absence of mainstream TV coverage.

The overall research found, in general, that those who join Facebook or WhatsApp groups tend to be better educated and more politically committed, coming from the far-right or the far-left rather than from the political center. Men are slightly more likely to join a news or political group on Facebook, at 16 per cent compared to 12 per cent of female users; the same is broadly true of WhatsApp.

Facebook itself has belatedly invested in collaborations with fact-checkers, digital literacy campaigns, and made it harder to send mass messages within WhatsApp. However, by its nature, a closed group cannot be subject to the same scrutiny as one which regulators, journalists, researchers, and others can view. It seems clear that not only will publishers have to get to grips with their news being shared in opaque closed platforms, but so too will regulators and human rights organizations.

References

Boadle, A. (2018). Facebook's WhatsApp flooded with fake news in Brazil election. *Reuters*, 20 October 2010. Available: https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-brazil-election-whatsapp-explainer/facebooks-whatsapp-flooded-with-fake-news-in-brazil-election-idUKKCN1MU0UZ

Nemer, D. (2018). The three types of WhatsApp users getting Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro elected. *The Guardian*, 25 October 2018. Available: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/25/brazil-president-jair-bolsonaro-whatsapp-fake-news

Welch, C. (2019). Read Mark Zuckerberg's letter on Facebook's privacy-focused future. *The Verge*, 06 March 2019. Available: https://www.theverge.com/2019/3/6/18253472/mark-zuckerberg-facebook-letter-privacy-encrypted-messaging

COMMENT: DISINFORMATION AND DIGITAL LITERACY

By Eileen Culloty

It's almost three years since "fake news" became a major talking point and the problem seems more intractable than ever. The major online platforms are awash with conspiracy theories, disinformation, and extremist propaganda. The alarming implications are evident across the world. Disinformation about vaccines is linked to a global rise in preventable diseases. Ireland had a threefold increase in measles cases between 2017 and 2018 (Pollak 2019). Just as troublingly, there is a global spike in far-right extremists pushing disinformation about minority groups (Newton 2018). Of course, such content always had a home online, but it was largely confined to fringe spaces where most people were unlikely to see it.

A major part of the problem is that social platforms amplify extreme content. This is an unintended consequence of algorithms that are designed to maintain our attention. Writing in The New York Times last year, Zeynep Tufekci noted that YouTube's recommendation algorithm "seems to have concluded that people are drawn to content that is more extreme than what they started with". So when someone seeks out a video about the flu vaccine, the recommendations will include anti-vaccination conspiracy theories.

The major social-media platforms have made some moves to address this issue. Facebook and Twitter both promised to reduce the prominence of anti-vaccine content. Political disinformation is more challenging and controversial. In the wake of terror attacks by white supremacists, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern convened a summit during which five major tech companies pledged to tackle extremist material. Unfortunately, we have seen such non-binding pledges before. Last September, the same companies committed to an EU code of practice for transparency in political advertising. However, the resulting actions of this self-regulatory standard are so far uninspiring (Mozilla 2019).

While there is a growing case for regulating the platforms, it must be acknowledged that content moderation is technically challenging (Sakuma 2019). Moreover, the motivations behind the promotion of extreme content extend far beyond technology to include issues of politics, social inequality, and education. This calls for multiple, overlapping countermeasures that are not confined to regulation.

The online practices of ordinary citizens are a crucial and somewhat overlooked node in the problem. Afterall, disinformation and extreme content only have an impact when ordinary citizens are willing to believe it and promote it among their peers. This year, the Digital News Report asked a series of questions about information quality and how people react in response to concerns about accuracy. Some 61 per cent of Irish online news consumers are concerned about about the reliability of online information. Yet, there is a gap between those who expressed concern and those who have taken action to address that concern.

To evaluate the reliability of a news story, 42 per cent of respondents compared multiple sources. This is a simple strategy, which is widely recommended by media literacy experts. On social media, it is especially important to check sources because, as previous Digital News Reports have shown, people often do not notice the source when a news item appears in their feed. Consequently, it is relatively easy for people to be duped by false articles that mimic the look of established news media or by the re-sharing of old articles.

Some people have begun to pay more attention to the reliability or reputation of sources: 22 per cent stopped using certain news sources due to concerns about accuracy and 32 per cent have become more reliant on sources that are considered reputable. Of course, what is considered reputable is somewhat subjective, but these actions indicate an awareness of basic media literacy principles.

Survey responses regarding the role of peers are especially interesting. Social platforms rely on information-sharing among peers, which creates a highly personal environment for evaluating information. That is, we are more likely to trust information we receive from peers and less likely to directly confront peers about the information they share. To stop the spread of disinformation, these social dynamics need to shift. It is promising to find that 26 per cent of Irish respondents declined to share a news story because they doubted its accuracy and 25 per cent ignored news when they were unsure about the trustworthiness of the person who shared it.

Only a quarter of respondents are currently taking such actions, but we can hope to see evidence of increased media literacy in the coming years. Last March, Media Literacy Ireland launched the Be Media Smart campaign to encourage people to check the reliability of information. Such campaigns are an important part of promoting the skills and competencies that are necessary to make informed decisions about media content. The DCU FuJo Institute is leading a major research project (called Provenance) to address this issue through automated content verification and a 'verification indicator' for social media users. The goal of the project is to intervene in the attention cycle of social media by encouraging people to think "is this legitimate?" or "where is this coming from?" before they hit like, share, or retweet.

References

Mozilla (2019). Facebook's Ad Archive API is Inadequate. *The Mozilla Blog*, 29 April 2019. Available: https://blog.mozilla.org/blog/2019/04/29/facebooks-ad-archive-api-is-inadequate/
Newton, C. (2018). Why social media is friend to far-right politicians around the world. *The Verge*, 30 October 2018. Available: https://www.theverge.com/2018/10/30/18040510/stochastic-terrorism-democratic-recession-gab

Pollak, S. (2019). Number of Irish measles cases more than triples between 2017 and 2018. *The Irish Times*, 25 April 2019. Available: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/number-of-irish-measles-cases-more-than-triples-between-2017-and-2018-1.3871238

Provenance (H2020 Project): www.provenanceh2020.eu

Sakuma, A. (2019). Why tech companies failed to keep the New Zealand shooter's extremism from going viral. Vox, 17 March 2019. Available: https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/3/17/18269617/new-zealand-shooting-mosque-online-extremism-tech

Tufekci, Z. (2018). YouTube, the Great Radicalizer, *The New York Times*, 10 March 2018. Available: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/opinion/sunday/youtube-politics-radical.html