

COVID-19 geeft het vertrouwen in nieuws en nieuwsmedia in Vlaanderen een forse boost

Vandaag 23 juni publiceert het Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism zijn jaarlijks [Digital News Report](#), waarvan imec-SMIT de Belgische partner is. Deze jaarlijkse survey beslaat ondertussen 48 landen verspreid over de hele wereld. Voor België werden ca. 2000 respondenten bevraagd in januari/februari 2021, waarvan 926 voor Vlaanderen.

Prof. dr. Ike Picone, hoofddocent Media en Journalistiek aan de Vrije Universiteit Brussel, en Ruben Vandenplas, onderzoeker bij imec-SMIT-VUB en het Kenniscentrum Cultuur- en Mediaparticipatie, doken in de data voor Vlaanderen.

Dit jaar staat de bespreking van de onderzoeksresultaten volledig in het teken van **de impact van het coronavirus op nieuwsgebruik in Vlaanderen** en hoe het onderliggende trends in nieuwsgebruik heeft scherpgesteld dan wel gekeerd.

Bijgaand vindt u

- De **9 key trends voor Vlaanderen** die het meest uit het oog springen uit de data van 2021, inclusief een paar quotes van prof. dr. Ike Picone
- Een uitnodiging voor een **korte webinar op 23 juni om 9u** waarop wij de 9 key trends toelichten alsook **een nieuwe webstek** voorstellen waarop de data voor Vlaanderen te raadplegen zullen zijn adhv interactieve grafieken en thematische analyses.
- De Policy Brief van imec-SMIT-VUB (in het Engels), die **dieper ingaat op deze 9 key trends**
- Het **Country Report voor België**, met een aantal kerncijfers over evolutie van nieuwsgebruik **in Vlaanderen en Wallonië**, dat opgenomen is in het DNR
- Het persbericht van het Reuters Institute met de **kernpunten** uit de internationale data van het [Digital News Report](#).

9 key trends in nieuwsgebruik in Vlaanderen uit het Digital News Report 2021

- 1 COVID-19: VLAANDEREN'S EERSTE DIGITALE DESINFORMATIEGOLF**
Vlaamse nieuwsgebruikers worden meer geconfronteerd met nep of misleidend nieuws over COVID-19 dan met desinformatie over enig ander onderwerp. Politici blijken het meest gewantrouwd te worden als bron van nepnieuws over de pandemie.
- 2 NIEUWSINTERESSE GROEIT, MAAR NIEUWS MIJDEN OOK**
De wereldwijde gezondheids crisis leidde tot een verhoogde nieuwshonger bij Vlaamse nieuwsgebruikers. Ondanks de verhoogde interesse in nieuws, keren een groeiend aantal gebruikers zich helemaal af van nieuws.
- 3 TELEVISIE SPANT DE KROON**
De pandemie heeft de nieuwsgewoonten van de Vlaamse nieuwsgebruikers op zijn kop gezet. In een jaar waarin mensen het grootste deel van hun tijd binnenshuis doorbrachten, heeft televisie zijn plaats als belangrijkste nieuwsbron heroverd.
- 4 NIEUWS VIA SOCIALE MEDIA DAALT**
Sociale media worden minder gebruikt als bron voor nieuws. Dit valt samen met een groeiende bezorgdheid over nepnieuws op sociale media en messaging apps. Vlaamse gebruikers kiezen er steeds vaker voor om nieuws rechtstreeks te raadplegen.
- 5 VERTROUWEN IN NIEUWS STIJGT**
Na een gestage daling in de afgelopen twee jaar, steeg het vertrouwen in nieuws in 2021 met ongeveer 10 procentpunten. Een meerderheid van de Vlaamse gebruikers (61%) geeft nu aan het nieuws te vertrouwen, maar daar achter gaat wel een groeiende kloof schuil tussen politiek links en rechts georiënteerde nieuwsgebruikers.
- 6 GEVESTIGDE NIEUWSMERKEN WINNEN AAN VERTROUWEN**
Het vertrouwen van het publiek in Vlaamse nieuwsmerken is in 2021 toegenomen. 'Kwaliteitsnieuwsmerken' blinken uit als betrouwbare bronnen. Vooral de VRT lijkt zijn plaats als baken van vertrouwen te verstevigen, met 63% van de nieuwsgebruikers die de VRT meer dan een 8 /10 geven.
- 7 DE MEERDERHEID BETAALT NOG STEEDS NIET VOOR NIEUWS**
Ondanks de toegenomen interesse in nieuws tijdens de pandemie, is de bereidheid om te betalen voor nieuws niet zo heel erg gestegen. Met een stijging van iets meer dan 4 pp betaalt nu ongeveer 16% van de Vlaamse nieuwsgebruikers voor online nieuws.
- 8 MILLENIALS DRIJVEN ADOPTIE VAN ALTERNATIEVE BETAALWIJZEN AAN**
De meerderheid van de betalende nieuwsgebruikers neemt het liefst een maand- of jaarabonnement bij één online nieuwsleverancier. Een groeiende groep jonge, hoogopgeleide Vlamingen ondersteunt wel meerdere nieuwsmedia financieel.
- 9 WE PRATEN NIET MEER (OVER NIEUWS) ZOALS VROEGER**
Door de lockdowns deden zich minder gelegenheden voor om met vrienden en collega's over nieuws te praten, en dat werd niet opgevangen online. Dit heeft geleid tot een aanzienlijke dip in participatie aan nieuws. De helft van de Vlaamse nieuwsgebruikers gaf aan nieuws niet te delen, liken of te bespreken.

“Het vertrouwen in nieuws bleef relatief hoog in Vlaanderen, maar daalde de laatste jaren wel. De coronacrisis lijkt dit gekeerd te hebben. Niet alleen stijgt het vertrouwen in nieuws in het algemeen, maar de meeste Vlaamse nieuwsmedia zien dit ook weerspiegeld in een hogere vertrouwensscore, ook voor hun meer populaire merken.”

“Verschillende Vlaamse nieuwsmedia rapporteerden significante stijgingen in hun abonnementen en inkomsten met mooie jaarresultaten als gevolg. Uit de cijfers blijkt inderdaad dat meer mensen het afgelopen jaar betaalden voor online nieuws, maar met 16% blijft dat een zeer beperkte groep. De vraag blijft hoe sterk dat aantal nog kan groeien, en of dit een voldoende grote markt zal blijken om alle huidige spelers in de Vlaamse nieuwssector te onderhouden.”

Voor meer informatie kan u contact opnemen met Ike Picone via ike.picone@vub.be of 0479742384.



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Webinar 36/06 – 9u tot 10u – 9 key trends in nieuwsgebruik in Vlaanderen

Dit jaar stellen we de cijfers graag voor in een korte webinar. In deze webinar maken we u wegwijs doorheen de **9 belangrijkste trends** en veranderingen uit de Vlaamse cijfers van het Digital News Report 2021 en stellen we ook een **nieuwe webstek** voor met meer trends en analyses.

De **webinar gaat online door op 23/06 van 9u tot 10u**. Inschrijven kan gratis via [deze link](#).

De key trends voor Vlaanderen, alsook de **nieuwe webstek** zullen 23/06 publiek gemaakt worden via onze imec-SMIT nieuwsbrief, waarvoor u zich [hier](#) kan inschrijven.

Ook de internationale studie zal die dag gelanceerd worden op www.digitalnewsreport.org en via een webinar van 10u tot 11u, waarop u [hier](#) gratis kan inschrijven.

POLICY BRIEF #49

23 June 2021

9 major ways in which the pandemic has marked Flemish news consumption

Ruben Vandenplas, Pauljan Truyens, Sarah Vis & Ike Picone



Today, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism publishes its yearly [Digital News Report](#), in which imec-SMIT is the Belgian partner. This year, our analysis shines a spotlight on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on news use in Flanders. In this policy brief, we will guide you through **9 MAJOR WAYS** in which the pandemic has marked Flemish news consumption in 2021.

Interested in how to move forward based on these results? Take a look at the [CONVERSATION STARTERS](#) at the bottom of this document.

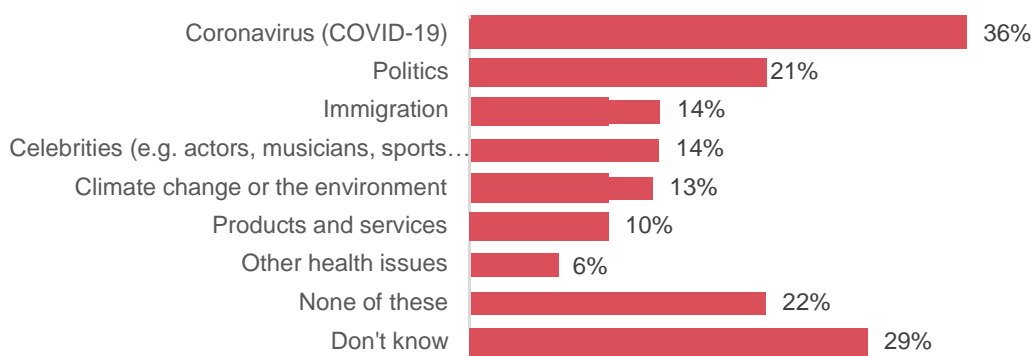
- 1 COVID-19: FLANDERS' FIRST DIGITAL DISINFORMATION WAVE**
Flemish news users are confronted more with fake or misleading news on COVID-19 than with disinformation on any other topic. Politicians appear to be the subject of most concern as a source for fake news on COVID-19.
- 2 NEWS INTEREST GROWS, BUT SO DOES NEWS AVOIDANCE**
The uncertainty of a global health crisis sparked an increased news hunger among Flemish news users. Despite the interest in news, a growing number of users are tuning out of news altogether, as news avoidance rises.
- 3 TELEVISION TAKES THE CROWN**
The pandemic caused tremors in the news routines of Flemish users. With users spending most of their time indoors, television has reinstated its place as the most important provider of news.
- 4 SOCIAL MEDIA NEWS IN DECLINE**
Social media see less use as a source for news. This coincides with a growing concern over fake news on social media and messaging apps. Flemish users increasingly choose to access news directly on their own terms.

- 5 TRUST IN NEWS IS SOARING**
After a steady decline over the past two years, trust in news increased by roughly 10% in 2021, as a majority of Flemish users (61%) now indicate they trust the news. Despite a general increase, political differences in trust are growing.
- 6 LEGACY NEWS BRANDS GAIN TRUST DURING PANDEMIC**
Audience trust in Flemish news brands has increased in 2021, but 'quality news brands' excel as trustworthy sources. VRT in particular appears to solidify its place as a beacon of trust, with 63% of users rating it 8 or higher.
- 7 THE MAJORITY STILL DOESN'T PAY FOR NEWS**
Despite the higher interest in news during the pandemic, the willingness to pay for news didn't increase all that much. With an uptick of slightly more than 4%, approximately 16% of Flemish news users now pay for online news.
- 8 MILLENIALS PUSH ALTERNATIVE PAYMENT METHODS**
The majority of those paying for news prefer taking a monthly or yearly subscription for a single online news provider. Although a growing group of young, highly educated Flemings expands their news diet to include multiple news providers which they support financially.
- 9 WE DON'T TALK (ABOUT NEWS) LIKE WE USED TO**
With users forced to isolate in their homes, fewer occasions presented itself to talk about news face to face with friends and colleagues. This has led to a significant dip in participation in news. Half of the Flemish users reported not participating in news, including sharing, liking, or discussing news content.

1. COVID-19: FLANDERS' FIRST DIGITAL DISINFORMATION WAVE

Due to the spread of disinformation related to the coronavirus and the vaccines that are supposed to protect us against it, **the past year has presented Belgium with its first major wave of digital disinformation**. The numbers speak for themselves: Flemish news users were substantially more confronted with false or misleading information about the coronavirus (36%) than on any other topic.

Have you seen false or misleading information about any of the following topics, in the last week?



This **was even higher amongst the younger groups**: around 45% of news users under 35 years old indicate that they have been confronted with disinformation about the coronavirus in the past week, compared to only 30% of those aged 45+. This may be due to the higher use of social media for news [among the younger generations](#).

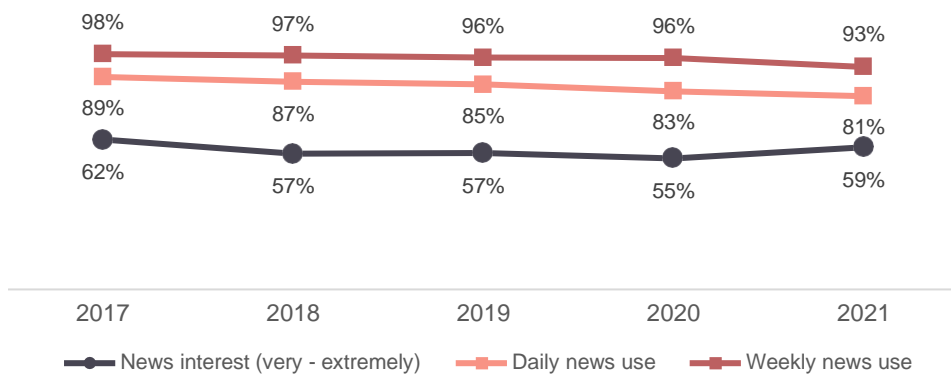
Politicians appear to be the subject of most concern as a source for fake news on COVID-19. More than 1 in 4 Flemish users reported being concerned about politicians as a source of

fake news related to the coronavirus, which is substantially higher than those concerned about disinformation coming from ordinary people, journalists and celebrities. Remarkably, amongst the 18 to 24 year olds not politicians but ordinary citizens are regared as the most mistrusted source of coronavirus news.

2. INTEREST IN NEWS GROWS, BUT SO DOES NEWS AVOIDANCE

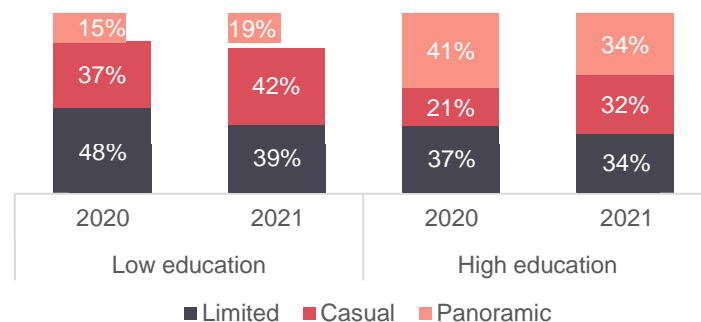
The pandemic appears to have sparked a higher interest in news. But despite what one might expect based on the early [boost in reach](#) that most Flemish news media benefitted from during the pandemic, the overall number of users that consumed news on a weekly basis has declined by roughly 3,5% in 2021. This coincides with what appears to be a slight increase in news avoidance, as the number of users that use news less often than once a month has grown by 4%.

Regular news use and news interest during the past 5 years



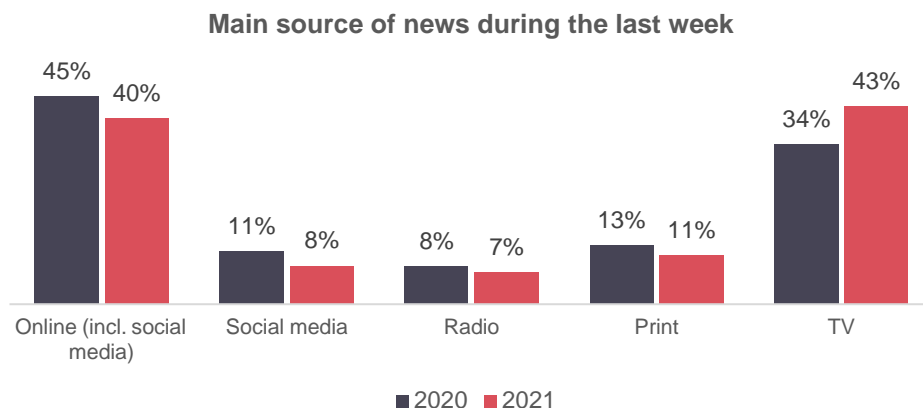
Looking at the entirety of media that Flemish users consume on a regular basis, we find that **users have begun to significantly change their news routines** in the wake of the pandemic. This is noticeable in the shifting proportions of people that make use of a specific news repertoire. Broadly speaking, the amount of Flemish news users that consume news sparsely and casually from different sources (casual news repertoire) has increased in 2021. Specifically, the number of higher-educated news users who used a broad range of news sources intensively (panoramic repertoire) appears to have shrunk in 2021. This might be an indication that **users have trimmed down their news use in favor of more tempered news habits during the pandemic**. In contrast, lower-educated news users predominantly consumed news sparsely from a limited number of sources (limited repertoire) in 2020, but now feature more casual (+5 pp) and even panoramic repertoires (+4 pp).

Percentage of users of a repertoire within level of education



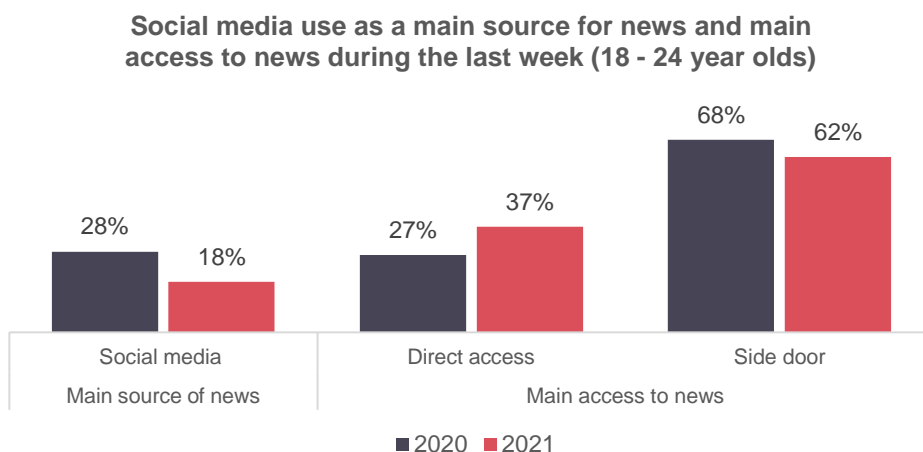
3. TELEVISION TAKES THE CROWN

The interest in the televised press conferences of the National Security Council appears to have shifted the primary sources that Flemish news users consulted during the past year. **Television news use grew by roughly 8% since 2020**, solidifying its place as the most important source for news during the pandemic. Despite the possibility for online news media to provide users with a constant stream of news and information, **online news use shrunk** during the pandemic, connecting to a broader shift towards more selective news use patterns during the pandemic (described **Error! Reference source not found.**). **Lower and middle education and income users in particular** exhibit the most noticeable turn towards television as their main news provider.



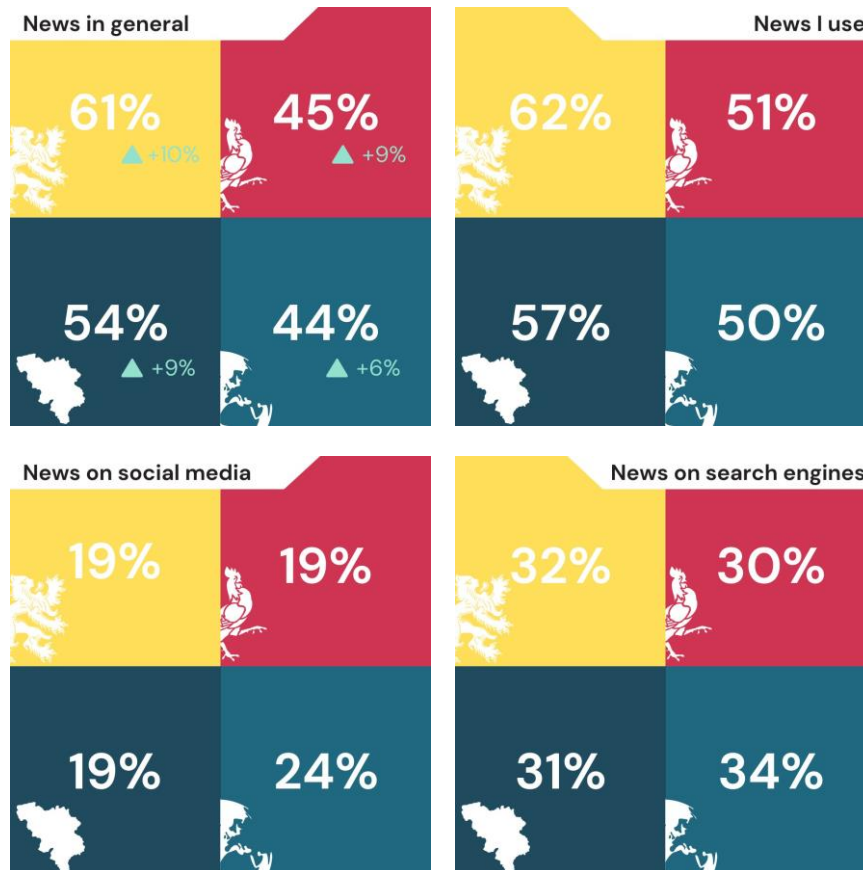
4. SOCIAL MEDIA NEWS IN DECLINE

Flemish news users have **turned away from social media as news providers** in 2021. This trend is particularly noticeable for young news users (18 to 24 years old), which relied most on social media for news consumption in 2020. The decline in social media news use coincides with a **general move towards direct, branded access** rather than side-door access as their main way to access news. **Information overload** is often considered an important factor in news avoidance. In the tumultuous news environment of the pandemic, operating at a high velocity and rife with fake news (especially online), this might explain why a higher number of Flemish news users **engage with the news on their own terms**.

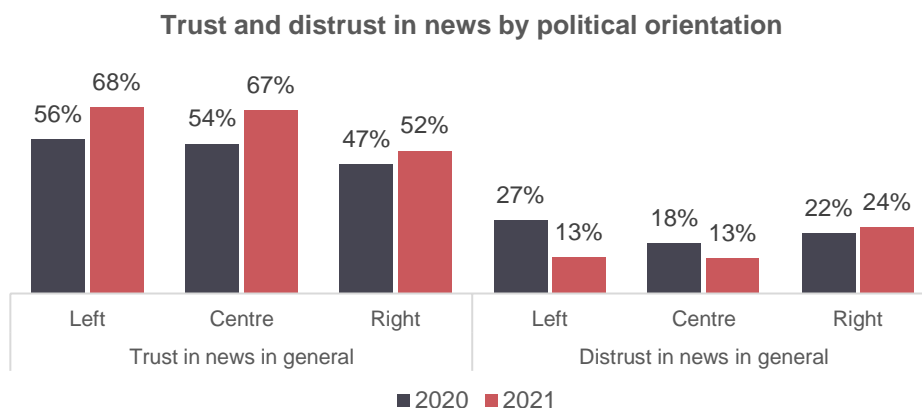


5. TRUST IN NEWS IS SOARING

The coronavirus pandemic appears to have reignited trust in news with Flemish users. Roughly 61% of Flemish news users indicate they trust news in general, **up roughly 10%** from 2020. Trust in news on social media, however, stagnates at 19%. Despite the general rise in trust, **significant differences in trust remain between Dutch- and French-speaking Belgians**.



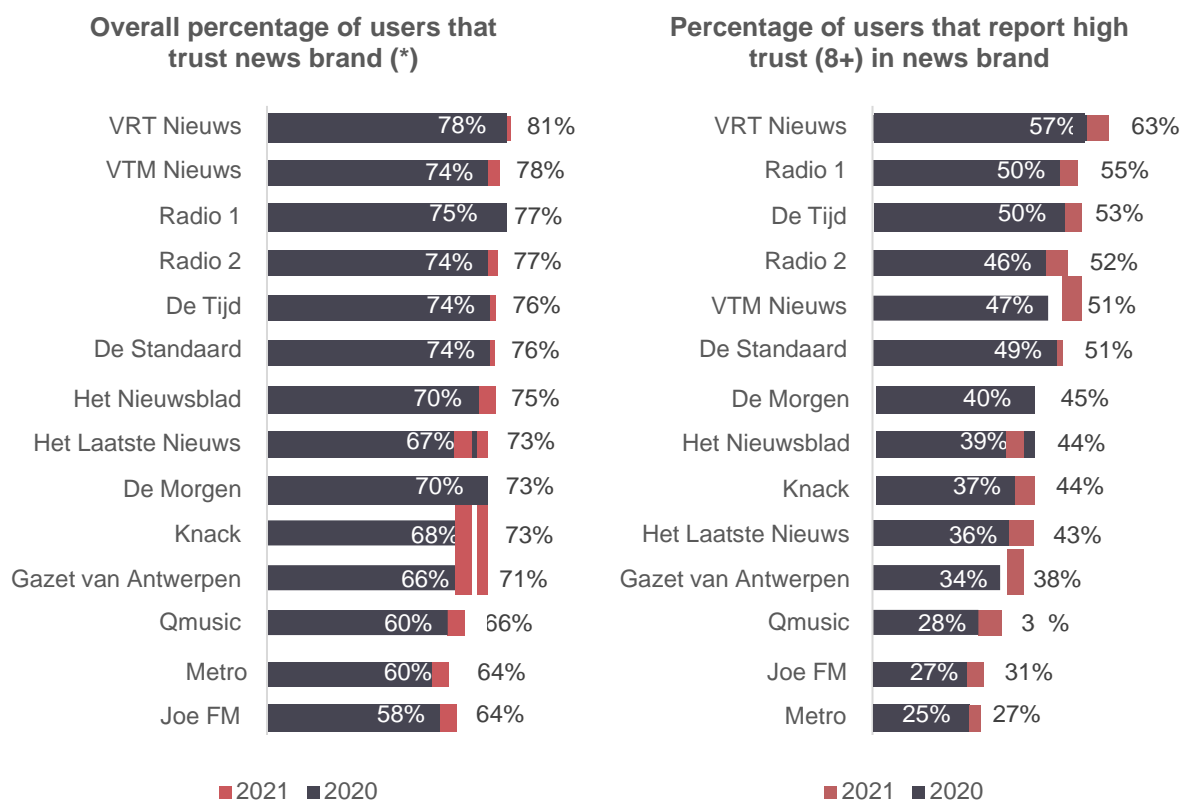
Differences in trust levels across political orientation have increased since the coronavirus pandemic. The trust gap has grown significantly between those news users of a left-wing and centre political orientation on the one hand, and those of a right-wing political orientation on the other. While distrust in news has generally decreased in Flanders, the **amount of news users of a right-wing political orientation who distrust news is growing**.



Trust scores are measured via a 5-point Likert scale where a score of 1-2 is recoded as distrust and 4-5 as trust

6. LEGACY NEWS BRANDS GAIN TRUST DURING PANDEMIC

Legacy news brands are increasingly perceived as reliable news sources by Flemish news users during the coronavirus pandemic. In line with the more general growth in trust described **Error! Reference source not found.**, Flemish news brands have marked a growth in trust across the board. Popular news brands in particular saw the biggest uptick in trust, including JoeFM (+6,5%), Het Laatste Nieuws (+6%), and Qmusic (6%). Connecting to the renewed importance of television as a source of news in Flemish media repertoires during the pandemic, public broadcaster VRT and commercial broadcaster VTM spearhead the lineup of most trusted news brands in 2021.



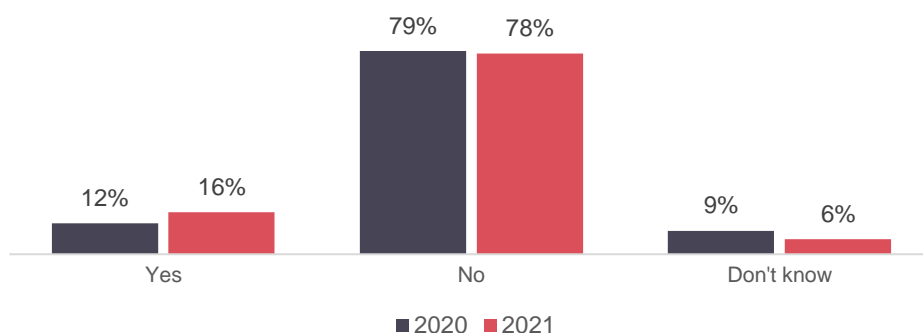
(*)Trust scores are measured using a 10-point Likert scale (0 = not at all trustworthy – 10 = completely trustworthy), where the percentage of users that find a brand trustworthy equals the sum of users that rate 6-10 on the Likert-scale

Although quality news brands such as VRT, De Tijd, De Standaard, and De Morgen see less growth in the overall percentage of users that indicate trust in their brands, **quality news brands excel as trustworthy news sources** during the pandemic. **VRT News in particular solidifies its place as a beacon of trust** in the past year, as 63% of Flemish news users afford VRT Nieuws a trust score of 8 or more. In comparison, popular news brands such as JoeFM or Het Laatste Nieuws are afforded a score of 8 or more by respectively 31% and 43% of Flemish news users.

7. THE MAJORITY STILL DOESN'T PAY FOR (ONLINE) NEWS

In the past year, the majority of the Flemish audience went looking for reliable news to stay up to date on the evolution of the coronavirus pandemic. However, the considerable shift towards national and local news did not result in a significant **change of mind towards paying for (online) news**. **16% of Flemish news users** indicate they have made some sort of payment for (online) news during the past year, an increase of 5% since 2020. In comparison, approximately 80% of Flemish news users has refrained from paying for (online) news entirely.

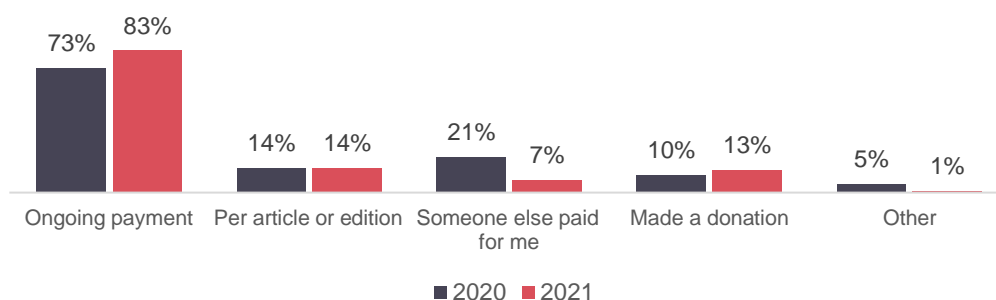
Have you paid for online news in the last 12 months?



8. MILLENIALS PUSH ALTERNATIVE PAYMENT METHODS

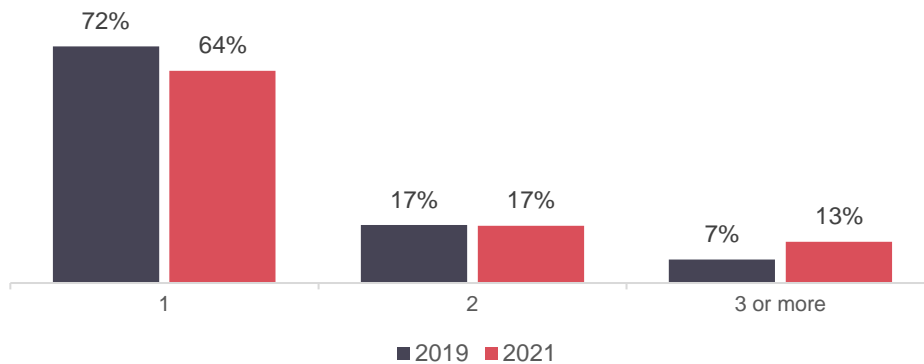
The minority of those who paid for news in the last year does this in a **slightly different way** in comparison to 2020. **Ongoing payments** (monthly or yearly) still is the preferred way of more than 80% of the Flemish users. Less traditional payment methods, such as paying per article or making a donation, are gaining popularity among the younger generations. Especially highly-educated millennials are casting themselves as early adopters of **these alternative payment methods**. Remarkably, getting access to news via someone else's subscription dropped 14%.

Which of the following ways have you used to pay for online news in the last year? (Base = Paid for (online) news in the last year)



Flemish users who pay for 3 or more news providers has nearly doubled during the pandemic. This can also be ascribed to the younger news users. A small group of highly interested news consumers decided to **broaden their newsdiet** in the past year, looking for qualitative, reliable news from a set of diverse sources.

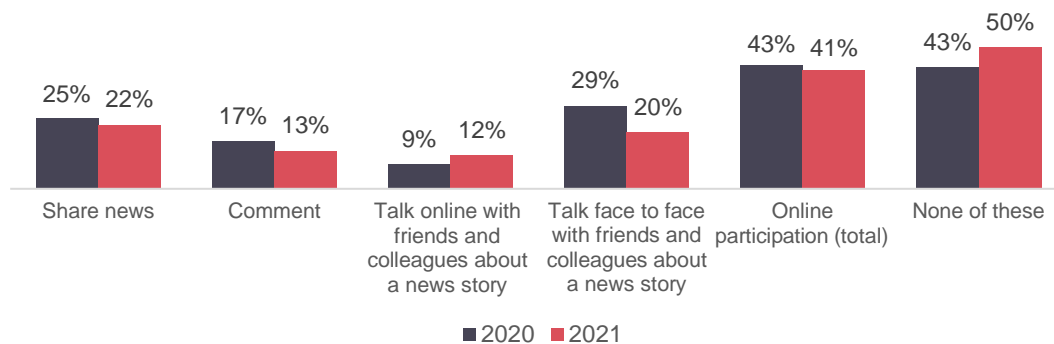
How many different news providers do you regularly pay money to? (Base = Paid for (online) news in the last year)



9. WE DON'T TALK (ABOUT NEWS) LIKE WE USED TO

Despite a general decline in news participation, **young news users** (18 to 24 and 25 to 34 years old) **remain the most active news participants**. Unsurprisingly, as most of the year was spent in lockdown, talking about news with friends and colleagues during face-to-face conversations has dropped significantly in 2021. However, this doesn't mean that this activity has been moved online. **Online participation has declined** in 2021, perhaps further highlighting how Flemish news users adopted more selective patterns of news consumption.

Which, if any, of the following ways do you share or participate in news coverage during an average week?



This shift in participation in news is **especially noticeable with users of a right political orientation**. In 2020, 'right-wing' users appeared to be the most active participants in news by far, with 53% indicating they **participated in news online** during the last week. During the pandemic, a significant number of right-wing users has stopped participating in news, as **50% now indicates they did not participate in news at all** (up from 36% in 2020).

10. CONVERSATION STARTERS

Now that we have updated you on the highlights in news use in the past year, we leave you with 4 conclusions that are meant to spark the discussion on how to move forward with these results. **Want to continue the conversation?** Be sure to visit [Nieuwsgebruik.be](https://nieuwsgebruik.be) for more data and analysis on news use in Flanders.

A

SHOULD NEWS MEDIA LEAD THE FIGHT AGAINST FAKE NEWS?

With fake news on the coronavirus and vaccines, Flanders is no longer exempt from the spread of disinformation. Flemish news users are most wary of fake news coming from politicians, while news organisation still benefit from a trust bump and (re)claim a central position in people's news diets.

This puts news organisations in an ideal position to curb the spread of fake and misleading information. **But how can news organisations capitalise on this position, from both a journalistic and commercial perspective? And can they take up the fight without help?**

B

CAN WE STILL REACH THOSE WHO TURN AWAY FROM NEWS?

It is remarkable that the spikes in audience reach reported by many mainstream media in Flanders were not reflected in a higher amount of people consuming news. On the contrary, **our data show that slightly more people sparsely consume news or avoid it entirely.**

Reaching those who disconnect from the public sphere is becoming a key challenge for governments across Europe. Thinking of our news habits as our 'window to the world', an important question for media policy makers then becomes **who are the citizens that turn away from the news and why?** In our analysis on the impact of [COVID-19 on news avoidance](#), we begin to explore an answer to this question.

C

ARE NEWS ORGANISATIONS WINNING THEIR BET ON PAYWALLS?

It might be too early to say, but for the first time since 2017 we see **a slight increase in paying for online news.** A small but growing portion of Flemish news users are concerned about the financial difficulties that plague news media. And a small group of highly educated millennials is even willing to pay for multiple subscriptions.

These users have specific consumption patterns, look for quality and unique content, and are open to support journalism financially in various ways. **How to cater to these highly demanding groups of news users** might be key to win the bet on paywalls.

D

CAN NEWS ORGANISATIONS CONSOLIDATE THEIR POSITION?

The tremors of the coronavirus pandemic have redrawn news consumption patterns. Users exhibit a move towards more tempered and structured news habits, highlighted by a shift in news repertoires, a move away from social media and online news, and an increase in direct, branded access. Put together, users increasingly sought to inform themselves **on their own terms.**

This leads to a strong momentum for news media as trusted sources, but not without challenges, as we already see signs of audience reach returning to [pre-COVID-19 levels](#). Hence, an important question emerges: **how can news organisations consolidate their central, trusted position in people's news diets once we leave the pandemic behind and new challenges emerge?**

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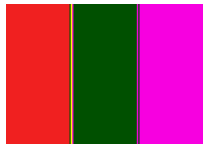
*imec-SMIT's **Media & Society Program** hosts approx. 45 researchers that study business, user and policy aspects of mediated communication. The program has a track record in fundamental and applied national projects.*

Prof. Dr Ike.Picone@vub.be heads the program's Journalism, Trust & Participation Unit.

BELGIUM

STATISTICS

Population	11.6m
Internet penetration	94%



Belgium has two distinct media markets – French-speaking

Wallonia and Flemish-speaking Flanders. Given the small size of the markets, publishers continue to see consolidation as a way of securing their digital transition and keeping international companies at bay.

As elsewhere, Belgians Locked to mainstream media during the pandemic, while advertising revenues initially dropped significantly before recovering in the second half of 2020. DPG Media and Mediahuis, Flanders' largest publishers, increased subscriptions across their Flemish and Dutch titles by 2% and 11% respectively, leading to strong annual results.²⁶ There is a similar picture in Wallonia, with digital subscriptions increasing for most publishers.²⁷ All this is taking place in a context of major structural changes where, although there are positive signs of an increased willingness to pay and growth in digital subscriptions (up 4% points to 16%), these do not compensate for falling advertising revenues. Estimates suggest that about 40 to 50% of Belgian online advertising flows to Google and Facebook.²⁸

The year 2020 saw the consequences of recent mergers play out. At DPG Media, the merger brought Flanders' most popular newspaper/website, *Het Laatste Nieuws*/hln.be, and commercial TV news provider, VTM Nieuws, under the same roof – literally, in the purpose-built News City building in Antwerp city centre – with a single integrated newsroom for all their news properties. DPG Media also dropped the TV station's own news site vtmnieuws.be and launched the live online video news channel HLN Live in an attempt to position hln.be as the go-to online news site.

In Wallonia, Rossel continued its local consolidation by acquiring the remaining shares of the free daily *Metro* from Mediahuis as well as expanding in Northern France by buying the struggling newspaper *Paris Normandie*. IPM bought *L'Avenir* and the other print activities from Nethys. RTL Group (Luxembourg) bought out the third of its shares held by Audiopresse (a joint venture of Belgian publishers), meaning RTL Belgium is now 100% owned by an international media group. This ended the peculiar Belgian arrangement dating back to 1985, where companies seeking the new commercial TV licences were required to partner with publishers, to reduce their hostility to increased competition for advertising. In both regions, legacy news publishers have now refocused their activities mainly on print and online. As a result, the daily press is dominated by two big players in each region, Mediahuis and DPG Media in Flanders and Rossel and IPM in Wallonia.

The argument seems to be gaining ground that small media markets need a degree of concentration and collaboration to face international competition and digital transition. One concrete example is the 'Flemish NetLix' Streamz, launched in September 2020 as a joint venture between DPG Media and telecom operator Telenet, helped by the Flemish government easing regulatory obstacles and requiring the public broadcaster VRT to offer its drama content on the platform.

In 2020 there was also a new five-year agreement between public broadcaster VRT and the Flemish government. It requires VRT to accelerate its digital transformation but also to restrict its online news to broadcast-based, rather than text-based content. This is in response to lobbying by news publishers concerned that VRT's free news online undermines willingness to pay for commercial digital news. Meanwhile, public subsidy for (profitable) commercial media prompted debate. In Flanders, DPG Media received €996,000 for digital reskilling, while in Wallonia, RTL Belgium nearly received €40 million to cover losses due to the pandemic, but in the end, given the controversy caused and a recovery in the market, did not pursue their request.



The pandemic has brought Belgium's first high-profile case of disinformation, from anti-vaxxers. The issue remains high on the policy agenda, but so far proposals from a 2018 federal expert group for a joint initiative to combat disinformation have come to nothing. However, trust in news overall remains high, especially in Flanders, and the downward trend of recent years has been reversed. Trust in major news brands remains stable, with Flemish news brands even showing a small trust bump. In Flanders VTM (DPG Media) has now overtaken één (VRT) as the most used online news source, and VTM Nieuws has also surpassed quality newspapers *De Tijd* and *De Standaard* to become the second most trusted news brand after VRT Nieuws. In Wallonia, RTBF's TV news (La Une) has overtaken RTL to become the most used online source and RTBF News remains the most trusted brand, but RTL is still the leading brand by online weekly use.

Ike Picone

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²⁶ https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20210318_98025429

²⁷ <https://www.lesoir.be/308910/article/2020-06-23/les-ventes-dabonnements-aux-journaux-en-forte-hausse-pendant-le-confinement>

²⁸ https://www.vlaamseregulatormedia.be/sites/default/files/rapport_mediaconcentratie_2020_zonder_aloop.pdf

WEEKLY REACH OFFLINE AND ONLINE

TOP BRANDS

% Weekly usage

- Weekly use TV, radio & print
- More than 3 days per week TV, radio & print
- Weekly use online brands
- More than 3 days per week online brands

16%



pay for **ONLINE NEWS**

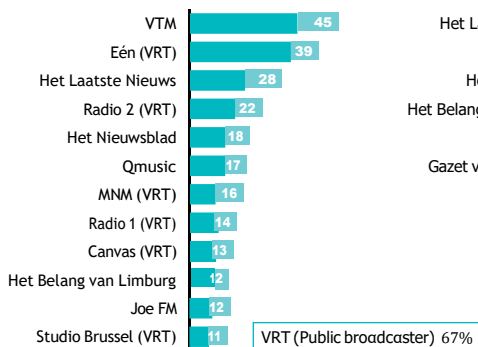
Wallonia 16% | Flanders 16%

26%

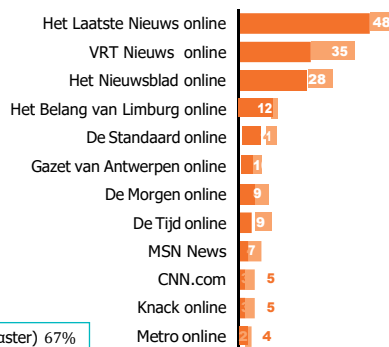


listen to **PODCASTS** in the last month

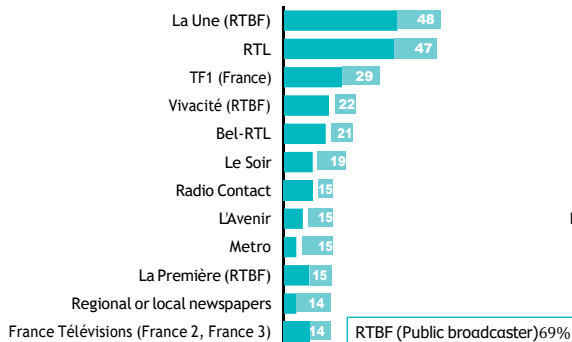
TV, RADIO AND PRINT (FLEMISH)



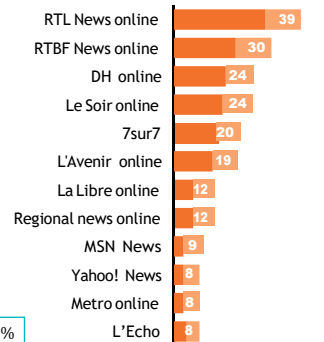
ONLINE (FLEMISH)



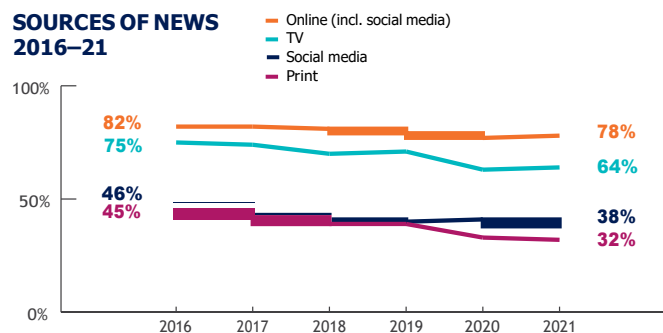
TV, RADIO AND PRINT (FRENCH)



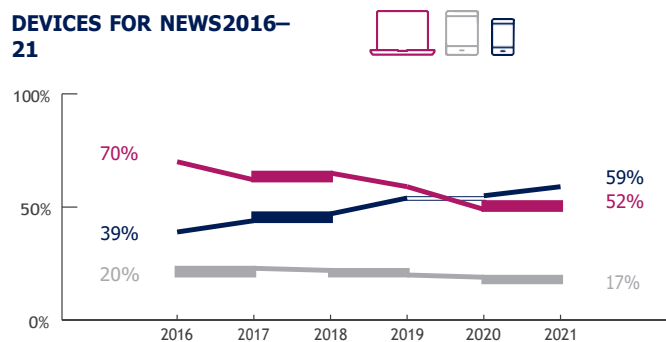
ONLINE (FRENCH)



SOURCES OF NEWS 2016-21



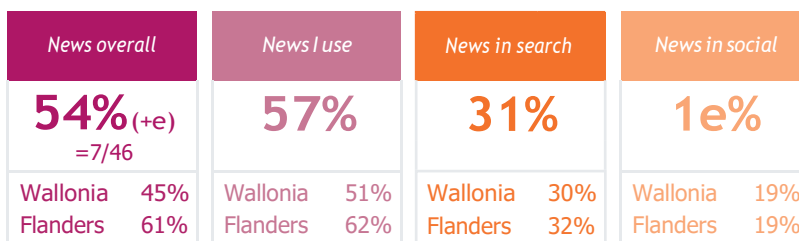
DEVICES FOR NEWS 2016-21



TRUST

Trust in the news is up overall, though it remains considerably higher in Flemish-speaking Flanders (61%) than in French-speaking Wallonia (45%). During the COVID-19 crisis, public broadcasters VRT and RTBF have been a source of reliable information for their respective communities and are also the brands with the highest trust scores.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF TRUST

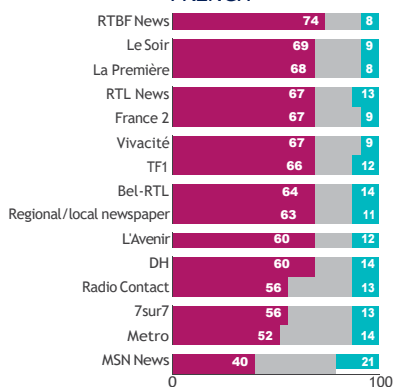
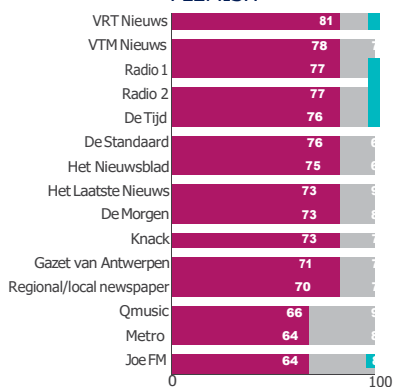


BRAND TRUST SCORES

Trust Neither Don't trust

FLEMISH

FRENCH



Trust = % scored 6-10 on 10-point scale, Don't trust = 0-4, Neither = 5. Those that haven't heard of each brand were excluded. Only the above brands were included in the survey so should not be treated as a list of the most trusted brands

TOP SOCIAL MEDIA AND MESSAGING

Rank	Brand	For news	For All
1	Facebook	39% (-2)	69%
2	YouTube	18% (+2)	52%
3	Facebook Messenger	12% (-)	51%
4	WhatsApp	12% (+3)	49%
5	Instagram	9% (+1)	31%
6	Twitter	5% (-)	13%

Press release embargoed until 23 June 2021 00.01 BST

COVID-19 increases appetite for trusted and reliable news, but turning this into revenue remains a significant challenge

This year's [Reuters Institute Digital News Report](#) provides evidence that some news organisations have benefitted from a desire for reliable information over the last year – in terms of higher reach, higher trust and more subscribers. But the pandemic has also accelerated shifts to digital, social and mobile environments putting further economic pressure on publishers worldwide. Overall, still only a minority are prepared to pay for online news while younger generations continue to rely on new, convenient ways to access news that are proving hard to monetise.

These are some of the conclusions of the 10th edition of the Digital News Report, which is based on an online survey of 92,000 people in 46 media markets, representing the views of more than half the world's population and including India, Indonesia, Thailand, Nigeria, Colombia and Peru for the first time.

The report is [embargoed until Wednesday 23 June 00.01 BST](#). You can download an embargoed PDF version in [this link](#). It will be live on our dedicated microsite at www.digitalnewsreport.org/2021

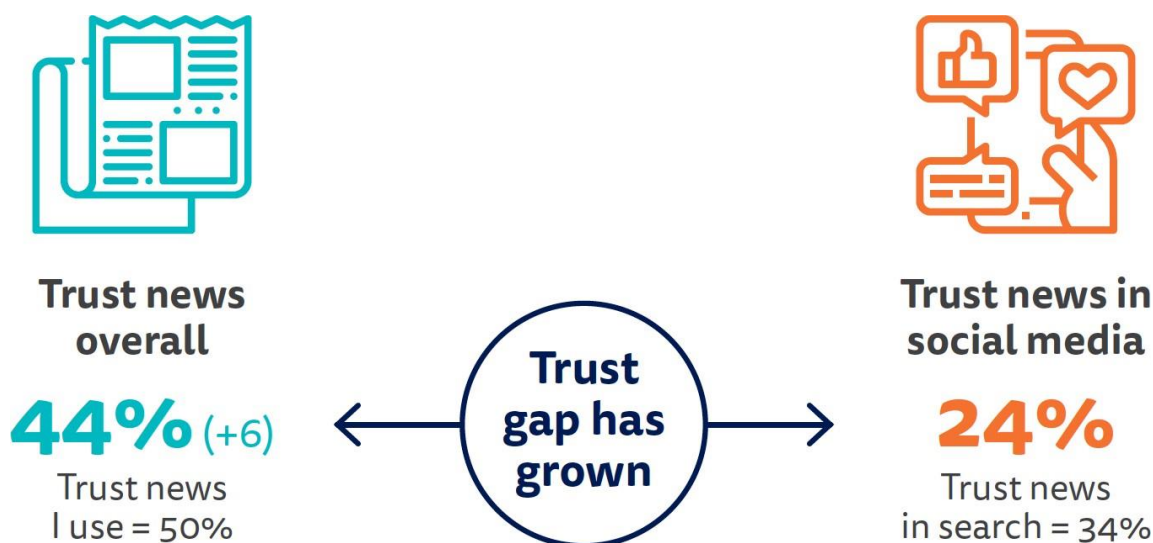
Trust in news is up in almost all countries

Trust in news has grown, on average, by six percentage points in the wake of the pandemic – with almost half of our total sample (44%) saying they trust most news most of the time. This partly reverses falls in average trust over the last few years that have, to some extent, been driven by increasingly bitter political and social debates. Finland remains the country with the highest levels of overall trust (65%). The United States has the lowest levels (29%) reflecting a divisive election and the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd.

In a number of countries, especially those with strong and independent public service media, the report also documents greater consumption of trusted news brands. The pattern is less clear outside Western Europe, in countries where the crisis has dominated the media agenda less, or where other political and social issues have played a bigger role.

Proportion that trusts most news most of the time

All markets



Q6_1/2/3/4. Please, indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: I think you can trust the news/news I use/news in social media/news in search most of the time. Base: total sample in all markets: 92,372.

At the same time, trust in news from search and social media has remained broadly stable. This means that the *trust gap* between news in general and news found in aggregated environments has grown.

Lead author Nic Newman says:

“The focus on factual reporting during the COVID-19 crisis may have made the news seem more straightforward, while the story has also had the effect of squeezing out more partisan political news. This may be a temporary effect, but in almost all countries we see audiences placing a greater premium on accurate and reliable news sources”

Pandemic increases economic pressures on news publishers

The report documents how badly print publications have been affected by COVID-19, due to restrictions on movement affecting sales and the associated hit to advertising revenue. Countries that have traditionally had high levels of circulation, such as Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, have seen some of the biggest falls and this is accelerating the push to digital subscriptions.
















Across 20 countries where publishers have been actively pushing digital subscriptions, we find 17% saying that they have paid for some kind of online news in the last year (via subscription, donation, or one-off payment). That’s up by two points in the last year and up five since 2016. Despite this, the report notes that the vast majority of consumers in these countries continue to rely on freely available sources and do not pay for any online

news, and most of those who do subscribe to a single title. Subscribers tend to be richer, older and better educated and tend to pay for just one online publication.

Most success comes in a handful of wealthy countries with a long history of high levels of print newspaper subscriptions, such as Norway 45% (+3), Sweden 30% (+3), Switzerland 17% (+4), and the Netherlands 17% (+3). Around a fifth (21%) now pay for at least one online news outlet in the United States, 20% in Finland, and 13% in Australia. By contrast, just 9% say they pay in Germany and 8% in the UK.

Profile of ongoing digital subscription

Selected markets

Country	% paying for online news	Examples of national titles	Median number of subscriptions	Average age of subscriber (ongoing payment)
 Norway	45 %	VG, Aftenposten, Dagbladet	1	50-55
 Sweden	30 %	Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter	1	50-55
 USA	21 %	New York Times, Washington Post	2	50-55
 Finland	20 %	Helsingin Sanomat, Aamulehti	1	45-50
 Netherlands	17 %	De Telegraaf, AD, Volkskrant	1	45-50
 Denmark	16 %	Berlingske, Politiken	1	55-60
 Ireland	16 %	Irish Times, Irish Independent	1	40-45
 Australia	13 %	Sydney Morning Herald, Herald Sun	1	50-55
 Canada	13 %	Globe & Mail, Toronto Star	1	50-55
 Italy	13 %	Corriere della Sera, La Repubblica	1	50-55
 Austria	12 %	Kronen Zeitung, Der Standard	1	45-50
 Spain	12 %	El País, El Mundo, elDiario.es	1	40-45
 France	11 %	Le Monde, Mediapart	1	45-50
 Germany	9 %	Bild, Der Spiegel	1	45-50
 UK	8 %	Times, Guardian, Telegraph	1	50-55

Q7_subs_name. You said you have paid a subscription/membership to one or more digital news services in the last year... Please enter the name of the news subscription you value most, followed by your supplementary subscriptions? Base: All that paid for a subscription/membership to a digital news service in the last year: Range: UK = 125 to Norway = 656

One striking finding from our survey this year is the difference in contribution made by local and regional publications across countries. In Norway, 57% of subscribers pay for one or more local outlets in digital form. This compares with 23% in the United States, but just 3% in the United Kingdom.

Co-author Rasmus Kleis Nielsen says:

“Subscriptions are beginning to work for some publishers but it won’t work for all publishers and most importantly, it won’t work for all consumers. Many people don’t wish to be tied to one or two news sites or apps, others don’t find the product worth the price. Given abundant access to free news,

publishers will need to develop compelling options to bundle publications or more ways of paying a smaller amount for limited access for payment to become a mass phenomenon.”

Misinformation and COVID-19

Concern about misinformation remains high, with 58% of our global sample expressing concern about what is true or false on the internet when it comes to news.

More respondents said they had seen more misinformation about coronavirus than any other subject, including politics. They expressed most concern about the role played by politicians in spreading inaccurate or misleading information about COVID-19, followed by ordinary people, activists and journalists. Concern was even higher in Brazil (41%) where President Jair Bolsonaro has made many false claims about the pandemic.

Proportion that say they are most concerned about spreading false or misleading information about COVID-19

All markets



Q_FAKE_NEWS_2021b. Thinking specifically about COVID-19 and its effects, which of the following, if any, are you most concerned about online? False or misleading information from... *Base: Total sample in all markets = 93,372.*

When it comes to the spread of false information about COVID-19 through online channels, respondents in many countries were most worried about Facebook. However, in parts of the Global South, such as Brazil, Mexico, Malaysia and Chile, people say they are more concerned about closed messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram. This is a particular worry because false information tends to be less visible and harder to counter in these private networks.

A vote of confidence in impartial news

The growth of online and social media has in some cases encouraged the growth of news organisations and individuals that take more overtly partisan positions than in the past. But survey evidence, backed up by qualitative interviews in four countries, shows that the public still strongly supports the ideals of impartial and objective news, while recognising that they themselves are sometimes drawn to more opinionated and less balanced content.

Across countries, most respondents (74%) say they still prefer news that reflects a range of views and lets *them* decide what to think. Most also think that news outlets should try to be neutral on every issue (66%), though some younger groups think that ‘impartiality’ may not be appropriate or desirable in some cases – for example, on social justice issues.

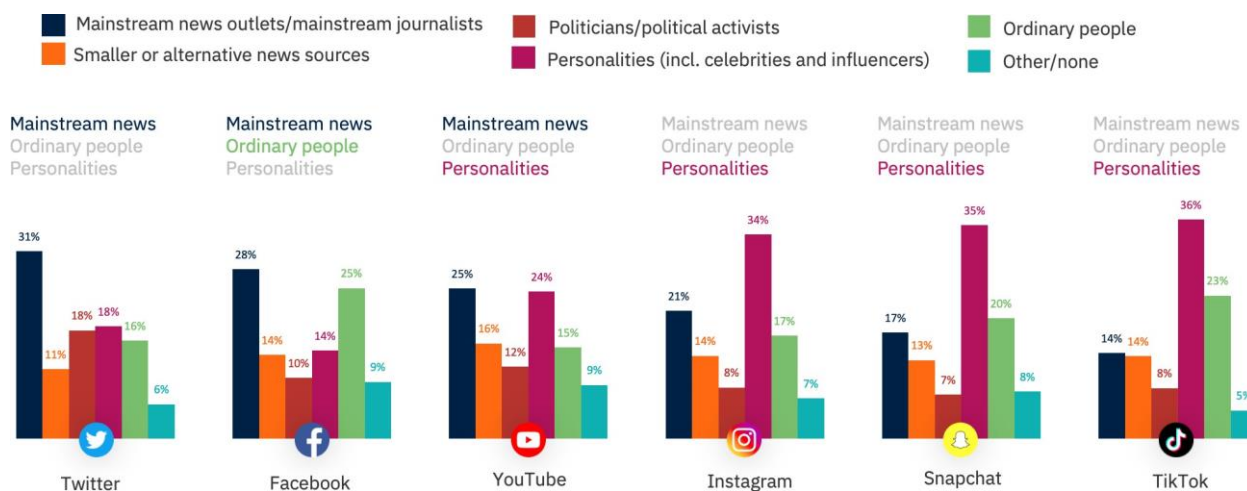
Younger audiences turn to new networks and listen to influencers

Across all markets, just a quarter (25%) prefer to start their news journeys with a website or app. Those aged 18–24 (so-called Generation Z) have an even weaker connection to traditional news sites and are almost twice as likely to prefer to access news via social media, aggregators, or mobile alerts.

Facebook has become significantly less relevant for news in the last year, while WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram have continued to attract more use, especially among the young. Coronavirus and Black Lives Matter have both galvanised the sharing of news-related posts in TikTok over the last year. The network has also been central to a wave of protests by younger people across the world, in countries such as Peru, Indonesia and Thailand. TikTok reaches 30% of our Thai sample, with 14% using it for news.

Who people pay most attention to when using each network for news

All markets



Q12_Social_sources. You said that you use <social platform> for news... When it comes to news on <social platform> which of these do you generally pay most attention to? *Base: All that use Twitter / Facebook / YouTube / Instagram / Snapchat / TikTok for news in all markets: 6,338 / 28,762 / 15,663 / 6,570 / 924 / 1,500.*

The report also shows how influencers play a much bigger role in TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram than in more traditional networks like Facebook and Twitter. Journalists have traditionally led the conversation in news-focused Twitter but struggle to attract attention in these newer networks compared with celebrities and other personalities.

Co-author Simge Andı says:

“The lack of strong journalistic presence could make those relying on these networks particularly vulnerable to misinformation. On the other hand,

news is largely incidental in these spaces and the expectations of snappy, visual, and entertaining content do not always come naturally to newsrooms staffed by senior journalists with a focus on traditional formats”

Other findings from the 2021 report

In the light of debates about diversity and inclusion, the report finds that in many cases young people (especially young women) and political partisans feel that media coverage is less fair to them than to other groups. In the United States three-quarters (75%) of those who self-identify on the right feel that media coverage of their views is unfair, compared with just a third of those on the left. Black Americans, Hispanic Americans and young women are also more likely to say media coverage is unfair.

The use of smartphones for news (73%) has grown, with dependence also growing through coronavirus lockdowns. Use of laptop and desktop computers and tablets for news is stable or falling, while the penetration of smart speakers remains limited in most countries – especially for news.

Growth in podcasts has slowed, in part due to the impact of restrictions on movement. Our data show Spotify continuing to gain ground over Apple and Google podcasts in a number of countries and YouTube also benefiting from the popularity of video-based and hybrid podcasts.

Methodology

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Survey conducted in 46 markets; United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Singapore, Australia, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Kenya and South Africa. Total sample size was 92,155 adults with around 2,000 per market (1,501 in Hong Kong). Fieldwork was undertaken at the end of January/start of February 2021.

The survey was carried out online. Samples were assembled using nationally representative quotas for age, gender, region in every market, and education in all markets except Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, Romania, South Africa, Thailand, and Turkey. In the US, UK, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Italy we have applied additional political quotas based on vote choice in the most recent national election. The data in all markets were also weighted to targets based on census/industry-accepted data.

Data from India, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa are representative of younger English-speakers and not the national population, because it is not possible to reach other groups in a representative way using an online survey. The survey was fielded in English in these markets, and restricted to ages 18 to 50 in Kenya and Nigeria. Findings should not be taken to be nationally representative in these countries.

More generally, online samples will tend to under-represent the news consumption habits of people who are older and less affluent, meaning online use is typically over-represented and traditional offline use under-represented.

Contact

For more information, interview requests or a copy of the full report, please contact **Eduardo Suárez** at eduardo.suarez@politics.ox.ac.uk or **Matthew Leake** at matthew.leake@politics.ox.ac.uk.

More information on the 2021 Digital News Report

The report can be found on our website <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/> from 23 June, including slide-packs, charts, and raw data tables, with a licence that encourages reuse. A description of the methodology is available along with the complete questionnaire.

Sponsors of this year's report include Google News Initiative, BBC News, Ofcom, Edelman UK, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), the Media Industry Research Foundation of Finland, the Fritt Ord Foundation in Norway, the Dutch Media Authority (CvdM), the Korea Press Foundation, the Open Society Foundations as well as our academic sponsors at the Leibniz Institute for Media Research/Hans Bredow Institute, Hamburg, the University of Navarra in Spain, the University of Canberra, the Centre d'études sur les médias, Quebec, Canada, and Roskilde University in Denmark. The Fundación Gabo is supporting the translation of the report into Spanish.

About the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism is dedicated to exploring the future of journalism worldwide. The Institute receives core funding from the Thomson Reuters Foundation and is based in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford. It was launched in November 2006 and developed from the Reuters Journalist Fellowship Programme, established at Oxford almost 40 years ago. See <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/>

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Dr Craig T. Robertson. Author, Research fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism whose interests include news trust and credibility, fact-checking and verification.

Prof. Rasmus Kleis Nielsen. Director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and Professor of Political Communication at the University of Oxford. His work focuses on changes in the news media, political communication, and the role of digital technologies in both.

About YouGov

YouGov is an international market research agency and pioneer of market research through online methods. YouGov has a panel of 15.8 million people worldwide, including 2.5 million in the UK representing all ages, socio-economic groups and other demographic types.