



News Literacy Report:

Lessons in building public confidence and trust



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Background

Earlier this year, Impress carried out extensive public engagement research in collaboration with the School of Media and Communication at the University of Leeds and the School of Humanities and Journalism at the University of Derby, surveying 3044 representative respondents across the UK and carrying out in-depth focus group work.

This study builds on previous academic research which suggested that greater levels of public understanding of how journalism

works and how it is regulated – the standards and ethical principles guiding journalists – may increase levels of trust in journalism¹. Following on from the earlier study that engaged with journalists, regulators and NGOs in the UK and Europe, the current project piloted a survey and focus groups to engage with news audiences to assess public understanding and attitudes to press ethics, standards and regulation².

Methodology

The nationally representative survey was administered by Savanta ComRes online in March 2022 with 3044 respondents from across the UK. The questionnaire explored four themes:

- * How do the public understand the role and function of journalism in society?
- * What do the public understand about how the news media is regulated?
- * What do the public understand about regulatory codes and the normative principles underlying them?
- * How do the public think regulators might help journalists do a better job and facilitate trust in the news? (Firmstone and Steel, 2022)³

The 42 questions in the survey were wide ranging to capture nuances in attitudes to and understandings of the different regulatory environments, knowledge of journalism, accountability mechanisms, and responsibility for regulation and oversight of the news media. For example, some questions focus specifically on the print news media whereas others ask more broadly about the news media and journalism. Five focus groups were conducted with a total of 22 participants recruited from the survey based on their responses to specific questions. The five groups varied in their perceived knowledge and interest in regulation, support for the public having a voice in regulation, gender, age and ethnicity⁴. The focus groups were conducted online and explored a range of issues to unpack the survey data in more depth. Quotes from participants have been used sparingly in this report and a further report will provide a detailed analysis of the groups. Due to rounding, some percentage figures may have a margin of error up to 1%.

¹ See Steel et al., 2021; UKRI, 2022.

² The project received funding from the University of Leeds's ESRC Impact Acceleration Account, the University of Derby's SURE Impact Accelerator Fund and Impress.

³ Previous research about ethics, trust, and public expectations of journalism were considered as part of designing the survey (Ward, 2005; Strömbäck et al., 2020; Ogbebor, 2021; Van Der Wurff and Schoenbach, 2014).

⁴ The five groups comprised: 1) low knowledge of and interest in regulation, mixed gender and age; 2) high knowledge of and interest in regulation, male, over 50; 3) mixed interest and knowledge, female, under 40; 4) mixed interest and knowledge, from ethnic minority background, mixed age; 5) high agreement with public having a voice in regulation, men, over 60.

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Introduction

In today's media landscape, the importance of understanding the public's relationship with the news and journalism is as important as it has ever been. Journalism is changing. Audience engagement is now intertwined with news production in multiple ways, from crowdsourced investigations and citizen journalism. These changes have been wrought by the dominance (and decline) of advertising revenue in news publishing, click-driven traffic models, and intimate user interaction (from familiarity to hostility) on social media.

The spread of inaccurate and misleading information threatens our shared sense of facts and reality, undermining our communities and our democracy. Journalism might have been the public's guiding light in the new landscape of abundant digital information, and it still can be. As we will see in this report, however, the UK public are disillusioned with journalism and struggle to confidently understand the role that it plays in society. They still believe in journalism's potential to deliver a variety of benefits, but they are not currently seeing the UK news media deliver on this. The public are calling for increased transparency from the sector and want regulatory solutions that build trust so that they can support and consume news with confidence.

This report will present the findings of our research, outlining current news consumption habits and values and the key challenges this presents for news journalism and regulators, before going on to consider some solutions for addressing these challenges.

In **Chapter 1**, we provide a snapshot of the UK public's current news habits, looking at how members of the public use, feel about, and interact with local and national news in their daily lives.

Chapter 2 looks at the profound challenges the news sector, journalism, and regulators are currently facing. The chapter explores the public's disillusionment with news journalism today, public perceptions of news production and how they believe it currently works. Further, the chapter will look at the public's flagging trust in news journalism as well as current literacy levels surrounding news production and regulation.

News literacy is the ability to critically process, analyse and evaluate news content, editorial decision making and journalistic processes, ethical standards and how news is regulated. Its relation to broader considerations of media literacy is dynamic, as contemporary media and understandings of literacy evolve, and news literacy is tied more inherently to ethical literacy. We will see that levels of news literacy are, as it stands, incoherent and low across the board.

Chapter 3 will look at potential solutions to these challenges. We will look at public support for independent regulation and the tools that it offers. The chapter will also examine how the public feel their trust can be improved, exploring the collaborative role that regulators and news publishers can play in upholding journalistic standards and providing transparency while engaging a public that feels strongly about these issues.

The report will conclude by assessing how the sector might better address the challenges raised in this report, through improved public engagement, education about journalism standards and regulatory solutions.

The key findings are:

- * Media use is changing, and the public have high hopes for the news sector.
 - * These hopes are currently unfulfilled, and the public are unconvinced that the news is meeting its potential.
 - * Trust is low, and many are still to make up their mind on the reliability of newer online news publishers.
 - * The public support a news sector that is independently regulated, however current news literacy levels are low, and the public is confused about how news works and how it is regulated.
 - * Effective, independent press regulation and higher news literacy have the potential to rebuild public trust and confidence in the news, ensuring a strong, independent news sector.
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CHAPTER 1

Media use, the value of news & social trust

Media use is changing, and everyone knows it. In this research we wanted to explore and better understand the public's relationship with news media and how they interact and engage with it day-to-day.

- * Each generation is moving increasingly towards phone news and social media-first news feeds, with interactive engagement being a key aspect of modern patterns of news consumption.
- * Both newer platforms and older news outlets have a significant role to play in shaping the national conversation, despite the apparent dominance of broadcast media and national titles.
- * The public see news journalism as a key pillar of society and hold it in high regard.

This chapter builds a snapshot of how the UK public currently accesses and uses the news.

We'll look at the frequency of news use, how people interact with the news, their main news sources, how the news fits into daily lives, what value it brings, and the current general trust levels across society.

Media use & habits

The research tells us that when the average news user in the UK wakes up in the morning, they might turn on the TV to see the latest headlines while they get ready, or they might sit and open their phone while they eat. When they open their phone, they might check their notifications or they might go straight for their daily news dose, whether through an app, aggregator, or news feed.

This hypothetical news user checks the news a couple of times a day. They will come across local news maybe once a day. Alongside a daily check, they check national news more often (64% of people access national news daily, with 50% using local news daily). When respondents were asked to comment on how they experience national and local news, we found that they

were slightly more likely to share national news stories than local stories once a week or more (22% to 20% respectively). They see news that informs them and holds powerful people to account more often in national publications than in local news. That said, they are still quite critical of their news sources, as we'll see below.

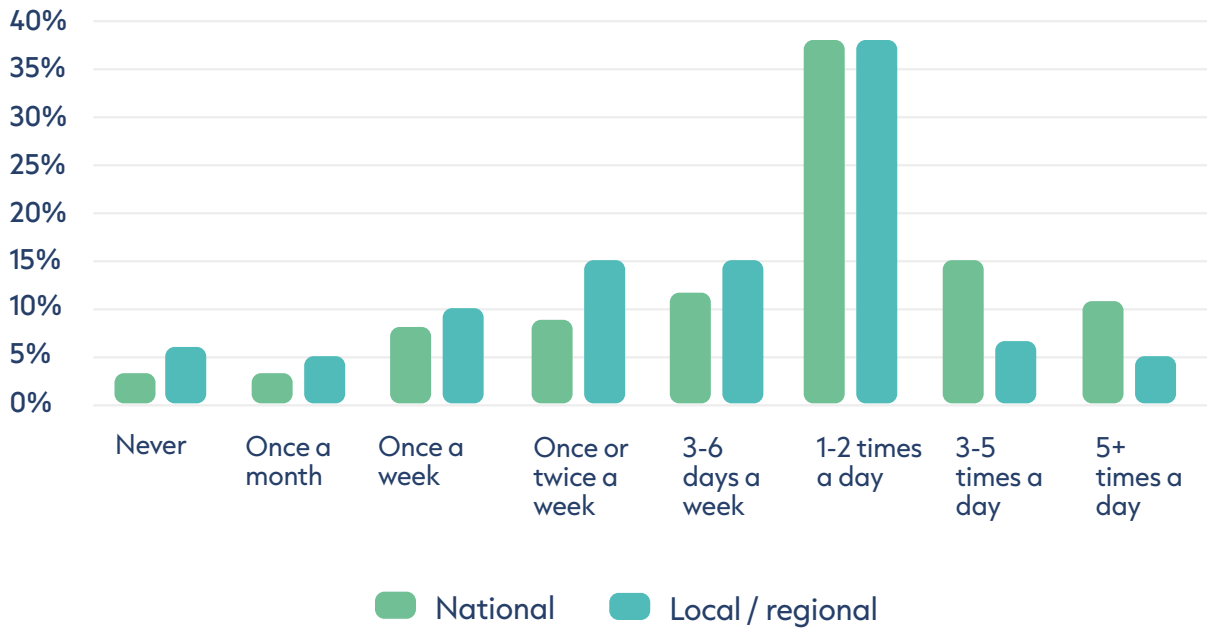
Over the course of their day, they are more likely than not to comment on a national news story; more likely than if it is a local news story by comparison. Once a week, the average UK news user is more than likely to share stories to their own news feeds, or every couple of months when a particularly noteworthy article pops up.

In the cases of local/regional and national

news, people most commonly take in the news around them one to two times a day, with 38% of the public taking in both. They are less likely to think their local news has a hidden agenda, spreads mis/disinformation, or promotes hatred or violence than its

national counterpart. Local and regional news, however, are used less regularly. For those who use news multiple times a day, national news is more likely to be the go-to source.

How often do you usually read, listen to, or watch national or local/regional news?



TV is by far the most used news source by the public, with over half of people citing it as the main way of getting their news. 32% of people say online outlets are their main source of news, while both radio and print are the main ways for less than 10% of people. There is a clear preference for TV and print among older age groups, with TV reaching as high as 65% for 55+ year olds.

Online (particularly phone usage) is more prolific among younger age groups. Online use moves from 48% among 18-24 all the way down to 6% among 75+, as might be expected. There is a significant drop in online phone news use between the ages of 35-44 and 45-54, reflecting the onset of digitally native generations. Radio news use is steady across all age groups except in 18-24, where it is below average. As we will see, however, news use is nuanced beyond first choices, especially given the variety of sources we have available in today’s news landscape. Different social media platforms facilitate

different types of news engagement. Facebook is by far the most used source of news on social media, twice as much as runner-up Instagram. Facebook is the only platform where unofficial news use outperforms established outlets, while Twitter is (relatively) used more for finding news from established news organisations and journalists. A sizable proportion (over 35%) also say that they don’t use social media for news, almost double the amount that use Instagram or Twitter individually as their main source of news on social media.

Online-only news is a dominant source of local and national news for 13-14% of people. While national newspapers outdo any individual online-only publisher, online-only publishers collectively are accessed slightly more often than The Daily Mail (the highest selected national newspaper). While this collection of online-only publishers is fragmented, this indicates that its collective voice is influential in the news landscape.

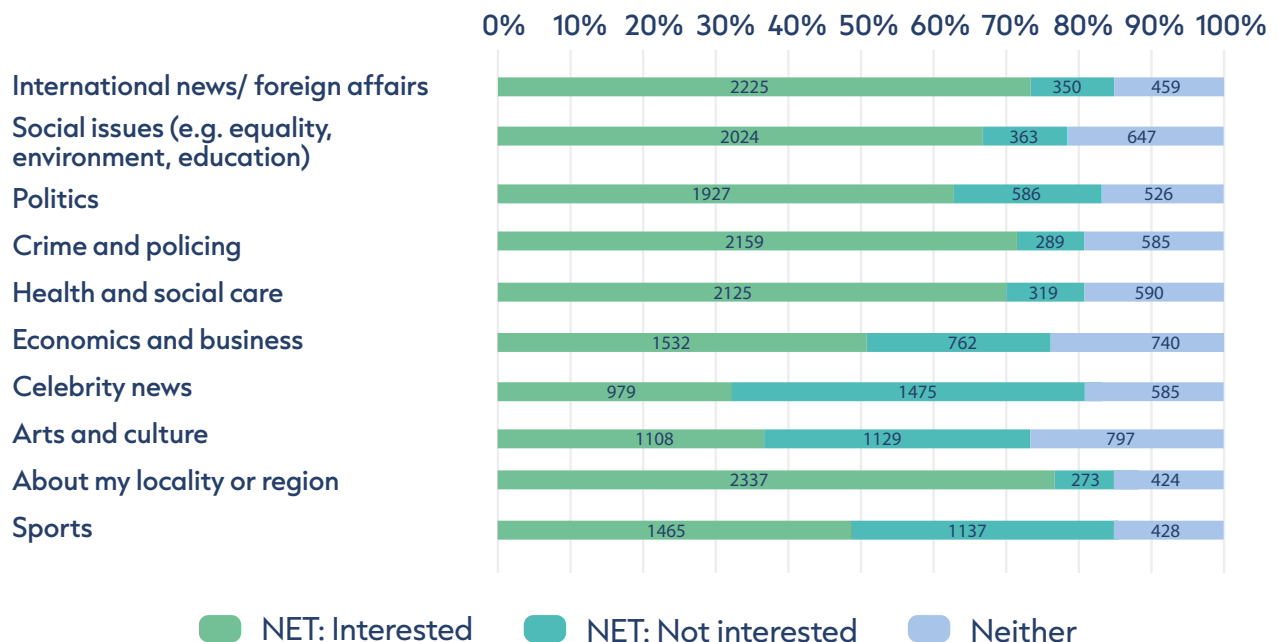
While TV is still dominant, both newspapers and radio are more commonly used than they first appear, with independent online-only publishers on par with commercial radio and close to the levels of use of BBC local radio. While radio and print are rarely people’s first port of call for news, they are still part of the mixed news diet and, alongside online news, still play a significant role in the national conversation.

Almost half of people make a deliberate decision to access the news, and as we’ve already seen and will continue to see, age groups differ significantly. 22% of 18-24-year-olds say that they mostly make a deliberate decision to access the news. This slides as high as 72% of those aged 75+. Older groups are far more likely to deliberately seek out news while younger groups are more likely to come across news while doing other things, mainly when spending time on social media.

The top topic of interest is local or regional news, closely followed by international news, social issues, crime, and then health. Younger groups take a slightly stronger interest in social issues (which are also more likely to interest those with higher educational qualifications) and arts and culture, with older groups far less interested in celebrity news. Sports is the one topic that remains relatively even across the demographic board. As educational qualifications increase, there’s a higher tendency towards politics, business, and international news, with similar dynamics echoing those of higher socio-economic groups.

Online users differ significantly from each other on celebrity news, with 42% of phone users ‘interested’ compared to only 17% of other-online device users; this may also reflect the age gap differential between phone and other-online device users.

To what extent are you interested or not in the news media and journalism about the following topics?



All of this has important consequences for news publishers. As we will see in the coming chapters, many people are still undecided on how much they trust news online, and it is only younger groups that feel any degree of confidence in it – which may be associated with their greater propensity to access news

via their phone. This confidence should be tempered somewhat, however, by the finding that younger groups tend to have a more passive relationship with news.

While there are plenty of discussions surrounding digital dominance and social

media’s role in news, the reality is more nuanced.

Print news falls behind, with TV out in front as the preferred primary news source. Many, however, particularly younger groups, experience news in tandem with other activities, as digital services take over many aspects of daily life. Traditional media still has a significant role in the national conversation, while other mediums have an

News roles & principles

We have learned that in today’s diverse multimedia landscape, there is no single way that people experience the news. News may engage people with their local community, inform them of significant global events, or provide some light entertainment when commuting to work. Many use the news actively, and others come across it while

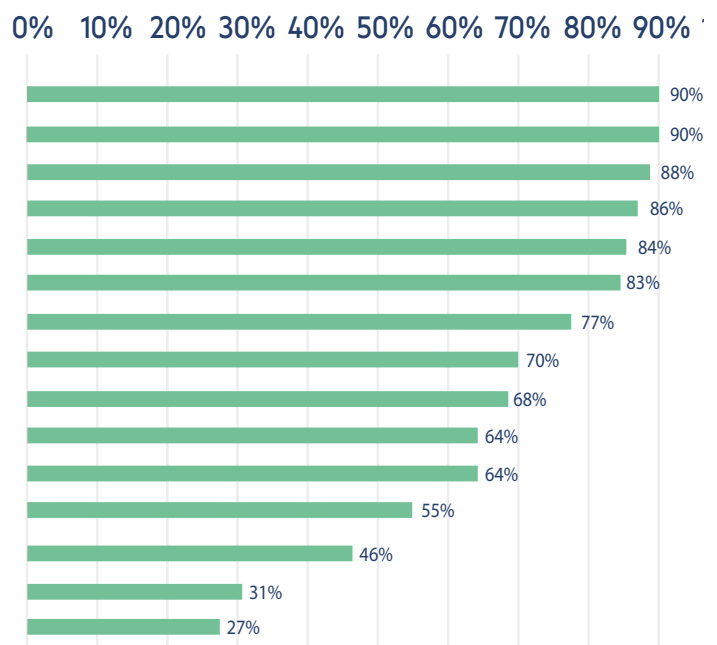
increasing part to play in determining the public’s relationship to the news landscape.

Given what we know about the public’s news use, how they are accessing news, and what they are interested in, we will explore how this shapes what role they think news plays in society and whether the news sector fulfils that role, and finally, what values they think news providers should work to when engaging in these roles.

doing other things. Many regularly comment on and interact with national news, while checking in on local news once a week or so. While interactions with news are varied, there is strong shared consensus amongst the public about the role that news plays in society, and what values news providers should be guided by.

How important are the following roles that journalists and news publications could play in UK society?

- To inform
- To be balanced and unbiased
- To be accurate
- To highlight wrong-doing
- To hold powerful people and institutions to account
- To educate
- To speak up for minorities
- To advocate on behalf of the majority of the public
- To help people form opinions
- To be entertaining and engaging
- To reflect the views of the audience
- To reflect the values of the news organisation
- To reflect the opinions of the news organisation
- To provide information on the private lives of celebrities
- To support a political party



Informative, accurate, and balanced reporting are seen as the top roles that the news can play, with all three being overwhelmingly popular amongst the public. Again, there are multiple roles that the public feel the news can and should play. That said, political partisanship, invasions of

privacy, and opinion pieces sit comfortably at the bottom, with all three seen as significantly low priorities compared to the overwhelmingly popular roles of accurately informing the public, presenting balanced reporting, and exposing the actions of those in power.

At the same time, when we asked the public to reflect on their news habits, the public do not necessarily feel that their use is always particularly balanced or free from bias, as expressed by these two focus group participants:

“ I think we’re all quite guilty of – even though we know [...] we should check a lot of sources – merely aligning ourselves to a certain political view. [...] I’m guilty of it too, like I read the newspapers that I mostly relate to politically and automatically discredit ones that I don’t like [or] maybe don’t like the view of.”

“ We all sort of say [...] we want news to be black and white and, you know, just tell us what’s happening and then we can form our own opinions. But we probably wouldn’t read it if it was, as it’d be quite boring.”

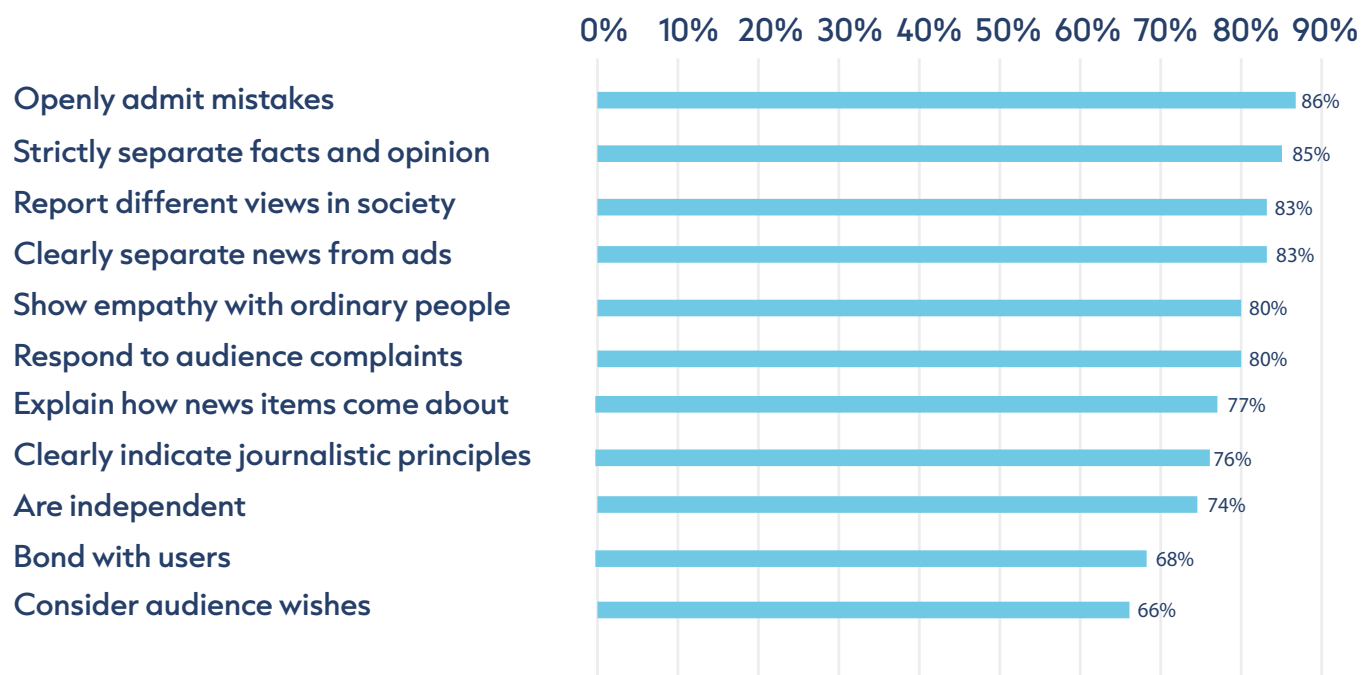
Therefore, while there is a shared consensus on what role news should play, the public are also aware of some of the contradictions of their expectations; that while they think

the news should be accurate and balanced, and less so peddling in opinion, political partisanship, and celebrity gossip – they also recognise that they themselves choose to engage in partisan self-selection of news and may not always find balanced or neutral reporting very engaging.

There is a strong, shared consensus around what values should guide news. The top values are: openly admitting mistakes, separating facts, opinions, and adverts, and reporting different views. Values such as user engagement and empathy, responding to complaints, and explaining news processes are comfortably supported by more than 70% of people. There is a strong sense that news should be transparent, open, accountable, empathetic, and independent.

This public consensus illustrates the high esteem with which the public regard the potential of news journalism, making delivering on these principles key to justifying its existence. We will come to address whether the public think the news is fulfilling these roles and whether news providers are perceived as having these values.

To what extent is it important to you that the work of journalists and the news media are guided by the following values?¹ “That they...”



¹ These options are replicated from a study by van der Wurff and Schoenbach (2014).

CHAPTER 2

Challenges for news journalism

Our research with the public has drawn out three key challenges facing news journalism:

- * The public are disillusioned and do not feel that the news is aligned with roles or values that are seen as important.
- * Trust levels are systemically low, however, regulated media is far more trusted. Such disillusionment and lack of trust can have profound risks for the sustainability of the free press.
- * Literacy confidence is low. The public do not feel confident in their ability to understand how the news works, what news standards are, or how the news is regulated.

Disillusionment with journalism in society

Building on what we learned in Chapter 1 about news use and values, we will now look at how the public feel the news is fulfilling the hopes they have for it. The public are actively invested in and strongly support quality journalism. For now, however, they are alienated from the news process and feel that the news could be achieving far more than it currently is.

There was an average 30% drop in expectations when we asked the public how effectively they considered news is fulfilling values they think are important. This means that, overall, news is failing to live up to public expectations. They saw the most significant failures were in relation to openly admitting mistakes and responding to audience complaints, clearly signalling that lack of accountability is the most prominent issue for the public.

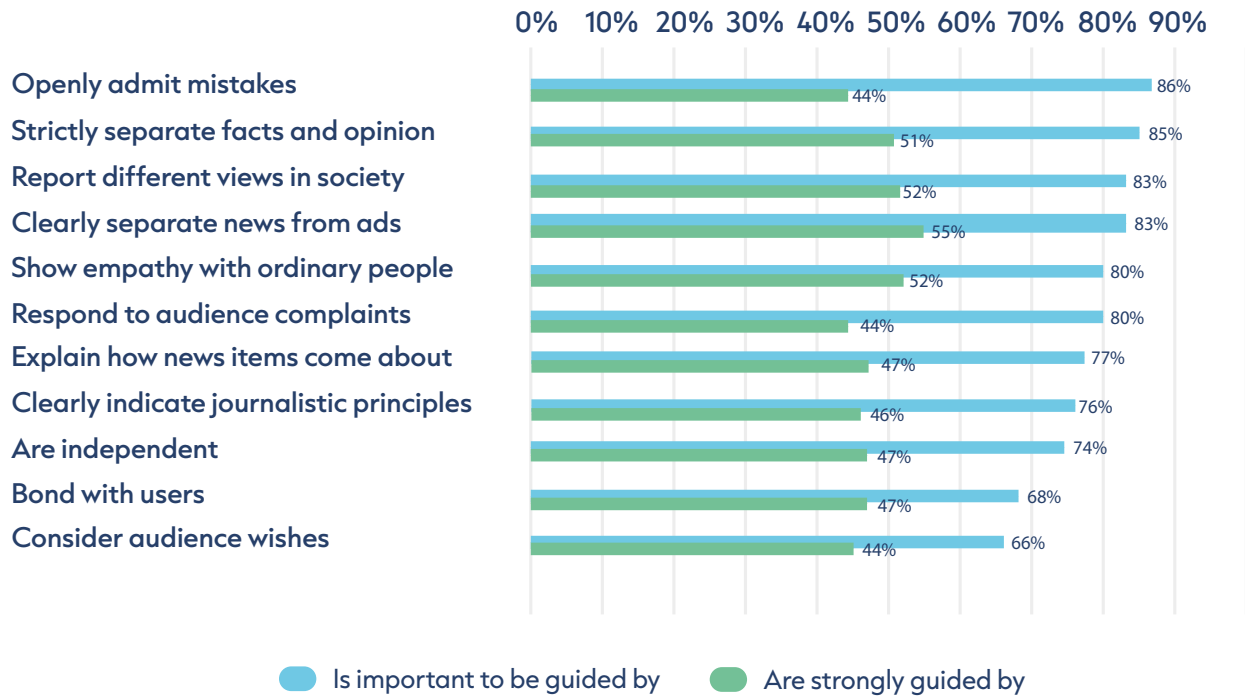
However, none of the values considered were regarded as being 'met' by any more than

55% of people, meaning that news providers are clearly struggling to convince the public that the news adheres to the values that the public think are important. This failure to meet public expectations is problematic for publishers and regulators who are invested in serving the needs of the public.

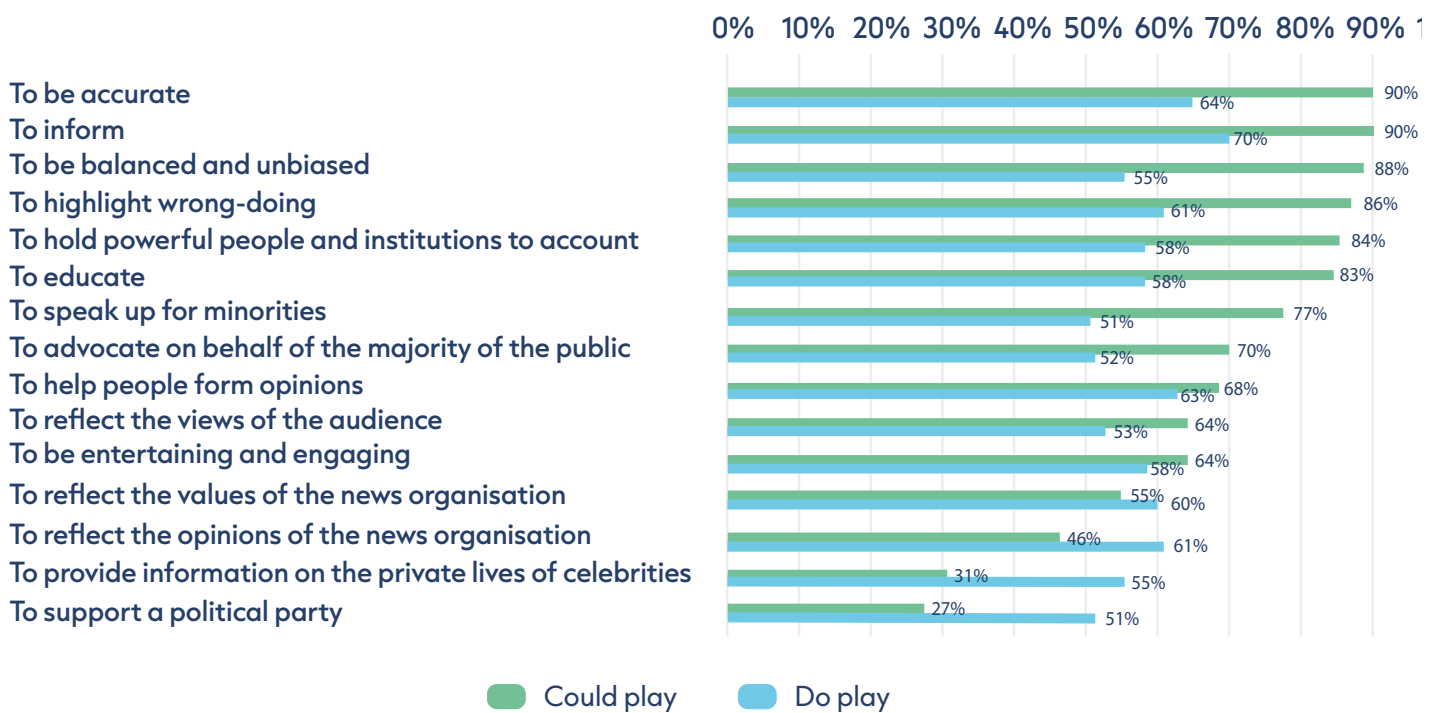
It is important to note that this failure is not unique to the press or online news. While trust levels vary (as we will see later), these value failures are constant across those who use TV, radio, print, and online news. The views of those who never use news and those who distrust the media are also broadly aligned with the majority, meaning that there is at least some consensus across the board about the failure of the news industry to meet these values, which may also relate to wider societal issues around trust and legitimacy.

The only areas of journalism and news publication that the public feel are

To what extent is it important that news media is guided by the following values, compared to, how strongly or weakly, if at all, do you think news providers and journalists operate according to these guiding values?¹ "That they..."



How important are the following roles that journalists and news publications could play in UK society? Compared to how strongly do you think news providers and journalists in the UK operate according to the following values?



¹ These options are replicated from a study by van der Wurff and Schoenbach (2014).

exceeding expectations are celebrity news, political partisanship, and agenda sharing. However, even entertainment news is falling short of expectations. This suggests that the public may be experiencing ambivalence towards news, as much as cynicism. There is a lack of public conviction that the news is performing its main roles or values, whether those are perceived as important or not.

The public feel let down. They struggle to understand the process behind the news content that they see and how that connects to news values, as one focus participant highlights:

“ If you spoke to a journalist, they would say that they only print the truth. I think some of it is, then, how that truth is arrived at and how it is then reported to get people to read it and believe it.”

Trust: who, what, why?

Now that we know the public feel disillusioned by the news sector, they perceive news as alienated from its publicly valued roles, and it is failing to live up to public expectations, we will look in detail into whether the public trust the news, and particularly in relation to other institutions.

It is important to place trust in news in context and compare it to trust in other institutions. As might be expected, the NHS is comfortably the most trusted institution in the UK; 88% of the public say they trust the NHS. This trust is generally universal across demographics. Notably, when we look at the relationship between news use and trust in public institutions, trust in the NHS drops 20% among those that never use the news. The inverse is also true; trust in the NHS climbs as more news is consumed, and trust in the NHS reaches above 90% among those that use the news multiple times a week. The same is true of the legal system, schools, and local government, which are also more trusted depending on how actively people consume news. Even among less trusted institutions, more frequent consumers of news are more trusting of them. Overall, this

Lower priorities far exceed their perceived value, while high priorities fail to be delivered. The news sector now needs to reflect on what this means. It may be that some publishers do not subscribe to the same set of values that the public think are important, and some might argue that a healthy news landscape allows for a broad spectrum of journalism.

The dominant trend, however, is that there is a widespread failure to meet public expectations. Whether it is a journalist's role to inform, advocate, entertain, or engage, the public lack confidence across all these areas. These low confidence levels, however, are not set in stone. There are different courses the sector could chart, as we will see, to turn the tide and improve both standards and confidence in news journalism.

shows a strong pattern of higher institutional trust among more frequent news users.

Overall, average trust in local government (47% trust to 50% distrust) is higher than in the national context of parliaments and assemblies (37% trust to 60% distrust). Local government is trusted by less than 50% in all regions, except the West Midlands where trust sits at 51%. Of the areas with sample sizes of over 100, Yorkshire & Humberside showed the least trust in local government (39% trust local government while 56% do not). Otherwise, trust in local government is relatively steady across other regions, sitting between 46-49%. Increased local news use appears to relate to increased trust in local government, climbing from 32% of those that never use local news up to 50%+ of those that use local news at least once a day.

The least trusted institutions are political parties, with only 26% of people trusting them compared to 70% who distrust them; this remains reasonably constant across demographics. This distrust is highest among those that never read the news, with trust increasing only slightly as news use goes up.

The research confirms that low trust in the media accompanies lower trust in other institutions. General patterns of trust still apply, such as which institutions are trusted more. For example, 82% of those that distrust the media still trust the NHS (compared to an average of 88%), 51% trust the police (compared to an average of 65%), and 10% trust political parties (compared to an average of 26%).

This tells us that high levels of news engagement align with higher societal trust. Whether that is because of specific reporting about these institutions or because those that trust the news are naturally inclined to trust other public institutions (and vice versa of those that distrust), the relationship is clearly a significant one.

Public institutions, and society at large, therefore, have a stake in the public engaging actively with news journalism, and trusting their news sources. Low news use and media distrust have real consequences for the support and perceived integrity of institutional bodies that are designed to serve the public good.

So, what do the public tell us when asked about whether they trust the media?

" I've been looking up lots of different coverage from different agencies and I do see major differences at times in the way that they are reporting things. I can't be certain what is [...] fact and what is fiction."**"**

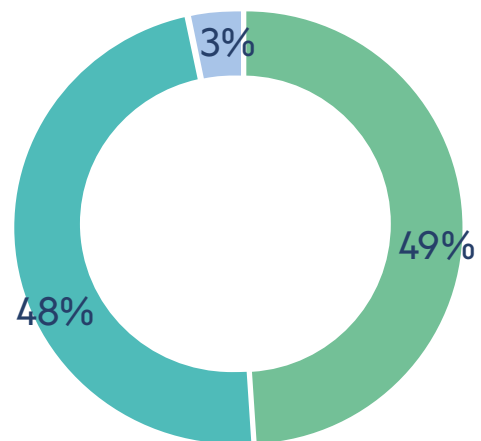
Public trust in the news media is split between those that trust it (49%) and those that distrust it (48%); the public hold even less trust in its practitioners, journalists, who are trusted by only 39% of the public. Trust in journalists increases slightly among those with higher educational achievements but remains below 50% in all cases. Trust in journalists is highest among age groups 18-24 and 75+ (both sitting at 47%), whereas 25-34-year-olds have the lowest levels of trust with 39% trusting the news media and 33% trusting journalists.

Of sample sizes over 100, Yorkshire &

Humberside polled the lowest trust in the media (at 45%), with London polling the highest (53%).

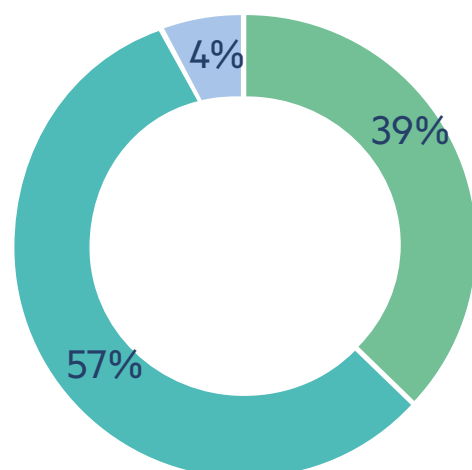
Trust is lowest among passive news users compared to active users, and lower among those that access news on their phones and via the radio. Those that never use national news are more likely to not trust the media than those that never use local news. This indicates that indirect experiences of national news are more relevant to low trust than those of local news.

To what extent do you trust the news media?



NET: Trust NET: Don't trust Don't know

To what extent do you trust journalists?



NET: Trust NET: Don't trust Don't know

With both the news media and journalists being trusted by less than half of the public, there is clear cause for reflection. For example, it seems worth exploring why journalists are less trusted than the media as a whole. Journalists can cultivate individual followings and command audiences outside

TV & radio

TV is held in higher regard than other mediums. Almost 80% of the public trust national and local/regional TV, with only 3% unsure. Radio is confidently trusted, with BBC radio just short of 70%. 14% don't know if they trust independent radio or not, similar to the online news figures, however a comfortable majority of 59% still trust independent radio. One young focus group participant explained the role of structural transparency, when discussing the differences between broadcast news, which is subject to compulsory regulation, and print news which is not:

" I trust the news on TV more than newspapers. [It's] live in front of so many people, they have standards and professionalism to uphold, whereas newspapers are written behind the scenes. They basically have a habit of forming their own opinion which makes it sometimes fictional as well as factual."

Others attributed higher trust in broadcast news to balanced and open news publishing processes, rather than the guiding force of individual opinions:

" You would tend to find that the broadcast journalists [are] balanced and pretty unbiased. Whereas the newsprint wouldn't be. And that's not a criticism, it's the nature of newsprint. It is about opinion as much as it about news. That's not so true of broadcast journalism."

" I don't think anyone can ever be, in the end, totally impartial but I do see a real attempt in [broadcast] reporting to try and achieve that. I don't see it so much [elsewhere]; you

of news publisher brands, particularly online. How they sustain this with faltering trust in their profession and the implications this has for credibility, professionalism, and accreditation in the age of citizen journalism and news influencers must be better understood and explored.

can see a different slant at times with other news reporting and with newspapers, it is literally whatever they want to say."

There is a notable jump in trust depending on how regularly people use the news. 62% of those that use national news once or twice a week trust national TV news, while 81-85% of those that use national news multiple times a week trust it. On age, trust in TV news is lowest among 25-34 and highest among 75+, however it remains strong across age groups and never drops below 70%.

At least half of those that say they don't trust the media, do place trust in national TV and BBC radio, with as many as 63% trusting local and regional TV news. Therefore, even those that do not generally trust the media still differentiate between different types of media and have different trust relationships based on mediums and the accountability frameworks that underpin them.



Print

"If there's a big news story of the day, then the BBC, ITV, Sky will report it. Newspapers select what they report."

The public are more certain in their feelings about print news than they are of online and radio news (less than 9% say they don't know if they trust print or not). 60% of the public, and almost all demographics, trust traditional local newspapers. The only notable exception is those that never use the news (19-23%).

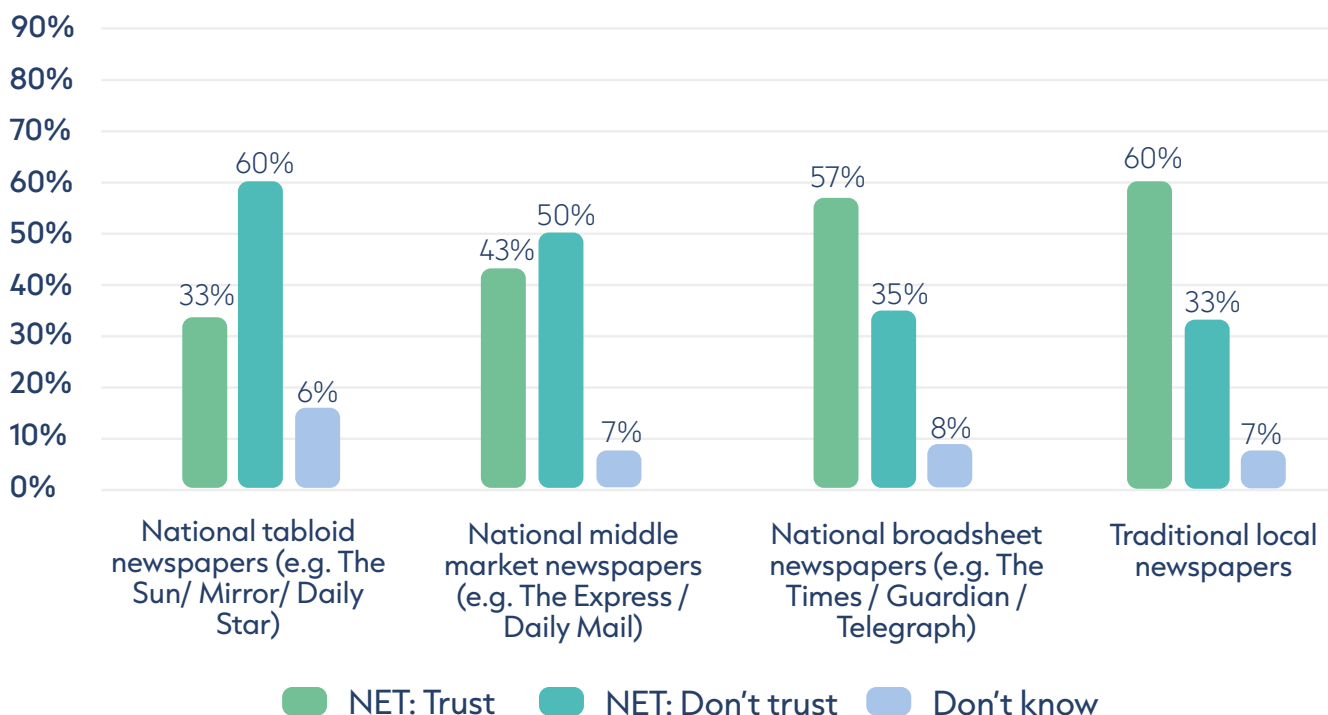
Tabloids are the least trusted newspapers. Only 33% of the public trust them and only 56% of those that say they trust the media generally, trust tabloids. Broadsheets are more trusted at 57%, although this does mean 1 in 3 distrust them. Middle market newspapers such as The Daily Express and The Daily Mail are trusted by 43% of the public, with 50% not trusting them. One focus group participant highlighted why the public are less trusting of newspapers:

"A lot of the big newspaper groups push their own agenda. I won't name names but that seems to be what they do in reality. They don't report, they push an agenda."

Those that use mainly print news are not particularly confident in their chosen news sources. 38% trust tabloids, 50% trust middle markets, and 63% trust broadsheets and traditional locals. TV news users are broadly similar in their trust of print news, while online and radio users are notably less likely to trust tabloids or middle markets.

While active news users generally trust print news more than passive users, they show some of the lowest trust in tabloids (31%). Middle markets are most trusted by those that come across news when it is shared with them by friends and family, with 51% trusting middle markets compared to the average of 43%.

To what extent, if at all, do you trust the following news media and journalism sources to report on issues fairly?



Online

There is a predictable decrease in online news trust as age increases. 46% of 18-24 trust online only news providers compared to 26% of 75+. This shouldn't be surprising as it is still a relatively recent medium with a diverse, fragmented and largely unregulated market.

A significant proportion of older groups don't know if they should trust online news. As many as 35% of 75+ year olds don't know if they trust online only news providers, while only 9% of 18-24-year-olds are unsure.

Trust in online-only news is higher among those that trust political institutions (as many as 58%), although online-only news is still among the least trusted by this group. 17% of this group don't know if they trust online only news or not.

Notably, even among those that mainly use news online, less than half trust online-only news to report on issues fairly. There are a few possible reasons for this. It is still a relatively new space with audiences unsure about the nature of it, as is supported by the higher average levels of 'don't know' respondents. It may be that users typically do not go online to access fair reporting, as seen in Chapter 1: a high proportion of people still do not use social media for news. It may also, along with the overall figures on online trust, speak directly to the fragmented nature of the online news ecosystem.

Fewer professional and cultural norms bind online publishers together, whereas TV has established working norms formed over decades. As such, it may be difficult for the public to confidently place trust in online news or acknowledge it as a space for fair reporting when awareness and understanding of its production and regulatory processes is low.

What the data tells us is that we are at a critical juncture with news. More people use varied news sources and are gravitating

To what extent, if at all, do you trust the following news media and journalism sources to report on issues fairly?



online but are unsure whether to trust the news they encounter online. As digital journalism expands accessibility (in terms of production and consumption), it is unlikely that overall trust will improve without a framework in place that allows users to navigate their way around online news with confidence. We should consider the benefits of sector-wide approaches, such as approved regulation, that might improve content standards and structurally support and stabilise ethical news publishing practices online.

In the case of newer independent local newspapers and hyperlocal publications, many of which publish largely online, trust is neck-and-neck with distrust. 17% of people don't know whether to trust them or not. Earning the trust of sceptics could be the tipping point for the profession's integrity in the coming years.

In the coming sections, we will start to look in more depth at ways that publishers, audiences, and regulators can work together to build more trust in journalism.

News literacy: low confidence, low knowledge

Now that we know that the public are disillusioned by the news and that trust is low, we will now look at what they understand about the news, how it is made and how it is regulated.

Perceptions of news production

In the UK there are many different types of journalists and publishers operating according to different factors and working in different ways. As newspapers and broadcast journalism operate under different regulatory systems, reporting ethics and practices can also differ across the sector. Appreciating all those differences, we can assess the general impression the public has about how news is made.

Most of the public believe that decisions surrounding which stories to cover are made by editors based on what is important to individual organisations. Verified stories and the social importance of the story are ranked last in terms of what the public thinks goes into news reporting. The wants of readers are also seen as low priorities in the news production process compared to the views of owners and the political agendas of news organisations.

A quarter of people say that they don't know what factors journalists take into consideration when deciding to write or publish a story. One focus group participant suggested that, in the absence of clarity around these processes, it becomes a matter of faith:

“ You're putting a lot of faith in somebody's opinion and how they put that on paper, or how their editor has changed what [they have] written on paper.”

When asked what journalists must do to get a story published, there is no strong consensus as to what requirements are necessary (no more than 52% agree on any one requirement). Only 50% of people believe that publishers must verify the

facts or assess the truth of a story to get it published. Less than half believe that journalists are required to be balanced, unbiased, or use multiple sources, and 17% either don't know or believe that none of these requirements apply.

This is in contrast to how the public believe newsgathering and reporting should be undertaken in practice. While the public believe that there is room for bias in news reporting, they say it must be supported by other methodologies:

“ There should be a place for advocacy journalism which inevitably has to be subject to some bias but that has to exist, otherwise arguments cannot be made. They have to be supported [...] with good evidence, sources quoted, and methodology [...] but I think there has to be a place for some bias in journalism, it has to be allowed.”

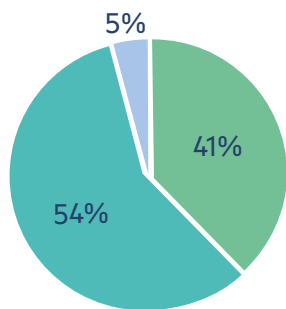
The data appears to show that the public believe news organisations are motivated by their own goals and not those that are beneficial to their audiences or to society, or even based on what has been verified as factual. The public appear to see news organisations as self-serving in their editorial decision making rather than being led by the evidence and high journalistic standards. No more than 51% of those with the highest educational levels feel that they know enough about news production processes.

Confidence is varied and incoherent. Younger groups are generally more confident, with over half claiming to know enough in all cases. Only 31% of 65–74-year-olds feel that they know enough about how journalists choose which stories to cover. London is the

most confident part of the UK, with over half always feeling they know enough, while the East of England sits lowest in the 30-40% range. Generally, more frequent news users tend to feel that they know more, however those that use the news only once a month or once a week often feel more confident in their literacy skills than more frequent users.

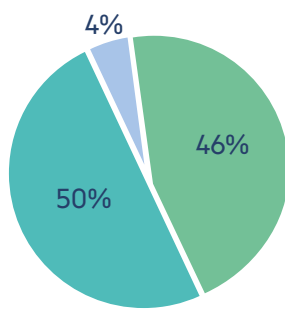
Those that use the news more than 3-5 times a day feel more confident while those that use it 1-2 times a day show a notable drop in confidence. Print users are normally more confident than others, with 55% claiming to know enough about online and print news standards.

How much do you feel you know about and understand how journalists choose which stories to cover?



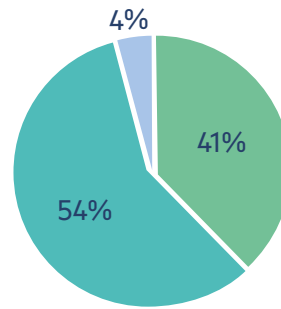
- Knowledge
- No knowledge
- Don't know

How much do you feel you know about and understand why journalists choose to cover the stories they do?



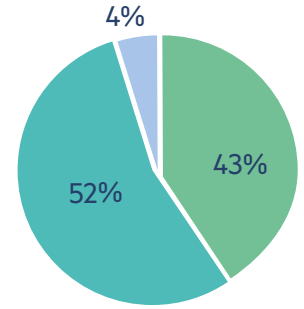
- Knowledge
- No knowledge
- Don't know

How much do you feel you know about and understand how UK news media and journalism are regulated?



- Knowledge
- No knowledge
- Don't know

How much do you feel you know about and understand standards of print and online UK news media and journalism?



- Knowledge
- No knowledge
- Don't know

There is not necessarily a sweet spot to be found between a person's background, location, news use, or choice of medium to determine how confident people are in understanding news production processes. Rather, news production literacy is varied and unpredictable and consumption, education, and location are not reliable indicators. While there are indications of confidence here and news literacy is evident to some extent, the current overall pattern is ultimately not positive.

The data shows that the public feel their news literacy is limited. This does not mean they do not care and do not want to find out more about it. In fact, it is the opposite:

“ When a journalist writes a piece that’s submitted to an outlet, [...] we should be made aware of the actual process that that

takes before the particular outlet decides to publish it.”

As such, there is a need for information and education to meet the demand for improved literacy about newsgathering and reporting practices, so that the public can have confidence in understanding how the news is produced.

There are findings that point to possible solutions. Active news users regularly feel less confident than others, while those that share news stories with friends and family, or receive them via digital notifications, are more confident. Those who share news with others around them appear to be more confident about how news is produced.

This could indicate the importance of community and peer-to-peer engagement when it comes to literacy. Communities

collectively process and make sense of national news stories together. That might mean checking in on neighbours during the outbreak of a pandemic, gossiping about local, national or world events with your local hairdresser or barber, or just casually watching the news at the pub next to friends and strangers. We should also take caution when assessing how well people understand their own news literacy skills. Are those who claim to know enough feeling over-confident? Are those who claim no

knowledge being modest? The focus group work indicated that some who claimed less knowledge of news and journalism were still aware of important notions such as news values and news genres but often lacked the ability to verbalise them in these terms. All the same, the lack of knowledge about news processes, varied confidence, demand for more knowledge and understanding, and peer-to-peer confidence, map out a blueprint for news literacy strategies moving forward.

Awareness of the regulatory landscape

A strong majority of the public do not feel confident about their own news literacy and understand little about the standards that journalism is regulated by. Before we look at this in detail, it is important to summarise how news media is regulated in the UK.

Explained: Regulation in the UK

Licensed TV and radio broadcasters are regulated by Ofcom, under a statutory system of government funded regulation. The BBC has its own unique set of impartiality rules; however, it is also still regulated by Ofcom, just like other broadcasters. The press and online news providers, meanwhile, are not subject to statutory regulation, and operate within a system of voluntary self-regulation that is not organised or funded by government.

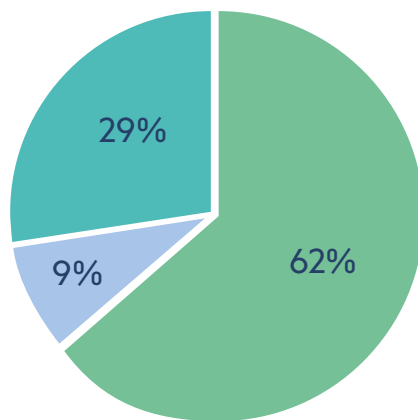
Voluntary self-regulation of the press and online news providers takes various forms and the system has become increasingly fragmented by two main factors during the last decade. Firstly, the collapse of the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), after it was discredited by the Leveson Inquiry, led to several national and local titles ceasing to be members of a regulatory body (e.g., The Guardian, The Observer, The Independent, Financial Times, London Evening Standard). Secondly, the entry of largely unregulated digital first news providers into the news market (e.g. Huff Post, BuzzFeed, Vice).

Many national and regional titles became members of the Independent Press

Standards Organisation (IPSO), the successor body to the PCC. IPSO is set up, organised, and funded by the press industry to ensure that the industry retains influence over the regulator's rules, regulations and governance.

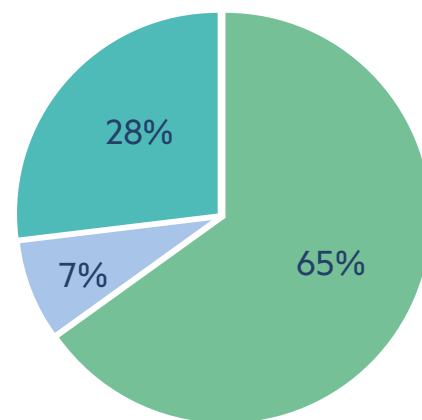
A significant minority of independent, not-for-profit, hyperlocal, local and digital-first publishers began, and continue, to join Impress, an 'approved' independent regulator recognised under the post-Leveson Royal Charter on self-regulation of the press. To become recognised Impress is required to meet 29 criteria of independence and effectiveness which are assessed by an independent body, called the Press Recognition Panel (PRP). Impress is funded by member subscription fees and charitable trusts and is designed and independently recognised to ensure that the press industry, government and commercial interests have no control over its rules, regulations and governance. The remainder of the market currently chooses not to join a regulatory body and instead operate their own internal publisher-led complaints handling solutions, which often lack sufficient transparency or independence.

To what extent is it important that you understand how a news story has been put together by a journalist?



NET: Important
NET: Unimportant
Neither / don't know

To what extent is it important that you understand how the news media and journalism are regulated in the UK?



NET: Important
NET: Unimportant
Neither / don't know

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the public has a low level of awareness about regulatory arrangements for the press and online news providers compared to broadcast media. 49% of the public accurately identified OFCOM as playing a role in the media regulation landscape, compared to 16% for IPSO and 7% for Impress.

We asked the public further questions about their knowledge and understanding of press regulation in the UK. Only 14% correctly know that press regulation is non-compulsory.

45% falsely believe that TV, radio, print, and online news all share the same regulator, with 33% unsure as to who that regulator is. Only 22% know that they don't share a regulator. The one statement that is answered correctly by most people is that the BBC is regulated in the same way as other broadcasters. 43% of the population incorrectly believe that the BBC plays a role in the regulation of UK news media. In some cases, as many as 33% openly admit to not knowing the answers to questions about media regulation.

Many in our focus groups were surprised that tabloid newspapers were members of a regulatory body that enforced basic journalistic standards. While many generally expect the press to be regulated and assume (incorrectly) that there is some form of regulation, they do not actually see

regulatory standards at play in the national news landscape. As we will see later, they would be far more likely to trust news if they could see that journalism standards were being upheld and if they were confident that regulation was working effectively across the industry. While the public is confused about the precise details of regulation, the core finding here is that the news they come across is largely not adhering to the standards that they would expect of a well-regulated industry.

More clearly needs to be done to improve the public's knowledge about how regulators work to uphold high standards of journalism. Filling this regulatory literacy gap means improving awareness of the regulatory landscape and ethical standards that regulated publishers apply, and empowering the public to actively engage with publishers and regulators about those standards.

There is high demand. All age groups, regions, educational achievements, and users (including TV, radio, print, and online users) place strong importance on regulatory literacy. While the extent of this support increases among those that use the news more, over half of those that never use the news (a normally sceptical demographic) still believe it is important to know how news is made and how it is regulated.

Awareness of press codes

Well-enforced press codes are a key pillar of ethical journalism practice. Three main press codes of practice operate in the UK. The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) Code of Conduct is made up of twelve core principles that its members agree to follow. The Editor's Code of Practice is owned by the newspaper industry and is operated and enforced by IPSO with regard to its regulated members. The Impress Standards Code is owned, operated and enforced by Impress, independently of the newspaper industry, and forms the foundation of its recognised scheme of regulation.

While there are subtle and important differences between the three codes of practice referred to above and how they are enforced and by who, they broadly cover the same ground with regard to encouraging accuracy, open and fair justice, protection of children and vulnerable groups, and protection of the wider public from harm associated with discrimination, harassment and invasion of privacy. Awareness of these codes is consequently key to public experiences of news.

We asked the public about these codes and the issues they cover so that we can examine how these standards might help promote better trust and literacy in journalism. The public are generally aware of press codes but have no knowledge of what they cover. At the same time, one third of people are not aware of press codes at all. Of those that are aware of press codes in some capacity, two thirds know nothing about what they cover. Awareness tends to increase as news use goes up and among active users of news, but not to any significant extent. As we will also see, confidence in code knowledge is often unfounded.

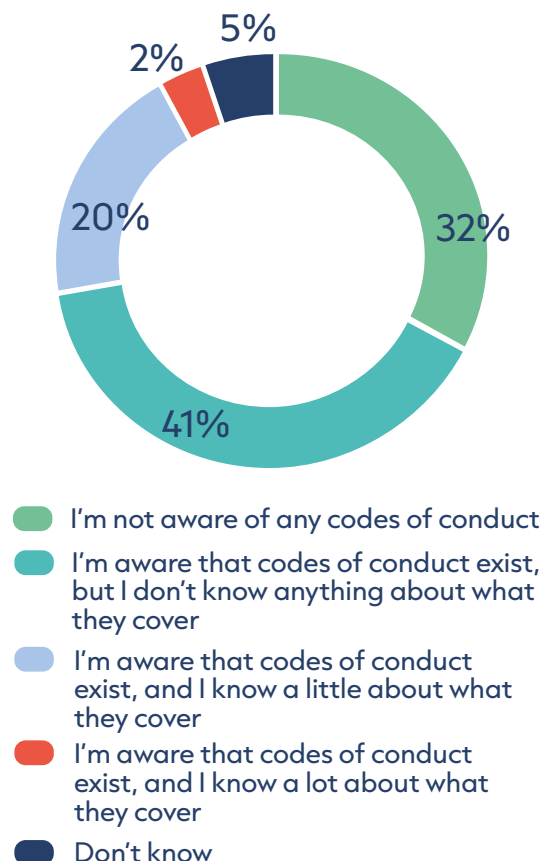
" I actually have no idea what the regulations are. To say that they're regulated is one thing but what those regulations are, what standards they're held to, I wouldn't have a clue."**"**

Those that use news via phones are the least likely to be aware of codes of conduct, while print users are more likely. This is an urgent point to bear in mind when we consider that digital media use is eclipsing traditional means and digital devices play an enormous role in the modern news landscape.

Bearing in mind that one third of people are not aware of codes at all, a majority (57%) believe that protecting children is or should be covered by journalistic codes of practice. Accuracy and discrimination are close behind it, with over 50% choosing those options. In last place is the requirement to declare conflicts of interest (at 39%).

Political engagement and active news use are strong indicators of standards awareness. 67% of active users are aware that children are protected by ethical

To what extent are you aware of regulatory codes of conduct?



guidelines, whilst those that are politically engaged are 15% more likely to believe that conflicts of interest are a journalistic standard. Today, advertising prolifically accompanies almost all content and is a primary source of revenue for news publishers.

Editorial transparency involves publishers openly disclosing financial arrangements behind specific content. The lack of awareness about requirements to declare conflicts of interest is notable.

“ As long as people are aware of where the information’s coming from [...] and as long as you look into [...] a wide range of views, then I think [journalism] still has a purpose in spreading information and telling people what’s happening in the world.”

Considering the earlier finding that the public find the separation of news and adverts highly important, we can infer that there may be some confusion around what ‘conflicts of interest’ means or that the public are cynical about how well this standard is

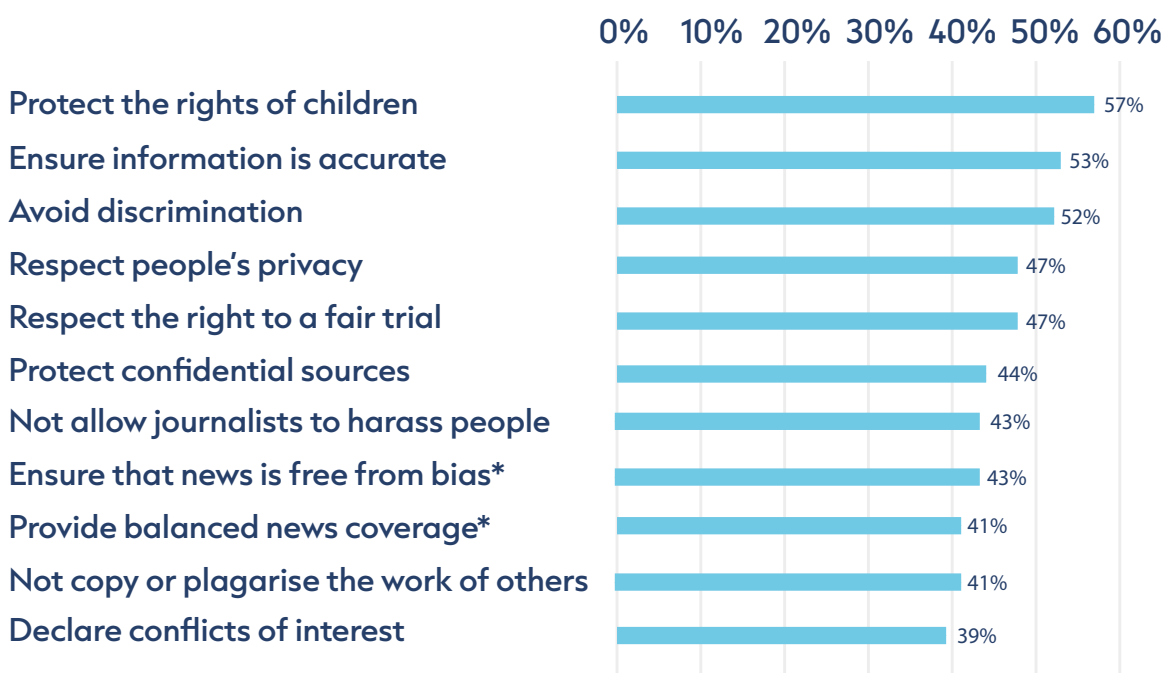
regulated and take editorial and commercial conflicts as a given.

Balanced and impartial news coverage is not a requirement of press codes of conduct. 18–24-year-olds, followed by 25-34 and 35-44, were the most likely to answer this correctly. Given the increased polarisation of digital news (their favoured medium), it is probably not surprising that they are more likely to perceive this correctly.

These findings suggest that standards awareness campaigns need to find ways to address those that are disengaged from media and politics.

The overall assessment is that there is low press standards awareness amongst members of the public. Over half are unaware that privacy, harassment, and source protection are covered by codes of conduct. Some that claimed to know ‘a lot’ about press codes sometimes had lower knowledge levels than other groups, indicating that confidence is often misplaced.

Which of the following guidelines do you think are covered by codes of conduct for journalists and news media providers?
**not covered by the Impress Standards Code*



Public views on complaints & redress

We also asked how the public would behave when they believe that journalistic standards have not been met.

40% of the public say they would go directly to the editor with a complaint, while 27% would go to a regulatory body. This is generally reflective of actual complaints processes under the current UK self-regulatory system. A key principle of self-regulation is that news publishers (represented by editors in this survey question) should have the opportunity to correct mistakes and put the record straight before the intervention of a regulator.

Confidence about the current efficiency of regulatory mechanisms is quite split, with a defining factor appearing to be how often people use the news. Less than one third of non-news users believe complaints about news stories will be dealt with promptly and fairly, compared to over half of those that use the news multiple times a day.

Confidence is slightly higher among TV users (51%) while phone users are the least confident (43%), and confidence tends to fall slightly as age increases, indicating both generational and medium-based differences, while regulated broadcast media once again stands out. 63% of those that trust the media believe that their complaints about news would be dealt with promptly and fairly. Only 34% of those that don't trust the media believe the same.

“ There doesn't seem to be an effective system of penalties for publishing, whether in print or broadcast, demonstrable untruths. **”**

This suggests that trust in news and trust in regulatory processes go hand-in-hand, and inversely, improving trust in regulation is the key to unlocking trust in news.

Notably, while the 18-24 age group are likely to contact the editor about their complaint (30%), they are also more likely to contact their local MP (18%) than they are to go



to a regulatory body (15%). This is a trend that can be seen elsewhere, as younger age groups are slightly more likely to contact local representatives and public bodies, while older groups are more likely to go straight to the publisher or a regulatory body. This suggests that regulators will have to better engage younger audiences to ensure they can be seen as a credible option or backstop for obtaining redress.

When presented with the scenario of a personal intrusion by a journalist and what they would do about it, the public responded with their own suggestions and had a stronger tendency to contact the police or take legal action. Active news users are more likely to push for content removal, by contacting the publisher or regulator. Both active and passive users are similarly likely to contact the police or take legal action. Those that do not trust the media are also more likely to lean towards actions such as contacting the police or taking legal action.

Police are poorly placed to address harm or wrongdoing by journalists and publishers, unless they have broken the law. Seeking redress via criminal law should not be the first option for dealing with concerns

about news publishers and journalists. Therefore, the tendency for the public to suggest contacting the police in the first instance is troubling, as it butts up against one of the key tenets of press freedom: the freedom to publish without fear of state/law enforcement interference. This could be indicative of the public's trust in law enforcement to address wrongdoing or harm, or the public's lack of trust in self-regulatory bodies to take effective or decisive action against news publishers that act unethically. It is worth remembering, from earlier in this report, that the police are significantly more trusted than journalists and publishers.

There is a puzzle here that needs solving and goes to the heart of journalistic and democratic values. As we will see in the next section, the public are champions of an independent, free, and regulated press, and do not want to see media freedom infringed upon by government. They want accountability and transparency, and the model for upholding these values is at our disposal. It is vital that the sector addresses public perceptions of regulatory effectiveness in line with the public aspirations for press freedom. Otherwise, there is a strong risk of alienating the public further.

As this focus group participant notes, the ultimate goal is worth the effort:

“ It's a really difficult thing to get absolute independence and fairness. Which is what people want when they make a complaint. They may not get the answer they want but if they see that there's a fair procedure then, you know, they may accept it.”

CHAPTER 3

Bridging the gap

Disillusionment, low trust, and low literacy present a significant challenge to the news sector and the future of news in the UK. But it is not a public rejection of news principles or its various roles in society. Our research presents an opportunity to re-engage the public, improve trust, and improve understanding to ensure that the UK news sector meets the ambitions of a supportive public that is willing it on to do better.

- * The public fully believe in and support the importance of a free press that is independently regulated.
- * Trust and confidence can be improved by engaging with the public over journalistic processes and standards, providing greater press accountability, and improving general news literacy.
- * Independent groups with diverse experiences are well-positioned to collaborate and provide solutions that build public confidence and trust in a quality news sector.

We have seen the extent of the existential challenges facing journalism. We should now focus on bridging the gap between the news sector and a supportive but disillusioned public, so that both can enjoy the benefits of a healthy functioning and well-regulated sector that delivers for its diverse communities. Key to this is examining how much public support there is for press regulation and how they see its role in improving and enhancing news.

Support for regulation

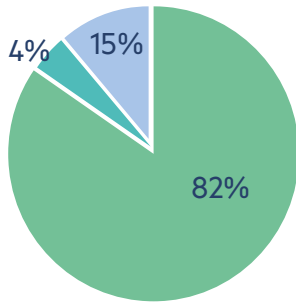
While we can see that current knowledge and literacy levels are low and that the public is confused about how the press is regulated, we can take a fresh look at what the public would like to see from the UK news, before considering how to improve the knowledge gap.

There is strong support for press regulation that is operated independently of the press. While there are minor differences based on age and news use, there is broad consensus across all demographics. The most notable variance is political engagement, where non-politically engaged respondents are more likely to answer neither or don't know.

A very comfortable majority of non-engaged respondents still believe that independent press regulation is important, while as many as 92% of engaged respondents are supportive.

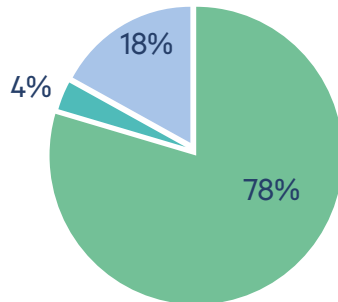
A strong majority feel that journalism should be held to account for untrue or harmful content, and a similar amount feel that independent regulation improves the quality of journalism. Those that are disengaged or distrustful of the media and politics are also very likely to believe effective regulation enhances free speech.

To what extent do you think it is important that the news media and journalism are regulated effectively?



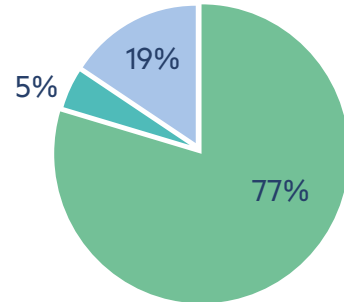
NET: Important
NET: Unimportant
Neither / don't know

To what extent do you think it is important that all news media organisations are regulated independently?



NET: Important
NET: Unimportant
Neither / don't know

To what extent do you think it is important that the news media you use is regulated independently?

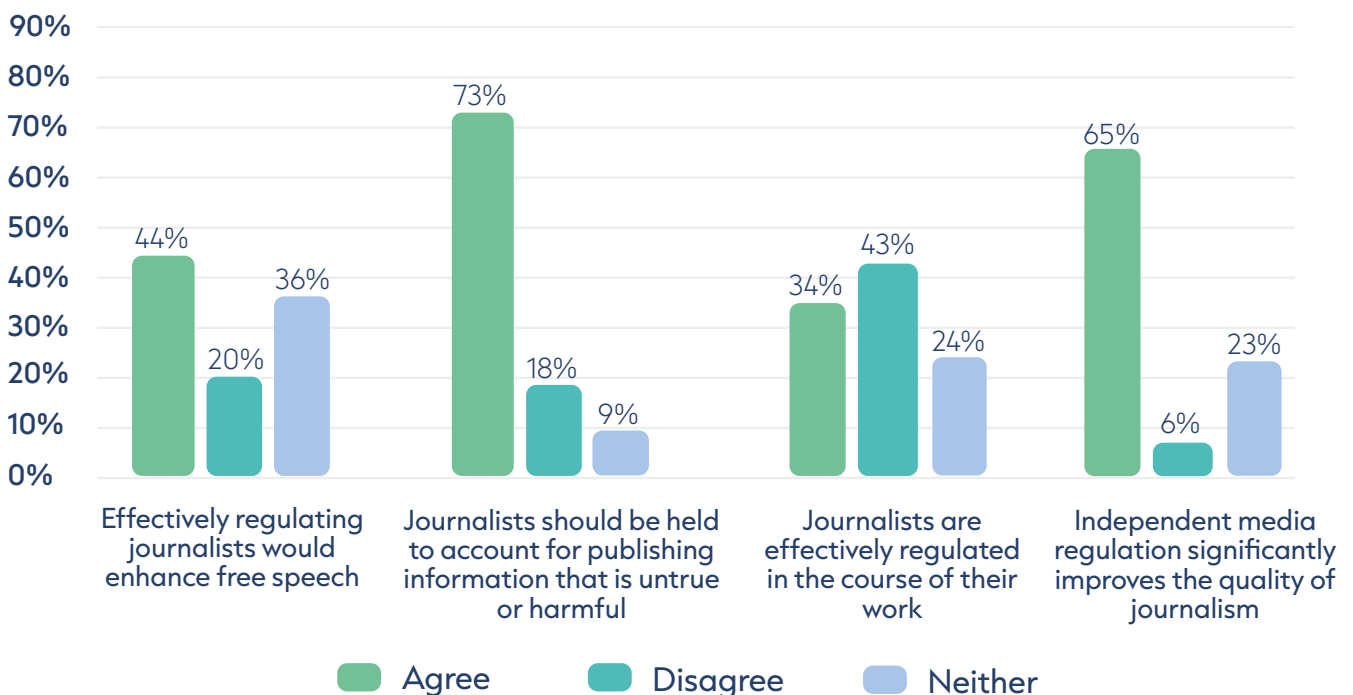


NET: Important
NET: Unimportant
Neither / don't know

One focus group participant called for regulation that:

“Is totally independent, where you can go if you feel there’s something wrong or misleading. People should be held up to account for giving false information.”

This highlights the crucial role that independent press regulation can and should play in the sector, and the strong public demand behind it.



While regulation is significantly popular across the board, independent regulation enjoys the most support, with a strong majority of 78%, with just 12% unsure. Around 70% of younger groups support independent regulation, while as many as 87% of 75+ do so.

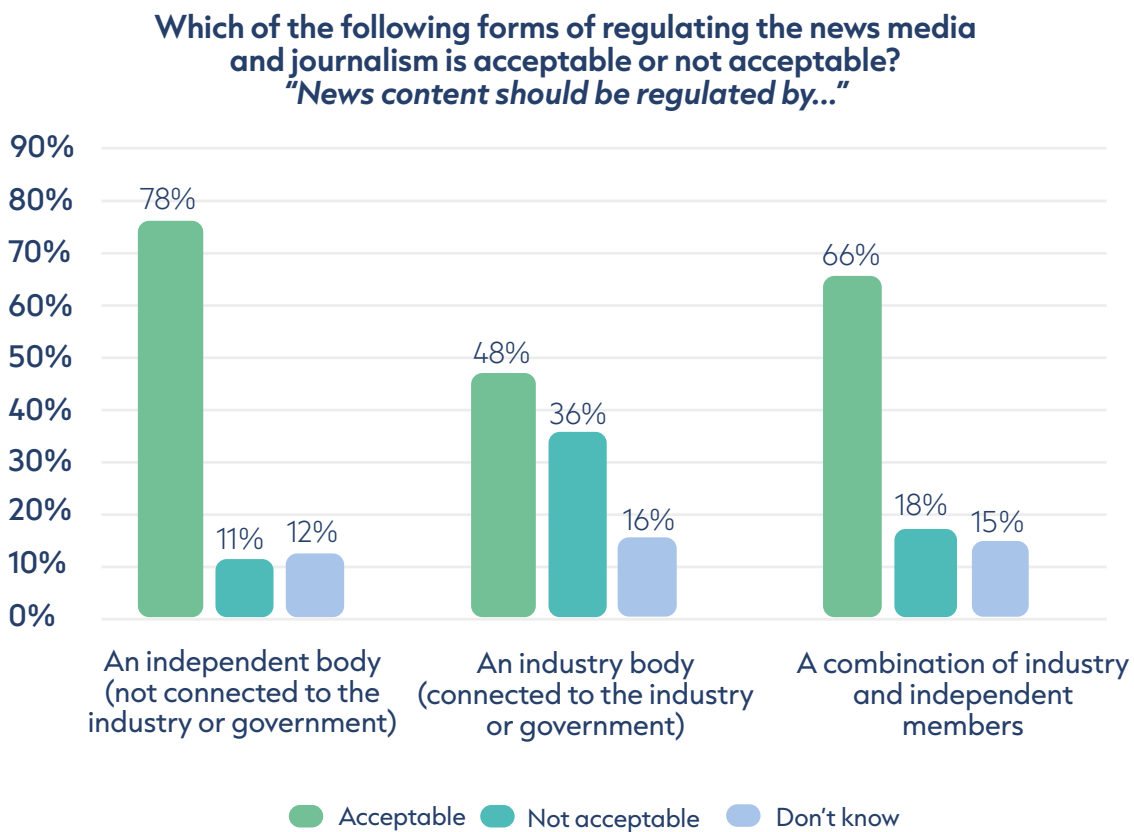
All types of news users are supportive of independent regulation, including those that trust and do not trust the media, never use the news, and regularly use the news, and TV, radio, print, and online users.

Opinion is more divided over industry-led regulation, with under 50% supportive and

36% opposed. These figures begin to meet in the middle when it comes to a combination of independent and industry regulation.

Independent regulation remains by far the most popular option, as is supported by this focus group contribution:

" I have always got doubts when the press and magazines regulate themselves. Because I think any complaints could be seen to be biased [...] in favour of themselves. Whereas if it was an independent body that was doing it, it would be more objective."**"**



Regulatory values

Now that we have seen the strong support for independent press regulation, we can look more specifically at what the public thinks this would entail.

A key takeaway throughout the research has been that the public hold strong beliefs and values in press freedom and its independence. They want to be proactively

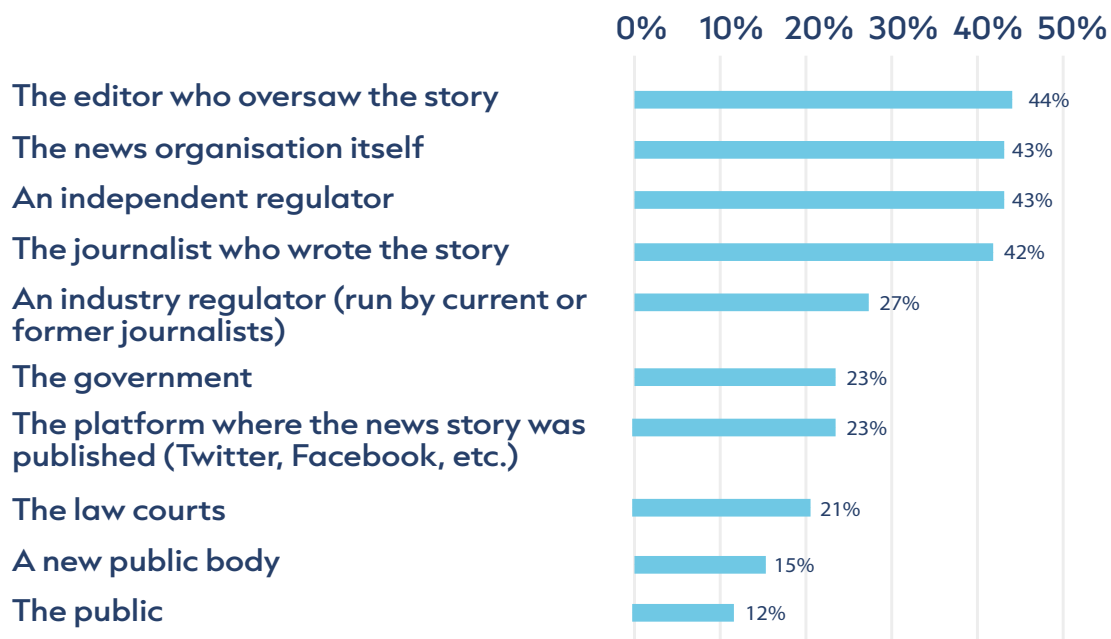
involved in improving and upholding news standards, they are passionate and proactive about quality, standards-based news journalism, and they want their voice and values to be heard. Throughout this, they feel that news producers and regulators bear ultimate responsibility for ensuring that standards are met.

A comfortable majority would like to see public involvement in regulation, from having a voice, to being part of decision-making processes and assisting journalists in improving the quality of their work (Steel et al., 2021). 53% feel confident enough to leave regulatory decisions to regulators, while 17% think this would be unacceptable. In light of the strong support for independent regulation, some patterns emerge. The public strongly advocate for the importance of independent regulation and find it important that they are involved in seeing this through to everyone’s benefit. Effective, independent regulation is seen as a top priority, but the public believe they could play a greater role in achieving this.

The public has a firm belief that the ultimate responsibility for upholding standards of accuracy and verifiability lies with those responsible for news content: publishers

first and regulators second. Younger groups are more likely to think responsibility should be shared across the news ecosystem by both public bodies (such as governments and courts) and private companies (such as platforms), while older groups are likely to place this responsibility more firmly in the hands of regulators and publishers. More frequent news users tend to be keener to distribute responsibility among different sources of authority. Over half of online (via non-mobile devices) and active news users believe that editors and independent regulators should be responsible for upholding standards. Passive users lean towards news producers having primary responsibility and independent regulators second. Those that never use the news and those that do not trust the media firmly believe that news producers and independent regulators should both be responsible for upholding standards.

Who do you think should be responsible for ensuring that news content meets high standards of accuracy and verifiability?



We can now look at the public’s main priorities for effective regulation. Addressing disinformation is far ahead of other priorities with 51% of the public ranking it in their top three regulatory priorities. This drops to 38%

for those with no formal education, who place more importance on holding individual journalists to account (41%) and as much in protecting the public from mistreatment as they do in stopping disinformation. Only 35%

of those that never use the news prioritise stopping disinformation compared to 57% of active users. All age groups broadly agree on regulatory priorities, however there is a stronger belief among younger age groups of the importance in stopping misinformation (46% of 18–24-year-olds sliding down to 33% of the 75+ age group). Notably, those that trust the media and those that distrust the media broadly agree on all principles, again showing that there is general consensus on regulatory priorities.

Regulatory tools

In the event of news publishers failing to adhere to journalism standards, the public largely support publishing corrections with equal prominence to the original story, followed by 29% who support fines. Both the survey and focus group work show clear cynicism of redress mechanisms that much of the UK press adhere to; the public are critical of the lack of visibility and prominence given to corrections:

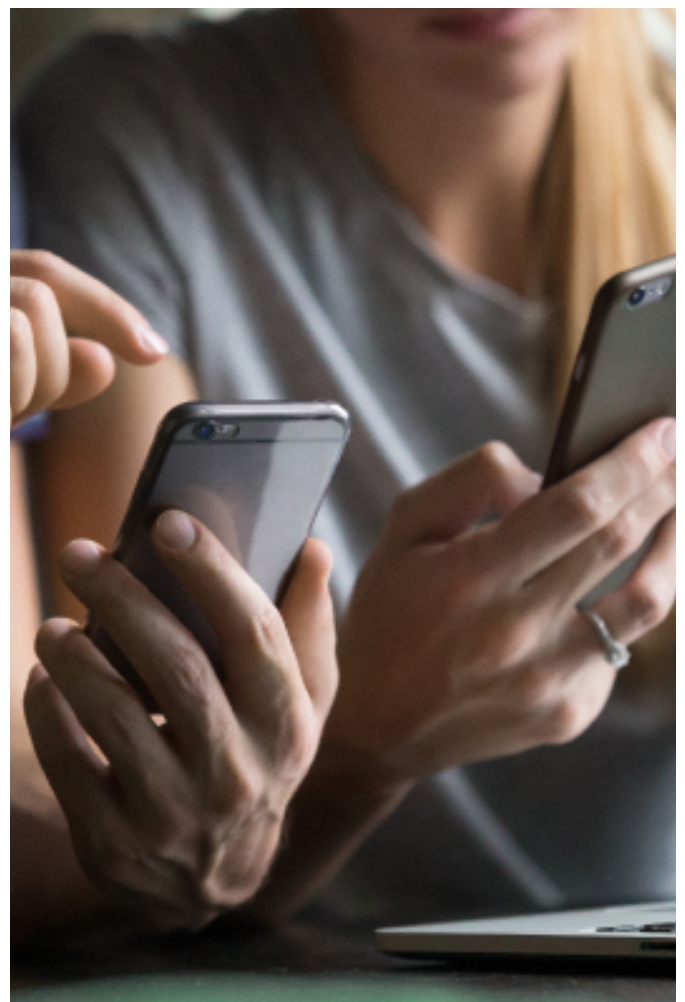
“ If someone complains, [...] they will put in a retraction [...] on page 39 of the newspaper [...] where it doesn't receive any prominence. The story was done with by the time the complaint gets upheld, it's already done and dusted. So, it doesn't get much attention and I'm not too sure that helps anyone.”

“ Retraction all the way in the back pages, sort of a month and a half, two months, three months after the event [loses] its impetus. There's no point to it at that stage. [The regulator] becomes a toothless organisation that's just there for show.”

The public support a range of functions, powers, and values that press regulators should have access to, from the avoidance of political and industry interference to public awareness campaigns and various regulatory services. Effective, accessible redress mechanisms, regular standards reviews, and efficient processes are the most popular powers the public think that regulators should have.

Over half of mixed and other ethnic groups prioritise preventing discrimination compared to the average of 35%, while women are also more likely than men to prioritise it. While preventing discrimination remains one of the higher priorities across the board, this raises important questions around how standards are perceived by differently impacted groups. Regulatory bodies should recognise how different groups perceive priorities differently, and why, when setting regulatory agendas.

Public awareness and consultations are also popular but come below measures that directly improve regulatory mechanisms. This once again confirms the strong value that the public places in effective, independent press regulation, and the importance they place in its success.



Improving trust & confidence

As the data has shown us throughout this report, much of the current public mood on journalism is not positive; however, the public think that the solutions are relatively straightforward:

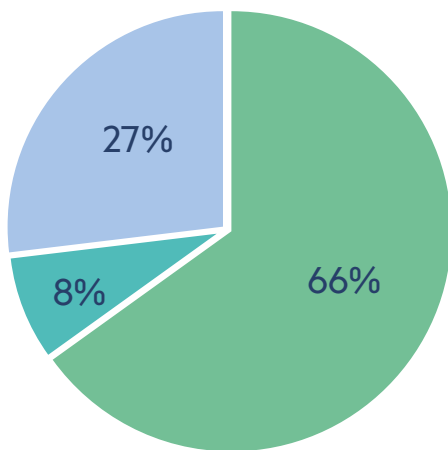
“ You don’t need to give us loads of information, but if we know that they are regulated and who they are regulated by, then we have the information to go and look up anything else we need to.”

They think greater transparency and literacy would improve the public’s trust in news: 66% of the public believe that knowing more

about news production would improve trust, while 70% believe that knowing more about news regulation would do the same.

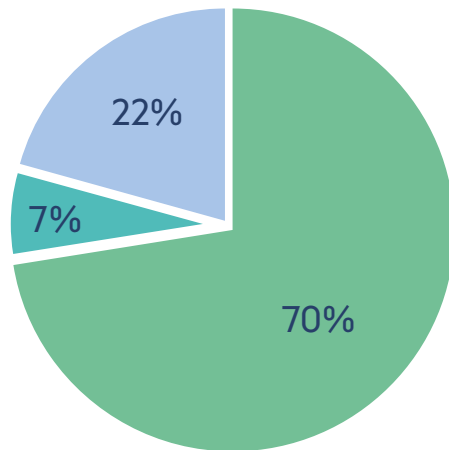
This is constant amongst almost all demographics and users. Of those that don’t currently trust the media, 61% believe that better news literacy would lead to higher trust and 67% believe greater regulatory literacy would do the same. This view is held by 3 out of 4 people who already trust the media, and this improves as news use increases. Those with diverse media habits all agree that higher literacy would improve trust.

I think I would trust the news more if I knew more about the process that journalists use to produce news content.



Agree Disagree Neither / don't know

I think I would trust the news more if I knew more about how news was regulated.



Agree Disagree Neither / don't know

We can also look at specific factors that increase or decrease trust in the public’s experiences of news. As might be expected, the likes of mis and disinformation, misleading headlines, bias, and undeclared sponsored content negatively impact trust levels. The three factors that produce a net positive increase in trust, however, are links to external support services when sensitive issues are discussed, balanced reporting of all sides, and press regulator

membership. When publishers indicate that they are members of a press regulator, there is a notable increase in trust in 33% of respondents. However, a sizable proportion (38%) of the public say it would have no impact, while an extra 14% say that they don’t know.

Therefore, while these findings indicate that regulatory literacy can strengthen trust and that the public support independent

press regulation, currently, membership of a press regulator does not have as significant an impact on trust as it could. This could be explained by the fact that a significant majority of written press and online news platforms are not subject to the kind of independent regulation that is preferred by the public. It may well be the case that the public do not know how independent regulation would improve their news experience because it has largely been absent from their past and present experiences of news in the UK.

When we look at digital news media, the only factor with a net positive trust outcome is when a news story features a 'complain' or 'report' button, with over 40% believing it would increase their trust. The only other factor with parity to this is comment moderation (but only for 25% of people). Ironically, 32% of people believe comment moderation would decrease their trust.

The lack of consensus here indicates that any new methods to increase trust require public consultation, in conjunction with tried and tested regulatory practices. What is clear, both here and in previous findings, is that displaying a commitment to external accountability appears to be the most promising opportunity to increase public trust in news journalism.

This provides press regulators with a unique challenge and opportunity. The research has laid out a blueprint: to rebuild journalism in a way that addresses disillusionment, low trust and literacy. Increased transparency and accountability can nudge an untrustworthy and disillusioned public towards increased trust and support.

Conclusion

Today's news journalism is complicated. The public's relationship with the news is rapidly evolving into unknown territory, as is the ambiguity, nuance, risk, and opportunity that come with it.

The public strongly support journalism, believe in its potential to deliver for society and democracy and expect high standards from their news. The ways that we access and experience news continue to change with technology, but these values remain steady as the public remain committed to a news sector that delivers quality meaningful content for its audiences, communities, and the public at large.

There is some way for journalism in the UK to go to address the existential challenges that it faces, as the public feel disillusioned about what the sector is delivering and expect more than they are currently getting from their news. The public fully believe in the benefits of high-quality journalism, but the simple fact is they are struggling to see it day-to-day.

Trust in this sense is not just about the public's response to the news, but the integrity of journalism itself. The industry, in close collaboration with the public, needs to promote conditions that enable publishers to produce trustworthy valued news content that is independent and free, and representative of what the public want to see from journalism.

There are two things that the public are calling for from the news they consume every day. They want higher standards of journalism, specifically with regard

to accuracy, greater balance and representation of minorities, and they want to improve their news literacy by gaining a better understanding about how news is produced, edited and regulated.

Improving news literacy is crucial to building public trust in news. The industry and regulatory bodies have a greater role to play in engaging the public about the role that journalism plays in society, the processes and standards that it follows, and the regulatory services that are available to the public if they believe that standards have been compromised or their individual rights have been infringed.

News is changing but the public still have high hopes for its potential. The public are unconvinced that the news is currently delivering this potential, confused about how the news is made, and struggle to trust journalists.

The public believe that the key to building confidence and trust in news is to improve journalism standards, ensure that regulation is operated independently of the news industry and to actively engage them in initiatives that deepen their understanding of how the news works, how it is regulated, and how they can relate to it.

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