

# THE KALEIDOSCOPE

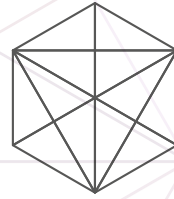
YOUNG PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEWS



# CRAFT.

HUMAN INTELLIGENCE





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# FOREWORD

Audience surveys, such as our own Reuters Institute Digital News Report, have repeatedly shown stark differences in news consumption and behaviours by age – in particular greater reliance on social media by younger groups. They also show that younger groups, across countries, tend to be less interested in the news, and are often less trusting of mainstream media than older ones. In our **2022 report**, we also find that many young people are selectively avoiding the news – and this number has increased dramatically in the last few years, partly because traditional news subjects like politics do not feel relevant to their lives, partly because the depressing nature of some news has a negative effect on their mood.

To some extent younger people have always been less interested in news, but many worry that the generation now coming into adulthood – who have largely grown up in the world of the social, participatory web – are developing a shallower and less meaningful connection with the stories that will shape their lives. These social natives spend much of their time in apps like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, and are much less likely to directly visit a news website or app. On the other hand, we also see that young people have often used these platforms to actively and constructively engage with topics like Black Lives Matter, climate change and issues of social justice – even if they often pay more attention to influencers and celebrities than they do to journalists and publishers.

There is much that we still do not know about these emerging behaviours and how they might shape the formats and approaches journalism needs to take in the future. This report, commissioned by the Reuters Institute and conducted by strategic insight agency Craft, aims to look critically at some of the broad narratives and assumptions about young people through showing us how they respond to a range of news stories, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine which took place during fieldwork. Using a series of news-based tasks including video and text-based diaries, together with in-depth interviews, the researchers have explored the impact of the channels young people use to access the news, the type of stories, as well as the language and formats that they prefer. In these pages, you'll also find some helpful frameworks and models for understanding how this kaleidoscope fits together and what can be done about it.

We hope that the insights in this report can give journalists, academics, and policy makers a more nuanced understanding of the range of behaviours exhibited by young consumers in three countries: the United Kingdom, the United States, and Brazil. These groups are critical audiences for publishers around the world, and for the future sustainability of the news, but are increasingly hard to reach. It may require different strategies to engage them.

**Nic Newman, Senior Research Associate,  
Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**For young people, news is not just digital, but social. They have grown up with the social, participatory web, which has conditioned their consumption behaviours, brand perceptions, and attitudes towards information. In social environments, news is ubiquitous and ambient. Young people do not need to ‘seek’ news, it often comes to them in snippets, by happenstance. Algorithms and aggregation are as, if not more, important than conscious content choices.**

Young people make a distinction between ‘news’ and ‘the news.’ ‘The news’ is narrowly defined as (mainly) politics and current affairs. It is the preserve of mainstream news brands, who are expected to act impartially and objectively, even if there are doubts that this is achievable. ‘News’ is topically broader and afforded more tonal latitude. Alternative media is felt to operate better here.

Some young people actively avoid ‘narrow,’ ‘serious’ news – at least some of the time. In sum, young people seem to engage more with ‘news’ than ‘the news.’ With ‘the news’ being mainly associated in young people’s minds with mainstream brands, young news consumers therefore have a broad palette and varied diet of news content. This extends well beyond mainstream brands. They engage with alternative brands and perspectives, and with types of content that include that generated by celebrities, social influencers, individual journalists, podcasters, users, and many more others.

Myriad factors – contextual and personal – influence a young person’s news consumption preferences and behaviours. The proliferation of choice driven by the social mobile web results in as many pictures of young people’s news consumption as there are young people, though we can discern a typology of hobbyist/dutiful news consumers, main eventers, and the disengaged.

Only the most politically engaged seek out ‘narrow’ news in discrete, carved out news occasions. For this group, news and current affairs are passion genres, keeping up with the world a hobby or a duty. For others who are less or not at all engaged, news is simply another piece of content in a social stream.

We cannot, however, really speak about young people as one – rather, there is a kaleidoscopic variety of news consumption behaviours, attitudes towards information and who is trusted to deliver it, and topical and executional preferences, driven by:

- The fragmentation of the news media landscape;
- The proliferation of formats and brands;
- The ‘flattening’ of the brand landscape (especially within social platforms);
- Allied with the natural variety of circumstances and worldview within the group.

In this fragmented landscape, young people tend to take a bricolage approach to consuming news, taking from multiple sources across multiple topics and platforms, from providers across the mainstream-alternative-user generated spectrum, building bespoke news portfolios.

Traditional ‘mainstream’ news brands are under pressure from three directions:

- 1 Weakening engagement with narrow news.
- 2 A proliferation of brands and providers from beyond the mainstream competing for time and attention, playing different-yet-equally (or more), valued roles in young people’s news portfolios.
- 3 A suspicious, sceptical approach to information meaning news brands are judged by, but not inherently valued for, their impartiality – except in times of crisis, when their professionalism, reach, and resources come into their own.

Mainstream news brands cannot please all young people all the time, but they can give themselves a better chance of being chosen more often. That means broadening and diversifying their offers, not totally changing what they are already good at in digital – a case of an ‘as well as’ evolution, not an ‘instead of’ revolution. This can be achieved by broadening topically and lightening tonally.

News brands should investigate creating social and digital content that feels more of young people and contemporary internet culture. Using emergent platforms, respecting their codes and conventions, is the key. To deliver this, news brands should consider who is producing and delivering news aimed at young people – young, socially native talent should be invested in, to create content with the intuitive feel of emergent platforms. New (sub-)brands could be considered, to signal a different approach to covering news, while retaining equity and credibility in existing brands.





# THE KALEIDOSCOPE

YOUNG PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEWS



# BACKGROUND

1



# 1.1 OBJECTIVES

Much continues to be written and said about young people – in general, and when it comes to their media behaviours and their news consumption. Grand claims about ‘them’ are often made. Not all of what is said, however, is based on evidence or rigorous analysis.

## What we aimed to do

We set out to address that knowledge gap, to obtain a detailed, rich, textured picture of how people aged between 18 and 30 in Brazil, the United States and the United Kingdom feel about news, why they consume it, and what this means for news brands.

More specifically, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

- Can we meaningfully speak about ‘young people’ as a homogeneous group? For instance, are they all socially liberal and politically engaged?
- How do young people define ‘news’?
- How, when and why do they engage with different kinds of news?
- What are their associations with mainstream and alternative news sources, and what impacts do those associations have on their consumption?
- What, if any, are the roles that mainstream news brands play in the lives of young people?
- What roles do digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and WhatsApp play in young people’s news consumption?
- What can news brands learn from news on digital platforms, in terms of topic, tone and format?

As a qualitative study, this research does not seek to provide representative measurement of behaviours and attitudes. The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism’s [Digital News Report 2022](#) covers that and so much more in greater detail than this research is designed to. Instead, this study aims to understand young people’s perceptions of the news market, the conceptual frameworks they use and their motivations for engaging (and not engaging) with news.



This was a qualitative study among people aged between 18 and 30 years of age. 24 young people participated in each of Brazil, the UK and US, a total of 72 participants.

# 1.2 APPROACH



To avoid biasing the sample towards heavy consumers of politics and current affairs news, we used a relatively broad definition of 'news', namely:

*When we say 'news', that can be from mainstream providers or alternative ones – the important thing is that it is a source that you use to keep up with what is going on in the world. That could be politics and current affairs, entertainment and celebrity news, sport, technology, any subject really.*



## Who we heard from

As is customary for a qualitative study, we recruited purposively. No qualitative research can claim to be representative in the statistical sense. Rather, it aims to involve different target groups in data collection, controlling for carefully selected key variables that might (or might not) influence the research findings.

With one of the key questions being whether we could speak about this age group as a monolithic mass, we sought to hear from a broad variety of news consumers. Recruitment on studies such as this is often instructive

– we faced little difficulty in finding the range of participants we initially sought, thereby proving practically that the range we were looking for exists.

Within each market we recruited a range of participants, controlling for:

- **Age** – 8 x 18-21, 8 x 22-24, 8 x 25-30
- **Gender** – within each age group, an even split of male and female, while being inclusive of non-binary gender identities

- **Lifestage** – a variety of young people living at home with parents, beyond the parental home, including with others, alone and co-habiting, either with or without children
- **Socio-economic status/income** – a range, using standard local classifications
- **Work and education** – a critical mass of those working and/or studying

- **Ethnic origin** – to reflect each market's ethnic diversity
- **Location** – a mix of cosmopolitan, metropolitan and provincial settings
- **Political worldview** – a mix of progressive/left-wing, conservative/right-wing, agnostic/centrist and apathetic/disengaged

- **Trust in mainstream media** – a range of those who broadly trusted and distrusted the mainstream media
- **Brands and platforms relied upon for news** – participants consumed news across a range of 'traditional' mainstream brands, digital-only brands and alternative sources; we also ensured a range of social and digital platforms were used.



## How we went about it

Understanding news consumption is complex. Like many media behaviours in the twenty-first century, cross-platform engagement with news content is often fleeting and ephemeral. Using a purely discursive methodology that relied upon recall of claimed behaviour would not have generated the nuanced, detailed dataset required to meet the study's objectives.

Instead, the core of the methodology was a set of asynchronous digital data collection techniques. Participants completed an assignment consisting of several activities, all designed to get under the skin of their attitudes, beliefs, and motivations with regard to news consumption. Tasks included:

- **'Follow the Stories' diaries** where participants tracked their news consumption over the fieldwork period, showing us the content, brands, and platforms they used by uploading annotated screenshots and photos;
- **Brand mapping tasks**, to understand the conceptual frameworks participants used to categorise their news sources;
- **Screen recorded 'Show and Tell' tours** of their digital devices, where participants were asked to analyse their mainstream and alternative media sources, and to show us instances of innovation in the provision of news;
- **A discussion board**, where participants debated the strengths and weaknesses of 'mainstream' and 'alternative' media;
- **Stimulus-led reflective tasks** where participants reflected on the tones and formats they preferred in their news consumption.

Throughout, participants responded by blogging, vlogging, and voice notes, supplemented with illustrative photography and screenshots. In total the sample spent around 378 hours engaging with the questions and 2,635 photos were generated.

We then followed up with 8 participants per country, conducting an individually tailored depth interview with each over Zoom, lasting around 45 minutes. During these discussions, answers given during the digital assignment were probed and emerging hypotheses tested. Around 18 hours' worth of interview transcript were produced.

## The news at the time

Fieldwork was conducted from 16<sup>th</sup> February 2022, with the final answers to the digital tasks given on 11<sup>th</sup> March. Given the longitudinal nature of the methodology, it is important to understand responses within the context of the main news stories of the day. At the outset:



The Beijing Winter Olympics were taking place, with a particular focus on Kamila Valieva's positive doping test;



In Brazil, the new season of Big Brother, Jair Bolsonaro's upcoming trip to visit Vladimir Putin in Russia, and severe flooding and landslides were in the headlines;



In the UK, Storms Dudley, Eunice, and Franklin came and went, replacing allegations of parties at Downing Street in contravention of Covid-19 legislation as the most topical stories;



In the USA, the Canadian trucker protests and the potential relieving of mask mandates were in the spotlight;



In both the UK and the USA, Virginia Giuffre's civil case against Prince Andrew was also prominent, as were several controversies surrounding the Joe Rogan podcast.

**Of course, much more news was circulating at the time, especially beyond the realms of politics and current affairs.**



At the start of fieldwork Russian troops were massing on Ukraine's borders, though it was still a matter of debate whether an invasion would ensue. On 24<sup>th</sup> February, Russia invaded Ukraine. Subsequent events dominated the news agenda for the rest of the fieldwork period in all markets researched.







# Interpretative framework

Before we embark upon understanding what the study has shown us, we should make clear how we have approached the analysis and interpretation of the data.

## Synthetic cohort analysis

This is not a study about 'Gen Z.' It is a study about young people. We have not juxtaposed 18-30s with older people because:

*not everything can be explained by generations, nor are they always the most important divisions in society.<sup>1</sup>*



As Professor Bobby Duffy of the Policy Institute at King's College London puts it:

*While we can learn something very valuable about ourselves by studying generational dynamics, we will not learn anything from a mixture of fabricated battles and tiresome cliches.<sup>2</sup>*



In our analysis we have actively avoided the broad-brush characterisations of a huge group of people based simply on their date of birth. Rather than trying to characterise young people as a whole and setting them in opposition to other groups, we have aimed to produce a more sophisticated analysis that considers the interplay of three factors.

- **Period effects** – where attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of a society change in consistent ways across all age groups, often in response to major events that affect everyone.
- **Lifestage effects** – where change occurs in predictable ways as people age.
- **Cohort effects** – an age group can have different attitudes, beliefs and behaviours to other groups because they were socialised at a different time, in different conditions.

Even here we must be careful, as it is difficult to disentangle the three effects when looking for causality.

It is empirically impossible to know whether and how those aged 18 to 30 will change – will differences between them and older generations stand the test of time and result in true generational differences? Or will they follow the same trajectories as older generations did, with attitudes and behaviours changing in line with predictable patterns? At this stage of their lives, we simply cannot know. Perhaps the safest, most accurate answer is 'a bit of both.'

Furthermore, we have been careful in making grand claims about a set of young people in three very different markets – for all the talk of a globalised society flattening out differences, national contexts continue to exert powerful influences on many aspects of our lives, not least news consumption. The brands we consume and the news they cover are still in large part bound by nationality and language – "country before cohort", as Duffy puts it.

None of this is to deny that there are unique circumstances in which young people have grown up and continue to live, that impact their attitudes to and motivations for consuming news, and how they engage with it. This study aims to identify what young people have in common with each other and the differences within the cohort with regard to their attitudes towards news.

<sup>1&2</sup> Duffy, B. (2021); Generations: Does When You're Born Shape Who You Are? Atlantic Books: London.





**THE KALEIDOSCOPE**

YOUNG PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEWS



# THE KALEIDOSCOPE

# 2



## The vast variety of news consumers and behaviours

The landscape of young people's news consumption is best described as kaleidoscopic. 'Digital news consumption' is an almost empty term because there's so much variety within 'digital' and 'news.' The devil is in the detail. In this fragmented landscape, there are more platforms, more brands, more choice and a greater unpredictability of outcome than has previously been the case. For example, news is starting to permeate platforms such as TikTok and Twitch – both professionally-produced and user-generated.

## An 'as well as' evolution rather than an 'instead of' revolution

We are not seeing a radical shift from one set of behaviours to another. A more accurate characterisation of young people's news consumption is that more and different behaviours are being added to existing ones. There are many instances of older behaviours, for example reading articles on news brands' websites, as well as some consumption on TikTok or via podcasts.

## Modelling the influences on young people's news consumption

In the following sections we'll make sense of some of this complexity. Modelling the interplay and predicting the outcomes of the complexity is beyond the reach of a qualitative study. We can, however, identify the variables that are influential in conditioning a young person's news consumption. Each time somebody aged between 18 and 30 accesses the news, all these different variables are in play.

Broadly, we can categorise the variables as follows:

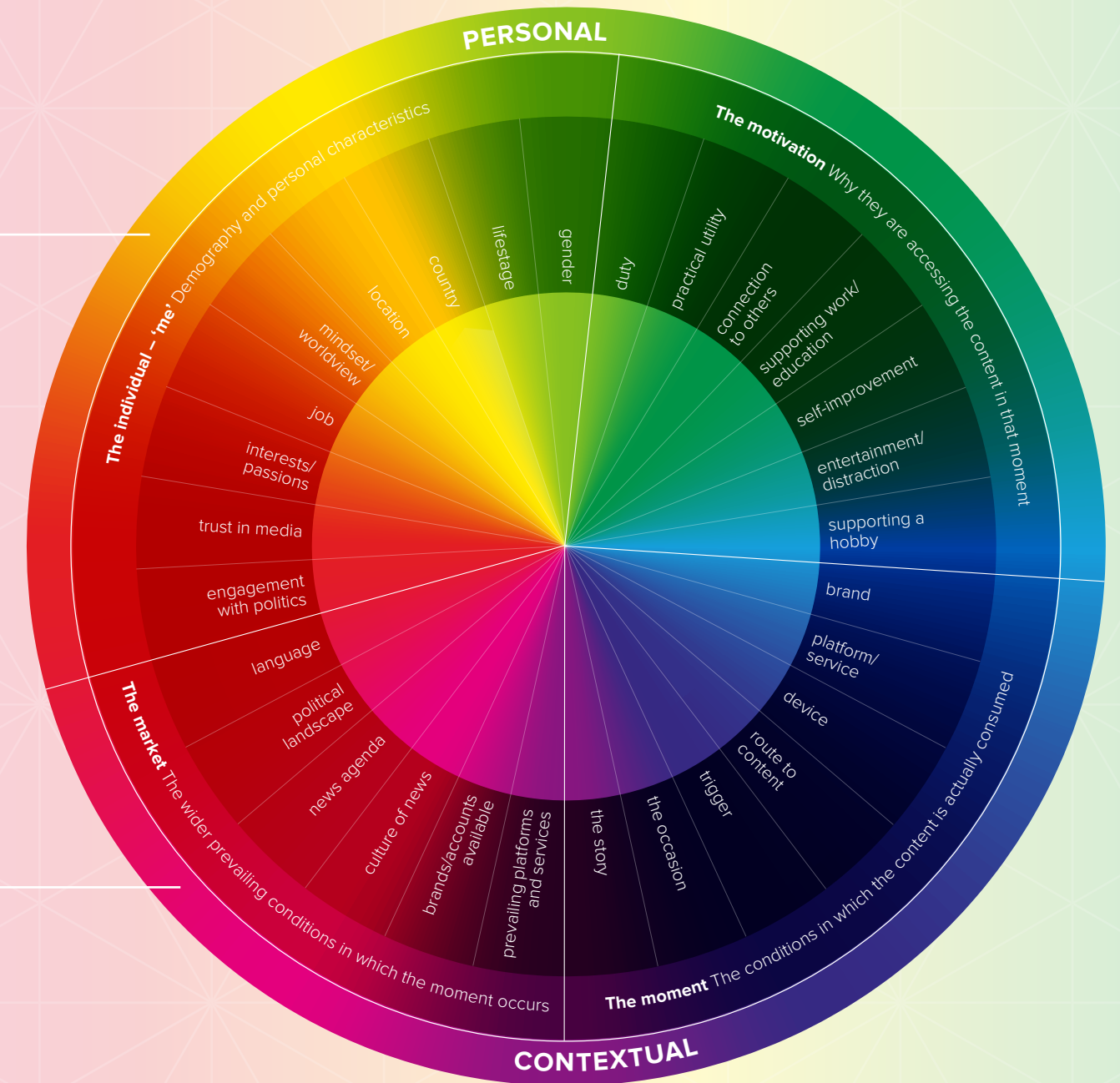
### PERSONAL

- **Me** – all the variables that make a person who they are, condition what they like, feel is important and worth knowing
- **Motivation** – the reason why someone consumes news in any given moment, their mood. Their motivation may be very different in accessing one piece of content one minute, and another piece of content another minute

### CONTEXTUAL

- **Moment** – the conditions in which news is consumed also has a great influence: what, where, when, on which device, all make a difference to what news is consumed and how
- **Market** – the country a news consumer is in or from conditions what is available to people in all manner of ways. It sets the socio-cultural, political and economic context. It influences the language news is most likely to be consumed in and the brands available to a consumer, and much else besides.

## Myriad variables interact to influence news consumption, leading to largely unpredictable individual outcomes





# The outcome – a bricolage approach to news consumption

Ultimately, each young person puts together their own bespoke, messy patchwork of content that ends up being a news portfolio. They most likely are unable to say explicitly and consciously why their portfolio is as it is.

# The exponential expansion of possibility is driven by two factors

A combination of two overarching factors explain why this kaleidoscope has emerged.

**1 Young people are natives of the mobile, social, participatory internet – Web 2.0**



**2 Natural in-group diversity, which would characterise any group of people of this size**



# Growing up with Web 2.0 has several implications that contextualise and condition young people's consumption of news

Access to the social participatory web is a period effect. Those aged over 30 also have access to it. Younger people, however, have grown up with and been socialised into it. They do not know anything else before it, making those within the cohort the most extreme examples of behaviours extant across large swathes of the population, and probably the biggest, clearest window we have into the future. We can break down its impacts into four broad categories:

**1 How they consume news**



**3 Their trust in information, in general**



**2 What they consider 'news' to be**



**4 Who they trust to deliver news**





## How they consume news


Digital consumption is clearly dominant amongst this age group, replacing print and broadcast to a large degree – in the USA and the UK in particular we saw very little TV and radio, and no print. Their news behaviours are to a large extent an extension of their wider media behaviours. Digital, mobile, social, integrated, continuous, fast, fleeting, discovered passively but actively interacted with – much of the time.

*I am more inclined to use social media, as it is the quickest way to access the news and I personally prefer the way the news is presented.*

Female, 19, UK 




*I really like the social aspect of news where it's like people discussing the topic at hand. I like that more immersive experience of news.*

Female, 22, UK 



Young people encounter news in an always on, ambient environment. They receive news more than seeking it.

*I follow Gina Indelicada, Fofoquei on social media, and other Instagram accounts. On Instagram, I turn on notifications to always stay up to date. All new information they post comes to me. When I open my laptop, the news tab gets huge, because so much stuff comes in.*

Male, 24, Brazil 




As such, the carved-out news occasion is rarer than serendipitous bite-sized instances of consumption. Bite-sized content on social media or in news aggregator services tends to be the starting point of young people's engagement with a news story. They alert people to stories, sometimes creating a sense of 'swell' and importance, that 'something is happening that I need to know about.'

News is often consumed in social environments, where news content is fragmented, decontextualised and consumed in social feeds (alongside other non-news content and separated from a provider's other output). Consumption also largely occurs via news aggregators, where many brands sit alongside one another. The result is the same – weaker relationships with brands in third party environments.

Young people are required to navigate a highly complex, ubiquitous, and pervasive information landscape, potentially extending well beyond traditional news brands' output. They do not always or even often consciously seek news out or make active brand choices. Third parties aggregate, algorithms and people recommend – serendipity and randomness characterise much of their news consumption.

*I use TikTok in a different way to Instagram. I follow very few people, so much so that if you ask me who I follow on TikTok, I couldn't tell you. However, somehow, they create filters. It has become a really cool platform for me as it mixes entertainment with news. I really like things related to astronomy, such as planets, Milky Way etc. These subjects come up a lot for me, as well as soccer stuff.*

Male, 30, Brazil 



Quite apart from the platforms and devices, and the services that they use, these factors have an even more fundamental impact – influencing what young people consider news to be.





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# DEFINING NEWS

3





# 3.1 Narrow and broad

Young people make a distinction, not always verbalised as such, between 'the news' and 'news.'

- **'The news'** – is associated with mainstream, traditional media. Unlike young people's broad definition of 'news', 'the news' is perceived to have a narrow focus on traditional party politics, international relations, economics and finance, and 'current affairs.' The topics that 'the news' focuses on are defined by 'what is happening in Westminster' or 'on Wall Street,' the 'corridors of power'. 'The news' is mainly associated with mainstream traditional news brands.

- **'News'** – is distinguished from 'news' – for young people, 'news', more broadly, is anything new that is happening in any walk of life: sports, entertainment, celebrity gossip, current affairs, culture, arts, technology, etc.

It is important to note that many traditional news brands do in reality cover a wider agenda than just 'the news,' and that young people consume content from them, e.g., The Guardian's lifestyle and environmental content, and MailOnline's entertainment and celebrity content.

*Mainstream media tends to obsess over a particular topic. I understand why because it's giving them the most views, but they have A LOT of news about these issues and forget about everything else.*

Female, 24, USA



*The attempt to close strip clubs in Bristol. I have some friends who are sex workers and I follow a few strippers on Instagram so this would be something I wouldn't class as mainstream news but is still of interest.*

Female, 21, UK



The narrow and broad definitions are more about brand associations than about actual behaviours, though no less important because of that. Ultimately, brands primarily associated with 'the news' have less chance of being

chosen when a young person is looking for 'news', or of being picked up by algorithms if a consumer visits them less because of these associations.



# 3.2

## The three categories of news

Using the broad definition, news falls into three categories. The lines between the three categories are blurry. They exist along a spectrum rather than as three discrete entities. Almost all young people in the study had a varied, balanced news diet, consuming news from across the spectrum. The balance of news across the categories varied by individual, as did what precisely goes into each of these three categories.

### 1 Need to know –

is often framed as ‘serious’ in people’s minds, ‘the news’ as narrowly defined.

### 2 Personal interest –

is less defined, there is less agreement and less commonality of definition as interests totally depend on personal tastes. It could be something to do with one’s education or with one’s job. Quite often hobby-related, entertaining but not quite ‘fun.’ People engage with it more deeply than for fun, whether that’s liking football or politics or gaming.

### 3 ‘Fun’ –

news as pure entertainment is almost totally serendipitous because young people aren’t looking for specific stories. Stories just come their way, served up seemingly at random by an algorithm.

### 1 Need to know –

- The big issues of the day
- Things that affect my life directly (personal utility)

### 2 Personal interest –

- Hobby-related - entertaining but with deeper roots than ‘fun’
- Totally depends on personal tastes

### 3 ‘Fun’ –

- Throwaway, almost random content for easy entertainment



Politics and international relations

Local

‘Serious’ personal interest e.g. climate, finance, science

Tech, gaming, sports, culture, TV, film, entertainment

Celebrity gossip, weird and wonderful, memes





Brands tend to be associated with one of these types, even if their output is broader. For example, despite its breadth of output, the BBC is primarily perceived as a ‘need-to-know/serious’ brand. Conversely, despite its investigative journalism, BuzzFeed News is primarily associated with ‘fun.’

In the middle is a longer tail of subject-specialist brands and individual social accounts. For those who engage with them as a profession or a hobby, this can include political and current affairs and therefore traditional news brands.

Fun can come from anywhere. Social sharing and serendipity are a huge part of consumption in this category, whether through online or offline word of mouth. The line between news content and entertainment becomes especially blurry here.

The model has implications for brand perceptions and perceptions of ‘importance.’

### 1 Need to know –

- Largely mainstream news media
- Narrow news agenda
- Narrow set of mostly mainstream news brands

### 2 Personal interest –

- Broader news
- The long tail of subject specialists – brands and individual accounts
- Can also include political and current affairs, from mainstream and alternative media

### 3 ‘Fun’ –

- Can come from anywhere, often serendipity or social share
- Anything in a social feed – professionally-produced content, UGC, memes
- Merges with other content

“More important”

“Less important”



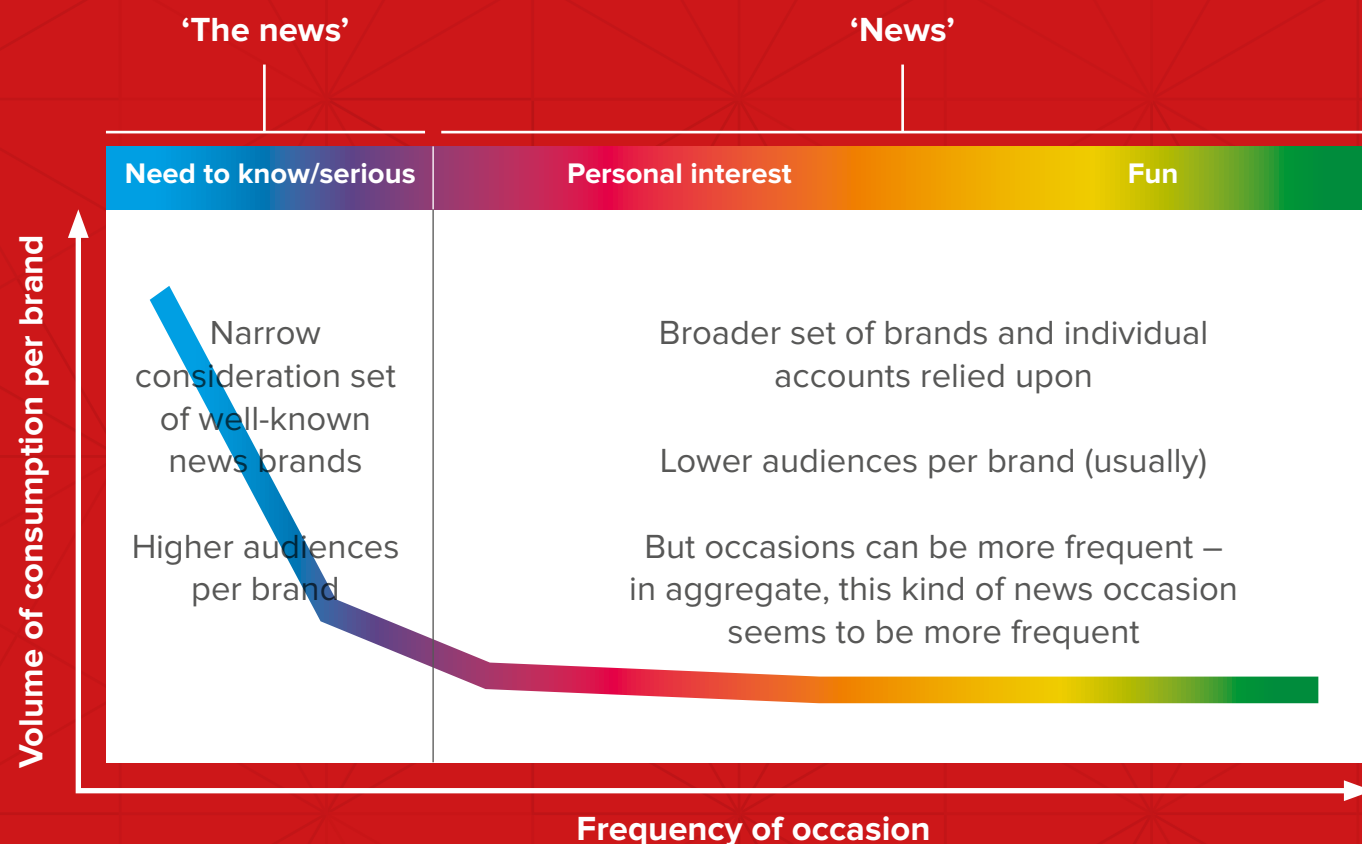
Young people apply a sliding scale of ‘importance’ to the three different kinds of news. Almost all say that ‘serious’ news is more important than other kinds. Perceptions of importance, however, do not necessarily translate into greater consumption of ‘serious’ news. Chapter 4 expands on the different kinds of news consumer and why some are more drawn to serious news than others.

Although this was not a quantitative study, the number of use cases generated during the diary element does allow us to make some tentative suggestions on weight of consumption. What emerges is a classic ‘long tail’ model.





# Perceptions of ‘importance’ do not necessarily translate into greater consumption of ‘serious’ news



In the ‘Need to know’ category are the big stories, the well-known news brands, and the highest audiences per brand. Young people still coalesce around the big stories. The narratives that state they operate in a totally different world from older people and that they exist in totally isolated bubbles with completely different agendas from one another overstate the issue.

In the aggregate of the long tail, however, we can begin to see why some news brands attract smaller younger audiences. News brands’ share of any one young person’s consumption is being chipped away at by brands and individuals in the long tail.

*I get most of my more niche news on TikTok, whether that’s about pop-culture issues, upcoming books/films, or general health and wellness tips.*

Female, 22, UK 🇬🇧



This is not a total revolution, a move away from mainstream news brands – it is a gradual erosion of relationships with them. Each one of us, however, only has so much time in the day, we all have only so much attention to give, only so much cognitive load one can bear. Much of a young person’s is being used in this long tail. While we might see lower audiences per brand in the long tail, in aggregate, and for certain kinds of young people, the long tail dwarfs their consumption of ‘serious’ news and therefore mainstream brands.



# 3.3

## Suspicious minds - Fact, opinion and trust

We are often told that ‘this generation is particularly politically engaged.’ We have our doubts about this claim. Less debatable is the fact that young people are exposed to a wealth of information from a young age, whether they like it or not. While not all politicised or polarised, they have been trained to think critically.

*We haven't been afforded the luxury of being ignorant. We're not especially political; we get exposed whether we like it or not. We're forced to think about our future and how we're going to fit into the world a lot earlier.*

Ife Grillo, influencer, quoted in Flamingo's Gen Z: Redefining Authority



Only half of 12-15 year-olds **(49%)** think the news they see on news websites is mostly or totally true...

...compared with almost nine in ten **(87%)** of 12-15 year-olds (young Millennials) in 2008

Ipsos MORI, Beyond Binary: The Lives and Loves of Generation Z





# In principle, young people are clear on what constitutes fact and what is opinion, and the rules that govern their deployment.

## Fact

What has happened or is happening, with no interpretation

## Opinion

An individual's or organisation's interpretation of why something has happened and what it means

## The rules

1. Fact and opinion should be kept separate
2. Opinion should be clearly signaled as such
3. The mainstream media should stick to reporting the facts

In practice, these neat boundaries and axiomatic statements are much more difficult to identify and enact. One of the great commonalities in this study is that almost all young people believe that all information is put in the public realm for a reason, and is not to be trusted or taken at face value.

There are different explanations for this, but they all end up in the same place – very little information is taken on trust.

Some will give postmodern philosophical explanations that 'there is no such thing as objective truth, everything is relative, socially constructed.' Others will point to an understandable commercial incentive for news brands and other providers to speak to their audiences' beliefs, conditioning what they put into the public realm.

Others still take a more conspiratorial stance, that news providers are purposefully manipulating opinions for their own gain.





“We’re not living through a crisis about what is true, **we’re living through a crisis about how we know whether something is true.**”

We’re not disagreeing about facts, we’re disagreeing about epistemology. The “establishment” version of epistemology is, “We use evidence to arrive at the truth, vetted by independent verification (but trust us when we tell you that it’s all been independently verified by people who were properly sceptical and not the bosom buddies of the people they were supposed to be fact-checking).”

The “alternative facts” epistemological method goes like this: “The ‘independent’ experts who were supposed to be verifying the ‘evidence-based’ truth were actually in bed with the people they were supposed to be fact-checking.”

In the end, it’s all a matter of faith, then: you either have faith that ‘their’ experts are being truthful, or you have faith that we are. Ask your gut, what version feels more truthful?”


Cory Doctorow

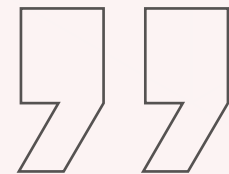






*Nowadays I do not trust almost anything. In terms of politics, everyone has a political orientation – I do not even trust the vehicles that are theoretically left-wing, as I am. Honestly, I check everything.*

Female, 30, Brazil 



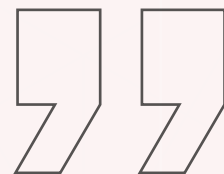
*They definitely have their own agendas. They're usually owned by very wealthy people with their own particular interests. Their own interests are at heart when they report news a certain way.*

Male, 23, UK 



*I do not think anything is 100% reliable in the mainstream media. You can never think that that is the absolute truth, because we are not sure of anything.*

Female, 24, Brazil 



*A lot of the time, mainstream news can be very biased or politically-motivated. This makes it hard to decipher its credibility. In turn, I oftentimes have to spend additional time seeking out information and facts.*

Female, 28, USA 






Young people are aware of confirmation bias and can speak lucidly about filter bubbles, algorithmic recommendations and the dangers of not seeing ‘the other side.’



*Google’s recommendations are a bit problematic, but I don’t think it is intentional. It is very good at recommending the news we like, but this intensifies a political polarisation of opinions because we only read what we like to read. We do not realize there are other things beyond what we are reading.*

Male, 18, Brazil 



*Because I mainly get my news through social media, I might get a bit more of a biased left view of things in terms of politics.*

Female, 21, UK 



*This polarisation is quite negative. If we are on the left, we will read several news stories on Globo, we will read only Globo, and if we see people criticizing Globo we will condemn these people. People on the right will consume Pingos nos Is and Jovem Pan, and then they will say everything on Globo is wrong.*

Male, 18, Brazil 



*I like the fact that the New York Times and The Guardian have a liberal, left-wing bent because it’s more in line with my own views. I tend not to read conservative newspapers because they tend to make me upset and I don’t like to be stressed or upset when reading the news, as ironic as that sounds.*

Female, 29, USA 





**Broadly, scepticism defines three groups of young people**  
 This in turn conditions where they get the bulk of their news, though all tend to rely on a mix of mainstream and alternative sources.

## Ultimately, though, they have a human brain and are susceptible to confirmation biases.

They easily end up consuming brands and opinions that reinforce their worldviews and rejecting those that fly in the face of them. Even those who recognise their own biases do little to address them. Perhaps most concerning is that those who are most politically engaged are the ones who are the most likely to float the idea that ‘the other side’ is “biased.”

Being digitally native does not automatically equip young people to navigate an increasingly complex news landscape. They are highly sceptical of most information, to greater or lesser degrees – they don’t necessarily judge a source’s value by its impartiality. This has implications for mainstream news brands, who often trade on impartiality and being trusted.

	More sceptical of mainstream sources	Equally sceptical of everything	More sceptical of alternative sources
Attitudes to mainstream and alternative media	Reputation, access and speed means that they still must rely on mainstream media for summarising top stories, verifying and breaking exclusive stories	Each is as biased as the other – both need to be consumed to obtain the whole picture	While the mainstream media might be biased, the alternative media is worse
Impact upon the balance of mainstream and alternative media	They supplement their alternative media consumption with mainstream media	They combine the two, putting each on an equal footing	Alternative media is to be avoided or at least taken for what it is – overly biased and opinionated



# 3.4 Mainstream and alternative

News is provided by brands and actors along a spectrum.

Definitions get fuzzier as one moves beyond the mainstream.

## Mainstream

Generally consistent

## Alternative

Definition more open to question

## User-generated

Blurred line between UGC and alternative

- 'Legacy' media – big businesses, large scale operations
- Benefits from scale and legacy – budgets, speed, access

- Not the mainstream media
- Beyond that can be different things to different people

- Sometimes on-the-ground reporting
- More commonly, (social) content generated around news

Quite what constitutes 'alternative' media is open to question.

Young people tend to define it loosely and in opposition to 'the mainstream media,' as one or a combination of the following:

- Digital-only news media;
- Content from individuals, as opposed to brands;
- Views from beyond the mainstream;
- Emergent formats;
- Topics from beyond 'narrow news'.

The boundary between 'alternative' and 'user-generated' is particularly blurry. Included here are:

- Behind the scenes and on the ground accounts e.g., Bald and Bankrupt on YouTube;
- Memes and take-offs, which often involve the repurposing of mainstream news content e.g., Cassette Boy;
- Niche podcasts;
- Comments, especially on services such as Reddit, where the comments often are the content.

*I really love Reddit because I love reading the comments and you can put your own opinion on there.*

Female, 28, USA 🇺🇸



# Each is felt to have its strengths and weaknesses.

The mainstream media is often quick to break the news. It summarises top stories, provides detail and wider perspectives, and breaks and verifies exclusive stories. Alternative media is less likely to break the news but might ultimately cover it, even on location, and might continue to cover it even after it has fallen off the mainstream news agenda. User-generated media almost always piggybacks on the mainstream media and alternative media.

*I feel that the difference between mainstream media and alternative media is that mainstream media provides facts and alternative media provides opinions.*

Female, 27, UK 

*It tends to be either very all right or very heavily left. I don't think there is a lot of Centrist alternative news.*

Non-binary, 18, USA 

*Mude Minha Ideia, which is alternative, has a lot of opinion. But it makes it clear that it is an opinion, it is not fact-based news because people there are debating, They can lie and be called out. But the concept is people talking and giving their opinions.*

Male, 18, Brazil 

There is no consistency of preference for one over the other amongst young people – it is in the eye of the beholder, with even those most engaged with ‘narrow’ news using a combination of the types.

	Mainstream	Alternative/ user-generated
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Providing verified, checked, reliable facts and figures</li> <li>● Curation of the main, relevant, topics of the day</li> <li>● Well-funded and resourced</li> <li>● High production values, professional</li> <li>● Access to the stories, places and people that matter</li> <li>● Easily accessible, easy to find</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● More personality-driven, showing passion, opinion, connecting with an audience in more emotional ways</li> <li>● Can be fun, entertaining, offering escapism</li> <li>● Often feels more interactive, like a community or club e.g. comments</li> <li>● Can draw attention to important topics and issues not covered by mainstream media</li> <li>● Increases the number of voices heard</li> </ul>
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facts and figures might not necessarily be true</li> <li>● Negative, scaremongering</li> <li>● Narrowly focused and repetitive</li> <li>● Perceptions of a hidden agenda</li> <li>● Limited number of faces and opinions, not much diversity</li> <li>● Tonally boring, straight, too serious, lacking personality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Drive for clicks can distort what they report on and what they say about it, creating clickbait</li> <li>● Lack of verification calls veracity into greater question</li> <li>● Not usually trustworthy enough to be a main/ the only news source on most stories</li> <li>● Can sow division and create cult-like followings – societally unhealthy</li> </ul>



# Alternative and user-generated media have more scope to be entertaining, which appeals to some young news consumers,

be that in addition to or instead of the more ‘neutral’, ‘dry’ tones and formats expected of the mainstream.

	Mainstream	Alternative	User-generated
<b>Definition of news</b>	Narrow – ‘the news agenda’	Broader Even within politics and current affairs, topics beyond narrow news	Broadest – could be anything news-related
<b>Role in breaking news</b>	Expected to be first to the news	Less likely to break the news but might ultimately cover it, even on-location	Totally reliant upon mainstream and alternative media, piggybacking on it
<b>Expectations</b>	Serious, objective, accurate, emotionless reporting	Opinions permitted and welcomed, can still be serious and thoughtful	Broadest emotional/tonal range – serious, frivolous, angry, funny, off-beat, politically incorrect

Increasing scope for topical variety, opinion, bias and emotion/personality

## A narrow agenda and hidden agendas

Beyond the executional, mainstream news media faces two interrelated criticisms. These are levelled especially by those who trust alternative media more.

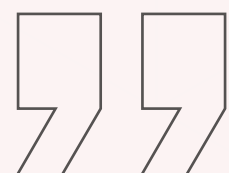
- 1. Following a narrow agenda** – some young people perceive the mainstream news media to be tied to and share the same concerns as ‘The Establishment’ or authority – they are part of the same discourse. This leads to perceptions that the mainstream media ignores news, issues, and topics that are (more) relevant to some young people. In the context of lower engagement with traditional party politics (and even finance), this positions mainstream media as somehow ‘other’ to many young people’s everyday concerns.
- 2. Pursuing hidden agendas** – the mainstream media can be perceived as ‘dishonest’, especially media from the other side of the political spectrum, masquerading as impartial when impartiality is impossible. For some, the mainstream media does not simply operate within the same discourse as ‘the Establishment’, it is linked to and a proponent of its agenda/s, a mouthpiece of rich and powerful owners’ interests.






*I try and avoid the mainstream news when I can – I feel like they're all competing for my attention in the wrong way and trying to make things seem worse than they are for viewing figures/money.*

Male, 26, UK 



*Brazil needs media regulation because, today, only a few families own radio stations, printed newspapers, TV channels. And they are somehow related to power, so there is only one kind of opinion. We will see this mainly in the elections.*

Female, 30, Brazil 



**Alternative media is not judged by the same standards as mainstream media**

**Instead, it adds something different to young people's news mix:**

- It is not mainly used to find out what is happening, but more for explanations, opinions and fun.
- It covers topics beyond the narrow news agenda.
- It is not expected to be objective.
- It is easier to seek out alternative content that chimes with their worldview (and speaks against other worldviews).
- It is explicitly and 'honestly' opinionated or biased, which brings a certain integrity.
- It covers the narrow news agenda in more interesting ways – tonally, formats.

**Mainstream media therefore finds itself in a paradoxical position**

It is judged more harshly than other types of news media, because it is held to a higher (impossible?) standard. It is expected to be impartial, objective, and cold-blooded by a group of people who seriously question whether that can ever be truly achieved and who don't always value the tonal execution of impartial, objective, cold-blooded news.



# 3.5 Challenges for traditional news brands

Traditional news brands are under pressure from three directions:

1. Weaker engagement with narrow news, stronger engagement with broader news among some young people
2. Proliferation of brands from beyond the mainstream competing for time and attention, playing different roles
3. Suspicious, sceptical approach to information, meaning news brands are not inherently valued for their impartiality

**Topically**, young people have a broader definition of news than they perceive the mainstream news media to cover, or they prefer to get their 'broader' news elsewhere.

**Tonally**, young people replace or supplement the serious tones of mainstream media with casual, conversational, entertaining, opinionated approaches more readily associated with the alternative media.

**Executionally**, socially and digitally native alternative and user-generated brands feel more 'of the internet' and its culture, using its tools effectively, respecting their conventions.

This is not to say that traditional news brands have no place, nor even a major role, to play in young people's news mixes. They have a well-defined place within young people's news ecosystems – leveraging scale, speed, access, and availability. But their content only appeals to certain groups of young people on certain occasions.

In the next chapter, we will examine the multiplicity of young people that adds even more complexity to the kaleidoscopic picture of their news consumption.





# THE KALEIDOSCOPE

YOUNG PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEWS



# DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

4



# 4.1 IDENTITY



One key driver of difference is identity. Identity is intersectional.

**It's hard to disentangle different parts of people's identities. We all have fluid, multi-layered and contextually-dependent personas – a person's age is one layer and not necessarily always important.**

For example, we saw men, women, and non-binary people engaging with and avoiding news in different ways: some women, in particular, did not wish to engage with news of violence against women but were drawn to stories of female success.

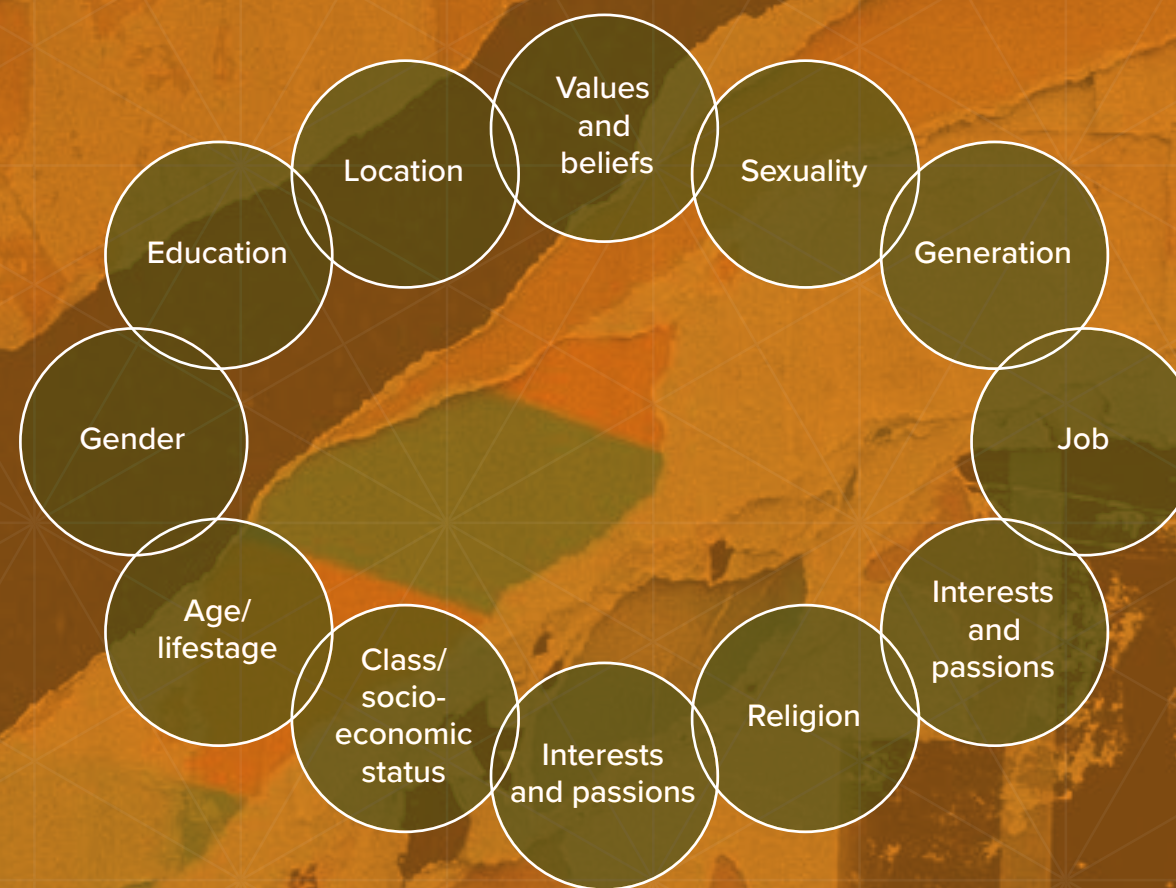
Age can be a differentiator as much as a unifier. An 18-year-old is very different to a 30-year-old: a 30-year-old might want to know what's going on in the school system because they have children within it, for example. As one moves through the life stages, one tends to get more into serious news, local news, and community news.

Those from smaller and provincial locations tend to be more interested in local and community news than those in metropolitan/cosmopolitan locations.

Ethnic origin, sexuality, and religion may make young people feel common cause with other underrepresented groups or want to access news that deals specifically with issues or topics that are important to them.

Beyond demographics, beliefs and worldview also play a conditioning role in what news is consumed. Libertarians might look to libertarian news sites, conservatives to conservative ones, and so on.

The list of conditioning identity-based factors and outcomes is almost endless, cutting across age, another multifaceted variable contributing to the kaleidoscope.



*There is this small local newspaper, where I was born, in the countryside. It brings local information. I follow one of the journalists of that newspaper on Snapchat and see him posting some news. That is very cool, it makes people feel closer.*

Male, 24, Brazil







# 4.2 COUNTRY

For all the talk of ‘a globalised generation,’ country remains a significant influence on news consumption. It sets the socio-cultural, political, and economic context. It influences the language news is most likely to be consumed in and the brands available to a consumer, and much else besides.

By design, this report mainly focuses mainly on the commonalities across markets. Insights were relatively universal across the three countries studied, though there are of course specificities that condition consumption.

## THE CULTURE OF NEWS

News has developed within nation-states, mainly through national broadcasters and newspapers. Each country has its own cultures. Even now, in a globalized world, news is a product of its historical national development. For example, the culture of news was very different in the USA and the UK. In the USA, newspapers are generally seen as more impartial than TV stations. In the UK it is the opposite, where newspaper brands are seen as much more politically aligned. The UK does not have as much of a culture

of talk radio. Brazil was a much more traditional landscape, where mainstream news brands held greater sway. There is less alternative media consumption because there is less alternative media provided in Portuguese, and specifically Brazilian Portuguese. There was therefore less familiarity with and less trust in alternative sources in Brazil.

## LANGUAGE

With the UK and the USA sharing a language, the global lingua franca, young people in each of these countries were more likely to engage with news brands from beyond their ‘home’ market, wittingly or not. News aggregators showed UK news consumers US content, and vice versa. Some actively sought news from the other market or from more global brands e.g., the BBC, CNN.

## THE NEWS BRANDS AVAILABLE

Language clearly conditions the news brands available. In Brazil, participants were looking for news in Brazilian Portuguese, steering them to national, regional, and local news brands. International news brands such as the BBC and CNN have Brazilian versions, catering specifically to that market, testament to its size and the commercial viability of doing so. Other countries are not always catered for so specifically.

## THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

As long as the nation-state remains the primary mode of political organisation, the national politics of a country will continue to condition how people, young and old, experience the news. News brands at times take a political position. Even those aiming for impartiality need to steer a course between the different viewpoints in each market. A US liberal is very different to a UK liberal. What is perceived to be socialist in Brazil – where Lula is a political force – is very different to how the term is seen and used in the USA.

## SALIENT TOPICS AND STORIES

Narrow news is to a large extent defined by the political agenda. A country’s politics conditions the salient topics and stories. Centuries of nation-building have resulted in populations who find common cause with the imagined communities of their nation-state. Floods in Petropolis are therefore interesting to Brazilians not impacted by them directly, while natural disasters over the border may not even get a mention.



# WHATSAPP IN BRAZIL



WhatsApp is a highly popular messaging service in Brazil, beyond its popularity for sharing and even, in some cases, publishing news. The genesis of its popularity is the free minutes of WhatsApp usage that many mobile phone networks bundle in with contracts. This has helped establish a large base of WhatsApp users. The use of WhatsApp for news-related purposes in Brazil is in large part an extension of its usage more generally.



That said, sharing news content via WhatsApp in Brazil seems hugely popular, more so than in other markets covered in this research, with 41% using WhatsApp for news, the second most prevalent social/digital platform after YouTube. By comparison, one in ten Brits do the same. Usage in the USA is so small as to not be referenced in 2022's Digital News Report.<sup>3</sup>

*I learned about Covid through my mother and my aunt, who sent me news via WhatsApp. Sometimes people send you something and you cannot even finish reading it, because you already know that it is absurdly false, it is even comical. But WhatsApp is very important, because we share opinions and information through it.*

Female, 22, Brazil 🇧🇷

*I receive the Diário de Pernambuco newspaper via WhatsApp and read it at work. After coffee, I open WhatsApp on a computer tab, open the newspaper and read, it is also another source of news.*

Male, 30, Brazil 🇧🇷

As well as driving conversation through social sharing, WhatsApp alerts Brazilian news consumers to stories in the long tail and to narrow news. For less 'serious' consumers, it is a useful way of keeping up and being alerted to 'big' news. While WhatsApp recommendations can lead anywhere, the dominance of the mainstream media in Brazil means often they lead to mainstream media. More 'serious' news consumers can question the veracity of what is shared via WhatsApp.

*I am part of several groups where people post some news on WhatsApp and then it will be shared to other groups. Nobody knows if that news is true or not, but it is being shared. Most of the time, when I see a news posted on WhatsApp, I go to Instagram or Google to see if it is true.*

Female, 25, Brazil 🇧🇷



<sup>3</sup> Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Digital News Report 2022.



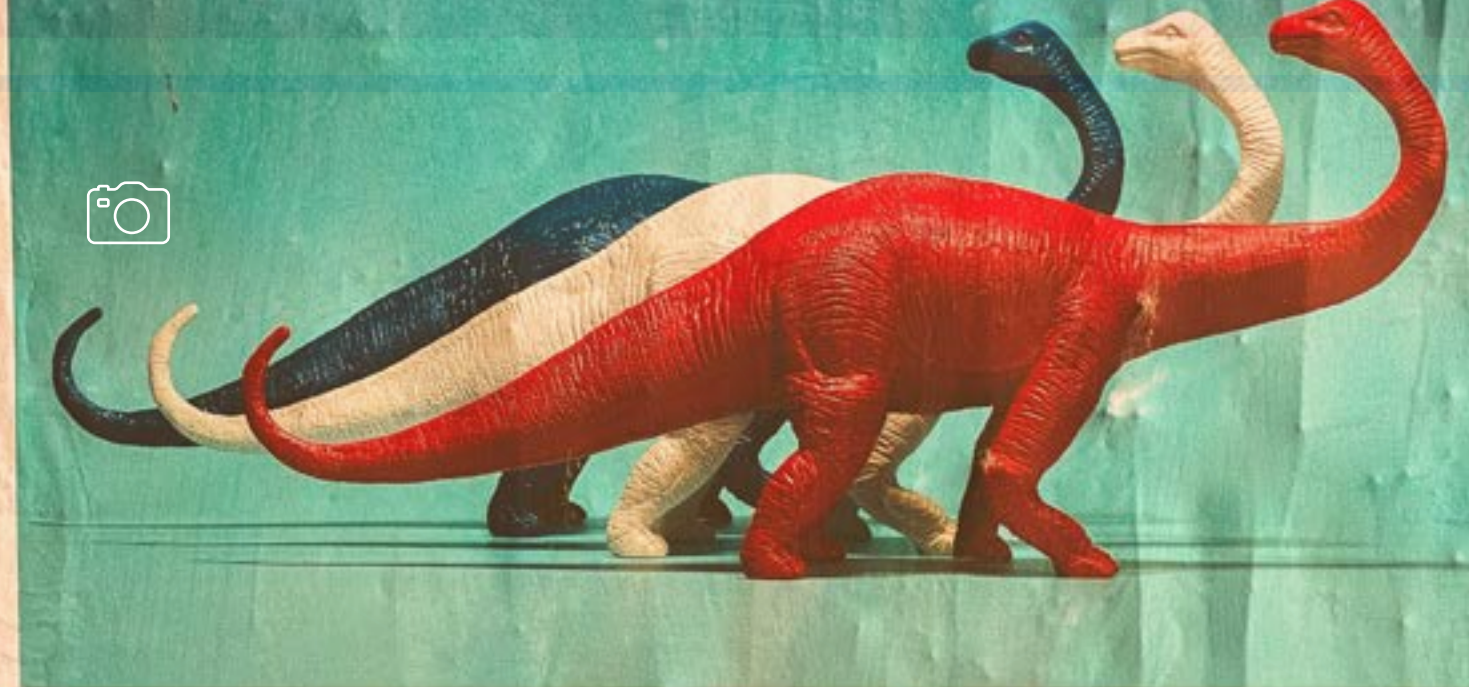
# 4.3 ENGAGEMENT WITH POLITICS

A young person's level of engagement with politics and current affairs is the key variable in conditioning their relationship with 'the news.' It conditions:

- Whether they engage at all with 'the news';
- How deeply they engage;
- How broadly they engage;
- Their relationship with news brands;
- The kinds of content they look for.

**The engaged** fell into two camps – engaged with the narrow news agenda and traditional party politics, or with a broader, issue-based political agenda, e.g., interested in some or all of climate change and environmental issues, gender issues, LGBTQIA+, race relations.

**The disengaged** were not simply disengaged with news. Instead, their disengagement nested within feelings of apathy and powerlessness to make meaningful change – a disengagement with politics, full stop. For some this was a case of politics being “pointless,” while others could see the point but actively avoided a “negative”, “stressful” news agenda characterised by doom-laden stories and/or polarised debates.



*I tend to avoid political news as I have no interest in it. I feel like all politicians lie.*

Male, 29, UK 



*I actively avoid news about politics as it frustrates me. It makes me feel small and no matter what my views it won't make any difference at all to what goes on in the country or world, so there is no point listening to it. I have lost even more interest in it during the Covid outbreak as I feel I can't trust anything the Government or news say, so I don't tend to listen.*

Female, 22, UK 



# 4.4 REASONS FOR CONSUMING (AND NOT CONSUMING) NEWS

## Selective news avoidance

Engagement isn't black and white, though. Even amongst the highly engaged there were signs of selective avoidance of negativity. Equally, only the most disengaged totally avoid any news or even 'the news.'

Engagement and disengagement were often sporadic and fluid. Rather than a fixed state, many of those who disengaged with the news did so occasionally. Engagement could spike, especially at the initial stages of 'a crisis' or at inflection points during a long-running story.

Rather than total news avoidance, there was the avoidance of certain kinds of news or stories, at certain times – to guard mental health.

Young people are well attuned to the increasing socio-cultural trend towards greater self-care and place an emphasis on their mental well-being. As such, they tend to avoid certain kinds of news that they feel will affect their mental wellbeing negatively.



*I do not like to watch catastrophic news and sensationalism, explicit videos about accidents, things like that. And when the intention of the news or content being released is to defame someone's image.*

Female, 22, Brazil 🇧🇷

*Depending on my mood if I see news that I know is bad, is going to upset me, sometimes I leave it, and read it later.*

Male, 24, Brazil 🇧🇷

*I tend to try and limit the amount of negative news I consume, especially first thing in the morning and last thing at night. I don't want it to affect my day or make me worry.*

Female, 29, UK 🇬🇧

*I avoid all articles and opinions on Covid-19 due to the high tensions Covid-19 brought to society. The news become rather morbid and made it hard to endure each lockdown whilst knowing the situation was not improving. Therefore, I stopped following all information on Covid-19.*

Female, 24, UK 🇬🇧

*I actively avoid things that trigger my anxiety and things that can have a negative impact on my day. If it isn't something that I need to know or act upon, then I will try to avoid reading news and accounts about things like deaths and disasters.*

Male, 27, UK 🇬🇧

*I avoid anything related to rape, violence and murder because it causes me anguish. The world is bad enough nowadays and, if we keep watching this, we can even be afraid to go out on the street or to get involved with someone due to the fear of rape. So that scares me. I avoid trying to find out more, so I do not have that on my mind.*

Female, 25, Brazil 🇧🇷

*On days where I really want to relax, I avoid political news because it gets me anxious sometimes. I also try to avoid sad news like news about suicides, murders or deaths. I usually don't open death-related articles.*

Female, 24, USA 🇺🇸





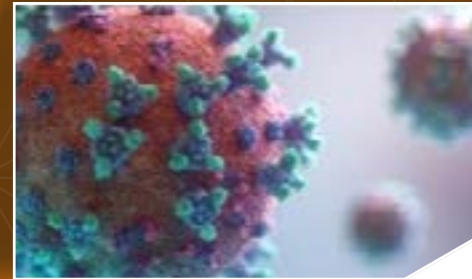


Again, the specific kinds of news to be avoided varies from individual to individual, but common areas were:



### The culture wars

manifesting differently in each market surveyed, due to their differing socio-political environments, but present in all



### Covid 19-related stories

in all markets



### Brexit in the UK



### The war in Ukraine



### Political news

for the disengaged



### Death & violence

in general, but some women particularly avoided stories of attacks on women

There was almost universal recognition that these stories were 'important' but, again, that did not always translate into consumption. The common thread running through disengagement was fatigue, and a sense that these long-running stories lacked any kind of resolution.

Avoidance of 'narrow news' has implications for mainstream news brands, who are felt to operate primarily at the serious end of the spectrum. As such, it is mainstream news brands and what is perceived to be their type of news that tend to be selectively avoided.





# 4.5

## THE THREE TYPES OF YOUNG NEWS CONSUMERS

Given the multiplicity of young people we came across in this study, it should come as no surprise that we observed a range of reasons for consuming news (in its broadest definition):

- As a hobby/passion;
- From a sense of moral/civic duty;
- To support study/work;
- To feel connected to others – globally, locally, in groups defined by markers of identity;
- Self-improvement/personal development;
- Practical utility;
- For entertainment/distraction.

Many were motivated in multiple ways, consuming different kinds of news and content for a range of these reasons – yet another layer of complexity within the kaleidoscope.

We can, however, identify three groups of young people, each engaging differently with ‘the news’ as narrowly defined. In terms of their motivations for consuming it, how they encounter it, their brand consideration set and their content preferences. The three types are:

**Hobbyist/dutiful** – consume the news for enjoyment or out of a civic duty to know what is happening and contribute to the discourse. They can be activist, though are by no means always ‘woke’ or ‘liberal.’

**Main eventer** – young people in this group are attuned to the practical need to keep up with developments as they impact day-to-day life, rather than out of enjoyment or duty.

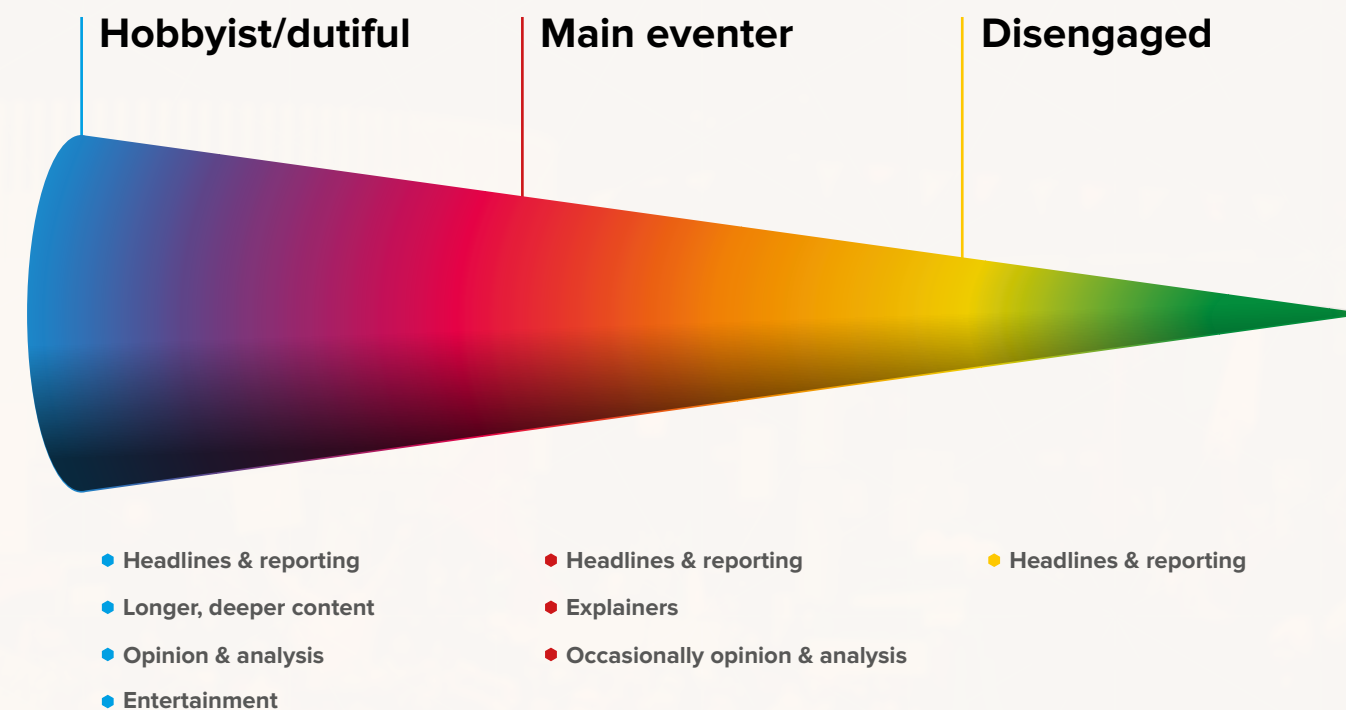
**Disengaged** – although avoiding ‘the news’ as a general rule, young people in this group feel they need to know the unavoidable ‘big’ things going on in society, those that have practical impacts on their lives. They are also motivated by a type of FOMO, needing to know at least a little of what is happening around them so they can be part of conversations, though these tend to be rarer among their social groups.





# Hobbyists/dutiful have the most appetite for a broad range of news and news-related content

	Hobbyist/dutiful	Main Eventer	Disengaged
<b>Engagement with 'the news'</b>	Continuous. Constant, highly frequent	Sporadic, event driven, cherry-picking stories and topics that have direct personal impact	Usually active avoidance; occasional event-driven engagement
<b>How they encounter 'the news'</b>	Most likely to seek out by social search, web search, direct consumption via websites and apps, customised aggregation  Engaged with news on social media, algorithmic recommendation and WOM	Mix active seeking around big stories and a more ambient relationship, where the news finds them  Use search, social and news aggregators at a more superficial level	Driven by WOM or ambient consumption on social media  Use search and news aggregators when driven to by a big event
<b>Brand consideration</b>	Active consideration of a broad set and many sources, actively looking for different voices across mainstream and alternative – in addition to go-to brands	Less consideration. More reliant on aggregation and search  A small set of go-to mainstream sources	A small set of go-to mainstream sources  OR  Whatever a search delivers



**We would wager that hobbyists and dutifuls make up most of mainstream brands' young audiences.** We would also predict that they are a relatively smaller audience group than the others, with a greater addressable audience beyond them. Reaching beyond the hobbyists and dutifuls requires news brands not only to broaden topically (and be recognised for doing so), but also executionally – in terms of format and tone.



# 4.6 THE WAR IN UKRAINE

**An event such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine can cause the typology to break down, transcending usual relationships with ‘the news.’ Stories of this magnitude become ‘need-to-know’ for almost everyone, at least at the outset. Consumption rises and new behaviours start, although they may not turn into habits.**

*I found this global news podcast which I haven't actually listened to before but I've just followed it. I'm going to listen to some of the podcasts relating to the situation in Ukraine at the moment. I feel really awful to say it but I've been quite ignorant to the whole situation. I want to use this platform to learn more about what's going on. I'm going to listen to a few of them. It's a really good method of learning.*

Female, 27, UK 



**Mainstream brands, live news and on-the-ground reporting became more important – some displayed totally new behaviours that we had not previously seen in the study, even turning on the TV!**

**The access that mainstream media offers really comes into its own – but alternative media sources are still used to supplement the diet of mainstream reporting.**

*The BBC is so fast in how they are updating stories. Here on the most important story at the moment, which is the Ukraine and Russia story, here it's live so every time something happens it's been updated. The most recent update is only six minutes ago.*

Male, 20, UK 

*This is people in Ukraine, actually, sharing footage of what's happening on the street.*

Male, 24, USA 

*I use TikTok videos to keep up with stuff that is rapidly changing, specifically the situation in Ukraine.*

Female, 18, USA 

*A lot of the news has simply reported what is happening in Ukraine but in this video I saw exactly what was happening and how desperate they are to protect their city.*

Female, 24, USA 

*I liked how they had people in Ukraine speaking to the public about the events. I also like how they showed a map of where the Russians would come in from, it gave me a better understanding – a feel for the situation.*

Male, 29, UK 





# There were different effects by each type of young news consumer

Hobbyists/dutiful	Main eventer	Disengaged
Following the story, sometimes for years – less background explanation needed	Less aware of the background – need for explainers	Last to the story, scrambling to get up to speed on the basics – where is Ukraine?
Broad brand consideration set becomes even broader	Go-to-mainstream brands plus some new ones	Go-to-mainstream brands
Highly frequent, borderline obsessive checking of live updates	Not as obsessive or ongoing – more sporadic and starting to tail off	Initial burst followed by tailing off
Access (longform) supporting content, sometimes academic	Beyond primers, content viewed through the prism of personal relevance	Summaries and simple explainers through the prism of personal relevance
No signs of fatigue, ongoing deep engagement likely	Likely to keep an eye on events, especially for personal relevance	Clear signs of fatigue as it became clear the story would be ongoing and depressing

*I spent the afternoon listening to CNN. They were live streaming the EU and US ministers talking about the sanctions and what they are doing towards Russia. It is a subject I have been following. It impacts the whole world, it will influence us a lot, even in the financial sphere.*

Female, 24, Brazil 🇧🇷

*I have not read much about the war but I saw reports, news stories about how this war can impact our country, rising fuel prices etc. This makes us worried and makes us want to know more, despite it not being local news. I need to know more about this thing that could affect me.*

Male, 24, Brazil 🇧🇷

*Mum had mentioned to me about being careful with leaving lights on etc in my house as she had heard on the TV news that the prices will be increasing due to the current war with Russia and Ukraine.*

Female, 22, UK 🇬🇧

*When you see something like ‘War between Russia and Ukraine,’ at first you think this is not going to affect you, because it is so far away. There is general news on the war, for readers that read everything regardless if it is local news or not. And there are readers like me who read things that are going to affect their day, more local news. And these pieces, “Understand how...”, attract us.*

Male, 24, Brazil 🇧🇷

*I usually view what some people post as hot takes or current events that are happening. When I saw this, I had to share with my friends because I know some of them are aware of what is happening among Ukraine and Russia but may not be as on-the-pulse as I’ve been lately.*




Male, 21, USA 🇺🇸







# There were also clear differences by market

Relevance felt earliest and more greatly	Relevance perceived later than in the UK and not by all	Relevance perceived post-invasion and not by all
		
<p>Hobbyists and dutifuls first to the story, main eventers following quickly</p> <p>Rising energy prices, effects of sanctions on oligarchs' UK interests, refugee crisis</p> <p>“Everyone is talking about it” highest, driving engagement amongst the disengaged</p>	<p>Hobbyists and dutifuls early to the story</p> <p>Rising energy prices and USA's prominent role in international relations</p> <p>Still felt 'far away' for the more insular, even among main eventers. Easily avoided</p>	<p>Generally last to the story, when Russia invaded</p> <p>Seen through the prism of Bolosonoro's relationship with Putin and rising prices</p> <p>Some still questioning relevance – more of a personal interest than need-to-know story</p>







# THE KALEIDOSCOPE

YOUNG PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEWS



# VIDEO DIDN'T KILL THE RADIO STAR

5





## True to the spirit of what we have found so far, the formats and tones young people prefer is a story of multiplicity.

The medium is often the message – young people are well attuned to the roles of different media, platforms, and services within their overall news diets. Each has its own place. The platform itself often conditions what young people expect. Young people tend to pigeonhole brands, linking them to platforms and media types, thereby setting expectations that are difficult to break.

There is room for a wide range of executional treatments – another case of ‘as well as, not instead of.’ More options are being added to the mix as platforms such as TikTok emerge, adding new conventions for producing content, changing habits and expectations. Rather than replacing earlier formats, these emergent options supplement them, further splintering news consumption.

There is little consistency in what ‘young people’ want in terms of format – it is usually a matter of personal taste. Far from the consistent traits often ascribed to them, there is a lot of variability, which is unsurprising considering the increasing plethora of options available.

*I like that they [Sky News] are using Instagram Stories, they're really using the features. They've got 'link in bio', they're making use of Reels and podcasts.”*

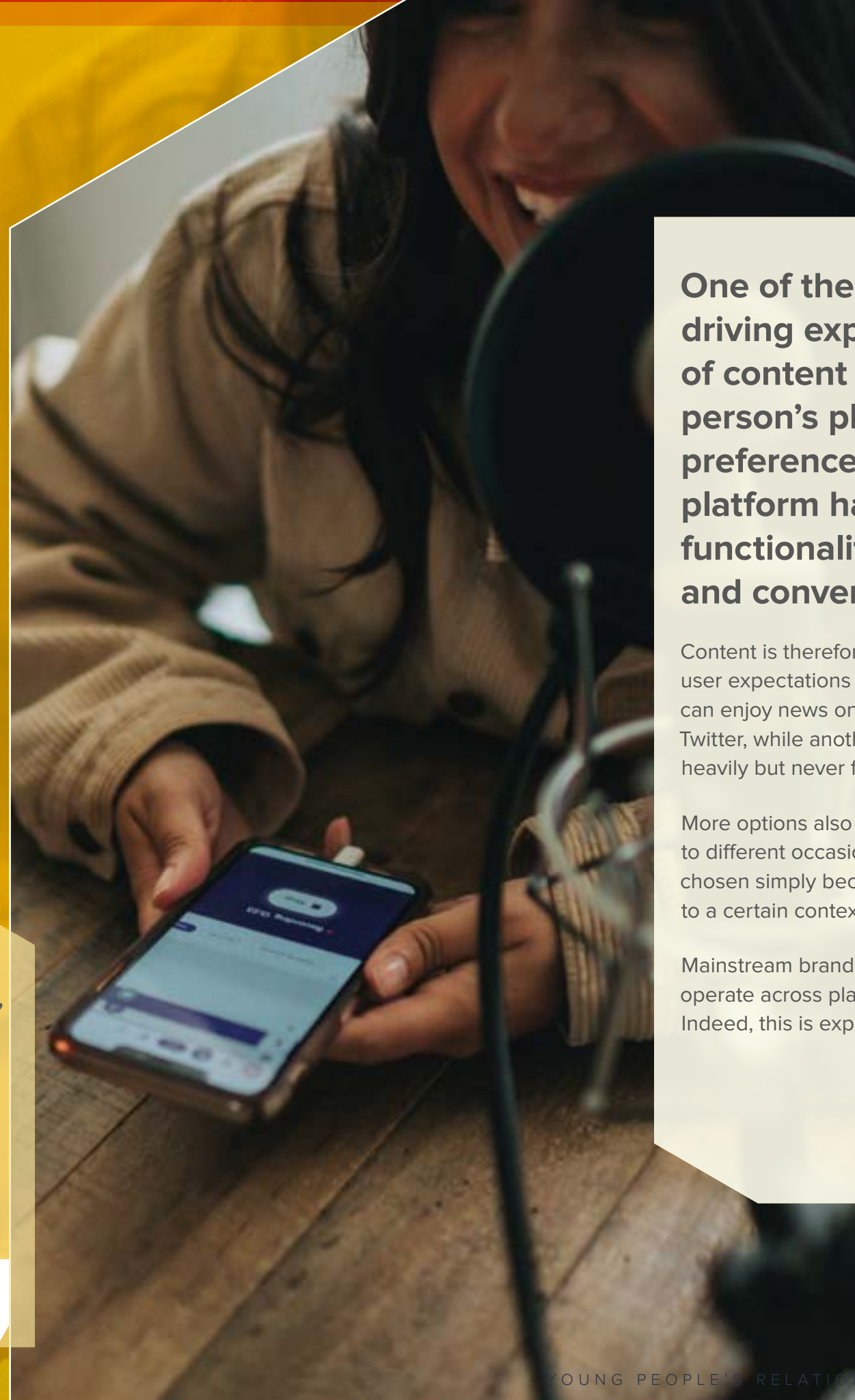
Female, 21, UK

One of the key factors driving expectations of content is a young person's platform preferences. Each platform has its own functionalities, codes and conventions.

Content is therefore constrained by them, user expectations set by them. One person can enjoy news on TikTok, Instagram, or Twitter, while another can use the platform heavily but never for news.

More options also allow news to adapt to different occasions. Some formats are chosen simply because they are best suited to a certain context.

Mainstream brands have permission to operate across platforms and formats. Indeed, this is expected and even desired.






## The example of TikTok

**It was striking how much ‘news’ (in the broadest sense) came to some of our young people via TikTok. This fell into two categories:**

- Memes and take-offs of the news, e.g., videos of planes trying to take off during the big storms in the UK.
- On-the-ground ‘citizen journalism,’ clips of actual happenings, e.g., footage from inside occupied Ukrainian cities.

*A TV reporter who also has a TikTok page gives us regular updates on the situation. It feels comforting and more intimate than watching on TV news.*

Female, 22, UK 

*I came across this on TikTok and I thought it was really funny. I liked it because it was light-hearted and nobody was being brought down for a change! I like to see stories like these.*

Female, 22, UK 

*TikTok, they're not really covering the news, just making it more attractive by going behind the scenes.*

Male, 26, UK 

*I originally saw this story on The Daily Show's TikTok and later went to go find more information on it and found a few articles.*

*The original video talks about Fox News reporting on the Durham Probe.*

Male, 23, USA 

*NowThis has recently been showing a lot of clips that are directly from the [Ukrainian] president, just with translations of his words. I do wonder if the clips are longer, and if they're really curating these down to something more dramatic. I know TikTok can sustain longer videos. However, I know right now everyone is craving more first-hand information directly from the source. There's a lot of misinformation on TikTok especially, so these are helpful.*

Female, 22, USA 

*I liked how this TikTok showed just a clip of actual footage from the ground in Ukraine, and something the president put out, with nothing added but the translations. I found it very moving. It's always helpful to see clips of these people just as actual people, to really understand the direness of the situation. Even if it's not strictly 'news,' it puts into context what's happening and calls for people to empathetically care beyond just the statistical facts.*

Female, 22, USA 

**Young people do not expect much of news on TikTok, because they do not perceive the service itself to be ‘serious.’** As such, all news on TikTok is taken with a pinch of salt, to be verified and checked against other sources. TikTok content is to be used in conjunction with content from other sources, unless it comes from a credible mainstream news brand. The increasing presence on TikTok of credible news brands (and journalists working for them) is increasing its credibility as a platform for news. TikTok has come a long way since being perceived as the home of silly dances.





# 5.1 FORMATS

There is a role for all formats, although it is debatable the degree to which any format is totally discrete in the social multimedia age, where audio, video, photos, graphics, and text are seamlessly blended into one content experience.

Alternative media on emergent platforms such as Twitch and TikTok are especially good at blending them – perhaps a sign of things to come (or things already here for a more emergent group of consumers).

## Text remains the fastest and least intrusive way of actively taking information on board.



Despite some narratives, young news consumers are still highly wedded to the written word. It brings with it a number of benefits and is often blended with other formats, to be consumed if the reader wants more. It is perfectly suited to the most common news occasions – keeping up with happenings on a need-to-know basis, assimilating headlines and developments. It is the most flexible format, able to be consumed in the widest variety of locations and contexts – without ear/headphones.

Often news consumption can start with text, especially summaries, live updates, and comments. It can be quickly skimmed for information and easily re-read if not understood or concentration wanes. Long reads require more engagement, characteristic of personal interest news and hobbyist/dutiful news consumers.



*The reading thing is more of a personal preference of mine. I prefer to read, because it is quicker to open a website and get to know what I need.*

Male, 24, Brazil 🇧🇷

*The formats I prefer are concepts such as 'live reporting', e.g. through the form of live news feed such as on the BBC website and live commentary on newspaper websites.*

Male, 24, Brazil 🇧🇷

*I like news articles that I can read and feel professional. I find reading to feel far more serious than a video. If I do listen to audio it is more of a background sound rather than active listening. Text based learning is my favourite.*

Male, 23, USA 🇺🇸

*I tend to be a fan of a mix of videos accompanied by text and infographics to help me digest the fact.*

Male, 20, UK 🇬🇧

*Personally, I tend to prefer reading news opposed to watching/listening to it on a daily basis. It is, however, situational. If I'm in public or just scrolling through social media I prefer to read about news topics but if I'm on my own at home or have a bit more time, then I do like to watch/listen to news.*

Male, 26, UK 🇬🇧





**Still imagery** is the visual version of text – fast and unobtrusive – whether that is photos, diagrams, maps, or data visualisations.



**Video** is such a broad category as to be almost meaningless as a catch-all. It is, however, the most immersive but also most intrusive format, often requiring full ocular and aural attention.



There is such a range of video formats as to render speaking about 'video' as a whole almost meaningless. Engagement with different types is totally different. Although by no means intended as an exhaustive list, to illustrate the range of possibility within 'video', we came across:

- Journalistic pieces-to-camera;
- (Animated) explainers;
- User-generated clips;
- Video-based podcasts;
- Memes and take-offs;
- Longform documentaries and TV-style programmes.

The crucial difference is whether a video is shortform or longform, part of a wider (social) content experience or the experience itself. We have defined shortform as a minute or under, longform everything longer than that. Longform (YouTube) video is replacing the long read for some, but in terms of volume it seems that shortform dominates, especially in social environments.

**Shortform video** is often embedded in (often social) environments increasingly built for video. Shortform is usually part of a wider content experience, one piece of content in a feed or search, decontextualized, not necessarily sitting next to other news content and in a soup of brands. Native shortform content is not expected to deliver serious or in-depth news – it is best suited to quick updates and basic explainers, or light-hearted content, especially memes. It is also used for teasers leading to content elsewhere, though it seems that young people increasingly want to remain on-platform, thereby increasing the importance of native content.

**Longform video** is largely the preserve of news brands' websites, specialist video sites and TV channels' websites – YouTube, broadcaster VOD, Netflix. Consumption can vary between a highly immersive experience such as a documentary, or an ambient radio-like one such as breakfast news. We witnessed very little linear TV viewing, especially in the USA and the UK.



*I don't like videos that clearly don't NEED to be videos and just include random pictures and random highlighted words (that are already being said) just as an excuse for there to be a video.*

Female, 22, USA 

*Vice misses the mark for me nowadays because of their documentary format of news. It is too long to hold my attention and also does not allow for multitasking.*

Female, 23, USA 






**Audio** is less intrusive than video, allowing for multi-tasking and more passive consumption than text or video, perfect when ocular attention is needed elsewhere. Some video can be treated as audio, i.e., as 'background'. Audio more readily fits in with chores and travel.




*Mostly I like podcasts because I can do things while listening in. Joe Rogan podcast, Jordan Peterson podcast, YouTube videos on Fox, Tucker Carlson. They are entertaining to listen to with their dialogue and you can get other things done while listening to them.*

Female, 23, USA 

*Listening to the news is much more effective for me, so much so that I think it is really cool that there are some sites that present written news where you can also turn on the audio and listen.*

Female, 23, USA 

*The BBC's Global News Podcast is a good way to present news as it can sometimes be hard to sit and read long articles.*

Female, 19, UK 







## The bulk of audio news consumption was via podcasts, especially in the UK and the USA.

The sheer variety of podcasts available is dizzying, as is their topical and tonal range. They are often used to add depth and specificity to a topic/issue. One clear signal is that podcasts allow for conversational approaches that are very much appreciated in personal interest news. This tone is not a feature of a more didactic mainstream media.

## There is still a role for radio, for example in the car and at work.

News consumption here can be incidental and ambient, e.g., bulletins on music-based stations, a snippet in the kitchen at lunchtime. We also witnessed TV and Twitch streamers being used 'as radio' – as ambient background.



*For hobby news I prefer things like YouTube videos or podcasts that I can listen to while doing other things. I'm listening to one about new TV as I write this. For legitimate news, I like to read it, though video aids like the videos of missiles being launched at homes in the current Russia/Ukraine crisis are welcomed when article relevant.*

Male, 18, USA

*The LuAnna podcast does discuss current affairs. It's very opinion based. It does discuss the facts but it's always their slant on it. I don't always agree with them, but I like the way they discuss serious but also light-hearted stories. It feels like you're just chatting with friends.*

Female, 27, UK

*A lot of young people watch people on Twitch now instead of TV. People can build trust and relationships with people that they follow, endorse and give money. That can be problematic as those people may not be in a position to provide quality information.*

Male, 27, UK





# 5.2 TONE


**Tone** is judged in terms of 'appropriateness' rather than there being any absolute preferences. Appropriateness is situational and contextually dependent. The topic being covered, the brand covering it and the platform on which it is covered all have conditioning effects on expectations of tone.

“


*There is a very serious tone to the press at the moment due to the circumstances. I don't feel that much else is being reported which, at a time like this, isn't a bad thing as the public need to be educated on ever changing situations in Ukraine.*

Male, 29, UK 

*Sharing news about the current Russia and Ukraine issue on Snapchat is using the wrong style and format as Snapchat to me is a more informal social media platform and I would not feel that the information shared here was reliable.*

Female, 23, UK 

*When it comes to like everything that's happening with Ukraine and Russia, you can't take an informal tone to that, that's just wrong.*

Male, 26, UK 

”





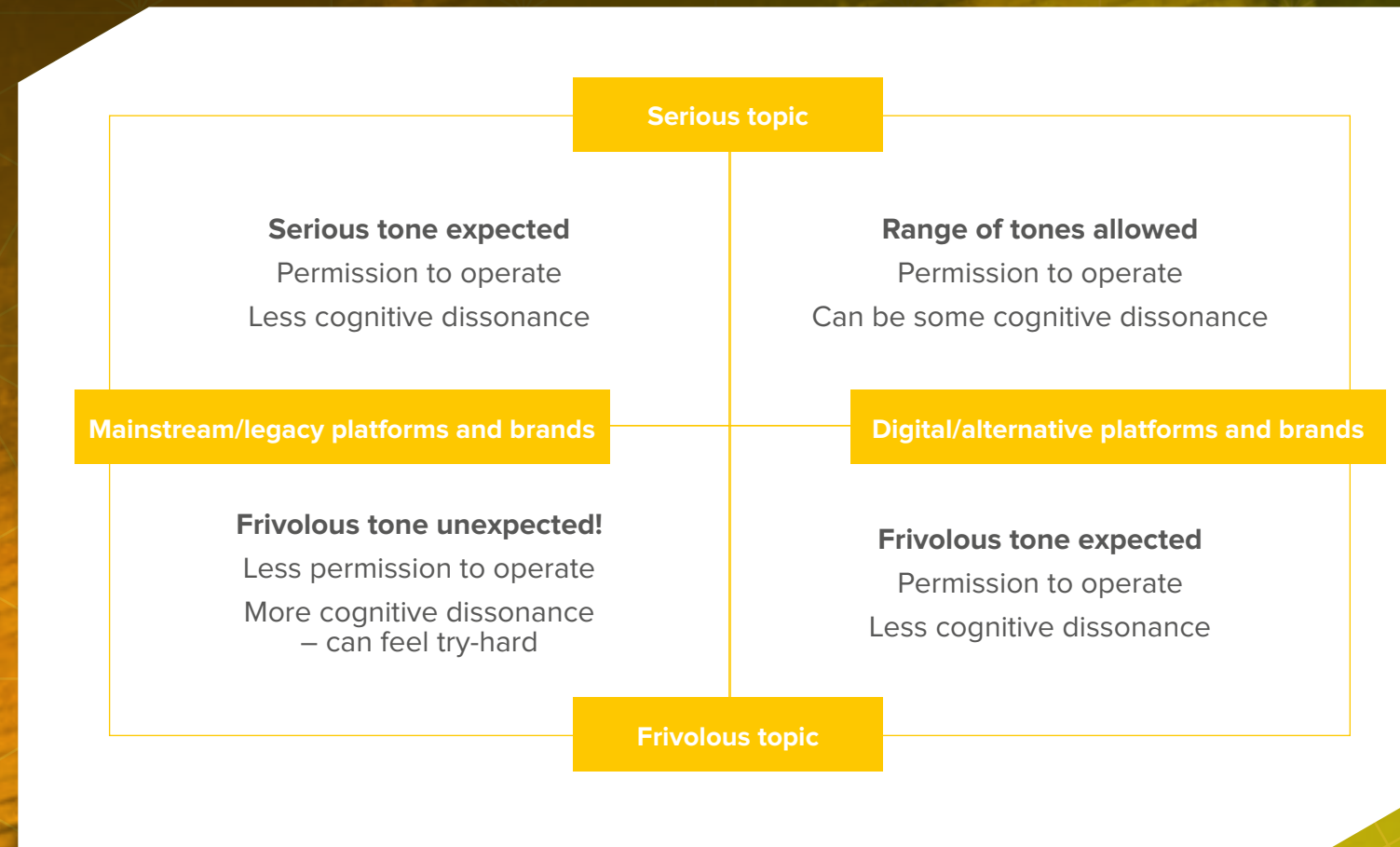
The broadening of who provides the news and how it is provided has led to a broadening in the tones used to convey the news.

The topic being covered, the brand covering it and the platform on which it is covered all have conditioning effects on expectations of tone.

'The news'	'News'	
Need to know/serious	Personal interest	Fun
<p>Serious topics, legacy media and brands</p> <p>Often negative, with some degree of harm</p> <p>Serious and respectful tones expected</p> <p>(Room for satire, especially for Hobbyists)</p>	<p>Less serious topics, alternative and digital media and brands</p> <p>With less serious implications and less negativity</p> <p>More leeway here for emotion, opinion and interpretation</p> <p>The more 'user-generated' the content, the lower the expectations of professional, serious respectful tones - even if the subject matter is still considered to be 'the news'</p> <p>Indeed, entertaining tones are somewhat expected from alternative brands</p>	

There is no clear preference for how 'the news' should be delivered – some young people prefer the humorous, casual, conversational; others the straight, serious, objective, impartial.

Mainstream brands are expected to have a straight, serious tone and to cover credible topics. Straying too far from this runs the risk of being 'dad dancing at the disco' – it is fine to leave the suit and tie behind, but mainstream brands don't have to wear skinny jeans. Indeed, doing so can feel 'try-hard,' undermining hard-won reputation and brand equity while not appealing to younger audiences in the slightest.







# THE KALEIDOSCOPE

YOUNG PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEWS



# IMPLICATIONS FOR NEWS BRANDS

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**Mainstream news brands can please all of the (young) people some of the time, and some of the (young) people all of the time.....**

**.....but mainstream news brands can't please all of the young people all of the time (with their current offer).**



## Mainstream news brands face challenges from three directions:

- Weaker engagement with narrow news, stronger engagement with broader news.
- Proliferation of brands from beyond the mainstream competing for time and attention, playing different roles.
- A suspicious, sceptical approach to information meaning news brands are not inherently valued for their impartiality.

## Furthermore, the dizzying complexity of the kaleidoscope makes predicting young people's consumption preferences nigh on impossible

There is simply too much variety, multiplicity, and serendipity to be able to model meaningfully. One thing we can say as a result, however, is that there is no silver bullet solution to engaging young people with news.

## There is great value in what traditional mainstream brands have been doing in digital

For hobbyists, dutifuls, main eventers and during times of crisis. Here, traditional news brands' professionalism, their verification of facts (if believed), high production values, and access to the highest echelons of power all have an important role to play for many young people.

## Engaging young people does not require a revolution, more a broadening of the offer

News brands must evolve, but they must also be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Firstly, what they have done is valued. Secondly, they must retain the credibility and brand equity that they have taken so long to build. News brands do not need to move away from their traditional offer (in digital) – this is a case of as well as, not instead of. Growth and retention will be best served by supplementing current offers, not replacing them.



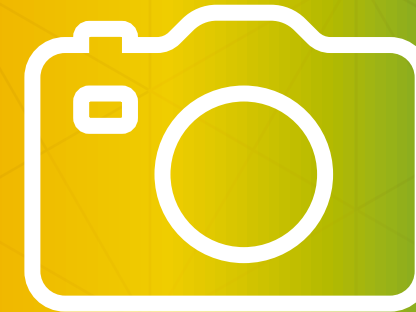
The challenge is to meet those who are less engaged with narrow news on their territory – topical, tonal, platforms.

## Doing so requires:

- **Topical broadening** – to move beyond (and be recognised for moving beyond) ‘narrow’ news;
- **Tonal broadening** – to embrace emotion, warmer, more personal and discursive, entertaining tones;
- **Brand strategy work** to ensure that traditional mainstream brands can meaningfully move into these newer tonal and topical areas, receive credit for doing so yet not undermine their journalistic professionalism, credibility, hard-won reputations and brand equity;
- As part of that brand strategy, **new brands and sub-brands** could be considered – to differentiate ‘older’ and ‘newer’ approaches to news;
- Making **socially native content**, not just using social as a driver to owned properties;
- In doing so, **respecting each platform’s codes and conventions**. Part of that is employing social natives who intuitively understand how engagement on emergent platforms works and are creatively adept at driving it. That extends to those producing content and those delivering it, both behind and in front of the keyboard, camera or microphone.



# PHOTOGRAPHY



ussatlantis AdobeStock	P1	jon-tyson unsplash	P34
Farknot Architect AdobeStock	P5	cardmapr-nl unsplash	P35
Raw Pixel AdobeStock	P6	little-plant unsplash	P36
peopleimages AdobeStock	P7	annie-spratt unsplash	P37
rodion-kutsaev unsplash	P8	bruno-Yhu unsplash	P38
parrish-freeman unsplash	P9	mikhail-volkov unsplash	P39
malcolm-lightbody unsplash	P10	tong-su unsplash	P40
Raw Pixel AdobeStock	P13	mikhail-volkov unsplash	P41
Farknot Architect AdobeStock	P14	eric-nopanen unsplash	P42
peopleimages AdobeStock	P15	soundtrap-c unsplash	P43
Raw Pixel AdobeStock	P16	solen-feyissa unsplash	P44
magnus-andersson unsplash	P20	annie-spratt unsplash	P45
ksenia-yakovleva unsplash	P25	vladimir-proskurovskiy unsplash	P46
peopleimages AdobeStock	P28	alexandre-debieve unsplash	P47
nick-shandra unsplash	P29	austin-distel unsplash	P48
jakob-owens unsplash	P30	cash-macanaya unsplash	P49
jazmin-quaynor unsplash	P31	mikhail-volkov unsplash	P50
marjan-blan-marjanblan unsplash	P32	austin-chan unsplash	P51
rafaela-biazi unsplash	P33		



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