

Portland



The changing ways decision makers are consuming news:

*Lessons for communicators on
AI-supercharged news consumption*

June 2026

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About Portland Research

Introduction

Last year, Portland launched its inaugural decision makers report, featuring research conducted entirely in-house by our dedicated research team. Our aim was to understand the news consumption habits of the audiences most important to the success of our clients.

Through this research, we identified a subset of the population – our decision makers – currently working in a role that affords them influence and a degree of power in the everyday decisions which impact Britain’s corporate and public affairs. This group, including business leaders, senior civil servants and NGO strategists, has a set of media consumption habits and attitudes that are distinct from the wider public. In last year’s report, we found that decision makers are distinctly voracious consumers of news who use a variety of sources, especially as compared to the public. While they embrace AI and new technology, traditional media, such as broadcast media, newspapers and radio, remain vital sources for reaching this audience.

This year, we repeated this study to explore how decision makers’ habits have changed, delving further into last year’s key findings around the use of traditional media and AI, and how the joint consumption of these has evolved.

The three groups of decision makers are defined as follows:

The Private Sector Decision Makers

This group of decision makers, working in the private sector, derive their professional influence from their control of budgets and ability to make decisions related to the activity of their organisation. In addition, their incomes are significantly higher than the national average.

They include senior leaders in a large company or those who have a recent history of financial involvement in philanthropic initiatives or politics.

The Public Sector Decision Makers

These are key decision makers within government and public institutions. Their influence stems from their authority to shape policy, allocate public resources, and deliver programmes.

They include senior civil servants, elected officials, and management-level professionals in public services such as healthcare, education, and defence.

The Third Sector Decision Makers

These 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. Their influence is derived from their ability to disseminate ideas, advocate for specific causes, and shape narratives that influence both public opinion and policy.

This sector includes media professionals with editorial authority, research-focused academics, think tankers, and strategic staff within NGO and charitable organisations.

For more details on the audiences, please see our detailed methodology section at the end of this report.

How AI is shaping decision makers' news consumption: *key findings*

Corporate, government and institutional decision makers are rapidly reshaping how they use AI and consume news, setting themselves apart from the broader population in fundamental ways.

In this year's survey of the news consumption habits of the UK's top decision makers, we found nearly two-thirds of those polled (63%) pay a subscription for an AI service like ChatGPT, Claude or Gemini, which they say is to help them sift through and analyse the large volume of news they consume daily. By comparison, only 20% of the broader population pays for AI services.

This is a fundamental shift from last year's survey. Decision makers are increasingly prepared to invest in premium AI tools because they see them as essential to understanding, filtering and acting on information. And the news they see is increasingly tailored as AI learns about what and where they read, their interests, their sector and their specific information needs.

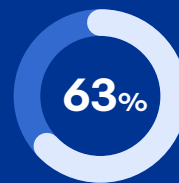
This use of AI as a means of developing and synthesising news into usable intelligence is significantly different to how the public uses and consumes news, and requires a completely different approach from communications professionals.

Overall, our findings show a significant shift in behaviour among the UK's executives, policymakers, budget-holders and other decision-makers. Given the vast quantity of information from news and other sources that they must sift through every day, they are continuing with their high news consumption habits, while increasingly relying on paid-for AI assistance to sort through it all, prioritise and help categorise information to make it more 'actionable'.

The survey's key findings are:

27 —
10 ●

Decision makers read far and wide in their news consumption, regularly accessing news from an **average of 27 different news sources**, (compared to just 10 among the general public)



86% of decision makers are now using AI as part of their news consumption in some way (up from 81% last year), **with the vast majority (63%) paying for higher-grade AI services**



Because decision makers consume more news, they are also subjected to more fake news, deep fakes and misinformation, with **88% saying they've encountered misinformation on at least one platform**



However, **89% of decision makers say they actively fact-check information from AI**, with 25% of them saying they do that every time they use it

When we asked decision makers what drives their AI use, three factors dominated:

- the need to save time (35%),
- the desire to better understand complex topics (33%), and
- the utility of getting long articles simplified into digestible summaries (29%)

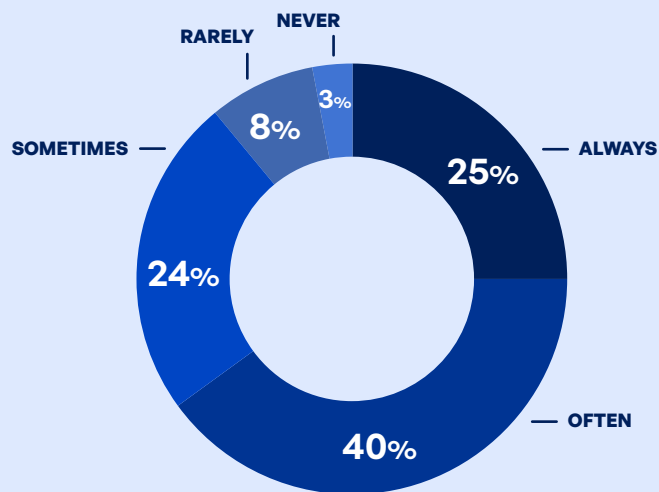
These three drivers point to what decision makers want from news: usable and easily digestible intelligence.

This has direct implications for how organisations communicate with this audience. If AI is being used to distil, synthesise and simplify, then vague or surface-level coverage won't survive the filter.

Your message needs to be clear, substantive and easy to extract because if it cannot be clearly understood and summarised, it won't make it through the AI-filtering process that decision makers are now relying on to consume news.

This need for clarity sits alongside another critical behaviour: decision makers don't simply accept AI-filtered information at face value. Instead, they approach both the news and the tools they use to access it with active scrutiny. **We found that 89% of decision makers at least sometimes fact check information from AI and 25% do so every single time.** It is this process of fact checking, alongside their vast consumption of news, that contributes to them encountering more misinformation than the general public (88% vs. 63%) and why – despite this – they have higher overall levels of trust in the media. They have both the tools and knowhow (as seasoned and savvy consumers of news) to identify what they can and cannot trust. By contrast, the public are less certain on what they can trust which is why they are more concerned about AI misinformation than decision makers. Only 26% of decision makers are concerned about deepfakes, compared with 33% of the public. Similarly, 25% of decision makers are concerned about misinformation or hallucinations, with concern about this slightly higher among the public (28%).

How frequently do you fact check the information that you get from AI tools?



89% at least sometimes fact check

Since decision makers turn to trusted sources to validate information, organisations must maintain credible, accessible, and consistent evidence (through reports, case studies, data, attributable quotes, etc.) across multiple channels and sources.

This will help decision makers to verify AI outputs and also improve AI summaries' representativeness from the start. By contrast, vague or unsupported claims will fail active interrogation by decision makers and show up poorly in AI outputs. Decision makers have a higher credibility threshold in the changing media landscape which communicators must adapt to.

The evolution of news consumption:

the Portland point of view

This behaviour didn't emerge overnight. It's a multi-decade transformation in how all of us access information. Understanding that evolution helps explain why decision makers have adopted this practice so rapidly, and why it matters so much to communications strategy.

One way to understand the evolution of news consumption is by thinking about three overlapping eras, each defined by how audiences get information.

- The first era was the **'habitual news era'**: where consumption was almost always by appointment. Until the mid 90s, news was a routine that required the audience to create a habit. They watched the evening bulletin at a set time each evening, or had to walk to the newsagents to buy a physical copy of a newspaper. Finding news required some effort.
- Then, in the noughties, with expanding internet penetration and the emergence of mobile and social media, you had the arrival of the **'ambient news era'**: where news started to find its way to you. The news you saw came to you through content shared by friends, surfaced by algorithms owned by platforms or pushed by apps. Audiences did not always go looking for news. News found them through their networks.
- Since around 2020, and accelerating sharply with the mainstreaming of generative AI from 2022, we have been entering a third phase: the **'personalised news era'**. This is consumption by utility. The news people receive is from a greater number of sources, but often filtered, summarised and reframed around their needs and actively curated by users based on their own preferences. AI can personalise the news - a short briefing, a risk assessment, a sector update or a set of implications for a specific organisation. Rather than being ambient, the news is on-demand in a unique format entirely geared to an individual.

The shift from habitual, to ambient to personalised creates a conundrum for communications professionals. As it becomes progressively easier for audiences to get the news in the format they want, finding the audience becomes progressively harder. Shared moments of attention are rarer, feeds are fragmented and AI is increasingly reshaping how information is packaged before it reaches audiences.

That is why the finding that decision makers are paying for AI services at much higher rates than the general public matters. It suggests people responsible for taking big calls on budgets, policies or other strategic decisions might be early adopters because they have sharper information needs.

They want news to become usable intelligence but this is based on an increasingly personalised information feed. Communicators and organisations can't afford to sit on the sidelines of these information feeds; they need to find a way in.





How decision makers consume news: *adoption, volume and critical practice*

As our 2025 survey revealed, AI is already heavily embedded in decision makers' news consumption habits, accelerating at a rate that far outpaces the general public. What is most significant in this year's findings is that they pay for AI and how they use it.

This widespread AI use does not mean that decision makers have stopped seeking out news direct from the source. On the contrary, decision makers consume news from nearly three times as many sources as the general public, from an average of 27 sources compared to 10. This expanded consumption serves a purpose: to gather more comprehensive and verified intelligence.



Decision makers consume
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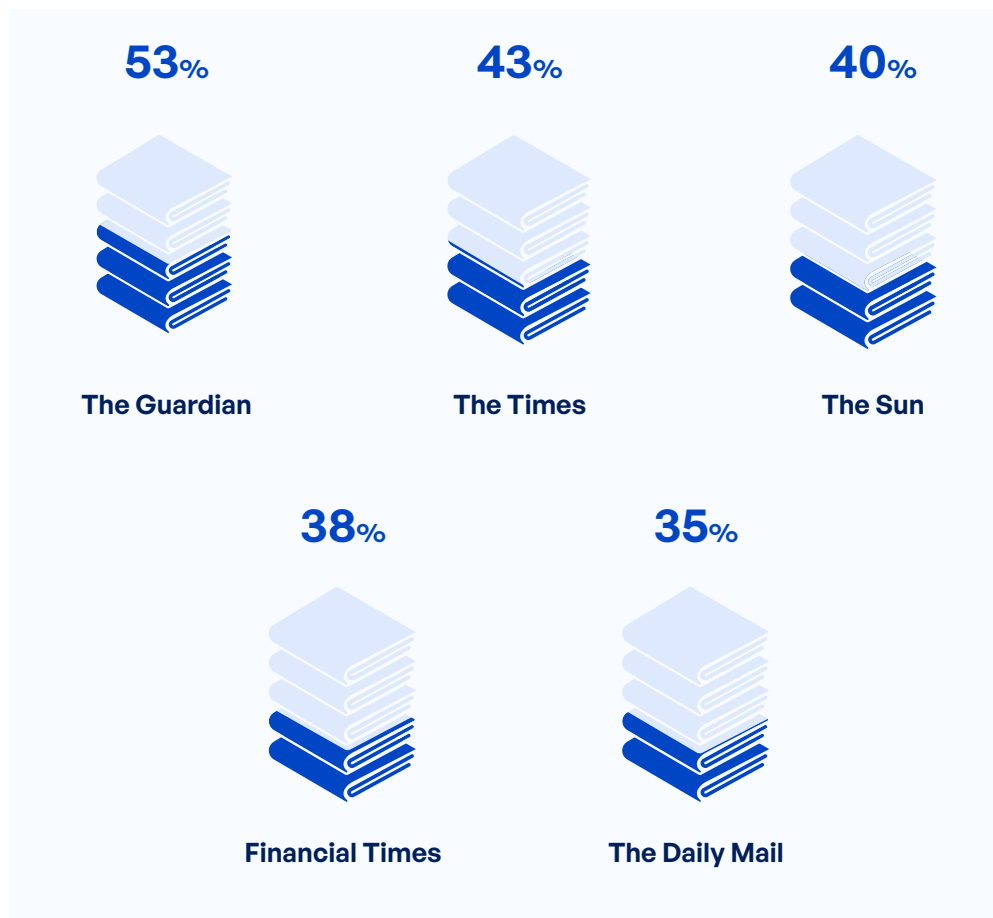
When decision makers use AI to synthesise news, those tools aren't just pulling from The Times or The Financial Times. They're drawing from newspapers, magazines, Bloomberg terminals, websites, social media platforms, YouTube, newsletters, and countless other channels. A decision maker's AI tool learns about you not from one placement win, but from the cumulative pattern of where you appear and what gets said about you across the full range of sources they engage with. That's what drives communications strategy in this era.

It is for this reason that it is so vital to know where decision makers are accessing news from across a range of media types – both as the original sources of their news consumption and as the sources that feed their AI summaries. These continue to be the sources that communicators and organisations need to be present in, in order to reach decision making audiences.

Top sources by each media category

Top 5 newspapers read by decision makers

Figure 1: Which, if any, of the following newspapers do you read, either online or print? Please select all that apply. (Among who read newspapers for news and current affairs)



The Guardian remains decision makers' most read newspaper, followed by The Times and The Sun.

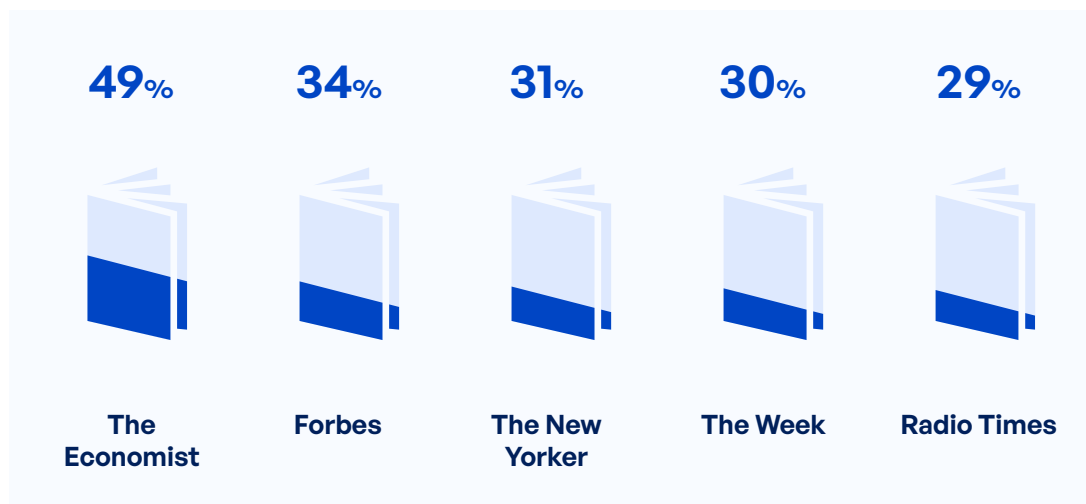
The Guardian

THE Sun

THE TIMES

Top 5 magazines read by decision makers

Figure 2: Which, if any, of the following news and current affairs magazines do you read, either online or print? Please select all that apply. (Among those who read magazines for news and current affairs)

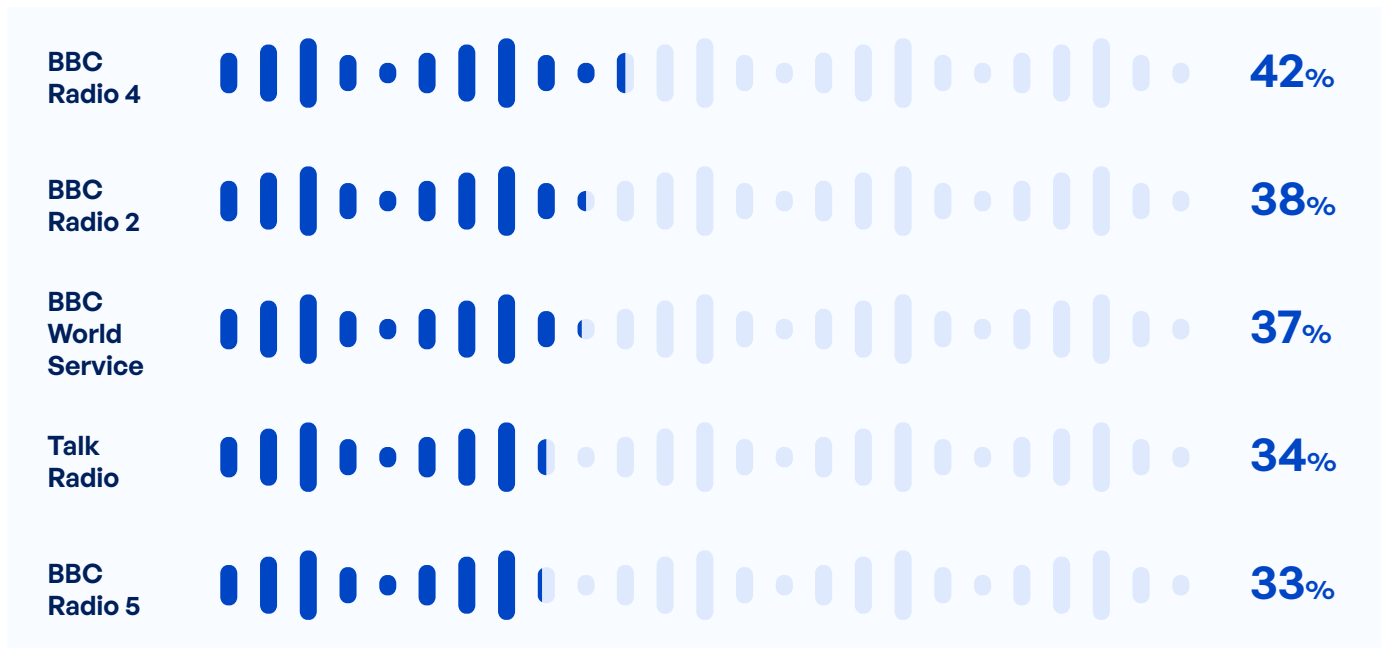


The Economist and The New Yorker remain in decision makers' top three magazines.

The Economist
THE NEW YORKER

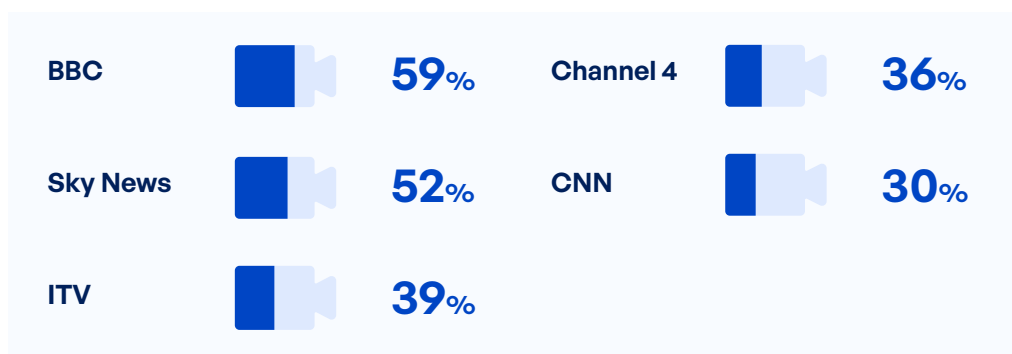
Top 5 radio stations listened to by decision makers

Figure 3: Which, if any, of the following radio stations do you listen to for news and current affairs?
Please select all that apply. (Among those who listen to radio for news and current affairs)



Top 5 broadcasters watched by decision makers

Figure 4: Which, if any, of the following broadcast channels or streaming platforms do you watch for news and current affairs?
Please select all that apply. (Among those who watch broadcasters for news and current affairs)



The BBC and Sky News remain decision makers' top two broadcasters.

B B C

sky NEWS

Top 5 online outlets read by decision makers

Figure 5: Which online outlets or newswire services do you use for news and current affairs?
Please select all that apply. (Among those who use online outlets for news and current affairs)



Decision makers are still BBC enthusiasts, with high consumption rates across broadcast, radio and online platforms.

Top 3 newswire services read by decision makers

Figure 6: Which online outlets or newswire services do you use for news and current affairs?
Please select all that apply. (Among those who use newswire services for news and current affairs)



Top 5 streamers watched by decision makers

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. (Among those who watch streamers for news and current affairs)

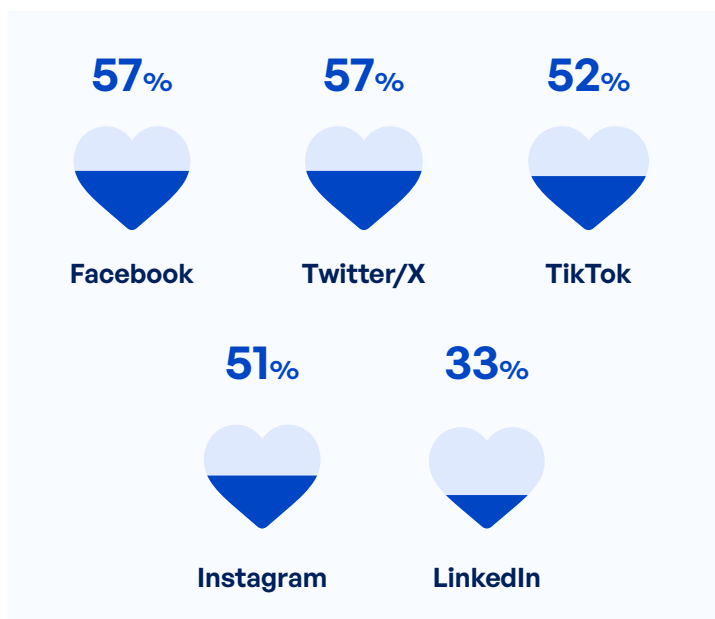


YouTube and Netflix are both widely used by decision makers for news and current affairs, even compared with more traditional news sources.

YouTube
NETFLIX

Top 5 social platforms used by decision makers

Figure 8: Which, if any, of the following social media, messaging and subscription platforms do you use for news and current affairs?
Please select all that apply. (Among those who use social platforms for news and current affairs)

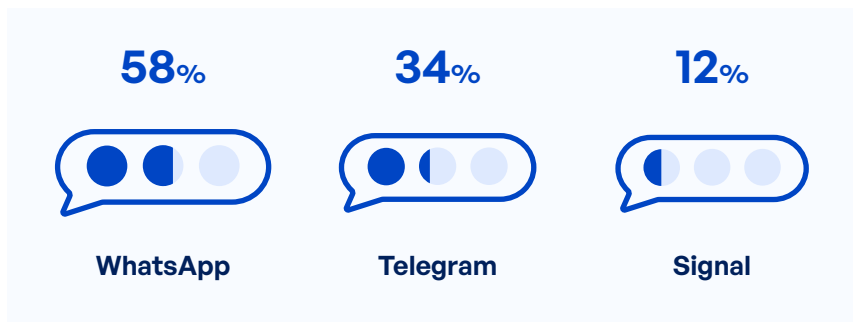


Facebook and Twitter/X remained widely used among decision makers. TikTok and BlueSky usage has increased among decision makers since last year. Among decision makers who use social platforms for news, TikTok use has gone up by eight points since 2025. BlueSky's increase was more modest, with a three point increase.

f **X**

Top 3 messaging platforms used by decision makers

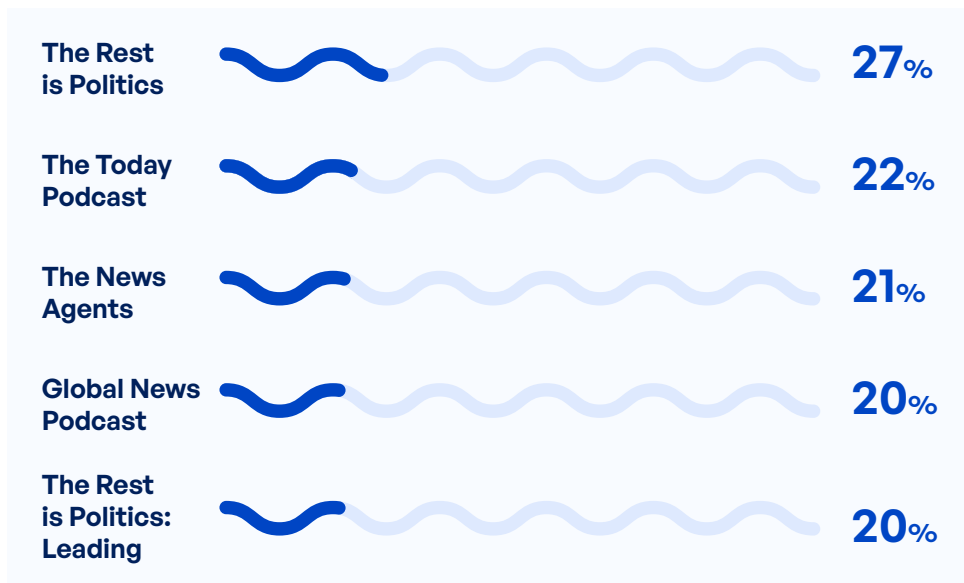
Figure 9: Which, if any, of the following social media, messaging and subscription platforms do you use for news and current affairs? Please select all that apply. (Among those who use messaging platforms for news and current affairs)



WhatsApp is still widely used by decision makers to share and read news.

Top 5 podcasts listened to by decision makers

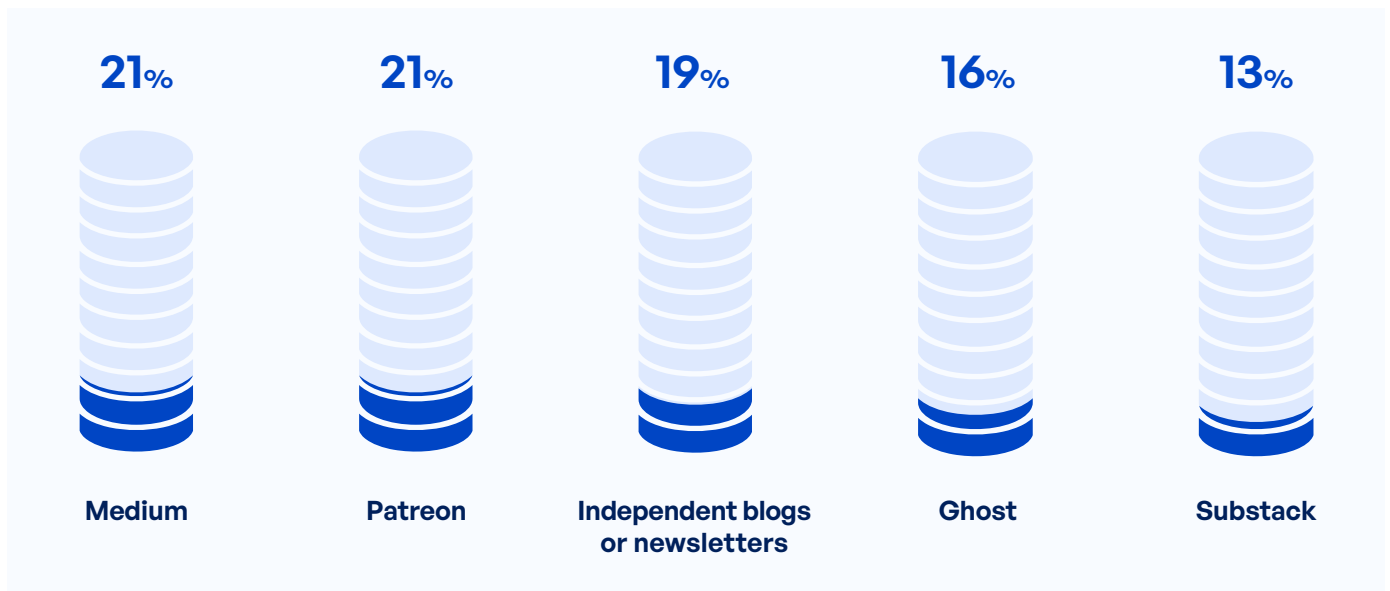
Figure 10: Which, if any, of the following news podcasts do you listen to? Please select all that apply. (Among those who listen to podcasts for news and current affairs)



Before we gave decision makers a set list of news podcasts, we asked about the podcasts they listen to most frequently (of any genre), with the option to write in up to five podcasts. The most frequent, unprompted podcasts mentioned by decision makers were The Rest is Politics, The Diary of a CEO, The News Agents, The Joe Rogan Experience, and Off Menu with Ed Gamble and James Acaster.

Top 5 subscription platforms used by decision makers

Figure 11: 'Which, if any, of the following social media, messaging and subscription platforms do you use for news and current affairs? Please select all that apply. (Among those who use subscription platforms for news and current affairs)



Conclusion:

what this means for engaging with decision makers in 2026

This current state of play creates a fundamental challenge for communications. A well-placed story is no longer enough.

In the age of AI-driven news consumption, decision makers see your message filtered, summarised, and reframed through multiple AI models. What matters now is consistency across the quality sources that feed those models because when decision makers ask an AI about your organisation, the answer depends on what that AI has learned from.

This does not mean earned media matters less. In many ways it matters more, because high-quality coverage is one of the signals AI systems are likely to rely on when answering questions about an organisation, issue or sector.

But communications teams now need to look beyond whether a story landed in the right outlet. They need to ask how that story is being picked up, summarised and presented by AI tools.

In practice, that means regularly testing how an organisation appears in model outputs, not just search results. It means checking whether websites are clear, current, easy for machines to read and optimised for AI. It means understanding which third-party sources AI tools are drawing on – from news articles and reports to summaries, trade publications and social media conversations. It also means being more disciplined about the facts, language and proof points an organisation puts into the public domain.

These practical steps matter. But they work best when guided by **four core principles**.

1. Consistency matters more than spike.

One story in one prominent outlet, no matter how high-profile, is insufficient in an AI-mediated world. Decision makers encounter your message through multiple channels simultaneously. They may read a story directly in a traditional outlet like The Times or the FT, then encounter summaries of it (or references to it) across multiple AI tools, each drawing on different source bases. Crucially, those AI tools are learning from sources far beyond traditional media, including content from social platforms, sector-specific websites,

LinkedIn, YouTube, newsletters and community forums. This fragmentation means that a single ‘placement win’ in a premium outlet gets diffused. What builds a coherent, persistent narrative is consistency across a breadth of sources, including both high-credibility traditional outlets and the specialised and digital platforms where decision makers actively engage.

2. Quality works in tandem with quantity.

In the AI era, where you appear is as important as whether you appear. Coverage in a trusted, high-credibility outlet carries more weight with AI systems than the same story in a marginal one because AI systems are increasingly trained to weight source credibility as a signal of reliability. Specialist outlets (including financial services titles, sector-specific publications, industry-focused platforms) play a particularly important role here. They carry heightened authority within their domains, due to frequent citation by other sources and a higher Google ranking. When decision makers ask an AI about financial performance or sector trends, these specialist sources carry outsized influence in shaping the answer. But credibility alone isn’t enough. Appearing only in one quality outlet, or scattered thinly across many lower-credibility ones, both leave gaps. Decision makers’ AI tools will notice the inconsistency. The winning formula combines breadth (appearing across multiple outlets) with quality. This ensures those outlets are ones that decision makers trust and that AI systems have been trained to recognise as credible. This dual approach is what builds the coherent, credible narrative that cuts through in an AI-dominated landscape.

3. Clarity is a competitive advantage.

AI systems extract, synthesise and reframe. Stories that are clear, substantive and well written survive this process intact. Stories that are vague, reactive, or buried in jargon get flattened, misrepresented or discarded altogether. Decision makers are using AI precisely because they prioritise efficiency; they need to absorb information quickly and act on it. Your communication must respect that need. Messages that require unpacking don’t travel well through AI filters. Those that are crisp, evidence-backed and easy to extract do.

4. Accessible evidence across multiple channels and sources is non-negotiable.

Decision makers don't passively accept AI-filtered summaries but interrogate them. When they fact-check an AI summary, they're looking for supporting evidence: published reports, attributed quotes, verifiable data. Organisations that put clearly sourced, easily verifiable facts into the public domain across multiple platforms and sources – through rigorous reports, case studies, data, and transparent impact claims – survive this verification process. In practice, this means auditing every major claim you make publicly. Is it verifiable? Is the evidence easily accessible? Does it appear consistently across your communications? Narrative power matters but it must be anchored in demonstrable reality.

In the personalised news era, the question is not only “did our audience see the story?”, it is “when they ask about us, what answer do they get?”

Portland can help you to navigate this change

As decision makers increasingly use AI to discover, filter and interrogate information, organisations need to think differently about how they build visibility, credibility and influence. Portland's expert teams can help you adapt your communications strategy for this new environment.

Specific support includes:

GEO audits

- Portland's GEO offer helps organisations understand and shape how they appear inside generative AI platforms, where decision makers increasingly turn for news summaries.
- We identify how your organisation appears across generative AI platforms and identify opportunities to improve visibility, accuracy and favourability.
- Using AI Optix, we assess how leading AI tools answer questions about your organisation, leadership team, competitors and sector.
- We then identify the sources shaping those responses and provide recommendations to strengthen visibility, improve accuracy and align outputs with your communications objectives.

AI-era earned media strategy

- Build earned media programmes designed to influence both audiences and the AI systems increasingly shaping how they consume information.
- We identify the publications, platforms and third-party sources most influential in AI-generated responses, develop targeted media strategies to secure visibility in those channels and ensure your organisation is consistently represented across the information ecosystem decision makers rely on.

Message and Narrative Development

- Develop clear, evidence-based narratives that resonate with stakeholders and perform effectively in an AI-driven information environment.
- Through workshops, stakeholder insight and message development, our experts work with you to define a compelling narrative, sharpen key messages and identify the proof points that bring them to life. This creates a clear foundation for communications, helping ensure organisations are consistently understood across media coverage, AI-generated summaries and stakeholder conversations.

Bespoke Decision Maker research

- Gain a deeper understanding of the audiences shaping business, policy and investment decisions.
- Drawing on our proprietary decision maker audience and in-house research expertise, we can test messages and narratives, explore attitudes towards organisations, sectors and issues and track how opinions evolve over time. We can also conduct bespoke research among specific decision-making audiences and international markets.

If you'd like to discuss how we can support your organisation, please get in touch at workwithus@portland-communications.com

Methodology

Portland's Research team conducted an online survey of 5,296 UK adults between 17th and 29th April 2026. 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 509 respondents who met certain criteria to qualify as decision makers (e.g. based on job role, or influence).

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

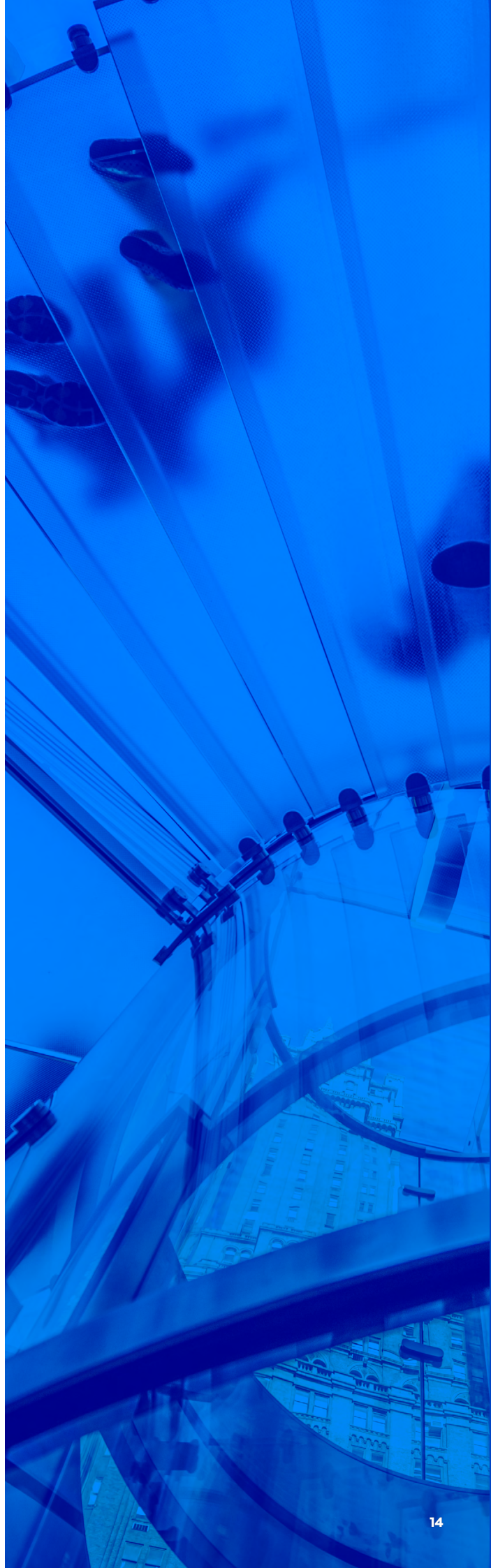
Private sector

Either: Earning over £75,000 in the private sector AND has 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





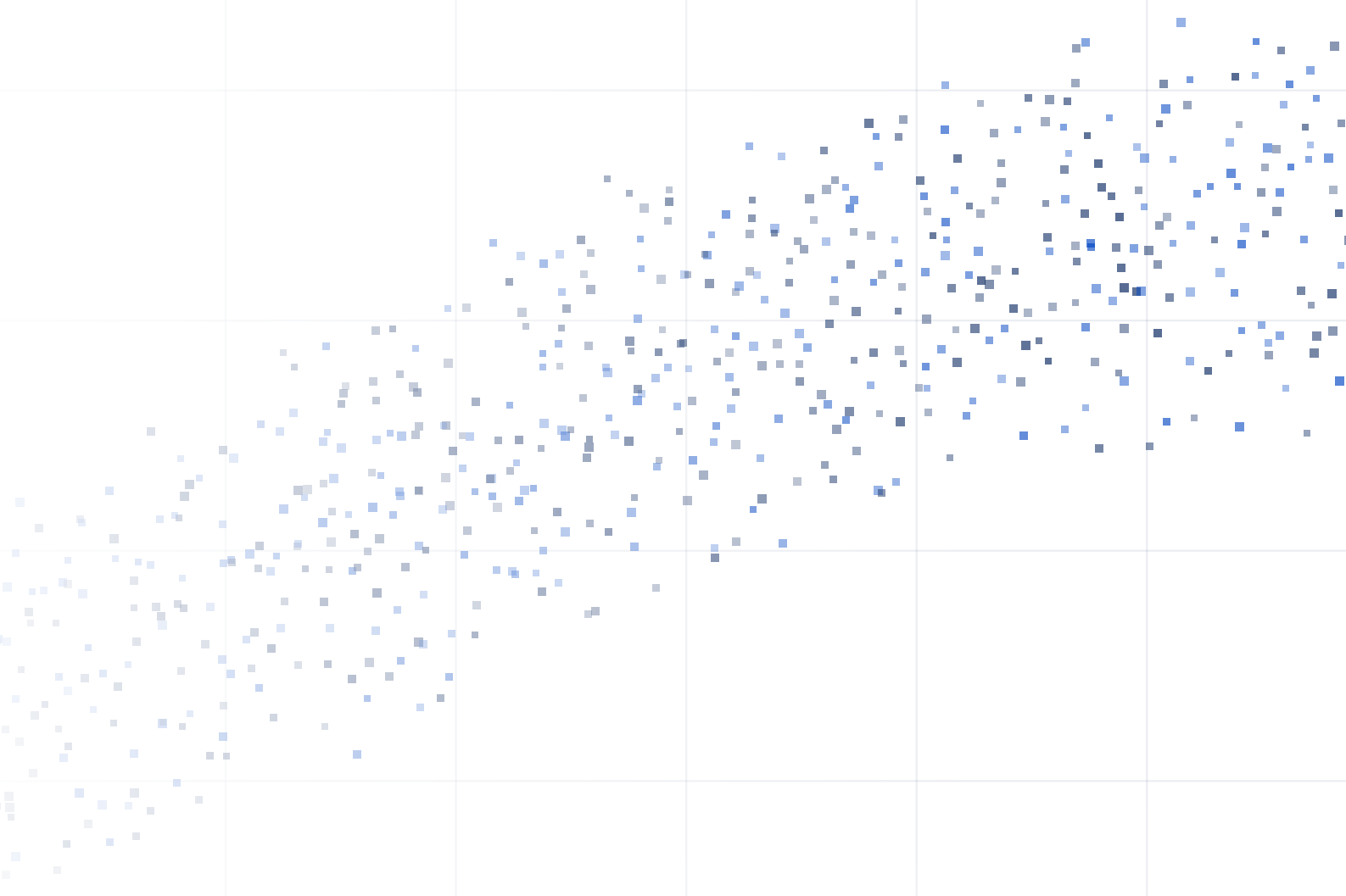
About Portland Research

Portland's in-house research team generates data driven actionable insights that drive our clients' success in a complex world. Not every agency or consultancy has a team like ours. We provide a competitive advantage.

We use integrated 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.

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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