

Journalists play an important role in driving traffic to news brands and in encouraging people to pay for them

The digital age has brought about a shift towards journalists as a key reason for using or trusting particular online sources of news.

The reputation of individual writers is cited as one of the key reasons why people might be prepared to pay for online news.

Following a year in which Glenn Greenwald emerged from relative obscurity to become a star name after his work with the fugitive US intelligence agent Edward Snowden, the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2014 suggests he is part of a wider trend.

The report, based on YouGov surveys of more than 18,000 people in 10 countries, contains findings that journalists are very important as interpreters and trusted sources in a bewildering news environment.

In a number of countries, notably France, Spain and the US, the role of the journalist is now considered almost as important in driving trust as the role of the news brand itself.

As report author Nic Newman says: "This is particularly true where traditional titles are weaker, or face challenge from online-only news sites, many of which are increasingly built around the personality and skills of a columnist or reporter".

In other countries, such as Finland Germany and the UK, mainstream news brands remain the main drivers of trust but even here the reporter is an important factor in determining the choice of a particular brand. (see Table 1)

The growing importance of individual journalists has been fuelled by the ease with which new enterprises can be set up and distribute content in the internet era.

"In the US in particular we have seen a succession of high profile columnists like Ezra Klein (Vox Media), Glenn Greenwald (First Look Media) and Felix Salmon (Fusion) leaving mainstream publications to make a more direct connection with readers," Newman says.

The Reuters Institute report also provides evidence that the quality of writers and reporters is one important factor in getting people to pay for online news. More than a third cited writers as a key reason for taking out an online news subscription in France (40%) and the United States (35%). Other key factors include the role of the news brand

in pulling together a broad package of news coverage and the freedom to access news on any device. (see Table 2)

The report also produced evidence that journalists are also playing a key role in social media. In the UK, YouGov’s analysis for the Reuters Institute tracking actual usage across a representative sample of Twitter users suggests that 64% (c 5.4million) are following a professional news account with 48% them (c.2.6 million) following at least one journalist account compared with 40% (c2.2 million) who follow a breaking news account.

This research is further evidence that individual journalists are key drivers of trust and engagement. “Digital and social media seem to be encouraging journalism with a human face”, says Nic Newman, author of the Reuters Institute Digital News Report. Newman also suggests that “in an increasingly competitive market there is likely to be an increasing economic premium attached to the very best writers and journalists.”

TABLE 1

REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2014
ROLE OF BRAND AND JOURNALIST IN CREATING TRUST

	US	UK	GER	FRA	DEN	FIN	SPA	ITA	BRA	JAP
BRAND IMPORTANT	57%	63%	64%	63%	57%	57%	55%	72%	82%	37%
JOURNALIST IMPORTANT	53%	44%	35%	60%	40%	31%	60%	66%	72%	31%

Q5e. To what extent are the following important to you in terms of whether you trust a source of news. Net important = those responding quite or very important
 Base: Total country samples

This table shows that in Spain, Italy and the US the journalist is almost as important or more important than brand in creating trust around news. In other countries like the UK, Germany and Finland, news brands remain the key driver of trust

TABLE 2

REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2014
**TOP REASONS FOR SIGNING UP FOR AN ONLINE NEWS SUBSCRIPTION
 (SELECTED COUNTRIES)**

	UK	GER	SPN	FRA	FIN	US
A BRAND I PREFER FOR NEWS	35%	34%	23%	31%	23%	33%
BROAD RANGE OF NEWS COVERAGE	46%	26%	42%	49%	46%	47%
QUALITY OF SPECIFIC COLUMNISTS, WRITERS AND JOURNALISTS	31%	22%	34%	40%	11%	35%
ENABLES ACCESS WHEREVER AND WHENEVER I WANT	42%	43%	37%	39%	63%	49%
NO OTHER WAY TO ACCESS VALUED CONTENT	16%	24%	15%	19%	9%	20%

OPTQ7b/c. You said you have a subscription with at least one news provider, what were the three most important factors in _taking/keeping_ an online news subscription in the first place (please choose up to three)
 Base: All who subscribe UK: 93; Germany: 93; Spain 83; France 103; Finland 131; USA 171

This table shows that the quality of specific writers is an important factor in persuading consumers to sign up to an online news subscription – especially in France and the US. Other important factors include the broad range of coverage, the freedom to access on different devices and identification with the brand itself

TABLE 3

REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2014
TOP JOURNALISTS IN TWITTER (UK)

1. Caitlin Moran	6. Grace Dent	11. Evan Davis	16. Polly Toynbee
2. Jon Snow	7. Jonathan Agnew	12. Krishnan Guru-Murthy	17. Henry Winter
3. Victoria Coren	8. Guido Fawkes	13. Laura Kuenssberg	18. Alan Rusbridger
4. Robert Peston	9. Owen Jones	14. Rory Cellan-Jones	19. Kevin Maguire
5. Nick Robinson	10. Andrew Neil	15. Jeremy Vine	20. Andrew Rawnsley

Source: YouGov social media analysis tool (SoMA) following a representative sample of 7000 UK Twitter users. Usage monitored 26 February– 11 March 2014

The full report will be available from: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/>

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Notes for Editors

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Survey conducted in US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Finland, Brazil and Japan. Total sample size was 18859 adults with around 2000 per country. Fieldwork was undertaken at the end of January/start of February 2014.

The survey was carried out online. The data was weighted to targets set on age and gender, region, newspaper readership and social grade to reflect the total population.

The sample is reflective of the population who have access to the internet and respondents were screened out if they had not accessed news in the last month.

Please note that Brazil is representative of an urban population rather than a national population as such the internet penetration is likely to be higher than for the country as a whole, which must be taken into consideration when interpreting results.

Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2014

The research and report can also be found on a dedicated website (www.digitalnewsreport.org) from 12th June containing slidepacks, charts, and raw data tables, with a licence that encourages reuse. A description of the methodology is available with the complete questionnaire.

This is the third in what the RISJ hope will be an annual series of reports that tracks the transition of the news industry towards an increasingly digital and multi-platform future.

Sponsors of this year's report include Google, BBC Global News, Ofcom, Newsworks, Edelman, France Télévisions and the Media Industry Research Foundation of Finland as well as RISJ's academic partners Hans Bredow Institute in Hamburg, the School of Journalism at the Institute of Political Science in Paris, and Roskilde University in Denmark – and the School of Communication at the University of Navarra in Spain. However, sole responsibility for the analysis, interpretation and conclusions drawn lies with the authors and editors of the Report.

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

The Thomson Reuters Foundation is the core funder of the Reuters Institute, based in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford. The Institute was launched in November 2006 and developed from the Reuters Fellowship Programme, established at Oxford 31 years ago. The Institute, an international research centre in the comparative study of journalism, aims to be global in its perspective and provides a leading forum for scholars from a wide range of disciplines to engage with journalists from around the world. See <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/>

Nic Newman - Study Author and Joint Editor

Nic Newman is a journalist and digital strategist who played a key role in shaping the BBC's internet services over more than a decade. He was a founding member of the BBC News website, leading international coverage as World Editor (1997–2001). As head of product development, he led digital teams, developing websites, mobile, and interactive TV applications for all BBC Journalism sites. Nic is currently a Research Associate at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford and a consultant on digital media.

David Levy – Joint Editor

David Levy is Director of the Reuters Institute, a Fellow of Green Templeton College and an expert in media policy and regulation. He previously worked at the BBC both as a news and current affairs producer, reporter, and editor, and later as Controller of Public Policy. His recent publications include *The Changing Business of Journalism and its Implications for Democracy* (edited with Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, RISJ, 2010) and *The Public Appetite for Foreign News on TV and Online* (with Richard Sambrook and Simon Terrington, RISJ, 2013).