WHAT THE FUTURE: TRUTH

Who can you trust if you don't trust the news?
PAGE 04

Where do you fight for the truth?
PAGE 08

How should brands protect their truth?
PAGE 12

Can we protect truth from disinformation?
PAGE 16

PLUS: How do we protect the shared truths we all need?
PAGE 02

GAME CHANGERS

Ipsos

The truth about shared truth

There's a prevalent narrative that trust and truth are dead. Some even call this the post-fact era. But Ipsos research finds these concepts alive, important, and more valued than ever. So, ironically, that is fake news, for lack of a better term. Wait, there is a better term: disinformation.

Truth is not dead, but it is under assault. Intentional disinformation from nations and individuals (as opposed to less nefarious *mis*information) is just one front in the war. Another is people screaming about the "lamestream media." Finally, there's the rise of synthetic content making it harder for us to trust what we see and hear.

This issue is therefore, hopeful, but also cautious and alert. Just as your brand should be.

Using exclusive new Ipsos data and research, coupled with expert interviews, we set the scene with the state of truth and how that plays out with an important purveyor of truth: the news media. Then we delve into how brands tell their truth in this complicated landscape in general, and in these hyper-polarized election times.

"The truth is, truth is complicated these days."

The truth is, truth is complicated these days, just like everything else. A proliferation of outlets means that it's always possible to find something we might consider a truth. But is it the truth? There are large, systemic forces at play, ranging from disinformation campaigns, to nativist and populist sentiments that impact how and where we find the truth. Then there are new forms of disinformation, like synthetic videos that purport to show real people saying things they never said. It's getting harder to believe even things that we see with our own eyes.

That's by design, of course. If we can't believe what we see, we'll fall back on trusting certain people or outlets that reinforce the truth we already believe, rather than challenge us to defend our truths as new evidence surfaces.

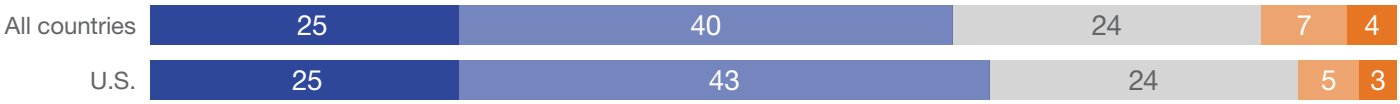
One thing is certain: Without a guiding set of truths, we'll all have a hard time making heads or tails of the world we live in and finding much-needed consensus on politics, brands and our collective and individual futures.

How do we earn the trust needed to tell the truth? Read on. The questions you need to ask yourself and your organization — and a path toward the answers — just might be in here.

***Oscar Yuan** is president of Ipsos Strategy3. He advises Fortune 500 clients about the future of their industries and how to plan accordingly in the present.*

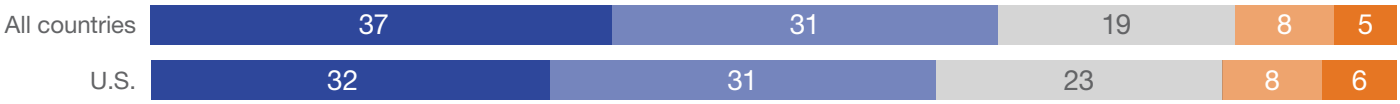
It is easy for me to get news I can trust…

Q. I have easy access to news from sources I trust.



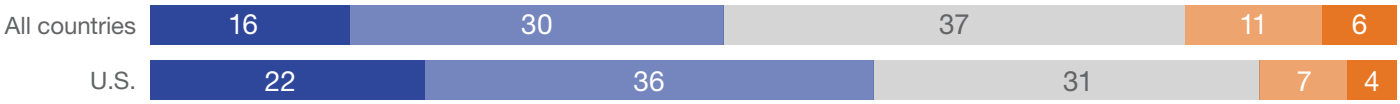
…but I tend to get free news.

Q. I only read news I can access for free.



Truth is under attack.

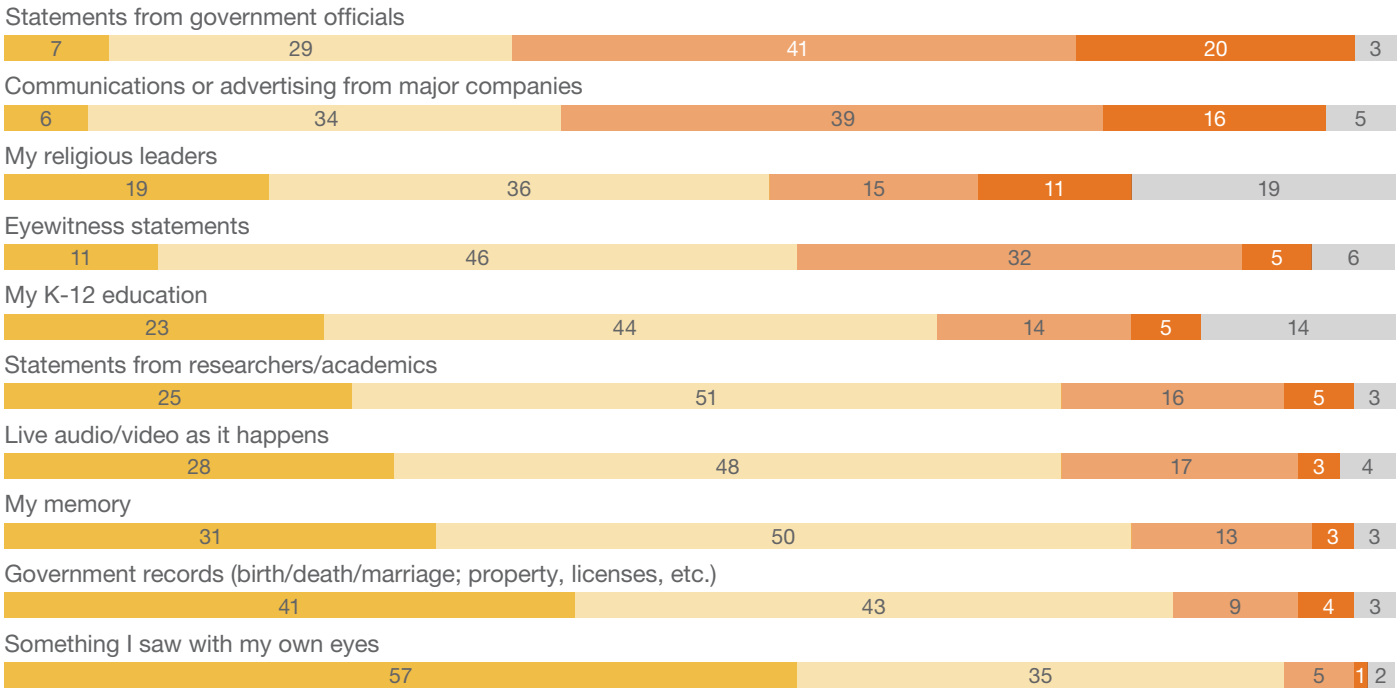
Q. I believe other countries target people in my country with disinformation/fake news.



Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree

So we trust ourselves above all others to tell the truth.

Q. How confident are you that the content or information you receive from each of the following sources is true?



Very confident | Somewhat confident | Not very confident | Not at all confident | Don't know / Doesn't apply to me

The Big Question:

How do we protect the shared truths we all need?

(Sources: Ipsos Global Advisor survey conducted online May 22-June 5, 2020, among 18,998 adults in 27 nations, including 1,000 U.S. adults; Ipsos survey conducted Aug. 25-26, 2020, among 1,003 U.S. adults.)

Question: Who can you trust if you don't trust the news?

Sally Lehrman

Founder, CEO, The Trust Project

Several years ago, Sally Lehrman realized that she and her journalism colleagues had been bemoaning the same issues for the previous 15 years: Trust and truth in media were in peril from a number of causes.

To try to put some of those conversations to bed and make progress on those issues, she began The Trust Project. It's a nonprofit consortium of global news organizations working with tech platforms and search engines to help surface quality news on search and social. When she thinks **What the Future**, she's wondering what media can do to continue earning the public's trust.

68%

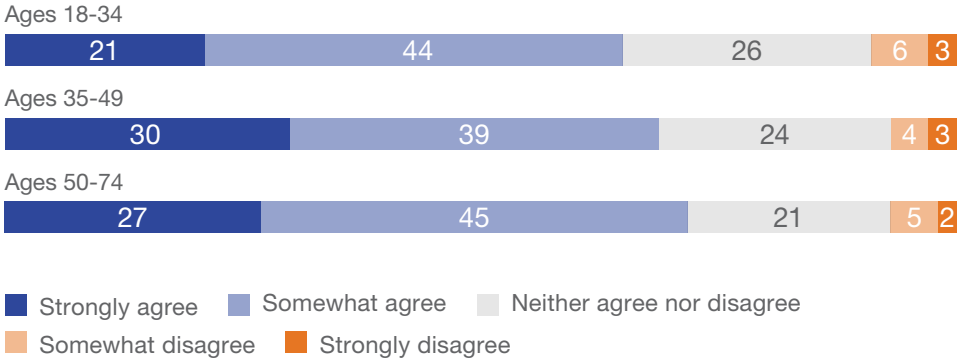
of people globally say they only read news they can get for free.

(Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey conducted online May 22-June 5, 2020, among 18,998 adults in 27 nations.)

"Why can't we create a digital space that supports high-quality journalism? All you have to do is train the algorithm to know what quality journalism is."

Most Americans can get news they trust.

Q. I have easy access to news from sources I trust.



(Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey conducted online May 22-June 5, 2020, among 18,998 adults in 27 nations, including 1,000 U.S. adults.)

Matt Carmichael: What was going on when you started The Trust Project?

Sally Lehrman: Around 1997, when you saw more news organizations starting to go online, that's when you started to see this steady decline in trust in news. Journalists had been blaming trust issues on external factors, like the tech algorithms or trying to hit certain metrics. I thought, well, why can't we flip the picture? Why can't we create a digital space that supports high-quality journalism? And I talked to some people that I knew in technology, and they said, Yeah, you can do that. All you have to do is train the algorithm to know what quality journalism is.

Carmichael: We have been working together on a project about the future of trust for media (see page 07). Together, we identified four factors that have a big impact: nationalism and populism; tech advances; economic/business model issues; and disinformation. Why do those things, in particular, matter so much?

Lehrman: Those are the macro forces that shape the ability of accurate information to flow freely throughout society. We need people to be able to have access to trustworthy information so they can make decisions about their own lives, so that they can contribute to their local communities and build a community that they're happy living in, and so that they can influence and shape their governments. We can't do any of that unless we have a shared understanding of what the facts are. If populism and nationalism shape our worldview, we're not going to be open to facts that contradict that worldview. If the economics are dire for journalism, then the hard work that journalists have to do to seek and report the truth won't be sustainable. That's what we're already suffering from to some extent. And disinformation is an incredible challenge. As journalists, what we have to do is raise up a countering force and make it as strong as possible.

Carmichael: What are some challenges for readers and news organizations?

Lehrman: We interviewed people to try to understand what they value in the news, when they trust it, and when they don't. We were all worried that people didn't really care about the news. And in fact, they did across the board, even people that were really angry about journalism. But people felt frustrated in a lot of different ways. They were frustrated because they thought journalists had a hidden agenda. And they were frustrated because they thought news and opinion were blending. They felt like all they would hear from in journalism were people at high levels of business and government. And they weren't seeing people like themselves in the news.

Carmichael: What are the challenges for news organizations?

Lehrman: One is, that in this digital environment, everything looks the same. You can't tell the difference between a news story produced by journalists that has standards and values behind it, and any other piece of information that might be designed to sell you a pair of shoes, or sell you a political perspective.

“We need to remind the public that they are part of the information system, too.”

Carmichael: You talked a little bit about opinion journalism. How does it hurt or enhance truth and trust?

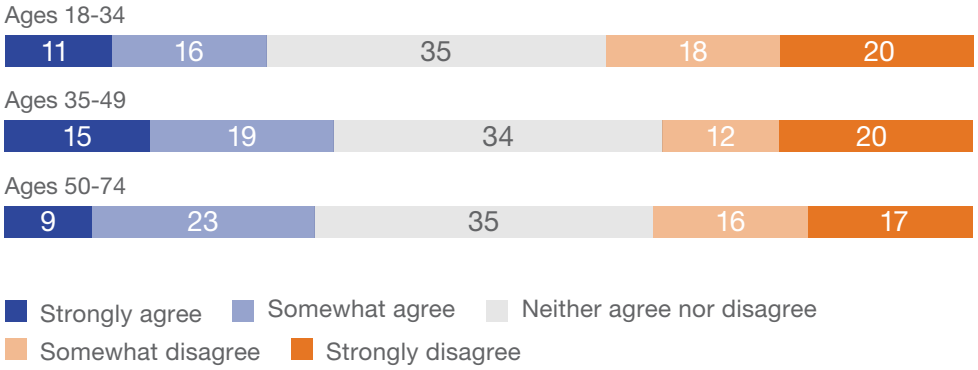
Lehrman: As long as it’s fact-based, opinion journalism can help in this really complicated world and shine some light on the possibilities. If you have a nice diet that includes news and includes opinion journalism, I think that’s healthy. However, I do see that there are a lot of people frustrated with opinion journalism because we don’t draw the lines clearly enough. I still hear journalists saying, “Well, it’s obvious that this is opinion, because it has a different format,” as if people are really going to notice that on their phones.

Carmichael: In the past, people would actively seek out information. They’d subscribe to a paper that showed up on their doorstep. They’d tune to Channel 5 at 6 p.m. for the local news. Now, much of our information comes to us on platforms where we don’t control what we see and what our friends share.

Lehrman: I think we need to remind the public that they are part of the information system, too. They’re not just victims of information that comes flowing at them, or passive recipients of it. That, in fact, they are a part of creating a healthy information ecosystem. They’re even part of creating really accurate, fair, impartial news. I hope we can accomplish getting people to think about how they’re getting information and evaluating it through that lens. It gets down to thinking about what is your source of news, and what are the values behind that source? If you share something, people are going to trust you, and they may give it more credibility than it deserves.

As many can afford to pay for news as those who can't.

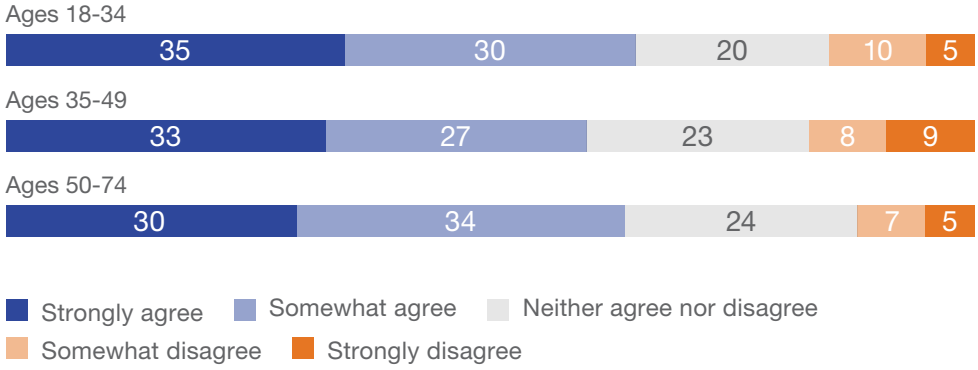
Q. I am able to pay for news from sources I trust.



(Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey conducted online May 22-June 5, 2020, among 18,998 adults in 27 nations, including 1,000 U.S. adults.)

But few Americans are willing to pay for news.

Q. I only read news I can access for free.



(Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey conducted online May 22-June 5, 2020, among 18,998 adults in 27 nations, including 1,000 U.S. adults.)

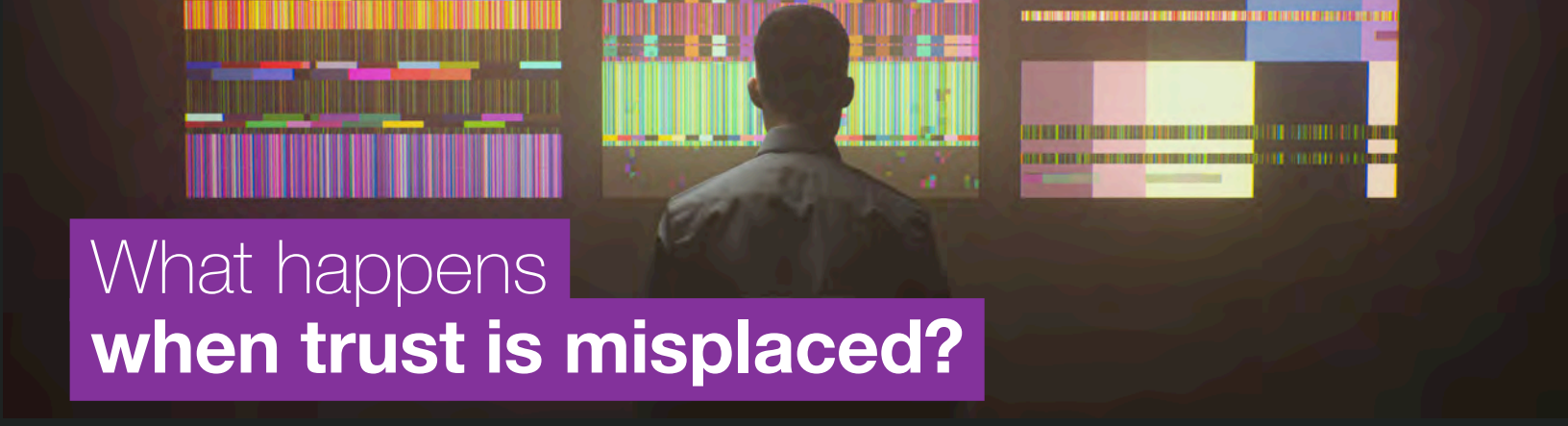
Carmichael: Simple question: How do we fix all of this?

Lehrman: I think that having more transparency and labeling and more clarity around our own standards and policies and then communicating them is extremely important. That’s what the public told us when we did our research. We also need to get out there and engage with the public more directly, communicating that we have the ethics that we live by. But also listening better.

Carmichael: That seems so straight-forward, but of course it’s incredibly complicated.

Lehrman: As people are getting really discouraged, sometimes they will stop reading the news because it just seems like nothing but tragedy is going on. You’re already experiencing that in your life, so why would you want to just keep reading about it and feel worse? We want people to be informed about the tragedies that are happening around us, but we can also use reporting strategies that help people feel more of a sense of empowerment around them.

***Matt Carmichael** is VP of editorial strategy at Ipsos in North America.*



What happens **when trust is misplaced?**

Ipsos and The Trust Project identified four major factors impacting the future of truth and trust in the media.

During a scenario-planning exercise conducted with publishers from The Trust Project's global partners, the group highlighted: a struggling business model, disinformation, technology that is changing how we get our news, and nativist and populist beliefs, much of that boiled down to a central question of access to quality sources.

A chief concern in the group was the spread of so-called fake news, which really is better called disinformation. It is truly viral content in that it spreads quickly — six times faster than truth, according to a study from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology — and can cause varying degrees of harm to the body politic.

Disinformation itself is a problem, but so too is the ability of people to discern truth from fiction. People are far more confident they can spot fake news than they are that their neighbor can, according to a two-part Ipsos Global Advisor survey, the results of which were published in a report called, "Trust Misplaced? A Report from Ipsos and The Trust Project on the Future of Trust in Media." In every region, it's a fairly consistent two-to-one margin of self-confidence.

News consumers are faced with an onslaught of media. Most reported getting news from a wide range of media types at least three to five times a week. In most countries, majorities said they get news from television and social media daily. Not all of that is quality news reported by professional journalists working for reputable outlets.

The ability to sift through all of this and find the truth is hard on a good day. Add in the fake news, outright propaganda campaigns from other nations (see page 19) and a rising chorus of "trust no one" voices and it's easy to see how our foundational institutions can start failing in their missions to inform and educate.

So how can the media and the tech platforms on which they get much of their news teach people to place their trust in truth-telling platforms? That's one problem The Trust Project is working to solve with its established Trust Indicators.

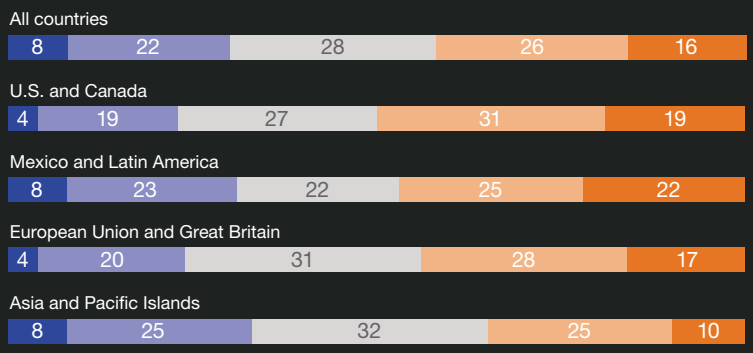
More broadly, it's a conversation we should all be having because truth impacts how we all tell our stories, be they personally, as media organizations, or as brands.

***Matt Carmichael** is VP of editorial strategy at Ipsos in North America.*

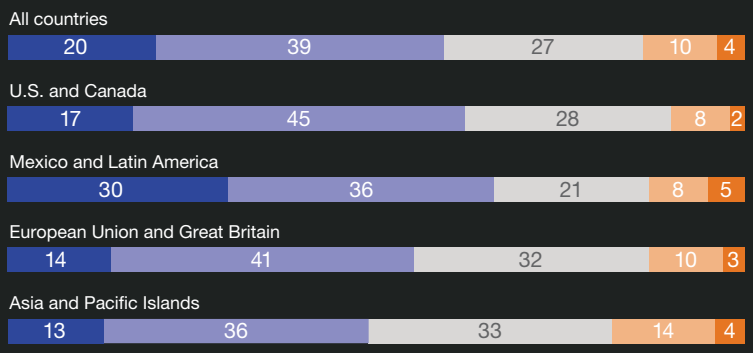
People have real confidence about fake news.

People are confident they can discern fake news, but their fellow citizens can't.

Q. I am confident that the average person in my country can tell real news from "fake news." (Agree net)



Q. I am confident that I can tell real news from "fake news." (Agree net)



Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree

(Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey conducted online May 22-June 5, 2020, among 18,998 adults in 27 nations.)

Question: Where do you fight for the truth?

Rachel Botsman

Author, professor, Oxford University

Rachel Botsman is the author of "Who Can You Trust? How Technology Brought Us Together and Why It Might Drive Us Apart," and the first Trust Fellow at Oxford University's Saïd Business School. When she thinks What the Future, she's curious how trust and truth intersect.

Matt Carmichael: Can we believe what we're learning is the truth from media and institutions we don't trust?

Rachel Botsman: If you actually get to the heart of trust, it's not about what you believe but why you need to believe it. We often focus on the information or the people or the facts, the "what we believe" versus the motivations. Distrust has actually become a negative term versus thinking of distrust as something that can protect us by holding us back from placing our confidence and faith in the wrong people and the wrong information. I'm not talking about a type of distrust that is completely blanket and toxic. I'm talking about a type of distrust that gives you pause.

Carmichael: We fielded a survey that asked people where and how they are willing to call out misinformation. Personal settings were preferred to online.

Botsman: In terms of the private versus public settings, it's where you have the most influence on someone in terms of shifting an opinion. If you want to change what friends and colleagues think, pointing out something that they've read is not true is rarely going to lead to a positive result. But by helping someone think about why they need to believe that piece of information, you can have a really different conversation.

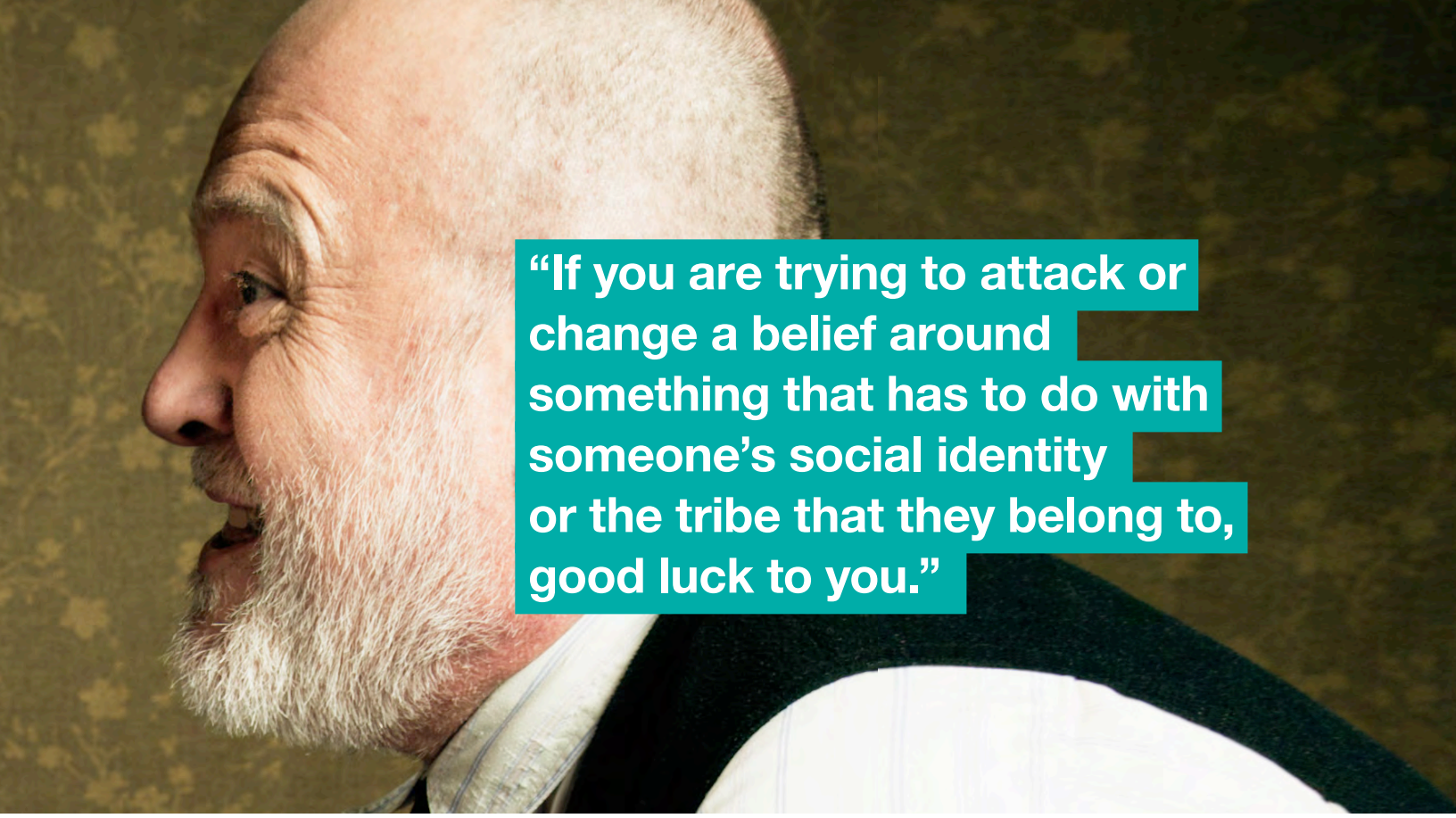
Carmichael: What are some of the answers you get if you start that conversation?

Botsman: To answer it very simply, it's often a motivation to fit in or to stick out: "I need to believe this because I want to avoid drawing attention to myself and I need to fit into this group." Which is why if you are trying to attack or change a belief around something that has to do with someone's social identity or the tribe that they belong to, good luck to you.

18%

of Americans are not willing to call out misinformation to others.

(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Aug. 25-26, 2020, among 1,003 U.S. adults.)



"If you are trying to attack or change a belief around something that has to do with someone's social identity or the tribe that they belong to, good luck to you."

Carmichael: Part of the power of the truth comes from this willingness of people to fight for it and argue on its behalf. So how can people or brands build their own trust so they're seen as trustworthy purveyors of truth?

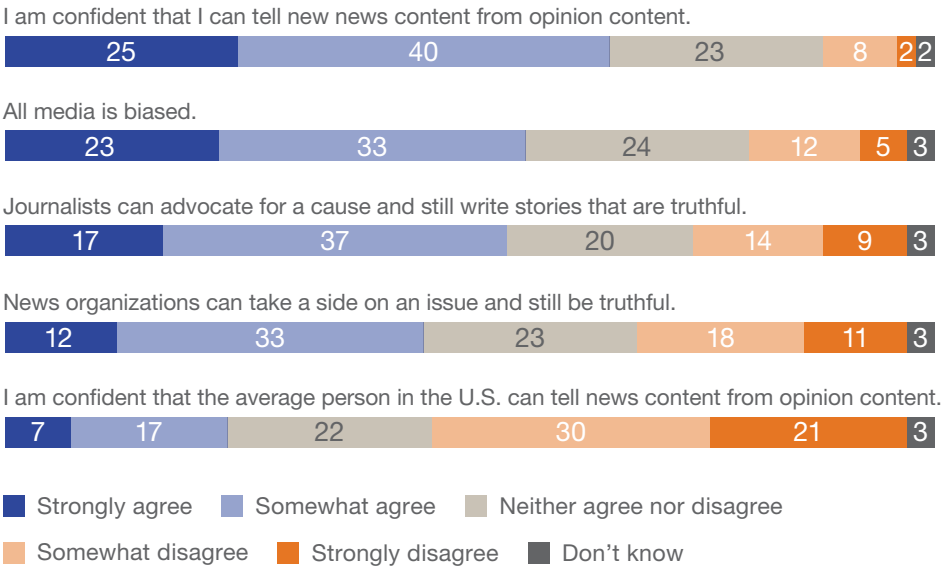
Botsman: The most important thing is integrity. And what I mean by that is you have to be very clear that your intentions and motives are aligned with the people or the citizens or the customers or whoever it may be that that information is serving. If you are an organization and you are putting out information and, in some way, that information is self-serving, that's one of the easiest ways to damage trust.

Carmichael: How do brands go about building the kind of trust necessary to be able to tell their own truth to their customers?

Botsman: I hate it when brands say, "We're going to build trust." Like they're going to build loyalty or they're going to build awareness. The reason why this is so key is because so many of these things they do in marketing and advertising and outreach is about them being in control. Trust doesn't work that way. Trust is given to you from your customers, and you have to earn it.

When it comes to telling news from opinion, people trust themselves, but not others.

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Aug. 25-26, 2020, among 1,003 U.S. adults.)

Carmichael: What can brands do in these "suspicious times," as you call them?

Botsman: The number one thing I would advise brands to do right now is to over-index on integrity and empathy. I don't think enough brands are listening. I don't think enough brands still feel like they care. I think it's about them and being reactive and pushing stuff out and it feeling very, very transactional.

Carmichael: We've seen that in our data, too. As the social justice movement was regaining its strength in June there was an awful lot of demand from consumers, for brands, not to just say things, but to really prove they're doing them.

Botsman: There's a shift between looking good, doing good and being good, right? Like looking good was one area of branding. Doing good was the whole sustainability era, and now it's about being good, and how you behave.

Carmichael: For news organizations, brands and government agencies, when they talk about trust, they often want to turn to transparency as a solution. You debunk that idea. Why?

Botsman: I define trust as a confident relationship with the unknown. If you need things to be transparent, you're in a low trust state. Think about tracker apps parents put on their kids' phones. The intention may be to keep your child safe, but the way that feels to the other person is that you don't trust them. Companies and entire sectors like the media, technology, financial institutions think the way they are going to fix their trust problems is like a magic wand with transparency. It's a very dangerous promise to make because what you're basically promising is information disclosure, and you are going to get to a point where there are certain things that you cannot share. So, it either has zero impact or a negative impact over time.

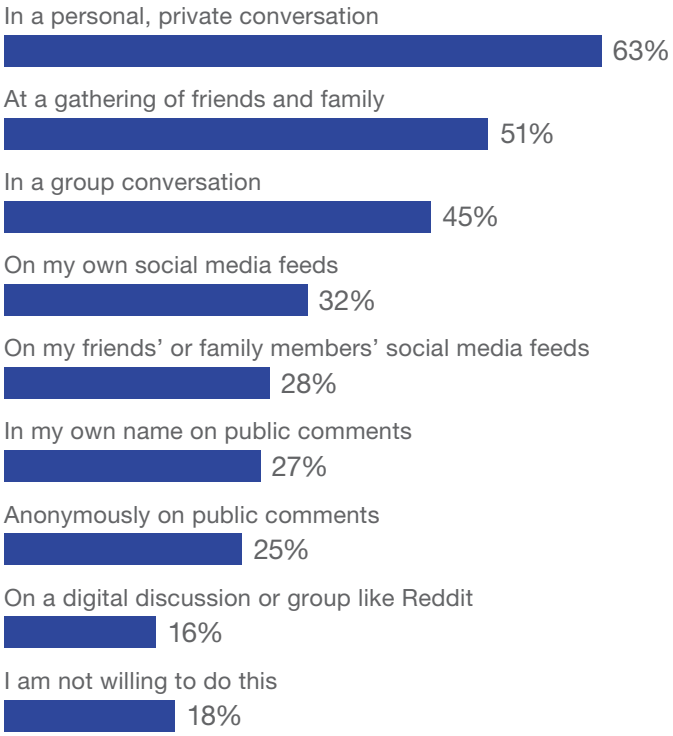
Carmichael: We're in such polarized times. How do we fix all of this?

Botsman: When there is a high degree of uncertainty in our lives, the human response is to go to the familiar and the known. We can't even contemplate something different or something unknown or an alternative response because the biological thing right now is just to go back into your cave that feels very safe and familiar. The response to uncertainty and what that does to whom we trust and how we trust is something people aren't talking about enough.

***Matt Carmichael** is VP of editorial strategy at Ipsos in North America.*

Americans are willing to fight for the truth, sometimes.

Q. In *what places* are you willing to call out misinformation to others, generally?



Q. *How, specifically,* are you willing to call out misinformation to others?

(Sources: Ipsos survey conducted Aug. 25-26, 2020, among 1,003 U.S. adults.)

Brands need not fear sharing ad space with political ads

This election season will bring an estimated $4.4 billion in spending on 8 million ad airings on traditional broadcast media alone over the current election cycle.

The crush of often misleading and divisive messages is enough to give pause to brand marketers whose ads will share that same space. But new Ipsos research shows that political ads won't hinder brands from being able to tell their truth. In other words, they are just as able to cut through all that distraction as any other types of ads in their pods.

This insight came from Ipsos' Creative | Spark assessment tool for quickly evaluating and optimizing creative. The results showed that being surrounded by political ads virtually had no effect on people's awareness, memory or linkage to the advertised brands.

Moreover, 78% of consumers surveyed said that the political ads had no impact on how they received brand ads.

The style of ads, however, did make a difference. Uplifting brand-building creative broke through the political haze better by 7%. Conversely, the sales-focused ads saw a 13% slide in branded impressions. In addition, viewers' political leanings do influence viewers in what they give their attention to and how brands stand up on hot-button issues.

Here are four tips for preparing for election cycle success:

Don't fear the changed environment. There's no inherent bias to performance in the highly polarized, political context of an election. Brands can expect advertising success, on average, at the same level as any other time on the calendar.

Know the affiliation of your target. Independents are most likely to tune out, while Democrats are most supportive of brands taking a stance on hot topics.

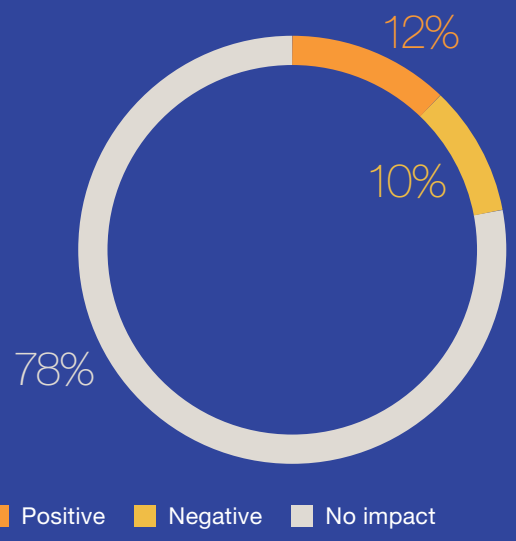
A positive, uplifting message could stand out more. Great creative always stands out, and in a potentially negative campaign, a style that contrasts this could see a pop in effectiveness. This signals brand-building as a better opportunity, compared to sales-focused promotional campaigns.

If you take a stand, stay the course. Plan for potential negative backlash, either at the time of airing or even after the election. If you believe in the brand purpose, and it's strategically sound, don't let a few loud voices scare you into reversing course.

***Pedr Howard** is a senior vice president of Creative Excellence at Ipsos.*

How do brands carve safe space?

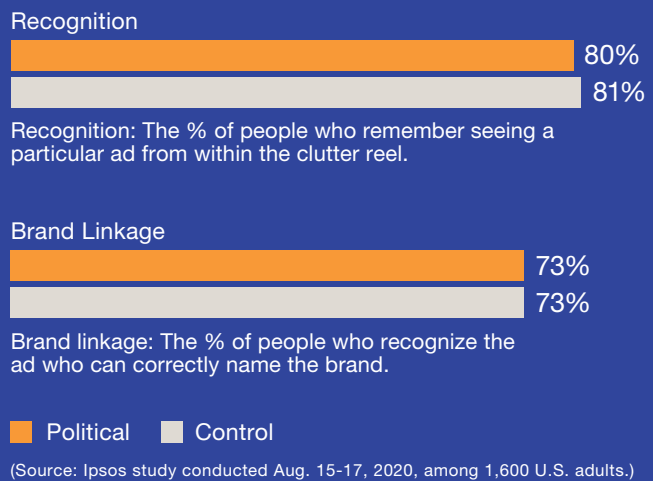
Few people felt that political ads impacted how they view other spots.



(Source: Ipsos study conducted Aug. 15-17, 2020, among 1,600 U.S. adults.)

Context is not king.

The context of the ads had no impact on recall of a spot or the brand that ran it.



(Source: Ipsos study conducted Aug. 15-17, 2020, among 1,600 U.S. adults.)

Question: How should brands protect their truth?

Shiv Singh

Co-author of "Savvy: Navigating Fake Companies, Fake Leaders and Fake News in the Post-Trust Era"

Shiv Singh has been a top digital marketer for more than two decades, including for PepsiCo and Visa.

In 2019, he compiled his lessons learned in the book, "Savvy: Navigating Fake Companies, Fake Leaders and Fake News in the Post-Trust Era," with his co-author, wife and business partner, Rohini Luthra, a clinical psychologist. When he thinks **What the Future**, Singh sees a fundamental shift in how brands should communicate in the post-truth era.

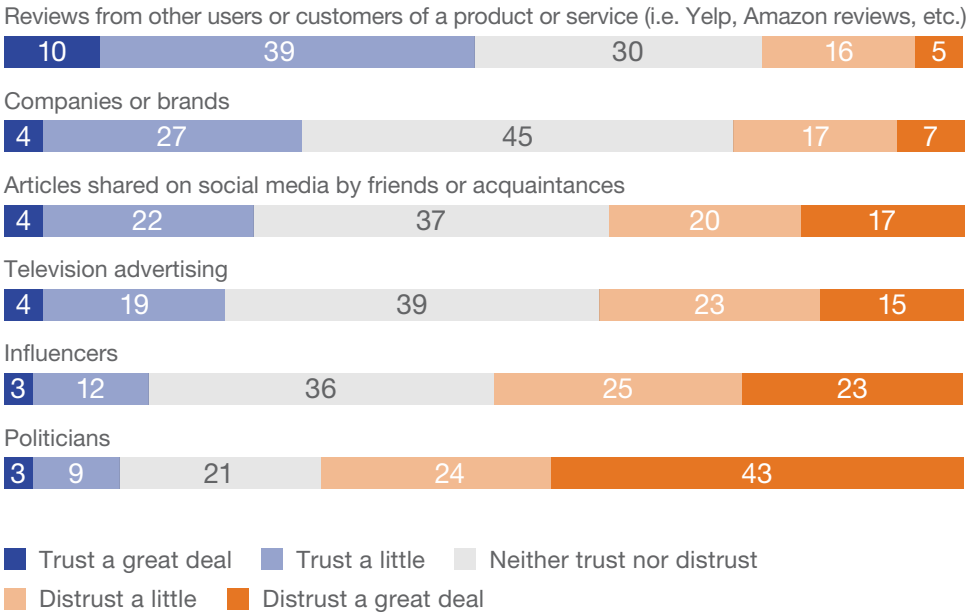
31%

of Americans trust information from companies or brands.

(Source: Ipsos Coronavirus Consumer Tracker conducted Aug. 4-5, 2020, among 1,111 U.S. adults.)

We most trust information from humans over institutions.

Q. In general, how much do you trust the information you receive from the following sources?



(Source: Ipsos Coronavirus Consumer Tracker conducted Aug. 4-5, 2020, among 1,111 U.S. adults.)

Kate MacArthur: How is brand marketing different in this post-truth era?

Shiv Singh: It hasn't changed dramatically as yet. But what marketers need to think about is a few key things. Firstly, their brands do not have the natural, organic credibility that they once did. Trust in businesses, while higher than governments, comparatively is still very low. Trust in anything that's coming through the media ecosystem is extremely low. And trust in anyone that represents anything that touches the lightning rod of politics is through the floor. So, all of this creates an environment where the usual tools and techniques that marketers have used to build trust and communicate with their constituents are being threatened.

MacArthur: How does the post-truth era change how brands should be marketed?

Singh: Brand marketing has been built on the idea of having a good story to tell and capturing the hearts and minds of consumers. The emphasis needs to be on capturing the minds first and then the hearts. And if there's any fundamental flip that's taken place, that's it. As brands do this, they need to really depend much more heavily on being fact-based. That means talking about their sources of information, using experts staying in their own swim lanes where they have natural credibility and permission, taking extra effort to inform and educate versus just entertain and celebrate. It's all of those things that matter more immensely. Brands sit in the context of a society. And they need to be a lot more conscious of their role in society and be willing to stand for what is right, which they haven't really had to do in any meaningful sense in the past.

"Brands would assume that they are trusted in a lot of different contexts. That's not the case anymore."

MacArthur: How can brands avoid becoming unwitting participants or sponsors of disinformation?

Singh: The way they have to respond is not by waiting for something bad to happen. Instead, they have to explain and articulate their position, their set of facts, and their narrative before they're in a moment of crisis. They need to make sure that they've always done their homework, because often in those disinformation or misinformation campaigns, there's a seed of truth in them.

Sometimes a spark can come from mistakes within the company itself. So, they have to be a lot more buttoned up in that regard. When it comes to misinformation, you never have enough information on your own to counter it. If you are a medical product, then it's with the scientists, or if you're a car manufacturer, then it could be with the authorities that investigate car crashes. You have to have much tighter and much more open relationships with them so that when the moment of disinformation happens, they know enough about your business to lay out the facts in a credible, third-party fashion.

“Brands can play with humor. But we have to be really careful about words being misinterpreted, misconstrued, or sliced and used in ways that make them weaponized.”

MacArthur: How do you get consumers to think of companies and brands as truthful?

Singh: Trust is all about taking a leap of faith. Tied to that is this really important concept that trust should be and is context-specific. Now, brands would assume that they are trusted in a lot of different contexts, historically. That’s not the case anymore. And that’s such a critical difference that brands have to be mindful of and know where they can and should be clustered, and not assume to be trusted just because they are a top 50 brand in some global ranking or the other.

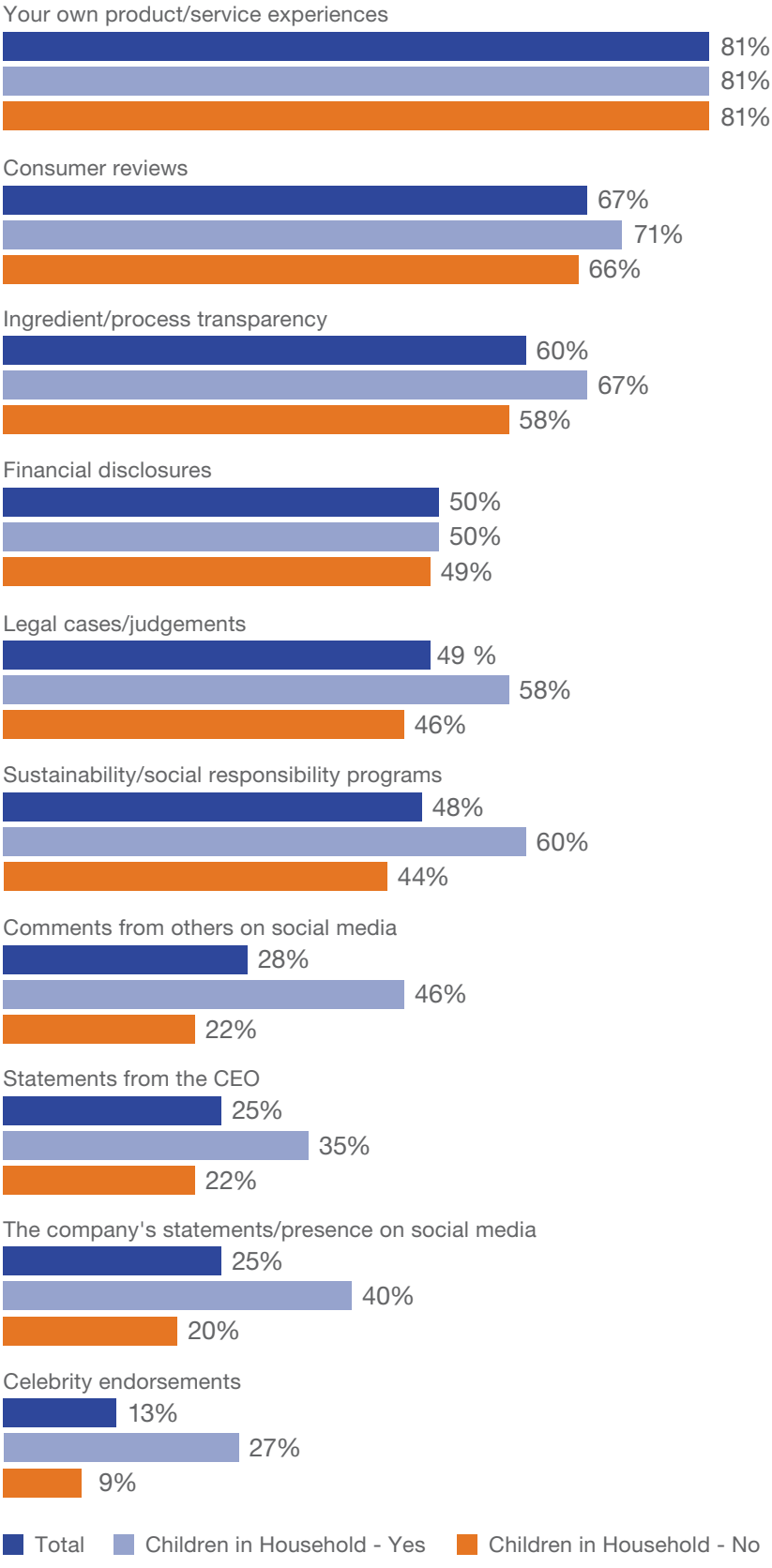
MacArthur: That’s a really great point. How big of an issue could disinformation be in the future with companies weaponizing disinformation against competing brands?

Singh: If a brand is being misleading in a way where it’s saying, “We’re just having a bit of fun online and we’re joking around,” at a time like this, it can absolutely be interpreted in the wrong way. They absolutely have to be extra cautious, and I wouldn’t recommend it. The flip side to this is: Especially here in America because of what’s going on politically and through the tech platforms, we’re looking for more humor and the simplicity of the way life used to be. So, yes, I do think brands can play with humor. But we have to be really careful about words being misinterpreted, misconstrued, or sliced and used in ways that make them weaponized.

__Kate MacArthur__ is a senior writer at Ipsos.

Having kids at home skews what kinds of external sources people trust.

Q. For each type of information you might see, read, or hear about a company, please indicate if that information makes you more or less likely to trust that company. (Net more likely to trust)



(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Aug. 25-26, 2020, among 1,003 U.S. adults.)

How brands can move beyond purpose **and become trusted news sources**

In this complex news landscape, brands have an opportunity to maintain and even earn more trust with their customers.

This is important as consumers demand brands take more of a role, not just in a purpose-driven way, but also in an evolved way that includes supporting the consumers themselves. Similarly, they expect the platforms where they get their news to proactively ensure that content shared there is true.

Moving forward, there are four things that brands can do to earn consumer trust with the content they provide or associate with:

Avoid associating with fake news: In an effort to reach larger audiences, brands often connect themselves with the most popular stories. Brands should therefore be more discriminating and not merely ban specific keywords, but carefully select the news outlets where they advertise.

Provide content to educate and inform the public: An Ipsos survey found that customers expect tech platforms and sectors like financial services and healthcare to help educate them on using their services. Moreover, there was broad feeling that brands should help support their customers when they need help. For example, Google offers free training, tools, and resources such as Grow with Google, which helps business owners rebound from the pandemic.

Inform and help tackle social issues: When appropriate, brands can speak out about social issues, and focus on contributing to change rather than make vague, washed-out statements.

Tell the brand story in a trusted way: Consumers show high levels of trust for regulated channels like packaging, but also trust company websites. Use those channels (and of course advertising, which is still trusted by many) to shape your narrative.

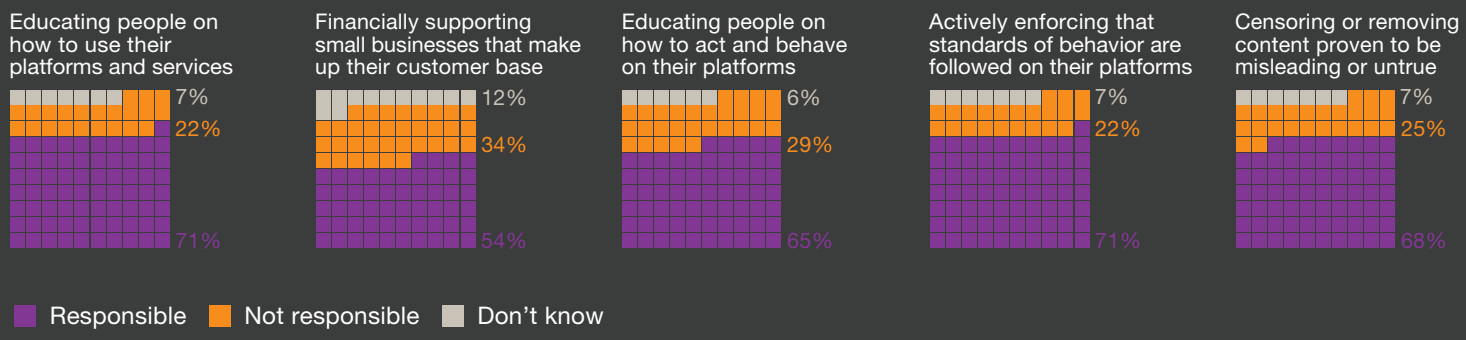
So how do brands actually do all of that? To help ensure accurate and reliable information to inform, educate and act on economic and social issues, brands should retain journalists, scientists and educators in addition to marketers and advertising agencies to help guide them through.

***Emmanuel Probst** is a senior vice president of U.S. Brand and Creative Excellence at Ipsos.*

People think brands have a responsibility to do more than advertise.

Tech platforms, a massive purveyor of news, are expected to help make sure that news is accurate.

Q. To what extent do you think technology companies (e.g. Facebook, Google, Apple, or Microsoft) are responsible for...



(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Aug. 25-26, 2020, among 1,003 U.S. adults.)

Question: Can we protect truth from disinformation?

Among her roles at the nonprofit think tank Rand Corporation, Jennifer Kavanagh studies disinformation and the relationship between U.S. political and media institutions.

When she thinks **What the Future**, she believes people need better skills and awareness for navigating information online along with a public dialogue between citizens, tech companies and policymakers to build a new online landscape that harnesses the good while minimizing disinformation and exploitation.

Jennifer Kavanagh

Senior political scientist at the Rand Corporation, co-author of "Truth Decay: An Initial Exploration of the Diminishing Role of Facts and Analysis in American Public Life"

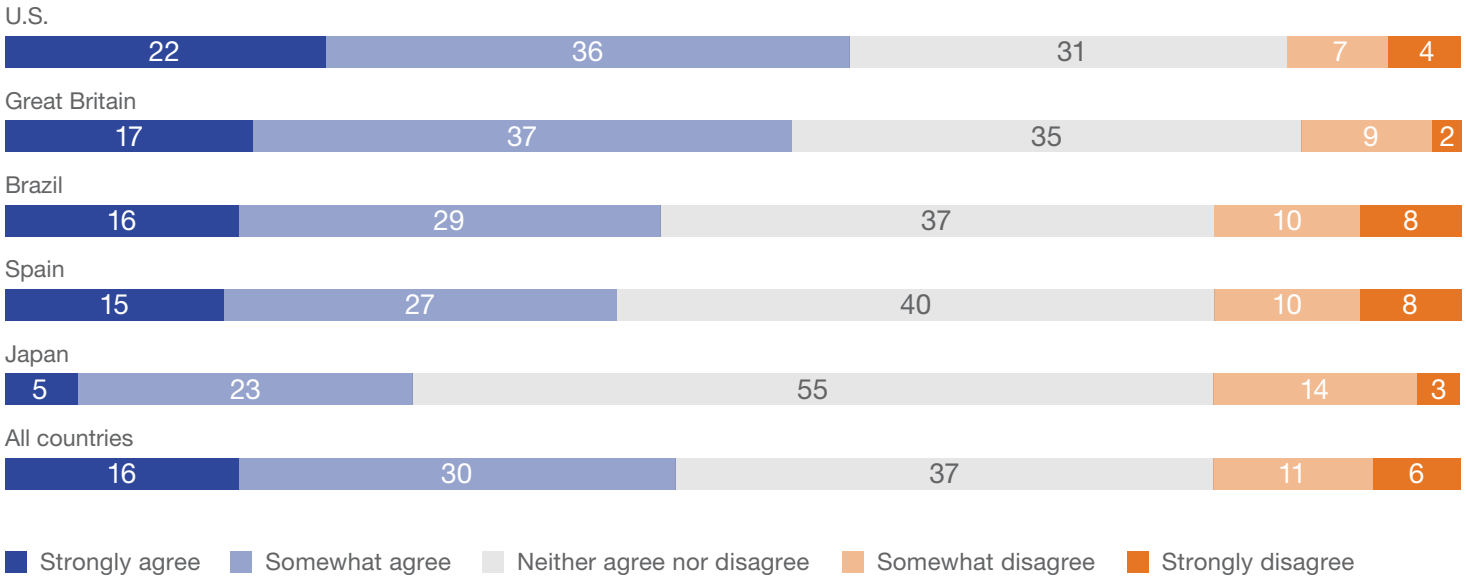
67%

of U.S. adults trust that the content and information from their K-12 education is true.

(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Aug. 25-26, 2020, among 1,003 U.S. adults.)

Americans feel more vulnerable to fake news than their global peers.

Q. I believe other countries target people in my country with disinformation/fake news.



(Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey conducted online May 22-June 5, 2020, among 18,998 adults in 27 nations.)

Kate MacArthur: How do governments contribute to disinformation?

Jennifer Kavanagh: Populist governments have always relied on a similar set of narratives, rooted in a sense of nostalgia, a return to an imagined past, and in many cases, a struggle of the average person against the elites. But these narratives are very often filled with false and misleading information intended to stir emotion and build a sense of belonging or community. Populist leaders harness disinformation to further their us vs. them platforms and this helps them sustain and grow their movements.

MacArthur: Since disinformation is being used to split people on fault lines from race to gender, how can media consumers combat that?

Kavanagh: It's really important to be aware of the fact that there is so much false and misleading information. It's easy for us as human beings, who are subject to cognitive biases and emotions and this desire to be right, to see something and cling onto it because of the emotional resonance or a reaction within us to want to share that information with our friends and family. But unless we check that the information is accurate and question it, then we are just contributing to the problem.

MacArthur: How do we improve consumers' media literacy in this age of synthetic media and social engineering?

Kavanagh: The right way to think about media literacy, especially given the nature of the challenge and how systemic it is, is to think about how we can integrate the skills of media literacy into all the other subjects that we already teach. If it's an extra set of things a consumer has to remember to do, it's much less likely that they are going to develop that habit. But if it's integrated into how that consumer thinks about the world, consumes information, looks at media, and produces media and branding, then it's much more likely that over time, it's going to become second nature.

MacArthur: We're seeing this reckoning of our historical heroes and the history that's been told. What happens when we question the fundamental truths of these bedrock institutions?

Kavanagh: This isn't a case where truth is changing. But we're finally taking the time to look at all the facts that exist and think carefully and critically about what that means for how we should think about these complex situations and individuals. It's not a perfect analogy, but if you think about the process of scientific discovery, science evolves over time as we get better methods and better data. In the case of social justice, we're being asked to think in a new way to integrate that additional information and to come up with a new interpretation that's more accurate. And that lets us move toward justice and equity in a real way.

That creates a challenge for people who are unwilling to have that evolving interpretation. For those people who have a different worldview, these types of changes can be very disconcerting, and can contribute to distrust because they don't understand why things are changing. But if we think about the fact that changes that occur because of better and more complete information aren't bad, that they're helping us move forward, that's very different than a change that's caused by disinformation where our view changes because someone is lying to us. Being able to distinguish between those two situations is really important.

"You have to be willing to look at multiple sources and to not just look at the headline on Twitter and retweet."

MacArthur: So, what can news consumers do?

Kavanagh: For information consumers, the first step is just being aware of the really complicated and complex information environment, and then taking the steps to combat that. That requires a time commitment. It means that you have to be willing to look at multiple sources and to not just look at the headline on Twitter and retweet. Instead, consumers need to actually look at the article and see, does this seem factual? Is this something that I really want to share? It means searching for factual information when it may not be easy to find.

MacArthur: And for media?

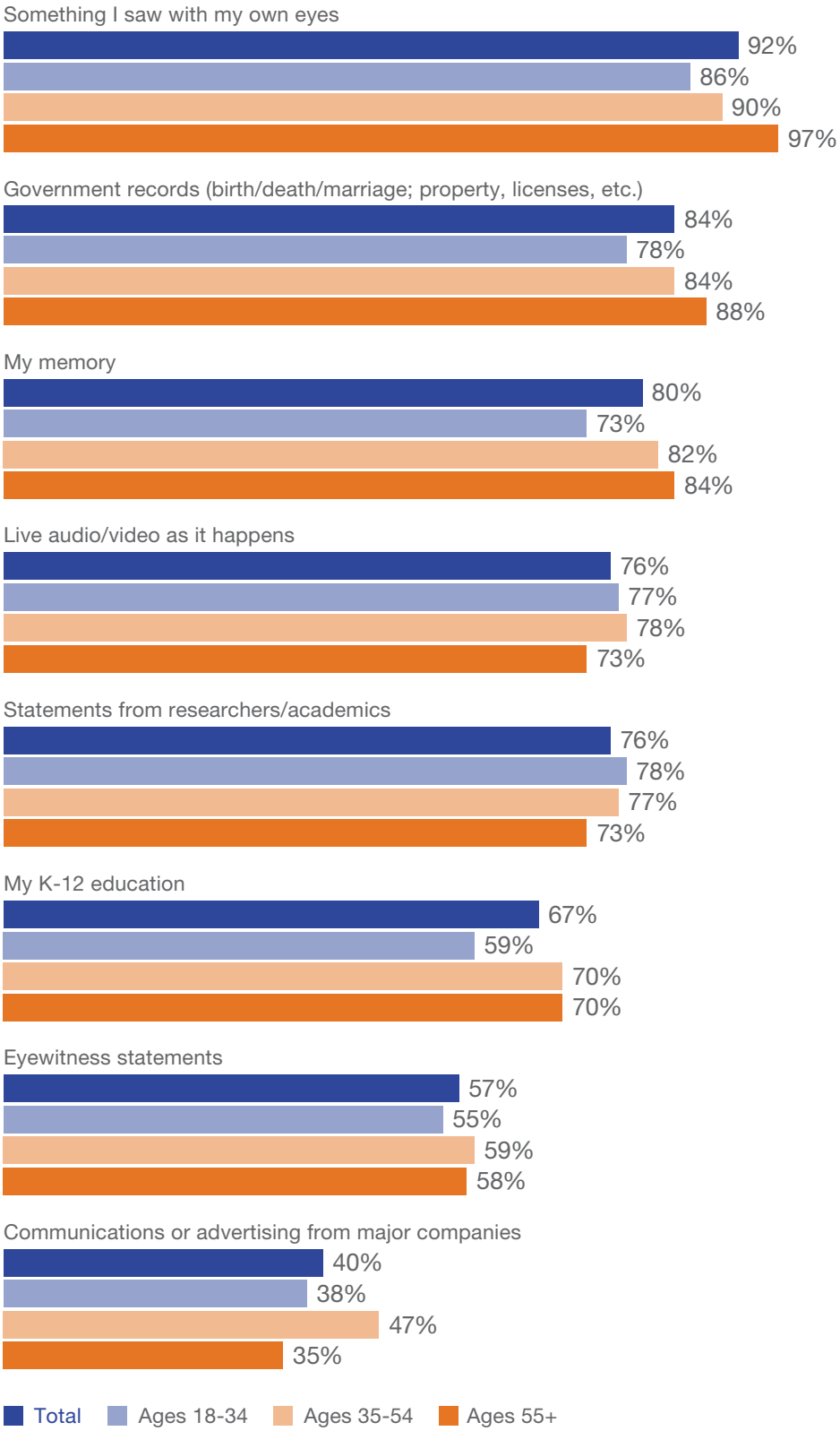
Kavanagh: For journalists, whether they're on television or print or online, the challenge is similar in recognizing that the first set of information they get may not be right. They need to resist the urge to be first. The economics of the industry push media outlets to publish first and check facts later. But journalists also need to think carefully about how and what information they report. The first concern is the tendency to repeat false information just to report that [something] happened. For example, so and so said, "X, Y and Z." When X, Y, and Z are false, that is just spreading the false information. For that casual consumer who didn't spend the time to actually investigate that information, they may think actually, X, Y, and Z are true. The second concern is the nature of the incentives driving the industry. There's a desire to be sensational, to be a little bit edgy in order to attract those clicks. That can then contribute again to this problem of spreading misleading information or twisting and distorting of factual information.

***Kate MacArthur** is a senior writer at Ipsos.*

Younger adults are more skeptical than older adults.

But they trust research and live audio/video more than their older peers.

Q. How confident are you that the content or information you receive from each of the following sources is true? (Net confident)



(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Aug. 25-26, 2020, among 1,003 U.S. adults.)

Why we are susceptible **to disinformation**

Do populist or nativist sentiments impact the spread of fake news?

That was one of several questions Ipsos and The Trust Project set out to answer in a two-part global study. The short answer is yes, although perhaps in a bit of a chicken-and-egg way.

The study included a series of questions to discern populist and nativist attitudes to then see how people who held those views consumed media.

People who do not value expert opinions, a populist sentiment, are less likely to be willing and able to pay for news and much more likely to read only news they can access for free. Those who hold these views are more likely to trust news from people they only know on the internet (i.e., bloggers, influencers, chat boards, etc..) The problem is that quality news often sits behind a pay wall. Disinformation tends to be free, poorly ad-supported, and cheaply produced.

People who hold nativist views, e.g. the 36% who agree that "my country would be stronger if we stopped immigration," are also more prone to trusting news from people they only know on the internet and to being confident in the average person's ability to "tell real news from fake news."

This suggests that many people who espouse populist and nativist views may be caught in a feedback loop: They are more likely to get their news from sketchy sources that propagate disinformation and conspiracy theories, which only reinforces their distrust of experts and their sense of powerlessness.

In today's world, few disagree that their country is "targeted by other countries with disinformation and fake news" (only one in six) while nearly half agree. Among all countries surveyed, the United States is where agreement is highest, at 58%. It turns out that those who hold populist or nativist views are about equally likely as those who don't to believe that their country is targeted by foreign powers with disinformation. However, the perceived threat is obviously not important enough for many people who distrust experts and feel disenfranchised to seek more reliable sources for their news.

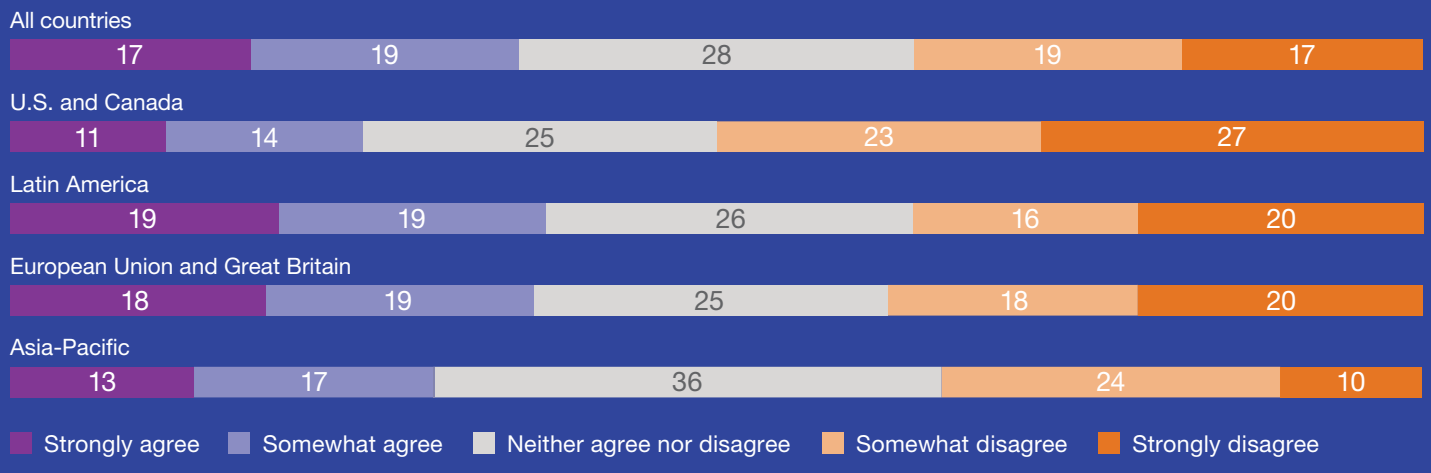
All of this sets up a challenging set of circumstances for truth, trust and those who trade in it like the news media.

Nicolas Boyon *is a senior vice president in Ipsos' Public Affairs practice.*

Nativism is related to distrust in news.

High rates mean it might be harder to come to a consensus on facts and opinions.

Q. My country would be stronger if we stopped immigration.



(Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey conducted online May 22-June 5, 2020, among 18,998 adults in 27 nations.)

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