

Reuters Institute: Trust in News

Qualitative research report

20th April 2021



1. Background and Introduction

1.1 Background to this study

News organizations in competitive, contentious environments face a host of challenges around cultivating and sustaining trusting relationships with the communities they seek to serve. While some of these challenges may be self-inflicted and inadvertent, or a consequence of deliberate decisions made to report critical news (even when it means alienating segments of the public), many other challenges stem from the changing digital environment.

Research indicates that news outlets are looking at how to create durable bonds with readers when consumers are discovering and engaging with their work via platforms. Research is now required to understand what the public thinks about news and the platforms they increasingly rely on to get their news.

In interviews conducted with journalists and senior managers at news outlets across the Global North (UK and US) and South (Brazil and India), Reuters Institute has reported considerable apprehension about how media organizations can create durable bonds with readers, listeners, and viewers when growing numbers are discovering and engaging with their work via platforms: search engines such as Google, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and messaging services including WhatsApp and Telegram. Little is known about how the public thinks about news and the platforms they increasingly rely on to get their news.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The study aims to establish a better understanding of how people think about the news media choices in their countries and the extent to which platforms serve as key brokers in structuring those relationships, specifically exploring:

1. How people think about the news media choices in their countries;
2. How people curate the news they engage with and what matters to them when they seek out trusted sources;
3. What people expect from reputable news organisations and journalists, compared to what they get;
4. How credibility is established over time, how it is lost, and how news outlets can engage with audiences in new ways.

1.3 Method

The research involved a two-stage qualitative approach comprising online text-based focus groups and video-enabled depth interviews to generate the detailed insights required.

YouGov conducted two 90-minute text-based online focus groups with the public in the UK, US, Brazil, and India. Respondents were recruited from the YouGov panel in the UK, the US and India, and via a recruitment partner in Brazil. Following the focus groups, fifteen 45-min video-enabled interviews were conducted in each market using fresh sample. Interviews were recruited by YouGov and conducted by the Reuters Institute team.

1.4 Sample

The research focused on a targeted sample of metropolitan respondents, with a higher social grade and average or above average education. Social grade and education varied in each market, to reflect cultural and market differences. In the US and the UK, for example, average or above average education is classed as degree-level, whereas in India and Brazil average or above average education is secondary school and above.

Groups were split by trust in news – with one group of those more trusting of news, and one group of those less trusting of news in each market. Trust was established using a series of scale

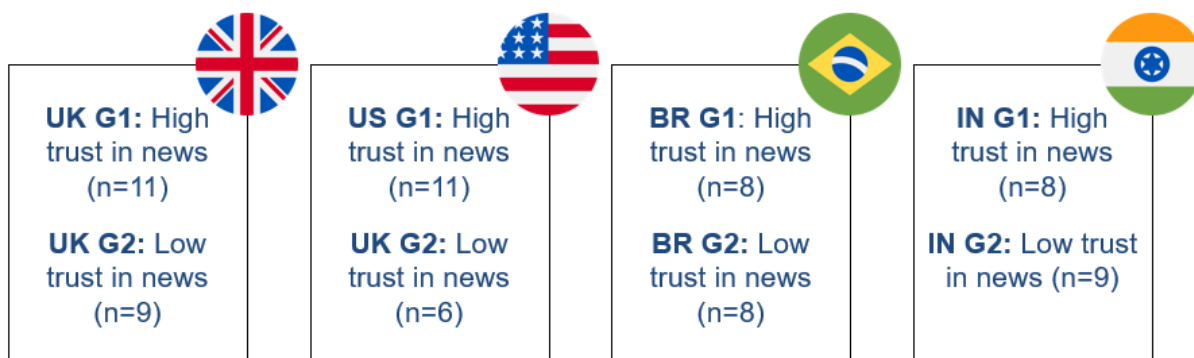
questions, used in the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (DNR) survey, focusing on trust in information in the news media, usage of and trust in platforms, and trust of specific news outlets.

- **Generally speaking, I can trust information from the news media in [LOCATION]?**
- **Many people access news in different ways. Thinking about your own news habits, how often do you... [engage with different news platforms]**
- **[Generally speaking, to what extent do you trust information from the following media types in [LOCATION]?**
- **Which of the following sources do you generally TRUST or DISTRUST for information?**

In addition to trust in news, focus groups included a mix of media behaviour, political affiliation, and demographics. The sample structure of the depth interviews was reflective of the focus group sample frame.

- Mix of gender, age, all metropolitan
- Higher social grade; average-above average education
- Mix of platforms (inc. social media, messaging, and aggregator sites), and news outlets used
- Mix of frequency of access to news content
- Mix of devices used to access news content
- Mix of political affiliation / partisanship

The focus groups comprised 6-11 respondents in each market.



The following report is based on feedback from the online focus groups only. It is important to note that the analysis reflects the discussions had in the focus groups, so reports of actual behaviour must be treated as somewhat subjective. However, it is possible to confidently identify a number of themes from the data which were seen across groups and markets, in addition to some nuance between the different markets.

The focus groups took place between 18th and 21st January, and the interviews were conducted between 25th January and 11th February. The focus groups took place against a backdrop of news stories affecting the research markets, and the world.

Unrest in US over Black Lives Matter and racial inequality

Covid-19 deaths exceed 200,000 in Brazil – the worst affected country

US Capitol is stormed in protest at upcoming Biden inauguration

Trump is locked out of Twitter for incitement of violence

Ford Motor Company announce closure of 3 engine plants in Brazil

Indian Farmers Protests

Covid-19 vaccines rolled out globally

2.1 Executive summary

1. Staying informed about national and global events is a key driver for respondents to engage with news content;
2. Respondents recognize that fake news, misinformation and bias are present in the media and are mindful of the content they engage with;
3. When choosing an information source, familiarity, convenience and situation are key, and some sources are trusted more than others;
4. When choosing a platform, habit and convenience play a key role in the selection process; social media is trusted less than other platforms;
5. Respondents say they are conscious of the role that algorithms play in the content that they see and engage with online;
6. Content type and social context influence the news content respondents share, and platforms influence how they share it;
7. Many say they are confident in navigating news content online, though the less tech-literate require some support;
8. Individuals across all groups have unknowingly shared fake news in the past;
9. Respondents are looking for platforms to do more to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the news content they make available;
10. Good journalism means accurate reporting based on adequate investigation and minimal bias, so respondents give journalists some responsibility here too;
11. Some respondents are aware of, and sympathetic to, challenges and pressures which may impact the quality of journalism;
12. Few follow specific journalists, although many show preferences for sources and journalists generally who produce impartial content;
13. Many are critical of partisanship and highlight its potential to negatively impact on trust in news;
14. Representation in the news could be improved across markets, but particularly in Brazil and India;
15. The accessibility of news is a positive change, with many saying they seek out a variety of sources and content online;
16. The quantity of news available can be overwhelming, particularly when content is negative;
17. Many hope for a more accurate, impartial news media in future but there is scepticism over the likelihood of this;
18. There should therefore be greater support for audiences looking to evaluate content – linking to source, highlighting opinion pieces, for example;
19. Engagement with news is likely to stay consistent for many, although some suggest an increase in critical engagement.

2.2 Key findings – UK

Respondents in the UK focus groups appear to be particularly savvy when it comes to news. They say they feel confident in navigating content and distinguishing between fact and fiction, with little support from others, and approach news content with a degree of scepticism. Many have identified a range of sources which they access regularly, based on the quality of the content produced, and some enjoy engaging with opinion pieces in addition to fast news updates on national and global events.

Whilst they enjoy news as individuals and see it as a valuable resource which keeps them informed, few admit to sharing news with family or friends. Those who do say they are careful about what they share and with whom, given the reputational risk of sharing fake news, although it is difficult to gauge the accuracy of this given that respondents may not always identify fake news.

Across UK groups, respondents seem to exhibit a level of pragmatism when discussing journalism and news content; while they value accuracy and impartiality, they also say they are aware of challenges which may prevent this. They therefore expect to have to rely on their own critical eye to an extent, in order to extract the greatest value from the content they consume.

While many access news content frequently, a majority mention that over-consumption of news when content is particularly negative can have an impact on wellbeing. Consequently, given high-profile global events such as the pandemic and political divides, some say they have limited their access to news for the time being.

2.3 Key findings – US

Similarly, to respondents in the UK, respondents in the US groups say they exercise caution when engaging with news content. Many have been exposed to more extreme sources and report being particularly aware of partisanship in the media, which some say can create polarised views in society. Some say this has felt particularly prevalent in the run up to the US elections, alongside 'fake news', so while there is a level of fatigue present, respondents also see partisanship as somewhat inevitable.

A majority of respondents in this market say they are accessing a range of sources and seek these out based on the accuracy and also the recency of content. While some enjoy news sources with a lighter tone, there is appetite for news to be informative rather than relying on celebrity content to pull in views.

Again, these groups say they try to assess the accuracy of the content they access. Those more trusting of news do share content when it is relevant, choosing closed groups for the most part (for example WhatsApp) rather than posting content publicly; some of those who are less trusting share news infrequently, although this was also mentioned in the high trust group to a lesser extent.

In line with other markets, respondents in the US focus groups appear keen to see a reduction in biased news in future, alongside increased accuracy in reporting.

2.4 Key findings – Brazil

Respondents in these focus groups often refer to the potential for bias in the media and there are comments in particular about the use of the media by the Government to push a political agenda. This leaves many feeling manipulated. Unlike respondents in the US and UK groups, respondents in this market show a marked negativity towards a partisan media and call for journalists and publications to do more to tackle biased news.

Despite this, it is more common for respondents in these markets to share news, both via messaging apps, but also through posts on social media, discussing current issues with friends



and family to keep them updated and hear their perspectives. Respondents say they use their judgement to ascertain whether the story is true first.

Respondents in these groups are open to accessing news from various sources, however are wary of being manipulated or sold content which is politically one sided; there is a feeling that news outlets and journalists are acting on behalf of politicians rather than for the good of their audience. In these groups, there is less acknowledgement of the challenges faced by those producing news content when compared to the UK and US.

2.5 Key findings – India

Similar to respondents in the Brazil focus groups, respondents in India frequently mention the propensity for news content to be sensationalist and biased. In this market particularly, respondents perceive a lack of representation of the general population, with stories focusing on issues which are seen to be more glamorous, for example reporting on celebrities, and are keen to see content become more balanced.

Respondents in this market are accessing news via a range of platforms online, but also reading print news and relying on TV more than in other markets. Many say there is a need to cross-check information for accuracy, and they rely on Internet searches for this.

Reports of sharing news were more common in this market, with respondents in the high trust group especially mentioning using WhatsApp and social media to share internet news links with friends and family. While many mention the importance of using credible sources, many also recall instances of sharing false information which prompted some to consider engaging greater scrutiny in future.

Similarly, to other markets, respondents in the India focus groups report being keen to see greater accuracy of reporting going forwards and a move away from partisan press in order to build back trust in news.

2.6 High versus low trust

While some differences exist between those who are more trusting versus those who are less trusting of news, there are many more similarities, with respondents often expressing the same views and strength of sentiment. Regardless of their level of trust in news, respondents say that they question the content they consume, and are mindful of validity.

While many comments are echoed across both high and low trust groups, there are sometimes subtle differences in the frequency and language used, although it is difficult to infer why this may be. Those who are more trusting of news appear to be more confident in the news they read, and may place more trust in the media generally, but it does not mean that they trust all the content they see. While they place trust in their preferred news outlets, i.e. outlets that provide quality, considered and (often) balanced content, they consume news more widely than this, and say they have seen bias and misinformation in the media at large. These respondents say they cast a critical eye over content, checking sources and reading as widely as possible to achieve a balanced view.

Those who are less trusting of the news generally seem to be less engaged with news content than those in the higher trust groups. Not only are they less trusting of the industry and the content available in general, they also comment on bias and misinformation in the media, particularly fake news. Although this was a common theme across both high and low trust groups, this audience appear more resigned to the situation than higher trust groups: some say they struggle to navigate the volume of content available, some say they feel overwhelmed by negative news, and others find differentiating genuine content from fake news a challenge. This can lead them to take a step back and disengage.

- *“I think with how much of the media reports negative stuff over positive stuff, people in general have become more anxious and negative themselves.”* **UK, Low Trust**
- *“Feels like news outlets can pump out whatever they like to their audience with little repercussion.”* **UK, Low Trust**
- *“Fake Stories – woah! there are too many. We find at least 7 out of 10 easily.”* **IN, Low Trust**
- *“Most of the political parties have their social media accounts they try to demean other parties by creating fake stories about them”* **IN, Low Trust**

Impact of Culture

The cultural context also plays a role in how trusting respondents are of the media, with some key differences between the groups in the UK and US, and in India and Brazil.

In the US and UK, especially in higher trust groups, respondents say they are generally confident in their ability to access trusted content in the media. This is particularly the case in the UK, where they feel they can access balanced and impartial content. Across groups in India and Brazil there is a frustration at the bias present in mainstream media, and respondents say they have to work hard to access trusted content.

In India, respondents report that some news outlets provide a more biased view of the world than others and say they will critique what they see or filter their viewing as a result. The celebrity focus of a lot of news content in India is also frustrating for this group; more educational and informative content would positively impact perceptions of trust and credibility. In Brazil, respondents report bias in the media, and say that they must filter and critique the information that they engage with. Bias is said to be more prevalent on some platforms, such as TV, than others, which is a concern for some given the reach of TV news in this market.

- *“Nowadays, there is no neutral news anymore. All of them come with the journalist's formed and injected opinion. We have to read, filter and absorb.”* **BR, High Trust**
- *“I also don't believe much in what television says. Everyone has their own game of interest, whether political or financial. We need to have a greater discernment to be able to filter the information that is presented to us. Because they want to manipulate the mass with often distorted news.”* **BR, High Trust**
- *“No news should be in favour of someone or some group. This would create negative impacts amongst the citizens which may lead to civil issues.”* **IN, High Trust**

Confidence

Respondents in lower trust groups report limited trust in news but a minority also seem to have slightly lower confidence in their ability to manage the volume of news available and to identify trusted content within this. However, there are some regional differences in how those less trusting of the news talk about accuracy in news and trust in the content they engage with.

In the US, India, and Brazil, some of those in lower trust groups find it difficult to identify platforms where they can easily distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information. Respondents often appear to be resigned to this – they feel that bias is ever present and report applying a ‘healthy scepticism’ to what they engage in as a result. In these markets’ frequent exposure to fake news and misinformation has undermined the trust they place in the content they engage with. In the UK, some respondents identify some news outlets as more reputable than others, given their previous online and print behaviour. Individuals say that news outlets may use their reputations to their advantage, and push messages out that can lead to a more polarised position.

- *“At the moment, news is generally inclined towards certain affiliation, equally unbiased and to mention, without fact.”* **IN, Low Trust**
- *“With so much fake news, nowadays it is very difficult to distinguish a reliable source or not, but I always try to choose the one that gives me more confidence, the most secure ones, for example G1.”* **BR, Low Trust**
- *“I think healthy scepticism is necessary – at some point we have to rely on some source though... all platforms have some kind of fault in trustworthiness, though, admittedly, social media is the least trustworthy.”* **US, Low Trust**
- *“Though I'd say the Telegraph is taking advantage of its past reputation to move to a more polarised position.”* **UK, Low Trust**

Impact of global events

Respondents note that fake news has touched on some important global events in the last year, particularly the Covid-19 pandemic. While it's not clear if respondents' trust in the media has diminished during this period because of this, they say they are exercising caution when engaging with any such content.

News consumption: chapter summary

1. Staying informed about national / global events is a key driver to engage with news content;
2. Respondents recognize that fake news, misinformation and bias are present in the media and are mindful of the content they engage with;
3. When choosing an information source, familiarity, convenience and situation are key, and some sources are trusted more than others;
4. When choosing a platform, habit and convenience play a key role in the selection process; social media is trusted less than other platforms;
5. Respondents are conscious of the role that algorithms play in the content that they see and engage with online.

3.1 What is news and is it important?

Across groups, key associations of news centre on news content, fake news and misinformation, and news outlets and platforms.

Respondents define news in broad terms as 'information about what is going on in the world'. Most talk about news in the context of 'hard' news, in particular politics and current affairs, taking place on a national or international level. Individuals also comment on regional news in this context, especially in the UK. Some of those who are less trusting of news talk about news in negative terms, describing it as 'negative' and 'fear-mongering' and saying that it makes them feel 'anxious'.

- *"News" is what is happening around the world, the events taking place.* **US, High Trust**
- *"Fearmongering, confusing, frustrating, divisive."* **US, Low Trust**
- *"At the moment, all associations are doom and gloom, to be honest!"* **UK, Low Trust**

Across groups, fake news is spontaneously mentioned in the context of news consumption. Respondents report being aware of bias in news, which can be linked to the partisanship of the news outlet, the type of content, for example, bias in opinion pieces, as well as misinformation. As stated earlier, some mention that fake news and misinformation has touched recent global events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic in all markets, as well as political unrest in Brazil, and the US election. Given the amount of fake news and misinformation surrounding these events, respondents can struggle to identify fact from fiction when reviewing content, which they say is both challenging and frustrating.

- *"It's definitely helpful to follow the news to be well-informed. You can hear news from word of mouth or social media, but they tend to be biased opinions, and often don't tell the whole picture."* **UK, High Trust**
- *"During the pandemic, in the news we saw a lot of bad information, many were fake news, like many people died from heart condition, accident, and other things and in hospitals, they said that it was Covid, many were buried in a sad way, without having a dignified burial, due to dirty lies of a dirty government."* **BR, High Trust**

Across all markets, online, social media, TV and radio are key platforms for accessing news. Respondents are positive about the range of ways in which they can access news content, which they say makes news more accessible than ever before. Increased access to news means that respondents can find, read, and disseminate content to others, which is particularly well received in

India and Brazil. However, in the UK and US, where respondents say news has been readily accessible for some time, this can lead to a sense of 'news overload', which can leave some feeling overwhelmed.

- *"Yes, to a degree. I mean, everyone needs to have a general idea of what is going on in his/her community and world. But we also need to take a step away if the news is affecting our mental or physical health."* **US, Low Trust**

3.2 Why do people access the news?

Across markets, staying informed on a national and global level is a key driver for accessing and engaging with news content. Many are conscious of the potential for bias in news, and respondents cite the importance of reading widely to capture a balanced view.

News is more accessible than ever before, due to 24/7 news coverage, and the wide range of platforms through which respondents can engage with news content. While keeping up to date with news content can be a challenge where situations are developing rapidly, respondents believe that it is important to stay up to date wherever they can. By engaging with the news, they can increase their knowledge on key topics and go on to have informed discussions with others.

- *"Definitely, there's a lot that affects us personally with the economy or international travel, and it's our duty as citizens to be well-informed."* **US, High Trust**
- *"We need news to be aware of what is happening around us, even if this news is an untruth."* **BR, Low Trust**

While staying informed is seen as important, many say they are mindful of bias and fake news in this context. Engaging with news content that is reliable and accurate will lead to a more informed individual, however, engaging with news content that is biased, or based on fake news will lead to a misinformed individual, undermining any positive impacts of engaging. Some of those in lower trust groups appear to be particularly mindful of the prevalence of misinformation and fake news in the media and how this can impact the reader.

- *"This has been the era of fake news, so you have to use your best judgement."* **US, Low Trust**
- *"I think you need to follow the news to make well-informed decisions. If the news source itself does not intend to inform (but rather mislead), you may be worse off."* **US, Low Trust**
- *"Majority of the News Portal whether Offline, Online, Live are manipulative, demeaning, targeting a certain section, controlled under respective Politicians or Business inclining to certain Ideologies. The news portal at the moment are more concerned on profits and would never think twice not to create fake contents."* **IN, Low Trust**

While respondents agree that it is important to understand what is happening on a local and national level, especially if it directly impacts them, their family, or their networks, it is also important to understand news on a global scale. This has become increasingly important in more recent months given the number of high-profile global events that have taken place, for example, the global pandemic and Covid-19 measures, the US elections and inauguration of President Biden, and the Brexit negotiations. Having access to up-to-date information in cases where events develop rapidly is key as it allows them to stay informed of change.

- *"At the moment especially, you have to keep up with the news in case of the rules suddenly changing and you not breaking the law one day to breaking the law the next."* **UK, High Trust**
- *"If one does not follow the current news, he/she may be left behind. Hence it is very important that we follow the news several times daily."* **IN, Low Trust**

Many describe taking a pragmatic approach to engaging with news content. Respondents are aware that bias and opinion can filter into the content they consume, and they say they do not take content as read as a result. Many say that readers and viewers have a responsibility to question the news content they consume, and search more widely for content wherever they can. Respondents say there is a need for balance, for example, reading different sources – including those that do not reflect their own political or policy views – and reflecting on these to gain a more considered view of a topic. Some also talk about the importance of casting a critical eye on content, to avoid being misled by fake news or misinformation.

3.3 Choosing a source

When it comes to selecting information sources, respondents report being primarily led by accuracy of information, and familiarity with a news outlet or brand. Many also mention the importance of accessing multiple perspectives in information sources, though this can be challenging in some markets.

Respondents say that they are looking for content that accurately portrays events, that is clearly sourced, and has well-evidenced claims. Content also needs to be clearly presented and well-written, so that it is accessible to the consumer. There is a preference for simple, bite-sized content, but while brevity is important, it should not be at the expense of quality. Many say they are looking for content that is succinct yet accurate, rather than over-simplified or dumbed down.

- *“Yes, it needs to be understandable, but you don't want it oversimplified as you may miss the point.”* **UK, High Trust**
- *“For me I would be concerned that the shorter the message, the more it could be pushing an agenda, not giving a thorough assessment of a situation. I try to read around the headlines.”* **UK, Low Trust**

Accuracy of content is closely linked to trust in content. Respondents say they want to be confident that the information they consume is reliable and credible. Across groups, respondents talk about being drawn to news outlets and news content that they consider to be accurate; accuracy therefore appears to be a pull factor, with respondents actively seeking out trusted news outlets, and avoiding or overlooking news outlets that provide reports that are inaccurate or misleading.

- *“Reliability of the source, I watch the BBC or ITV news because I trust them and think they are reporting objectively.”* **UK, High Trust**
- *“I rely on Mint and CNBC as I have found their data to be most accurate and to the point, I engage in their apps, newspaper and tv channels.”* **IN, Low Trust**

Across groups, familiarity also plays a role in source selection. Respondents tend to favour a small number of reputable news outlets that they are familiar with and have used before. As noted previously, respondents need to be assured of the accuracy, reliability, and trustworthiness of a news outlet's content to use it long-term.

While familiarity is important, respondents recognise that their wider views and experiences, for example, their political affiliation and policy views, also shape their preferences. Respondents are often naturally drawn to news outlets that share their views; however, while many respondents in the UK and US say it is relatively easy to seek out sources that reflect their viewpoint, this is not the case in all markets. In India and Brazil, some news outlets are known to take a strong partisan stance, shaping the news agenda. In these markets, respondents say that seeking out content that reflects their views or provides an alternative perspective, is a more involved process.

While there is an understanding that news content can be one-sided or biased, there is strong appetite for a more impartial view that draws on multiple perspectives for a more nuanced view on a topic. In some markets, particularly India and Brazil, but also in the US, respondents find it more

difficult to seek out impartial or balanced content. Indeed, in India, some respondents question how news can work in the public's favour given the lack of impartiality. Impartiality seems particularly important for those in the UK, and respondents are generally positive about the BBC in this context. Many say that the BBC strives to deliver balanced coverage, especially on controversial topics, such as Brexit. However, they also recognise that its impartial stance is criticised by other members of the public.

- *"I don't have time/desire to look at multiple sources. I use the BBC – somebody once commented to me that the right thinks it's left-wing, and the left think it's right-wing! That tells me all I need to know about its impartiality."* **UK, High Trust**
- *"I stay away from news on any social media channel as so much click bait and fake news and head to so called reputable sources – such as BBC."* **UK, Low Trust**
- *"The BBC is a preferred brand although it's not perfect. I don't like the fact that some of their journalists are so active on social media as this can lead to accusations of bias."* **UK, Low Trust**

3.4 Choosing a platform

Across groups, respondents are using a range of platforms to access news content and their choice is shaped by habit, situation, and convenience. The trust that they place in different platforms also shapes their decisions.

For many, habit is a key driver in their choices around accessing news content. They often fit news into their daily routine and will use specific platforms to access news content at specific times, for example, checking news alerts on their mobile in the morning, watching TV news in the evening, or reading the paper at the weekend. Most use a variety of platforms over the course of the day, based on their situation, and what is accessible at the time. When they are at home, TV and radio play a role, along with online channels. Out of the home, online sources, such as news outlet websites, search engines and social media, play a more prominent role. For many, social media plays a role both in and out of the home.

Across markets, respondents also talk about the role of convenience in this context. Online news is the most up-to-date source, as it is updated around the clock, and provides 24/7 access to content. TV and radio are considered to provide access to bite-sized news content, such as hourly news bulletins, or evening news programmes, which appeals to those who want fewer regular updates.

- *"[Online is important] As I can access online website anytime anywhere and it is instantly updated and latest news."* **IN, High Trust**
- *"Yes, nowadays we have an easier access through websites by cell phone; in past years, we didn't have this rather quick access."* **BR, Low Trust**
- *"Quite often it's routine and familiarity – reading newspapers on specific days or including news websites as part of your morning routine."* **UK, High Trust**

In addition to habit, situation and convenience, the platform itself also plays a role, and some are more trusted than others. For many, platforms that take them direct to the source of news, such as a news outlet website, are preferred to those that are a step removed from the original source, such as social media. Content on a news outlet website – overseen by an editor – may be more reliable than content that is found in a shared social media post. Social media provides a key challenge for respondents, as they recognise that anyone can share content via this channel, not just journalists with training and experience.

- *“Social media networks are something in which anyone can write whatever they want, that is, I believe there is a lot of fake news spread out and a lot of information that ends up being distorted or misinterpreted.”* **BR, Low Trust**
- *“I have heard that Twitter is mostly based on people's opinions rather than facts, although I don't use it so haven't investigated enough to know for sure, but I do use Facebook and often notice spammy, clickbaity, fake news there, so I don't think it is very reliable.”* **UK, Low Trust**
- *“I don't trust social media information very much, there is a lot of fake news and people publish whatever they want and often distort the information according to personal interest.”* **BR, Low Trust**

Online

As mentioned previously, online news is important for respondents across markets, with all engaging with online news in some form. News outlet websites and apps are key for many, though aggregator sites (for example, Apple news), and search engines also play a role.

For most, it is accessibility that draws them to this platform: with enhanced technology and access to devices they can access content whenever they need throughout the day. As mentioned above, online news sources are considered to provide the most current content, especially for breaking news, which they can follow live (for example, breaking news about the storming of Capitol Hill).

When engaging with news content online, many say that they seek out providers that they consider to be the accurate and credible, as they expect the content they produce to be good quality and trustworthy. There is also a view that engaging with online content closest to the source is more reliable and trusted, given the presence of the editor.

While credibility and reliability of sources is important for online platforms, many, especially those in the US, Brazil, and India, say that impartiality is a concern, and can undermine trust. Respondents are aware that different news outlets have their own agenda / partisanship, and that this can shape the content they produce and promote online. As a result, many say they look to multiple online sources where possible to capture different angles of a story; by reading several sources they can be more confident in the key facts. In the US there are comments around the poor quality of news content available, which for many is due to 24-hour news culture. Outlets are under pressure to produce a lot of content on a continual basis, and some question the quality and accuracy of the information as a result.

- *“One other criticism is that with 24-hour news there's so much airtime to fill it means more fluff, commentary, outrage, etc.”* **US, Low Trust**
- *“I get somewhat bored with so much fake news being displayed or news that privilege the interest of one and not others. We have to search for them to have reliable news. We are always questioning if what we read or hear is reliable and true.”* **BR, Low Trust**

Social media

There are mixed views on the quality and accuracy of news content available via social media across markets. While many are engaging with social media to a degree, it is said to play a more prominent role in accessing news in Brazil and India than it does in the UK and US.

Amongst the sample, few currently search for news on social media, though they may click through links that come up in their newsfeed. Many, especially those in the UK, say they use social media for opinion more than they do for 'hard news'. They recognise that social media provides a space where 'anyone can be an expert' and where writers can 'push their views' on others. As a result of

this, they say that they question the credibility of the content they see. For individuals, Twitter is seen as more trusted than Facebook as the reader can go direct to the source for news content. Respondents – whether more or less trusting of news – note the importance of fact checking news on social media, however this can be a challenge at present as sources aren't always clear.

- *"I don't trust social media, I think there's a lot of fake news."* **BR, Low Trust**
- *"I don't usually access news through social media, except when I directly receive a link that leads me to the real news outlet. The social media networks are full of fake news, often spread in an industrial way."* **BR, Low Trust**

While social media is used in the UK and US, respondents are often relying more heavily on more established platforms, such as online sources, TV, and radio. Respondents say that these platforms provide more reliable and accurate content than social media.

In contrast, in Brazil, social media appears to be seen as closer to other mainstream news platforms and it plays a key role in the dissemination of news. Respondents in India also welcome the ease and speed at which social media allows them to access and share news. However, in both markets, respondents say they are aware of the prevalence of fake news and misinformation on social media, as well as bias in India. Respondents say that they must exercise caution when engaging with content.

- *"Social media news spreads fast but we can't rely on the news completely."* **IN, High Trust**
- *"When I see news on social media, I usually Google for the source, and go to either the source or other websites that I find reliable."* **BR, Low Trust**

TV

While TV is a key platform across markets, there are some challenges about the quality and reliability of the news content on this platform in the US, Brazil, and India.

In the UK there is general positivity about the range of TV news available, on both a national and a local level. Respondents say they can easily pick and choose TV news outlets to meet their needs, for example, if they're looking for 'hard news' rather than entertainment content. In the US, many talk about the influence of entertainment in TV news, which can lead to an opinion-led agenda, rather than one based on the facts. Respondents give examples of news outlets which they perceive as providing inaccurate content, such as Fox News, Newsmax, and OAN.

In Brazil and India, accessing reliable and trustworthy news content on TV is said to be more challenging. In India, respondents state that some news outlets provide a balanced agenda, but many more take a biased view or promote fake news. Respondents say that some TV news outlets are partisan, for example, Republic TV and DD News taking a pro-BJP view, and NDTV taking a pro-congress view, which shapes the content that they deliver. In Brazil, some respondents believe that TV news does not always portray a realistic view of events. Mentioned as a popular and accessible platform by respondents in these groups, some raise concerns that people may be misinformed as a result of what they perceive to be unreliable information shown on TV.

- *"Reliability of the source, I watch the BBC or ITV news because I trust them and think they are reporting objectively."* **UK, High Trust**
- *"I feel like tv is the most entertainment – based with opinions leading the shows and facts falling behind."* **US, High Trust**
- *"TV, I don't concern myself with Fox News, Newsmax, OAN, as these three do not accurately portray what is going on. Targeting only their audience and not including reality."* **US, High Trust**

- *“I follow every day what the President says, I watch on the internet and videos so I see the speech and what he said in full, in the evening on Journal National (Globo’s main news program) show his speech all edited and just the part that he says something that would make him look bad, but that in reality would not be that if he saw the full video, and unfortunately most still do not have access to the internet to see what is happening, and believe what they see in the news programs on TV.”* **BR, High Trust**
- *The news channels which are currently under the radar of the police for spreading fake news.”* **IN, High Trust**

Understanding what they see online

Across the sample, there is an understanding of the role and influence of algorithms in the content they see online.

Respondents realise that social media content and content from news aggregators is often linked to the articles or sources they’ve clicked on before. To mitigate this, they say they search widely and check sources to gain a more rounded view of a topic. One key concern with algorithms expressed by respondents, particularly those in the UK and in Brazil, is their perceived role in creating echo chambers. Respondents believe that algorithms shape their news feeds, showing content that reflects rather than challenges their beliefs. If readers fail to read more widely, they worry they may fall into echo chambers, which reinforce polarized views and inhibit potential for debate.

- *“It creates echo chambers, so people don't get to see opposing views. I think it's unhealthy.”* **UK, High Trust**
- *“My criticism about the platforms is precisely the algorithms that govern them. There is a tendency to show the user only the non-conflicting information, which ends up generating large groups that only agree among themselves, without room for debate.”* **BR, High Trust**

Another factor that shapes the content they see online is sharing behaviour, with many receiving news contents from friends and family via social media, such as Facebook and Twitter links and via social messaging, such as WhatsApp. However, the content that is shared can be of variable quality. To counter this, many say they are looking at the source of the article where possible, to assess the credibility of content. Most report taking shared content with a ‘pinch of salt’ and relying on other content they’ve sourced themselves for ‘hard’ news and more trusted information.

Finally, respondents see the role of the editor as influencing the content they engage with online. They perceive that news outlets have their own agendas, and while this can be frustrating, they are generally confident in their abilities to identify where bias exists by comparing different sources. While some news outlets are better at giving a balanced view – with content that shows both sides of the story – they mention that others are more partial, and report reading alternative or contradictory sources to gain a more balanced view.

Sharing content: chapter summary

1. Content type and social context appear to influence the news content respondents share, and platforms influence how they share it;
2. Many say they are confident in navigating news content online, though the less tech-literate require some support;
3. Some of those who are less trusting of news can, however, struggle to navigate the volume of news content that is available, and others struggle with the prevalence of negative content;
4. Many mention the presence of bias, fake news and misinformation online, and some have unknowingly shared this content;
5. Respondents are looking for platforms to do more to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the news content they make available.

4.1 When and why people share news

Respondents' decisions around sharing news are reported to be influenced by content type, and the social and political context. Many also talk about platforms in the context of sharing news.

A key trigger to sharing content is the subject matter, with respondents across groups sharing content that they think is interesting and relevant to those they choose to share with. Respondents mention sharing both serious and more light-hearted content, with light-hearted content often seen as an 'antidote' to more serious news stories. Most say they are selective in their choices, sending content that is reflective of the recipients' views and outlook. As stated earlier, respondents across markets report being conscious of bias, and say they take care to review the source where possible before disseminating.

In addition to subject matter, the social and political context also influences the content that they share. Many are sharing content relating to current affairs and breaking news stories, for example, the Covid-19 pandemic, on a global and national scale. Just a minority, especially in the UK are sharing content relating to local news and events. While many report being mindful of sharing content on politics and religion – which are controversial topics for some – others say they actively seek out and share this type of content to provoke discussion and debate.

Channel is also an important consideration regarding sharing content. Respondents report sharing content in several ways, and the ability to access and disseminate content via a range of platforms encourages and supports sharing activity. Use of social messaging apps is more prevalent in India and Brazil, where WhatsApp enables them to share content with their networks at speed. Social media is also used to disseminate news content by those in India and Brazil – the ability to share content widely holds appeal.

- *"I sometimes share links with friends and my parents, but they are always from a reputable source like the BBC..."* **UK, High Trust**
- *"I rarely share a link, but if I do it is something, I think has meaning from the folks I have on FB or GAB..."* **US, Low Trust**
- *"I share on my social networks and in a WhatsApp group with friends who enjoy the subject..."* **BR, Low Trust**

- *"I do share news with my close peeps if I get to know somethings important is happening. It's good to be informed."* **IN, High Trust**

4.2 Navigating online news

Respondents say they are largely confident in their ability to navigate content online and need limited support to do this. Some, however, find it challenging to negotiate the volume of content available.

Across markets, respondents say they generally feel able to seek out news content online. Although they can identify and select information, this process is seen as a dynamic act that requires time and effort on their part. As noted earlier, respondents report that misinformation and bias exist alongside more trustworthy and credible content, and say they must exercise caution as they navigate the news landscape.

However, for some, navigating online news can be challenging. Selecting accurate content from the vast pool of information available can feel stressful. Others talk about tackling the vast amount of negative content online, which can be overwhelming, and inhibit engagement.

- *"I think we are constantly exposed to information, most of it bad news, and it's incredibly draining."* **UK, Low Trust**
- *"We are overloaded with information, a constant stream of opinions, and I think it is damaging people's health. I have to limit my time on social."* **UK, Low Trust**

While most say they feel confident in their ability to seek out content online; individuals, for example, those who are less tech-literate, look for support when navigating specific platforms, such as social media. A sizeable minority, however, say they support others to seek out information as they have the skills to do so. Many say they that they engage with others when sharing, discussing, or analysing news content. While accessing news may be an individual experience, discussing and sharing is a collaborative event, when hearing a different viewpoint is key.

4.3 Fake news and validating sources

While respondents talk about looking at the source of the content they read, and identify a need for caution when sharing, a small number have shared fake news in the past. Most discovered that they'd shared fake news after being alerted to this by friends, family, or colleagues. Others discovered their mistake after conducting additional research on the topic. Individuals were alerted to their error by an alert on social media. Once they discovered their mistake their response was to retract their comments or remove their post.

Many of these respondents felt a sense of embarrassment or shame when they discovered their error, especially given their awareness of misinformation and bias online. Some talk about their frustration at being 'taken in' by fake news. These respondents say they have become more mindful of fact-checking following their experiences; checking content and source material before sharing content is reported to be essential. There is however a possibility of socially desirable responding here – those who had shared fake news reported feeling embarrassed. Reporting an increase in vigilance and checking could be a way to save face when discussing this in a group context.

- *"I unfortunately [I] already did that and felt very bad, and managed to delete in time, after that I research very well before publishing."* **BR, Low Trust**
- *"From time to time. I get a lot of news from journalists on Twitter and occasionally they share false info. [I] usually just correct the mistake and moved on."* **US, High Trust**
- *"Yes, I felt pretty bad. But that's when I started to get interested in the news. After I found out it was a lie, I sought the truth and retracted... what I had posted."* **IN, Low Trust**

- *"I... felt humiliated that someone might have seen and had a bad opinion of me."* **UK, Low Trust**

4.4 Differentiating in future

Many believe that platforms could do more to enable users to access reliable and trustworthy content. However, some question how impactful any measures will be in real terms.

Across markets, sourcing content clearly is seen as fundamental in building trust between platform and users. The source of content should be clear, and individuals, especially in India, call for a greater use of graphics and statistics to be used to enhance validity. Ultimately, the more evidence they have available, the more confident they can be in the accuracy of the content. In addition to these measures there are also calls for news outlets to acknowledge reporting errors where they have occurred and rectify them. In the US, some ask for news content to be labelled so that the user can more easily differentiate between news versus opinion, for example.

- *"Mainly the data and pictures they provide... pictures with corresponding data. This help us analyse and compare."* **IN, High Trust**
- *"I would really like platforms to label news sources. For example, noting fact vs. opinion or noting known political or policy biases."* **US, Low Trust**

There also appears to be appetite for platforms to embrace higher quality journalism moving forward. Content delivered via platforms should be well-researched and well-written to be trusted and credible. In Brazil and India in particular, there are calls for more impartial news content to ensure a more balanced and realistic view of events. In India, respondents also ask for less sensationalist content, and a shift from celebrity culture to content that is relevant to the wider population. Finally, individuals would welcome a move away from opinion to more 'hard news', which limits the potential for bias in reporting.

While there is support, in theory, for measures that improve quality and credibility of content, many are cynical about how this will work. Respondents recognize that news outlets are businesses, driven by revenue, and many question how seriously more partisan outlets would take this matter. Respondents say that readers should, therefore, continue to cast a critical eye, read widely, and use fact check tools, to assess the content they see.

- *"It's having sources, acknowledging when they've reported incorrectly, reducing opinion pieces, remaining reliable over time."* **US, High Trust**
- *"Fact checks by the platforms [have] to be introduced, if not at the time of upload then within the next 24 hours as such fake news travel like wildfire."* **IN, Low Trust**

Journalists and Journalism: chapter summary

1. Good journalism means accurate reporting based on adequate investigation and minimal bias;
2. Some mention challenges and pressures which may impact the quality of journalism;
3. Few follow specific journalists, although many show preferences for sources and journalists generally who produce impartial content;
4. Many are critical of partisanship and highlight its negative impact on trust in news;
5. It is felt that representation in the news could be improved, across markets.

5.1 What is good journalism?

Across groups, respondents are clear about what ‘good journalism’ looks like in an ideal world, although there is acknowledgement of potential challenges of translating this into practice in some groups.

Echoing criticisms of biased content mentioned previously, there is a particular focus on objectivity when describing quality journalism. Across groups, respondents say objectivity can be demonstrated in a variety of ways; in the UK and US markets especially, it can mean presenting a variety of perspectives to ensure balance in the piece. Many respondents also highlight the need for publications to be grounded in fact, although how this can be assessed is less clear. Many, particularly those in Brazil and India, say they would support journalists separating their writing from their own political alignment, and steering away from producing content which could be divisive in the social context.

- *“Impartiality, because this way he will share the news as news, with no personal opinion.”* **BR, High Trust**
- *“As unrealistic as it is these days, good journalism would ideally be impartial”.* **UK, Low Trust**

Accessibility is also seen as an indicator of good journalism. Ultimately, respondents are looking to journalists to inform but also to entertain – they are looking for stories based in fact, but that does not mean that information should be dry and challenging to process. Accessibility is spoken about in terms of both content and language specifically. Content should address a variety of issues, both globally and in relation to issues of importance closer to home. While many respondents are keen to see the issues affecting society leading the news, there is appetite for some lighter content too, provided this is still informative. When it comes to language, many highlight the role of the journalist in breaking down complex issues in a way that is manageable for their audience; therefore, steering away from unnecessary jargon is key.

- *“A good journalist has to know how to bring the news to all audiences in a clear way.”* **BR, Low Trust**
- *“Facts, well written with the reader in mind.”* **US, High Trust**

It follows that objective, engaging and well-written journalism should involve time to put together a considered and informative piece. Respondents across groups highlight that quality journalism

should demonstrate thought and proper background research, ensuring that the final output is grounded and reflects the issues at hand in a fair manner.

- *“Good journalism is, above all, investigative. It doesn’t just wait for information to arise, but actively searches for it.”* **BR, High Trust**
- *“Well researched, balanced, factual.”* **UK, Low Trust**
- *“Thoroughly researched, with a balanced argument taking into account the views from both sides.”* **UK, High Trust**

Across groups, however, respondents highlight that adhering to these three pillars may be a challenge in the current news climate. In an era of 24/7 news and with so many preferences to cater for when it comes to content, some note that quality can be compromised to meet tight deadlines; this was a particularly prominent view in US groups. Amongst respondents in India, there were also comments on the current focus on celebrity or entertainment-focussed content, which is perceived as an attempt to increase click through rates on websites rather than to provide useful information. While lighter pieces are welcome, these should not overshadow or outnumber informative pieces.

- *“They [should] earn money in a professional manner not in a mis[informative] way, help themselves and help people through original journalism.”* **IN, Low Trust**
- *“Unfortunately some media are only interested in numbers...not all journalists are serious, so I don’t believe they follow code of ethics.”* **BR, High Trust**

5.2 The role of journalists in modern news

Despite heavy criticism of journalists by some respondents, particularly in the Brazilian groups, a majority say they have limited experience with the profession when it comes to knowledge of journalism itself and interacting with journalists directly. They are unsure what journalism entails, but assume it involves high pressure and should include a level of responsibility.

Amongst respondents, there is a widespread assumption that journalism is a pressurized profession, for a number of reasons. The prevalence of 24/7 on demand news is believed to mean a drive for new content being delivered at pace. Therefore, many say journalists will be working to tight deadlines around the clock, often to meet demands from above. Adding to this, respondents expect that journalists have to work hard to establish themselves in the media and gain a ‘reputation’ for themselves; successful journalists will then need to maintain and protect this reputation. Others assume a level of pressure to attract and retain high view or clicks, too.

- *“I think the move towards instant news is interesting, there’s always going to be mistakes.”* **US, High Trust**
- *“Only get one chance to make a first impression. You screw it up, good luck on getting it back.”* **US, High Trust**

While many note this potential for journalists to feel pressurized, there is limited sympathy for those seen as producing poor quality, biased or even divisive news content; they as individuals are seen to hold responsibility for the quality of outputs to an extent. Respondents assume that there is a code of ethics in journalism, and individuals have heard of high-profile breaches of this. Many express scepticism that the code is adhered to, however, citing the autonomy of the individual and the challenges involved in enforcing such a code in practice (especially when so much news is accessed online). Some are eager to see greater accountability when it comes to ethical practice in journalism, although individuals question how this could be done and some, particularly those in the UK and US groups, are quick to warn against impinging on freedom of speech.

- *“I believe that good journalists follow ethical principles, but as in everything in life, there are the good ones and the bad ones.”* **BR, High Trust**
- *“Good journalism includes journalists should feel they are responsible and accountable for what information they are providing to the people.”* **IN, High Trust**
- *“Good journalism must...share news with ethics and responsibility.”* **BR, Low Trust**

While some responsibility is therefore assigned to journalists, some respondents are clear that quality of news can be impacted by other factors and individuals, such as the publisher or source also have a role to play in regulating content. However, while respondents feel the industry could exercise greater care over content, some highlight the role of the audience too in being more discerning when accessing news, reading widely, being aware of the biases of different publications and ultimately critically engaging with content.

- *“Editors and producers have the say.”* **US, Low Trust**
- *“Sometimes the journalist has a name, is famous, but he or she is following orders from a TV station and has to report what the broadcaster wishes according to its political interest.”* **BR, Low Trust**

5.3 Relationship with journalists

Across groups, respondents say they tend to follow sources rather than journalists specifically, and although they appreciate high quality journalism, many have low expectations.

A minority of respondents say they follow individual journalists, with most opting to read widely and selecting content based on their preferred sources as opposed to following writers exclusively. Those who do pay attention to the journalist say their choice comes down to the style and quality of reporting. Bringing together the quality indicators mentioned earlier, respondents say their favourite journalists do their research and really get to the heart of an issue, enabling them to speak with authority and present a variety of perspectives. While this is less important for fast, breaking news stories, these are seen as essential qualities when it comes to longer reads and opinion pieces which serve as entertainment and where respondents expect the content to go beyond plain fact.

- *“I don't follow any journalist. I follow organizations like Band, Record and SBT.”* **BR, Low Trust**
- *“I appreciate the opinion of a reporter that I respect... but I also want the news I receive, the facts, to be impartial. I don't want things to be left out to prove one point of view.”* **US, High Trust**
- *“I respect anyone who appears to have done their research, knows their subject and will not be fobbed off in trying to get an answer out of a politician.”* **UK, High Trust**

There is also a clear distinction made by respondents between the professional and personal outputs of journalists – where respondents are following specific journalists on social media, they say that their news consumption would not necessarily be altered by the content presented on personal platforms.

When it comes to overall expectations of journalism, respondents seem resigned to variable quality and generally have low expectations; this is the case across markets, although views seem more positive in the UK. Additionally, respondents say they have sources they rely on more consistently than others, often chosen for their relative quality, which can mitigate against disappointment. It is unsurprising therefore that few report feeling disappointed by the content they see. Where respondents have felt let down, this is often due to inaccurate or biased reporting, or incorrect reporting on topics they are familiar with (for example, specialist topics). In Brazil in particular,

some express disappointment at Globo news specifically for producing what they see as particularly biased content.

- *“Total disappointment with the Globo that shares hate speech to some politicians to the detriment of others. Often distorted information made me stop following it.” BR, Low Trust*
- *“When reporting on topics relating to my profession and it is wrong or misrepresented. It makes me lose faith that other content I am not an expert in is correct.” UK, High Trust*
- *“In modern age there is hardly anyone who can be trusted.” IN, High Trust*

5.4 Partisanship in journalism

Partisanship is something that many respondents across groups say they are familiar with. Many report noticing the political alignment of various sources and some offer criticisms based on this. Ultimately, respondents warn of the negative impact of this.

There is consensus across groups that, in an ideal world, sources would remain neutral or at least the extremity of partisanship would be limited. At the very least, partisanship can impact trust in the news accessed; although being mindful of the partisanship to begin with means some engage with a critical eye rather than taking news as read. However, in some cases, the implications of partisanship are more extreme.

Across groups, although less so in the UK, respondents highlight the propensity for partisan press to cause divides in society, and some headlines and content are seen as deliberately provocative (again, this is linked to a need to attract a large number of views / drive sales). In an age where much news is accessed online, some note that this division could be exacerbated by algorithms exposing individuals to limited content rather than the balance of perspectives that many say is important.

- *“It’s extremely important because news is something that influences people and their lives. Impartial news can also lead to unrest among the citizens.” IN, High Trust*
- *“Subjective news can lead to divisions and extremism and more fighting and negativity.” UK, High Trust*

In the UK and the US, there appears to be less strength of feeling when it comes to partisanship. While it is not embraced as a virtue, respondents are pragmatic and say that partisanship, to some extent, will always be inevitable. Impartiality is seen as a challenge to maintain consistently – implicit, and explicit, bias is seen by some as part of ‘human nature’, and so respondents in these groups are willing to accept this to an extent. However, respondents are quick to add that there are measures that could be taken by publications and journalists to address this, particularly when it comes to transparency. Being open and honest where a piece may be biased could support audiences to engage with the content in a more balanced way, bearing possible biases in mind.

- *“I agree there will always be bias, so it is okay to have some bias, and it’s best when identified.” US, Low Trust*

In Brazil and India groups however, respondents express a range of negative feeling towards the press at present. Respondents talk about media outlets showing overt support for political parties and publishing content with a clear bias or skew towards specific views. While there is resignation from many in the US and UK groups, respondents in Brazil in particular, and India, are angry at the news being used as a platform to push specific agendas, as they see it; many say they feel ‘manipulated’. In these groups, the media is often seen as ‘out of touch’ with the reality of the public, conveying only one perspective. Trust is therefore undermined and there is a perceived lack of credibility which spans the industry.

- *“There is no impartiality...content about uprising, politics, preference and hatred for some politicians, making clear that one is at war with certain politicians and parties...ends up making people fight among themselves. The media works more to separate than to fight on behalf of all.” BR, Low Trust*
- *“Majority of the news, whether offline, online, live are manipulative, demeaning, targeting a certain section, controlled under respective politicians or businesses inclining to certain ideologies. The news at the moment is more concerned on profits and would never think twice not to create fake content.” IN, Low Trust*

When it comes to choosing sources then, it is unsurprising that many mention seeking out and showing some loyalty towards sources which are perceived to be the most impartial. Mirroring general feelings about partisanship overall, the UK appears to have the greatest availability of impartial news.

UK news outlets

In the UK, the BBC is widely mentioned as a go-to source for accessing news, and respondents highlight its relative impartiality as an accessible news source. Others mention the Guardian, Times, and Telegraph which, to them, represent good quality journalism, although a minority also mention engaging with tabloids to gain a different perspective. Respondents are keen to read widely, although can be easily put off by paywalls.

- *“Reliability, trust and a sense of serious news reporting, which is why I will watch BBC. I also find their top journalists have gravitas.” UK, High Trust*

US news outlets

Many in the US say they are accessing multiple sources, again seeking out news that is well respected and steers away from presenting extreme or biased views (for example Fox News). Common choices are CNN, ABC news, The New York Times, and Washington Post. Some also place importance on the news being as up to date as possible.

- *“I am not drawn to a single source, I do try to stay away from the ultra-biased areas like MSNBC and Fox, but I do try to read from all major sources.” US, Low Trust*

Brazil news outlets

A majority of respondents in this market say they rely on channels such as CNN, but also search independently on the internet, using Google search and YouTube, to access news in addition to more traditional access. While many also name Globo as a commonly viewed source, some report seeing criticism of this provider (for example, regarding ties to the government or use of ‘hate speech’)..

- *“Total disappointment with the Globo that shares hate speech.” BR, Low Trust*
- *“There is a lot of manipulation in the media and in the press, yes, in fact many people love being manipulated...I always try to watch or listen to the ones I am already used to, the ones I trust more.” BR, High Trust*

India news outlets

Again, respondents say they rely on a range of providers in this market – BBC, NDTV and Republic are all mentioned often, although some are critical of Republic and NDTV calling these providers ‘manipulative’. There is a sense that providers currently are biased, and few are able to name a provider they would see as impartial. It is important to note that respondents may hold their own partisanship and biases, and perceptions of news media may reflect this; while many mentioned a ‘manipulative’ news media, it was not clear what specific examples this belief was based on.

- *“90% of Indian News Channels are manipulative.” IN, High Trust*

5.5 Representation in the media

When it comes to representation in the media, there is again a contrast between the UK and US markets when compared with India and Brazil, with respondents in the former two markets expressing more positivity than the latter. Overall, many respondents say there is scope to increase representation.

In the UK, respondents report seeing some diversity of thought and opinion but say there is space for improvement. While there is diversity in reporters and while they can access news on a variety of topics, they question representation of some audiences. For example, some mention young people being misrepresented in terms of both views and behaviour. Individuals also ask whether the media can be fully representative, with so many unique views, showing some pragmatism when it comes to the potential challenges faced.

- *“I don't think the media accurately represents people like me at all. I'm young, and I see a lot of negative stories aimed at people my age.” UK, Low Trust*

Again, US respondents say they are represented in the media to an extent. However, much of what they recall seeing in the media feels geared towards white, middle class people living in the city and the ‘coastal elite’, while minorities and those in rural areas are much less present. Therefore, many speak of searching for representation first, and then following sources where they find this more closely.

- *“I believe that pockets of media accurately represent me. But as a whole, no, primarily due to being overwhelmed with only one viewpoint.” US, Low Trust*

Brazilian respondents express, at numerous points, that the media exists to manipulate public opinion, particularly in the interests of politicians. Therefore, many do not feel represented; the issues focused on by the media do not always feel in touch with the reality of much of the population.

- *“I don't think so, the media represents more the best known, the famous, political people, they should focus more on the reality of our country.” BR, Low Trust*

Similarly to those in Brazil, respondents in the India groups say that TV and print media offer little representation of the average citizen. Many feel the media is more interested in profit than in presenting a balanced and fair view, and so opt for the more ‘sensationalist’ stories about celebrities. Some feel that often the media serves political parties, promoting their agendas; a minority mention bribery. There also seems to be a focus on celebrity figures in this market.

- *“The problems of the common man is of no interest to the media houses... these are not spicy enough.” IN, Low Trust*
- *“Media highlight only certain aspects and celebrities but not common people issues.” IN, High Trust*

The future of news: chapter summary

1. The accessibility of news is seen as a positive change, with many seeking out a variety of sources and content online;
2. Volume of news available can be overwhelming, particularly when content is negative;
3. Many hope for a more accurate, impartial news media in future but there is scepticism over the likelihood of this;
4. There should therefore be greater support for audiences looking to evaluate content – linking to source, highlighting opinion pieces etc.;
5. Engagement with news is likely to stay consistent for many, although some suggest an increase in critical engagement.

6.1 Responses to changes in the news

There are several positives and negatives identified when it comes to recent changes in the news. Respondents across groups enjoy ease of access, however, are keen to see that quality is upheld.

When thinking about changes seen in news, many respondents comment on accessibility. With the internet now widely available, including on portable devices such as smartphones and tablets, news can be accessed on demand, and a variety of sources are available to browse. Given that news is seen by respondents as essential for keeping up to date with national and global events, this access is welcomed, particularly amongst respondents with higher trust in news.

- *“There is been a lot of positive impact with many people able to connect and reach across each corner of world through news.”* **IN, High Trust**

However, there are drawbacks to the prevalence of news mentioned, which are emphasised by those in the UK and US markets. The speed and volume of news is described by some as overwhelming; the number of stories available can mean having to navigate through a great deal of information, and the pressure to keep up with events can feel ‘draining’. Particularly in the current context, some respondents mention ‘doom scrolling’ – the draw to continuously scroll through negative news updates – despite adverse effects emotionally. Others mention that there is a tendency for the media to focus on the negative stories without presenting stories which are more positive or uplifting, and some say that would like to see this balanced out.

- *“Negative. I think we are constantly exposed to information, most of it bad news, and it's incredibly draining.”* **UK, Low Trust**
- *“People are more aware than before and a lot of more data is accessible but so is fake news, the intent was to have a positive impact but the commercialization of the same is leading to negative impacts now.”* **IN, Low Trust**

There is also mention here of algorithms on platforms such as social media, which shape users’ news feeds without them necessarily realising, meaning that over time they are presented with a more limited view of current events and a reduced number of perspectives. This can also mean the news they see feels skewed towards a certain political perspective. Some express concern that this could widen existing divisions in society.

- *“And the algorithms that only let you see articles of your viewpoint don't help, means people are more divided.”* **UK, High Trust**

- *“Negatives = decline of local news, even good outlets lowering standards to chase clicks, so much political “sorting” into echo chambers.”* **US, High Trust**

Many also highlight the variable quality of the news that is available – given that the quantity of news content online is expansive, this could be challenging to police. Individuals, however, say they are harnessing the power of the internet to fact check stories against other sources online, giving them more control over their approach to news consumption. Nevertheless, the perceived prevalence of fake news makes this a challenge.

- *“Positive as it’s easy to access and get detail and negative as some of them are false and biased.”* **IN, High Trust**
- *“Both. On one hand there’s more news and information available than ever before... But negatives = decline of local news, even good outlets lowering standards to chase clicks....”* **US, High Trust**

6.2 How can trust be maintained / strengthened by sources?

Respondents highlight several ways in which news providers can start to build trust in the content available.

Tackling ‘fake news’

In an ideal world, many respondents say the news of the future would be more accurate. While a majority report that they are already working to distinguish false stories from true accounts, some respondents are unfamiliar with this practice, and overall, it can be a challenge. In future, respondents say an overall reduction in ‘fake news’ would be appreciated.

- *“For the future hope that sanity returns to journalism and people report facts and their true implications instead of chasing TRP’s (target rating point)”*. **IN, Low Trust**
- *“The rise of social media has led to a huge rise of fake news and extremist views; with a lack of fact checking.”* **UK, High Trust**
- *“I hope it will be more reliable, with some greater control mechanism over this amount of information that is dumped on us.”* **BR, High Trust**

However, some are pragmatic – they recognise that there is a great deal of information accessible now, and the online world of news means that much content can be made widely available without undergoing rigorous check first. Therefore, ‘fake news’ may be challenging to police. The compromise may be that fake news becomes easier to spot so that audiences can more quickly evaluate what they are engaging with.

- *“The problem is, who is holding whom accountable?”* **US, High Trust**

Reducing sensationalism

Across groups, respondents say they hope to see a reduction in sensationalism in future news outputs. Given that some mention feeling overwhelmed by negative news content and the pressure to keep up with current events, it is unsurprising that fatigue is present when it comes to news stories being exaggerated at the expense of accuracy.

- *“Less outrage, more news. More high-quality local news.”* **US, High Trust**
- *“Less sensationalism. There’s way too much hyperbole.”* **UK, High Trust**

In some markets, especially the UK and US, respondents acknowledge that eye-catching stories attract greater, or wider, engagement. This is in line with the pragmatism seen at earlier points when discussing partisanship. However, individuals are clear that sensationalist content has the

potential to adversely affect consumers and society more generally, for example, polarization in political views. Ultimately, more relevant, and balanced content is desired.

- *“Advent of 24-hour news means they have to turn stuff into major news items which really should only ever have been local issues.”* **UK, High Trust**
- *“I think the changes have had a negative impact, such as the practice of selling clicks. It makes the debate shallow and encourages reading only the headlines.”* **BR, High Trust**

Some hope that news outlets, journalists and publishers in future will be held to account, or at least be under greater pressure to produce high quality content grounded in truth. However, there are challenges identified here too – there is a fine line between regulation and censorship, and respondents across markets, particularly in the UK and US, caution against impinging upon the free press.

- *“I know people might say it contradicts the nature of “free press”, but I'd prefer all content to be fact checked and regulated.”* **UK, High Trust**

Informative content

Across markets, respondents wish to see a move away from celebrity culture dominating the headlines. Some in the US mention being disengaged when it comes to ‘Kardashian news’, and hope that the news content of the future will be more informative and focus on important topical issues; again, this aligns with the concept of news as a way of staying in touch with current affairs.

Many also note that, particularly in the context of the pandemic and with the polarisation of political views, much news content is negative and can therefore feel overwhelming. While there is appreciation that the news will be driven by current events, there is a hope that news in future will give more time to positive and uplifting content too, rather than focusing purely on the negative. It is important to note, however, that uplifting does not necessarily mean lacking in substance – respondents still want to see journalism with integrity, getting to the heart of the story and engaging audiences in this way rather than focusing on superficial topics.

- *“I think there needs to be more good news. I'm sure it must be out there, I guess it just doesn't get as many clicks as the bad news... Less celebrity culture would be good too.”* **UK, Low Trust**

Following from this, respondents are keen to see a variety of news topics available, presenting a range of different perspectives. While perceptions of representation in the media seem more positive amongst respondents in the UK and US, there is room for improvement across all markets.

- *“I hadn't thought about it before tonight but get some younger journalists on board.”* **UK, Low Trust**
- *“What would help me is open dialogue and fair debate, rather than a circle of hive-mind people saying the same thing in different ways.”* **US, Low Trust**
- *“Transmit more and more real news and talk more about everybody's daily life about everything, everybody, all social classes, not just focus on politicians, famous for example, this way I believe they would have many more views and would attract a bigger audience.”* **BR, Low Trust**

Many suggestions for the news of the future centre on quality and accuracy of content. Respondents mention actively seeking out high quality news, assessing content for accuracy, and selecting sources based on their reputation for this. While few express disappointment when they

find news lacking in these areas, there is an implication for trust – many are already employing a great deal of scepticism in their interactions with news content and say they will continue to do so.

- *“I expect a journalism with more credibility, with more commitment to the truth. But I believe it will not change or it will get worse.”* **BR, Low Trust**

There appears to be some onus on journalists to regulate quality, with respondents’ keen to see them upholding the integrity of the profession rather than chasing ratings. With this in mind, some suggest greater accountability going forwards to encourage high standards in journalism; however, few are able to suggest how this could be done and note that internet news is difficult to regulate. Many also comment that many publications will retain bias in some way, and the final content produced may not be solely down to the journalist. With this in mind, many respondents also call for greater transparency – for example, making journalists’ biographies accessible to that the public can assess their experience and credentials, or sharing the quality check processes which content must satisfy before being made public.

- *“Not to go for TRP, just give real news which will help people to better understand the happenings in the world.”* **IN, Low Trust**
- *“Different branches of the media are biased to the left or the right. As long as you know which is which, you’ll be fine!”* **UK, High Trust**

Transparency could also include measures to support audiences to verify stories independently, for example, linking to source material as standard practice; this would be particularly useful when accessing information via aggregator sites or social media. Transparency could also mean being accountable by owning up to and correcting errors publicly could also support trust in future. Others say that opinion pieces could be more clearly marked to ensure this is considered when engaging with the content.

- *“Reclarify like print media on any mistake, errors or fake news reported by them.”* **IN, Low Trust**
- *“Link to other news sources or fact checkers.”* **UK, Low Trust**
- *“Show the source the news came from.”* **BR, Low Trust**
- *“Links to sources, links to bios of people involved, just back it all up.”* **US, High Trust**

Not all, however, are convinced trust can be achieved fully when it comes to news – many say they are in the habit of questioning the news they consume and have low standards when it comes to their expectations of news quality. Therefore, many emphasise the importance of continued critical thinking on the part of the consumer, too.

- *“More awareness of what is a creditable source.”* **US, High Trust**

6.3 How will audiences engage with news in future?

Overall, respondents say there is little they intend to change about their news consumption habits in future, although some mention frequency of access in light of the pandemic and other current events.

Respondents are already harnessing the internet to access a breadth of news, relying on a variety of sources, and seeking out content that keeps them informed and, in some cases, entertained. Many are accessing news on demand as opposed to live broadcasts and expect that this will continue for the most part; a minority, however, mention that they may return to other news formats (for example, radio or podcast) once their routines return to normal after the pandemic, for example listening on their commute.

- *“Might go back to listening to the radio more and reading the BBC app if it isn’t saturated with Covid.”* **UK, High Trust**

One key change is the frequency of access. Some respondents mention that their news consumption has altered as a result of global events over the past year – for example, the pandemic, and political change. For some, there is a pressure to keep up with news daily, or even more frequently, which can mean frequent visits to news websites or apps. This can have a negative impact, with some mentioning ‘doom scrolling’. Others say they have actively tried to restrict the time spent engaging with news content due to the negative content and potential effects on their wellbeing. As things settle, individuals say they intend to return to more moderate engagement with news content.

- *“And about my way of searching for news, it will remain the same: always seeking true sources.”* **BR, Low Trust**

Another consequence of the pandemic for some has been a focus on national or international news stories. Many are keen to continue engagement with national and international news stories, in order to gain a clear view of current events on a country versus global level. However, some intend to pay more attention to local or community news stories going forward.

- *“I also would love community news – I feel like we are overshadowed by national news, but I want to know if my city has new bike initiatives, what’s going to be under construction and why.”* **US, High Trust**

Some respondents, particularly those in Brazil and India groups, say they intend to develop a greater awareness of the credibility of the news they see, taking a more active role in vetting sources and critically engaging in content. In the UK and US groups, this is something that seems to be more embedded in behaviour already, although intention to continue this is evident to an extent.

- *“Perhaps, I will research even more about the credibility of the news.”* **BR, Low Trust**

7. Conclusions

Across markets, news is considered to play a key role in keeping informed; understanding what is happening at a local and global level and taking a considered view of events are both key.

When choosing news sources, respondents are led by trust, quality, and credibility of content – often choosing news outlets that they are familiar with and / or reflect their views. Impartiality is also key, though balanced content is said to be less accessible in the US, India, and Brazil there is a demand for more of this in future.

While both online and social media channels provide access to content, many say they question the quality of this, and the potential for bias and fake news. There is opportunity to provide support to consumers in future to help them identify accurate and quality content more easily.

Respondents say there is a need to exercise caution when reviewing content they see online; most say they are reading widely or fact checking to mitigate the effects of bias and misinformation. Those in Brazil and India are sharing content with their networks via social media and social messaging more than those who are in the UK and US. However, respondents in Brazil and India report being mindful of sharing content from social media or online channels, given the incidence of misinformation and bias on those channels.

Respondents say they are generally able to navigate content online and that they rarely need support in doing so. However, some of those who are less trusting of news say that searching through vast amounts of online content can seem overwhelming and others can struggle with the volume of negative information.

Despite their caution around the veracity of online content, individuals have, on occasion, inadvertently shared false information. There is appetite for clearer sourcing of content, fact-check indicators (for example, badges or alerts on social media sources), so that they can better distinguish between real news and fake news. While news outlets can do more to flag biased or false content to consumers, respondents say that readers should also cast a critical eye over content – ensuring that consumers understand their role in the process is key.

For this audience, ‘good journalism’ is described as objective, accessible and considered content. Some believe that ‘good journalism’ is currently lacking, especially in India and Brazil. Journalists and news outlets are expected to take responsibility for the quality and accuracy of content they produce. However, there’s agreement that readers should also take a role, casting a critical eye over content rather than taking it as read.

While few feel that they are fully represented in the media, those in the UK and US say that representation exists if they search for it. In India and Brazil, respondents say that news content rarely reflects the experiences of the public, and many can feel overlooked as a result of this.

While partisanship is seen as inevitable in the media, it is also a concern, especially in markets where the media is seen as biased and manipulative. In Brazil and India there is a strong desire for this bias to be addressed.

While many expect their engagement with news outlets to remain the same in future, there is scope for greater engagement with local news, as well as news on a national and global scale. Respondents are looking for news outlets and platforms to tackle fake news and also address the quality of content that is available. A step away from ‘light’ or sensationalist content will provide consumers with the informative content they require, especially in India and the US.

There is appetite for action to be taken to build trust in news – focusing on improving the quality of content available, greater regulation of content by journalists / news outlets, and tools to support



readers in fact-checking content. However, many are cynical about what can be done, given the wide-scale challenges around fake news, bias, and misinformation.