DIGITAL NEWS REPORT IRELAND 2023

Institiúid DCU um Meáin Todhchaí, Daonlathas agus Sochaí
DCU Institute of Future Media, Democracy and Society

University of Oxford
Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

Coimisiún na Meán

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Colleen Murrell, Kirsty Park,
David Robbins, Dawn Wheatley

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COIMISIÚN NA MEÁN FOREWORD

> *"In an era marked by the relentless surge of digital innovation and the profound impact it has on our media landscape, Coimisiún na Meán is honored to present the Digital News Report Ireland 2023, a comprehensive analysis of the state of digital news in Ireland."*
> – Chat GPT, in response to the command 'Write an opening sentence for Coimisiún na Mean's Foreword for the Digital News Report Ireland 2023.'

Without appropriate attribution, the opening sentence to this year's Digital News Report Ireland 2023, may raise a few eyebrows, not least due to the use of spelling uncommon on this side of the Atlantic. The overall sentiment of the sentence is accurate: like its predecessor the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), Coimisiún na Meán values the analysis provided by the Digital News Report Ireland and this year's report once again presents an excellent overview of how digital technology and trends continue to alter the shape of our Irish news media landscape. However, it is clear that the use of artificial intelligence presents a challenge in ensuring transparency and accuracy in news production, particularly when audiences are unaware of its presence and impact.

The Digital News Report does much more than that suggested by the AI tool. Now in its ninth year, the Irish report continues to give a detailed understanding of the who, the what, the how and even at times, the why, of news audiences and consumption in Ireland. The 2023 report indicates that, in general, levels of interest in news are high, and while overall news avoidance is retreating, patterns of selective news avoidance (on topics such as the war in Ukraine) are appearing. It is a familiar issue and one that was also highlighted in an earlier analysis of the Reuters data by Dr Dawn Wheatley, exploring migrant attitudes to news media in Ireland. This report, commissioned by the BAI and published earlier this year, is another example of the value of the inclusion of Ireland in the global Reuters research.

It is heartening to note that while trust in news has returned to pre-pandemic levels, it nevertheless remains high, and it's particularly encouraging to see high levels of trust in public service media and local radio.

In order to reflect some of the recommendations of last year's Future of Media Commission report, this year's respondents to the survey were asked to prioritise subjects for public interest journalism that might benefit from public funding. Climate change and environmental news emerged as the top priorities, with journalism for less well served communities such as the Irish Traveller Community, disabled audiences and immigrant communities coming in second. These types of insights are very valuable to An Coimisiún, particularly as we commence planning for new funding schemes for journalism.

Perhaps one of the most striking notes from this year's report, is that 'media should not give up on the youth'. Over the past nine years, the Digital News Report has documented how young audiences have flocked to online outlets offering different types of content, predominately targeting this age demographic. This year, this point is highlighted once again, in that 20% of Irish 18-24 year-olds report not being interested in news. Nonetheless, 77% of this age cohort are still extremely, very, or somewhat engaged with news and it will be important for news providers to continue to find novel ways to engage with this demographic.

On 15th March this year, Coimisiún na Meán was established as Ireland's new media regulator. In line with its statutory functions, the Commission is committed to ensuring a diverse, pluralistic and safe media environment, including the provision of a mix of voices, opinions, and media sources for Irish audiences. An Coimisiún will publish its first work plan in June 2023 and will set out its priorities up until February 2024, by which time the Digital Services Act (DSA) takes effect, and an Coimisiún will be joined by Ireland's Digital Services Commissioner.

One of the tasks of an Coimisiún under the DSA will be to minimise the effects of disinformation in Ireland and across Europe. It is likely that the strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation (COP) will play a central role in this regard, and Coimisiún na Meán hopes to build on the COP monitoring work already undertaken by its predecessor, the BAI, since the Code was first introduced in 2018. An Coimisiún is actively contributing to preparatory work being undertaken on the new European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) which is set to introduce protections for a range of players in the media sector. Finally, An Coimisiún looks forward also to continuing to deliver appropriate and meaningful research, such as the Reuters Digital News Report, to assist An Coimisiún in delivering one of its core statutory objectives of ensuring a diverse and pluralistic media landscape in Ireland.

On behalf of Coimisiún na Meán, I would like to take this opportunity to thank sincerely our partners at DCU Institute for Future Media and Democracy (FuJo) for their continued diligence and commitment to the publication of the Digital News Report Ireland. A special thanks to the researchers at FuJo, including Professor Colleen Murrell, Dr Kirsty Park, Dr Dave Robbins and Dr Dawn Wheatley, whose detailed analysis and insight make this report an essential read for anyone working in the news media in Ireland.

Celene Craig
Broadcasting Commissioner
Coimisiún na Meán

DCU FUJO FOREWORD

By Prof Colleen Murrell

Welcome to the 9th Digital News Report Ireland (2023), which gathers together and analyses the latest information regarding the nation's evolving media landscape. This is part of the global Reuters Digital News Report which is in its 12th year and is the largest, ongoing study of digital news consumption, taking in 46 countries.

2023 finds Ireland, like many countries in Europe, battling with an ongoing cost-of-living crisis, caused in large part by the continuing war in Ukraine and the high cost of food, gas and electricity supplies. Instability in the world's financial markets is adding to generalised worries about finding money for the essentials in life. Set against this backdrop, paying for newspapers, or taking out digital subscriptions may seem like a luxury.

In 2021 when the Covid-19 pandemic was still raging, people showed a markedly raised interest in news media, whether on television, radio or online. This spike appears to be over, and our data demonstrate a return to a pre-pandemic situation. Also, trust in media has fallen but is comparable to our 2019 figures. What we are seeing now, following on from 2022, is a distinct case of selective news avoidance among some of the population – in particular regarding news about Ukraine, Covid-19/health but also regarding other more surprising subjects.

In this report we cover some of the areas that we have always covered – related to people's media habits, the sources they seek out, the devices and gateways they use to access media, and which media brands they consume and/or trust. This year we have added a separate section related to the financial impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

We have broken down some of the Irish data to compare ourselves to Europe, the UK, and the US. We have also examined cases of difference between men and women and between the 18-24-year-old cohort and those who are 65+. This helps our understanding of the major fault lines between people who grew up with traditional media and the younger generation, who are now following social media much more closely than they are other forms of media.

The report also incorporates six essays on issues relevant to Ireland and connected to the report. Four are written by DCU researchers from FuJo: Prof Colleen Murrell, Dr Dawn Wheatley, Associate Prof David Robbins, and Dr Kirsty Park. We also have essays by Brian O'Donovan, the Technology Correspondent for RTÉ, and Reuters lead researcher Nic Newman.

We would like to thank our sponsors Coimisiún na Meán (Ireland's Media Commission), in particular our collaborators for the past few years Deborah Molloy Bergin, Stephanie Comey and Ciarán Kissane. We would also like to thank our colleagues at the Reuters Institute: Nic Newman, Prof Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Dr Richard Fletcher, and Dr Craig Robertson. As university researchers we are all active members of the FuJo Institute at DCU, and we extend our thanks to its director Prof Jane Suiter.

METHODOLOGY

- The global Reuters Digital News Report was commissioned by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. Here in Ireland the researchers from Dublin City University have regular input into the topics surveyed in the report and we analyse the data that are specific to Ireland, and to our selected comparative markets.

- The global report survey was conducted by YouGov using an online questionnaire at the end of January/beginning of February 2023. In Ireland 2035 people were surveyed using representative quotas for age, gender, region, and educational level. The data were weighted to targets based on census/industry accepted data.

- A repoll was conducted in Ireland in late March 2023 as YouGov missed a brand in the 'reach numbers offline'. We have only used the repolled data to deliver a number for the specific missing brand. All other numbers are taken from the January/February poll.

- This year instead of comparing ourselves with the EU market, we now compare ourselves to the same 'Europe' category as in the global report, meaning the 24 countries sampled by YouGov, including countries such as Norway and the UK.

- For comparison between 2022 and 2023, we have extracted the Europe data rather than the EU category data so that the comparison is straightforward. If data are used from pre-2022, then the comparison involves EU countries.

- We have also decided to change from a comparison with North America to a comparison with the US by itself. We felt that the North America data were diluted in some topics by having Canada in the equation. Once again for easy comparison with 2022, we have extracted the US data rather than the North American data so that the comparison is straightforward. If data are from pre-2022, then the comparison involves North America.

- Regarding this type of polling, it should be noted that online samples 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 is under-represented. Our data are representative of the 92% online population.

- The use of a non-probability sampling approach means that it is not possible to compute a conventional 'margin of error' for individual data points. However, differences of +/-2 percentage points (pp) or fewer are unlikely to be statistically significant and should be interpreted with a high degree of caution. The same applies to tiny changes over time.

- It should also be remembered that surveys capture people's self-reported behaviour, which does not always reflect people's actual behaviour due to biases and imperfect recall. Some of our survey-based results will not match other industry data, which are often based on different methodologies, such as web tracking.

AUTHORSHIP AND RESEARCH ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Prof Colleen Murrell works at DCU's School of Communications. She teaches broadcast journalism and researches global newsgathering, transnational broadcasting, and digital and social media news. Prior to DCU she was an academic in Australia and before that she worked as a senior journalist for a number of international media companies including the BBC, ITN, and Associated Press.

Dr Kirsty Park is a post-doctoral researcher at DCU's Institute for Future Media, Democracy and Society (FuJo) and the Disinformation Lead at the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) Ireland Hub. Her research focuses on political communication, disinformation trends and platform regulation.

Dr David Robbins is an associate professor of journalism in the School of Communications at DCU. He is the founding director of the DCU Centre for Climate and Society. Before coming to DCU, David worked as a senior journalist and ministerial adviser.

Dr Dawn Wheatley is an assistant professor in the School of Communications in DCU, focusing on journalism, social media, and political communication. She worked as a production journalist in national newspapers before turning to academic research and teaching. Dawn is particularly interested in sources and diversity of voices in the news, journalistic reporting practices, and audience customisation habits on social and mobile media.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By Prof Colleen Murrell, Dr Kirsty Park, Dr David Robbins, and Dr Dawn Wheatley

How we access and engage with news in Ireland is constantly evolving. Some of these changes have been happening steadily over time, such as the move from printed newspapers to online and social media. Other factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, fragmenting online audiences and platform disruption are now speeding up some of these changes. The connection between media and audiences is less secure and the abundance of entertainment choices weakens loyalty.

Below you will see evidence that there is less interest in news, and there is also selective news avoidance. As these issues play out, we see a real age divide between older groups who favour traditional media news sources and younger age groups who turn first to social media as news sources. The importance of this annual Reuters news survey is that it enables media companies to examine and react to these trends to ensure that Ireland's population can continue to access informative and trustworthy media.

At the back of the Irish report, you will find essays on the following topics:

- The impact tech job losses, by RTÉ's Brian O'Donovan
- News podcasting, and making them pay, by Reuters researcher Nic Newman
- Limited participation with the news on social media, by Dr Dawn Wheatley, DCU & FUJo
- The twilight of print, by Prof Colleen Murrell, DCU & FuJo
- Climate change reporting, by Associate Professor David Robbins, DCU & FuJo
- AI and the future of news, by Dr Kirsty Park, DCU & FuJo

Here are some of the report's major findings:

- Irish consumers' interest in news, while remaining relatively high, has fallen. The categories of 'extremely interested' and 'very interested' in news peaked during 2021 (70%) in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic but have since fallen 13pp in 2022 and a further 5pp in 2023 (52%). The 'somewhat interested' category shows a growing number are engaged at some level (37%), but this more nonchalant view reflects examples of selective avoidance of news seen in the report.

- The differences here between those aged 18–24 and the 65+ group could not be starker. In the 'extremely interested' and 'very interested' in news categories, young people register only 28%, whereas in 2016 they registered 53%. In 2023 those aged 65+ register 69%.

- Fewer Irish participants are 'often or sometimes' avoiding news in 2023 (34%), down 7pp from last year. It is possible that the dragged-out nature of Covid-19 into 2022 may have been the peak of news avoidance (41%). However, more 'occasionally' avoid the news (+7pp). Most of the people who avoid news do so by scrolling past it or changing channels. They also avoid specific news topics or news sources and turn off their news notifications.

- For those Irish consumers who are avoiding news, top of the list of topics for avoidance are the war in Ukraine (41%), followed by social justice news (32%). Further down the list sits health news including Covid-19 (26%), and climate change and environmental news (21%).

- Almost half of Irish news consumers (47%) either 'strongly agree' or 'tend to agree' with the statement that they can trust most of the news most of the time. This figure has fallen 5pp from a high in 2022, back at its pre-pandemic levels. Ireland compares favourably with the UK (32%), the US (31%) and Europe (40%). Irish men (18-24) are the most distrustful of news with only 31% saying they agree with the above statement, but men aged 65+ are more trusting (63%).

- This year, RTÉ News retains its place as the most trusted news brand in Ireland, with 71% saying they trust the public service news organisation. The Irish Times is the most trusted newspaper brand, with 70%. Irish news consumers show high levels of trust in local media - both radio (70%) and newspapers (68%). BBC News scores 68% and the Irish Independent 67%.

- Worries about misinformation and disinformation are growing. Concern about what is real and what is fake on the internet is comparatively high in Ireland (64%), up +6pp since last year. This compares with 50% in the rest of Europe. Meanwhile, the level of concern is at 64% in the US and is highest in the UK at 69%.

- Respondents' main sources of news are still television and online (excluding social media) which both sit at 32%. Television is down 9pp from the height of Covid-19 lockdowns in 2021, when viewing numbers surged as people sat on their sofas night after night. Social media overall is back up to 20% after falling in 2021 to 16%. Radio sits at 11% and printed newspapers at 5%.

- For 18–24-year-olds social media is the most important source of news at 39%, followed by online (excluding social media) at 31%. For these 'social natives', TV sits at 18%, radio at 5% and printed newspapers at 5%.

- When looking at social media use for news specifically, we can see that for Facebook and WhatsApp, usage peaks among those who are 25-54, with lower levels on either side of those age bands. Instead, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat, and Reddit are used as a source of news most by those under 25, but Twitter has a relatively even spread across ages, suggesting its news content holds broad generational appeal.

- The messaging app WhatsApp remains dominant (72%) in the category of 'social media used for any reason this year'. It has seen an increase of +2pp over the past year, continuing its steady growth since 2020. In contrast Facebook is down -2pp (61%) and Facebook Messenger is down -5pp (38%), but Facebook remains the most used site for hosting a personal profile with almost two-thirds of the population engaged with it. Instagram has seen growth from 2022 +2pp (43%), but it is TikTok that is showing the biggest increase +5pp (24%), with a quarter of Irish respondents now using the platform, up from just 7% in 2020.

- Smartphone use to access news has levelled off this year, down 5pp to 67% but it is still by far the most used device for this purpose. The percentage of people going directly to a news website (41%) is also down -4pp compared to last year, with consumers increasingly accessing news indirectly via social media (38%) or via search engines.

- Listening to podcasts remains a very popular pastime in Ireland (44%), compared to the US (41%), Europe (34%) and the UK (30%). The most popular category of podcasts for Irish listeners is lifestyle podcasts (19%), followed by 'specialist subjects' (17%). These two subjects were particularly popular among 18–24-year-olds, with lifestyle at 32% and specialist subjects at 30%. Podcasts about news, politics and international events are up 1pp overall (14%).

- Only a quarter of Irish people (25%) agree that it is better to have a human editor/journalist select or curate what they consume, while 31% believe that it is better to see news selected by an algorithm, based on their viewing history and preferences. Interestingly however, more than half of Irish news consumers (53%) 'strongly agree' or 'tend to agree' that personalised news may cause them to miss important news stories, while 51% are 'very' or 'somewhat' concerned about encountering only those viewpoints which accord with their own.

- RTÉ is the most popular digital brand (and offline brand), and the size of its digital audience indicates that one in four people (24%) are consuming the public service broadcaster's content online. Most outlets are down between 1-3pp over the past year, apart from the BBC and the Irish Mirror online, which remain steady. Sky News is the only brand to show any increase (+1pp) in digital audiences over the past 12 months.

- In Ireland the percentage of respondents paying for news subscriptions overall is down -1pp, a tie with Europe (15%). Looking back over recent years, Ireland's numbers had been going up slowly since 2019 when those subscribing constituted just 12%. The percentage subscribing in the UK remains low at 9% but is back to its 2019 level. The highest percentage of paid subscribers in Ireland are the 25-34 year olds (21%). Next is the younger cohort (19%).

- The Irish Times (41%) and the Irish Independent (32%) top the poll of publications attracting subscriptions/memberships. Interestingly after these two Irish publications come a set of outlets headquartered abroad: the Guardian (14%) and the New York Times (14%) tied, as did the Times/Sunday Times (10%), and the Daily Telegraph (10%), followed by the Economist (8%).

- The top reasons that would encourage people to take out a subscription are better pricing (24%), more value – for example being able to access more than one website with one payment (17%) and making the content more interesting or relevant (15%).

- Respondents were asked to rate the importance of publicly funded news services for both themselves personally and then for society. Interestingly more people think it is 'quite' or 'very' important for society (58%) than they think it is for themselves (48%).

- Fewer Irish respondents say they are 'extremely' or 'very interested' in politics (31%), down 9pp from 2019. On the other hand, the middle ground remains similar with 37% of respondents saying they are 'somewhat interested in politics'.

- Irish news consumers are more wary about discussing political events or issues online than their counterparts in the US, UK, and Europe. Over half of Irish respondents (51%) say they are careful about what they say in political discussions on social networks or messaging groups, compared to 37% in the UK, 49% in the US, and 47% in Europe.

- Climate change and environment news topped the poll (44%) of subjects seen as worthy of extra government resourcing. In second place were 'less well served groups' (33%) such as the Irish Traveller community, immigrant communities and the disabled audience. Local council meetings came in at 31% and courts coverage (22%) was next. Courts coverage is about to be improved through a financial grant scheme managed by Coimisiún Na Meán.

- Questions about the cost-of-living crisis were included this year as contextual information shedding a light on media issues. Ireland tops the poll in our comparative media markets with 83% of respondents saying they had been affected 'a great deal' and 'somewhat' by the crisis. In these combined categories Europe is -5pp lower (78%), the US is -4pp lower (79%) and the UK (72%) is -11pp lower than Ireland. The highest number of Irish respondents who said they had been affected 'a great deal' were the 45-54 cohort and 55–64-year-olds (42%).

- In Ireland the highest percentage of respondents (46%) chose mainstream media as a source of information on personal finances and the wider economy. After that they chose family, friends of colleagues (42%). Some way behind came 'experts with an independent public profile' (22%); specialist business or financial websites/magazines (20%) and social media came in last at 15%.

- Women said they found understanding the economy 'somewhat' or 'very' difficult (37%), compared to men (22%).

01

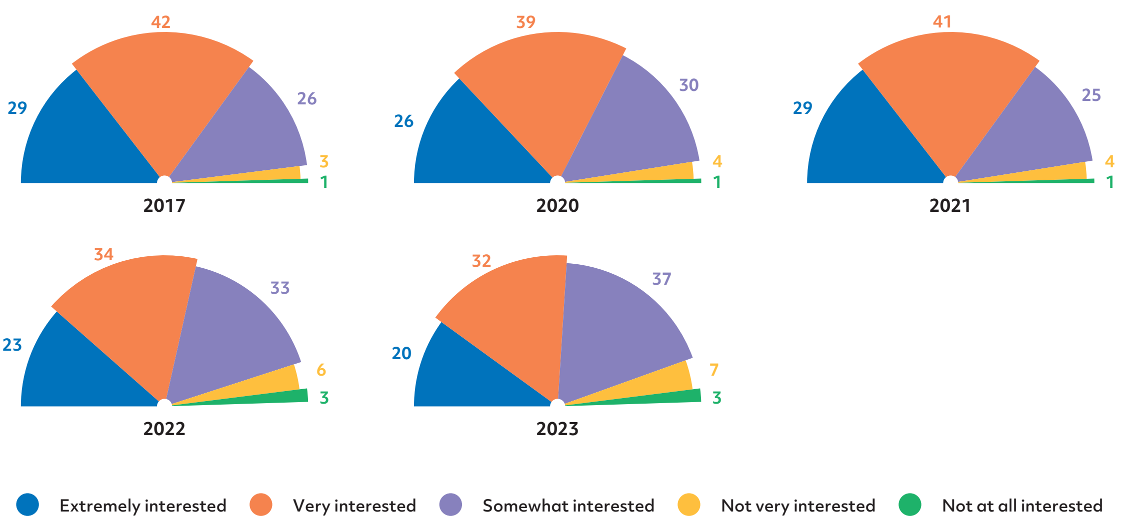
IRISH NEWS CONSUMERS

This section examines Irish news consumers, assessing their interest and engagement in news and technology.

This section documents the frequency of access to news and the reasons some consumers choose to avoid the news.

This section also asks how people define themselves politically.

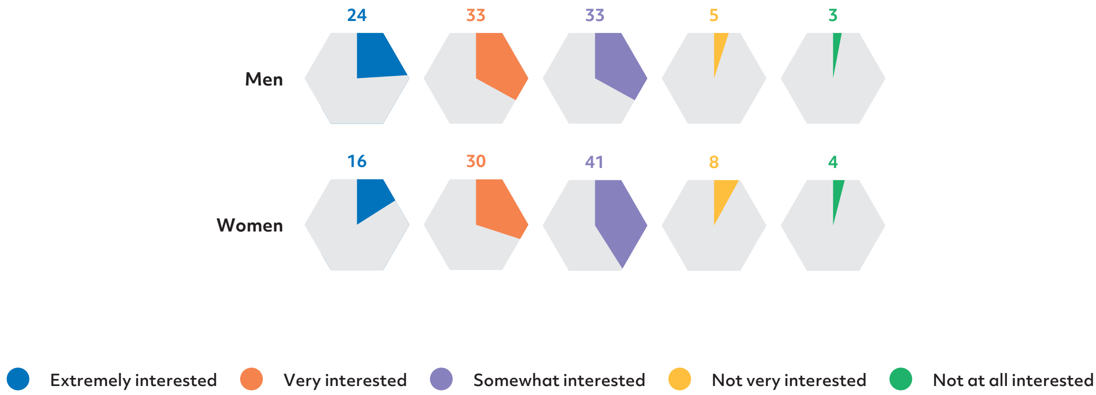
FIG 1: INTEREST IN NEWS



Q. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news?

This chart shows that Irish consumers' interest in news since 2017 remains relatively high, but has fallen. The categories of 'extremely interested' and 'very interested' in news peaked during 2021 (70%) in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic but have since decreased in 2022 (57%) and 2023 (52%). The 'somewhat interested' category shows a growing number are still engaged at some level, but this rather nonchalant view of news reflects increases in avoidance and selective avoidance seen elsewhere in the report. This category has grown from 25% in 2021, to 33% in 2022 and now to 37% in 2023. It is important also to note that the number of those who are 'not very interested' or 'not at all interested' is small but has more than doubled since 2017 to 10% in 2023. Overall, the bigger shift happened in 2022 when interest in Covid-19 news morphed into a reaction away from too much glum news. NB the 2020 data were collected pre-Covid (in January and February) and so do not reflect the start of the coronavirus pandemic that year.

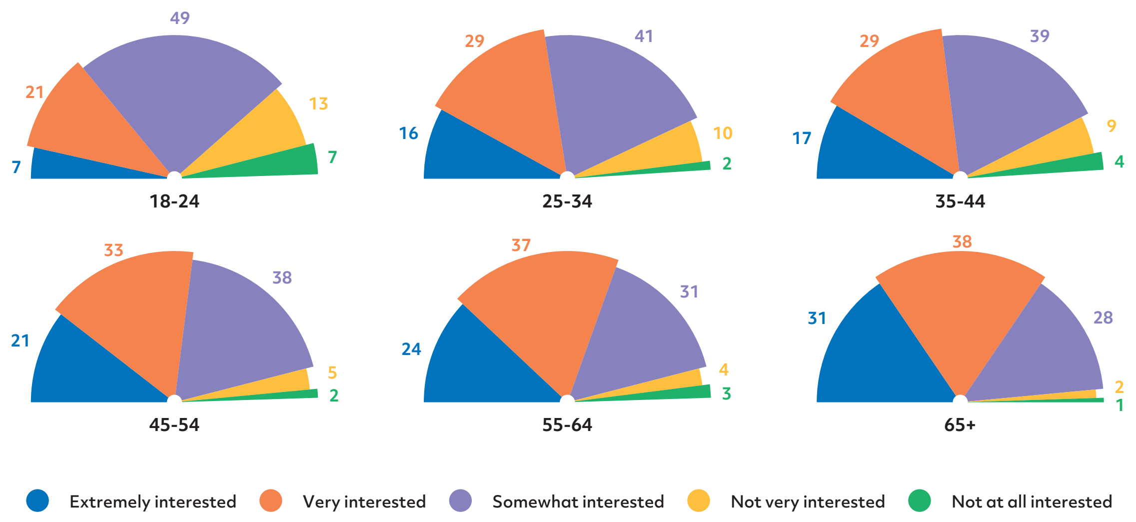
FIG 2: INTEREST IN NEWS BY GENDER



Q: How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news?

There is a fairly significant difference between men and women in terms of the 'extremely' and 'very interested' combined categories of news – with men registering 57% and women 46%. In 2022 women showed 12pp more interest than men in news about Covid-19, an issue that had largely disappeared from the headlines by early 2023. Women score highly in the 'somewhat interested in news' category, which shows engagement but not fascination.

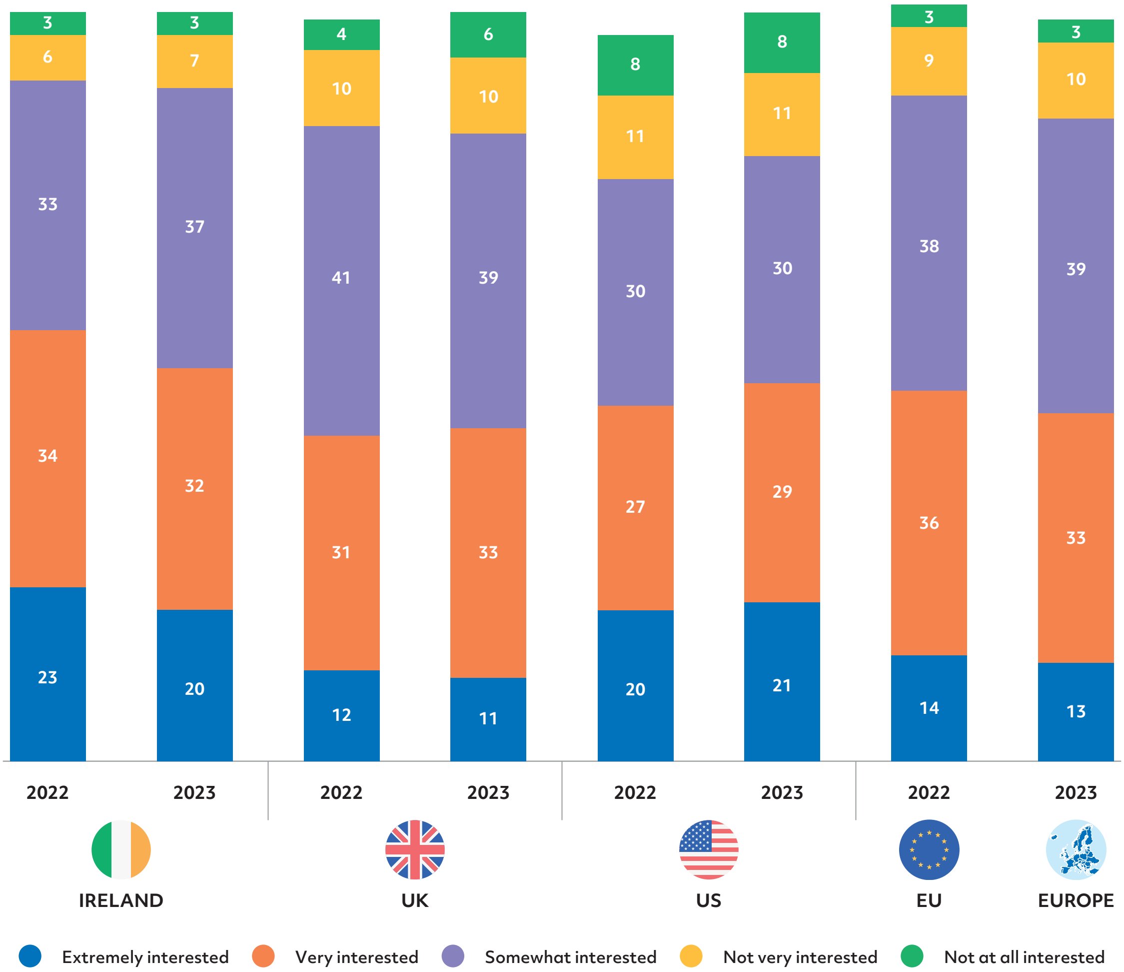
FIG 3: INTEREST IN NEWS BY AGE



Q: How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news?

The differences between the 18–24 year-olds and those aged 65+ could not be starker. In the 'extremely interested' and 'very interested' news categories, young people register only 28%, while the 65+ register 69%. Back in 2016, the 18-24 year old cohort registered 53% in these combined categories. Nonetheless the media should not give up on youth as the combination of the three categories of 'extremely, very and somewhat interested' in news shows that the 18–24 year olds are still 77% engaged with news at some level. However, there is also a growing number of young people who are 'not very' or 'not at all interested in news'. In 2016 this number was 7%, and now in 2023 it is 20%. For these two categories amongst the slightly older category of 25–34-year-olds the numbers changed from 3% to 12%. These findings prompt the question - how do news companies compete against the plethora of online entertainment offerings specifically aimed at younger people?

FIG 4: INTEREST IN NEWS INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

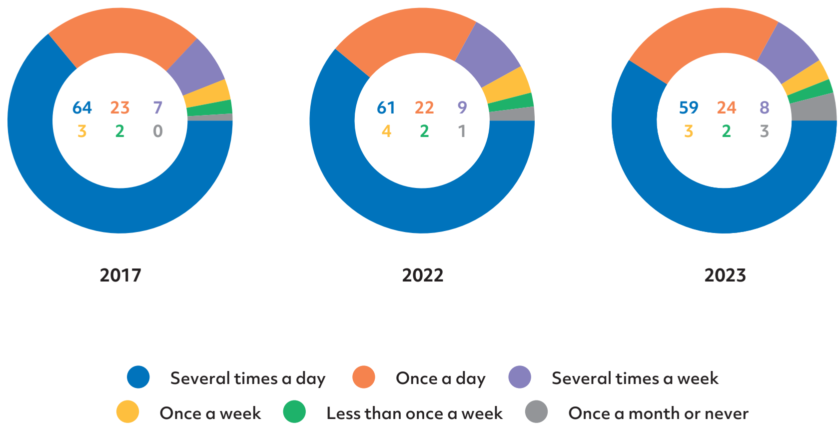


Q. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in news?

This chart shows that Ireland ranks the highest in this international comparison when you combine the categories of 'extremely and 'very interested in news' – at 52%. In these categories the UK shows 44%, the US shows 50% and Europe shows 46%. If we look at the 'not very interested' and 'not at all interested in news' categories, we can see the UK is at 16%, Europe shows 13% and Ireland 10%, while - most strikingly - almost a fifth of the US population (19%) show a complete lack of interest".

**NB Please note: In analysing our survey results, we sometimes compare the Irish findings to results from three other media markets. In 2023 we have two changes to the way data are categorised. Firstly, Reuters the international project managers have decided to change the 'EU category' into one called 'Europe', meaning all countries in Europe covered by the Reuters Digital News Report. We have used 'Europe' data for 2022, and so where we compare to last year, it is a correct comparison of like with like. Here in Ireland, we have also decided to switch from a comparison with 'North America' to one with just the 'US'. As we also have the data for 2022 for the US by itself, we have used that category for comparisons with last year. We feel that this change will allow us to see more clearly the media landscape in the US when Canada is not included as a dilution factor.

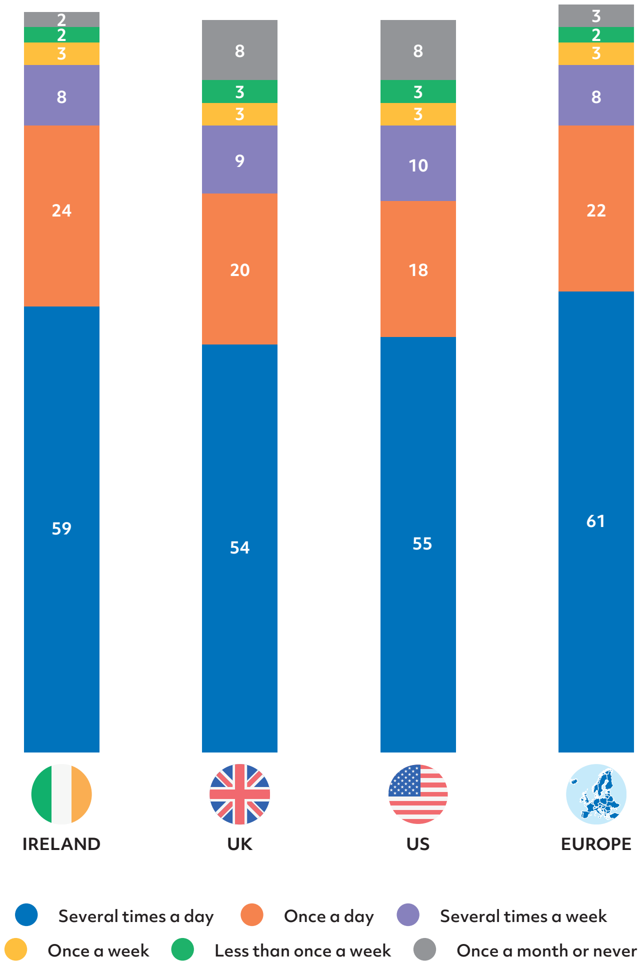
FIG 5: FREQUENCY OF ACCESS NEWS



Q. Typically, how often do you access news? By 'news' we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online).

This chart is fairly stable from 2017 through to 2023. There is a slight increase from last year in the number who say they only access news 'once a month or never' (+2pp) and a decrease in those who access news 'several times a day' (-2pp). If you combine the daily news users' two categories (several times a day and once a day) then the numbers show that there were 87% in 2017; which fell to 83% in 2022 and has remained the same for 2023 at 83%. In fact, the most recent year in which people accessed news more often on a daily basis was 2021, at the height of Covid-19 news (86%).

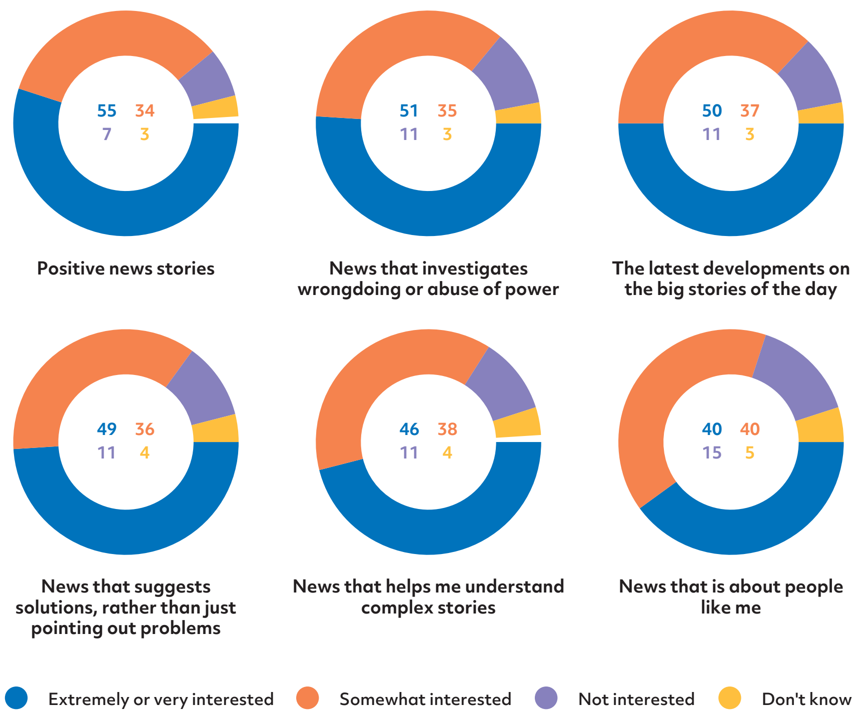
FIG 6: FREQUENCY OF ACCESS TO NEWS INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON



Q. Typically, how often do you access news? By 'news' we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform (radio, TV, newspaper or online).

This chart shows that Ireland is tied with the European average for the percentage of daily accessors of news (83%). These numbers are the same as the previous year but are down for Ireland from the height of Covid-19 when daily users numbered 86%. The 2023 daily user numbers are trailed by some distance by the UK (74%) and the US (73%). These two countries also have the highest percentage of people saying that they access news 'once a month or never' at 8%, compared to Ireland (2%) and Europe (3%).

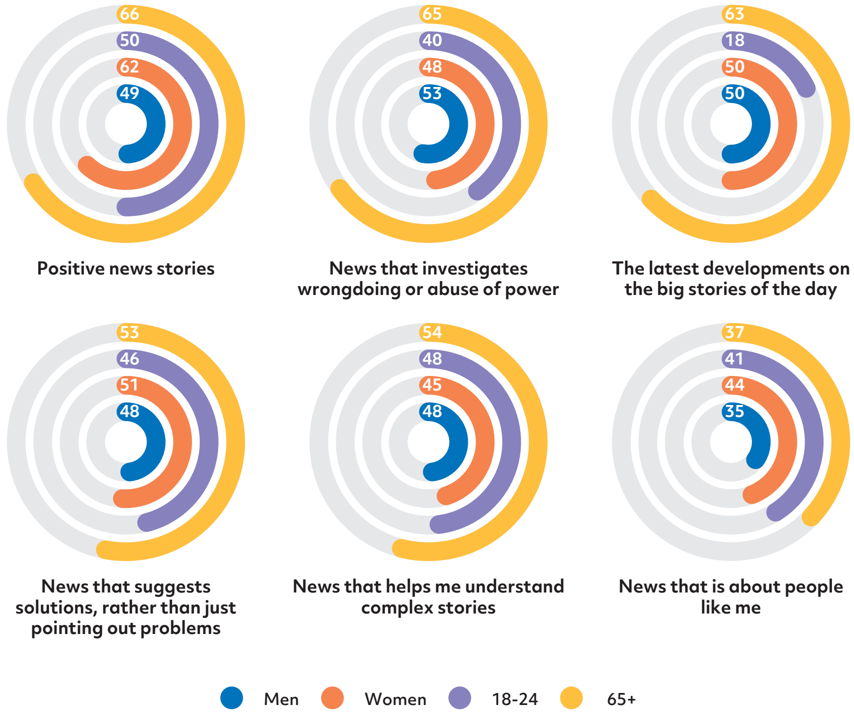
FIG 7: INTEREST IN TYPES OF NEWS



Q: How interested are you, if at all, in the following types of news?

What this chart shows us is that after the horrors of the global pandemic, a large majority of survey participants (89%) say they are 'extremely, very or somewhat interested' in reading some positive news stories in their daily news diets. After that, the next four percentages are very close: Readers would like to see news that investigates wrongdoing or abuse of power (86%); the 'latest developments' on big stories (87%); 'Solutions journalism' (85%), with consumers wanting changes proposed. and news that helps audiences better understand complex stories - often called 'explainers' (84%). Finally, 'news about people like me' (80%) demonstrates that people want to see themselves and their peers reflected in coverage.

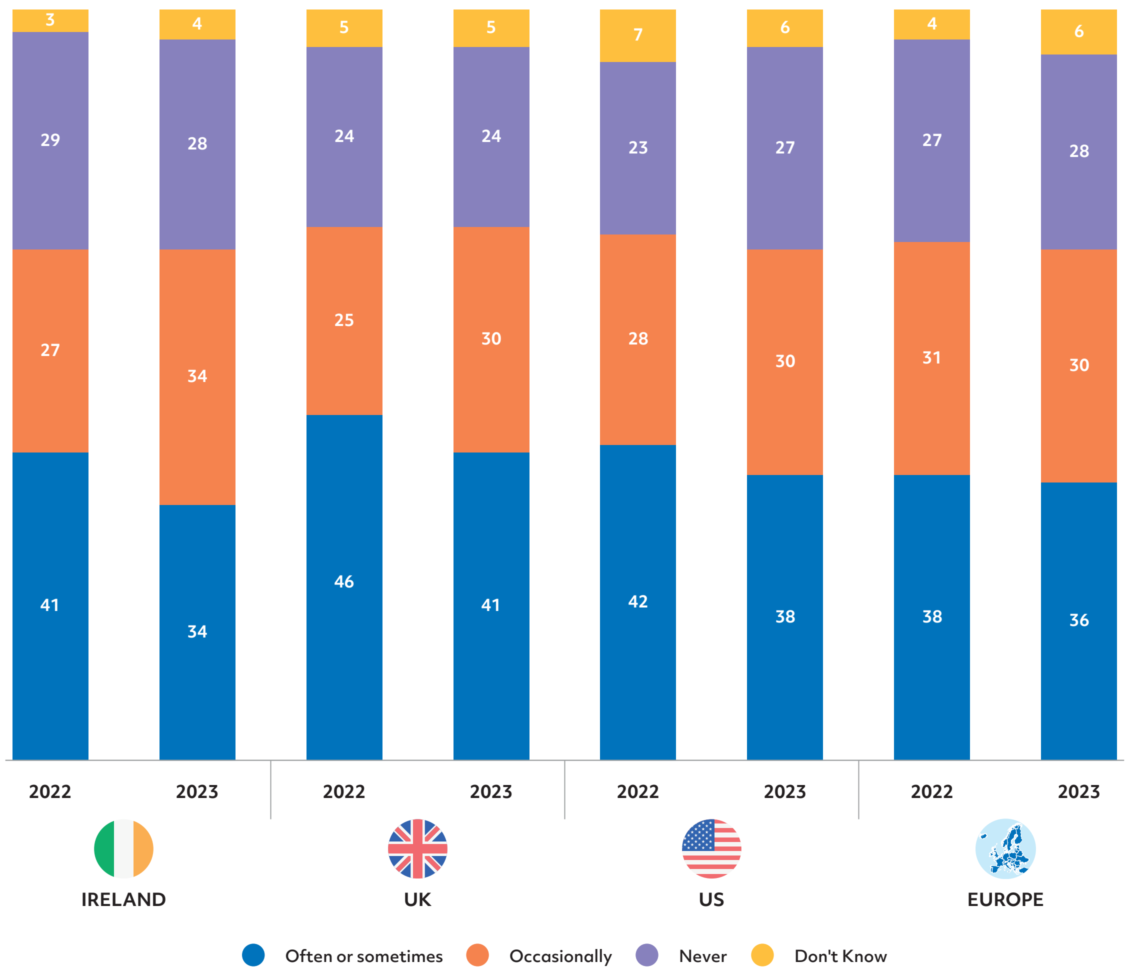
FIG 8: EXTREMELY OR VERY INTERESTED IN TYPES OF NEWS



Q: How interested are you, if at all, in the following types of news?

When you take the top two cohorts from the preceding chart, 'people who are extremely or very interested in [different] types of news' – and break them down by gender and by age, you find the following: Women (62%) are much more interested in positive news than men (49%). Positive news is also appreciated more by the older age group of 65+ (66%) than the youngest cohort of 18-24 year-olds (50%). The 65+ age group is also much more in favour of news that investigates wrongdoing (65%) than the 18-24 year-olds (40%). The other major difference to pick out here concerns news updates, with the 65+ category very keen on knowing the latest news (63%) and the younger cohort simply not very bothered (18%).

FIG 9: INTERNATIONAL NEWS AVOIDANCE



Q. Do you find yourself actively trying to avoid news these days?

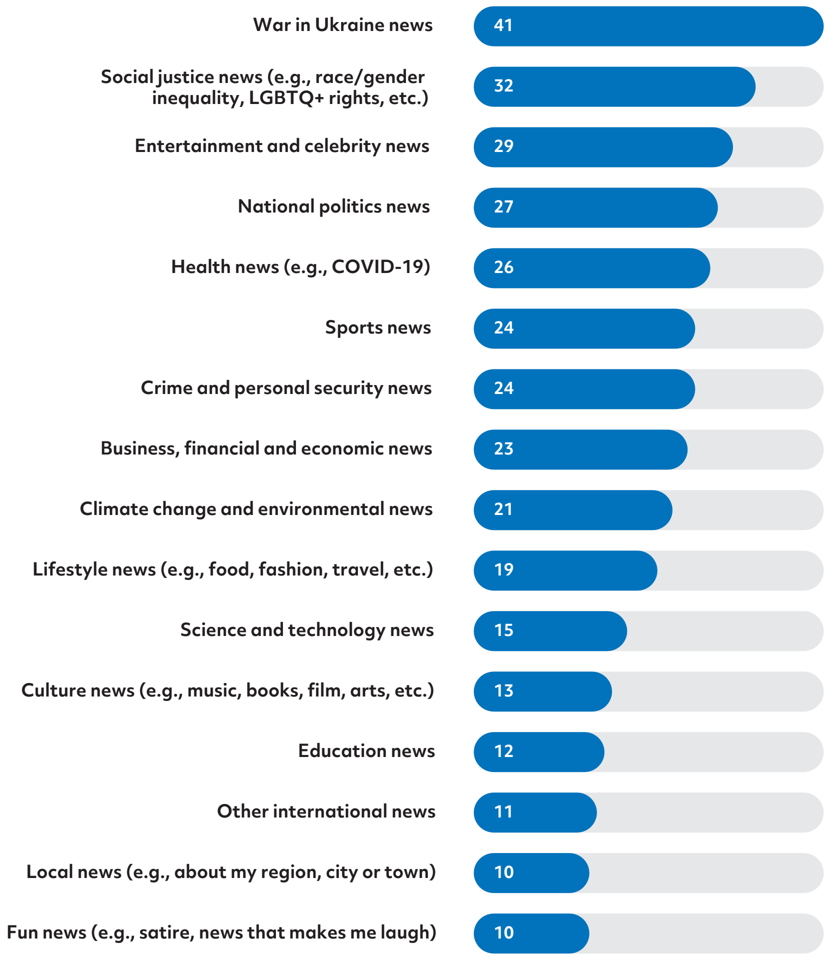
In this international comparison we can see that fewer Irish participants are 'often or sometimes' avoiding news in 2023 (34%) - down 7pp from last year. It is possible that the dragged-out nature of Covid-19 into 2022 may have been the peak of news avoidance. However, more 'occasionally' avoid the news (+7pp). Interestingly, across all four markets the numbers of 'often or sometimes' avoiders are down this year. Possibly there is less volume of the kinds of news they were avoiding in 2022. This would be the case if they were avoiding stories on health/Covid-19".

FIG 10: WAYS PEOPLE AVOID NEWS

Q. You said that you try to actively avoid news. Which of the following, if any, do you do? Please select all that apply.

This chart reveals how people avoid news by steering clear of its sources, websites or locations or by visiting those sources less often. The largest group of people admit to ignoring or scrolling past news or changing the channel when it's on news (28%). This constitutes a more decisive action of switching off media than simply being a passive avoider. Next comes checking news sources less often (27%) and avoiding specific topics (26%). Avoiding certain sources of news (24%) means knowing where news can be found, (whether traditional media or online media), but choosing not to visit these sites/outlets. This is very similar to those who avoid places or situations where news might appear (10%) People these days are glued to their phones, so turning off/ reducing news notifications (21%) means they can keep using their phones without being distracted by breaking news or updates. Giving yourself a better work-life and sleep balance may be behind those who cut out news at particular times of the day (16%). If the news might be grim, people may feel it might be better not to read it before going to bed. And finally, prioritising activities that don't involve news (16%) enables the person to opt in to other activities.

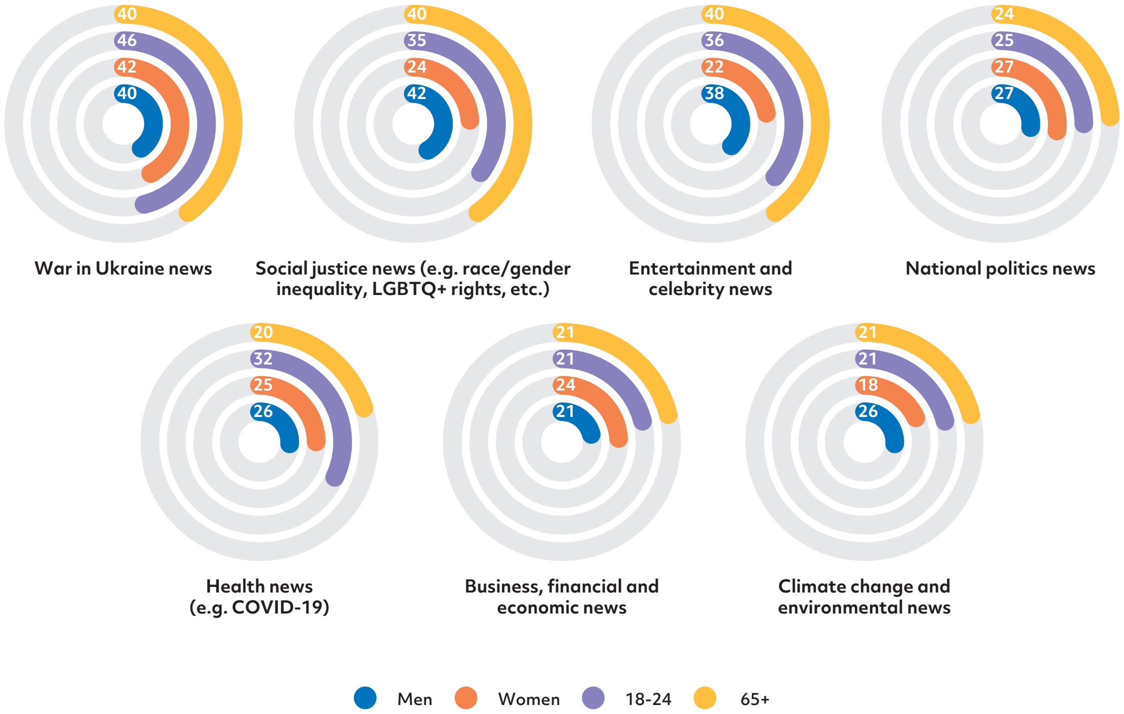
FIG 11: TOPICS OF NEWS AVOIDANCE



Q. You said that you try to actively avoid specific news topics. Which of the following news topics are you trying to avoid? Please select all that apply.

For those who have elected to avoid news in some manner, finding out why offers up some sobering information. Here survey participants were encouraged to choose as many topics as they wanted. After more than a year of grim news concerning the Russian attack on Ukraine, by far the topic most want to avoid is news concerning the 'war in Ukraine' (41%). This is followed by 'social justice news - including race/gender inequality, and LGBTQ+ rights etc (32%). The third category was perhaps most surprising: 'entertainment and celebrity news' (29%) followed by one that will make politicians unhappy – national political news (27%). And coming in fifth spot is health news – including Covid-19 news (26%).

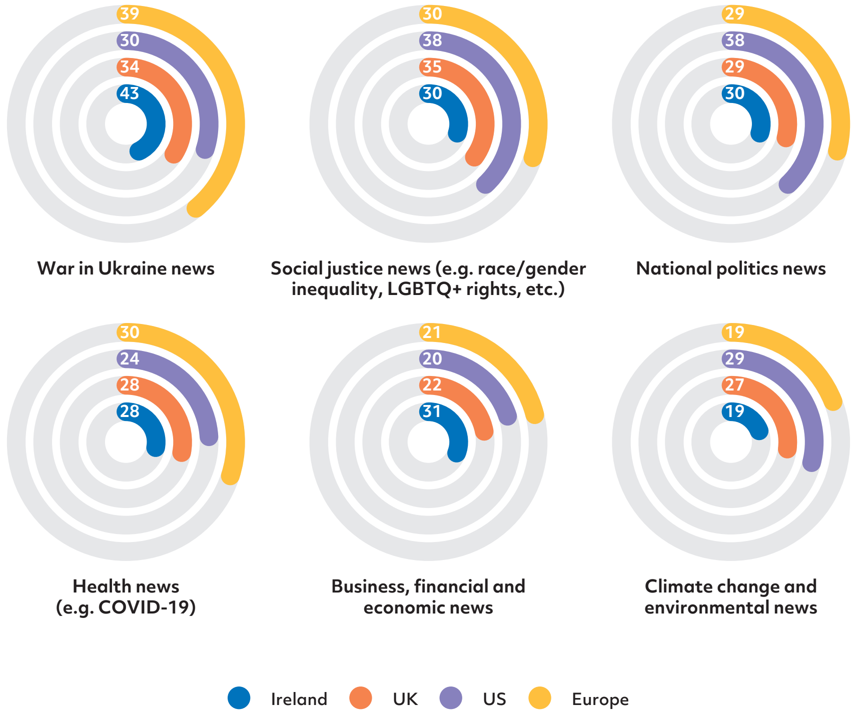
FIG 12: SELECTED TOPICS OF NEWS AVOIDANCE DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN



Q: You said that you try to actively avoid specific news topics. Which of the following news topics are you trying to avoid? Please select all that apply.

Some of the 'avoidance topics' from a preceding chart have been selected and are now broken down by gender and oldest and youngest age groups. Among those who avoid certain news topics, we can see that 18–24 year olds are the most likely to avoid news about Ukraine (46%). This age group is also averse to social justice news (35%), which many might find surprising. Less surprising are the data concerning 'health news including Covid-19' (32%). This age group has lost out on many opportunities during the pandemic years and may just be over the whole subject. The 65+ group wants to avoid Ukraine news (40%), 'social justice news' (40%); and 'entertainment and celebrity news' (40%). Only 22% of women are keen to avoid the 'entertainment and celebrity' category, compared with men (38%). Men seek to avoid news about 'social justice' the most (42%), whereas women avoid this kind of news the least (24%). With regards to 'climate change and environmental issues', 26% of men are seeking to avoid this topic compared with 18% of women. The 18-24-year-olds and the 65+ group have tied at 21% in this category.

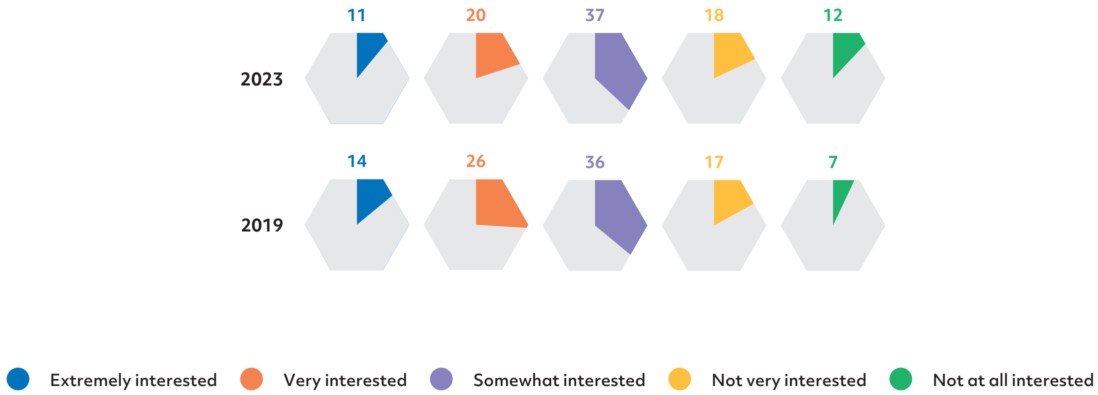
FIG 13: SELECTED TOPICS OF NEWS AVOIDANCE INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON



Q. You said that you try to actively avoid specific news topics. Which of the following news topics are you trying to avoid? Please select all that apply.

In our survey, the US is the country least avoiding news about the war in Ukraine (30%), while Ireland (41%) and Europe (43%) are much higher. In the US survey, participants also score the highest in our markets comparison when it comes to avoiding news about 'social justice' (38%), national politics (38%) and 'climate change and environmental news' (29%). The US is the country least likely to avoid 'business, financial and economic news' (20%) and Covid 19/health news (24%). With regards to climate change, Ireland compares favourably with the UK and US with 21% saying they are avoiding this news category, compared to the US (29%) and the UK (27%). However there is some way to go as Dr David Robbins explains in his essay in this report. In terms of politics, Ireland is the least likely to avoid news about 'national political news' with just 27% doing so, against 38% in the US.

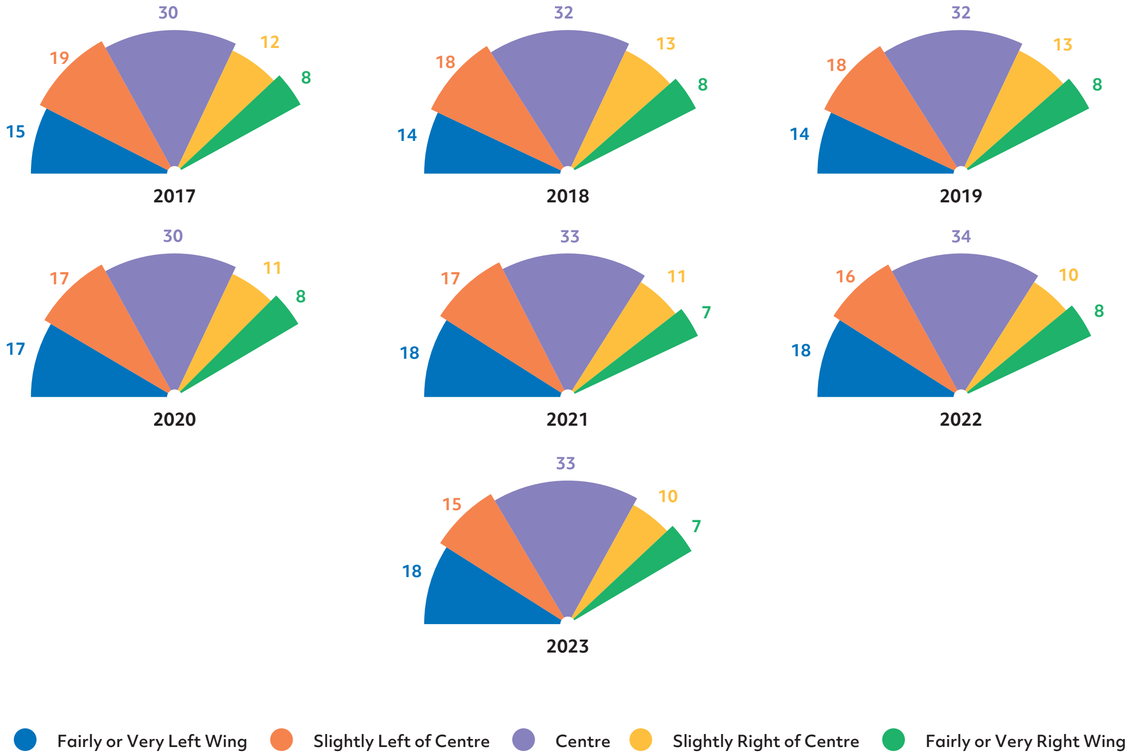
FIG 14: INTEREST IN POLITICS COMPARISON BY YEAR



Q1c. How interested, if at all, would you say you are in politics?

With a while to go until the next national election in Ireland, the percentage of survey participants who say they are 'not very interested' or 'not at all interested' in politics has risen since 2019 (24%) to 2023 (30%). The percentage of people who are 'extremely' or 'very interested in politics' has dropped 9pp from 2019 (40%) to 2023 (31%). The only category that has remained similar in both years is the group of people who consider they are only 'somewhat interested' in politics (37%) which is up 1pp. Politicians have some work to do here to woo news consumers back to a national political agenda.

FIG 15: POLITICAL LEANING OF IRISH SURVEY BY YEAR



Q: Some people talk about 'left'; 'right' and 'centre' to describe parties and politicians. (Generally, socialist parties would be considered 'left wing' whilst conservative parties would be considered 'right wing'). With this in mind, where would you place yourself on the following scale?

This chart shows that Ireland remains centrist in terms of its political affiliations. The percentages shift only very slightly and then often self-correct back to an earlier figure. Over the past 7 years, those claiming to be from the political 'centre' have only shifted from 30% to 33%. In the 'fairly or very left wing' end, the shift between 2017 (15%) and 2023 (18%) is small and there is a shift to fewer people saying they are 'slightly left wing', which was 19% in 2019, and down 3pp to 15% in 2023. When you combine these categories, those claiming left wing affiliation was 34% in 2017, against 33% in 2023. In 2023, slightly fewer people claim to be 'fairly or very right wing' (7%) compared to 2017 (8%). If you were to combine the categories of centre, slightly left of centre and slightly right of centre, then 58% of Irish media consumers have generally centrist views.


38
48
27
81
59

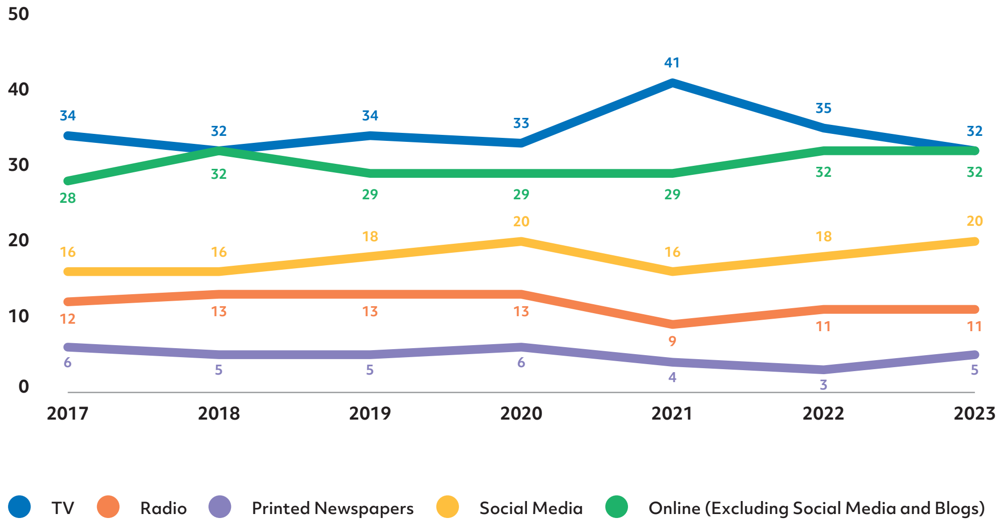
02

SOURCES AND DEVICES

This section explores in further detail the main devices used by Irish consumers to access news.

It also examines the sources people use to jump to news content, plus their preferences for text versus video, and their interest in podcasting.

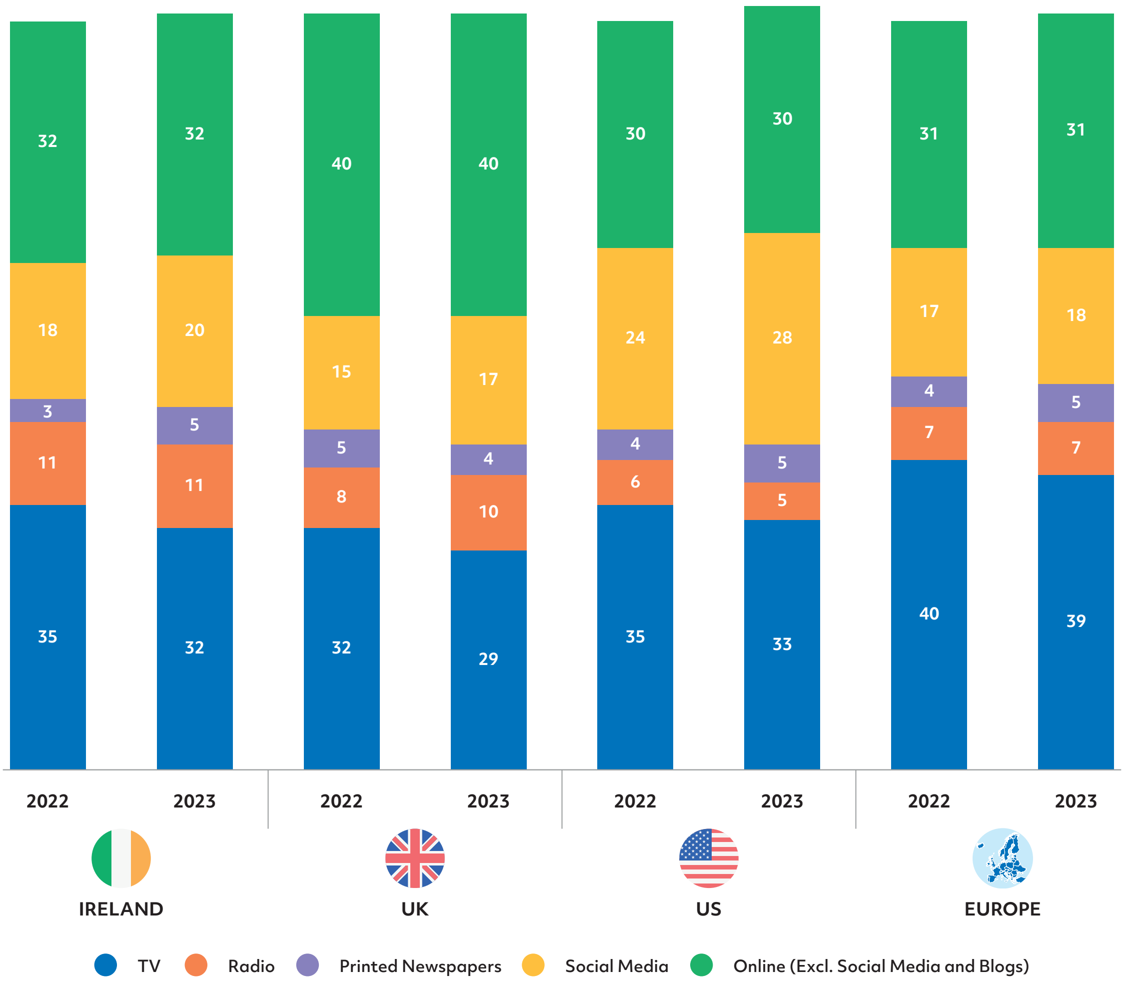
FIG 16: MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS BY YEAR



Q. You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news?

This year in Ireland, TV and Online (excluding social media and blogs) tie at 32% as the MAIN sources of news for survey participants. These two sources tied in 2018, after which the TV audience grew, especially in the main Covid-19 data year of 2021 when it increased dramatically to 41% due to pandemic lockdowns and the regular diet of government updates. In 2022, TV dropped by 6pp, and this year it falls a further 3pp. Online is stable at 32% and social media is back up to 20%, after a decline during Covid-19. Radio stays unchanged from 2022 at 11% and printed newspapers are back up 2PPs at 5%. Publishers of printed newspapers will nonetheless be noting that these last figures do not look rosy for the future of print. This is a topic that has been under discussion in media circles over the past year. For further analysis on the future of print, see the essay by Prof Colleen Murrell at the end of the report.

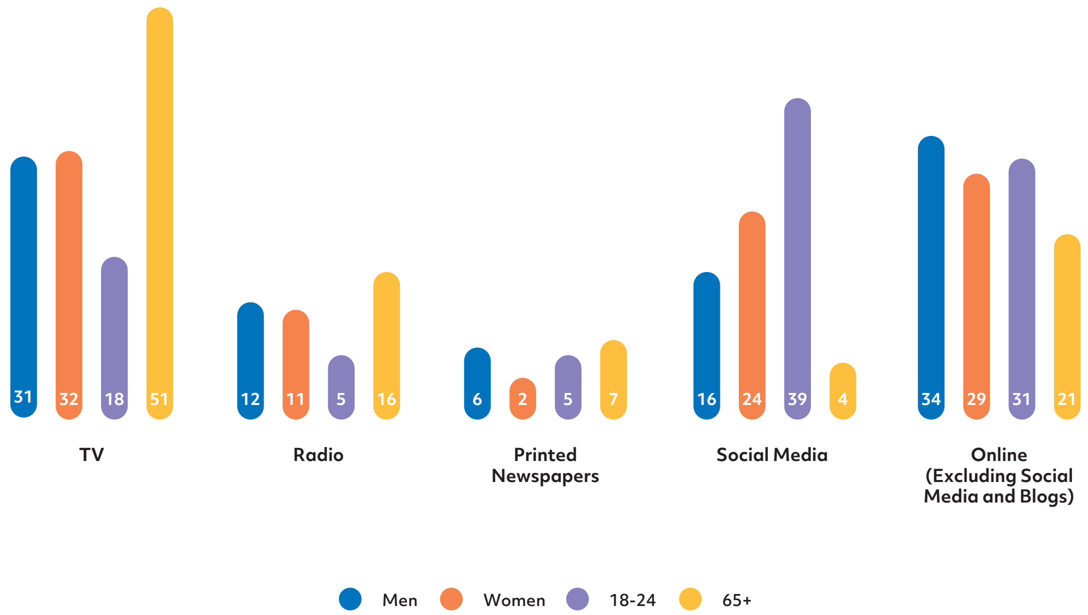
FIG 17: MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON



Q. You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news?

Interestingly, Ireland (32%), the UK (29%), and the US (33%) all have similar numbers of people who cite television as their MAIN source of news, and in all three markets the numbers are down slightly on 2022. Europe is the highest at 39%. A stand-out statistic is the UK's 40% who cite 'online – excluding social media and blogs' as their main source of news. This remains unchanged from last year and is significantly higher than in other markets. Social media is up slightly in all markets, most notably it is up 4pp in the US. Printed newspapers are all hovering in similar single digits. Radio as a main source of news was highest in Ireland - remaining stable at 11%, while the UK is catching up, moving up 2pp to 10% in 2023.

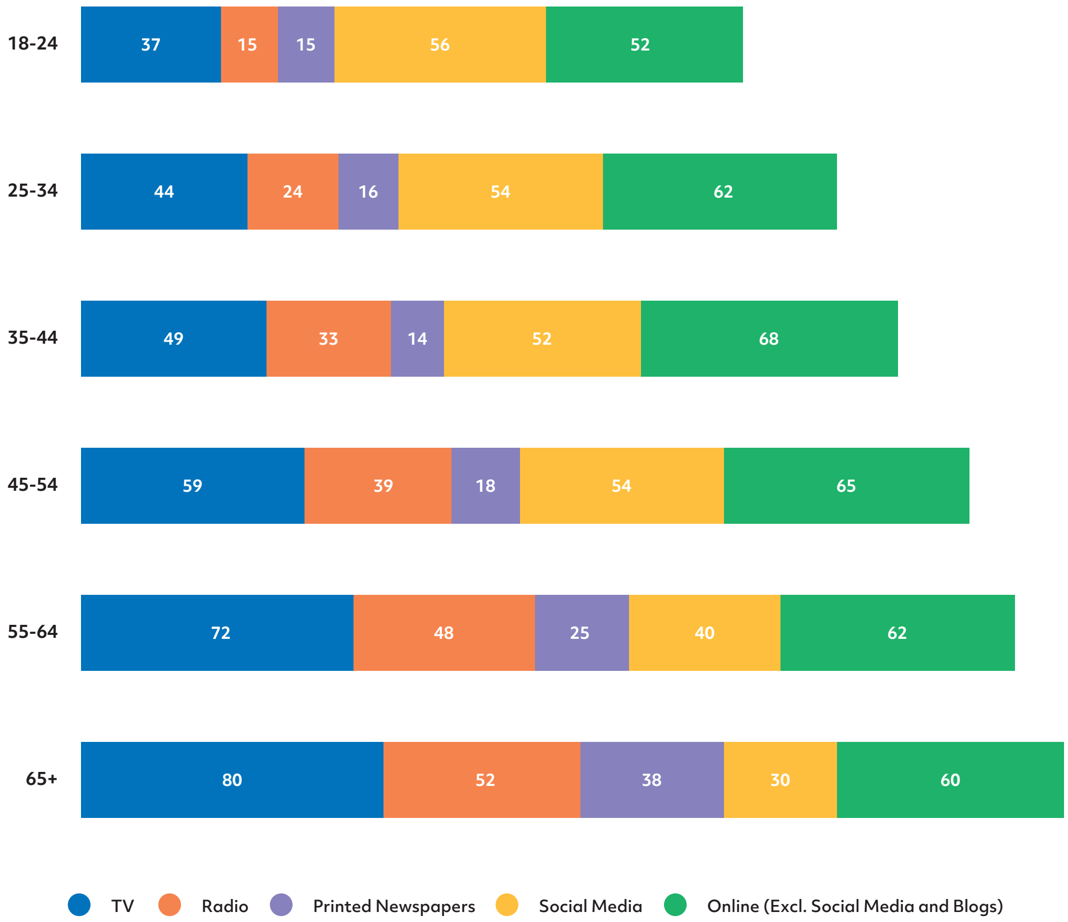
FIG 18: MAIN SOURCE OF NEWS BY DEMOGRAPHIC



Q. You say you've used these sources of news in the last week, which would you say is your MAIN source of news?

When you take the Irish data from the preceding chart and break it down for gender and the oldest and youngest cohorts, the numbers that jump out are the following: TV is by far the MAIN source of news for the 65+ age group at 51%. This has remained stable. In the younger cohort, TV as a main source of news has dropped from a pandemic high in 2021 of 28% to 18% (-10pps). For this group of 'social natives' social media is by far the MAIN source of news for 18-24-year-olds (39%) but down 6pps from 2022. For men, the MAIN source of news is 'Online – excluding social media and blogs' (34%), closely followed by TV (31%). For women, this is reversed, with 32% citing TV and 29% citing 'Online'. For the 65+ cohort, after TV (51%), the biggest number of consumers cite 'Online' (21%), then radio (16%) but only 4% cite 'social media'. Women cite newspapers the least (2%) as their MAIN source of news.

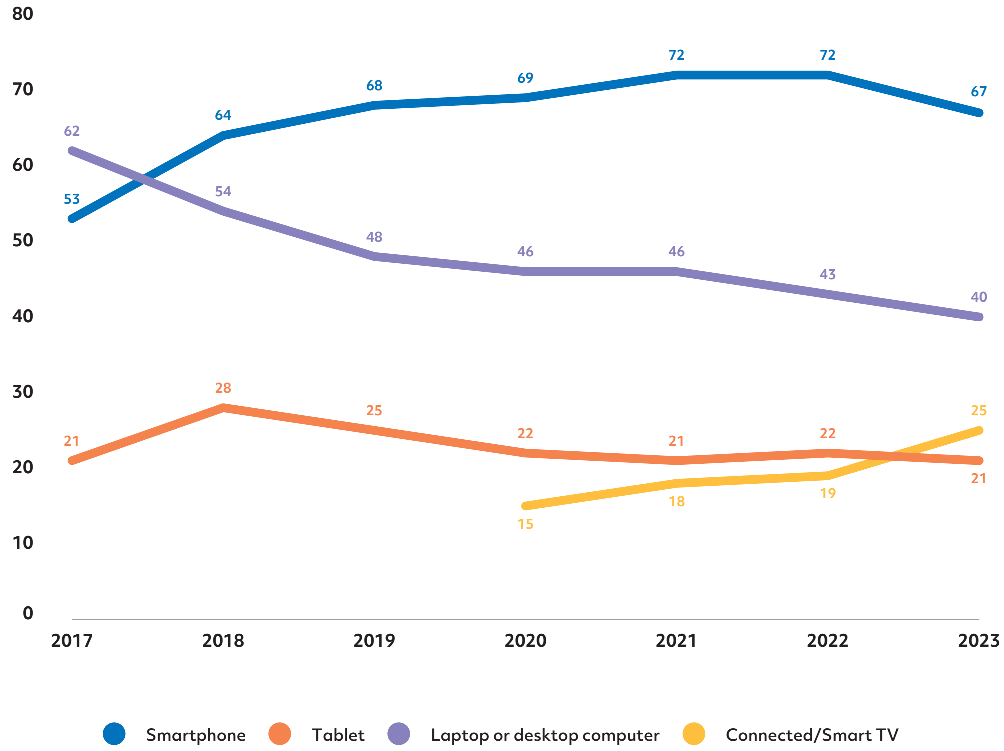
FIG 19: ANY SOURCE OF NEWS BY AGE GROUP



Q. Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news? Please select ALL that apply.

In this chart, we can see Irish responses to a question asking people to cite ALL sources of news (not just MAIN sources). The data are also broken down into six age cohorts. Like last year, we see the same trend in respect to TV and radio whereby the older the age group, the more consumers use traditional media. In the youngest cohort, one can see that 18-24-year-olds are still interested in TV as one of their sources of news among others (37%) and they are not shunning printed newspapers (15%) or radio (15%) altogether. Nonetheless, their preference runs clearly to social media (56%) and online (52%). For those aged 65+, 80% cite TV as a source. 'Online' is the next most popular for the 55+, followed by radio.

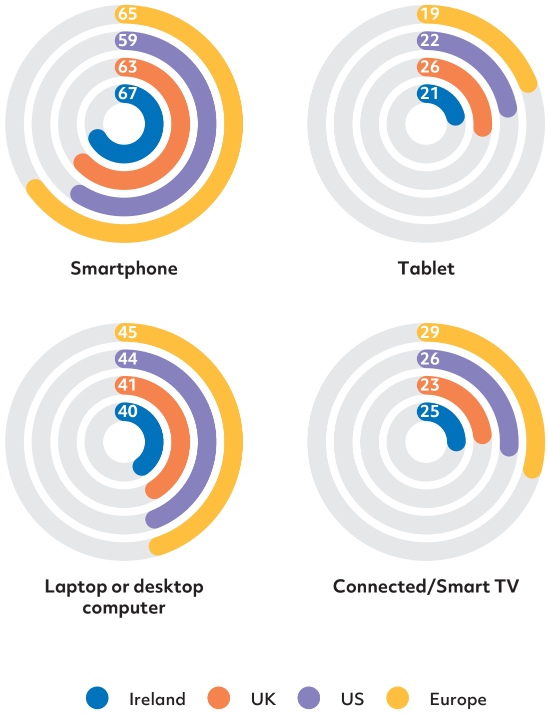
FIG 20: DEVICES USED TO ACCESS NEWS LAST WEEK



Q. Which, if any, of the following devices have you used to access news in the last week?

We wondered in the 2022 report whether or not smartphone use for accessing news was levelling off, after a rise from 2017 (53%) to 2021 and 2022 when usage was the same (72%). This is the first year the smartphone has fallen, down 5pp to 67%. The most persistent fall is the laptop or desktop computer. In 2017 their use to access news was at 62%, and in 2023 is at 40% (-22pp). The tablet is back at its 2017 levels (21%) and connected/smart TVs are showing a steady rise: from 2020 (15%) to 2023 (25%).

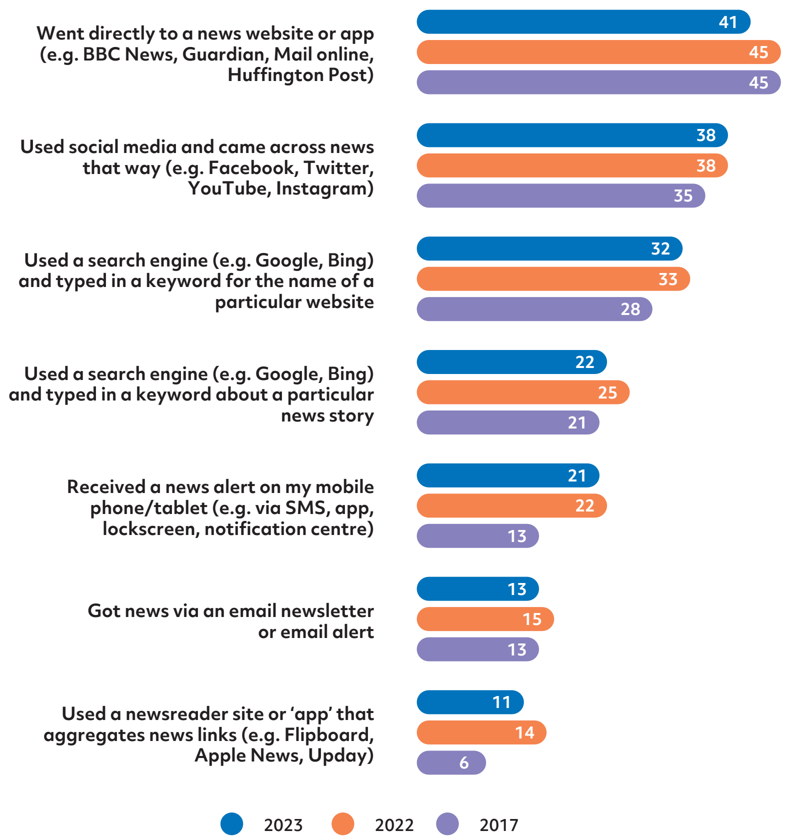
FIG 21: DEVICES USED FOR NEWS INTERNATIONAL



Q. Which, if any, of the following devices have you used to access news in the last week ?

Smartphone use for news is highest in Ireland (67%), and lowest in the US (59%). The US percentages have remained the same as 2022 but the other three markets have all fallen slightly. Connected/smart TV use for news has grown across all markets: it is up 6pp in Ireland, 8pp in the UK, 5pp in the US and 9pp in Europe. Tablet use has fallen except for the UK where it is up 4pp.

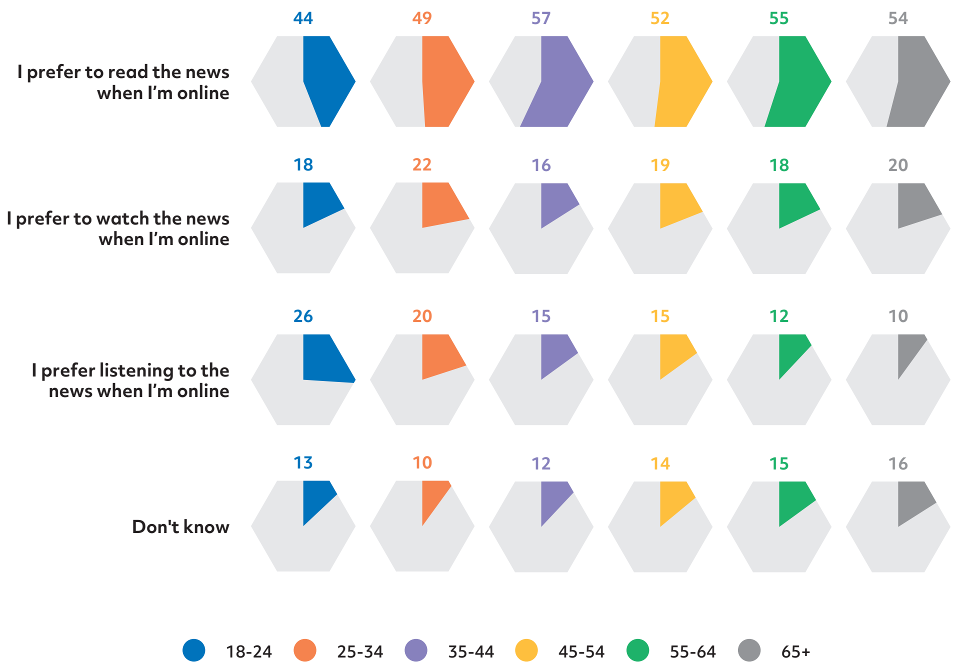
FIG 22: THE WAY PEOPLE FOUND NEWS ONLINE



Q. Thinking about how you got news online (via computer, mobile or any device) in the last week, which were the ways in which you came across news stories? Please select all that apply.

Survey participants were encouraged to choose ALL the ways that they access news online. In 2023 the percentage of participants in Ireland who are going directly to the news websites is down 4pp (41%) although this still remains the most popular way to access news. Getting to news via social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram etc.) has levelled off at 38%. The other categories have only minor changes: search engines to go to particular websites -1pp (38%); search engines to track down particular news stories -3pp (22%); news alerts on their phones or tablets -1pp (21%) ; emailed newsletters -2pp (13%) or newsreader aggregation websites -3pp (11%).

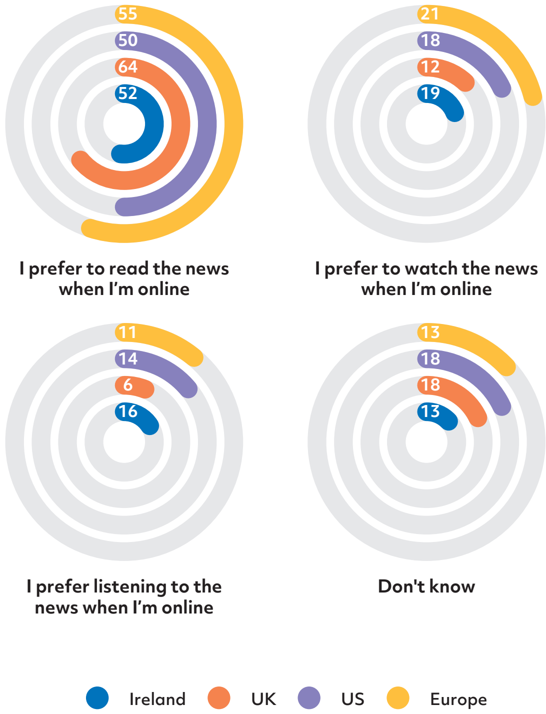
FIG 23: PREFERENCES IN CONSUMING NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS ONLINE BY AGE GROUP



Q. In thinking about your online habits around news and current affairs, which of the following statements applies best to you? Please select one.

According to this chart reading about news and current affairs (while online) is by far the most preferable way to access it across all six age groups. The age group with the most people who claim this is the cohort of 35-44 year olds (57%). For the 18-24 year olds, after reading (44%), comes listening to news and current affairs while online (26%), followed by watching it (18%). Interestingly, the age group 25-34 is the group that (after reading) prefers to watch news and current affairs while online (22%).

FIG 24: PREFERENCES IN CONSUMING NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS ONLINE



Q. In thinking about your online habits around news and current affairs, which of the following statements applies best to you? Please select one.

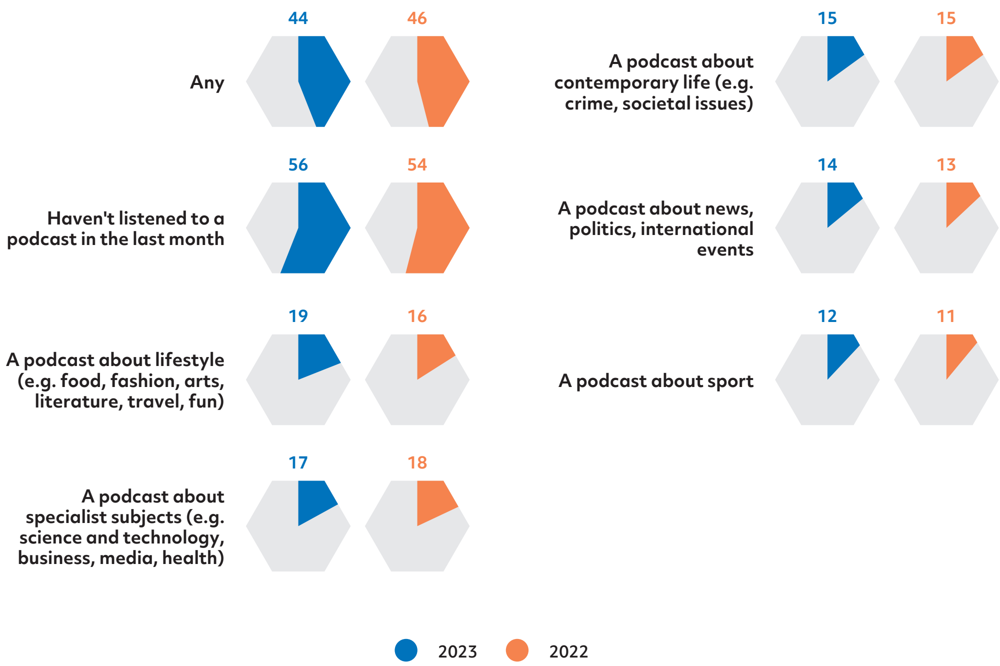
Reading about news and current affairs while online is by far the most preferable mode of access in all four markets. The UK has the most avid online news readers at 64%. In the wake of the reading category, Europe has the most people who like to watch news while online (21%). Ireland tops the listening to the radio category while online (16%) and the 'don't know' category is fairly high, ranging from 13% for both Ireland and Europe to 18% for the UK and US.

FIG 25: WAYS OF CONSUMING ONLINE NEWS VIDEOS IN THE LAST WEEK

Q. Thinking about when you used online news-related video (a short clip, a live stream, or a full episode) over the last week, which of the following did you do? Please select all that apply.

It is always important to record the dissenters, and 36% of survey respondents reported they had not watched any news-related videos in the preceding week. Of those who had, consumers were asked to choose as many of the categories as were relevant. This charts shows that the largest number who watched a news-related video did so via Facebook (25%). This was followed by browsing a news website or news app (24%). YouTube was next (19%); followed by a tie between Twitter and Instagram (14% each). TikTok is on 11% with Twitch some way behind on 4%.

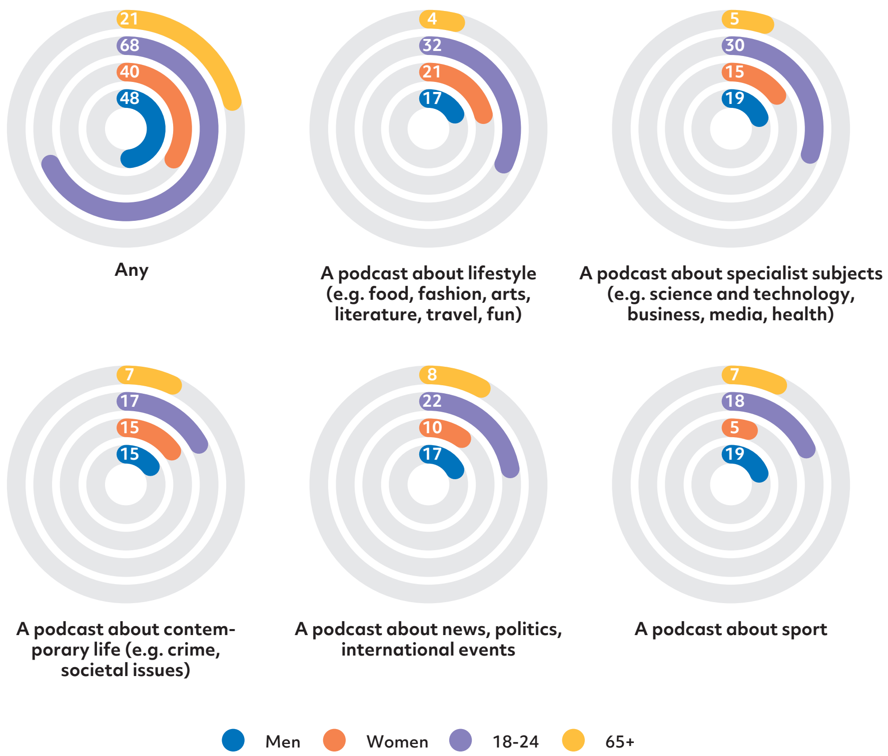
FIG 26: TYPES OF PODCASTS LISTENED TO IN THE LAST MONTH



Q. A podcast is an episodic series of digital audio files, which you can download, subscribe or listen to. Which of the following types of podcast have you listened to in the last month?

Again, to give context, it is important to record the dissenters and understand that 56% of survey respondents had NOT listened to a podcast in the month prior to the data gathering. This is up 2pp on 2022. Nonetheless, listening to podcasts remains a very popular pastime in Ireland (44%). Respondents were asked to choose as many as they liked from the proposed categories of podcasts. Lifestyle, which takes in a wide-ranging area including 'food, fashion, arts, literature, and fun' was +3pp (19%). Specialist subjects, which cater for more targeted, niche interests come in second, -1pp (17%). Podcasts about contemporary life in terms of crime and societal issues stay the same (15%). Podcasts about news, politics and international events are up 1pp (14%) and sports podcasts are also up 1pp (12%). (See the article about the podcasting landscape in Ireland, the UK and the US by Nic Newman later in the report).

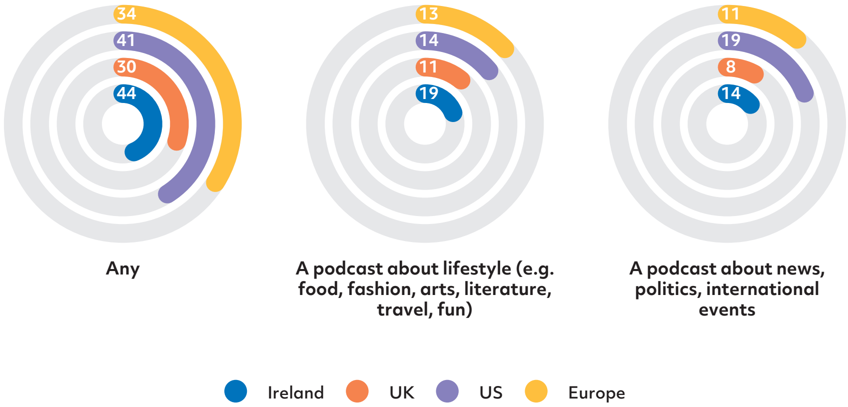
FIG 27: TYPES OF PODCASTS LISTENED TO BY DEMOGRAPHIC



Q. A podcast is an episodic series of digital audio files, which you can download, subscribe or listen to. Which of the following types of podcast have you listened to in the last month?

Podcast producers will be thrilled to know that the youngest cohort of 18-24 year olds are still very interested in podcasts (68%) which is up 3pp since last year. This group's favourite types of podcast are lifestyle (32%) and specialist subjects (30%). Its interest in podcasts about news, politics and international events is 22%. Men show 17% interest in this category, with women lower at 10% and the 65+ age group recording a mere 8% . There would seem to be an untapped market in the 65+ age group, according to this chart. Only 21% said they had listened to any podcasts in the last month and among all the categories the listeners are in single figures. Is this a tech issue or is it the content that doesn't interest this older age group with time on its hands? This is worth exploring.

FIG 28: SELECTED PODCAST CATEGORIES – INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON



Q. A podcast is an episodic series of digital audio files, which you can download, subscribe or listen to. Which of the following types of podcast have you listened to in the last month?

Here we have selected two popular categories of podcasts in a comparison with our other markets. Ireland tops the chart of avid podcast listeners in this comparison, coming in at 44% claiming to have listened to a podcast in the last month, with the US close by (41%) and Europe (34%) and the UK (30%) trailing some way behind. Ireland also has the highest number of people listening to lifestyle podcasts (19%), while the US tops the listeners' chart for podcasts about news, politics and international events (19%).

03

ATTITUDES AND TRUST

This section outlines attitudes to news among Irish news consumers. It details their attitudes towards trust, including how much they trust different news brands.

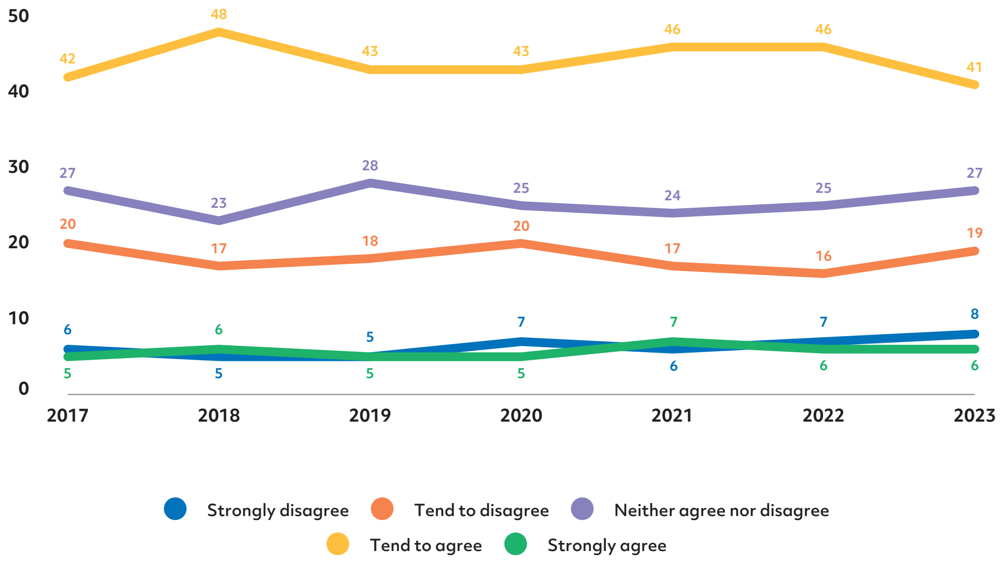
This section also examines current concern over what is real and fake on the internet.

Questions are asked relating to the audience's preferences for story selection to be made by journalists, algorithmic selection on past usage or on friends' usage

This section also examines the topic of filter bubbles and media criticism online.

Finally this section looks at consumers' engagement with news online.

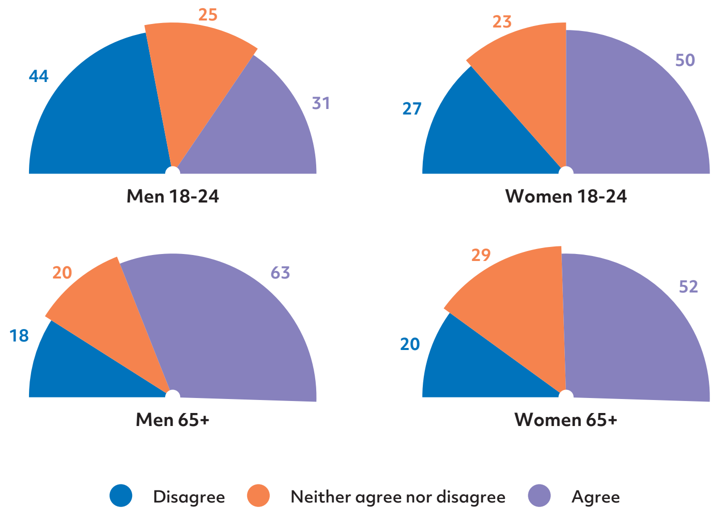
FIG 29: TRUST MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I think you can trust most news most of the time

Almost half of Irish news consumers (47%) either strongly agree or tend to agree with the statement that they can trust most of the news most of the time. This figure has fallen from 52% in 2022. Meanwhile the proportion of news consumers who tend to disagree, or strongly disagree, with the statement, is 27%, an increase from 23% last year. These figures represent a small yet concerning recent decline in trust in the news media. Other research by the Reuters Institute has identified negativity, divisiveness, exclusion of certain voices from the news, and the deployment of stereotypes as reasons for falling levels of trust in the media internationally. Concern over misinformation may also be a factor.

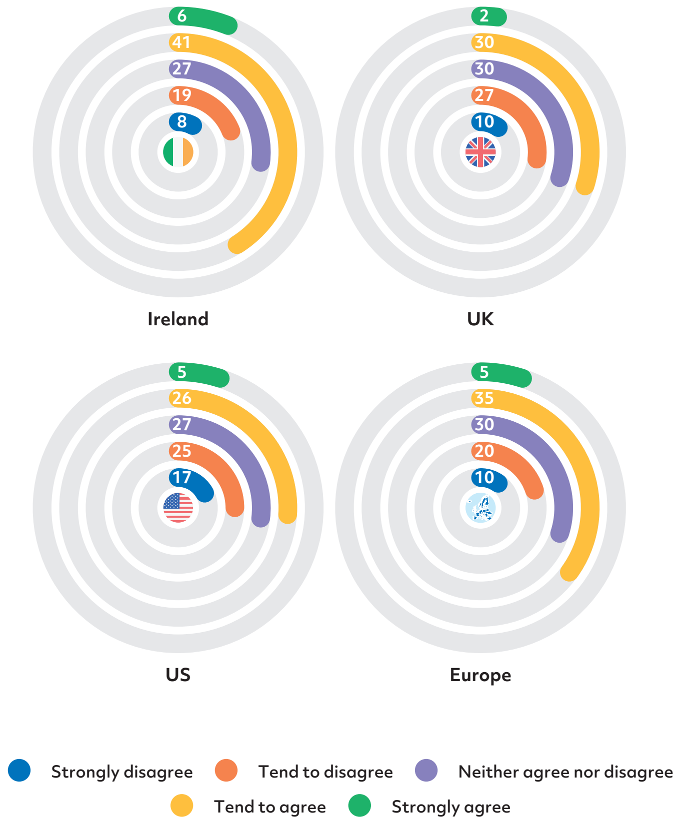
FIG 30: TRUST MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME BY AGE AND GENDER



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I think you can trust most news most of the time

Males in the 18-24 age bracket exhibit high levels of mistrust in the news media, with 44% disagreeing with the statement that you can trust most of the news most of the time. Elsewhere in this report, we find that YouTube is the most popular source of news for the 18-24 age group, and that men turn to YouTube for news more than women. It may be that younger men are exposed to content on YouTube which undermines their trust in traditional news media. Trust in news increases with age: 63% of men, and 52% of women aged over 65 agree that they can trust most of the news most of the time. Older news consumers have more established news habits and tend to get their news from traditional media.

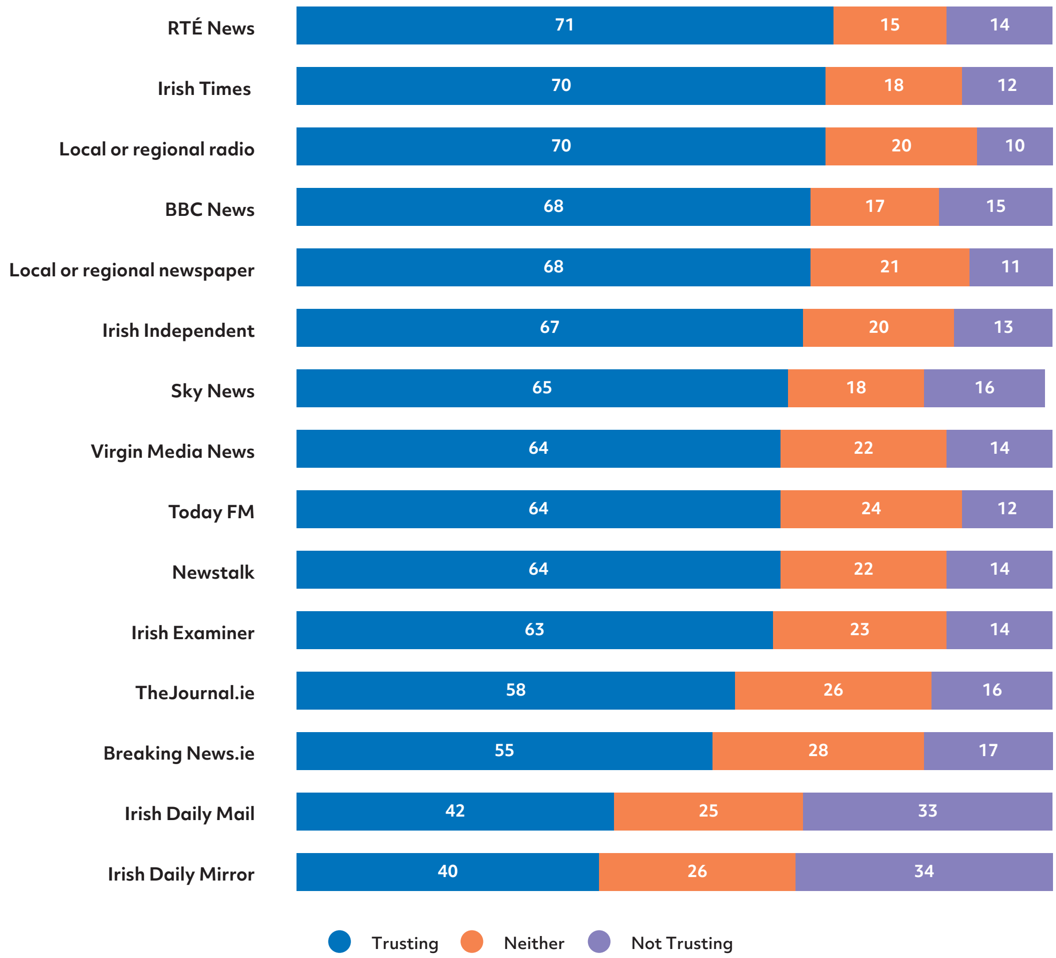
FIG 31: YOU CAN TRUST MOST NEWS MOST OF THE TIME INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: I think you can trust most news most of the time

Irish news consumers exhibit relatively high levels of trust in the media, with 47% either tending to agree or strongly agreeing with the statement that you can trust most of the news most of the time, compared to 27% strongly disagreeing or tending to disagree. Levels of trust in Ireland are slightly higher than in the rest of Europe, and considerably higher than in the UK and the US. Those mistrustful of the media to a greater or lesser extent account for 37% of our sample in the UK, and 42% in the US. The lower trust levels in the UK and US may be the result of a more polarised media environment in which news organisations have been involved in phone-hacking scandals (UK) or hyper-partisan coverage (US).

FIG 32: TRUST IN NEWS BRANDS

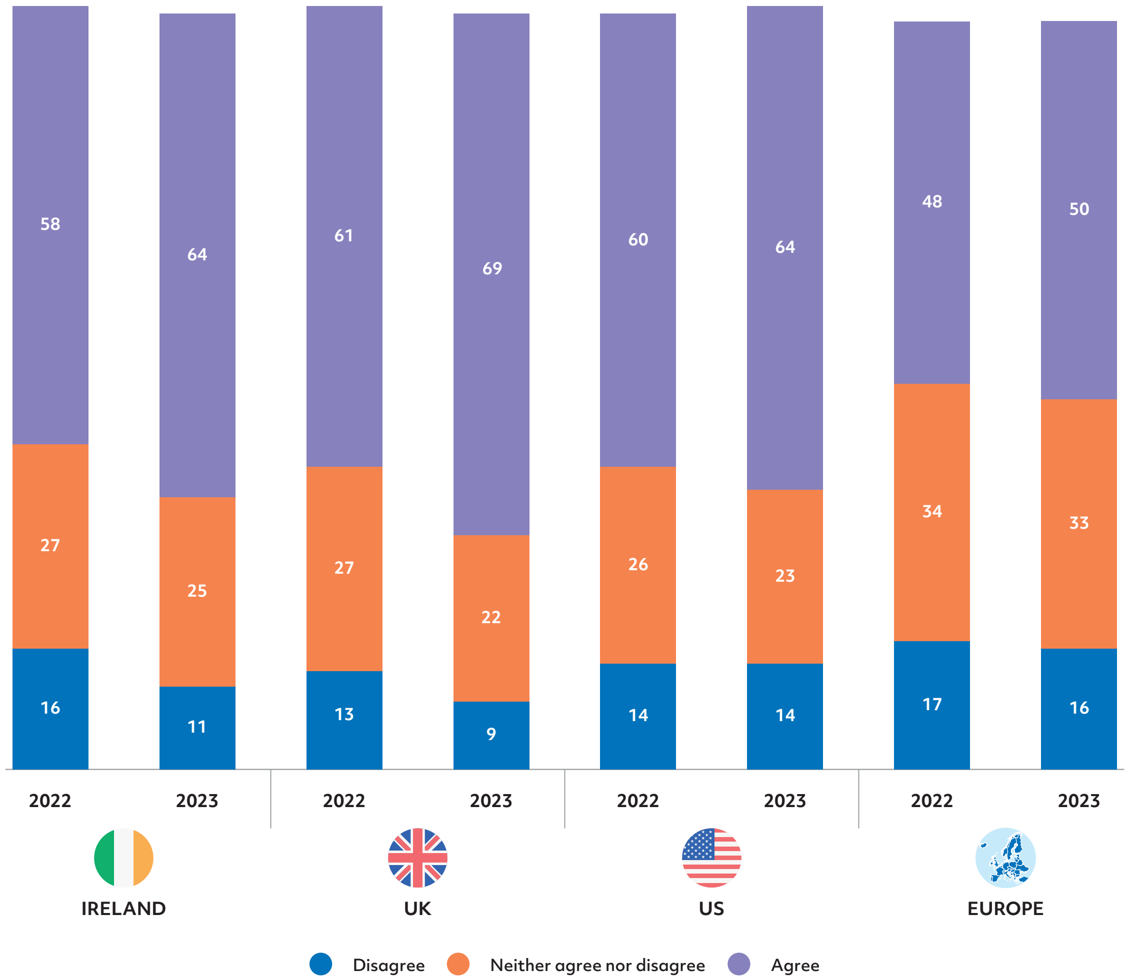


Q. How trustworthy would you say news from the following brands is?

Our data shows a gradual return to pre-Covid levels of trust in major news media organisations. During the pandemic, levels of use, trust, and engagement with media brands increased as people turned to traditional news media for verified information, and for distraction during lockdowns. This year, RTÉ News retains its place as the most trusted news brand in Ireland, with 71% saying they trust the public service news organisation. This figure is down on both the 2022 (74%) and 2021 (78%) figures. The Irish Times is the most trusted newspaper brand, with 70%, a decline of 1pp from last year. Irish news consumers show high levels of trust in local media, both radio (70%) and newspapers (68%). The Irish editions of UK titles, such as the Irish Daily Mail (42%) and the Irish Daily Mirror (40%), are less trusted than other news organisations.

NB – Only the above brands were included in the survey so it should not be treated as a list of the most or least trusted brands as it is not exhaustive.

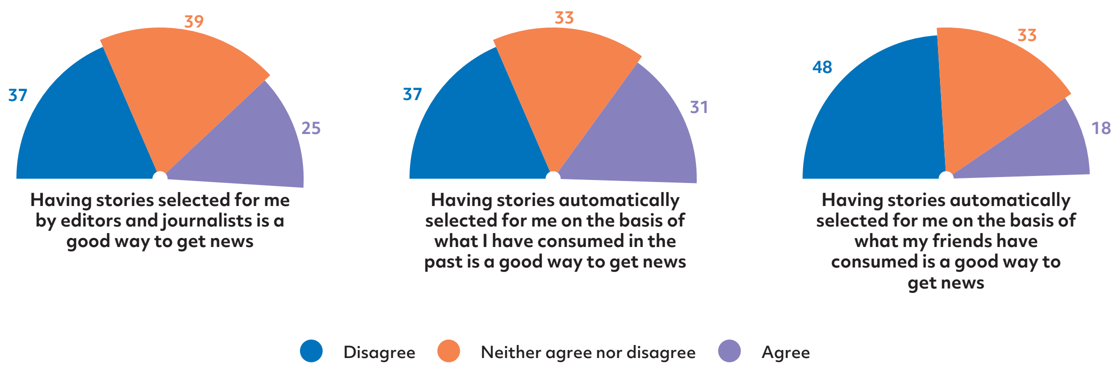
FIG 33: CONCERN ABOUT WHAT IS REAL AND FAKE INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON



Q. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: Thinking about online news, I am concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet.

Levels of concern about what is real and what is fake on the internet are comparatively high in Ireland, with 64% agreeing that it is a concern, compared to 50% in the rest of Europe. Furthermore, concern over fake news has increased over the past year in all territories surveyed: up 6pp in Ireland, 8 in the UK, 4 in the US, and 2 in Europe. UK news consumers are the most concerned about fake news and misinformation online, with 69% saying the issue is concerning. This across-the-board increase over the past year is perhaps connected to fears that news content - especially so-called 'deep fake' photos and videos - is being produced by AI technology.

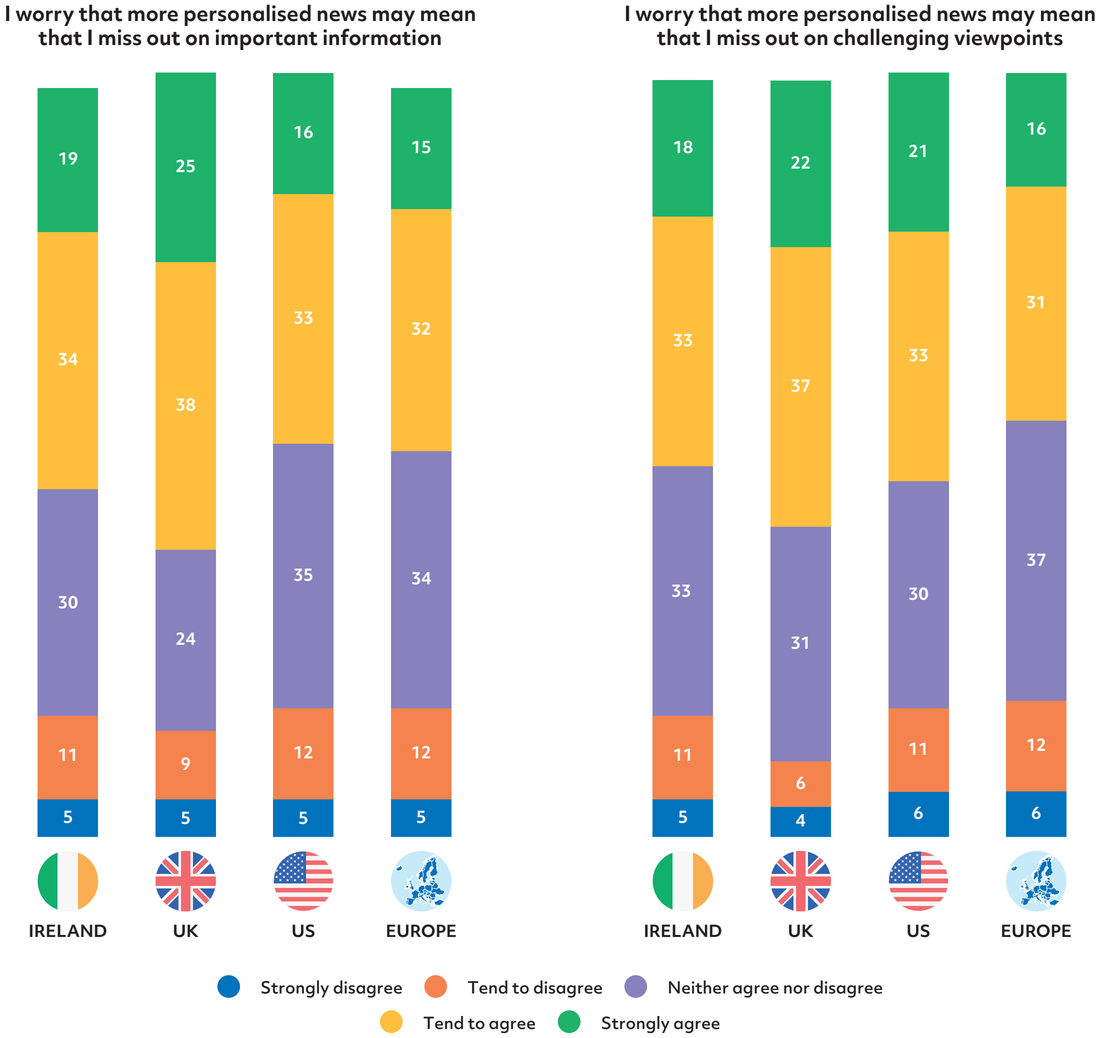
FIG 34: PREFERENCES FOR STORY SELECTION FROM OTHERS



Q. Every news website, mobile app or social network makes decisions about what content to show to you. These decisions can be made by editors and journalists or by computer algorithms analysing information about what other content you have used, or on the basis of what you and your friends share and interact with on social media. With this in mind, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements

This question attempts to uncover attitudes to the news gatekeeping function of editors and journalists, compared to news being selected, or recommended by algorithms. Only a quarter of Irish people agree that it is better to have a human editor/journalist select or curate what audiences see, while 31% believe that it is better to see news selected algorithmically, based on their viewing history and preferences. Only 18% believe that their news feeds should feature content selected because it was viewed by their friends. However, a sizeable cohort (between 37% and 48%) reject all three methods of selection. This suggests that Irish audiences may not fully appreciate the processes behind the construction of their news feeds on social media. The support for algorithmically selected news may lead to the creation of filter bubbles and echo chambers, in which citizens see ever-narrowing selections of news content.

FIG 35:



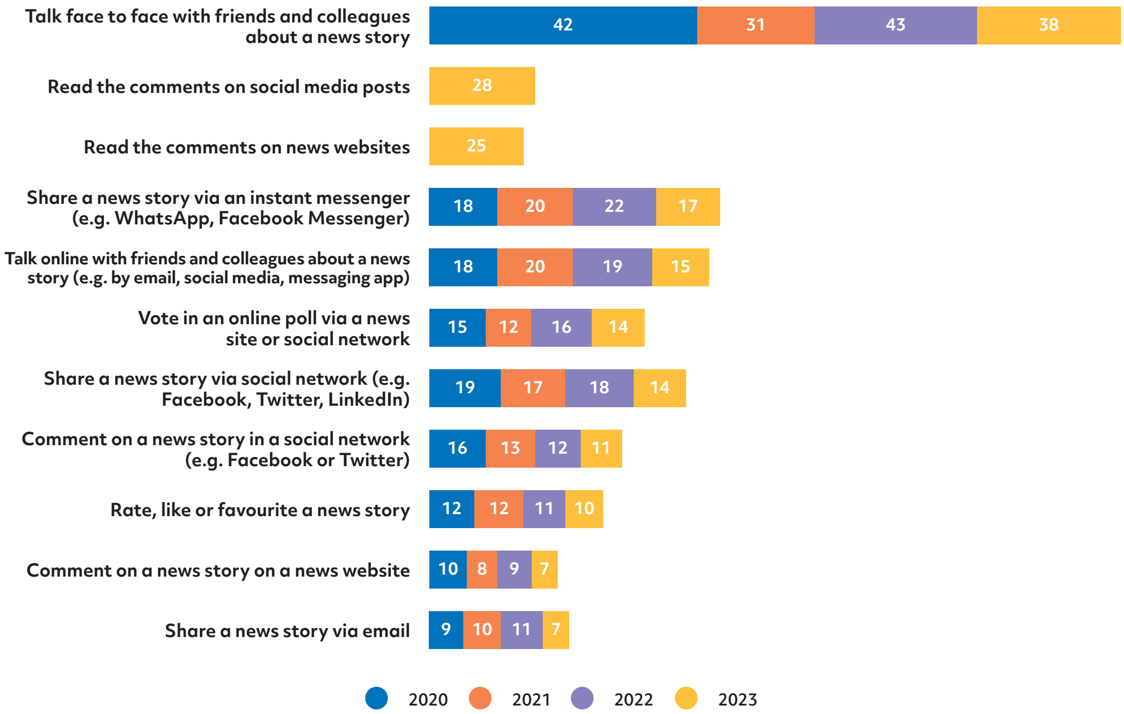
Q. Now when thinking about more personalised news, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

I worry that more personalised news may mean that I miss out on important information

I worry that more personalised news may mean that I miss out on challenging viewpoints

Delving a little deeper into the issue of news algorithms, we find that there is relatively widespread concern that personalised news - i.e. news that is selected based on user preferences and reading history - may cause news consumers to miss out on important information, and may also mean they do not encounter viewpoints which challenge their own views. Over half of Irish news consumers (53%) strongly agree or tend to agree with the statement that they fear personalised news may cause them to miss important news stories, while 51% are very or somewhat concerned about encountering only those viewpoints which accord with their own. In the more polarised media systems of the UK and the US, these concerns are more prevalent: 63% of those in the UK strongly agree or tend to agree that personalised news may cause them to miss important news, while 54% of those in the US strongly agree or tend to agree that personalised news restricts their access to diverse viewpoints.

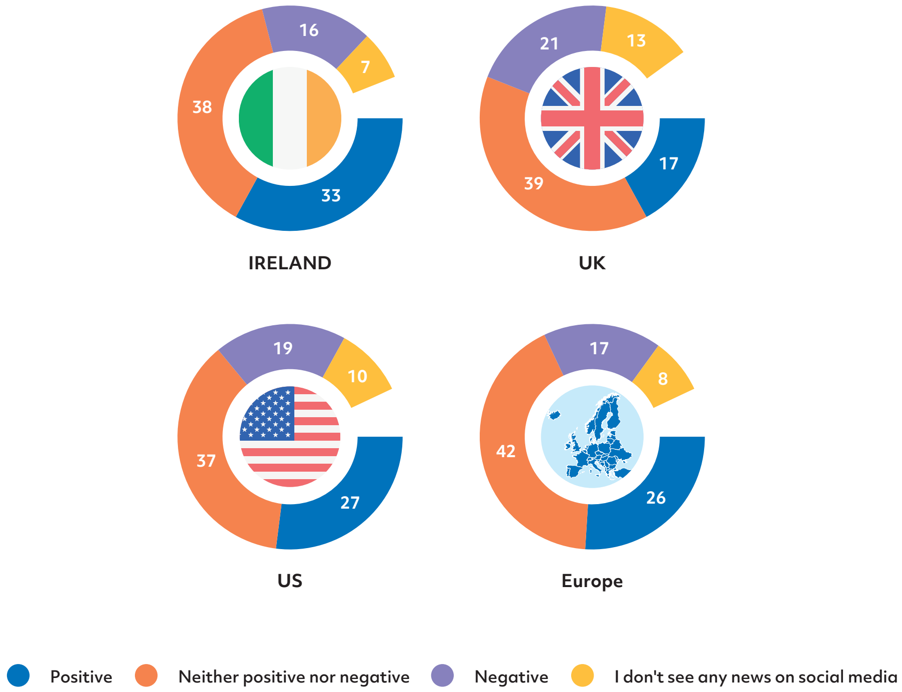
FIG 36: PARTICIPATION WITH NEWS



Q. During the average week in which, if any, of the following ways do you share or participate in news coverage? Please select ALL that apply.

All forms of engagement with the news - from talking about news developments with friends, to liking and sharing news online - have declined in the past year. This retreat from news participation may be expected as Covid disappears from the top of the news sites and bulletins and the media agenda becomes more dispersed. Irish people are much more likely to engage in a face to face conversation about something in the news (38%) than to share a news item on social media (14%). The interactive affordances of digital media - sharing, commenting, liking, voting - are underused by Irish news consumers: only 7% comment on a news website. Further analysis of these results is presented in Dr Dawn Wheatley's essay at the end of the report.

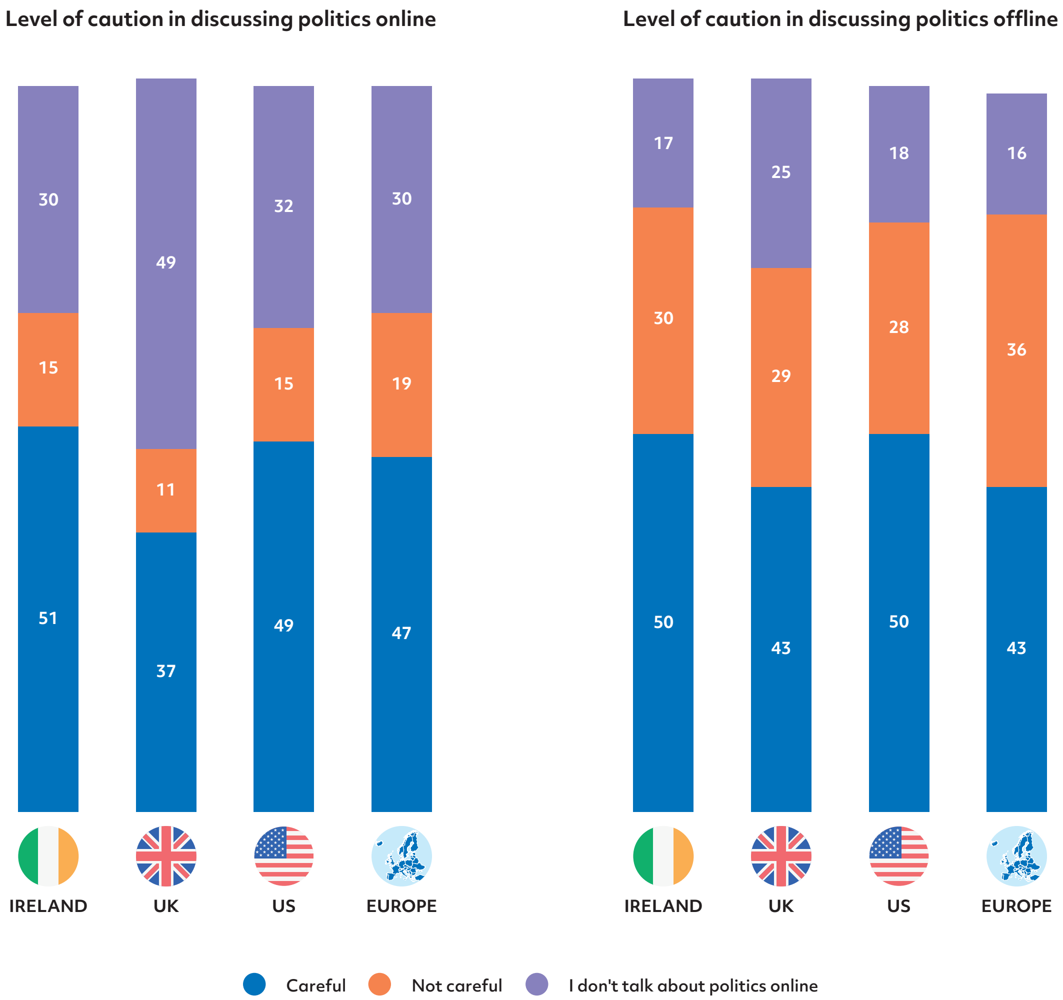
FIG 37: EXPERIENCE OF ENGAGING WITH NEWS ONLINE



Q. How positive or negative is your experience of engagement with news online or on social media (e.g., reading or posting comments, talking to people about news, etc.)?

The perception of some social media platforms, and the comments sections of news websites, as toxic and negative spaces is not borne out by our data. Irish news consumers have a relatively positive experience when they comment on online articles or discuss the news on social media: 71% say the process was positive or neither positive nor negative. Online negativity is higher in the UK, where 21% say they have had a negative experience when engaging with online content, compared to 16% in Ireland. However, as we have seen previously, the number of Irish news consumers who engage with news content in this way is low.

FIG 38:

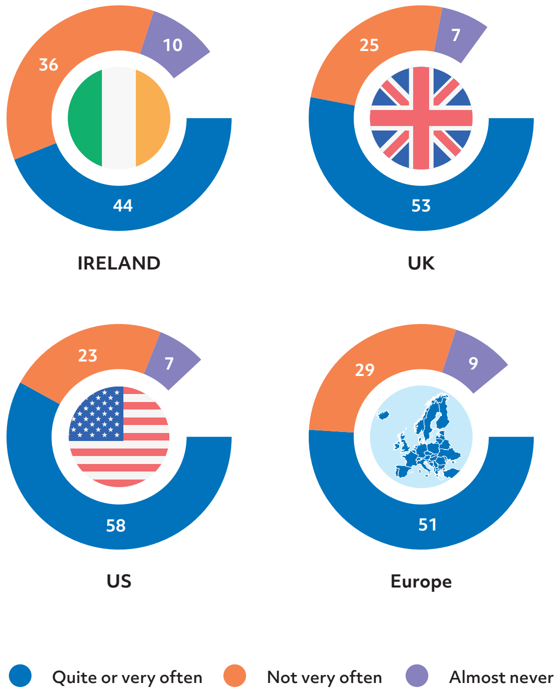


Q. When talking about politics with people online (e.g., via social networks or messaging groups), how careful do you feel you have to be with what you say?

Q. When talking about politics with people offline (e.g., face to face, on the phone), how careful do you feel you have to be with what you say?

Irish news consumers are more wary about discussing political events or issues online than their counterparts in the US, UK, and Europe. Over half of Irish people (51%) say they have to be careful about what they say in political discussions on social networks or messaging groups, compared to 37% in the UK, 49% in the US, and 47% in Europe. Irish people are almost equally cautious about discussing political matters offline, for example face to face or by phone, with 50% confirming they are careful about what they say. Despite this caution, Irish people do not shy away from political discussion altogether: only 30% (online) and 17% (offline) say they avoid politics entirely, compared to 49% (online) and 25% (offline) in the UK.

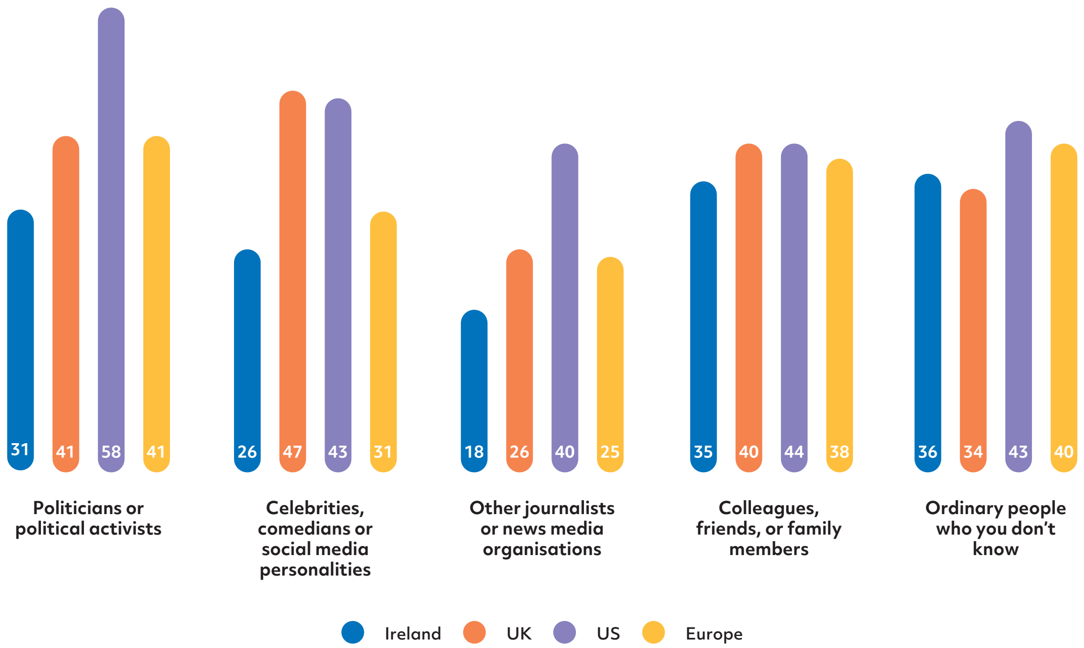
FIG 39: FREQUENCY OF HEARING CRITICISM OF JOURNALISTS OR THE NEWS MEDIA



Q. How often, if at all, do you see or hear people criticising journalists or the news media in your country?

This question aims to uncover the extent to which attempts to delegitimise the news media are prevalent in social discourses. Criticism of the media is prevalent in all the territories surveyed, particularly so in the UK and US. A sizeable section of Irish people (44%) come across criticism of the news media quite or very often. However, this number is low by international standards: 58% of Americans, 51% of Europeans, and 53% of those in the UK encounter media criticism frequently. And more Irish people (46%) never or rarely encounter media criticism than is the case in other territories. Taking into account the generally high levels of trust in the media in Ireland, these findings suggest there is a more healthy debate about the performance of the media in Irish society.

FIG 40: SOURCE OF JOURNALIST OR NEWS MEDIA CRITICISM



Q. Which of the following, if any, have you seen or heard criticising journalists or the news media in your country in the last year? Please select all that apply.

Irish people come across criticism of the media from multiple sources, but at lower levels than is the case in the US, UK, and the rest of Europe. Private conversations with friends or strangers is the most frequent source of media criticism in Ireland, with 35% and 36% experiencing these forms respectively, whereas more public criticism by politicians, other media, and celebrities is more prevalent elsewhere. Some 58% of Americans have heard politicians criticise the media, and former President Trump's attacks on news organisations is undoubtedly a factor in this finding. In the UK, celebrities and comedians are a source of media criticism for almost half (47%) of news consumers. The US and the UK score highly across all media criticism source categories, suggesting that anti-media discourses are relatively mainstream in these countries to an extent not evident in Ireland or the rest of Europe.

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04

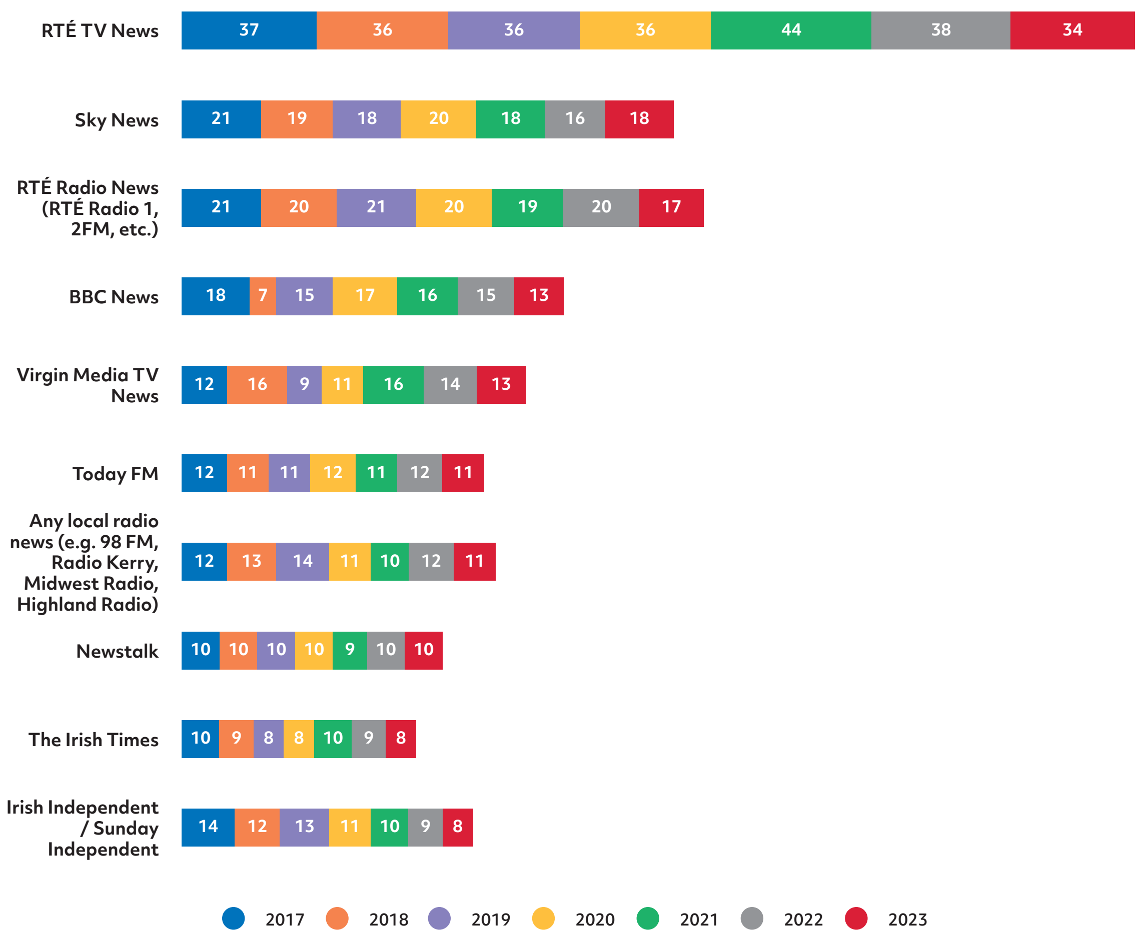
BRANDS AND DISCOVERY

This section outlines the main sources and brands used by Irish news consumers.

It provides a breakdown of consumption patterns across traditional, digital and social media brands.

It also examines the types of content preferred by consumers.

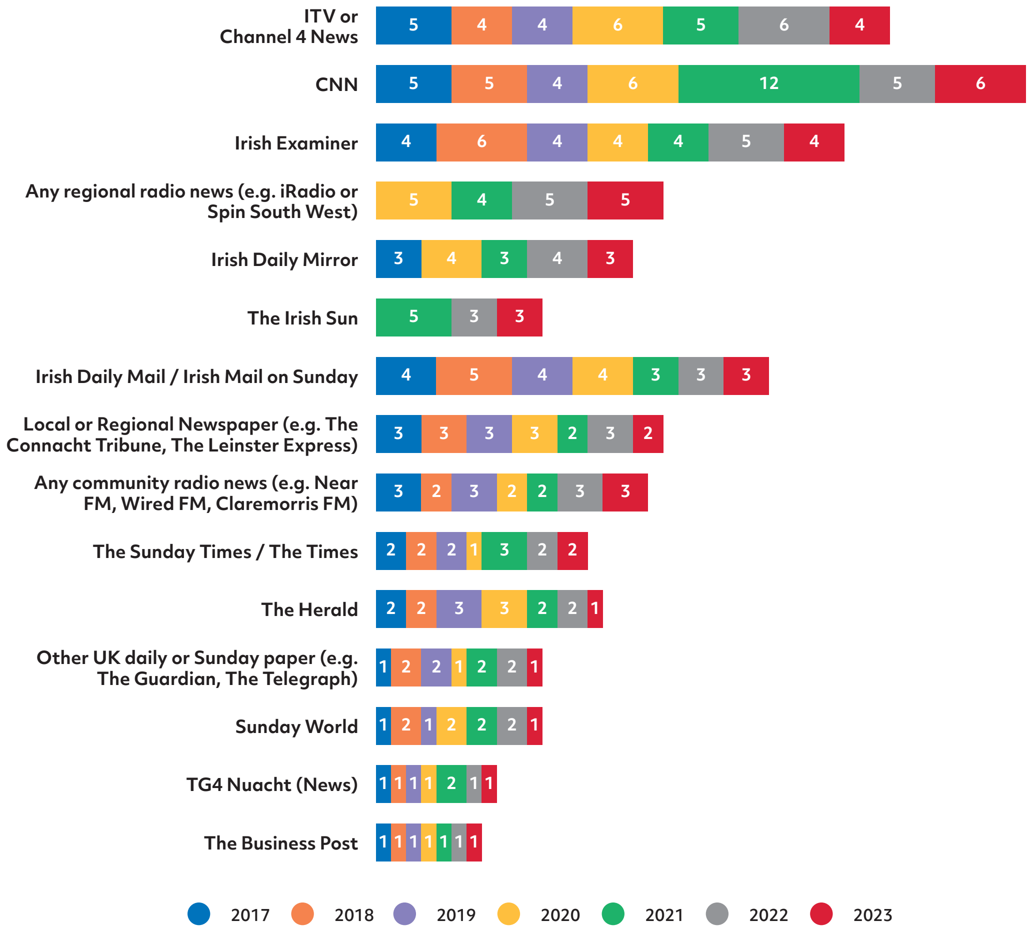
FIG 41: MOST FREQUENTLY USED TRADITIONAL BRANDS (1-10)



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news offline in the last week... Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

There is a slight drop in the popularity of most traditional news outlets over the past year. Most notably, RTÉ – which had benefited from a Covid boost in 2021 – was down a further 4pp for television and 3pp for radio. Nevertheless, it still clearly remains the most popular brand, with its television output reaching one in three people (34%). There was good news for Sky News (+2pp) the only traditional brand here to defy the downward trend, possibly being the beneficiary of a -2pp dip in the BBC's audience share among those interested in UK-focused news. The figures presented here go back to 2017 which is useful for some broader context: all outlets are down from what they were then, apart from Virgin Media, which is actually up +1pp on what it was in 2017, and Newstalk, which has remained steady at 10%.

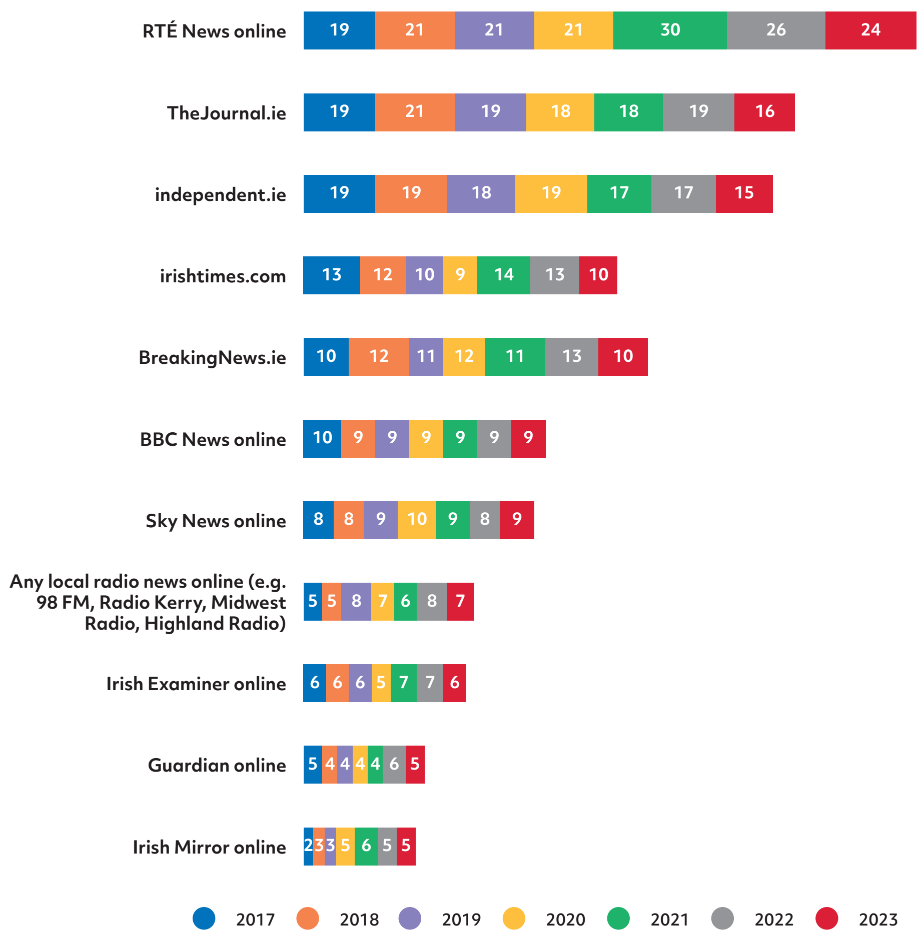
FIG 42: MOST FREQUENTLY USED TRADITIONAL BRANDS (11-25)



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news offline in the last week... Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

Looking beyond the Top 10, many of the same patterns are present, with news organisations remaining relatively steady, or showing slight decreases: CNN is the only brand showing any kind of increase on last year (+1pp) and it also shows growth from 2017 (+1pp). The Irish Daily Mirror, The Irish Sun, and Irish Daily Mail/Irish Mail on Sunday newspapers are closely aligned, all reaching 3% of readers, while TG4 Nuacht remains at 1%. None of these brands have seen substantial declines since 2017, with many remaining broadly in line with their figures of that time, suggesting groups of small but relatively loyal readers, viewers and listeners.

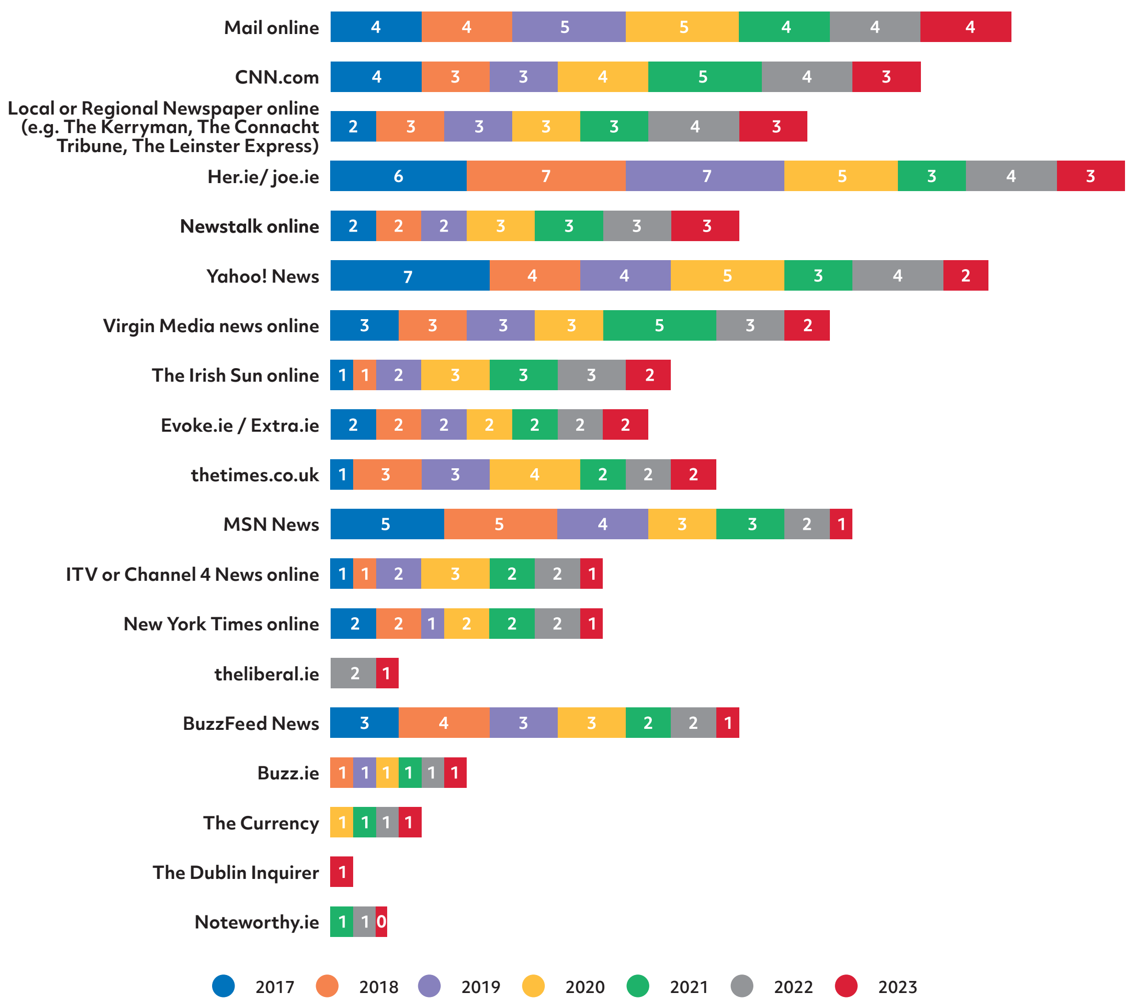
FIG 43: MOST FREQUENTLY USED DIGITAL BRANDS (1-11)



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news online in the last week... Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

Again, we can see RTÉ is the most popular digital brand, and the size of its digital audience indicates that one in four people (24%) are consuming the public service broadcaster's content online. Most organisations are down between 1-3pp over the past year, apart from the BBC and the Irish Mirror online, which remained steady, and again we see Sky News is the only brand to show any increase (+1pp) in digital audiences over the past 12 months. When comparing the landscape to 2017, we can see that there has been the most notable growth in RTÉ's audience (+5pp) while regional radio (+2pp), the Irish Mirror online (+3pp) and Sky News online (+1pp) have also increased their audiences over the past six years. Independent.ie has seen the biggest decline (-4pp) since then, perhaps tied to the introduction of its paywall.

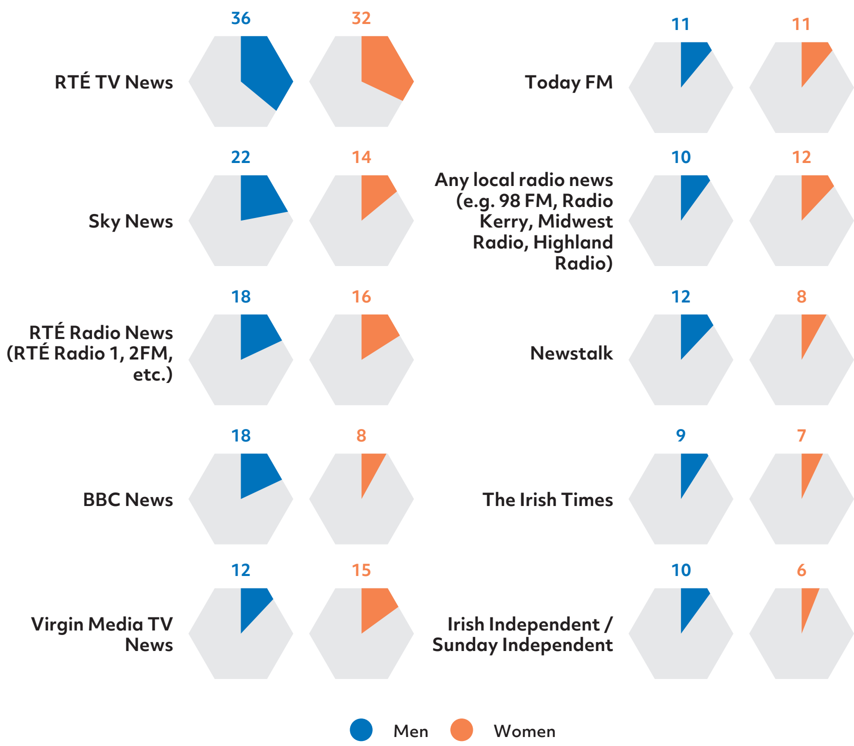
FIG 44: MOST FREQUENTLY USED DIGITAL BRANDS (12-30)



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news online in the last week... Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

We can see similar patterns among the other digital brands, which have generally remained consistent with last year, or shown a drop -1pp. Looking at the longer-term trend, it is worth noting that the most substantial declines in this category since 2017 have come from international outlets like Yahoo! News (-5pp), MSN News (-4pp) and Buzzfeed (-2pp). Among the Irish outlets, Her.ie/Joe.ie's popularity is now half of what it was in 2017, at 3pp. The Dublin Inquirer, an independent publication focused on the capital, makes its debut in the report, reaching 1%, the same as the business-focused Currency website.

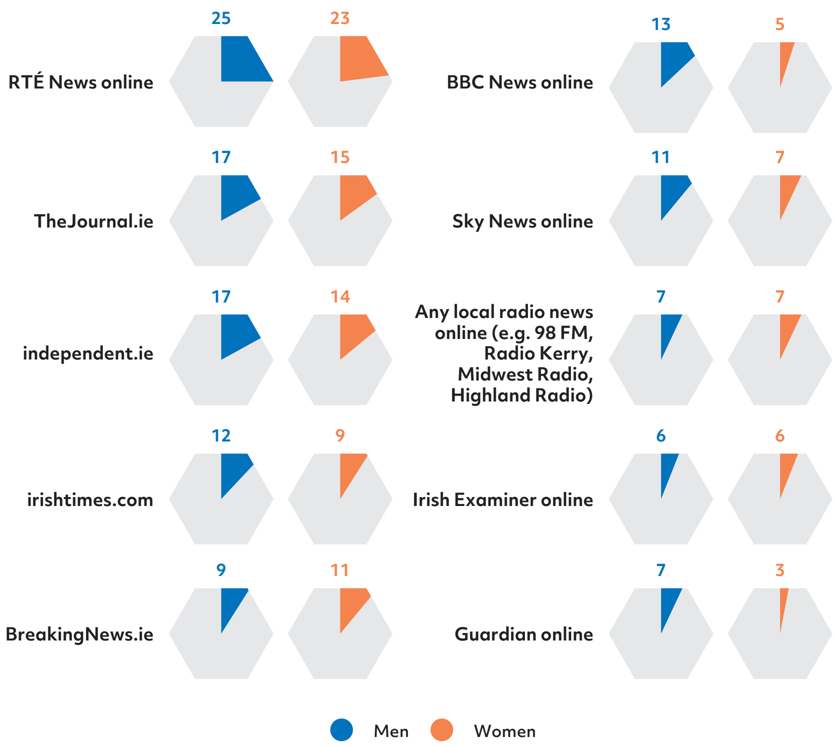
FIG 45: MOST FREQUENTLY USED TRADITIONAL BRANDS BY GENDER



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news offline in the last week... Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

Echoing last year's findings, most brands are more popular with men than women, with the biggest gaps appearing for the UK broadcasters Sky News (+8pp more popular with men) and BBC (+10pp more popular with men). RTÉ is relatively close for both its TV news (+4pp for men) and radio (+2pp for men), while Today FM is the only brand with equal popularity. There are two brands which are more popular with women: Virgin Media TV news is +3pp among women, while local radio news stations are +2pp.

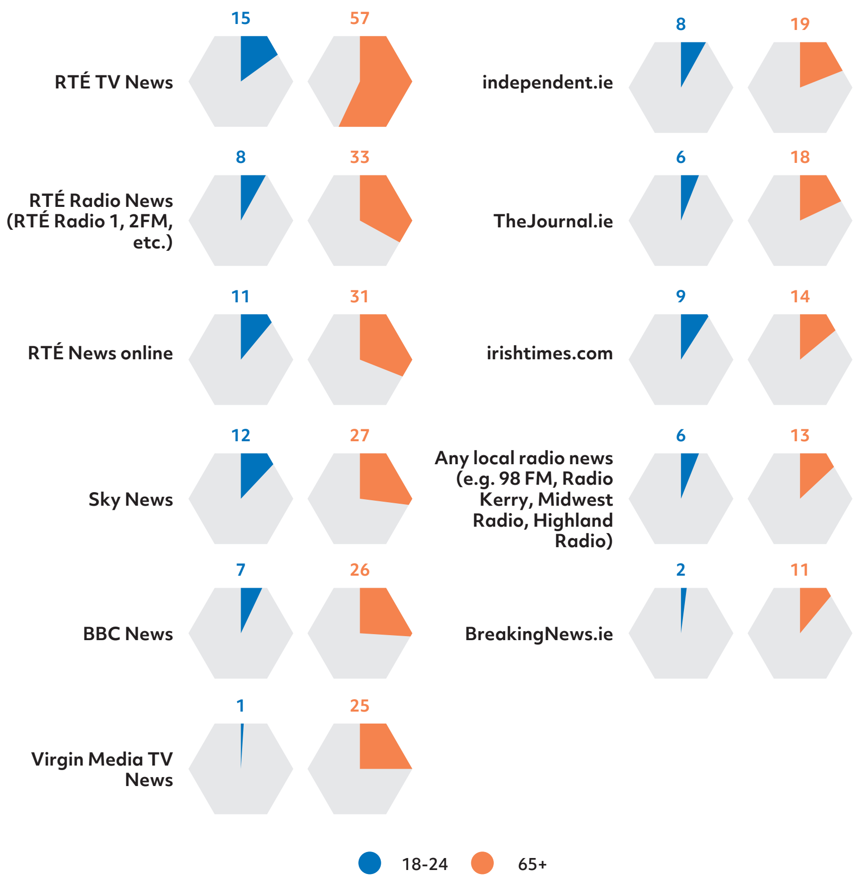
FIG 46: MOST FREQUENTLY USED DIGITAL BRANDS BY GENDER



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news online in the last week... Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

We can see that the same pattern is present when the digital brands are broken down by gender, with men more more frequent users of almost all the brands listed here. The gap, like its traditional equivalent, is most stark on BBC News Online with an 8pp difference, while the gap is just 2pp on both the most popular digital brands of RTÉ News online and TheJournal.ie. Elsewhere, BreakingNews.ie is the only brand listed here which is more popular among women, while local radio and the Irish Examiner are the two with equal gender popularity. One swing to note from last year is that, in 2022, Independent.ie was 2pp higher among women, but this year its popularity among women has declined and it is now 3pp lower than men.

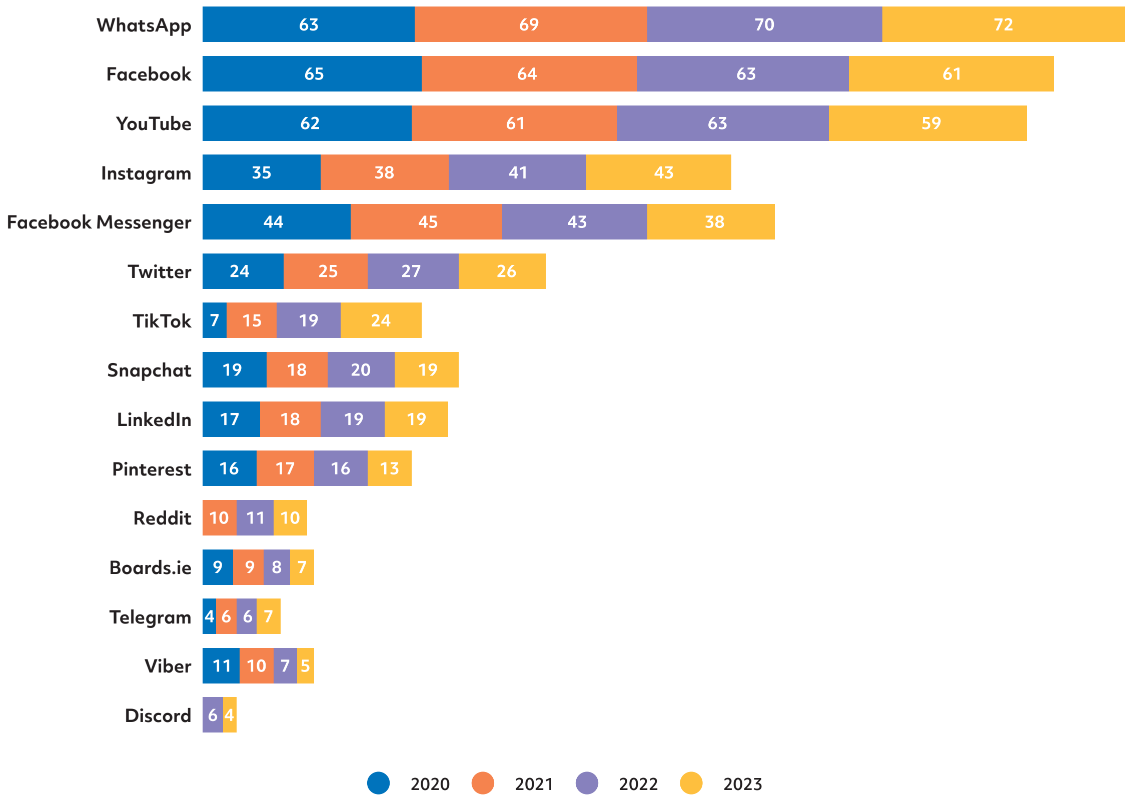
FIG 47: MOST FREQUENTLY USED BRANDS AGE COMPARISON



Q. You said you have used the following brands to access news offline in the last week… Which of these, if any, did you use on 3 days or more? Please select all that apply.

If we compare the consumption between the oldest and youngest respondents in the survey, we can see the stark difference in loyalty to, and consumption of, these brands, with all much more popular among the over 65s. RTÉ TV News is reaching more than half (57%) of the older group, but just 15% of the 18-24s, and RTÉ's three outputs (TV, radio and online) are the three most popular among the older group. Sky News is the second most popular brand among the younger cohort (12%), coming in slightly ahead of RTÉ Online (11%). Virgin Media's popularity has fallen 4pp on last year's survey dropping to 1% among the 18-24 group. The closest gap is for irishtimes.com where the difference is just 5pp.

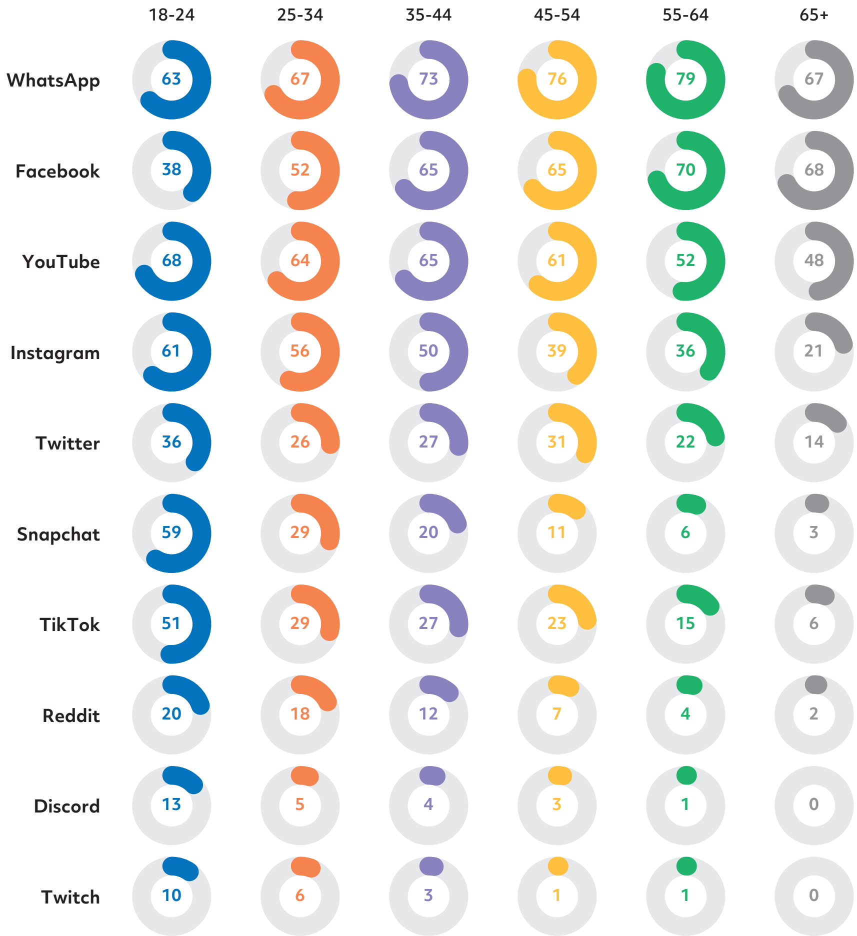
FIG 48: SOCIAL MEDIA USED FOR ANY REASON BY YEAR



Q. Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose in the last week? Please select all that apply.

WhatsApp's dominance remains and the messaging app has seen an increase (+2pp) in general usage over the past year, continuing its steady growth since 2020. In contrast both Facebook (-2pp) and Facebook Messenger (-5pp) have seen declines in popularity, but Facebook remains the most used space for hosting a personal profile with almost two-thirds (61%) of the population engaged with it. Instagram has seen growth (+2%) on 2022, but it is TikTok (+5pp) showing the biggest increase, with a quarter (24%) of people now using the platform, a notable and continued growth since recording just 7% in 2020. As noted last year also, its influence is greater than that figure suggests, as content from TikTok is often shared on other social media platforms. Since 2020, there has also been growth for Instagram (+8pp), LinkedIn (+2pp), Twitter (+2pp) and Telegram (+3pp). Snapchat and Reddit have remained at 2020 levels, while usage of YouTube (-3pp), Viber (-6pp), Boards.ie (-2pp) and Pinterest (-3pp) have declined over the past three years.

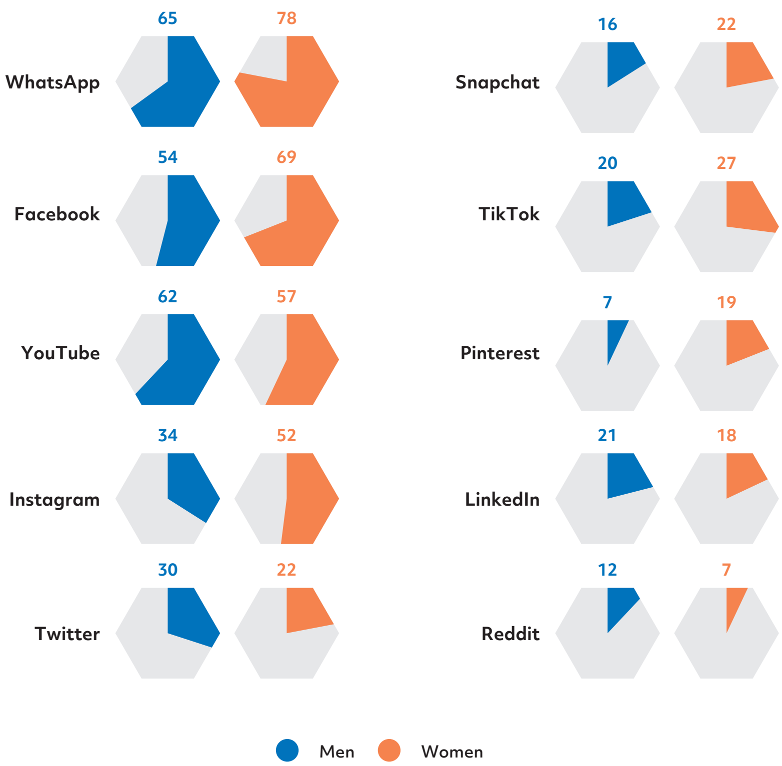
FIG 49: SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY AGE



Q. Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose in the last week? Please select all that apply.

Most of the social networks show a gradual but clear age-related trajectory in terms of usage, such as Facebook gradually growing in popularity as the audience gets older, or Instagram's popularity declining with age. The starkest age-based shifts are among Snapchat and TikTok: both platforms are reaching more than half of the 18-24s, but then both drop sharply to 29% among the 25-34 group. YouTube and WhatsApp are both quite popular among all ages, but interestingly, the lowest usage for WhatsApp is among 18-24s suggesting they are using other platforms or tools to communicate or have group conversations. Among the older audiences, it is WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube which dominate with more than half of these two age groups (55-64, 65+) active on all three, apart from YouTube dipping to 48% among the 65+ age, which is still a substantial number watching videos on the platform. The smaller social networks also lean towards younger audiences, but Reddit's popularity is the most evenly spread across age groups as it is still used by one in eight people aged 35-44 (12%).

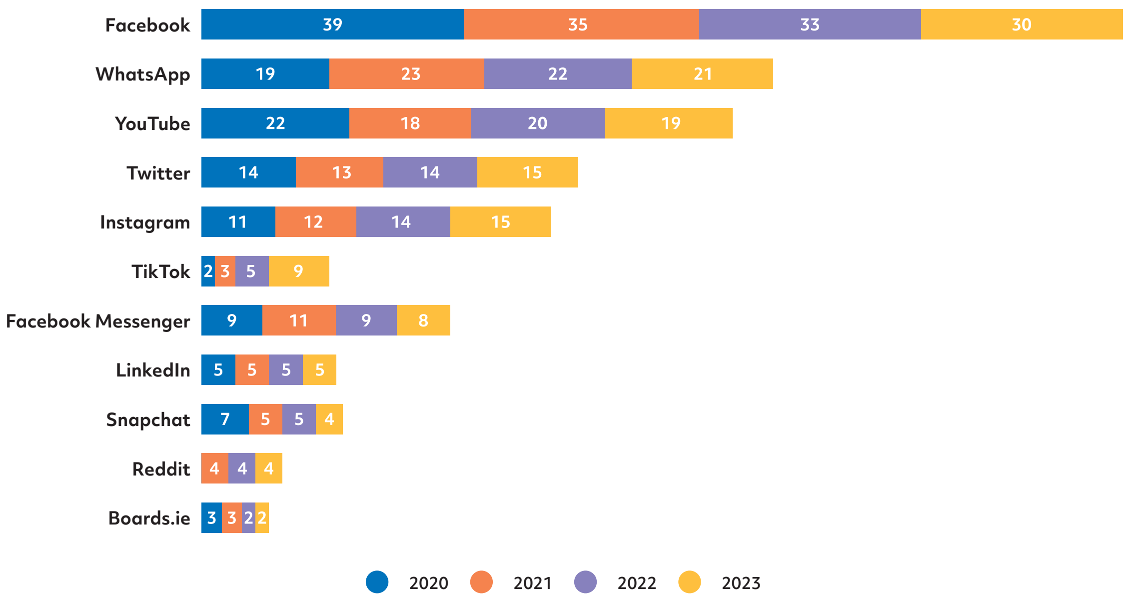
FIG 50: SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY GENDER



Q. Which, if any, of the following have you used for any purpose in the last week? Please select all that apply.

Among the most popular social networks, WhatsApp and Facebook show strong leaning towards women users with almost four in every five women (78%) using WhatsApp compared with 65% of men. A similar gap of 15pp is evident on Facebook, while the more visually driven platforms are also more popular among women with a 18pp gap evident with Instagram, and 12pp gap on Pinterest. There are more men than women users of YouTube, but only a 5pp gap, while that increases to 8pp on Twitter. Professional platform and networking site LinkedIn is the most balanced of the social networks. These gaps in usage raise questions as to how news outlets best respond, and whether they lean into the interests of their existing audience in terms of gender-targeted content, or whether they try to attract new audiences by promoting alternative topics or perspectives.

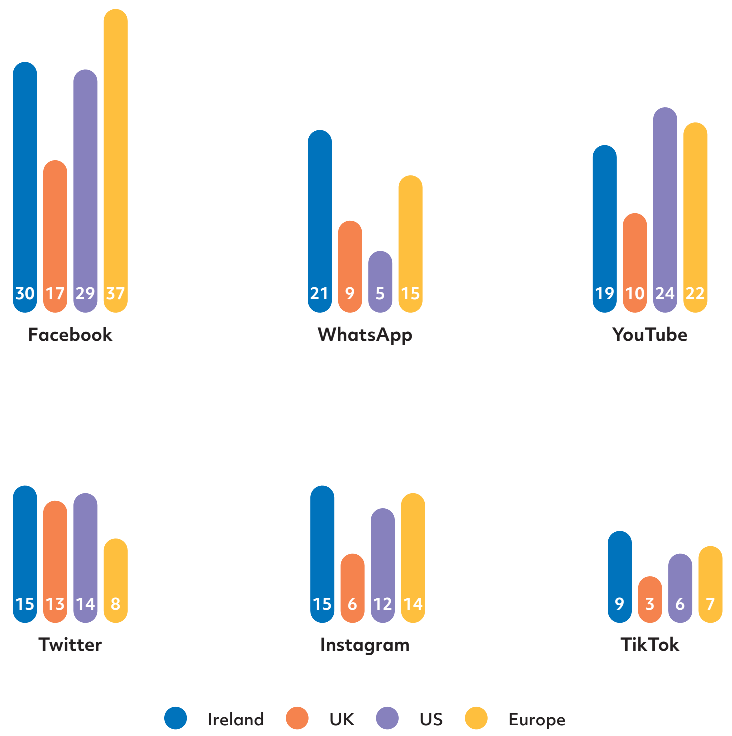
FIG 51: SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR NEWS BY YEAR



Q. Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? Please select all that apply.

Since 2022, there have been slight declines in usage of the top three platforms for the purpose of accessing and sharing news, with Facebook down 3pp and WhatsApp and YouTube both falling -1pp. In keeping with other results demonstrating its increased reach, TikTok has seen a growth (+4pp) on last year, and up +7pp since 2020. Over the past three years, the most notable shift is in Facebook's gradual decline (-9pp since 2020) although Facebook Messenger has not been impacted quite so much over that same period (-1pp), and the main platform is still reaching almost one in three people for news. Instagram as a platform for news has grown steadily since 2020, perhaps indicating that news organisations are now investing more seriously in the social network with content tailored for its format and audience.

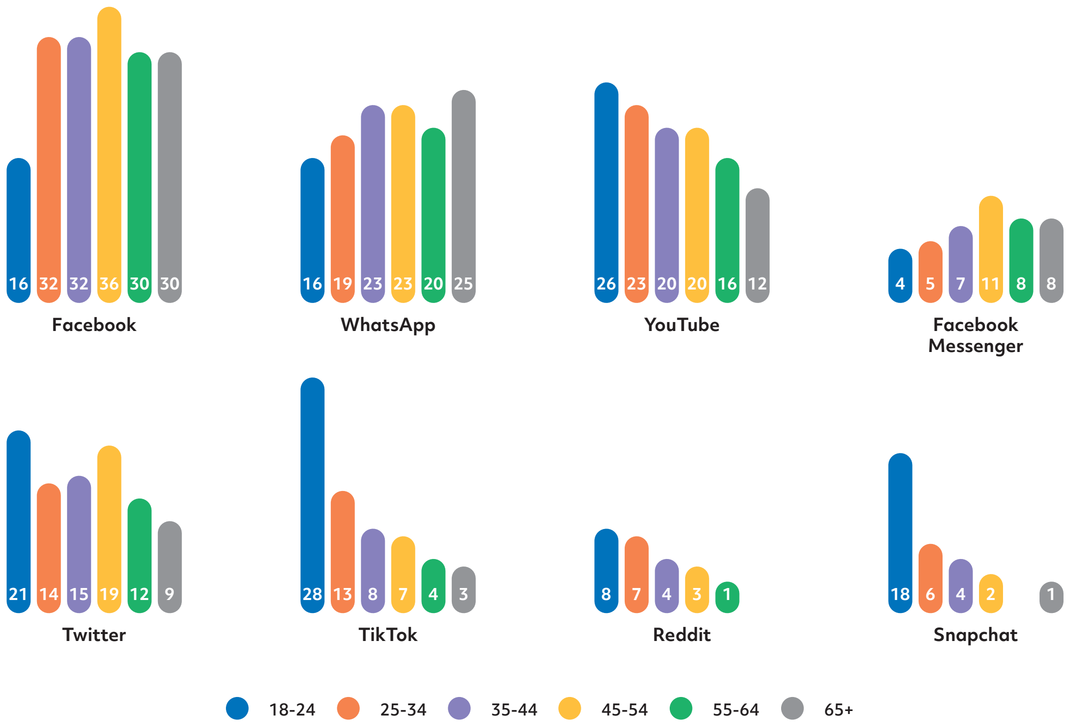
FIG 52: SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR NEWS INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON



Q. Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? Please select all that apply.

Ireland's use of the main social networks for news is higher than the UK across all six platforms listed here and is closer to the European average: for example, 15% of people in Ireland use Instagram compared with 6% in the UK, and 14% in Europe. Ireland is also relatively close to the patterns among US audiences, apart from WhatsApp which in Ireland (21%) is four times higher than in the US (5%). Ireland is most notably below Europe in Facebook usage, with a gap of 7pp. Interestingly, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok usage is higher in Ireland than in any of the other regions included here suggesting an Irish population that is relatively active on social media.

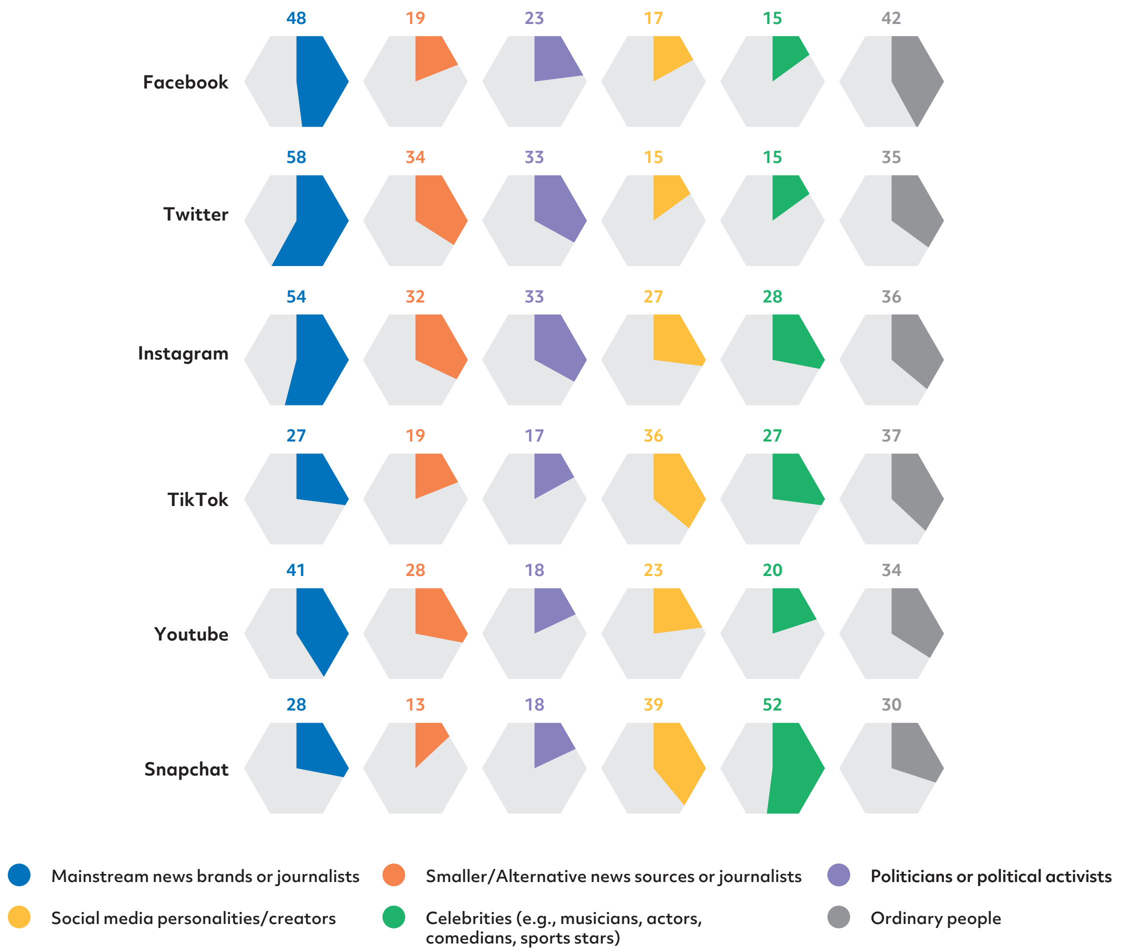
FIG 53: SOCIAL MEDIA USED FOR NEWS BY AGE GROUP



Q. Which, if any, of the following have you used for finding, reading, watching, sharing or discussing news in the last week? Please select all that apply.

When looking at social media use for news specifically, we can see that among Facebook and WhatsApp, usage peaks among those who are in three of the middle age categories, between 25-54, with lower levels on either side of those. YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat and Reddit are used mostly by the Under 25s as a source of news, but Twitter in particular has a relatively even spread across ages suggesting its news content holds broad generational appeal. Facebook's usage among the 18-24s (16%) is down on last year's figure, dropping 7pp from 23%, while it also dipped slightly across the other age groups. Elsewhere, in comparing last year's figures, some notable findings included an increase (+10pp) in TikTok usage for news among the 18-24s and a +4pp increase in Twitter among that same age group; a decline (-8pp) in YouTube usage for news among the over 65s; and -7pp decline in Facebook Messenger use among the 25-34s.

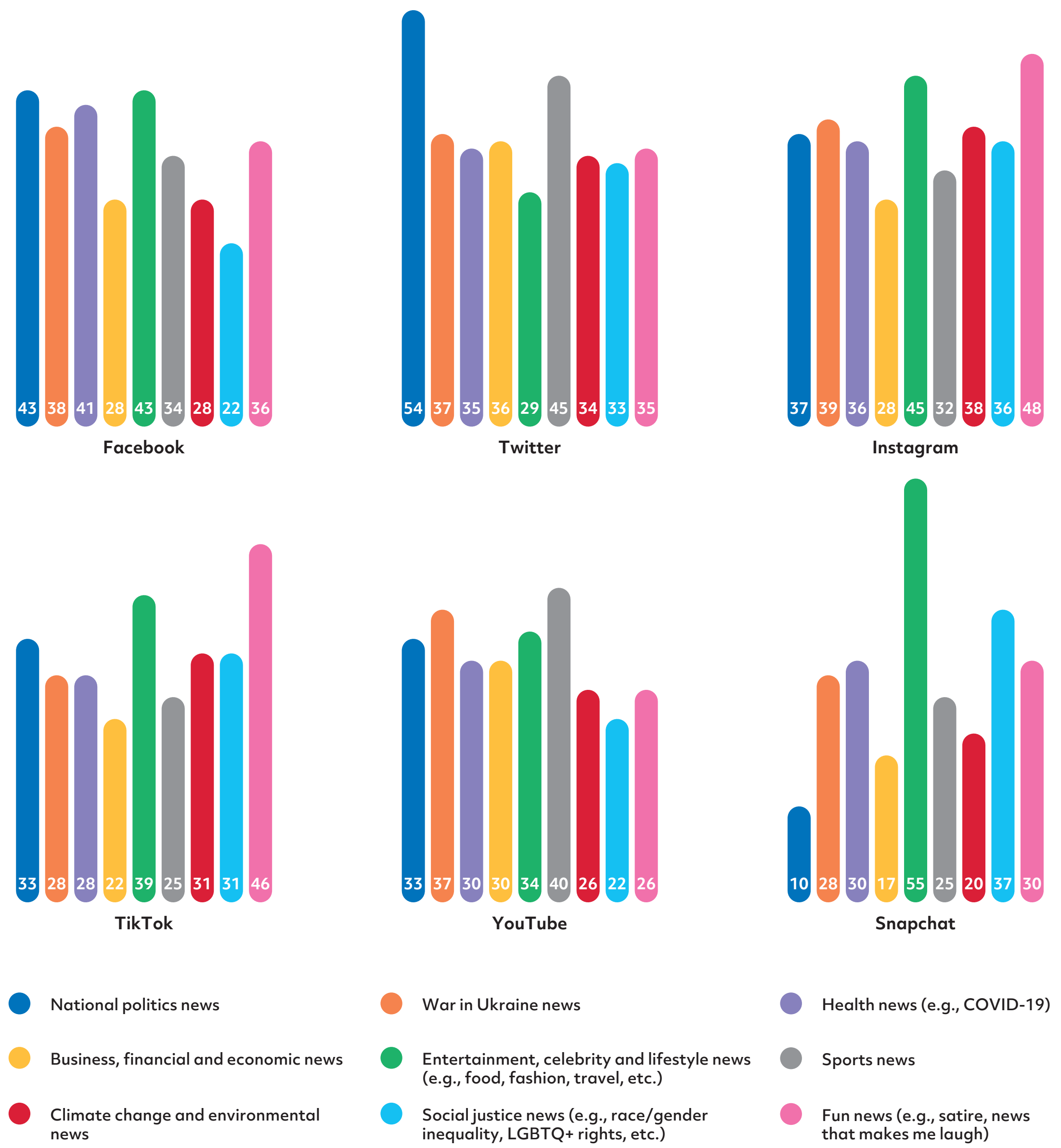
FIG 54: SOURCES OF ATTENTION FOR NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM



Q. You said that you use Twitter for news… When it comes to news on Twitter, which of these sources do you generally pay most attention to? Please select all that apply.

Mainstream news brands or journalists are the dominant source of news on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, which are the four most established platforms listed here. Conversely, on the newer platforms of TikTok and Snapchat, we can see the more non-journalistic streams of news content have more influence. On TikTok, it is very much people-driven, by both "ordinary people" (37%) and social media personalities/creators (36%), while celebrities are the key sources on Snapchat (52%). Mainstream news outlets have their lowest reach on TikTok (27%) and Snapchat (28%) suggesting there is potential for them to attract more younger audiences in these spaces if they can create appropriate, engaging content. Smaller/alternative news sources and journalists have most reach on Twitter and Instagram, as do politicians or political activists.

FIG 55: TYPES OF CONTENT PAID ATTENTION TO ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS



Q. You said that you use [platform] for news… When it comes to news on [platform], what types of content do you mostly pay attention to? Please select all that apply.

These results show what topics news people consume on what platform. There are only two standout categories above the 50% mark: Twitter is clearly used mostly for national politics news (54%), and used least for entertainment, celebrity and lifestyle (29%), while the direct opposite is true for Snapchat, which is low on politics (10%) but high on entertainment (55%). Instagram and TikTok are both most popular for the entertainment and the "fun news" categories, suggesting they are seen as lighter, more enjoyable spaces where people spend time relaxing. Facebook and YouTube both appear to be more evenly spread in terms of what kinds of news people consume when using them. In examining the topics themselves, we can see that social justice issues are most popular on Snapchat and Instagram, as is the climate and environment topic. Sport is most popular on Twitter and YouTube. The war in Ukraine has most reach on Instagram, perhaps indicative of the many striking and devastating images associated with the coverage.

05

FINANCE AND PAYMENT

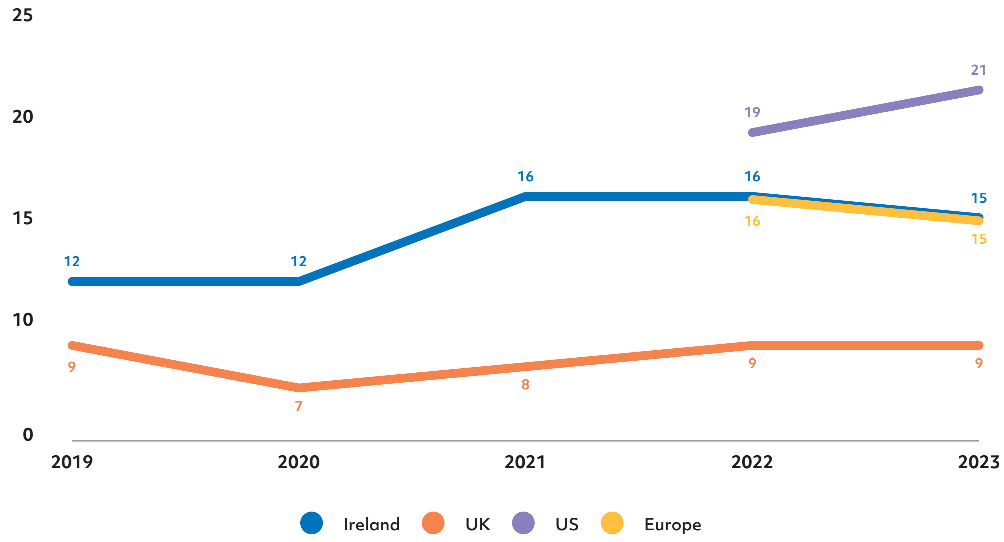
This section takes in questions directly related to the current cost of living crisis and asks who is most affected?

This section looks at media subscriptions and people's reasons for taking them out.

It examines attitudes to publicly funded news services.

Finally it asks which media sources people choose to help them understand finance.

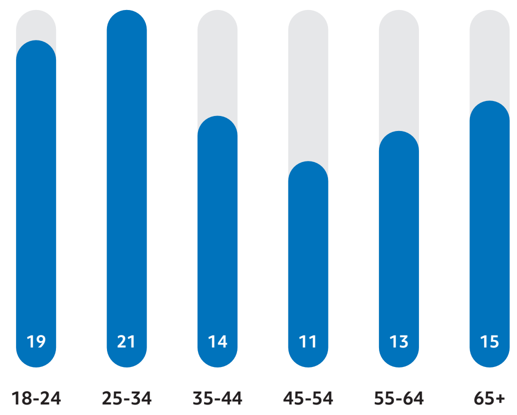
FIG 56: PAYING FOR NEWS INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON



Q. Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service in the last year? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition)

News subscription payments haven't changed much across these markets in 2023, despite the economic downturn. As we are now comparing ourselves to the US (rather than to North America) we can see that the numbers paying for a subscription in that country have gone up since last year +2pp (21%). In Ireland the percentage of survey takers paying for subscriptions overall is down -1pp, a tie with Europe (15%). Looking back over recent years, Ireland's numbers have gone up slowly since 2019 when those subscribing constituted just 12%. The percentage subscribing in the UK remains low at 9%, but is back at its 2019 level.

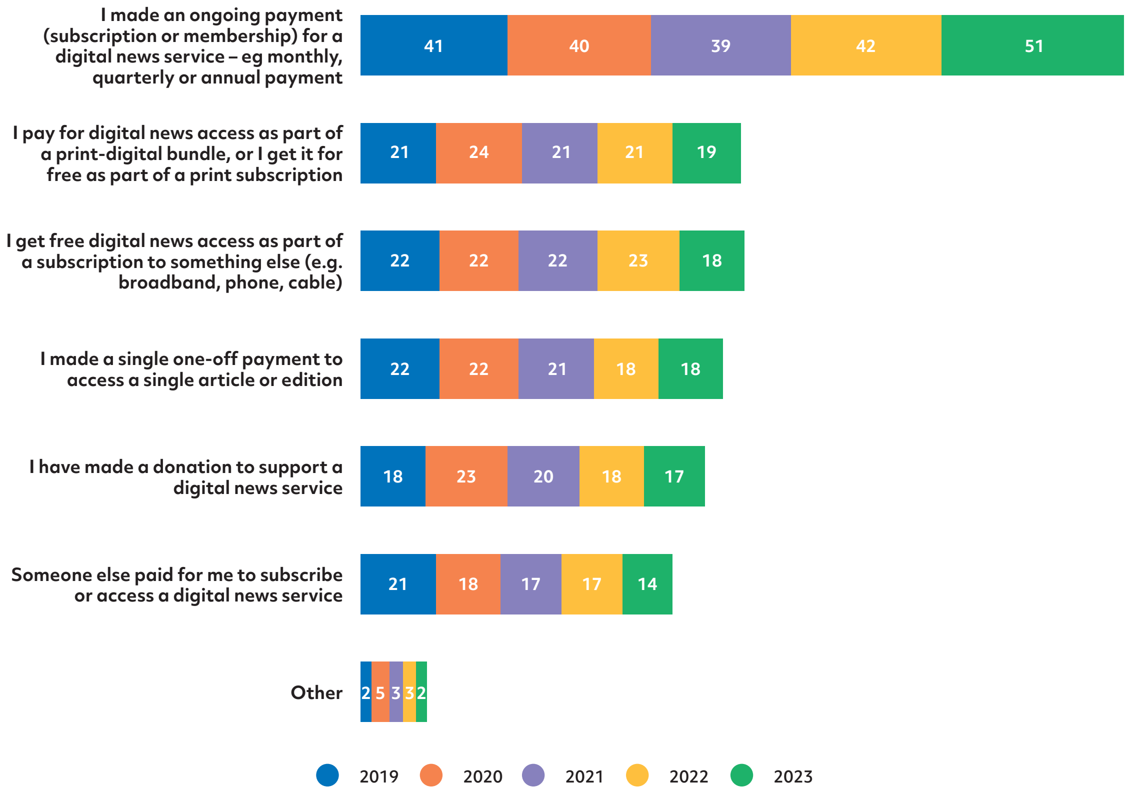
FIG 57: PAID FOR NEWS BY AGE



Q. Have you paid for ONLINE news content, or accessed a paid for ONLINE news service in the last year? (This could be a digital subscription, combined digital/print subscription, a donation, or one off payment for an article or app or e-edition)

In this chart, we examine the 15% of news subscribers in Ireland (from Fig:56) broken down into six age groups. Here we can see that the highest percentage (21%) are the 25-34 year olds. This group is largely finished with their student or apprenticeship years and are in employment and consequently they have more disposable income. However choosing one's own media is still important for the younger cohort (19%). The next three age groups, with large numbers juggling housing costs and children, spend less on media subscriptions. This number climbs again for the 65+ cohort (15%).

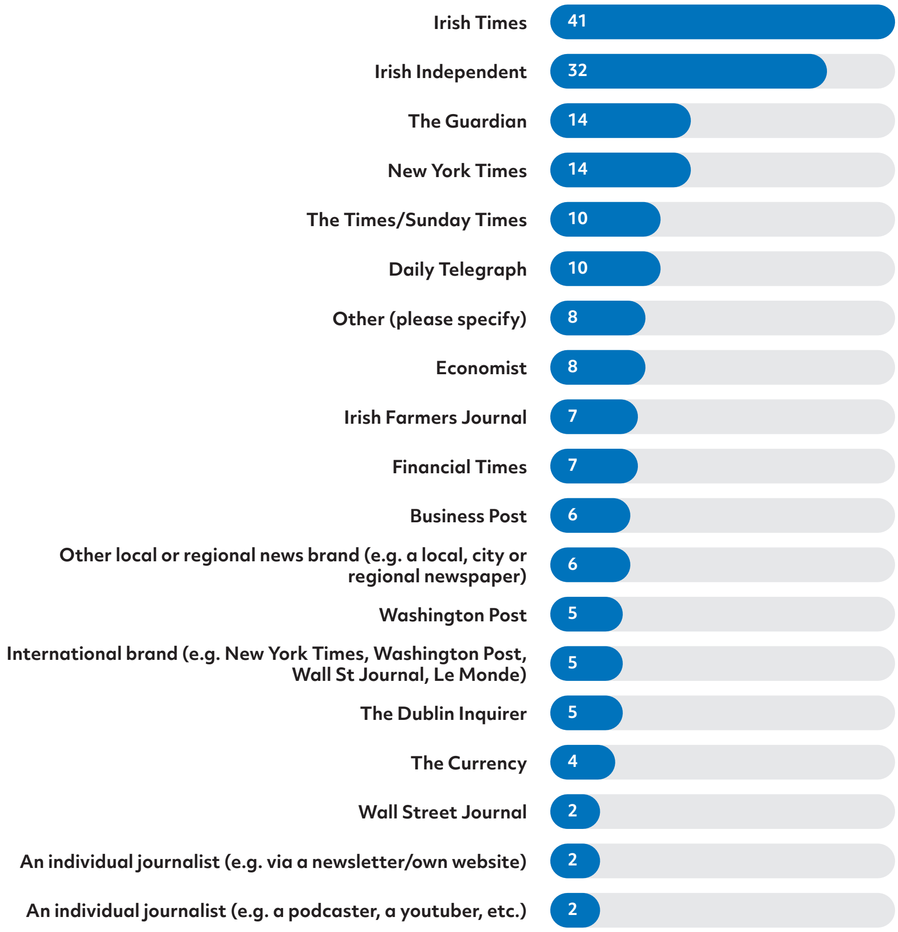
FIG 58: METHODS OF PAYING FOR NEWS BY YEAR



Q. You said you have accessed paid for ONLINE news content in the last year… Which, if any, of the following ways have you used to pay for ONLINE news content in the last year? Please select all that apply.

Here respondents who said they have paid for online news at some point over the past year were asked about the methods of paying for that content. The most popular means was through a regular payment, (e.g. a monthly, quarterly or annual subscription), and 51% chose this category. This is up a decisive +9pp on last year. Elsewhere around one in five chose the print-digital bundle, down 2pp (19%). A similar percentage got free access via a subscription to something else, down 5pp (18%). One-off payments remain stable from last year (18%); making a donation is down 1pp (17%) and the number having a third party pay for their subscription service is down 3pp (14%).

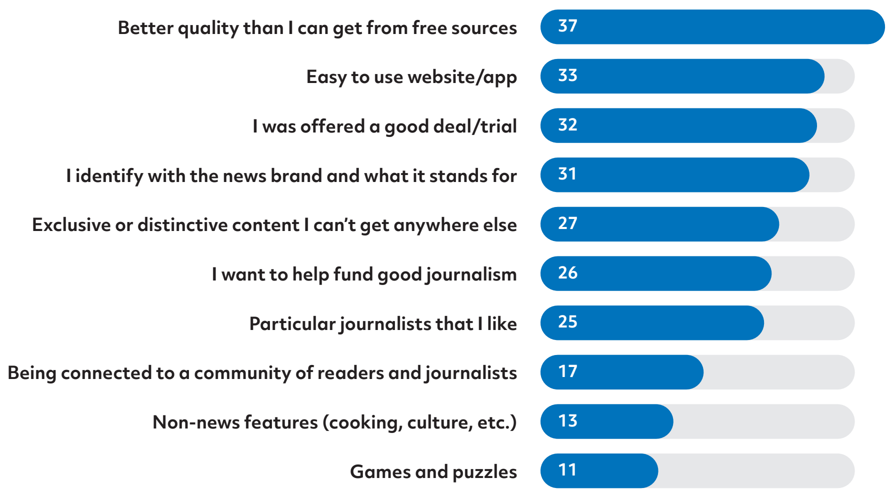
FIG 59: MOST PAID DIGITAL SUBSCRIPTIONS/MEMBERSHIP TITLES



Q. You said you have paid a subscription/membership to a digital news service in the last year... Which of the following did you subscribe to? Please select all that apply.

This chart shows the breakdown of the titles selected by those who say they have a subscription/membership to a digital news service. Two Irish titles top this poll for subscriptions - with the Irish Times up +2pp from last year at 41%, and the Irish Independent up +4pp at 32%. The next few titles hail from overseas: the Guardian is down 2pp at 14%, tying with the New York Times which is up +3pp. The Times/Sunday Times and the Daily Telegraph are both on 10%. These are followed by the Economist (8%), the Irish Farmers' Journal (7%), the Financial Times (7%), and the Business Post (6%). Overall this chart shows that a significant slice of digital media spend by customers goes to titles headquartered or owned abroad.

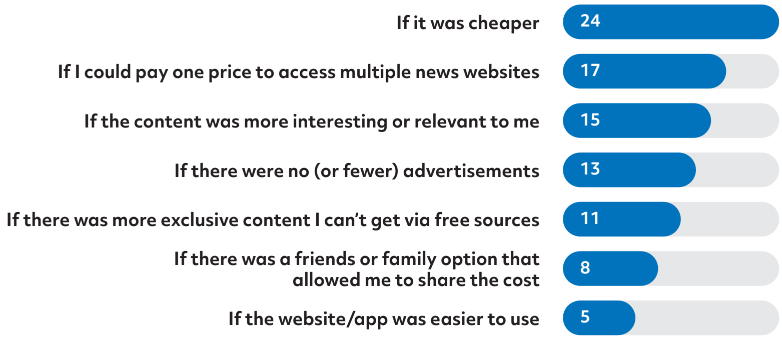
FIG 60: REASONS FOR CHOOSING TO PAY FOR NEWS



Q. You said that you have paid for access to online news in the last year... What are the most important reasons for this? Please select all that apply.

Of those with subscriptions, the largest number of respondents cite payment as a means of securing 'better quality' than from free sources (37%). This could be related to it being better written and/or being more trustworthy. The emphasis on the nature of the content is similar to the fifth category - access to 'exclusive or distinctive content I can't get elsewhere' (27%). This is an incentive for media outlets to enhance or grow their special offerings for paying customers. An easy to use website helps to cut through the confusion of information (33%) and 32% felt they had been offered a good deal. Two categories are linked to liking the news brand (31%) or its journalists (25%). The community aspects of subscribing are reflected in the respondents who 'want to fund good journalism' (26%) and those who like being connected to other readers and journalists (17%).

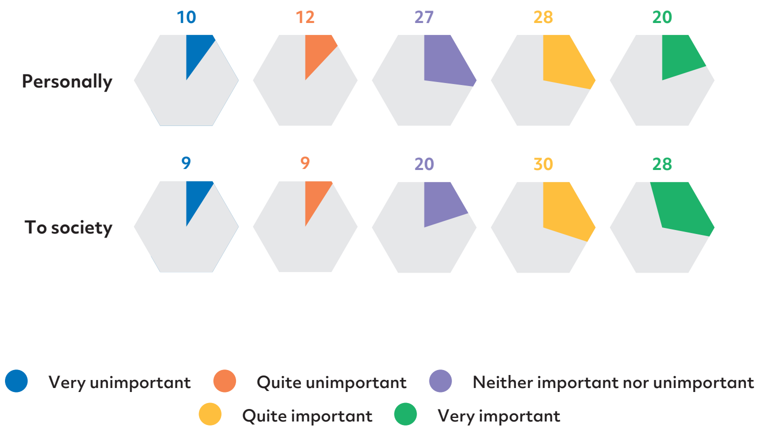
FIG 61: WHAT WOULD ENCOURAGE NON-SUBSCRIBERS TO PAY



Q. You say you don't currently subscribe or donate to an online newspaper or other news service. Which of the following, if any, would most encourage you to pay? Please select all that apply.

This time we are tackling the non-subscribers to find out which factors might tempt them to take out a subscription? This is the target audience that digital news companies need to get onboard, but how easy will it be to accede to the following demands? Unsurprisingly, during a cost-of-living crisis, the main reason people might take out a news subscription would be if the price were to come down (24%). Making the financial outlay more worthwhile is the second reason - through accessing multiple news sites via one payment (17%). The nature of the content being more interesting or relevant comes in third (15%), followed by a wish to see no advertisements or fewer of them (13%). People desiring more exclusive content is next (11%). 8% would like to see a friends or family option for sharing payment, and 5% would like websites or apps to be easier to use.

FIG 62: IMPORTANCE OF PUBLICLY FUNDED NEWS SERVICES

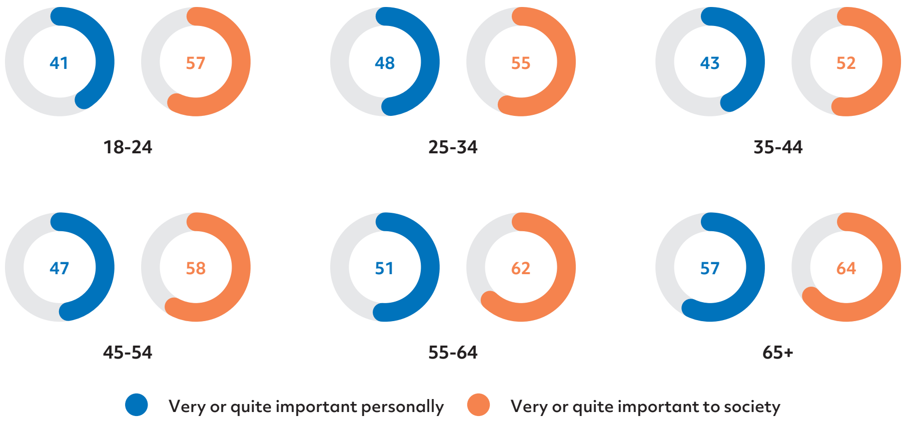


Q: How important, or not, are publicly funded news services such as RTÉ News to you personally?

Respondents here were asked to rate the importance of publicly funded news services for both themselves personally and then for society. Interestingly more people think it is 'quite' or 'very' important for society (58%) than they think it is for themselves (48%). A higher number of those who think it is 'very or quite' important for society tend to the Left in politics (67%*) versus the Right (53%*). The political leaning of those who think publicly funded news is 'very or quite important personally' is less consequential for both the Left leaning (53%*) and the Right leaning (50%*).

**Not included in this graph.*

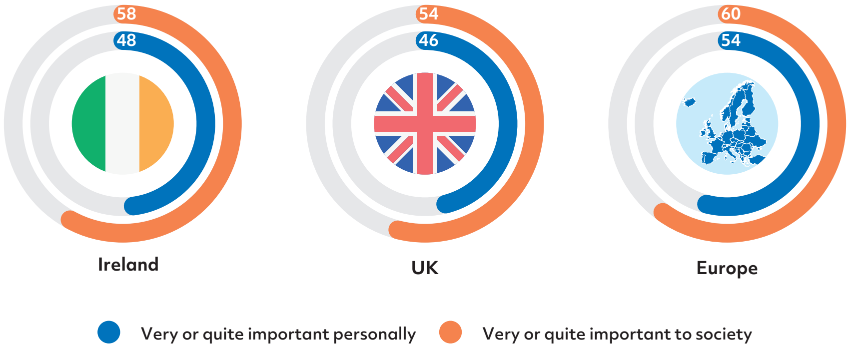
FIG 63: IMPORTANCE OF PUBLICLY FUNDED NEWS BY DEMOGRAPHICS



Q: 'How important, or not, are publicly funded news services such as RTÉ News to you personally?

When you break down how people feel about publicly funded news services, the numbers across all six age cohorts are highest for publicly funded news services being 'very or quite important to society'. The group that believes this the most is the 65+ age cohort (64%), but even the 18-24 year olds believe this to a surprisingly high degree (57%). For this group only 41% believe it is important to them personally, whereas for the oldest cohort of 65+ it is 57%.

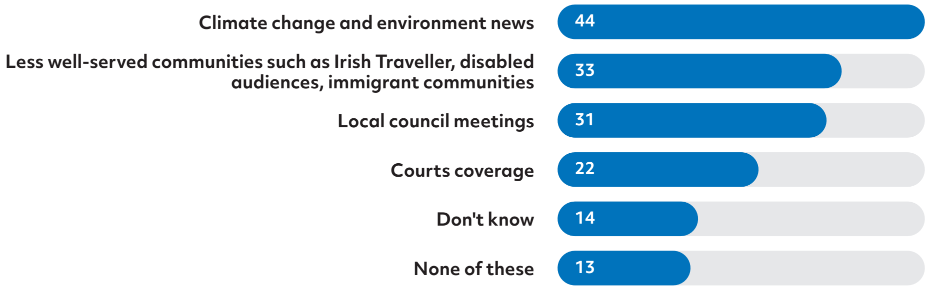
FIG 64: IMPORTANCE OF PUBLICLY FUNDED NEWS SERVICES



Q. How important, or not, are publicly funded news services such as RTÉ News to you personally?

Here we are comparing Ireland's statistics regarding publicly funded news services with those pertaining to the UK and to Europe. We haven't included the US as it does not have publicly funded media in the same way as do these other markets. Europe leads the way here in both categories - stating that it is important to society (60%) and to them personally (54%). In the UK 54% selected its importance to society, with 46% saying it is important to them personally. In Ireland 58% consider it is important to society with 48% saying it is important to them personally.

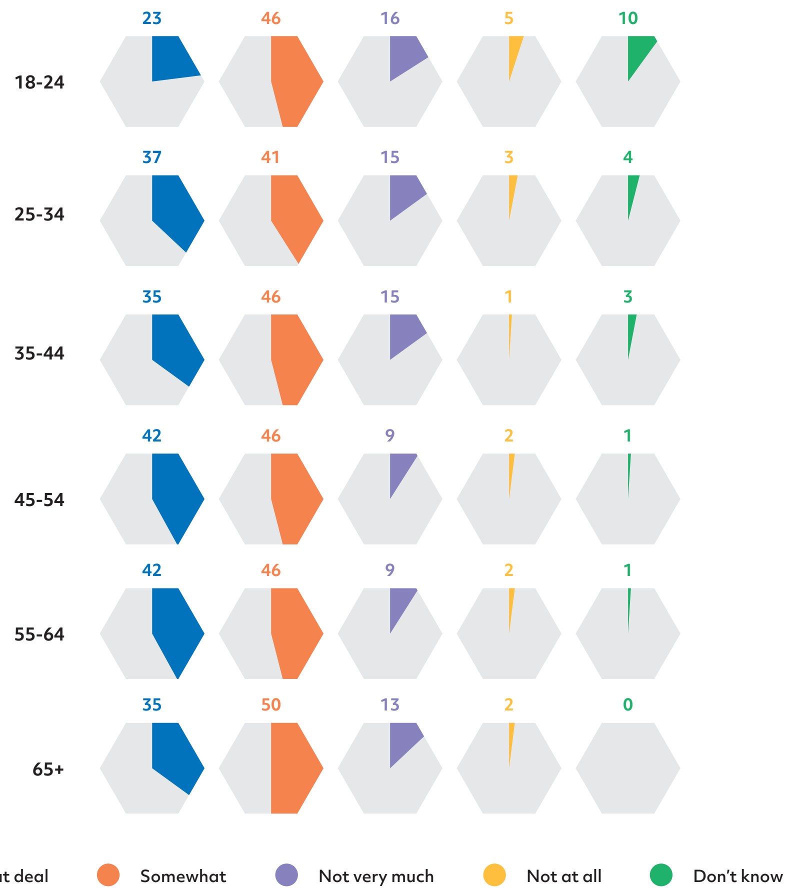
FIG 65: GOVERNMENT FUNDING QUESTION



Q. If the government were to provide assistance to some kinds of public interest journalism, which areas should be prioritised? Please select all of the options below that you consider to be important.

Climate-change and environment news top the poll (44%) for subjects that should be given priority were the government to provide financial assistance to some kinds of public interest journalism. This is a key area that can be expensive in terms of news resourcing. Many news outlets grapple with how best to make this coverage relevant and readable. Coming in second place (33%) is a call to finance coverage about 'less well served groups' such as the Irish Traveller community, immigrant communities and the disabled audience. Local council meetings are also seen as an under-covered sector (31%) and courts coverage (22%) brings up the rear. Courts coverage should be improved through a financial grant scheme managed by Ireland's new media commission, Coimisiún na Meán.

FIG 66: AFFECTED BY COST OF LIVING CHANGES BY AGE



Q. How much, if at all, have you been affected by changes to the cost of living (e.g., cost of energy, fuel, food) in the last year?

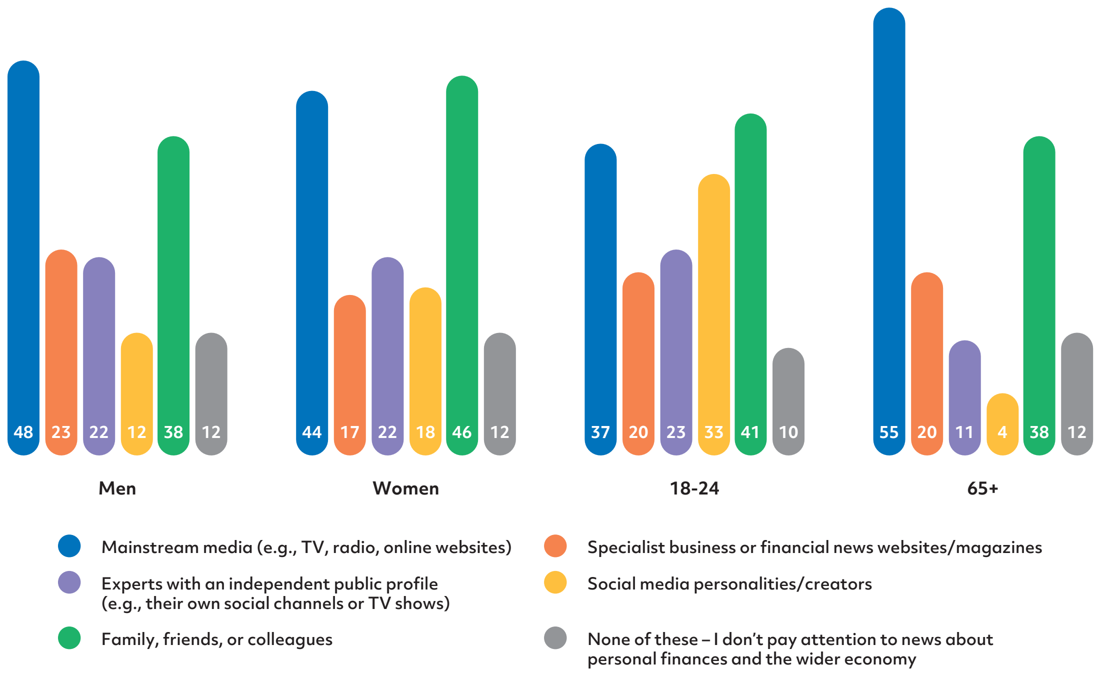
These questions have been added to the survey in 2023 to draw out information about how the current cost-of-living crisis is affecting media consumers. The highest number of respondents who say they have been affected 'a great deal' are the 45-54 and 55-64 year olds (42%). These groups often have caring responsibilities for both children and/or older parents and are the most squeezed by the rise in prices of food, petrol, gas and electricity. If you combine the categories of people who have been affected 'a great deal' plus 'somewhat' then it is the same two age groups (combined 45-64 year olds) that come out on top again (88%). Those aged 65+ who are affected 'a great deal' plus 'somewhat' is close behind at 85%. If you look just at the youngest cohort of 18-24 years olds, only 23% say they have been 'affected a great deal'. This is probably down to a large proportion living at home where bills are paid by their parents. If you add in 'somewhat affected' then those affected in this age group adds up to 69%.

FIG 67: AFFECTED BY COST OF LIVING INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

Q. How much, if at all, have you been affected by changes to the cost of living (e.g., cost of energy, fuel, food) in the last year?

Ireland tops the poll in these media markets with 83% of respondents saying they have been affected 'a great deal' and 'somewhat' by the cost of living crisis. In these combined categories Europe is -5pp lower than Ireland (78%) and the US is -4pp lower than Ireland (79%). The surprise statistic belongs to the UK where only 22% of respondents claim to have been affected 'a great deal' and 50% claim to have been 'somewhat affected,' leading to a combined total of 72%, -11pp lower than Ireland.

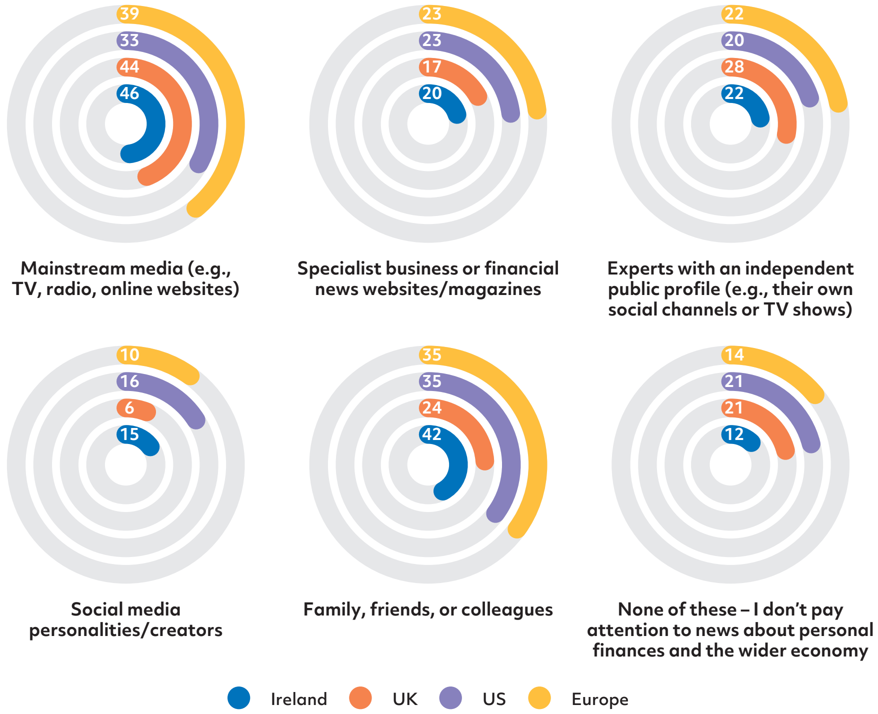
FIG 68: SOURCES OF ATTENTION FOR NEWS OR INFORMATION RELATING TO PERSONAL FINANCES AND THE WIDER ECONOMY



Q. Thinking about news or information related to your personal finances and/or the wider economy... which of the following sources, if any, do you pay a lot of attention to? Please select all that apply.

This question asks which media or which groups our respondents turn to for information about both personal finances and the wider economy. The answers are then broken down into men/women and the youngest and oldest cohorts. The mainstream media is the top answer by far for men (48%) and the 65+ age group (55%). It also comes in a high second for women at 44% but is topped by 'family, friends or colleagues' (46%). This last category (of close family and acquaintances) also tops the poll for the 18-24 year olds (41%) followed by the mainstream media (37%). Social media personalities/creators come out the lowest for the 65+ age group (4%) and this group is tied last with 'none of these' for men (12%). But for the youngest cohort it is (33%). The specialist business or financial news websites/magazines do not vary significantly in these selected groups: men (23%); women (17%); youngest (20%) and eldest (20%). And finally, experts with independent public profiles score similarly for men (22%); women (22%) and the 18-24 year olds (23%) but they score much lower for those aged 65+ (11%).

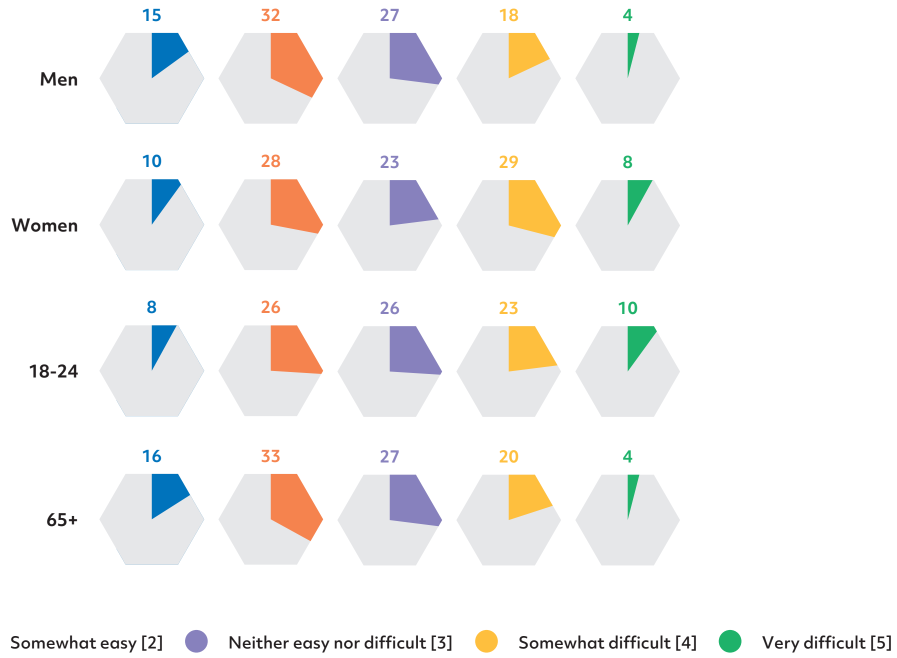
FIG 69: SOURCES OF ATTENTION FOR NEWS OR INFORMATION RELATED TO PERSONAL FINANCES/ECONOMY



Q. Thinking about news or information related to your personal finances and/or the wider economy… which of the following sources, if any, do you pay a lot of attention to? Please select all that apply.

Ireland tops this international comparison in selecting mainstream media (46%) and close acquaintances and family (42%) as their sounding boards in matters of finance. For the UK the top selection is mainstream media (44%) followed by 'experts with an independent public profile' (28%). NB There are more of these types of 'experts' in the UK currently than there are in Ireland. Europe, like Ireland, favours the mainstream media the most (39%), followed by 'family, friends or colleagues (35%). The US similarly preferences mainstream media (33%) and family, friends or colleagues (35%), after which it ties with Europe in consulting specialist business or financial news websites/magazines (23%).

FIG 70: EASE OF UNDERSTANDING NEWS ABOUT FINANCE AND THE ECONOMY



Q. How easy or difficult do you find it to understand news about finance and the economy?

We have broken down the data here to see how easy men versus women and the oldest and youngest cohorts say they feel about understanding news related to finance and the economy. Men (15%) are much more confident that it is 'very easy' to understand with only 10% of women finding these topics 'very easy'. When you add those who find these topics 'somewhat easy' to those who find them 'very easy' then 47% of men fall into this category, as opposed to 38% of women. If you look at these two combined categories for the youngest, they add up to 34% whereas the oldest cohort totals 49%. These data suggest that 'explainer' articles and videos could do well to plug this gap in confidence regarding news about finance and the economy.

The impact of tech job losses

By Brian O'Donovan, Work & Technology Correspondent, RTÉ News

"Twitter has not responded in relation to the invitation issued, nor has it been possible to make contact with the organisation by phone."

So went an email to members of the Oireachtas Media Committee in April 2023[1] informing TDs and senators that not only had Twitter failed to respond to an invitation to appear before them, it had not even been possible to make contact with the company's Dublin office by phone.

The social media firm's European Headquarters is just around the corner from Leinster House but it must have started to feel like a very distant place for regulators and legislators after Elon Musk took over Twitter and dramatically cut staff numbers.

In the weeks that followed the takeover, the Irish Data Protection Commission expressed concerns about the departures of senior Twitter staff, including the company's data protection officer. Publishing her annual report in March 2023, the Data Protection Commissioner Helen Dixon said that there had been a breakdown in communications with Twitter's Dublin office.

It appeared that, like the staff in Leinster House, when the DPC tried to call Twitter, nobody would pick up the phone. The Commissioner said she was concerned that Twitter had rolled out its Twitter Blue paid subscription plan in the European Union without consulting her office. "I think this week we have seen something of a breakdown of communication with the Twitter office in Dublin," Ms. Dixon[2] said at the time.

"When Elon Musk took over and new features of the service, such as subscriptions for the blue tick were announced, we were assured that these would not be rolled out in the EU market and we would have an opportunity to engage with Twitter in Dublin before it was rolled out but this is no longer the position," she added.

If a company chooses to set up a base in a particular country it signs up to a set of local rules and expectations, not least responding to officials when they try to make contact, but in Twitter's case a change of ownership and mass layoffs appeared to sever those traditional connections.

The staff cuts at Twitter did not just lead to communications breakdowns, the manner in which the redundancies were announced was deeply upsetting for employees, many of whom found out by email that their security passes and logins would no longer work and that their jobs were gone. The mass layoffs spooked advertisers worried about what kind of content their products would be appearing alongside on a platform that had slashed the numbers of people monitoring the site.

Twitter was an extreme example of the tech layoffs we saw over the last year, both in the way they were handled and the resulting fallout. But job cuts at other tech firms have also had a profound impact and have provided an indication of the direction that social media firms are travelling.

Typically, the global headcount reductions announced by tech companies have been in the region of 5% - 10% but thankfully, in many cases, those percentages have not been fully applied in Ireland. Much of that is down to the kinds of roles that exist within these companies' Irish operations. People working in artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity or data analytics have valuable skills and due to talent shortages in those areas many companies have been slow to let such staff go.

1 Horgan-Jones, J. 'TikTok and Meta reject Oireachtas committee invitations while Twitter fails to respond'. Irish Times, 12 April 2023.
2 Brian O'Donovan, 'Data watchdog rejects criticism that it is too soft on big tech', RTÉ Online, 7 March 2023

In May 2023, Meta announced that around 490 jobs would be cut at its Irish operation with redundancies across a number of teams including finance, sales, marketing, analytics, operations and engineering. It followed 320 job cuts in November 2022 at the parent company of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

The 490 redundancies came on a difficult week for Meta. Just days earlier, it had been hit with a record €1.2 billion fine imposed by the Irish Data Protection Commission (DPC) for breaches relating to the transfer of personal data from the EU to the US. As part of the decision, Meta was ordered to suspend transatlantic data transfers and was given five months to comply.

The ruling followed an investigation by the DPC into the legal tools used by Meta to transfer Facebook user data from the EU to the US. Meta vowed to appeal what it described as a flawed and unjustified decision.

The May 2023 redundancies at Meta were part of a global job cuts announcement made three months earlier by CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who said the company's workforce would reduce by around 10,000 people. He spoke about the need to make his company a leaner, more technology driven organisation. He highlighted the importance of the metaverse - the virtual reality world in which he has invested billions of dollars hoping it will be the next big thing.

He also made reference to a greater focus on AI[3]. The recent development of powerful large language models like ChatGPT has seen a rush by big tech companies to embrace the technology and come up with their own superior versions. The rapid pace of evolution in AI is sparking concerns among governments and regulators around the world who are trying to understand and police new systems and tools that could be exploited by cybercriminals or used to spread disinformation.

Advances in AI are also making news organisations question content in ways they never thought imaginable. Is that photo of the Pope wearing a puffer jacket real? Is that video of a politician making a controversial statement just a very convincing 'deep fake'? Was that opinion piece written by a human being or by a chatbot?

The EU is rolling out new rules in the areas of disinformation and artificial intelligence. It comes as social media platforms face ongoing criticism for being too slow when it comes to removing harmful content and instead putting clicks, shares and advertising revenue ahead of public safety. If those who control the delete button fail to remove damaging content in a timely fashion, then efforts to counteract disinformation will struggle.

While tech firms ramp up hiring in the development of virtual reality worlds and AI systems, let's hope they don't do so at the expense of staff in other areas such as content moderation and data protection. New rules and regulations will have limited impact if there is no one to answer the phone when the watchdogs come calling.

3 'Update on Meta's Year of Efficiency', Meta Newsroom. March 14, 2023.

News podcasting offers a rare bright spot for audience engagement but making them pay remains a struggle

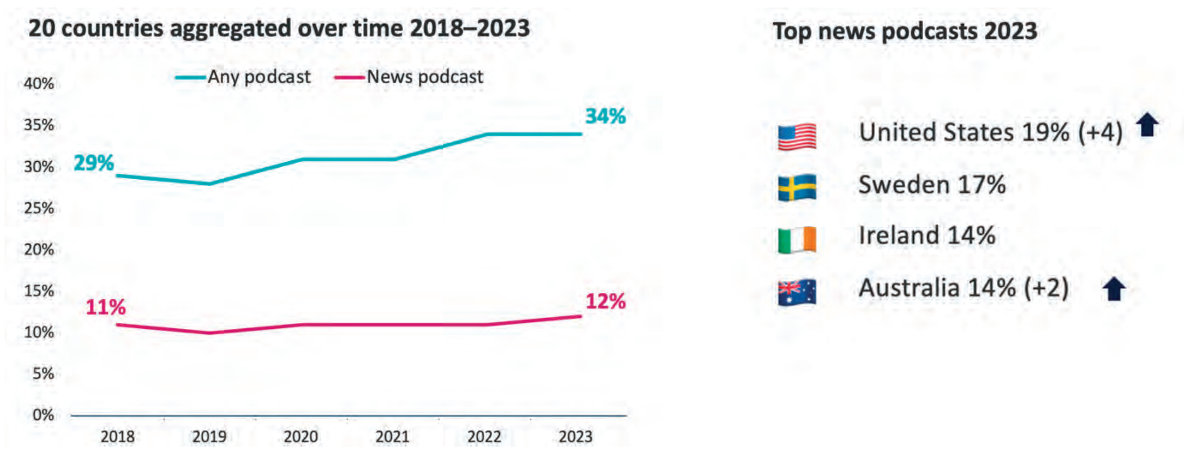
By Nic Newman, Lead Author of the global Reuters Institute Digital News Report

Over the last few years, much has been written about a so-called *golden age* of podcasting which many argue started with the true crime show Serial (2014) and a subsequent wave of 'deep-dive' news podcasts such as The Daily from the *New York Times* (2017). But fragmented listening and limited public measurement systems mean it has been hard to know what is working and with which audiences. In this year's report we have used online survey methodologies to identify some of the most popular news podcasts and formats across countries – including Ireland.

News podcast use stable as overall podcast market grows

Since 2018, our survey has tracked monthly podcast use in 20 countries[4] with a developed podcast industry. Across these markets, overall usage has grown from just over a quarter of our sample to about a third (34%), but news podcasts (12%) have grown more slowly despite a significant increase in supply.

PROPORTION THAT LISTENED TO A PODCAST/NEWS PODCAST IN THE LAST MONTH



Q11F_2018. A podcast is an episodic series of digital audio files, which you can download, subscribe, or listen to. Which of the following types of podcast have you listened to in the last month? Please select all that apply. Base: Total sample in each country-year ≈ 2000

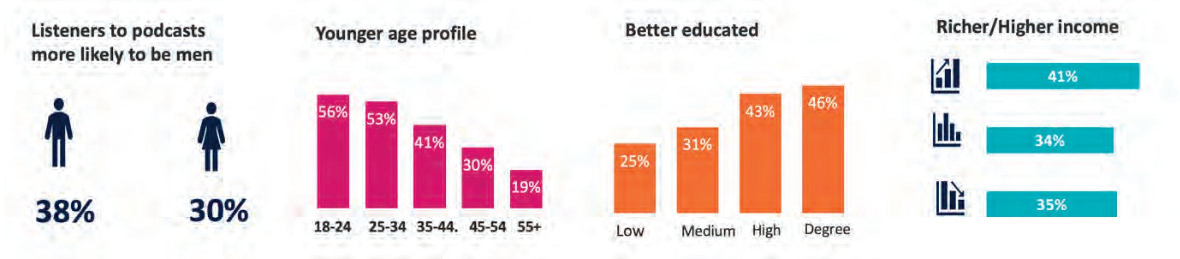
Consumption of news podcasts is highest in the United States (19%), and is strong in Ireland, and Australia but has attracted less attention in some large European countries such as France (9%) and the UK (9%).

Podcasting may not yet be a mass market medium, but its audience profile is extremely interesting to publishers and to advertisers. Listeners tend to be richer, better educated, and crucially *much younger* (see next chart). But people of all ages find podcasts a convenient format when commuting, walking the dog, in the gym, or doing mundane tasks at home such as cleaning.

4 The countries are UK, USA, Australia, Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Belgium: Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Japan, Singapore, Canada, plus Argentina (since 2019).

PROFILE OF THOSE THAT LISTENED TO A PODCAST IN THE LAST MONTH – AVERAGE OF SELECTED COUNTRIES

Podcast listeners are younger, richer, received more education



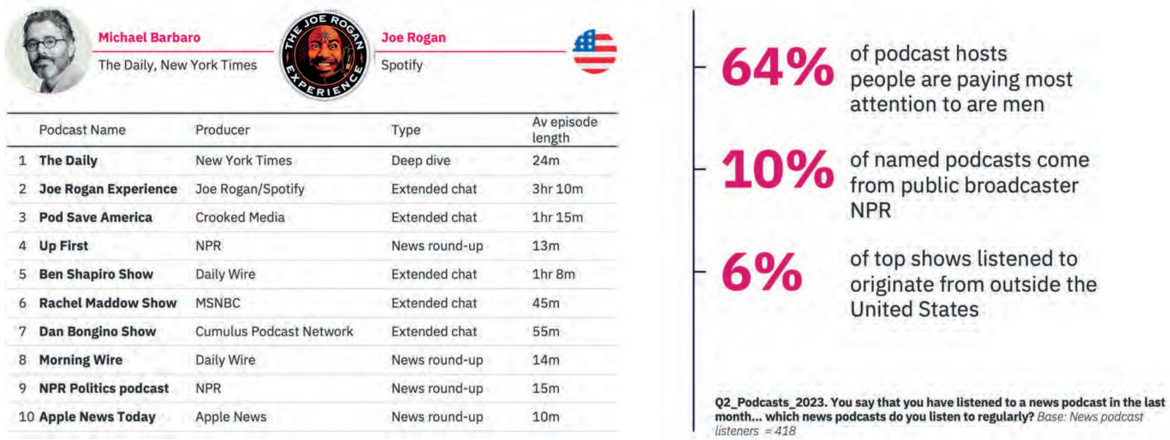
Q11F_2018. A podcast is an episodic series of digital audio files, which you can download, subscribe or listen to. Which of the following types of podcast have you listened to in the last month? Note: Question asked in 20 countries listed in footnote above. Bases vary

Different types of news podcasts and country comparisons

This year we asked survey respondents in 12 countries, including the US, UK and Ireland, to name the news shows they used most often and coded these responses by publisher, type, and origin country[5].

Across countries, we find that personality-led *extended chat* programmes like The Joe Rogan Experience are mentioned most often, along with *deep dives* such as The Daily from the *New York Times*. Short *news rounds-ups* such as 5 Things from CNN are also popular, often forming part of morning routines. By contrast, longer *narrative documentary* series such as ITV News's investigation into lockdown parties in Downing Street are mentioned more rarely. In some countries, we find uneven distribution, with a few big shows dominating and a very long tail, but in others listening is more evenly spread.

TOP TEN NEWS PODCASTS - USA



	Podcast Name	Producer	Type	Av episode length
1	The Daily	New York Times	Deep dive	24m
2	Joe Rogan Experience	Joe Rogan/Spotify	Extended chat	3hr 10m
3	Pod Save America	Crooked Media	Extended chat	1hr 15m
4	Up First	NPR	News round-up	13m
5	Ben Shapiro Show	Daily Wire	Extended chat	1hr 8m
6	Rachel Maddow Show	MSNBC	Extended chat	45m
7	Dan Bongino Show	Cumulus Podcast Network	Extended chat	55m
8	Morning Wire	Daily Wire	News round-up	14m
9	NPR Politics podcast	NPR	News round-up	15m
10	Apple News Today	Apple News	News round-up	10m

Q2_Podcasts_2023. You say that you have listened to a news podcast in the last month... which news podcasts do you listen to regularly? Base: Those that listened to a news podcast in the last month = 418. Note: Open-ended question. Respondents could type in up to three podcasts.

5 Typically, between 200 and 700 shows were mentioned in each country. Note that recall methodologies will inevitably produce different results from industry data.

In the United States, the list of most mentioned news podcasts is dominated by male hosts, most often from the right (Ben Shapiro, Dan Bongino). By contrast news round-ups (Up First, Apple News Today) and deep dives (The Daily) tend to have a more neutral tone. Hosting duties are often shared between men and women.[6]

TOP TEN NEWS PODCASTS – UK

Alastair Campbell and Rory Stewart
Goalhanger podcasts

Adam Fleming
Newscast, BBC News

	Podcast Name	Producer	Type	Av episode length
1=	**The Rest is Politics**	Goalhanger podcasts	Extended chat	43m
1=	**Newscast**	BBC News	Extended chat	31m
1=	**The News Agents**	Global Media	Extended chat	35m
4	**Americast**	BBC News	Extended chat	42m
5	**Today in Focus**	The Guardian	Deep dive	29m
6	**Ukrainecast**	BBC News	Extended chat	32m
7	**The NS Podcast**	New Statesman	Extended chat	24m
8	**Joe Rogan Experience**	Joe Rogan/Spotify	Extended chat	3hr 10m
9	**The Trawl**	Jemma Forte & Marina Purkiss	Extended chat	35m
10	**Oh God What Now**	Podmasters	Extended chat	1hr 6m

73% of podcast hosts of top mentioned shows are men

31% of mentioned podcasts come from the BBC (public broadcaster)

6% of top podcasts listened to originate from outside the United Kingdom

Q2_Podcasts_2023. You say that you have listened to a news podcast in the last month… which news podcasts do you listen to regularly? Base: Those that listened to a news podcast in the last month = 161. Note: Open-ended question. Respondents could type in up to three podcasts.

In the UK, the top three podcasts are politically focused extended chat shows, two of which are daily. The BBC has created a number of original podcasts, such as Newscast and Ukrainecast, as well as repackaging versions of popular radio shows, but is facing competition from commercial broadcasters, newspapers, and other disrupters. The Rest is Politics is hosted by former Conservative politician Rory Stewart and a former Labour spin doctor, Alastair Campbell while The News Agents (Global Radio) is presented by three former BBC correspondents who were lured from the Corporation with big money deals and the opportunity to express more of their personal opinions.

Other English-speaking markets we analysed show a similar profile, with a mix of deep-dive and extended chat podcasts as well as a strong male bias in hosts. In both Canada and Ireland, we find that the percentage of consumption from outside the country is even higher (about 50% in each case) with The Daily outstripping local shows such as In the News and Indo Daily at the top of our chart. A notable absence in the top ten list is public broadcaster RTÉ, which produces few native podcasts, instead mostly reversioning radio shows for on demand listening. This is also a strategy for Irish commercial radio networks like Newstalk and we also find sports podcasts like Off the Ball (OTB) are extremely popular.

6 Many programmes have dual male/female hosts, but for the purpose of this exercise we identified the first voice heard on each podcast on a particular day and categorised accordingly.

TOP TEN NEWS PODCASTS – IRELAND

Bernice Harrison
In the News, Irish Times

David McWilliams
David McWilliams podcast

	Podcast Name	Producer	Type	Av episode length
1	**The Daily**	New York Times	Deep dive	24m
2=	**In the News**	Irish Times	Deep dive	24m
2=	**Indo Daily**	Irish Independent	Deep dive	20m
4	**Newscast**	BBC News	Extended chat	31m
5	**David McWilliams**	David McWilliams	Extended chat	34m
6	**Today in Focus**	The Guardian	Deep dive	29m
7	**Blindboy**	Loud	Extended chat	1hr 2m
8	**Joe Rogan Experience**	Joe Rogan/Spotify	Extended chat	3hr 10m
9	**The Rest is Politics**	Goalhanger podcasts	Extended chat	43m
10	**Inside Politics**	Irish Times	Extended chat	43m

70% of podcast hosts people are paying most attention to are men

13% of named podcasts come from RTÉ (12% from the BBC)

51% of podcasts listened to originate from outside Ireland

Q2_Podcasts_2023. You say that you have listened to a news podcast in the last month... which news podcasts do you listen to regularly? Base: Those that listened to a news podcast in the last month = 281. Note: Open-ended question. Respondents could type in up to three podcasts.

Conclusion

Categorising the variety of news podcasts across countries is a complex and imperfect task, but overall we find that 'extended chat' formats – often reformatted from radio output – attract most audience attention, while 'deep-dive' podcasts also create significant reach. In most cases, however, attention remains highly fragmented, with a relatively small audience for any one news podcast or publisher. This, in turn, makes podcasts hard to monetise through direct advertising, especially in smaller markets like Ireland.

While Irish audiences have embraced podcasting to a greater extent than those in many other countries, local publishers face intense competition from high-quality podcasts produced in the UK and the United States, making the case for investment in native podcasting even harder. Podcasting is likely to become a more important part of media companies' strategies over the coming years but it is unlikely to reach mass audiences anytime soon, so monetisation is likely to remain a significant challenge.

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In online conversations about news, those on the edges can take centre stage

Dr Dawn Wheatley, Assistant Professor DCU & FuJo

The idea of audience engagement and participation in the news was once romanticised as a key democratic dimension of the internet and technological advancements, allowing dialogue and exchanges of views between members of the public, and with journalists.

The reality has not always been quite so enriching, with many finding that online spaces lack nuance and rationality, leading to uncivilised interactions. For journalists, there are additional challenges with targeted abuse and hostility, but feeling the potential wrath of angry social media backlash may also be off-putting for even "ordinary" news consumers and audiences.

The 2023 Digital News Report again asks about participation in the news and what forms are most popular. Commenting on a news story on a news website is done by just 7% of people, but 25% will actually read those kinds of comments. This is just one example but it captures a common pattern indicative of a vocal minority putting their opinions and interpretations of events out there, while many will remain silent onlookers, curious about what criticisms or praise about a story or journalist might be pointed out.

This question about participation was asked in the first Irish Digital News Report in 2015, when the figure for posting comments on news websites was 10%, so there has only been a slight decline. Yet in those intervening years, many of the "conversations" have moved on to social media platforms, often because news websites now limit comments to registered users, or have closed comments sections altogether because of legal risks or the inability to effectively moderate the content. In early 2023 US publisher Gannett[7], which has around 200 local titles, disabled comments for most of its outlets saying it was "not willing to risk discussions veering off track or people being verbally attacked", but instead encouraged users to be active on social media.

In this year's survey, when asked if they would comment on a news story on a social network (rather than a news website) during a typical week, the average across all demographics was 11%. Notably, it increases to 16% of men aged 25-34, while it is just 8% of women in that same age category. When asked about sharing a news story on social media, 14% of both men and women reported doing that, with the 25-34 year olds again the most likely; it increased to 17% in that age cohort, compared with 12% of the over 55s.

Interestingly, though, we can see further divergence when it comes to political affiliation: 13% of those who described themselves as being ideologically in the centre (including centre-right or centre-left) said they would share a story on social media during a typical week, but it increased to 19% of those who are "fairly or very left wing" and 20% of those who are "fairly or very right wing". These stronger left/right ideologies comprised a quarter of survey respondents so, although a minority, the nature of social media interactions means they can find an amplified voice and platform. This was especially important when coupled with the fact that those with more centrist views are more likely to stay quiet.

7 Fu, A. (2023). Gannett ends online comments for a majority of its news sites. Available at: https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2023/gannett-ends-news-website-comments-sections/

Across almost all categories of participation, a similar pattern was evident, where those respondents with stronger political ideologies on the left/right were more likely to be more active in online news spaces: just 9% of centrist respondents said they would 'like' or 'favourite' a news story, compared with 17% of those on the right. Elsewhere, 12% of centrist respondents said they would talk online with friends and colleagues about a news story, compared with 23% of those on the left.

Meanwhile, in almost all categories, we see men are more likely to be engaging and participating in some form, indicative of their overall higher interest in the news. However, there are three categories in which women are higher, including "talking face to face to friends/colleagues" where 40% of women do that, compared with 35% of men.

This offline discursive dimension is crucial and worth considering in the context of political discussions in particular, as the survey also explores. Despite the accessibility of diverse viewpoints present in online spaces, it is clear that audiences feel more confident discussing politics offline: 30% of Irish respondents said they did *not* discuss politics online, but that dropped to 17% offline. People also felt the need to be less cautious offline, perhaps indicative of their observations around the hostile reaction which can permeate online.

Offline spaces and dialogue remain hugely important for those who might not appear to be visibly participating online. For example, 34% of women said they did not discuss politics online, and that increased to 52% among women aged 65+. However, this does not mean that this cohort does not engage in "real" life: among the women aged over 65, the 52% who did not discuss politics online fell dramatically to 24% when asked about offline conversations, indicating how more news-related discourse happens offline.

Everyone with a stake in public engagement of current affairs – including journalists, politicians and political campaigners – should remember who is present and vocal in these digital spaces and who takes part in, or avoids, online debates about news events. Plenty of people are watching and interested, but they may not want to risk the backlash – or they simply might not want to waste their energy getting involved in highly partisan or ideologically spats.

Licence to print

By Colleen Murrell, Full Professor of Journalism, DCU & FuJo

A flurry of headlines in the past few months reflects that the future of printed newspapers is still a hot topic in Ireland. Peter Vandermeersch, the CEO of European publisher Mediahuis Ireland, got the ball rolling back in October 2022 when he welcomed the government's plans to reduce VAT on print and digital newspapers to zero per cent saying it would enable his business to move to a digital future. Speaking to the *Business Post*[8], he predicted that 'Somewhere in the future there won't be print editions during the week, they will only be on Saturdays and Sundays'. Nonetheless he went on to qualify that 'the future' was 'not the foreseeable future' during this 'transition phase' while the estimated €3 to €4 million windfall would be used to develop new platforms with 'quality content'.

Mediahuis, which owns a number of titles including the *Irish Independent*, the *Sunday Independent*, the *Belfast Telegraph*, *Independent.ie* and the *Sunday World*, shocked the industry in March when Cormac Bourke[9], the editor-in-chief, announced an 'extensive' round of redundancies. Alongside this news he underlined that the company was focusing on 'the way we work'. Vandermeersch linked these cuts to 'the newsroom of the future'. A week later he predicted daily printed newspapers would disappear within the next decade: 'Whether it is 2029 or 2032' wasn't immediately clear he said.

The *Irish Times* was quick to capitalise on this perceived lack of loyalty to the print reader. The Managing Director Deirdre Veldon told staff[10] the newspaper group was not considering reducing or exiting its printed newspaper business saying, 'And although print circulation is declining, we still have a loyal and valued newspaper reader base'. Ironically, part of what is enabling the newspaper to 'extend its print runway' is enabling those newspapers exiting print publishing (including Mediahuis) to print in the *Irish Times* printing plant.

So how has the print readership fared in the Reuters Digital News Report Ireland statistics over the years? The data from the question 'Which, if any, of the following have you used in the last week as a source of news' are revealing. In 2015, 49% said they read print newspapers, which descended to 45% the following year. In 2017, the percentage saying that they had read news in printed newspapers fell five percent to 40% and in 2018 it fell a further five percent to 35%.

From 2017, those surveyed who confirmed they had read news in the past week were asked additionally: 'Which would you say is your *MAIN* source of news?' The percentage citing newspapers as their main source has hovered around in the single figures: 6% (2017); 5% (2019); 4% (2021) and 5% (2023). In contrast, news from social media has grown from 16% (2017) to 20% (2023) and 'Online – excluding social media and blogs' has gone up from 28% (2017) to 32% (2023). The figures from Ireland in 2023 regarding newspaper readership (5%) are similar to those in the UK, the US and in Europe.

8 Ryan, Emmet (2022), 'Mediahuis chief: The money. We get from the Vat reduction will go into developing new platforms'. Business Post, October 1st 2022.

9 Macnamee, Donal (2023) 'Irish Independent publisher Mediahuis to lay off staff in 'extensive' round of cuts. Business Post, March 28th 2023.

10 O'Donovan, Donal (2023). 'Irish Times boss says print will remain a core part of its business'. Irish Independent, April 7th 2023.

In order to move more convincingly into Vandermeersch's transitional phase to full digital, Ireland's media companies are going to have to up their game – 2029 is only six years away. The Reuters' data show that the percentage of those who have subscribed to any form of online news site has only shifted slowly from 7% (2015) to 12% (2019) to 15% (2023). At the top of the charts for subscriptions are the *Irish Times* (41%); the *Irish Independent* (32%); followed by both the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* (14%). Two more foreign titles are next: the *Times/Sunday Times* (10%) and the *Daily Telegraph* (10%). The permeability of the Irish news market means a lot of the money, including any profits, goes abroad to the headquarters of these multinationals.

Media companies are doing their best to pull in subscribers via persuasive advertising and cheap entry incentives, whether for newspaper delivery and/or digital bundle incentives. At the highbrow end, the *Irish Times* implores readers to, 'be a member of an engaged and informed community of Irish Times readers with unlimited access to our great features'. At the *Independent.ie* 'Premium+ now includes access to 16 epaper Titles'. Over at *The Currency*, they're stressing the personal touch of being led by 'two of Ireland's most respected journalists' who are 'passionate about the power and importance of quality journalism'.

According to this year's Reuters data 37% cited 'Better quality [journalism] than I can get from free sources' as one of the top reasons for taking out a subscription, followed by 'the website/app was easy to use: (33%) and 'I was offered a good deal/trial' (32%). The largest number of subscriptions people surveyed have is one. There is a lot of competition for people's money now – especially given the proliferation of film and television streaming companies. If this cost of living crisis continues, one wonders how many readers will be left with ink on their fingers.

The case for public funding of climate journalism

By Associate Prof David Robbins, DCU & FuJo

Climate change is finally moving to the centre of policy and political action in Ireland. The 2023 Climate Action Plan, and its associated annex of actions, set out a path towards achieving a 50% reduction in Ireland's emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030, and reaching net zero emissions by 2050.

The media has a key role to play in the transition to a net zero society and economy. The twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss constitute a real test of the media sector's commitment to, and ability to deliver on, its normative functions: informing citizens, acting as a watchdog, holding powerful interests to account, and being socially responsible.

In the words of Wolfgang Blau, co-founder of the Oxford Climate Journalism Network, "…whether the news media want this or not, they tend to be their country's primary destination for people who would like to learn more about the climate crisis… Journalism will be needed to help us navigate this journey and to hold our societies together."

But just at the moment when it is needed most, professional journalism is on its knees. As the report of the Future of Media Commission (2022) outlined, the migration of advertising revenue away from media organisations and onto online platforms, the slow growth in news subscriptions, the steady decline in print copy sales, the constant disruption from new technologies and platforms, have left a punch-drunk sector in search of a sustainable business model.

Inside newsrooms, journalists find climate change a tough challenge: it is vast, complex, often slow-moving, and can seem to be the same story over and over again. Climate literacy among journalists is low, and this makes it difficult to hold different stakeholders to account in their reporting, or when they interview claims-makers on air.

What does this year's Reuters Digital News Report tell us about what audiences want and need when it comes to media coverage of climate change? First the bad news: of the people who report avoiding news 21% of them say they avoid news about climate change.

The negative framing by the media of climate change topics is, I believe, a factor in this avoidance. Journalists are reflexively attracted to negative news, and frame climate action in terms of cost and sacrifice, often omitting the cost of inaction from their reports. The benefits of climate action – societal, health, economic, and environmental – receive less attention.

This year's report shows that solutions journalism – coverage that critically investigates and explains how people are trying to solve widely shared problems – could be part of the answer. Almost all of us (85%) across all age cohorts are either very or somewhat interested in journalism that focuses on solutions and not just problems.

There is also a role for the public funding of environmental journalism. Having a full-time environmental correspondent on the staff increases the level and quality of climate journalism, and these correspondents also act as unofficial advisors and mentors to colleagues on other news beats. Yet, in the hostile economic environment for news, few newsrooms can afford to hire such a specialist.

The Future of Media Commission recognised that certain forms of public service journalism were a public good, and should be publicly funded. These including courts coverage, and reporting on local authority meetings and activities. The Commission also suggested that one-off, public-interest journalism projects should be funded from the public purse.

At the time, the journalism staff and students at DCU made a submission to the Commission, recommending, among other things, that environmental journalism also be funded in this way. In this year's Digital News Report we asked Irish people a new question: If the government were to provide assistance to some kinds of public interest journalism, which areas should be prioritised? Nearly half (44%) answered: climate change and environmental news.

Myself and DCU colleagues have, over the past year, been delivering climate communications and literacy training to media organisations. We have encountered high levels of engagement and commitment. There is a thirst among journalists to better understand climate science, and concepts related to climate debates, such as just transition, carbon neutrality, the circular economy, carbon budgets, and others.

The news media, as Wolfgang Blau notes, have been handed the task of explaining and analysing Ireland's transition to a sustainable future. They are struggling, due to their own depleted newsroom resources, and the extent and complexity of the topic. Public funding, similar to that recommended for courts and council coverage, would help.

AI and the future of news

By Dr Kirsty Park, DCU & FuJo

The debut of OpenAI's ChatGPT in November 2022 sparked a surge of interest in the future of artificial intelligence, with the chatbot gaining over 100 million users within a few months. Tech giants like Google and Microsoft are now actively dedicating considerable resources and manpower to incorporate AI into their business plans, even amidst periods of mass layoffs. While these tools are in their infancy, there has been much speculation on how they might disrupt the way we live and work, and journalism has been no exception.

Although newsrooms have long utilised various forms of AI, generative AI and its capacity to engage in advanced creative tasks such as writing, presents entirely new possibilities and risks, particularly regarding trust in news and the future of journalism. When Buzzfeed CEO Jonah Peretti addressed investors he discussed the closure of the Pulitzer Prize winning Buzzfeed News while also expressing his belief that "generative AI will begin to replace the majority of static content" and that "audiences will begin to expect all content to be personalized, interactive, dynamic with embedded intelligence"[11].

A little over half of Irish news consumers express apprehension about personalized news potentially omitting important information (53%) or presenting limited perspectives (51%). Furthermore, 31% of respondents consider story selection based on their previous consumption habits to be a favorable method of obtaining news, whereas 25% hold the same view regarding story selection conducted by editors and journalists.

These technological developments occur against a backdrop of increasing levels of concern about what is real and fake online, up 6pp in Ireland this year, as well as a decline of 5pp among those who feel they can trust most news most of the time. Just over half of Irish news consumers are concerned that personalised news may result in missing important information (53%) or challenging viewpoints (51%).

One risk with generative AI is that it can be used to flood the information ecosystem with deceptive or low-quality information, making it a dangerous tool for spreading misinformation. However, trust is also a concern as publishers experiment with AI. CNET recently revealed that there were substantial mistakes in a number of articles written with the assistance of their own 'internally designed AI engine'[12]. The risk of deception goes beyond content too, as The Irish Times issued an apology for the publication of an opinion piece, where both the article itself and the accompanying author photo were fabricated by an individual who employed generative AI to portray themselves as a young immigrant woman[13].

Another significant risk relates to the impact on journalists themselves. While current AI outputs are prone to errors, as the technology advances, publishers may opt to reduce costs by replacing human work with AI. The emergence of generative AI also introduces the unsettling possibility that a news outlet could train a customised AI model using their own content, meaning the work of journalists could be threatened by a technology trained on their own journalistic material which has serious ethical implications.

11 https://investors.buzzfeed.com/static-files/ec48b565-21af-4968-a5bb-85613c680afe
12 https://www.cnet.com/tech/cnet-is-testing-an-ai-engine-heres-what-weve-learned-mistakes-and-all/
13 https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2023/05/14/a-message-from-the-editor/

The European Commission is currently developing the AI Act which will introduce regulation of AI at an EU level. It looks likely that the approach taken will be similar to the Digital Services Act which acknowledges that some services, like the largest of social media companies, come with inherent societal risks which must be countered with both transparency and accountability measures.

With the ongoing AI revolution, the demand for transparency becomes increasingly crucial within the field of journalism too. In terms of content creation, this requires the use of clear bylines or disclosures regarding the use of AI as well as public editorial guidelines detailing a publisher's approach to AI. These measures are essential to ensure that readers can understand how AI technology is shaping the news they consume.

However, transparency also means more openness and disclosure around why readers see the news they do on both a publisher's digital channels e.g. website, app or emails as well as on their own social media feeds which means more transparency around content delivery and recommender algorithms.

It is clear that the impact of AI on news production and consumption will only grow. Publishers and, to some extent, social media companies bear the responsibility of ensuring that the benefits of AI outweigh its risks

NB: This article was written by Kirsty Park and ChatGPT was used in the editing process.