

Decision makers *and the news*

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An introduction from Simon Whitehead,
Chief Executive Officer - Portland

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Foreword

The media world has changed irrevocably in the last few decades. But the speed of that change is now faster than ever. Media has fragmented. There are more content providers than ever before, more channels and polarisation has increased, both politically and when it comes to where people choose to get their information. The beginning of the era of widespread artificial intelligence use will mean the pace of change is only going to increase.

These changes are playing out across society and across media. Since the shock of the 2016 referendum, people in the corporate and political world have put a lot of effort – correctly – into understanding how less powerful, less prosperous people understand the world around them, including what news they consume.

But this report focuses on a smaller section of society. These are the influencers and the powerbrokers. They are the decision makers in business, politics, government and all other walks of life. Their decisions often impact the rest of us.

And this group is changing. Once upon a time, the establishment was seen as a redoubt of conservatism with both a small c and a big one. And the paper of the establishment was The Times – so much so that it advertised itself with the slogan “Top People Take The Times”. Nowadays, no brand would refer to “Top People”, but our data shows that although The Times retains a lot of “Top People” as readers, the preferred choice of the establishment is now The Guardian. Some of this will be down to The Guardian’s free-to-read model compared to The Times’ rigid paywall. But there has also been a value shift. “Top people” are a more diverse group than they used to be, although our data suggests men are still hugely over-represented.

The people we polled are the audiences which frequently matter most to the kind of clients Portland works with. For them, it is not enough to know how many people read a certain newspaper and will see the content it carries. They need to know whether the people they most need to reach – the decision makers – are seeing it and whether they will trust it. And to be confident that decisions are being made on the basis of hard data. To paraphrase, “in God we Trust” – everyone else must bring data.

That is why Portland and its sister agencies across Omnicom are becoming ever more data-led, and ever more interested in the new technologies that people are using to understand communications. It is now clear that artificial intelligence is changing how people use news and explore it. One of the stand-out statistics from this report is that 81% of decision makers – and 47% of the whole population – are already using AI to go deeper into the news topics they are interested in. This data was obtained in April 2025, which means that by the time you read this report that number will likely only have increased.

This underlines the significant role AI will have in shaping reputations. As use of Large Language Models increases, getting to grips with how these interfaces select and surface information will be one of the most significant communications challenges of the years ahead – and it is one Portland is already equipped to deal with through the significant Omnicom tech capabilities which we are able to draw on for our clients. At a time when the previous primacy of earned media is sometimes questioned as a communication focus, it is fascinating that many LLMs seem to be attaching extra weight to information that their AIs are learning from high-quality sources such as top tier media. To influence what the AI says about you, a key approach is likely going to involve influencing what the AI sees.

Whether it is in corporate affairs, public affairs or navigating the geopolitical landscape in which they operate, our clients need to know how to get the attention and earn the trust of those taking decisions. This report shows why in-depth understanding of the news consumption habits of those decision makers is essential for all organisations.



Simon Whitehead
Chief Executive Officer

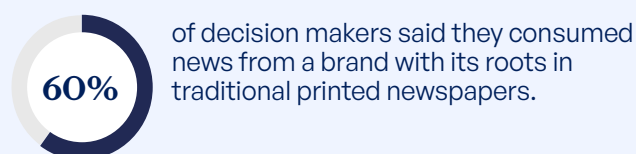
Executive summary

Key findings

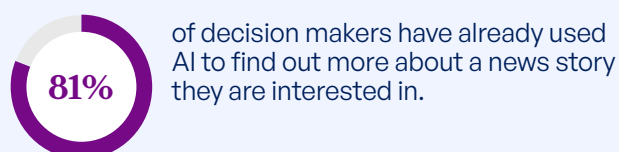
Decision makers have *distinct news habits*

Our research demonstrates how people in positions of influence consume news in ways that sets them apart from the general population.

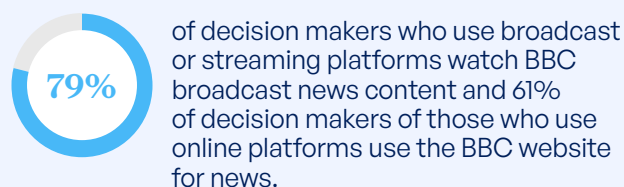
Traditional newspaper brands are still extremely influential.



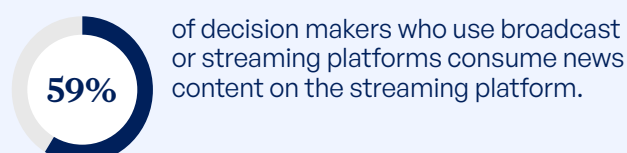
AI has been embraced.



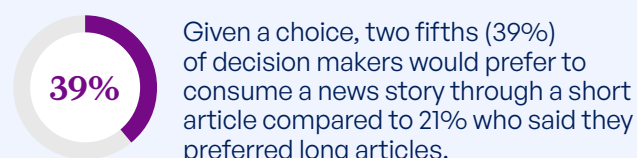
The BBC still dominates.



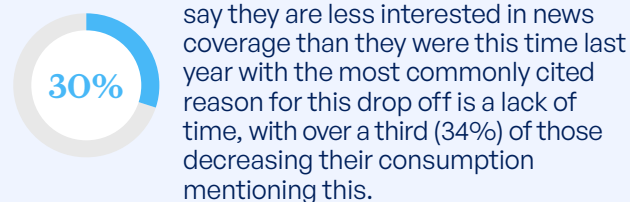
But YouTube is a big player for news.



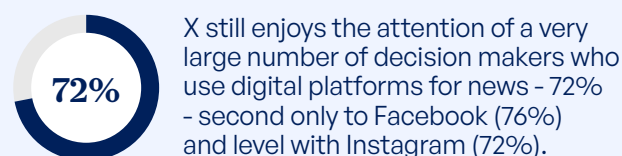
Brevity is important.



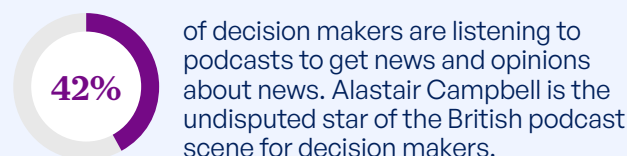
Decision makers suffer from news fatigue too.



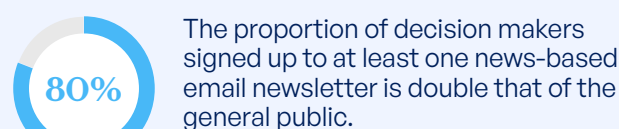
News of X's death may have been exaggerated.



Podcasts are a key source of news.



Email newsletters are relied upon.



Who are *the decision makers?*

Plenty of studies of news consumption have been carried out over the years that looked at the habits of different demographics of the UK population. They have identified trends like TikTok being the preferred source of news for Gen Z, or the shift amongst Millennials and Baby Boomers to consuming more online news than TV. But the focus of this report is on an altogether different cohort – the decision makers. This is a category developed to identify people who hold professional positions in which they wield influence or executive power in some way.

The Private Sector Decision Makers

Those that fall into this group are largely corporate decision makers. While the other groups in this report do not have an income threshold, this sector's group does. They are either a senior decision maker in a large company or have a recent history of financial involvement in philanthropic initiatives or politics. Their influence is held in their financial capacity and ability to make decisions related to corporate affairs. They are the people that make and advise on decisions about investments, and on how the economy functions.

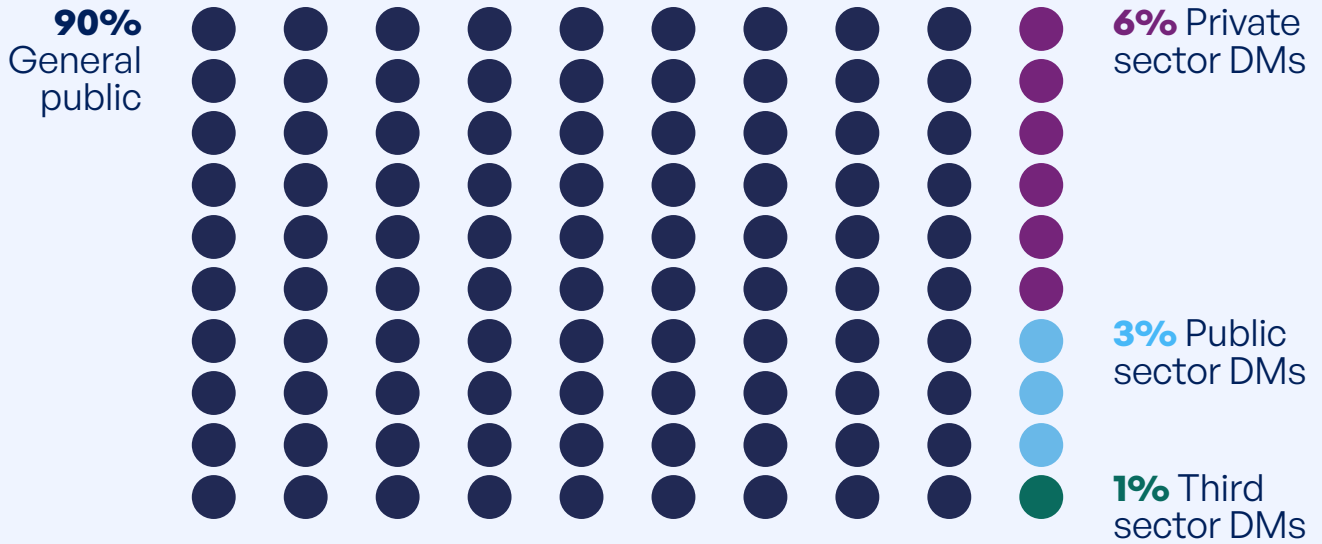
The Public Sector Decision Makers

Those that fall into this group are key decision makers within government and public institutions. Unlike the private sector counterparts, their qualification is based on position and responsibility rather than income thresholds. They include senior civil servants, elected officials, and management-level professionals in public services such as healthcare, education, and defence. Their influence stems from their authority to shape policy, allocate public resources, and deliver programmes.

The Third Sector Decision Makers

Those that fall into this group are influential figures operating outside traditional government and corporate structures. They represent thought leadership, advocacy, and the independent intellectual landscape that shapes discourse and policy development. This sector includes media professionals with editorial authority, research-focused academics, think tankers, and strategic staff within NGO and charitable organisations. Their influence is derived from their ability to generate and disseminate ideas, advocate for specific causes, and shape narratives that influence both public opinion and policy.

Who are *the decision makers?*



Decision makers are typically highly educated, affluent, heavily based in London and the South. While the number of women represented in this demographic has significantly increased in recent years, the way this decision maker group – 66% male – falls out of the public sample reflects the fact that the top of British society is still dominated by men. Two fifths of MPs are men, as is the lobby of top political journalists. Two thirds of judges are still men.

<i>Key Demographic Breakdown</i>	<i>Decision Makers</i>	<i>UK Public</i>
Male	66%	48%
Female	34%	51%
London	30%	13%
Rest of UK	70%	87%
Graduate	63%	34%
Non-graduate	37%	66%
Oxbridge	5%	1%
Russell Group	20%	8%

The big picture: How much news are decision makers consuming and *how are they doing so?*

Decision makers consume a lot of news and current affairs content - substantially more than the rest of the population. Their consumption habits are both deep and broad. While they read news published by traditional broadsheet brands, they read tabloid content too. They seek out the latest developments rather than choosing to solely absorb events through ambient exposure or mobile notifications. They listen to radio stations and watch broadcast and streaming video, such as BBC and YouTube, a similar amount to the rest of the population. But they are significantly more likely to be reading content produced by newspaper and magazine brands. They are voracious consumers of newer media forms, such as podcasts plus text platforms such as Substack and Medium.

For the majority of them, keeping on top of the news is a key part of their professional responsibilities. Only 12% of decision makers said they do not need to take an interest in the news to do their jobs properly, while 71% said it was essential or important to do so.

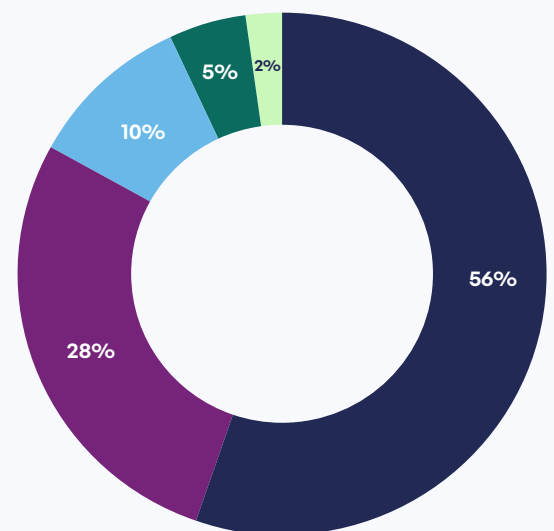
One of the key ways in which they take on news is they actively make choices and “curate” their own broad portfolio of news sources. From a fragmented media, they pick and choose what they need and what they find interesting. And AI is already starting to make heavy inroads into how they go about this.

Active and intentional news seekers.

Decision makers are not passive consumers of news. Over half of decision makers (56%) say they “mainly take in news by deliberately seeking it out”, which contrasts with the 41% of the whole UK population who say the same. Comparatively very few decision makers rely on mobile notifications (just 5%) or ambient exposure through background TV or radio (10%) as their primary news source. This is a group motivated and intentional in how they stay informed.

It is not just how they consume news that is particularly noteworthy, it's when they do. News consumption is distributed through their day in a way that reflects its professional relevance. Two thirds (66%) of decision makers say they consume news either during working hours or evenly throughout the day. This compares to just over half (52%) of the wider population. This deliberate relationship with news is not casual; it's functional. Over two thirds (71%) say that keeping up with the news is either essential or important for their role. Our decision makers are also much more likely to hold so-called “email jobs”. They are sitting in front of computers all day, not doing manual work.

Which statement best describes how you most often consume news?








-  I mainly take in news by deliberately seeking it out
-  I mainly encounter news while browsing social media
-  I mainly encounter news through ambient exposure
-  I mainly receive news through mobile notifications
-  None of these

Figure 1: Which statement best describes how you most often consume news?

The rise of artificial intelligence.

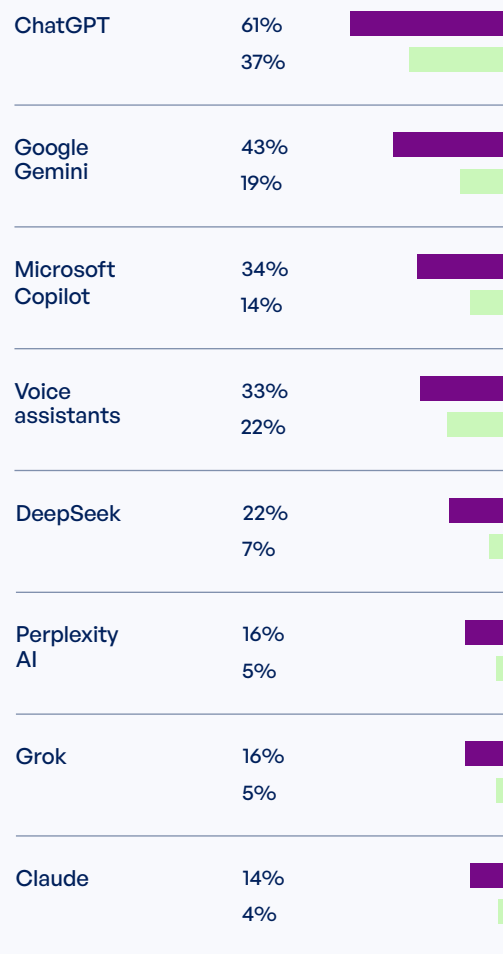
81% of decision makers say they are using AI in at least one way to stay informed – nearly double the rate of the general UK public at 47%. This adoption extends beyond casual use, with AI tools becoming a primary information source for many: 8% of decision makers’ first port of call when seeking more information about a news story is an AI tool, such as ChatGPT. This is nearly triple the rate among the general public (3%). The 8% number may seem low but it is already almost as many as head to Wikipedia (10%) – commonly seen as one of the main sources of information on the open web. It is also a number which is expected to surge. In reality it may also already be higher given that 18% of decision makers said they headed first to a search engine such as Google and Google is already offering AI-derived responses to many queries.

The platform take-up also shows a stark divide between early-adopter decision makers and the rest of the population. Among decision makers, 61% have tried ChatGPT and 43% have tried Google’s Gemini, compared to just 37% and 19% respectively among the UK public.

The primary motivations driving this AI adoption for decision makers are practical. Decision makers mainly use these tools to better understand complexity (33%), and to save time (31%). The fact that so many decision makers are time-poor and crave ways of using their time as productively and enjoyably as possible is one of the themes of this report.

This data suggests decision makers are not only early adopters of AI for news consumption, but they are also using it more strategically than the wider public, by treating AI as an initial information source and a tool for deeper analysis.

Most popular LLMs



■ Decision Makers ■ UK Public

Figure 2: Which, if any, of the following artificial intelligence (AI) tools have you used? Please select all that apply.

Breadth and depth.

Decision makers show a high degree of versatility with which they consume news. Both traditional and newer media formats sit side-by-side in their media diets.

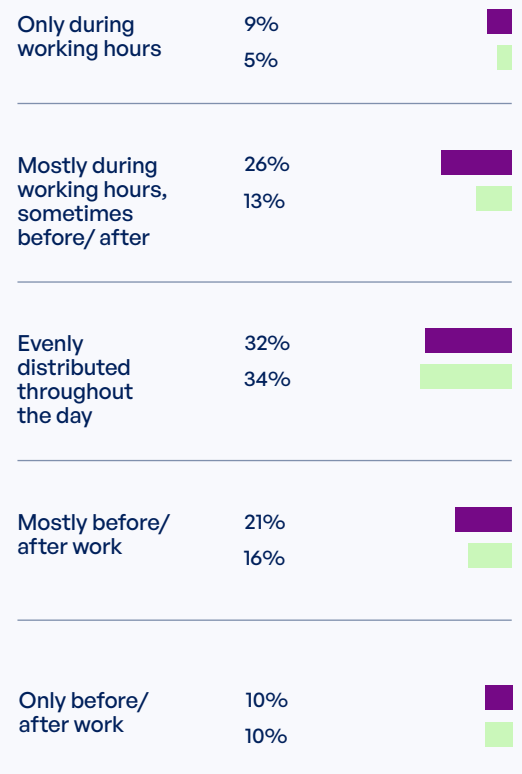
Over half of decision makers say they typically use newspapers, online news platforms, radio, and digital or social media to stay up to date with current affairs. Their habits are wide ranging: 67% typically use news websites and digital platforms, 60% typically consume news from newspaper brands like The Times, The Sun and The Guardian, 57% typically use digital or social channels like social media and messaging services, and 52% typically tune into the radio. Beyond these, a substantial number also typically consume broadcast channels or streaming platforms (42%), podcasts (42%), and magazines (39%) as part of their regular diet.

While radio and broadcast habits track very closely to the general population, the other formats reveal the large gap between the two groups. Decision makers are much more likely to engage with newer platforms. For example, while two fifths (42%) of decision makers say they use podcasts to stay informed, the figure seen in the UK public as a whole is half that (21%).

They are also more interested in foreign news and much more likely to consume foreign media. Two thirds (68%) of decision makers say they consume news stories about Europe and almost half (44%) consume news stories about North America. Around a third say they also keep tabs on events in the Middle East (36%), Russia (34%), and Africa (31%). Comparatively, only 16% of the public at-large say they consume stories about Africa, and a quarter (27%) keep abreast of Middle East current affairs. Stories about Europe (59%) and North America (36%) are slightly more popular with the public, but still lower than decision makers' interest levels.

The breadth of their media diet is what makes this group particularly distinctive. Their habits speak to a curiosity for knowledge that is not inhibited by platform.

When do you most consume news content?



Decision Makers UK Public

Figure 3: When do you most consume news content?

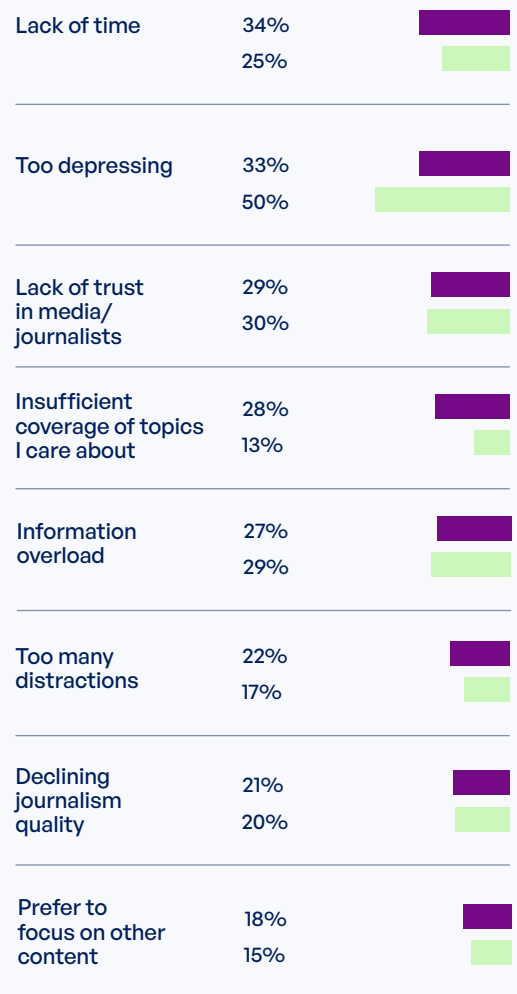
News fatigue is a problem for everyone, decision makers included.

Much has been spoken of news fatigue in recent years – especially the idea that the relentless grimness of news from Ukraine and Gaza, plus domestic soap operas like Brexit, has driven people away. Despite being a highly engaged group, with voracious media habits, there are signs of fatigue. Just under a third (32%) say they are less interested in news coverage than they were this time last year. This is notably more than the UK population, at large, with only 21% saying they are less interested now than last year – albeit from a higher base.

But the most commonly cited reason for this drop off is a lack of time, with over a third (34%) mentioning this – fractionally ahead of those who said the news was too depressing at 33%. But that was a less common reason for reducing news consumption among the general population, where 50% of those who said they had done so blamed depressing content.

Time is increasingly important for our decision makers, it seems. Successful entrants to the news market like Axios and Semafor in the US and the “i” newspaper in the UK have made much of their content being short and to the point. Given a choice, two fifths (39%) of decision makers would prefer to consume a news story through a short article compared to 21% who said they preferred long articles.

Drivers of news fatigue



■ Decision Makers ■ UK Public

Figure 4: Which, if any, of the following media sources do you typically use to consume news and current affairs? Please select all that apply.

Media: helpful or harmful?

- Katie Norton-Williams

Pointing out the changing media landscape has become a near-constant refrain in recent years. Between 24/7 news cycles and the rise of creator-led content – podcasts, social media, Substack, Medium – information has never been more abundant. Media plays a larger role than ever in shaping the conversation, raising the question: does the media help or harm discussions about serious issues facing this country?

Decision makers are split on this issue but are much more inclined than the public to give media the benefit of doubt. 37% of decision makers think the media mostly helps these discussions, compared with only 16% of the public. If there is a crisis of trust, it is much stronger among the least-engaged. Despite some signs of polarisation – for example the small but dedicated GB News audience among decision makers – those who have generally been more successful in their careers and have a higher standard of living are less inclined to see the mainstream media as a negative force.

Katie Norton-Williams is a Senior Executive working on research in Portland's Innovation team. She has conducted quantitative and qualitative projects for clients across a wide range of sectors and international markets.



In detail

Media Channels

Traditional *newspaper brands*

Traditional newspaper brands with their roots in print remain a staple of the media diet of key decision makers. While we are no longer in an age where every current affairs conversation is led, and commented on, by Fleet Street journalists, they are still highly consumed. They are the second most consumed media source, with 60% still reading a newspaper – either online or in print. The Guardian has replaced The Times as ‘the top peoples’ paper’, but their reading habits still have breadth – they are almost as likely to at least sometimes read The Sun as The Times.

Newspaper brands – *print and online*

The Guardian is the most popular paper, with just over half of decision makers (50%), who read newspapers, claiming to read it. The Guardian is closely followed by The Times (46%) and The Sun (45%) in popularity. Age plays a significant role in preferences, with 53% of 18-34 year old decision makers reading The Guardian, compared to 46% of those between 35-54. The decision maker preference for The Guardian sharply contrasts with the picture among the general public, where only 28% of newspaper readers opt for The Guardian while 42% read the Daily Mail.

The UK public pays more attention to the Daily Mail's front-page news (73%) than decision makers do (54%). Instead, they are drawn to content deeper into the paper, or the fact they are reading digitally makes the concept of a "front page" much less important. We see a similar pattern with The Guardian. Just 51% of those who read that paper digitally or online say they are drawn to front-page news. Instead, they prefer The Guardian's political coverage (76%), economics (66%), business news (64%), and international news (63%).

Top 10 newspapers

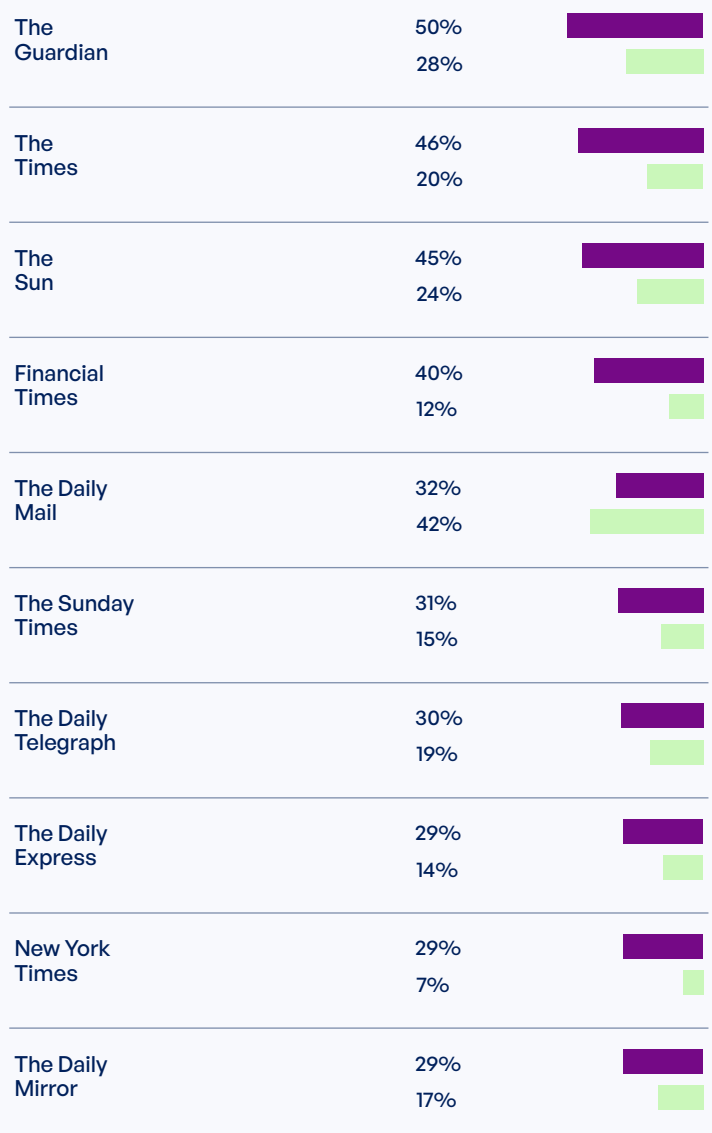


Figure 5: Which, if any, of the following newspapers do you read, either online or print? Please select all that apply.

Decision Makers UK Public

Trust and Influence

Among decision makers, The Guardian does not only dominate consumption, but it also leads in trust too, followed by The Sun and The Times.

As we see elsewhere in this report, our decision makers skew left and liberal in their politics and general worldview, there is a group within them that have strongly conservative views. The Sun may not be selling 4m print copies a day as it did at its peak, but it is still by far one of the most widely-consumed news brands in the UK. We think that a combination of sheer reach, a conservative element among our decision maker group and the fact it continues to break key stories and do high-quality popular journalism – without a rigid paywall – explains its high position. The same goes for the Daily Mail. Although the digital-only Independent does well in some sets of analytics, our figures are based on a UK-only audience set.

Trust levels significantly increase among each publication's own readership, with The Guardian holding 69% trust among its own readers.

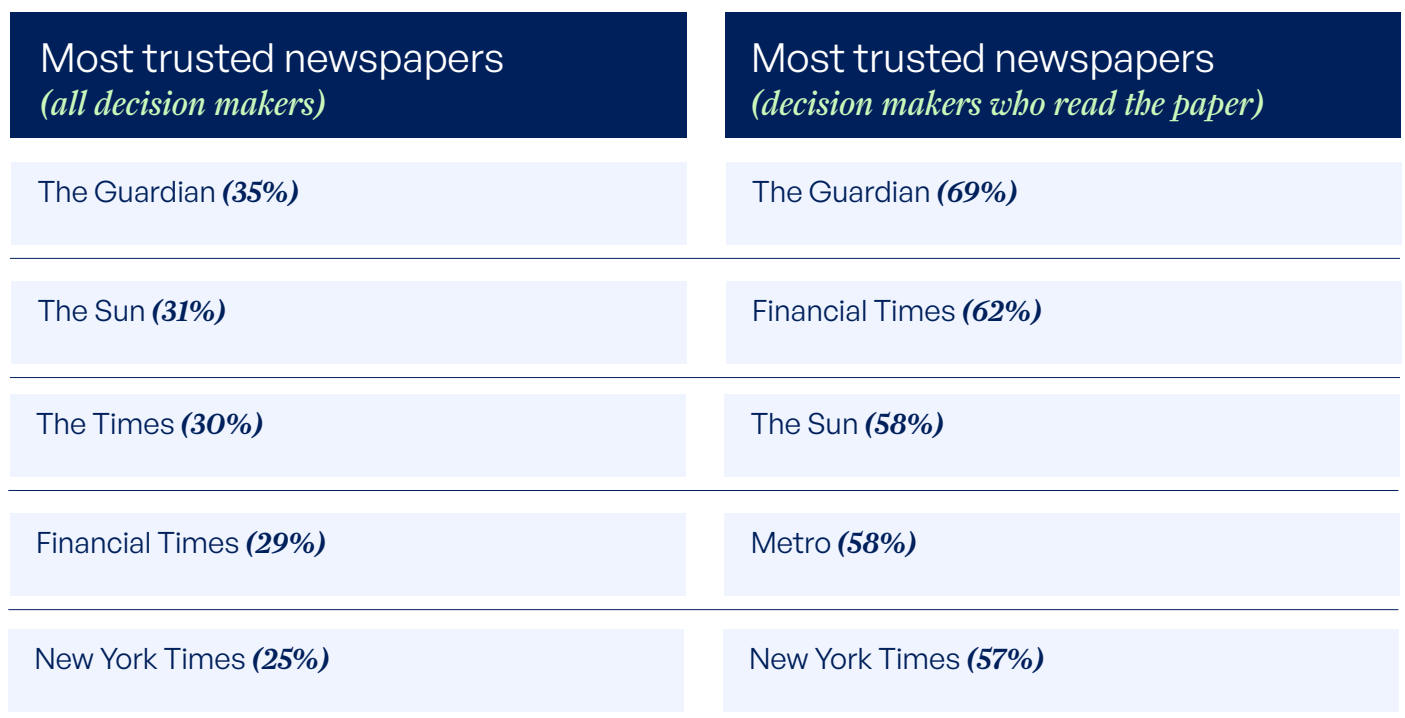


Figure 6: Above is a list of newspapers. Thinking about news and current affairs, which, if any, of the following newspapers do you find trustworthy? Please select all that apply.

A combination of high consumption and high trust sets The Guardian apart from the rest of the field as the most influential newspaper source for decision makers.

The fading lure of the op-ed

- Max Blain

Comment is free, but facts are sacred.

That was the slogan of one famous British newspaper editor. And it's a good thing that comment is free because our decision makers look like they are not interested enough in comment pieces to pay for it. Comment and op-ed sections are the least-read part of any news-brand's offering our polling suggests. While 76% of decision making Guardian readers look at the political news it carries, just 26% read the comment section. That number is only slightly higher for Telegraph-reading decision makers – with just 34% reading its comment section despite it traditionally being one of the most important places for right of centre debate in political life. That was lower than almost any other section in the paper, including lifestyle and sport. Comment readership saw a similar pattern in every title we tested – despite it traditionally being seen as among the most prestigious slots in every paper.

There's a puzzle there, given that decision makers are extremely keen on other heavily opinionated channels such as podcasts and social media. The answer must be that if you want to advance a particular view, rather than look for an op-ed slot you may be better off arguing it out on a popular podcast, writing on LinkedIn or constructing a punchy thread on X.

Of course, sometimes it doesn't matter if only a few people read your op-ed if they are the right few people. But if you are looking to get traction among a wider group there may be better options.

Max Blain advises on all aspects of corporate affairs with significant experience in crisis response and reputation management. He has more than a decade of experience working at the highest level in the UK Government, most recently as the spokesperson and civil service director of communications for the Prime Minister.





Broadcast
and video

Broadcast channels *and video*

The BBC has the largest audience among decision makers, with almost 8 in 10 (79%) of those consuming broadcast channels and video streaming platforms, consuming news and current affairs through them. Sky News is the second most popular platform or channel, with 65% consumption, albeit over 10pts behind the national broadcaster. Both online platforms are also widely consumed by decision makers. With 61% of decision makers who consume news on such platforms, typically using the BBC News website and 53% using the Sky News website. YouTube sits third at 59% as most watched video news source for decision makers, beating Channel 4, ITV and Channel 5. Decision makers say in-depth reporting and analysis is the most popular type of programme on YouTube (58%). On the most popular broadcasting channel or streaming platform, the BBC, decision makers prefer daily news bulletins (69%) over in-depth reporting and analysis (67%). Yet, the BBC remains the most popular channel for this type of reporting. These findings will confirm senior BBC executives' move to make an increasing amount of their content available on the platform.

YouTube is also making inroads among all kinds of viewing. Among decision makers who watch content on it, the most popular type of programming is "in-depth reporting and analysis" which suits its delivery format best perhaps. But bulletins and breaking news coverage are also popular (55% and 53% respectively). Speaking recently, BBC director-general Tim Davie said that the corporation would move to make ever more content available on YouTube. With the general public also showing very high levels of YouTube use for news, this is a move which looks necessary if the BBC is to follow viewers and license-fee payers.

Top 10 broadcast channels

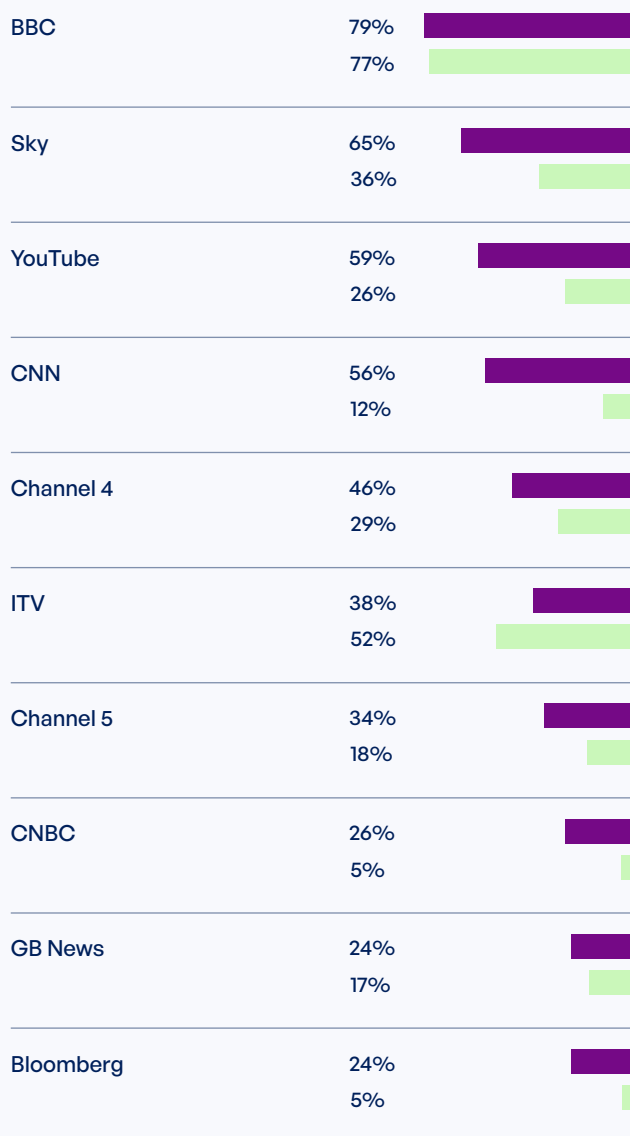


Figure 7: Which, if any, of the following broadcast channels or streaming platforms do you watch for news and current affairs? Please select all that apply.

Decision Makers UK Public

Trust and Influence

The BBC's consumption dominance and its history and brand all translate into high levels of trust, with 56% of decision makers trusting the national broadcaster – the highest of all platforms or channels tested. There is a similarly high levels of trust for Sky News. However, YouTube again is not far behind as the third most trusted broadcast/streaming platform (47%), demonstrating that the decision makers are confident in both newer platforms, alongside legacy media.

GB News – while not trusted among wider decision makers – achieves 67% trust among its viewership, suggesting strong brand loyalty among its small but dedicated and ideologically-aligned audience.



Figure 8: Above is a list of broadcast channels and streaming services. Thinking about news and current affairs, which, if any, of the following broadcast channels and streaming services do you find trustworthy? Please select all that apply.

The BBC's dominance in both consumption and trust establishes it as the primary broadcast influence for decision makers. However, YouTube's surging popularity shows how digital platforms – especially YouTube itself – are set to become a viewer default when people are looking for video content.

How feeding the beast changed news habits

- Tom Rayner

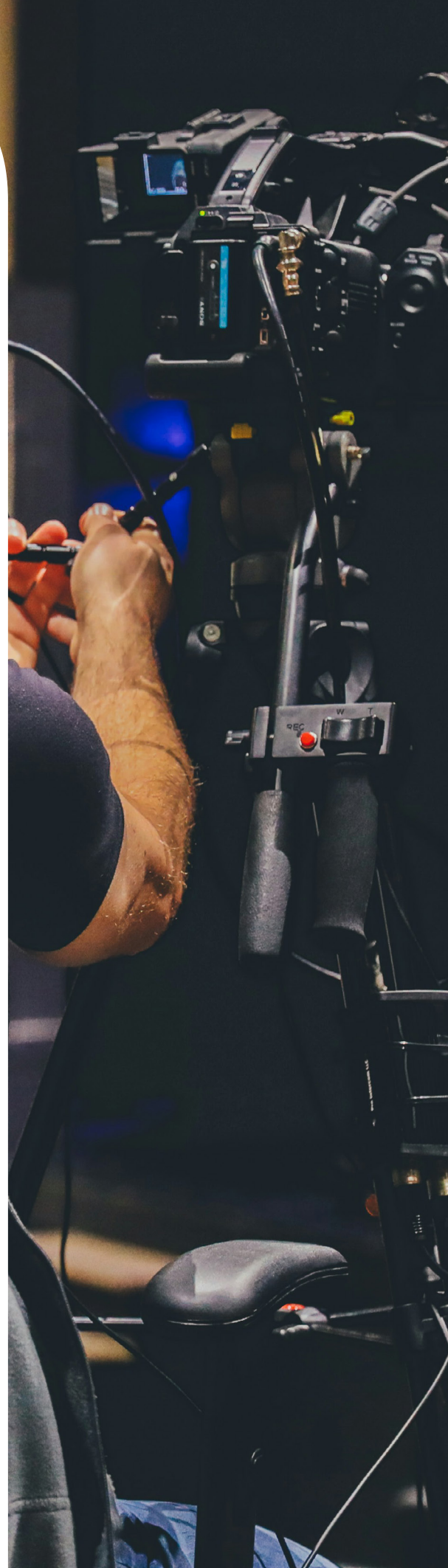
The communications strategy of ‘feeding the beast’ was born when rolling news channels gained traction in Westminster in the late 90s. 24-hour news upended the previous daily rhythm that had been so neatly defined by the bookends of the morning’s front pages and the BBC and ITN evening bulletins.

Hourly updates and commentary and a plethora of new interview slots made politics both a defining part of the wider breaking news world, but also a non-stop game. Those interested in shaping a message realised that if they were to have a hope of setting the agenda they needed to ‘feed the beast’ (otherwise known as the Lobby journalists, who now had more hours in the day to fill) in a way that reflected the new pace of news.

From around 2010, the accelerant of social media turned the speed of the news cycles and the babble of commentary and hot takes up to eleven. Forget hourly updates – this was a game of ‘exclusives’ played in minutes and seconds and delivered in 140 characters. Newspaper reporters found they too had a 24-hour non-stop platform.

The ‘beast’ is no longer just the political journalists, it is the audience themselves – not the UK adult population as a whole, but the decision makers. As the findings in this report show, they have developed an insatiable expectation of fresh information about the world around them – even if finding the time to consume it is a challenge.

Tom Rayner is a Partner in Portland’s Public Affairs & Policy team and advises on crisis handling, reputation management and strategy. Before joining Portland, Tom was an award-winning foreign correspondent at Sky News and editor of Sky’s digital political coverage.





Digital and social *platforms*

Digital and social media platforms have become a key part of the UK media landscape, overtaking more traditional media sources, such as radio and magazines. They are the third most popular media source, attracting almost as many decision-maker consumers as newspapers. More established social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) remain the most popular and the most trusted social media platforms ahead of newer competitors, such as Threads, Bluesky, and TikTok.

Digital and social *platforms*

More than half of all decision makers (57%) typically use digital and social media platforms to consume news. Men (59%) tend to use digital and social media platforms to consume news and current affairs more frequently than women (53%). It is not the youngest decision makers, but decision makers between 45-54 (64%) who use social and digital media platforms most frequently to consume news and current affairs.

Digital and social platforms used for news consumption

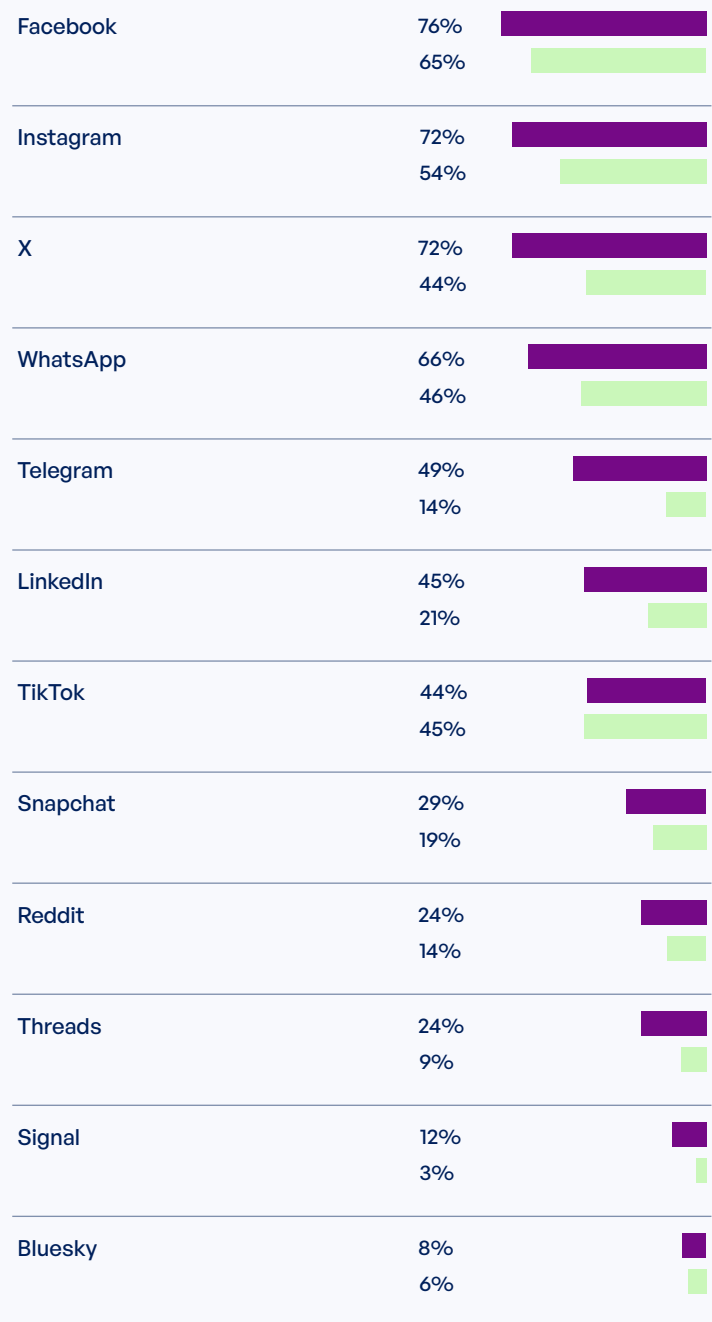


Figure 9: Which, if any, of the following digital and social media platforms do you use for news and current affairs? Please select all that apply.

Decision Makers UK Public

Facebook (76%) is the most popular platform for decision makers, closely followed by Instagram (72%) and X (72%). A majority of decision makers who use Facebook come across news through news organisations directly (61%). Fewer come across news by following trending topics (60%), individual journalists (45%), activists (42%), and influencers (39%). Only 28% of decision makers come across news through direct messages from friends or family.

Instagram is the second most popular platform (72%) for decision makers to consume news and current affairs, placing it ahead of its competitor TikTok (44%). Decision makers on Instagram consume news and current affairs through news organisations directly (56%) but equally rely on trending topics (55%) and individual journalists (51%) to stay informed. Although trending topics (64%) and news organisations (53%) remain an important source of news and current affairs for decision makers on TikTok, influencers (52%), journalists (47%), and activists (43%) are less important for them to stay informed.

Compared to female decision makers (65%), more male decision makers (75%) use X. A contrasting trend is emerging on Bluesky, which is used by only 4% of male decision makers compared to 15% of female decision makers. Yet, Bluesky (8%) has a much lower adoption rate among decision makers than Threads (24%), another X competitor. That is despite Bluesky marketing itself as a news platform while Threads has made clear that it does not see itself as a platform for news.

On X decision makers mostly come across news through trending topics (66%) and by following news organisations directly (63%). Direct messages from friends and family are much less popular on X (21%) than on other social platforms such as Facebook (28%) and WhatsApp (34%). Following news organisations directly is also the preferred way for decision makers to consume news and current affairs on Threads (60%). In contrast, following individual activists (65%) and journalists (54%) is decision makers' preferred way of consuming news and current affairs on Bluesky.

How Twitter survived – and prospered

- Asad Moghal

When Elon Musk acquired Twitter and rebranded it as X, many speculated the platform would lose its enviable position as the primary hub for breaking news and a forum where perspectives are both broadcast and challenged. But our data suggests that this is anything but the case. Despite persistent concerns about extremist content and brand safety, many users, including decision makers, continue to maintain their presence on the platform. 65% of decision makers have increased their usage of X in recent years, while just 16% reported decreased engagement or have left the platform entirely. Of those who use it less or have stopped using it, 34% say it's because it is less useful than it used to be. 24% cite too many automated bots and 20% cite technical issues. Just 19% of users have shifted to alternative platforms, while a mere 14% report that the accounts they follow have become more active elsewhere. Despite Bluesky attracting a dedicated user base and drawing some prominent news organisations like The Guardian to its platform, X remains the essential digital destination for decision makers across industries.

Asad Moghal is a Director at Portland where he oversees digital communications and our growing artificial intelligence offer.

Social Media



Trust and Influence

The most trusted digital platforms are X (50%) and Instagram (50%), followed by Facebook (47%) and WhatsApp (47%). Trust in these digital platforms among their own users is high.

Interestingly, only 10% of decision makers trust Bluesky. The gulf between trust in X, and trust in Bluesky suggests that the reported widespread renunciation of X has had very little impact on trust in the platform among decision makers. We suspect those who continue to use X have “curated” their feeds to follow people they believe they can trust, even if they lack trust in the wider user base.

Most trusted digital platforms <i>(all decision makers)</i>	Most trusted digital platforms <i>(decision makers who use the platform)</i>
X (50%)	X (80%)
Instagram (50%)	LinkedIn (79%)
Facebook (47%)	WhatsApp (71%)
WhatsApp (47%)	Telegram (70%)
LinkedIn (44%)	Instagram (68%)

Figure 10: Above is a list of digital and social media platforms. Thinking about news and current affairs, which, if any, of the following digital and social media platforms do you find trustworthy? Please select all that apply.

Despite the recent controversies around X it remains one of the most used platforms and the most trusted platform for decision makers among its own users. X remains an important platform on which to engage decision makers.



Radio

Radio remains a consistent part of the decision maker media mix, with just over half typically using it for news and current affairs. While overall usage mirrors that of the wider public, the types of stations decision makers prefer, diverge – favouring specialist programming, such as Times Radio. For those who do listen, trust is high particularly in BBC stations, reinforcing radio's position as a trusted channel, within a broader media spectrum.

Radio

About half of all decision makers typically (52%) listen to the radio for news and current affairs, placing it roughly in line with the general UK public (48%). However, their station preferences are remarkably divergent from the wider population. While the public tend to listen to local radio more than any other station (32%), decision makers gravitate toward different programming choices.

Times Radio ranks as the decision makers' most listened to news and current affairs radio station of those we tested, yet it is the least listened to among the UK public as a whole, highlighting the distinct media consumption patterns of this influential group.

But while decision makers may be dipping in to Times Radio on occasion, BBC Radio 4 has many more heavy listeners. Almost half its listeners - 44% - tune in for at least a couple of hours every day while just 29% of Times Radio listeners do the same. For them, it is a much more casual listen rather than a staple, it seems.

Top radio stations for news

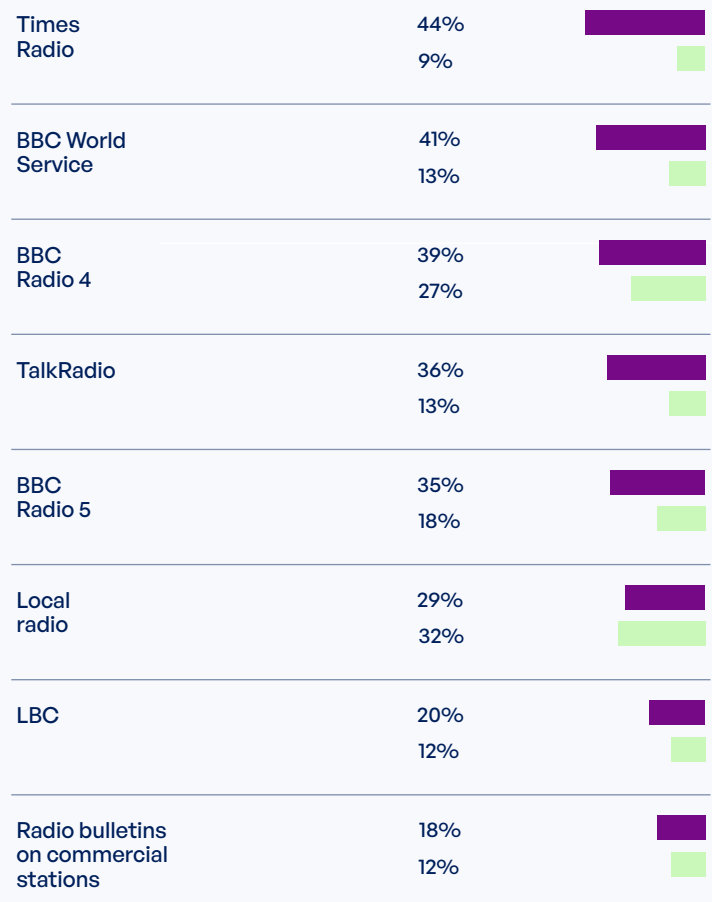


Figure 11: Which, if any, of the following radio stations do you listen to for news and current affairs? Please select all that apply.

Decision Makers UK Public

Trust and Influence

Among decision makers, trust in radio stations is dominated by BBC programming, with BBC Radio 4 (36%), BBC World Service (36%), and BBC Radio 5 (33%) forming the core of trusted sources.

Trust levels among listeners highlight the strength of audience loyalty across different stations. BBC Radio 5 Live achieves 71% trust among its own listeners, followed by TalkRadio (63%) and BBC Radio 4 (63%). However, some stations struggle even among their own audiences, with just 43% of LBC listeners selecting the station as trustworthy. We suspect Talk Radio's high trust-rating among its own listeners reflects its dedicated listener base among an ideologically-aligned audience.



Figure 12: Above is a list of radio stations. Thinking about news and current affairs, which, if any, of the following radio stations do you find trustworthy? Please select all that apply.



Podcasts

Decision makers have become podcast addicts. Every media organisation in the UK now has a podcast strategy. Most of these podcasts are produced by or associated with highly trusted legacy media sources, such as the BBC or The Guardian. But “challengers” like Goalhanger’s stable of podcasts have started to make serious inroads.

Podcasts

Just over 2 in 5 (42%) decision makers listen to podcasts for news and current affairs, double the percent (21%) of the public that listen to podcasts for news-based content.

Though decision makers listen to a variety of podcasts for news and current affairs, Sky News Daily is the most popular podcast (42%), compared with just 21% of the public. It is however, in first place with both.

With eight out of the top 10 podcasts listened to by decision makers associated with established media brands like the BBC, the salience of these organisations is very clear. Economics in 10 and The Rest is Politics are the outliers here, as neither are affiliated with a traditional media brand, indicating that decision makers are open to content from a variety of sources and from challengers.

When it comes to choosing a podcast, topic coverage is the number one factor for both decision makers (67%) and the public (46%). For decision makers, production quality (56%) and political perspective (52%) are also important factors. For the public, podcast popularity (22%) is the second most important factor.

Top 10 news podcasts

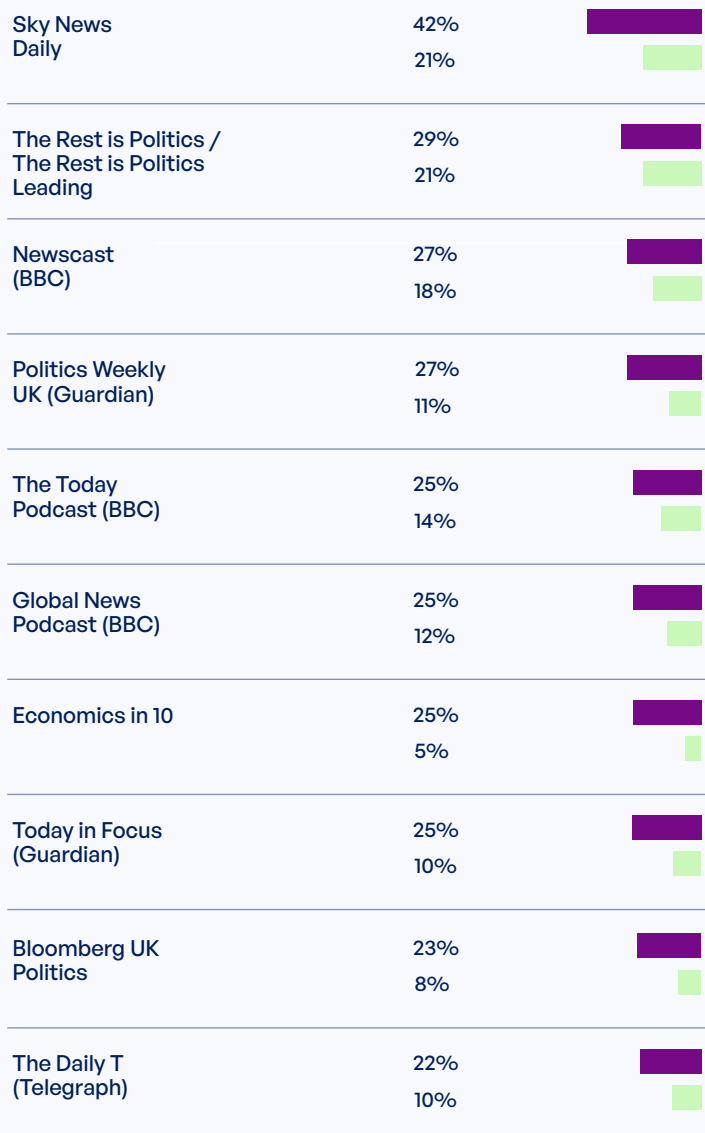


Figure 13: Which, if any, of the following news podcasts do you listen to? Please select all that apply.

Decision Makers UK Public

Trust and Influence

About 4 in 10 decision makers claim to trust podcasts (39%), making it one of the less trusted sources of news and current affairs, together with digital and social platforms (39%) and ahead of magazines (37%). Male decision makers tend to trust podcasts more (41%) than female decision makers (35%). Audio is by far the least popular format for decision makers to consume news. Though they slightly prefer long-form audio (4%), such as podcasts, over short-form audio (3%), such as radio news bulletins, this format lags more than ten percentage points behind long-form video content (16%), the next most popular option.

Podcasts emerged as one of the less popular and less trusted media sources among decision makers, possibly reflecting the trend that decision makers prefer to consume short-form content to stay informed about news and current affairs.

The undisputed king of the podcast world is Portland's own Alastair Campbell. If both editions of his "Rest is Politics" franchise – "Rest is Politics" and "Rest is Politics – Leading" with Rory Stewart are combined then it beats every other podcast bar Sky News Daily with 29% of decision makers listening to either or both streams.

The most popular podcasts with the public on our list are largely the same, although The Rest is Politics / The Rest is Politics: Leading are tied for first with Sky News Daily with the public. The News Agents also makes the top 10 with the general public underlining this brand's huge inroads, while Economics in 10 and Bloomberg UK Politics are lower down on the list.



The podcast revolution

- Alastair Campbell

There was a moment last year, as I heard 15,000 people clapping and cheering as Rory Stewart and I walked to the O2 stage, when I thought the world was going mad. Were all these people really paying good money to hear two ageing men talk about politics?

And they were. And they do. Since we started the Rest Is Politics and then the separate Leading interview channel, listener and viewer numbers have risen and risen so that the last time I looked we were getting 11 million downloads a month.

This at a time when people say the media is dying out.

To be clear: podcasting is a different animal from traditional media. Where newspapers and broadcast news often skim the surface or stick to familiar territory, not to mention political and commercial bias, podcasts open the door to in-depth discussion. They tackle issues that the traditional channels now often neglect or trivialise.

You no longer need to be part of the media establishment to have a voice. The range of creators – and listeners – is broader and more engaged than ever before. This isn't a closed club.

What truly sets podcasts apart is the genuine sense of community they foster. Listeners aren't passive - they're involved, asking questions and shaping the conversation.

People want to understand what's really going on and how to make things better.

Politicians increasingly recognise that podcasts offer a direct line to their voters. Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, with whom I have worked since the first of his four election wins, does his own.

Anyone hoping to reach key decision makers should take note. Podcasts are not a passing trend. Their influence is clear: they are setting the agenda and forcing decision makers to engage with deeper, more meaningful conversations. Traditional media should take note too. Maybe if they tried to be a bit more podcast and a bit less headline chasing tabloid clickbait they would not be in the mess they're in.

Alastair is a Senior Adviser for Portland and a writer, strategist and mental health campaigner. He presents The Rest is Politics podcasts with former Conservative minister Rory Stewart.





Magazines

Magazines represent the most specialised section of the decision maker media diet, with only two fifths reading one for news and current affairs. For those who do engage, however, they command high levels of routine – with many consuming on a weekly basis. Among decision makers, The Economist is a dominating force, being both the most read and the most trusted publication.

Magazines

Just over a third (39%) of all decision makers read magazines for news and current affairs. Among the UK public more broadly, magazines are again the least popular media format, with only 14% readership.

The Economist (58%) is by far and away the most popular news and current affairs magazine for decision makers, followed by the Radio Times (40%) and The Week (39%). Gender preferences reveal a divergent consumption pattern too: 60% of male decision makers read The Economist, compared to 54% of women. Male decision makers tend to prefer magazines covering the economy, investments, and the stock market – 30% read MoneyWeek versus 20% of women, and 26% read Investors Chronicle compared to 18% of women.

Although our panel skewed to the left politically, one interesting finding is how much more influential the right-wing Spectator is compared to the left-wing New Statesman. We found that 27% of decision makers read the Spectator, compared to just 19% who said they read the New Statesman. Despite a Labour government, the NS has a narrower audience. But both are beaten in our survey by the New Yorker, with 31% of decision makers saying they read it – even if only occasionally.

Engagement levels among magazines reading decision makers is very high. Of those who read online or print magazines, only very few read them less than weekly, with The New Scientist showing the most infrequent readership, with 7% reading less than weekly.

Top 10 magazines

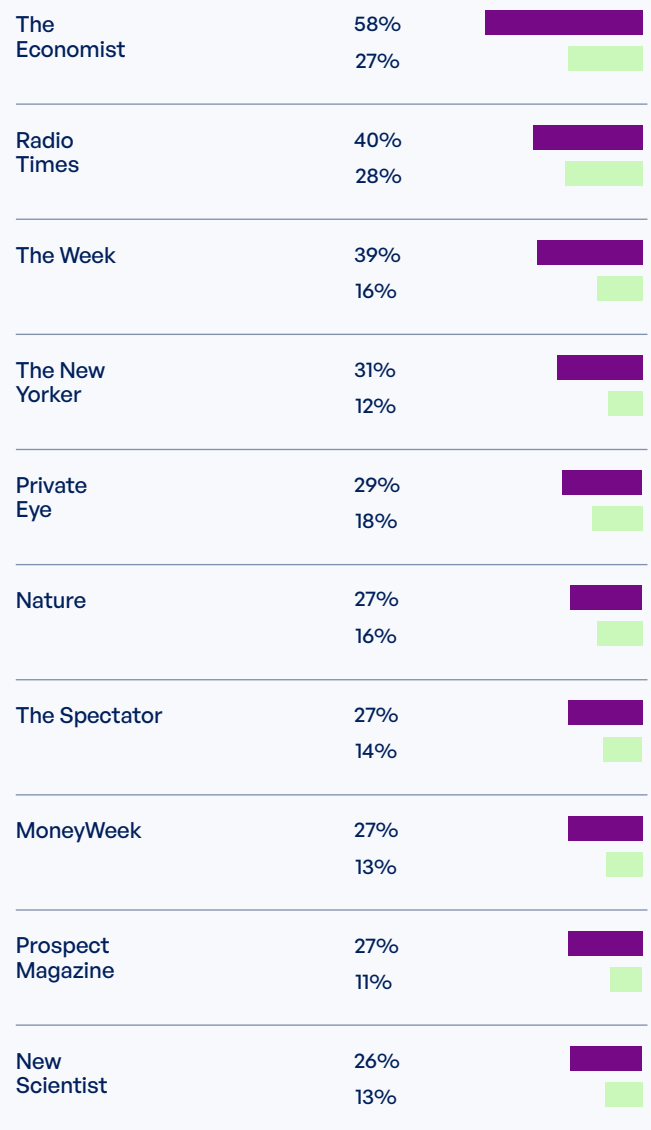


Figure 14: Which, if any, of the following news and current affairs magazines do you read, either online or print?

Decision Makers UK Public

Trust and Influence

The Economist is both the most consumed and the most trusted magazines of those we tested. Over two fifths (43%) trust The Economist, compared to Radio Times (33%), The Week (28%), and The New Yorker (25%).

Trust levels are sustained beyond the wider pool of decision makers, to those who consume The Economist. Nearly three quarters (72%) of those who consume The Economist say they consider it trustworthy, while Radio Times holds 68% trust.

Most trusted magazines <i>(all decision makers)</i>	Most trusted magazines <i>(decision makers who read the magazine)</i>
The Economist (43%)	The Economist (72%)
Radio Times (33%)	Radio Times (68%)
The Week (28%)	The Spectator (61%)
The New Yorker (25%)	The New Statesman (61%)
The Spectator (23%)	Investor's Chronicle (57%)

Figure 15: Above is a list of magazines. Thinking about news and current affairs, which, if any, of the following magazines do you find trustworthy? Please select all that apply.

The Economist's combination of high readership and very high trust among its readers show a considerable amount of influence, serving as a valuable source for in-depth economic and political coverage.

News from elsewhere

- Luke Baker

An eye-catching figure from our data on magazine readership is that the New Yorker has such a high UK readership. For a long time, the traffic was mainly in the other direction. The Daily Mail and The Guardian have long had substantial US operations, aiming to harvest American eyeballs and American advertising dollars. Others have followed. The cut and thrust of English journalism, honed in the ultra-competitive world of Fleet Street, created a British invasion almost reminiscent of the Beatles and Rolling Stones. But some of the traffic is now the other way.

We find large audiences for US publications like the New York Times (29% of UK decisions makers) and Wall Street Journal (19%) in the UK. The US-based TV network CNBC has developed an audience for its specialist business news. That teaches us two things, perhaps. First the growing internationalisation of content. Social media has made sharing news from elsewhere easier than ever. But second it means that messages designed for one market can now never be contained in just one market. There is no point in trying to say one thing in the UK and another in the US. Messaging can and should be localised for different markets and different media cultures. But it can never be contradictory – and it can be complementary.

Luke Baker is Head of Media Strategy at Portland and advises on reputation, crisis management and media engagement. He is a former foreign correspondent for Reuters and ran its news-gathering in Paris, Jerusalem and Brussels.





Newsletters

Newsletters

Decision makers are big fans of free newsletters, with a stunning 80% signed up to at least one – compared to only 36% of the public at large. The newsletters that are most subscribed to by the Decision Makers: BBC News Daily (41%), Politico (including London Playbook, Brussels Playbook, London Influence and EU Influence) (34%), BBC Politics Newsletter (26%), The Guardian First Edition (22%), The Guardian Politics Briefing (20%), and The Times Red Box (15%).

BBC News Daily is also the most popular with the public, but only 19% subscribe to it, less than half of the percent of decision makers who subscribe. 10% of the public subscribe to the BBC Politics Newsletter, followed by 6% who subscribe to the Guardian First Edition and the Guardian Politics Briefing, and 5% who subscribe to the Times Red Box.

Top 10 newsletters

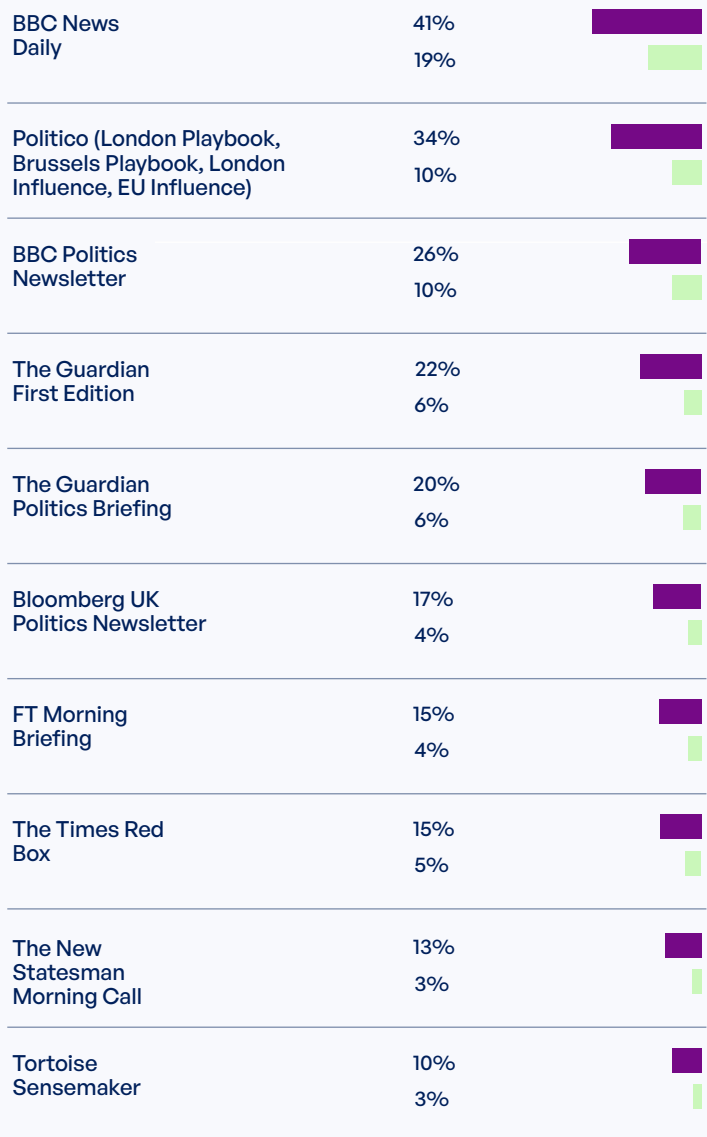


Figure 16: Which, if any, of the following news/current affairs email newsletters do you receive? Please select all that apply.

Decision Makers UK Public



Emerging platforms *and blogs*

Online news platforms are the most used and most trusted type of platform by our decision makers. Decision makers are using emerging online platforms, such as Substack and Tortoise Media, at a much higher rate than the public. Decision makers are turning to these new types of media for a variety of insight and analysis – political, economic, technological and media.

Emerging platforms and blogs – *Online news platforms*

19% of decision makers are reading personal/independent blogs, compared with 8% of the public. 31% of decision makers are reading political analysis on blogs. 27% are reading technology insights and 25% are reading economic analysis/commentary.

17% of decision makers consume news on Substack and Medium, while only 5% of the public use these platforms. On Medium, decision makers are reading technology insights (29%), political analysis (29%), and economic analysis (25%). On Substack, decision makers are largely reading economic analysis/commentary (29%), political analysis (28%) and media commentary (21%).

14% of decision makers use Ghost, compared with 3% of the public. Decision makers use Ghost for economic analysis/commentary (30%), political analysis (29%), and technology insights (29%).

13% of decision makers use Patreon, while only 4% of the public do. Decision makers are primarily consuming technology insights (30%), economic analysis/commentary (28%) and media analysis (21%).

12% of decision makers use Tortoise Media, compared with 4% of the public. Decision makers are largely seeking political analysis on Tortoise Media (38%), followed by economic analysis/commentary (33%), and technology insights (22%).

Which online platforms do you use to read news, blogs, or articles? Please select all that apply.

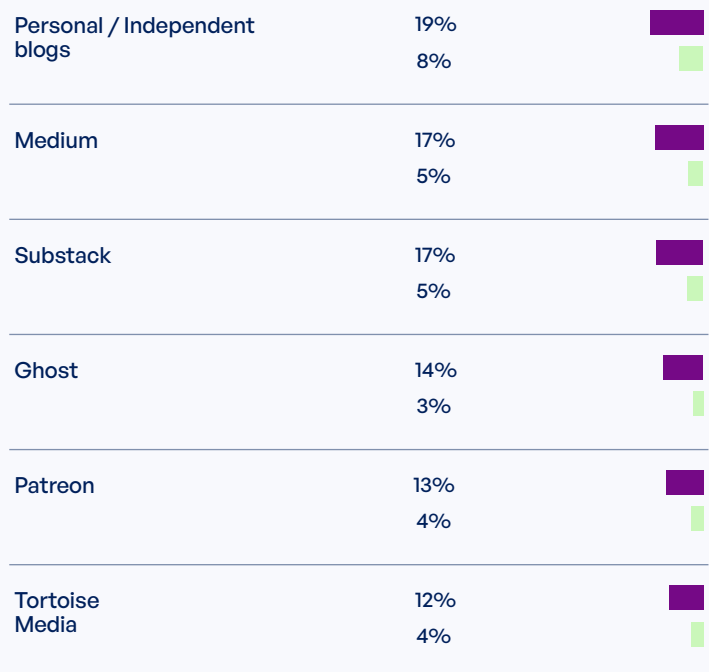


Figure 17: Which online platforms do you use to read news, blogs, or articles? Please select all that apply.

Decision Makers UK Public

Following the trend of high versatility in media sources, decision makers also show a greater versatility in the online platforms they use to consume news and current affairs.

Emerging platforms and blogs – *Online news platforms*

Trust and Influence

About half of all decision makers (53%) believe that online news platforms are trustworthy. However, the level of trust is much higher among those who work in the private sector (64%) than those who work in the public sector (39%).

Although only about half of all decision makers trust online news platforms, it is the most trusted media source.



The trust matrix

Decision makers occupy a unique position in today's fractured media ecosystem, operating as high-trust consumers in an era of widespread media scepticism. They are at home in both traditional and digital news worlds, blending the two to get a holistic understanding of current affairs. They consume news voraciously and have confidence in the publications they consume – setting them apart not just in terms of what they read and watch, but in how confidently they engage with information.

They are confident in traditional broadcasters, such as the BBC, which along with Sky News, tops their list of trusted sources. Yet notably, they also place high levels of trust in social media platforms like Instagram and X. This suggests decision makers may have developed their own internal algorithm of safety, navigating these spaces carefully. In fact, 84% say they have been impacted by misinformation

on at least one platform, compared with just 66% of the general public.

They are a sophisticated audience that understands the benefits and trade-offs of different media types. Comfortable operating outside the comfort zone of a single favoured newspaper, they use sources as varied as TikTok and The Guardian to build a comprehensive and nuanced news diet.

To identify the most influential sources, we've looked at those that are both widely consumed and highly trusted. Trust means little without reach, and reach means little without trust. There is a clear correlation between consumption and trust – the more a source is consumed, the more decision makers trust it. Those that stand out on both fronts fall into two clear categories – legacy media and social platforms. We've illustrated these concepts in the matrix below.

Media sources - Consumption x trust

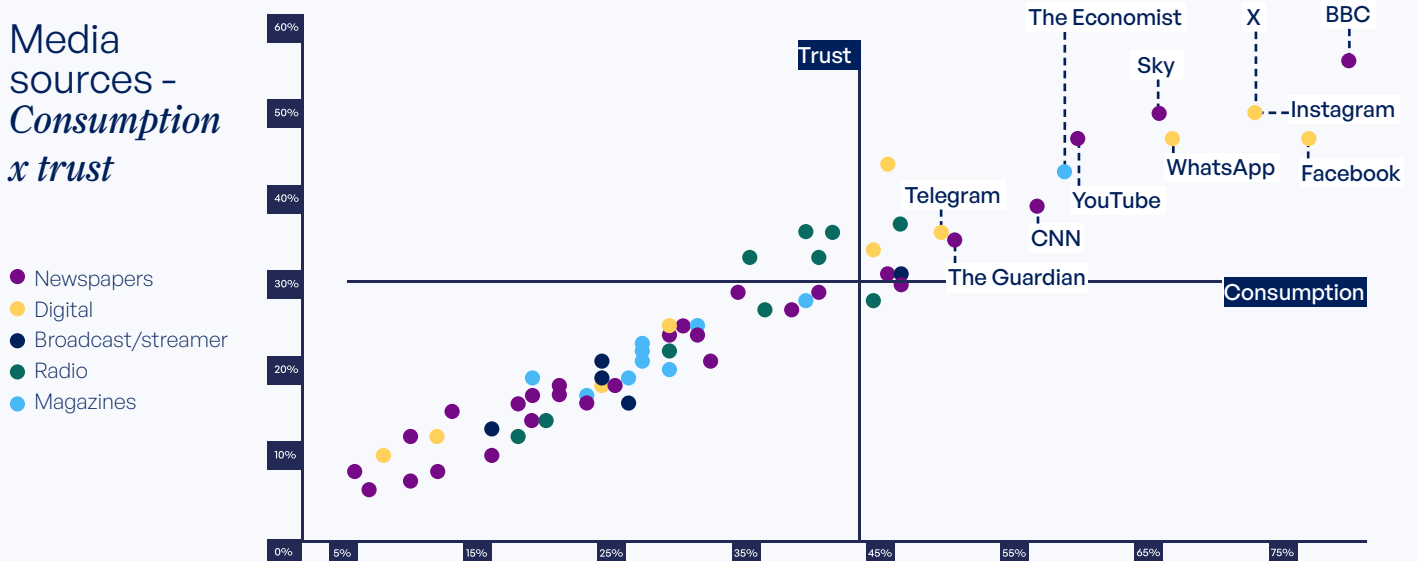


Figure 18. Which, if any, of the following [media sources] do you use for news and current affairs? Please select all that apply; Below is a list of [media sources]. Thinking about news and current affairs, which, if any, of the following [media sources] do you find trustworthy? Please select all that apply.

Afterword – The new top tier – *think outside the FT and Economist*

We began this report by asking how those in positions of power and influence get their information. The data is clear that we are in a world which is rapidly changing, but it's set for even bigger changes. And soon.

Influence is no longer confined to traditional outlets or single formats. Instead, it flows across newsletters, podcasts, AI tools, social platforms, and video content. This has significant implications not just for where you appear, but if you're heard and how you're found.

Traditional titles like The FT and The Economist still carry weight, but they no longer define the top tier alone. Today, that status is shaped by how content is discovered: through inboxes, commutes, timelines, and search, often filtered by algorithms.

Brevity matters. Format matters. Discovery matters.

Decision makers are curators. But they don't rely on a clippings service or a briefing pack. They consume newsletters, podcasts, social feeds, video, and AI-generated summaries – quickly and selectively. They're time-poor but insight-hungry, valuing brevity, clarity, and discoverability. International news and video are important for this group.

AI is accelerating this shift as time-poor leaders seek clarity and understanding. But rather than weakening traditional media, it may be extending its life. Generative platforms like ChatGPT and Gemini increasingly rely on credible, earned sources, through partnerships, licensing, or other means, to generate responses.

What AI sees shapes what it says – and what millions understand.

Being featured in a trusted outlet doesn't just reach its immediate audience; it also feeds the datasets that inform countless future interactions.

Communications professionals must consider two audiences: people and algorithms.

It calls for fundamentally strategic communications.

Being digital-first is not just about having a social strategy. Being top tier is no longer just about being in print. Nor is print 'dead' – it's part of a wider ecosystem.

To shape perception today, organisations need an omnichannel presence that maps to where important audiences are – and how each one reads, watches, and listens.

Every output – op-ed, tweet, podcast/vodcast interview, or a newsletter mention – is a tile in a mosaic that creates a picture of how an individual or organisation is perceived.

Strategic communications today is about orchestrating this picture. Frequency, consistency, and the flexibility of your message to each audience now matter just as much as reach.

To remain relevant, communications must reflect how influence now works: multi-format, AI-aware, and audience-first.

So the question for every organisation becomes: where are you showing up and what impression are you leaving behind? Are you discoverable in the spaces that matter, in the moments that count, to the people who decide?

This report doesn't offer all the answers. But we hope it helps you ask the right questions and begin to shape a strategy fit for what comes next.

Seonaid Hyslop-Parsons
Partner

Seonaid Hyslop-Parsons is a Partner in Portland's Corporate Affairs team, where she advises multinational groups and consumer-facing brands on all aspects of corporate reputation management and strategic communications.

Methodology

Portland's Research Team carried out two phases of polling in April and May 2025.

1. Wave 1 (Exploratory Phase)

Conducted between 11th and 16th April 2025, this phase involved an online survey of 4,573 UK adults. The sample was adjusted, or weighted, to reflect the national population across key demographics like age, gender, region, and education. Within this group, we identified a subgroup of respondents who met certain criteria to qualify as decision makers (e.g. based on job role, or influence).

2. Wave 2 (Investigative Phase)

Conducted between 19th and 22nd May 2025, this phase involved an online survey of 529 decision makers – previously identified in the first phase. This time, no quotas were applied during sampling. However, to ensure results could be considered in line with the first phase's decision maker group, we weighted the data to match that group's demographic profile – specifically on age, gender, and education.

Using the data

- Unless otherwise noted, analysis of the decision maker group is based on Wave 2 data.
- Analysis of the UK public is based on Wave 1 data.
- In some cases, when questions were not asked in Wave 2, we have used decision maker responses from Wave 1 instead.

Defining decision makers

The three components of what makes up our 'Decision Makers' definition:

- **Public sector**
 - Senior civil servants/senior local government officials/elected officials or staff/members of the armed forces with managerial responsibility/healthcare officials with managerial responsibility/education officials with managerial responsibility
- **Private sector**
 - **Either:** Earning over £75,000 in the private sector AND have conducted at least one significant activity in the last five years (owned a business with revenue of £5 million+; invested over £10,000 in a business, start-up, or private equity fund; donated over £1,000 to a political party; donated over £5,000 to a charity, arts organisation, or academic institution; served as a board member or trustee for a company, charity, or public institution, with substantial influence in its sector)
 - **Or:** senior management in a company with more than 250 employees
- **Other sectors**
media or entertainment staff with editorial responsibilities/academics with at least some research role/think tank or policy institute staff/international organisation staff with at least some policy or strategic focus/charity or voluntary sector staff with at least some policy or strategic focus

Portland Innovation: *Research*

We are the research, analytics and insights arm of Portland, integrating cutting-edge digital and AI innovation with primary data-gathering.

We design and execute research programmes to help our clients understand their audiences, their beliefs, motivations, and priorities – and what it might take to change their mind.

We do not retrofit objectives onto research frameworks. Every project is bespoke. We are methodologically agnostic and programmes are designed with our client's objectives front and centre.

As a team, we have deep experience running national and international research programmes for clients, ranging from FTSE 100 companies and think tanks, to political parties and NGOs.

We are full members of the British Polling Council, the UK's self-regulator for the polling industry, and adhere to its world-leading standards on transparency and rigour.

Our capabilities:

- Quantitative studies, including large-scale public polling, niche audience surveys, segmentations, and opinion tracking
- Qualitative studies, including focus groups, in-depth interviews, and communities
- Secondary research studies, including literature reviews, case study development, and desktop research
- AI-based measurement and analysis
- Synthetic audiences
- Custom GPTs to bring research to life and make it accessible throughout organisations

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