

## **WhatsApp is becoming a key social network for news, but few countries have fallen for Twitter as a source in the way the UK has done.**

Having shaken up the comfortable old world of news, the social media revolution is now itself fragmenting, with different players dominating different countries.

Reuters Institute experts say it is too early to say whether the new ways in which younger populations encounter, absorb and share new information about their worlds will have deep-rooted social effects, but there is already noticeable divergence in how successful different sources are.

One source, Facebook, has established a powerful position in all 10 countries where YouGov surveyed news consumption habits for the 2014 Digital News Report. But the battle for attention among other social media has thrown up a variety of winners.

WhatsApp is emerging as a key network for news in some countries, while Twitter turns out not to be as popular as British and American journalists often assume. YouTube is a vital conduit for some societies, but almost unused for news in others. The fragmentation of social media is one of the key findings of the 2014 Reuters Institute Digital News Report.

Despite Twitter's reputation for breaking and distributing news, the survey finds that overall Facebook is by far the biggest network with 60% of our online sample using it for any purpose and over a third (35%) saying they used it for news. (see Charts 1/2)

Twitter is widely used for news in the UK (12%), in the US (8%) and especially in Spain (21%) – in part because leading broadcasters (BBC, CNN) and newspapers (*El País*, *New York Times*, *Guardian*) have promoted its use in wider coverage. By contrast it is used much less in Germany (3%) and Finland (6%) where Google+ is twice as popular for news. (see Chart 3) In Finland, a domestic aggregation service called Ampparit, seems to be surprisingly popular (12 %)

Video network YouTube is heavily used for news in Italy (23%), France (16%), and the US (17%) but much less in the UK (6%) and Denmark (5%). Strong brands in countries such as the UK have been reluctant to put too much video content onto YouTube, hoping they can continue to attract users directly to their own websites.

The rise of messaging network WhatsApp, recently bought by Facebook for \$19bn, has been particularly striking. (see Chart 4)

In Spain, 60% of our sample said they had used the network in a given week, and 26% said they had used it for news, with *El País* amongst traditional news providers experimenting

with the platform. Germans and Italians have also taken strongly to the network as have world cup hosts Brazil where 32% of our urban sample use WhatsApp for any purpose and 15% for news. By contrast, the network has not yet caught on in the US, where only 3% use it for any purpose and just 1% for news.

Political parties and media companies in India have also been experimenting with WhatsApp in the recent elections. New challengers like BuzzFeed, Huffington Post and NowThisNews have been particularly adept at distributing content via Instagram, Pinterest, Google+ and Vine – as well as Facebook.

The report highlights the increasing adoption of new networks amongst the young and the growing importance of social recommendation as gateway to news: “The digital generation expect the news to come to them. Young people rarely go directly to a mainstream news website any more”, says report author Nic Newman.

The report goes on to suggest that these trends will have important ramifications for policymakers as well as publishers. Director of the Reuters Institute, Dr David Levy says:

“While choice proliferates, consumption may narrow as people rely on a limited range of sources, recommended by like minded friends with the risk that they are less exposed to a broader and wider societal news agenda.”

“As news aggregation and sharing take off, consumers may be more conscious of speed and the source of the recommendation than the reliability and trustworthiness of the original news source. Finally as the ways of reading news change, some people may operate in a news echo chamber where they are less likely to be exposed to other content through chance. “

### **Twitter in Britain – a case study**

Twitter may be smaller in size than Facebook, YouTube or Google+, but the research also shows it is highly influential and much more valued by heavy news users.

“Twitter users are actively interested in the news and tend to seek it out”, says report author Nic Newman. “Facebook users tend to bump into the news. They are less engaged”.

These data also show that UK Twitter users are significantly more likely to check what’s new (or click and read a news story) than users of other social networks like Facebook.

YouGov’s additional analysis for the Reuters Institute tracking actual usage across a representative sample of Twitter users suggests that 64% of people on Twitter in the UK (c.5.4 million) get news through one or more type of professional ‘news account’. 2.6 million follow at least one journalist, 2.2 million follow a breaking news account, and 1.9

million follow at least one general news brand. (see Table 1 for most popular accounts)  
Twitter users overall are evenly split by gender but are skewed more towards younger people than the overall UK population.

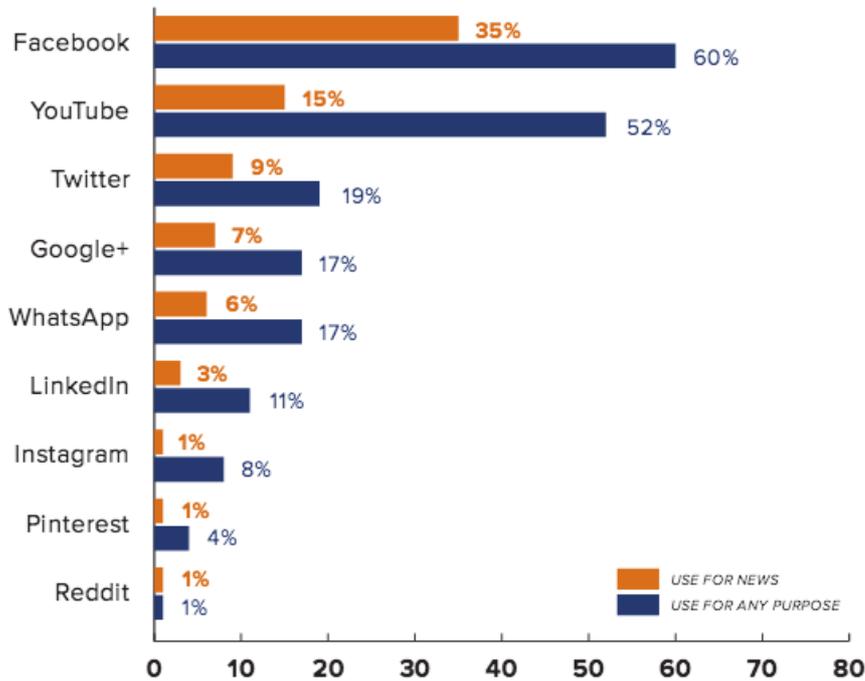
On average, people who follow journalists follow seven journalists. Those who follow news organisations follow just three accounts and those who follow breaking news accounts follow two on average.

The report also shows that, through searches and retweets from others, Twitter users are exposed to accounts and tweets in their timeline that they wouldn't normally see. Over two-thirds (68%) of UK Twitter users have interacted with a journalist or media organisation that they don't follow, through either a reply, favourite, or retweet. As a result, the influence of journalists and news organisations is probably more significant than the headline numbers suggest.

## CHART 1

REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2014

### TOP SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR NEWS (AVERAGE OF 10 COUNTRIES)



**Q12a/b.** Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose/for reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week

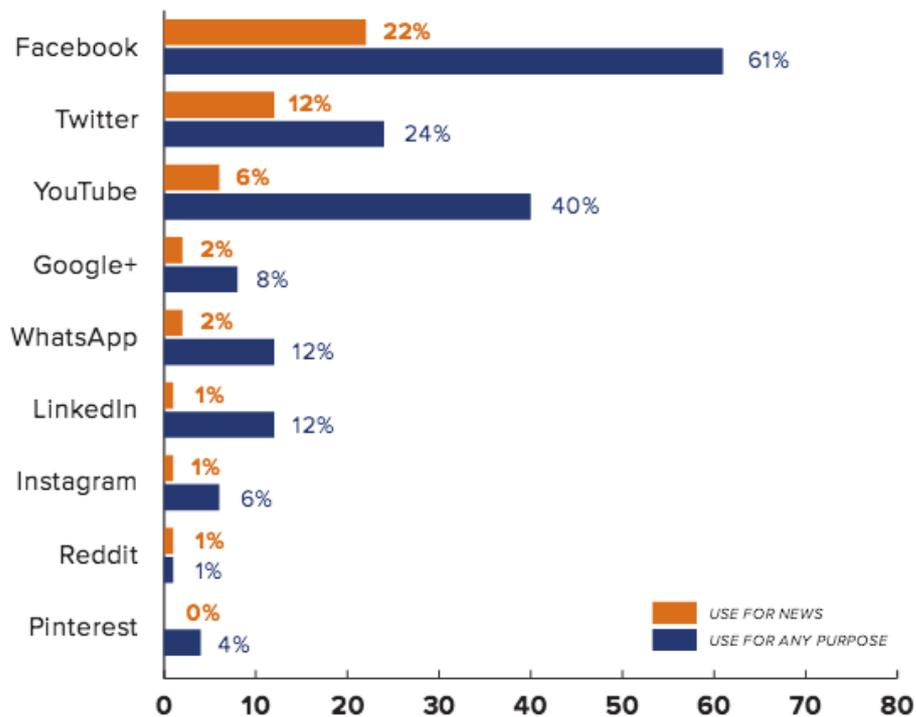
Base: All markets – UK=2082, Germany=2063, Spain=2017, Italy=2010, France=1946, Denmark=2036, Finland=1520, USA=2197, Urban Brazil=1015, Japan=1973

This chart shows that Facebook remains by far the most important network for news. It also shows the emergence of WhatsApp which is particularly popular with the young

## CHART 2

REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2014

### TOP SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR NEWS (UK)



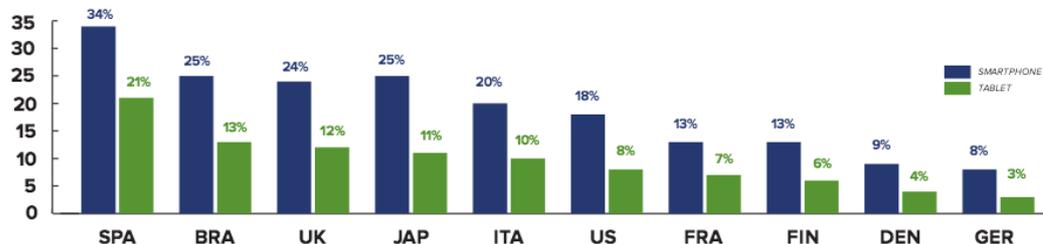
**Q12a/b.** Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose/for reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week?

Base: UK=2082

This chart shows that Facebook and YouTube is less used for news (as a proportion of total users than most other countries) but Twitter is used much more. Half of Twitter users in the UK use it for news every week

### CHART 3

#### REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2014 TWITTER FOR NEWS (ALL COUNTRIES)

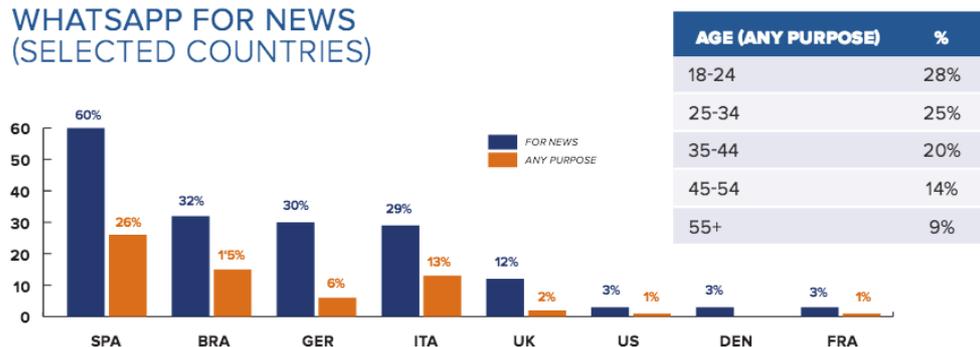


Q12a/b. Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose/for reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? Twitter code shown

Base: All markets – UK=2082, Germany=2063, Spain=2017, Italy=2010, France=1946, Denmark=2036, Finland=1520, USA=2197, Urban Brazil=1015, Japan=1973

### CHART 4

#### REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2014 WHATSAPP FOR NEWS (SELECTED COUNTRIES)



Q12a/b. Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose/for reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? WhatsApp code shown

Base: UK=2082, Germany=2063, Spain=2017, Italy=2010, France=1946, Denmark=2036, US=2197, Urban Brazil=1015

### TABLE 1

#### REUTERS INSTITUTE DIGITAL NEWS REPORT 2014 MOST POPULAR NEWS ACCOUNTS AMONG UK TWITTER USERS

	JOURNALISTS	BREAKING NEWS	GENERAL NEWSBRANDS
1	CAITLIN MORAN	BBC BREAKING	GUARDIAN
2	JON SNOW	SKY NEWSDESK	BBC NEWS
3	VICTORIA COREN	GUARDIAN NEWS	THE ECONOMIST
4	ROBERT PESTON	CHANNEL 4 NEWS	SKY NEWS
5	NICK ROBINSON	BREAKING NEWS	BBC NEWS (WORLD)

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

Interview requests should be sent to **Kate Hanneford-Smith** at the Reuters Institute  
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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](http://www.digitalnewsreport.org)) from 12<sup>th</sup> 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).