REUTERS INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF JOURNALISM | UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2023

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TikTok gains even more ground with younger audiences as Facebook become less important for news

With interest and trust in news still falling in many countries, economic downturn put further pressure on news business models

This year's Reuters Institute Digital News Report provides evidence that news audiences are becoming more dependent on digital and social platforms, putting further pressure on both ad-based and subscription business models of news organisations at a time when both household and company spending is being squeezed.

The report documents how video-based content, distributed via networks such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube are becoming more important for news, especially in parts of the Global South, while legacy platforms such as Facebook are losing influence.

Both interest and trust in news continue to fall in many countries as the connection between journalism and much of the public continues to fray. There is evidence that audiences continue to *selectively avoid* important stories such as the war in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis as they cut back on depressing news and look to protect their mental health.

These are some of the conclusions of the 12th edition of the Digital News Report. The report is embargoed until Wednesday 14 June 00.01 BST. You can download a PDF version in this link. It will be live at www.digitalnewsreport.org/2023

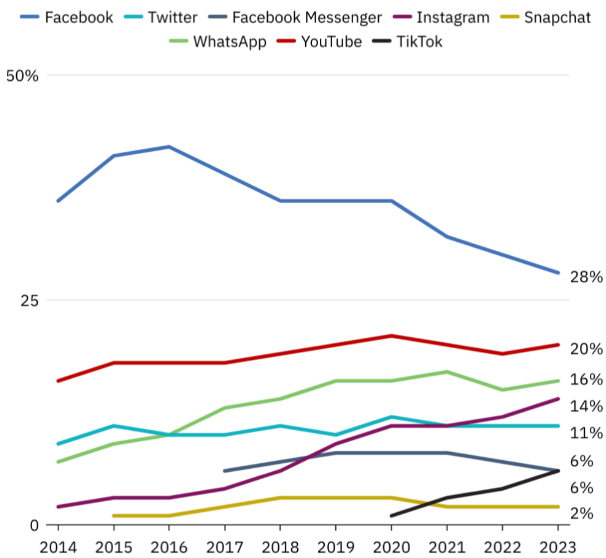
Younger audiences, platform shifts and the implications for news

Facebook is becoming much less important as a source of news – and by implication as a driver of traffic to news websites. Just 28% say they accessed news via Facebook in 2023 compared with 42% in 2016. This decline is partly driven by Facebook pulling back from news and partly by the way that video-based networks like YouTube and TikTok are increasingly capturing much of the attention of younger users. Weekly news usage for Twitter has remained relatively stable in most countries following Elon Musk's takeover, with usage of alternative networks, such as Mastodon, extremely low. TikTok is the fastest growing social network in our survey, used by 44% of 18–24-year-olds for any purpose (and by 20% for news). As the table below shows, the Chinese owned app is most heavily used in parts of Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Proportion that used each social network for news in the last week

2014–2023

Average of selected countries



Q12B. Which, if any, of the following have you used for news in the last week? *Base: Total sample in each country-year in UK, USA, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Australia, Brazil, and Ireland ≈ 2000. Note: No data from Australia or Ireland in 2014.*

TikTok resonates strongly with 18-24s

Average of 46 countries

TikTok

44% use for any purpose

20% use for news
5 points more than in 2022

Countries with highest and lowest TikTok use

Highest adoption	For news	For all
Peru	30%	48%
Thailand	30%	51%
Kenya	29%	54%
Malaysia	24%	42%
South Africa	22%	50%
Philippines	21%	42%
Lowest adoption	**For news**	**For all**
Denmark	2%	11%
Japan	3%	9%
Germany	3%	12%

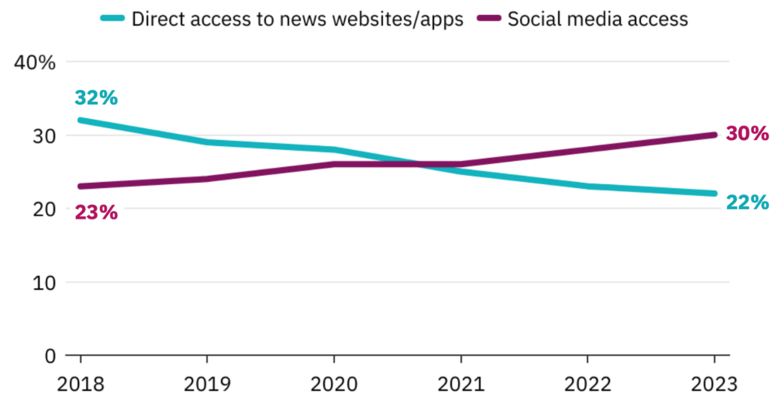
Q12B. Which, if any, of the following have you used for news in the last week? *Base: Total sample in each market ≈ 2000. Note: TikTok has been banned in India and does not operate in Hong Kong.*

The report shows that users of TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat tend to pay more attention to celebrities and social media influencers than they do to journalists or media companies when it comes to news topics. This marks a sharp contrast with legacy social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, where news organisations still attract most attention and lead conversations.

At the same time, stated preferences by audiences to directly visit news websites continue to decline. Across 46 markets, the proportion that say their main access point is via a news website or app has fallen from 32% in 2018 to 22% in 2023, while dependence on social media access has grown.

Main way of getting news has shifted from direct access to social media

All markets



Other gateways

All markets. 2023 (change from 2018)

Search	25% (+1)
Mobile alerts	9% (+3)
Aggregators	8% (+2)
Email	5% (-1)

Q10a_new2017_rc. Which of these was the main way in which you came across news in the last week? *Base: All who used a news gateway in the last week in each market-year ≈ 2000. Note: Number of markets grew from 36 in 2018 to 46 from 2021 onwards.*

Reuters Institute Director Rasmus Nielsen outlines the challenge for traditional media:

> *"Younger generations increasingly eschew direct discovery for all but the most appealing brands. They have little interest in many conventional news offers oriented towards older generations' habits, interests, and values, and instead embrace the more personality-based, participatory, and personalised options offered by social media, often looking beyond legacy platforms to new entrants (many of whom drive few referrals to media organisations and do not prioritise news)."*

Business pressures grow compounded by cost-of-living crisis

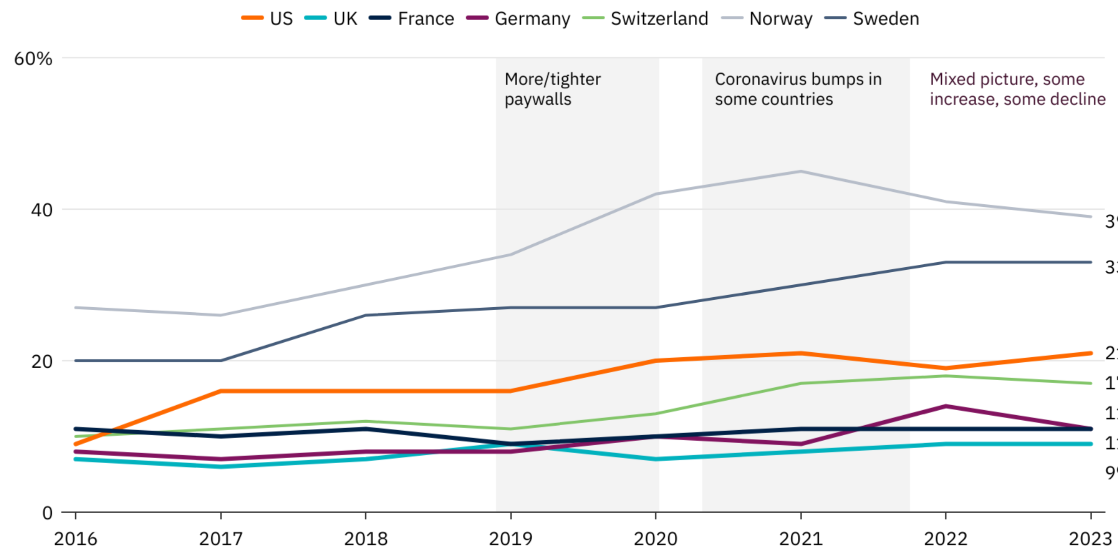
Generational and platform shifts have made things even more difficult for a news industry trying to deal with the fallout from a pandemic, a war in Europe, and a global squeeze on household spending. The report finds that growth in payment for online news has stalled in many markets, with more than a third of subscribers (39%) across more than 20 countries saying they have cancelled or renegotiated their news subscriptions in the last year. In qualitative interviews, the need to save money was by far the biggest reason given:

> *"I was spending too much on online subscriptions. I wanted to cut some costs, mainly. I just couldn't afford it anymore."*
> ***Female, 24, USA***

Despite this, the headline numbers have remained relatively stable in most countries with special offers and lower prices attracting some new customers. Around four in ten paid for online news in Norway (39%) in the last year, a third in Sweden (33%), a fifth (21%) in the United States, but just a tenth in Germany (11%), France (11%), and the UK (9%).

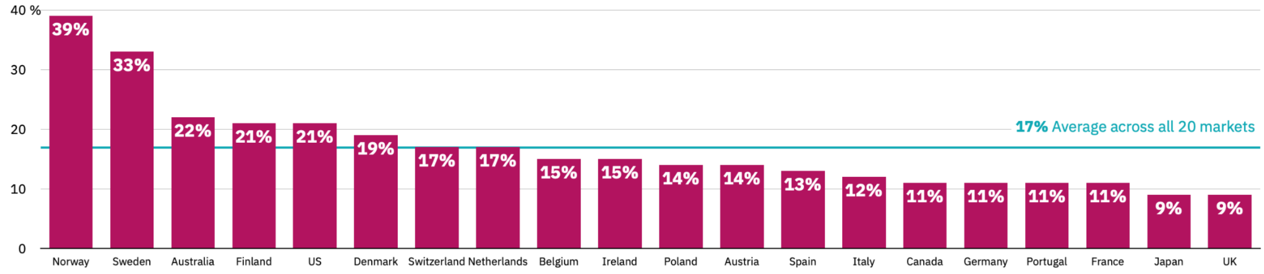
Proportion paying for news content over time

Selected countries



Proportion paying for news

Selected countries



Q7a. Have you paid for online news content, or accessed a paid-for online news service in the last year? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one-off payment for an article or app or e-edition). Base: Total sample in each country-year ≈ 2000.

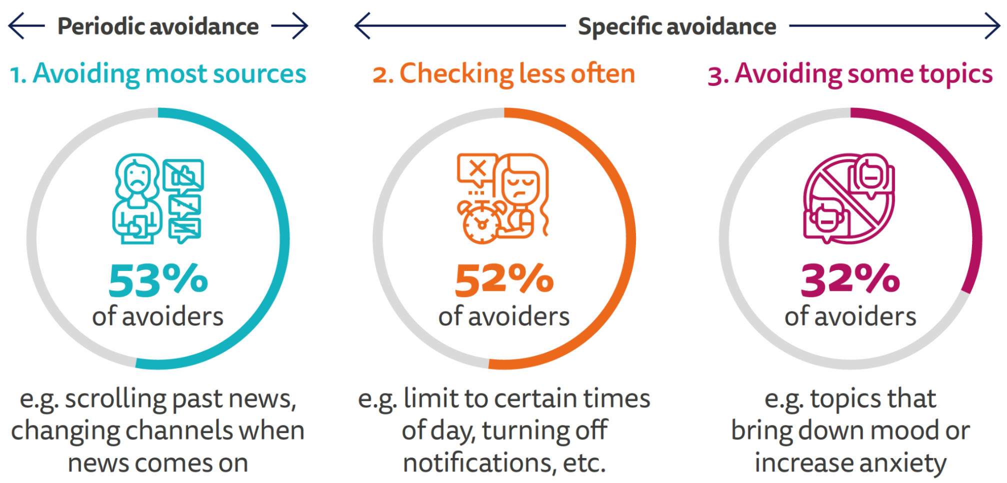
The report highlights how important news subscriptions are to some, but also how fragile the arrangement is for others. In exploring motivations for subscription, the report finds that while many people are increasingly price conscious, others subscribe based on either a long-standing relationship, or the sense that the outlet speaks *to* them and *for* them. Additional features such as games or podcasts are a motivation for a smaller proportion of customers with bundled subscriptions becoming more popular.

News avoidance and lack of interest

The report finds declining interest in news in a large number of countries – particularly with younger and hard to reach groups – and high levels of *selective* news avoidance (people who say they actively do it sometimes or often), with the headline rate at 36%, seven percentage points above the figure in 2017 but two points lower than last year. In qualitative interviews, many say that news stories are too repetitive or too 'emotionally draining'. Amongst news avoiders, the report notes that around half (53%) try to avoid all news in a *periodic* way with others being more *specific* by reducing the amount of news by checking less often (52%) or avoiding difficult topics (32%):

Proportion of news avoiders that do each of the following

All markets



Avoidance_behaviours_2023. You said that you try to actively avoid news. Which of the following, if any, do you do? Please select all that apply. Base: Those who sometimes or often avoid the news in all markets = 33,469.

Avoiders are much more likely to look for positive news or solutions-based approaches than constant updates on the big stories of the day. Lead author Nic Newman says:

> *"It is clear that many websites and apps are optimised for those that are super-engaged with every twist and turn of today's news (and politics) agenda. But these approaches also seem to be turning large sections of the public away – with potential long-term implications for civic and democratic engagement."*

Seven key findings from the 2023 report

On trust in news. Trust in the news has fallen across markets by a further 2 percentage points in the last year, reversing in many countries the gains made at the height of the Coronavirus pandemic. On average, four in ten of our total sample (40%) say they trust most news most of the time. Finland remains the country with the highest levels of overall trust (69%), while Greece (19%) has the lowest. The United States (32%) has seen a 6-point increase in trust in news as politics has become a bit less divisive under Joe Biden's presidency, but trust remains amongst the lowest in our survey.

On media criticism. The report shows how politicians in countries such as the United States, Mexico and the Philippines have become the leading source of criticism of journalists and of the news media, ahead of ordinary people, and influencers. Social media is by far the most common way people say they are exposed to criticism. Up to 49% of those who report exposure to criticism across markets say this is where they see or hear it, followed by discussions with people they know (36%).

On how audiences see algorithms for news. Much of the public is sceptical of the algorithms used to select what they see via search engines, social media, and other platforms. Less than a third (30%) say that having stories selected for them on the basis of previous consumption is a good way to get news, 6 points lower than when we last asked the same question in 2016. Despite this, on average, users still slightly prefer news selected this way to that chosen by editors or journalists (27%), suggesting that worries about algorithms are part of a wider concern about news and how it is selected.

On misinformation and disinformation. Across markets, well over half (56%) say they worry about identifying the difference between what is real and fake on the internet when it comes to news – up 2 percentage points on last year. Those who say they *mainly* use social media as a source of news are much more worried (64%) than people who don't use it at all (50%) while many countries with the highest levels of concern also tend to have high levels of social media news use.

On participation in news online. Despite hopes that the internet could widen democratic debate, we find that fewer people are participating in online news than in the recent past. Across markets, only around a fifth (22%) are now active participators, with around half (47%) not participating in news at all. In the UK and the United States, the proportion of active participators has fallen by more than 10 points since 2016. Across countries we find that this group tends to be male, better educated, and more partisan in their political views.

On public service news. Public media brands remain among those with the highest levels of trust in many Northern European countries, but reach has been declining with younger audiences. This is important because we find that those that use these services most frequently are more likely to see them as important *personally* and *for society*. These findings suggest that maintaining the breadth of public service reach remains critical for future legitimacy, especially with younger groups.

On news podcasts. News podcasting continues to resonate with educated and younger audiences, but remains a minority activity overall. Around a third (34%) access a podcast monthly, based on a group of 20 countries, but only 12% access a show on news and current affairs. Our research finds that deep-dive podcasts inspired by the *New York Times*' The Daily and extended chat shows are the most widely consumed across markets. We also identify the growing popularity of video-led or hybrid news podcasts. The report contains details of top news podcasts in a number of countries including the UK, US, and Australia.

Methodology

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Survey conducted in 46 markets; United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, Australia, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Peru, Mexico, Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa.

Total sample size was 93,895 adults, with around 2,000 per market. Fieldwork was undertaken at the end of January/start of February 2023.

The survey was carried out online. The data were weighted to targets set on age, gender and region (and education and political leaning where possible), to reflect the total population. The sample is broadly reflective of the population who have access to the internet in each country.

Data from India, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa are representative of younger English-speakers and not the national population, because it is not possible to reach other groups in a representative way using an online survey. The survey was fielded mostly in English in these markets, and restricted to ages 18 to 50 in Kenya and Nigeria. Findings should not be taken to be nationally representative in these countries.

The use of a non-probability sampling approach means that it is not possible to compute a conventional 'margin of error' for individual data points. However, differences of +/- 2 percentage points (pp) or less from individual countries are very unlikely to be statistically significant and should be interpreted with a very high degree of caution.

Contact

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More information on the 2023 Digital News Report

The research and report can also be found on our website from 14th June including slide-packs, charts, and raw data tables, with a licence that encourages reuse. A fuller description of the methodology is available along with the complete questionnaire.

Sponsors of this year's report include the Google News Initiative, BBC News, Ofcom, Edelman UK, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (now the Coimisiún na Meán), the Media Industry Research Foundation of Finland, the Fritt Ord Foundation in Norway, the Dutch Media Authority (CvdM), the Korea Press Foundation, Japanese public broadcaster NHK, and the Reuters News Agency as well as our academic sponsors at the Leibniz Institute for Media Research/Hans Bredow Institute, Hamburg, the University of Navarra in Spain, the University of Canberra, the Centre d'études sur les médias, Quebec, Canada, and Roskilde University in Denmark. Code for Africa has joined our network of sponsors this year. The Fundación Gabo is supporting the translation of the report into Spanish.

About the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism is dedicated to exploring the future of journalism worldwide. The Institute receives core funding from the Thomson Reuters Foundation and is based in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford. It was launched in November 2006 and developed from the Reuters Journalist Fellowship Programme, established at Oxford almost 40 years ago. See http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/

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About YouGov

YouGov is an international market research agency and pioneer of market research through online methods. YouGov has a panel of 6 million people worldwide, including 1.2 million in the UK representing all ages, socio-economic groups and other demographic types.